

The Key Role of *Sakka* in Support *Buddha's Sāsana*

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Abstract

The Myanmar word, “Thagyarmin” is derived from the original Sanskrit word *Sakra*, which is called *Sakka* in *Pāli* language. *Sakka* is the lord of devas who rules *Tāvatiṃsa* and *Cātummahārājika* (deva realms). This paper will present *Sakka's* key role in support *Buddha's sāsana*. His efforts to support and safeguard Buddhism were found in many *Pāli* text and commentaries (*Aṭṭhakathās*). Based on these reliable sources, *Sakka's* active and enthusiastic participation in supporting *Buddhasāsana* will be presented in this paper. It is expected that the recorders will be able to get a comprehensive description about *Sakka* who performs his duties and responsibilities to safeguard *Buddhasāsana* by reading this research paper.

Keywords: Thagyarmin, *Sakka*, *Buddha Sāsana*.

Introduction

In *Pāli* ‘*Sakka*’ is the capable one or powerful, *Inda* (lord), or *Maghavā* (the one who was a human called *Magha* in his former rebirth), etc. He was also known as *Deva Rājā* (lord of devas), *Meghavāhana* (the rider of clouds) *Vajiravuda* (the owner of varajain arm). These titles were given to them depending on his capacity and his attributes. *Sakka* had lived a virtuous life as *Magha*, a young man in the village of *Macala* in the province of *Magha* in his past existence. He had lived as a virtuous young man in *Macala* village long before the *Gotama Buddha's* enlightenment as the Omniscient *Buddha* in the world. He made his locality clean, tidy and delightful working together with thirty three youths, who volunteered on various tasks. He built wayside rest public houses and bridges, repaired the roads and dug a rectangular pond. He made stands for of cool drinking water for the public and travelers alike. He also made roads smooth, flat and even. While making donations, he gave things away generously, moreover. He had never failed to observe the five moral precepts all his life youth *Magha* always followed the seven rules of conduct: supporting the father; supporting the mother; supporting the elderly relatives such as elder sister of mother, younger sister of mother, elder brother of father, and younger brother of father etc.; telling only the truth, using no vulgar words in speech; no slandering and having no envy. These rules of conduct, in fact, can lead whoever follows them to becoming the lord of devas in his next existence, *Magha* never failed to follow them throughout life span a human being.

After his death, he was reborn as the lord of devas who resided in *Tāvatiṃsadeva* realm. According to *Sakka Pañha Sutta*, it was learnt that he went *Gotama Buddha* and raised the fourteen questions by the time his life span almost reached the end. While receiving the *Buddha's* teaching, he attained the *sotāpattimaggañāṇa*. After winning stream-entry, *Sakka* passed away in the presence of the *Buddha* and was instantly reborn as *Sakka* for the second time. Thus the existing *Sakka* is a stream winner or *sotāpana*, who has attained the first state of *Ariyā*. There have already, been numerous *sotāpannas* who have emerged in *Gotama Buddha's* time. But this was not necessarily meant that each one can go on enjoying three kinds of pleasures of men, *devas* and *Bhramās*. In other words not every *sotāpanna* is supposed to be reborn in the higher planes of existences successively (A Bon-sin-san) for seven more existences. There are only seven Bon-sin-san *sotāpannas* including *Sakka*. He is bound to be reborn in *Akanittha Brahmā* realm where he will attain Arahatsip and realize *parinibbāna* for his last existence.

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Sakka is not only an ideal person who has set to best example for all human beings but also the disciple whose outstanding veneration to Lord *Buddha* is remarkable. Moreover, he has already performed various activities and taken different responsibilities to support *Buddha sāsanā*. This paper will present *Sakka*'s major activities and highlight his key role in supporting and safeguarding *Buddhasāsanā*.

Sakka's major activities as well as his efforts that are described in *Pāṭi* Literature will be selected and taken out from the following sources. They are mentioned as follows:

- (i) Supporting the *Bodhisattas*
- (ii) Supporting Lord *Buddha*
- (iii) Offering practical assistance in revealing the truth for the *Buddha* when accused of evil doing.
- (iv) Providing assistance to the *Buddha* in admonishing (notorious) living beings.
- (v) Giving protection for *bikkhus*, *sāmaṇas* and lay people against dangers.
- (vi) Supporting the Buddhist missionaries and organizes and lay disciples alike for the perpetuation of *Buddha sāsanā*.

Supporting the *Bodhisattas*

It was mentioned in the 550 *Jātakas* that *Sakka* had provided his assistance to the *Bodhisattas*. He performed such activities as building a monastic dwelling for as *Bodhisatta* living an ascetic life and rescuing him when he gets into troubles. *Sakka* used to be one of the *Tusita* devas in the accompanying retinue of *Bodhisatta Deva Setaketu*, who had urged the latter to reflect upon his precious meritorious life and to be conceived in the womb of chief Queen *Mahāmāyā* of human abode at the end of his life-span in *Tusita deva* realm. Besides, he had urged respective made deities on devas to be reborn in human abodes after their demise who would be reborn as youth *Suvaṇṇasāma* prince *Mahāpadāna* and prince *Kusa*. No sooner was the *Bodhisatta* prince delivered clean and pure from the womb of *Mahāmāyā* than he stood firmly on his feet with the soles touching the ground fully and squarely. There looked toward the ten directions: the four cardinals, the four intermediate, the downward and the upward direction-one after another. Finally, the *Bodhisatta* faced northward from whose he stood and took seven steps forward. While the *Bodhisatta* was taking his steps, the ten thousand *Sakkas* stood blowing ten thousand conches to show their veneration to the *Bodhisatta*.

When the *Bodhisatta* prince reached at the age of seven, *Sakka* sent *Visukamma deva* to create an auspicious royal lake for the *Bodhisatta* to play in the water. Likewise, *Sakka* had built *Cūlāmaṇi Cetiya* at *Tāvatisa* deva realm so that devas would be able to worship it as a substitute for the *Buddha* himself.

At the age of twenty nine, the *Bodhisatta* prince renounced the world to become an ascetic. Having reached the other bank of the river *Anomā*, the *Bodhisatta* took his hair-knot by hand, and with a sword in the other and cut it off. The *Bodhisatta* held the hair-knot together with the diadem in his hand and made a solemn resolution "the hair-knot together with the diadem would stay in the sky if he was sure to become a *Buddha*" the hair-knot together with the diadem did stay in the sky. *Sakka* received it together with the diadem with a jewel casket having the size of one yojana in length. After that he enshrined them in the *Cūlāmaṇi Cetiya* with a height of these yojanas which he built and decorate with precious jewels at *Tāvatisa* abode of *deva*.

Supporting the Buddha

Sakka was never reluctant to venerate the *Buddha* or to offer service in praise of the *Buddha*'s glorious attributes. A multitude of *devas* and *Brahmās* come to the *Buddha* as soon as he had fully enlightened. They venerated the omniscient *Buddha* by blowing their conch. *Sakka* did the same.

Likewise, *Sakka* uttered words of joyous expression about the nine holy attributes of the *Buddha* taking the human form of a young man (usher-in-to Heaven) when the *Buddha* accompanied by his disciples on their alms-round to King *Bimbisāra*'s palace. He came at the front of the *Buddha* and his *sāvakas* as if he were a volunteer to inspire other people to do meritorious deeds. In this way, *Sakka* praised the holy attributes of the *Buddha*.

During the seventh rainy season after his Enlightenment, *Gotama Buddha* went up to the *Tāvātīmasadeva* realm to preach *Abhidhamma* to *Santussita deva*, his former mother in the previous existence and other *devas* there on the full moon day of Thadingyut, the *Buddha* descended to the earth at the city of *Sanikassa* (modern Farrukhabad district Uttar Pradesh province in North India). The *Buddha* came down by a triple flights of stairs, the central one being overlaid with gems (rubies) flanked by two others, the one painted in gold, and the other in silver. All these flights of stairs were created by *Sakka*.

There was a story in the *Pāli* text how *Ratanasutta paritta* came to be taught. The story took place in *Vesālī* where a certain epidemic broke out with a great toll of human lives. A very large number of people living in *Vesālī* lost their lives in the outbreak of this epidemic. So the *Buddha* came to *Vesālī* to protect those people against the fatal disease and to ward off evil spirits and demons that added to the tragedy of *Vesālī*. *Sakka* drove away the evil spirits and demons or ogres alike from before area the arrival of the *Buddha*: Moreover, *Sakka* recited the last three *gathās* of *Ratanasutta* himself when the *Buddha* taught the local people and lay disciples *Ratanasutta*.

Once, the *Buddha* accompanied by his disciples proceeded to *Cūlasubbaddhā*, who lived in *Uggapura*, which was one hundred for far from the *Buddha* monastic dwelling. *Sakka* managed to build five hundred coaches for all of them with the help of *Visukamma Deva* to ensure a smooth and convenient mean of transport.

Again *Sakka* looked after the *Buddha* when he was suffering from severe dysentery with discharge of blood prior to his passing away *Sakka* put the bed-pan onto his head to carry. He also did other add jobs around the sickly *Buddha*. In this way, *Sakka* offered his service to provide care for the *Buddha* lying on his death-bed.

Offering practical assistance in revealing the truth for the *Buddha* whom accused of evil doing.

There were some foolish people who offended the *Buddha*. Among them *Ciñcamāṇāvikā*, *Ambaṭṭha* and *Saccaka* were the worst offenders. *Ciñcamāṇāvikā* publicly accused the *Buddha* of a wanton person who had caused her pregnancy. *Sakka* together with four *devas* went to the place where the *Buddha* was preaching. Having decided to reveal the truth, they took the forms of mice and bit away all pieces of string that was tied to a piece of wooden board covering around *Ciñcamāṇāvikā*'s womb. They also made the wind below hard so that robe *Ciñcamāṇāvikā* was wearing was violently blown upward. All pieces of string that were fastened to the round wooden board over *Ciñcamāṇāvikā*'s womb dropped due to the strong bite of the mice. It dropped onto the insteps of *Ciñcamāṇāvikā* and her tip toes got crashed. In this way, *Sakka* helped the *Buddha* reveal the truth.

Likewise, youth *Ambatṭha* tried to disgrace the *Buddha* in public by using various kinds of insulting words concerning his clan and lineage. On a detailed analysis on his clan and ancestry, the *Buddha* found text he was born of *Ukkāka* ruling social class. On the contrary, *Ambatṭha*'s ancestry was born of the (*khattiya*) slave social class (*dāsa*). When the *Buddha* publicly asked *Ambatṭha* which clan he had been born, he has no answer to reply. In fact, his clan was called *Kaṇhāyana*, slave social class. Although the *Buddha* asked him to reveal his clan repeatedly *Ambatṭha* did not admit that he was a slave. Finally, he had to admit that he was a slave after being threatened to break his head to piece with a huge metal hammer by *Sakka*.

The wandering ascetic was a hard and he stick to his own view that 'rūpa, vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra and viññāna' to oneself. A person owned those things and these was personal belongings of oneself. Holding this wrong view, he did not accept the *Buddha*'s preaching that these things were not personal belongings and these was nothing like "self". The *Buddha* told him that everything was impermanent and all things were transient. None of the beings possessed such things as 'rūpa, vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra and viññāna' but they were only transient aggregate. To expound the concept of the five aggregates (*khandās*), the *Buddha* gave him some example. Some powerful kings such a king *Kosala* and king *Ajātasatthu* were able to use their absolute power either to kill or to give severe punishments to those who committed serious crimes. They might confiscate the property of those who were quality. Despite their dictatorship over their people, absolute one could neither make himself better looking nor prevent plain looks from existing with the use of this power. Even though they were powerful, they could not manage to create their appearance to their satisfaction. This showed no one was able to control such and such way to these five types of aggregates. So, the *Buddha* told him that nothing was permanent and no one could control the so-called *khandā*. In other words there was no self or 'atta', but all things were 'anatta'. Although the *Buddha* asked the ascetic if he could do so to his physical appearance repeatedly never replied, so *Sakka* took the form of celestial demon holding the varajain arm with red burning flame and stood in the sky. Being the fierce demon, he became frightened and replied to the *Buddha* question. Thus he had to dispel his wrong view and accepted the right view.

In this way *Sakka* offered his assistance to the *Buddha* in resealing the truth by threatening the offenders.

Providing assistance to the Buddha in admonishing living beings

In taming *Uruvelakasappa* and *Jambuka* heretic, *Sakka* came to the *Buddha* attended to him. *Sakka* offered his service to do jobs around the *Buddha*. By doing so, he convinced the heretics that the *Buddha* was holy and powerful person much superior to them. Moreover, they would be able to develop their confidence in the *Buddha*.

Giving protection for Bikkhus, Samaṇas and lay people against dangers.

Sakka sent the four *lokapāla* lord of *Devas* to look after *Paṇḍitasāmaṇa* and *Sukkasāmaṇa* while they were doing *vipassanā* meditation with the aim of attaining *Magga Phala* and the *Nibbāna*. They did their meditation daily. The four *lokapāla* lord of *Devas* had to drive away birds and small animals nearly the particular place so that these *sāmaṇas* could do their job without any disturbance. *Sakka*, himself guarded the entrance of the cove where these *sāmaṇas* did meditation.

In addition, *Sakka* was ready to help the virtuous people whenever they were faced with difficulties. When the monk *Cakkhupāla* lost his sight, *Sakka* took him to *Sāvatti* by holding his hands.

Sakka helped *Mahāduggata*, a poor but generous man with the cooking so that his donation ceremony would be successfully held. He lent his hand to *Mahāduggata* for cooking the alms med for the Buddha and *Sagha*. Thus, he encouraged the poor people in doing meritorious deeds.

Beside, when the people of lawlessness, or the king is nor rule of law in the world, *Sakka* threatening to make himself visible in front of the people and king, to avoid doing evils. He exhorted them to follows rules and moral precepts.

Sakka pays obeisance to those who are endowed with four qualities doing meritorious deed, observing moral precepts, taking refuge to the tree precious gem (the *Buddha*, *Dhamma* and *Samgha*) and supporting and administering wife and children. In addition to them, *Sakka* worships the seven “*sekkhapuggala*” who are practicing *dhamma* and the *Arahats* on daily routine.

Supporting the Buddhist missionaries and organizes and lay disciples alike for the perpetuation of Buddha *Sāsanā*.

Vinaya Piṭaka mentioned that the *Buddha* on his dead bed had told *Sakka* to safeguard *Buddha Sāsanā* after his demise. According to *Dīghanikāya*, it was learnt that *Sakka* accepted the *Buddha*'s wish and he promised to do so *Mahāvamsa* described that the *Buddha* had assigned *Sakka* to protect King *Vijaya* with 700 retinues on their arrival to *śrīlīnkā* (Ceylon) against dangers. This was because they would not only strive hard to develop towns and cities in Ceylon but also do their best to flourish *Buddhasāsanā* and to make it perpetuate on this island. It way mentioned in *Mahāvamsa* that *Sakka* had done this task dutifully. The treatise continued to state that *Sakka* offered the sacred collar bone relic of the *Buddha* enshrined in the *Cūlāmaṇicetiya* at *Tāvatisa* abode of devas to king *Devānarāpiyatissa* as he wanted to enshrine the *Buddha*'s relic in *Thūpa āramacetiya* that he built.

Again, *Sakka* created golden throne and gold casket to place the *Buddha* on this occasion, *Sakka* blow the conchrelic carried by *Sonuttara* to the abode of the mythical serpent (*nāga*). He offered necessary things to be enshrined in *Mehācetiya* build by king *Dhuthagāmaṇi*.

It can be seen that *Sakka* continues to provide assistance to missionaries and virtuous people in their efforts to perpetuate *Buddha Sāsanā* even after the demise of *Gotama Buddha*.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Sakka* can be viewed as a virtuous lord of devas. According to evidence obtained from *Pāli* text and *Aṭṭhakathā*, it is learnt that *Sakka* was as stream-winner (*sotapānna*) and so he has no doubt about the three precious Gems. He was fully confident in the holy attributes of the *Buddha*, *Dhamma* and *Samgha*. He can be viewed as a kind, compassionate and fair person who always helps the virtuous ones. Based on the findings from *Pāli* and *Aṭṭhakathā*, it can be concluded that *Sakka* was the most pious one and his excellent adoration to the *Buddha* was very prominent in his activities and efforts. As he was a faithful and obedient *Ariyā* disciple of *Gotama Buddha*, he has been doing his best to

support, flower and perpetuate *BuddhaSāsanā* in as many ways as possible. His efforts set a good example for the *Buddhas*.

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