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978-1-107-03393-1 - Narrating Karma and Rebirth: Buddhist and Jain Multi-Life Stories

Naomi Appleton

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NARRATING KARMA AND REBIRTH

Buddhism and Jainism share the concepts of karma, rebirth and the desirability of escaping from rebirth. The literature of both traditions contains many stories about past, and sometimes future, lives, which reveal much about these foundational doctrines. Naomi Appleton carefully explores how multi-life stories served to construct, communicate and challenge ideas about karma and rebirth within early South Asia, examining portrayals of the different realms of rebirth, the potential paths and goals of human beings and the biographies of ideal religious figures. Appleton also deftly surveys the ability of karma to bind individuals together over multiple lives, and the nature of the supernatural memory that makes multi-life stories available in the first place. This original study not only sheds light on the individual preoccupations of Buddhist and Jain traditions, but contributes to a more complete history of religious thought in South Asia, and brings to the foreground long-neglected narrative sources.

NAOMI APPLETON is Chancellor's Fellow in Religious Studies at the University of Edinburgh. She is author of *Jātaka Stories in Theravāda Buddhism* (2010).

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For Helen Gaunt

May she be my mother again in many future lifetimes.

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Preface

The majority of this book was written during my time as a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at Cardiff University. This fellowship was a golden opportunity to develop my research and lay the foundations for a career, and I am wholeheartedly grateful to the British Academy for their generous support. I must also thank my colleagues in Cardiff's Department of Religious and Theological Studies, most especially the Indological folks who provided resources, support and encouragement: Simon Brodbeck, Max Deeg, James Hegarty and Will Johnson. I would also like to thank the students who took RT1346 *Stories of Karma and Rebirth in Buddhist and Jain Traditions* in the 2011–12 academic year. This course was a real delight to teach, and it allowed me to clarify my analyses and road-test some of my arguments.

I am grateful to the University of Edinburgh for offering me a Chancellor's Fellowship and thus a secure academic position in which to finish this book and begin future projects. The School of Divinity has given me a very warm welcome, and many interesting staff-room chats (not to mention the coffee and cakes) have sustained me as I put the final touches to this work.

Early portions of this research have been presented at conferences and in their associated publications, and I would like to thank all those audience members and readers who have offered useful comment. The 2010 Cardiff workshop on genealogy in South Asia was one such occasion, and resulted in Appleton 2011b. An invitation to a conference on Buddhist narrative in Bangkok in August 2010 resulted in Appleton 2012b, while my contribution to the *Jātaka* panel at the Congress of the International Association of Buddhist Studies in Taiwan in June 2011 resulted in Appleton 2012a. A paper presented to the Jaina Narratives conference held at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in March 2011 will be published in a collected volume in due course.

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Preface

I was particularly delighted by the warm welcome given by the Jain studies community when I began comparative work, thanks in no small part to the work of Peter Flügel and the Centre for Jaina Studies at SOAS. Royce Wiles was kind enough to send me his thesis on the *Nirayāvaliyāsuyakkhandha*, Phyllis Granoff has provided copies of articles, Kristi Wiley has shared her expertise on Jain karma theory and Paul Dundas has answered a variety of queries.

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my partner, now husband, whose patience and support have been truly humbling. My 'academic sisters' Alice Eardley and Sarah Easterby-Smith have also been invaluable in providing a sounding board and support system. Many other colleagues, friends and relations have contributed to my well-being over the years of this research project, and though they are too many to list by name, I am grateful to them all.

I am hugely indebted to Will Johnson, who did me the great honour of reading the entirety of the book in draft form and offering his comments and corrections. Anonymous readers for the Press also made valuable suggestions. It goes without saying that any remaining errors are mine alone.

A note on sources and terms

As the following pages will reveal, multi-life stories are incredibly valuable sources for our understanding of how karma and rebirth have been viewed in Buddhist and Jain traditions. However, the sources are vast, and many relevant texts have not found their way onto the pages of this book for no better reason than the overabundance of materials and the practical limits of time. It has been my intention to focus upon the richest sources, to include what are considered to be the earliest texts, but also to examine representatives of the main textual genres from both traditions, some of which are later developments. How such criteria are applied is to a certain extent subjective, and I crave the indulgence of the reader who may differ with my judgments. Below is a brief outline of the main sources used in this book. Some additional details, along with references to published editions, translations, summaries and studies, may be found in the Appendix.

Both Śvetāmbara and Digambara Jains declare the oldest Jain scriptures – the *Pūrvas* – to be lost. The Śvetāmbaras nonetheless preserve a reasonably unified set of scriptures, with some variations between the different sects. Included in these scriptures are the twelve *aṅgas* ('limbs') and twelve *upāṅgas* ('subsidiary limbs'), which provide ample sources for multi-life stories. The key *aṅga* texts of interest for this study are the *Bhagavatī Sūtra*, *Jñātādharma-kathāḥ*, *Upāsakadaśāḥ*, *Antarḥdadaśāḥ*, *Anuttaraupapātikadaśāḥ* and *Vipākāśruta* (listed, as has become usual despite the language of their composition, according to their Sanskrit titles). The *Bhagavatī Sūtra*, or the *Vyākhyāprajñapti*, is a large and varied work, containing a whole host of teachings on a variety of subjects. There are many references to past and future lives, of warriors, gods, trees and Makkhali Gosāla, among others. The *Jñātādharma-kathāḥ Sūtra* is more explicitly a narrative collection, and many of its stories address the theme of rebirth. The famous story of the female *jina* Mallī is included in this text. The *Upāsakadaśāḥ* contains stories about lay followers who earn heavenly rebirth, while the *Anuttaraupapātikadaśāḥ* preserves similar stories about people attaining rebirth in the highest heavens.

The *Antakṛddasāḥ* is not really about rebirth, as it contains stories of ‘end-makers’ or those who attain *mokṣa*, but it can usefully be considered alongside the two preceding texts. The *Vīpākāśruta* tells of ten people who did bad actions and experienced negative fruits and ten people who did good actions and experienced positive fruits.

Of the Śvetāmbara *upāṅgas* the key texts are the *Aupapātika Sūtra* and the *Nirayāvaliyāsuyakkhandha*, which contains *upāṅgas* eight to twelve. The former contains, among other things, stories of the heavenly rebirths of various heretics and dissenters. The latter consists of five separate texts: the *Nirayāvalī* describes the lives and unhappy destinies of ten sons of King Śreṇika; the *Kalpāvataṃsikāḥ* tells of ten sons of these, who are reborn as gods; the *Puṣpikāḥ* explains the past lives of ten gods and the *Puṣpicūlikāḥ* the past lives of ten goddesses; and the *Vṛṣṇidasāḥ* relates the multi-life stories of the ten Vṛṣṇi princes. In addition to these *āṅgas* and *upāṅgas*, the *Uttarādhyayana*, one of the *mūlasūtras* that also form part of the scriptures, contains some interesting multi-life stories.

Commentaries and other compositions are also rich sources for narrative. The *Vasudevahiṇḍī*, an epic romp that perhaps dates from as early as the first century CE, contains some rebirth narratives, and the *Āvaśyaka* commentaries contain a large repository of stories, many of which concern rebirth. These appear to have formed the major source for a later tradition of recounting the ‘Universal History’, that is to say the history of the current half time-cycle and the stories of the sixty-three illustrious men (including the twenty-four *jīnas* and twelve universal emperors) born within it. The ninth-century Digambara *Mahāpurāṇa* and the twelfth-century Śvetāmbara *Triṣaṣṭ īśalākāpuruṣacaritra* are two major Sanskrit examples of the genre, and both are rich in multi-life stories. Hemacandra’s *Parīṣiṣṭaparvan*, which forms an appendix to the latter text, also contains some interesting narrative materials. Other more general narrative collections from a similar period include Hariṣeṇa’s *Bṛhatkathākośa* and Pradyumnasūri’s *Mūlasuddhiprakaraṇa*, selections from which have also been used in this study.

For Buddhist multi-life stories one place to go is the Pāli scriptures of the Theravāda school. The *Vinaya* (monastic regulations) and the four main Theravāda *Nikāyas* (*Dīgha*, *Majjhima*, *Samyutta* and *Aṅguttara*) each contain a few multi-life stories, but the richest sources are found in the *Khuddaka Nikāya* (or ‘miscellaneous’ collection of the discourses). Here we find the *Apadāna*, which contains past life stories of *arhats* (awakened beings), the *Buddhavaṃsa* and its narration of the Buddha-to-be meeting *buddhas* of the past, the small collection of *jātaka* stories (stories of the past lives of the Buddha) known as the *Cariyāpiṭaka*, and the *Petavatthu* and *Vimānavatthu*,

which tell of rebirths in the realm of the ghosts and the heavenly mansions respectively. The fifth- or sixth-century commentaries on two further *Khuddaka Nikāya* texts – the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* and *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* – are richer still, with their huge reserves of narrative material.

Outside the Theravāda tradition we find a wealth of Sanskrit Buddhist texts, including the *Mahāvastu* and the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, both of which contain many multi-life stories. The latter is closely linked to many collections of *avadānas*, including the *Divyāvadāna* and *Avadānaśataka*. The latter of these is a particularly rich source as it contains one hundred stories about different varieties of past and future lives, including stories of the past lives of *arhats*, the Buddha, heavenly beings and ghosts. In addition, past life stories were recounted in poetic compositions such as Āryaśūra's *Jātakamālā*, which retells *jātaka* stories in elegant Sanskrit verse and prose. As well as these Sanskrit and Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit sources, many Indian Buddhist multi-life stories have been preserved in the languages of Central and East Asia, but such sources are excluded from this study since they are beyond my linguistic expertise.

As this outline of sources indicates, most (though not all) of my Jain sources are preserved within the Śvetāmbara tradition, and my Buddhist sources do not extend into the Mahāyāna, though they do cut across the different schools of early Indian Buddhism. The choice of my sources is partly influenced by the availability of extant texts, as well as the necessity of limiting the field of enquiry in order to make meaningful connections and analyses. This book cannot be all-encompassing, and while I do try to take account of differences within the traditions as well as between them, the picture I paint here is necessarily composed of broad brush strokes. It is my hope that this study will act as a gateway to further work, and that other scholars may be inspired by this broad picture to ask similar questions of smaller sub-sets of stories, or of sources that are currently unavailable to me.

Throughout this book I tend to use terms and names in their Sanskrit forms where original-language terms are required, the aim being to provide a consistent and readable result. However, in translations or discussions of Pāli sources or specifically Theravāda ideas I use Pāli names and terms. Texts are referred to by their original-language name, though in the case of the Śvetāmbara Jain scriptures I use the Sanskrit version of the titles rather than Prakrit. In cases where it seems useful I provide an English translation of the title in brackets. Footnotes contain references to text divisions, where these are widely understood, as well as to editions and/or translations. A full list of sources, including bibliographic data and short summaries, may be found in the Appendix.