

THE BUDDHIST ATTITUDE TOWARDS SLAVERY

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Although Buddhism is against slavery, many forms of servitude grew in India along with Buddhist principles of support, empathy, responsibility, equality, respect and care-taking. Many Buddhist discourses show how slaves are treated either kindly or unjustly in ancient India. The slave is called *dāsa* (a male slave) and *dāsī* (a female slave), *dāsakamma* (works for slaves) and *dāsatta* (slavery) in the Pāli language. Various categories of slaves are depicted in Buddhist discourses. Buddhism is concerned about the mistreatment of slaves which is against the golden Buddhist norms. With such an attitude, Buddhism views buying and selling of slaves as against the right means of livelihood (*sammājīva*). However, slaves are prohibited from receiving Higher ordination without the permission of their masters yet Buddhism has laid down rules for both slaves and their owners and these rules and principles are relevant even in the modern context of employment. However, out of their volition it is not against the slavery. In the *Sigalovāda Sutta* states that proper attitudes towards both the slave and owner are based on empathy, responsibility, equality, respect and care-taking. Moreover, Buddhism also recognises becoming a slave of craving (*taṇhādāso*) from psychological perspective in the *Raṭṭhapāla Sutta* which is central in Buddhism for attaining liberation from suffering. This perspective is accounted from a spiritual point of view which one enjoys senses of sensual pleasure repeatedly without satisfaction which cause suffering through birth and death. In this paper, the Buddhist attitude of slavery is going to be examined in detail. To examine slavery with reference to Buddhism, it will pose the following questions: What kinds of slaves are depicted in the Buddhist texts with examples? How could we understand the concept of slavery from those examples? How is slavery identified in Buddhism from a psychological perspective? The above questions, will be discussed with reference to the Buddhist literature (*Pāli Tipiṭaka*). The textual approach will be used to discuss the topic.

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