The Impact of Karma Theory on Disability Identity in *Kusa Jatakaya*: An Intermedial Study of a Sinhala Jataka Story

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Disability has historically been interpreted through religious and moral frameworks in both Western and Eastern societies, where physical and mental impairments were often associated with sin, immorality, or supernatural forces. While Western disability discourse has increasingly shifted toward the Medical, Social, and Human Rights models, conceptions of disability in South Asia continue to be strongly influenced by the Religious/Charity Model. Rooted in Vedic, Buddhist, and other religious traditions, this model continues to shape contemporary perceptions of disability. Within Indian philosophical thought, disability is commonly understood through the doctrine of karma, whereby present conditions are interpreted as consequences of actions performed in previous lives. However, the Buddhist Pāli Canon presents a more nuanced view by identifying karma as only one of the five causal principles (*niyāma-dhamma*), suggesting that disability cannot be explained solely through karmic causation. Despite this broader doctrinal perspective, classical Sinhala literature frequently represents disability within a singular karmic framework. Among Sinhala literary texts, *Kusa Jātakaya* provides an important case for examining the construction of disability identity in Jātaka narratives. This study investigates the representation of disability identity in *Kusa Jātakaya* through an intermedial perspective. Employing a qualitative methodology, it explores the intersections of disability and gender in classical Sinhala literature. The study is guided by the primary research question: **How does the theory of karma influence the construction of disability identity?** A subsidiary question asks: **How is disability identity represented in *Kusa Jātakaya*?** Critical Disability Theory provides the analytical framework, while the methodology combines textual analysis with the examination of video-recorded performances, archival materials, published texts, mass media, photographs, and paintings. The findings reveal that disability identity in *Kusa Jātakaya* is represented primarily through a karmic and religious framework. Since Jātaka narratives link the Bodhisatta's previous and present lives through karma, disability is predominantly portrayed as the consequence of past actions. This limited perspective constrains the understanding of disability as a complex social identity. By critically examining these representations, the study contributes to disability studies and literary scholarship, encouraging more inclusive and critical approaches to representing disability in literary and cultural texts.

Keywords: karma theory, disability identity, Sinhala Jataka stories, Intermediality, *Kusa Jatakaya*