

Trobriand and Buddhist rebirth and the fate of the soul: The “virgin birth” debate revisited*

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ABSTRACT. The Trobriand islanders of New Guinea, like many other small- scale societies, believed in the reincarnation of deceased ancestors but without a belief in karma. The wide prevalence of such rebirth theories goes counter to the notion that South Asia was their original locus of such theories. In early anthropology the conventional view was that the Trobrianders, like the Australian Aborigines, were ignorant of physiological paternity and apparently believed that conception occurred when an ancestor as a spirit entity entered a womb of a woman from the same matrilineal clan. This thesis was further spelled out and documented in great detail by Bronislaw Malinowski, one of the founding fathers of anthropology. In the 1960s Malinowski’s thesis produced fractious debates by leading anthropologists in the journal *Man*. This article revisits the old debate with a fresh point of view and suggests that the anthropological debate ignores the multiple discourses on procreation that prevailed among the Trobrianders and smothered women’s voices. It then compares the dominant Trobriand conception of birth with a *minor* tradition of procreation in Buddhism known as *opapatika* or spontaneous births and discourses at length on the birth of the Buddha as an example of “virgin birth” analogous to the Christian. The essay concludes with an examination of related rebirth theories among the ancient Greeks especially Empedocles and Plato, the latter whom the present author, arguing against established opinion, thinks was a “rebirth fanatic”.

KEY WORDS. Anthropology, reincarnation, Trobrianders, ‘virgin birth’ debate, spirit conception, Malinowski, procreation

* "The Agnes and Constantine E.A. Foerster Lecture on the Immortality of the Soul" delivered at the University of California, Berkeley on Tuesday March 18, 2003.

The “virgin birth” and spirit conception

The “old debate” I am thinking about goes back into the late 19th century when ethnologists like E.S. Hartland and anthropologists like James Frazer argued whether the Australian Aborigines knew anything of physiological paternity and instead believed that conception occurred when a spirit child entered the womb of a woman. This was confirmed by colonial ethnographers in the first decade of the last century who lived and worked among the Australian Aborigines and gathered further empirical evidence justifying the spirit conception hypothesis.¹ They were in turn followed by several modern professional social anthropologists such as W.E.H. Stanner, Ashley Montague and Phyllis Kaberry.² Kaberry who did intensive fieldwork in 1934-36 made the point that the aborigines postulated “a spirit-child prior to birth and which bear on the meaning attributed to paternity and maternity” and these spirit children came from an original pool of spirits who were placed in pools “by the Rainbow Serpent in the Time Long Past before there were any human beings. Often they were temporarily incarnated in animals, birds, fish and reptiles, but they also wandered over the countryside;” later on they were incarnated in human wombs.³ This Kaberry maintains, with other ethnographers on the spirit procreation side of the argument, “arise[s] out of the ignorance of physiological paternity.”⁴ She adds that some aborigines even after thirty years of contact with white settlers “still had no idea of the true relation between sexual intercourse and conception.”⁵ Employing a familiar anthropological distinction Kaberry argues that the woman’s husband is the pater but not the genitor of the child.

These kinds of debates are not new in anthropology as any one familiar with the one on the mythic persona of Captain Cook might remember.⁶ But after some time these kinds of debates wear themselves out and become a bit boring and even dated, witness the aforesaid debate on Cook’s tours in the South Pacific. But then they suffer a resurrection or a new rebirth as ethnographers encounter new facts; or more likely new theoretical or ideological interests, both

of which are heavily entangled in the human sciences. Thus the old debate on the aboriginal ignorance of physiological paternity got a new lease of life when Edmund Leach, now deceased, wrote a seminal article (if you pardon the term) in 1966 in his usually provocative and polemical style and with the title "Virgin Birth."⁷ Here he argued that such conceptions were not at all unusual, the prime instance being that of the conception of Christ in the womb of the Virgin Mother, an idea found in other ancient cultures, as he rightly pointed out. Thus, he says, some Christians might well believe that children are given by God and that intercourse perhaps is not that significant for them, a somewhat dubious proposition as far as ordinary Christians are concerned. Leach was one of my friends and intellectual mentors and, ironically, the reasoned and careful response to Leach was by Melford E. Spiro, also a friend and mentor who vigorously defended the older ethnographies and responded to Leach's accusation of what one might call ethnographic orientalism, that is, the imputation that primitive peoples (a term we shun nowadays) are "ignorant" of physiological paternity and that therefore they are deemed "irrational" or "non-rational," a thought horrifying to the Western enlightenment imagination in which all of us are or were unhappily nurtured. Spiro made several important points: first, the Virgin birth was not a normal attribute of Christian procreation but was a miraculous one, apropos of Tertullian's famous dictum that "I believe in Christianity because it is absurd." Second, he reiterated that ethnographers were not mistaken in attributing the lack of knowledge of procreation to Australian Aborigines, and the greatest of them all, Bronislaw Malinowski, affirmed the same idea and in great empirical detail in respect of the Trobriand Islanders. Lastly, one could conclude, says Spiro, that either these Trobriand persons were not at all cognizant of physiological procreation; or they "denied" it, in the psychoanalytical sense of "denial" as defense. And that meant that denial of the father's role in procreation is due to the infantile oedipal conflict, the point that Spiro elaborated in a fine study *Oedipus in the Trobriands*.⁸ Yet, to me the latter hypothesis is a bit dubious because the Trobrianders were a

famously matrilineal people who, says Malinowski, had good relations with the father (but not with the mother's brother) and hence to me it is doubtful that they should outdo Western patriarchy in attempting to resolve the Oedipal conflict by denying the father's role in procreation.

The accusation of ethnographic orientalism drew spirited responses from several of the long letter writers in the journal *Man*. The general argument was that Australians (if not Trobrianders) were as rational as the European (indeed more so for Ashley Montague, another old friend, now deceased) because "ignorance" does not mean lack of our valued "rationality" but rather a lack of knowledge. But this conveniently ignores the fact that we do not call an undergraduate "ignorant" when he fails to answer a question in ethnography and it would be unthinkable to call such a person an "ignoramus" – though some of you might want me to retract that statement. David Schneider, another favorite person of mine, also now deceased, made the shrewd point that there are only few of us fully aware of the details of human procreation except as a simple correlation or connection between sexual intercourse, seminal injection and procreation. Then on hindsight, one might add that all ethnographers of the sixties were also somewhat ignorant of this issue because we now know that procreation could be engineered without all the coital fuss and bother. Why then resurrect this dead issue? Unhappily I have just written a book on comparative rebirth; and I do not want to remain all quiet on the coital front because I have retired from my job at Princeton and I want to make my voice heard before, like my several friends mentioned earlier, I also my quietus make.

After this spell of levity let me get back to seriousness and spell out my own "prejudices." I think that whenever one has a belief in divinities or spiritual entities or souls incarnated in human wombs there exists the potential for two kinds of aporias or existential puzzlements that may or not be explicitly recognized in any particular cultural tradition. First, what are the processes whereby the soul or spirit that exists in some other realm gets incarnated in the female womb, a problem that gets exacerbated when there is a belief in the

materiality of bodily processes and the immateriality of spirit? This is the case with Christ's birth and the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin and in some popular Christian traditions of Jesus himself. Second, there is a much more general problem that I think is *expectable* in societies believing in reincarnation or rebirth, and waiting to surface under suitable circumstances. The spirit or soul at death must eventually come back to earth and seek another rebirth and for this to happen the spirit must find its way into the womb of a woman (and in some societies in animal wombs and in plants). Take the not unusual case of the Kutchin of the Canadian Northwest Territories and the Yukon reported by Richard Slobodin where the spirit in the form of a small creature like a mouse creeps into the vagina of the woman just before parturition;⁹ or the invisible spirit child of the Trobriand clinging to a floating driftlog or a similar object and waiting to enter into a woman of the same matriline. *If it is indeed the spirit that initially gets incarnated or reincarnated in a human womb, then what is the role of coitus and seminal ejaculation in conception?* This aporia of rebirth is different from the Christological idea of the Virgin birth or parthenogenesis which is a miraculous one and pertains to none other than Jesus's birth. One must not assume, however, that ordinary people are obsessed with solving aporias of existence simply because they are what the ethnographer expects, not any more than ordinary Christians are with their theodicy. Aporias of existence become relevant to ordinary people only when they are hit by untoward events or when they are forced to confront cultural, personal or familial crises.

Both forms of spirit conception – that is as parthenogenesis or as spirit conception in ordinary humans - are found in Buddhism. There is the miraculous birth of the Buddha in a human womb very much on the Virgin birth model; then, insofar as Buddhism has a rebirth theory, a concern with the manner in which the spirit or rebirth seeking entity achieves a human embodiment. Unfortunately, in the anthropological debate the term “virgin birth” is loosely applied to both conceptions of conception whereas I think ordinary people, be it among Trobrianders or elsewhere, could hardly be interested in the virginity of

their women. I shall begin this argument, not with the Buddhist case, but the locus classicus of rebirth and spirit conception, the Trobriand, described by Malinowski.

In his important paper, "Baloma: the spirits of the dead in the Trobriand Islands," Malinowski dealt with Trobriand ideas of procreation.¹⁰ Among the matrilineal Trobrianders of Kiriwina village where Malinowski worked, the child traces descent through its mother; and conception is due to the entry of a spirit child into a womb rather than to the sexual intercourse of the parents. Malinowski's views remained virtually unchanged: pregnancy is solely caused by spirit incarnations of matrilineal ancestors in the process of what one ethnographer of Amerindian rebirth calls "continuous incarnation."¹¹ The father has nothing to do with physical paternity. However, the path to the womb has to be opened up for the spirit to enter and this is done through sexual intercourse. No virgin can conceive because of the blocked pathway. But, says Malinowski, the pathways can be opened by artificial means also. "My informants dwelt on this subject with much relish, graphically and diagrammatically explaining to me all the details of this process. Their account did not leave the slightest doubt about their sincere belief in the possibility of women becoming pregnant without intercourse."¹² After the spirit enters the womb there is no further need for sexual intercourse, except of course for fun, in order for the woman to conceive. In response to Malinowski's inquiries the Kiriwinians made an important proviso in respect of pigs. An informant told him: "They copulate, copulate, presently the female will give birth."¹³ Malinowski tentatively concluded that in this case "copulation appears to be the *u'ula* (cause) of pregnancy."¹⁴ But further questioning proved otherwise, because the question of animal reincarnation was of no importance to the Trobrianders. "Thus, in the case of animals, the whole problem about reincarnation and about the formation of new life is simply ignored."¹⁵ They added that animals die by natural causes whereas human death is always due to some supernatural agency.

It seems that the role of the Trobriand and Australians is to provide *facts*

that will permit the ethnographer to justify or validate his own point of view. It is impossible for these ethnographers to imagine that "natives" too might be carrying on their own debates on these very topics! To show that some such thing is indeed happening let me move from Malinowski to Leo Austen's restudy of Trobriand procreation published in 1934.¹⁶

Austen was the Assistant Resident Magistrate in the Trobriands who interviewed fifty persons in Kiriwina village. Austen had formulated an open-ended set of questions which were to be combined with interviews initially conducted in English but later substantiated with statements taken down in Kiriwinian and translated by him at leisure. The whole strategy of research was to get specific information in order to confirm or disconfirm Malinowski, and not to get at contentious discourses ("debates") among the Kiriwinians themselves on the subject of spirit conception. In fact Austen (like many others) probably discouraged native debates from erupting and fouling the hypothesis-specific nature of the interviews. It is not surprising, then, that the interviews confirmed Malinowski's hypotheses. Additionally, Austen provided detailed technical information on fetal development from the very entry of the spirit to the formation of a near-complete foetus.¹⁷ He also confirmed Malinowski's opinion that the vagina of a virgin has to be opened up by intercourse, but denied that, except for mythical cases, it was permissible to dilate the vagina artificially.¹⁸ Again: "Until the menstrual flow has ceased, a female cannot conceive; and the monthly flow of menstrual blood is checked by sexual intercourse."¹⁹ Yet semen has no role whatever in conception.²⁰ And he adds that "the greater number of my informants laid down with no uncertainty that the *baloma*, or the reincarnating *waiwaia* (spirit child) was undoubtedly the cause of pregnancy."²¹ When a woman is about three months pregnant she dreams that "a spirit child or reincarnating *waiwaia* is brought to her by some *baloma* or spirit of a dead relative" and placed on her head. Thereafter the spirit child waits floating in drift logs, leaves, boughs, and weeds ready to enter a woman, as Malinowski also asserted.²²

All this seems a near perfect confirmation of Malinowski except for the jarring fact that some of Austen's informants had *another* view of pregnancy, also consonant with matrilineal kinship and, more importantly, affirming the agency of women. "One of my best informants who did not believe in the reincarnating *waiwaia* being the cause of conception, still accepted the belief that pregnancy did not take place until after the second month from the cessation of the menses. She was an old woman, married about forty years ago [a young woman when Malinowski was there], had had five children, and on no occasion had she dreamt of a *baloma* bringing her a spirit child. "She was the strongest advocate of the belief that blood in the uterus brought the child into existence without the aid of a reincarnating *waiwaia*."²³ Austen says that her ideas on the development of the foetus were quite unorthodox; and further she did not think the father had anything to do with it. "And this fact was brought out forcibly by some few other married women who were unorthodox to believe that children were brought into existence by the 'turning over' of the blood in the uterus."²⁴ Anyhow here in Kiriwina village were some women, including one of Austen's "best informants," who, while supporting the unity of the lineage by affirming *their* exclusive role in procreation, were also affirming *physiological maternity*, minimizing, if not denying the role of the father as genitor (which is easy to do in matrilineal Trobriand) and also seemingly denying the idea of spirit conception -- a rather drastic "heterodoxy" erupting from the straightjacket of Austen's prearranged questions.

For Austen this heterodoxy seemed more apparent than real: "when the point cropped up as to whether their children possessed a *baloma* or spirit, *they were ready to fall back upon the orthodox idea of a reincarnating waiwaia*."²⁵ Austen believed that this statement indicated the relative lack of importance of dissident opinions. I look at it differently as another manifestation of the existential puzzle that any rebirth eschatology poses, namely, the reconciliation of the role of spirit conception with, in this case, *physiological maternity*. "Ready to fall back upon the orthodox idea" is surely the ethnographer's

conclusion. Once these women affirmed their relative autonomy in procreation they were posed with the problem of reconciling this with the rebirth theory that postulated that children are ancestors reborn. Consequently they were saying that the ancestral spirit inhabited the child *after* it was born, a viewpoint that Malinowski also recorded from an informant in the coastal village of Kavataria.²⁶

Austen's female informants thus preserved the idea that the actual physical procreation of the child was the mother's responsibility, though these informants did not express in their interviews what role, if any, the father might have had in that process. It is likely that these women, when they talked among themselves, unimpeded by the prearranged scenario with the white magistrate, would have had much more spirited arguments on spirit conception. To put it differently: the ethnographic inquiry such as Austen's imprisons the native discourse, not easily permitting the eruption of contentious arguments.

Malinowski, we all know, was sensitive to the voices of his informants and recorded multiple opinions on various subjects. However, like other ethnographers of the time, he wanted to distinguish the "orthodox" views of specialists from popular views and individual speculations; and at other times he was trying to formulate a "clear and final solution" out of the "contradictions which cropped up in the course of inquiries."²⁷ This seems a strange idea for the person who first formulated the improbable doctrine that the role of the ethnographer was to determine "the natives' point of view."²⁸ In his second Trobriand visit, however, Malinowski was much more receptive to local debates, and in his 1927 book, *The Father in Primitive Psychology*, he admits that natives have a "diversity of views *only partially merging into a consistent story*."²⁹ During this visit he engaged "definitively and aggressively" in open debates with natives on their procreation beliefs only to find that he "had been preceded in this attack by the missionary teachers."³⁰

Confronted with these hostile opinions by the missionaries and the ethnographer, Malinowski's informants reaffirmed even more vehemently their

view of spirit conception, this time to deny that even pigs could procreate through sexual intercourse. Thus they produced many dogmatic answers regarding both humans and pigs. When Malinowski posed "an arrogantly framed affirmation that the missionaries are right" to one of his most intelligent informants the latter retorted: "Not at all, the missionaries are mistaken; always unmarried girls continually have intercourse, and yet have no children."³¹ Another said: "They talk that seminal fluid makes a child. Lie! The spirits indeed bring [children] at night time."³² Yet another informant stated that while there is no *baloma* involved in pig procreation, "the female pig breeds by itself," thus bringing into question the earlier view of pig procreation, and proving that pigs too, like Austen's female informant, can produce babies through internal processes, though lacking the later intervention of a *baloma*. Further proof of perverse porcine procreation was supplied by another informant no doubt provoked by Malinowski's own dogma that testes alone contain the generative substance: "From all male pigs we cut off the testes. They copulate not. Yet females bring forth," conveniently ignoring, said Malinowski, the fact that actual copulation of the domestic female is the work of wandering feral pigs.³³ It is hard to believe, as apparently Malinowski did, that natives could not have observed the copulation of the wild and the tame. What seems to have happened here is a powerful native reaction in the face of an "arrogant" assault on their views, initially by the missions and then by the ethnographer, resulting in a firm insistence of *one* view as the only view. Pestered by outsider Europeans, now it is the native who is imprisoned in discourse and denies the multiplicity of indigenous opinions about rebirth.

Malinowski, for his own part, humbly admitted that his earlier view of pig copulation through heterosexual intercourse was wrong. But was it? His activity and that of the missions probably temporarily silenced the earlier debate: "They copulate, copulate, presently the female will give birth." This view of animals is not unique to Trobriand because some Australian Aborigines have similar opinions. It therefore seems entirely likely that Malinowski did record an

alternative view of procreation in his earlier visit. In order to record unusual cultural beliefs so much opposed to the European ones, he simply ignored the voices that expressed similarity between pigs and humans. Thus there are multiple debates and multiple reactions among native populations as a consequence of the alien presence. One such reaction is where the unwary informant is compelled by the presence of the outsider to provide an answer to something he had not given much thought. The paradigmatic case is where a curious Western interlocutor begins to ask questions regarding the puzzles that puzzle *him*. Naturally this fuels an already existing debate in the native society; or if the topic is not a subject of internal debate, the new inquiry introduced by the outsider might spark contentious discourses (debates) on the subject. Alternatively, these responses might well be a reflection of debates going on in the society itself, partly provoked by the new intrusive European presence that raises doubts among informants themselves regarding the central rebirth aporia that I have stated earlier. We often think and act as if the dialogues that informants engage in with us contain evidence which validate our hypotheses about them. Surely this is true but not entirely; for in engaging in dialogue with us they might well be engaging in debates with us or giving us discursive information about debates that exist in their own society. The latter is especially true of issues that are controversial with them also. In this type of situation "information" given to us as ethnographers is central to understanding contentious discourses in that society rather than as data for validating a particular ethnographic hypothesis on such hot topics as the ignorance of physiological paternity. From such information one cannot infer the dominant form of procreation beliefs in a society; one can only infer the existence of debates regarding the problematic nature of spirit belief and procreation. Yet these multiple responses do not occur willy-nilly: they hover around the central issue of any rebirth eschatology, the nature and role of the spirit being reborn in a woman's womb which is also the receptacle for intercourse and semen ejaculation.

In this case the ethnographer might simply be a convenient vehicle for natives to air the debates going on in their own society. The ethnographer is deluded into thinking that these informant discourses validate *his* hypotheses; in reality the discourses of both informant and ethnographer belong to the same class of statements, namely those containing hypotheses regarding the nature of procreation. This does not mean that one should not look for evidence to validate an ethnographic hypothesis; only that evidence is equivocal and this must be recognized, critically evaluated and understood before it is used for the validation of an interpretation. Hence, in the context of the preceding discussions, the statements of informants could be used for understanding the content and complexity of debates about physiological or spirit conception that occur in that society rather than as evidence to validate an ethnographic hypothesis as to what Trobrianders or Australian Aborigines knew about those very same phenomena. Malinowski, I think, correctly sketched an important view of Trobriand spirit conception, but it is unlikely that it was the only one. Yet he was trapped in his own imprisoning assumptions such that he had to convert that conception into a native "orthodoxy" refusing to recognize alternative views. Moreover, virtually all of his informants were male, thereby silencing the powerful contradictory views of females who, by his own thinking, were a strong force in this matrilineal society.

The Birth: Christ and the Buddha

If the Trobriand case (and that of the aborigines) has nothing to do with the Christian idea of the virgin birth, this is not so with Buddhism, which shares with Trobriand a rebirth eschatology, and with Christianity something that comes perilously close to the doctrine of the virgin birth.³⁴ The references to the miraculous birth of the Buddha are well known among ordinary folk in Buddhist societies and are depicted in a multitude of "texts" such as temple frescoes, popular and classic literatures and in songs sung in village healing rituals. I shall

refer only to a few ancient texts of the Theravada Canon to give the reader a feel for the material. In the *Accariyabhutadhamma Sutta* ("The Discourse on Wonderful and Marvellous Qualities") the Buddha asks Ānanda, his personal attendant, cousin (father's brother's son) and favorite disciple, to relate to the assembled monks the miracle of the Buddha's birth.³⁵ According to Ānanda, the Buddha-to-be was born in the Tusita heaven, and, after his life span there was over, he decided to be reborn in the human world, "mindful and clearly conscious." He entered the Mother's womb, mindful and clearly conscious, and when this happened the earth trembled "and there appeared the illimitable glorious radiance surpassing even the divine-majesty of the gods."³⁶ As he entered the womb, four gods guarded the four quarters to prevent any human or non-human from annoying the Bodhisattva or his mother. More miracles: The mother saw the Bodhisattva in her womb as an emerald jewel, and the child was "complete in all his limbs, his sense organs perfect."³⁷ Moreover, as the Bodhisattva is born "he issues quite stainless, undefiled by watery matter, undefiled by mucus, undefiled by blood, undefiled by any impurity"³⁸ He is "pure and stainless" owing to the purity of both mother and son.³⁹ The text lists other miracles also, and mentions the fact that the Bodhisattva's mother dies seven days after he is born.⁴⁰ The *Mahāpadāna Sutta* makes it clear that all Buddhas, past and future, have the identical life history and all mothers of all Buddhas must die seven days after the birth of the Redeemer.

Clearly then conception did not occur through sexual intercourse; moreover though Māyā, the mother of the Buddha, could not be converted into a virgin in the historical traditions of Buddhism, she does avoid sexual relations at the time of conception; and she conceives the Buddha when she was observing celibacy (i.e., the ten precepts on *uposatha* days one of which enjoins celibacy or *brahmacariya*). Yet, one might ask, what is the necessity for the Buddha's mother to die in seven days? Some Theravāda commentators say that this is to preserve the purity of the mother "because no other child is fit to be conceived in the same womb as a Buddha."⁴¹ The most interesting answer is given in the

Mahāvastu, the famous text of the Lokottaravādin or Transcendentalists, which says that the Buddha's birth in a pure womb is additionally due to sexual pollution. "I will descend", says he [the Bodhisattva], 'into the womb of a woman who has only seven nights and ten months of her life remaining.' And why so? 'Because', says he, 'it is not fitting that she who bears a Peerless One like me should afterwards indulge in love.'⁴² It therefore seems that the Buddha's mother dying a week after the Redeemer's birth is simply a structural requirement of the myth rather than a real life event in history which is the way that scholars have generally imagined it. The mother *has* to be eliminated if her womb is not to be polluted. The logic of this analysis is carried further back in the naming of the Buddha's father as "Suddhodana." The name Suddhodana is translated in standard fashion as "pure cooked rice." However, E.J.Thomas translates it "having pure rice" or rice after the outer husk has been removed; and Oldenberg as "pure rice."⁴³ A Sinhala scholar, K.D.P.Wickremasinghe says that his name "which means pure rice ... indicated the agricultural prosperity of the land."⁴⁴ I suggest that the term has an agricultural symbolism but it has nothing to do with the practice of rice cultivation, but rather with the symbolic meaning of the word "Suddhodana."

Let me take the standard dictionary meaning of "suddha" as "pure" and "odana" as "boiled rice." The former poses no problem: but *odana* does not make sense to me because Suddhodana's siblings have the same suffix with different prefixes, as for example, "having unmeasured *odana*," "having washed *odana*," "having white *odana*" and "having fine *odana*." It is nonsense to speak of "washed boiled rice," because rice is boiled after it is washed, and never washed after it is boiled! And "unmeasured *odana*" also makes more sense if it refers to uncooked rice or unhusked rice (paddy). One solution to the problem may lie with Sri Lankan agricultural practice: here the word for boiled rice is *baṭ* or *bata*. Yet, according to the language of the threshing floor, the word *bāta*, rice with its outer husk, is derived from *bata*, which in this context could only mean "unhusked rice" or paddy. In one of the stories of the *Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā*

there is reference to a Treasurer Ram who was possessed of magical power because of exemplary deeds at a time of famine in a previous existence.⁴⁵ He came to possess a pot of rice that never emptied, such that "even as one spoonful was taken out another spoonful appeared ... Thereupon the treasurer caused the following proclamation to be made throughout the city, 'Rice has appeared in the treasurer's house; let all those who require seed rice come and take it.' Thereupon men came to the treasurer's house and received seed-rice, all the inhabitants of the land of the Rose-apple [India] obtaining seed-rice in his hands."⁴⁶ The Sinhala version of this text translates rice seed as *bat biju* which could mean "boiled rice seed" or "unhusked rice seed." The Sinhala *bat biju* is the seed that germinates, and is used for sowing in the field. But *biju* also means "egg" or "semen;" and field can also symbolically refer to "woman," the receptacle for the sowing of the seed. These meanings are true of many South Asian and Indo-European languages. The power of the symbolism lies in the equation rice=seed=semen, and that makes sense only if the rice is uncooked, either in its unhusked form as "the rice that germinates" or, symbolically once removed, in the "rice seed that has been further cleaned and the husk removed."⁴⁷ Remember that Māyā conceived the Buddha, her only child, when she was in a sexually pure state; she also died in order to preserve the purity of her womb. What Suddhodana's name does is to complete the equation: Māyā's womb could not *possibly* have been contaminated ever, even though she was married to Suddhodana and presumably had sexual intercourse with him. Thus, there is reasonable, but not conclusive, evidence that Suddhodana's name symbolically refers to the purity of his seed and the myth attempts to bring the Buddha's father into the symbolic scheme of events centering on the Buddha.

After the mother's death, the Buddha's father married her sister Mahāprajāpati Gotamī who brought up the Redeemer as her own son. Following the symbolic ordering of the Buddha mytho-biography, one must seek the significance of the name Mahāprajāpati Gotamī in relation to the Buddha's own birth and life. Take the first part of the name: Mahāprajāpati. *Prajā* in Sanskrit

means "creation" or "procreation," and Prajāpati is none other than Brahma or God, the creator god of Vedic Hinduism. Prajāpati is also the originator and preserver of each cycle (*kalpa*). The mythic significance of the name is now clear: the foster mother is the real creator of Gotama (Sanskrit, Gautama), the Buddha; hence her name is converted into "Gotamī," the feminine form of Gotama. But Gotama is no ordinary person; he is the Buddha of our present age or *kalpa*; other Buddhas existed for other *kalpas*. Thus, the person who created the Buddha of our *kalpa* is indeed like the Prajāpati of Vedic thought. Further, this name and other Vedic names in the myth are a response to debates or arguments with Vedic Hinduism in early Buddhist thought: someone who nurtured a peerless one like the Buddha is like the lord of creation.

So is it with Māyā or Mahāmāyā, the mother who conceived the Buddha in an extraordinary manner. In Vedic thought Māyā means "illusion;" and in the Upanishadic view current at the time of the Buddha, the whole phenomenal world was an illusory manifestation of a true underlying reality or essence. These meanings are transferred to the Buddha's mother who consistently maintains a totally non-worldly, indeed illusory character. Texts like the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* say that the Bodhisattva was visible in the womb of his mother as a thread through a precious stone or like a beryl.⁴⁸ This idea is expectedly elaborated in the non-Theravāda text of the Transcendentalists or *Lokottaravādin* that heralded the rise of Mahayana Buddhism: "Just as though a gem of beryl in a crystal casket were placed on her curving lap, so does his mother see the Bodhisattva like a body of pure gold illumining her womb ...;" and he also sees her. How is this possible if Māyā indeed was a true phenomenal body and not an "illusion"?⁴⁹ The Buddha is himself a kind of illusion, *manomaya*, and she who begets "a body made of mind" must herself be an illusion.⁵⁰ In reference to the begetting of an illusion one must remember that the root of *māyā* is *mā* "to make or create ex nihilo."⁵¹ And this is what Māyā does; once the Bodhisattva is created in an illusory manner, it is left for Gotamī to bring him up as a flesh and blood being. Gotamī, unlike Māyā, can continue to

have her womb polluted by impurity or intercourse and beget two step siblings for the Buddha.

I have noted that the father of the Buddha possesses a pure seed that keeps the womb of the Buddha's mother unpolluted. But this past is repeated in the eternal return of the same theme, at least as far as the doctrines of the Transcendentalists are concerned. Their text, the *Mahāvastu*, believed in the transcendental nature of the Buddha and a total denial of the reality of his physical nature and viewed him as pure essence. This essence is always existent manifesting in the outer form of previous and future Buddhas. With the development of this idea, there is a point by point denial of normal processes of birth and conception, elaborated to an extreme degree. The Buddha surveys the world and decides to be conceived as Māyā's son. Māyā then tells Suddhodana, her husband, that he should abstain from sex. "She becomes rid of passion and lives an unimpaired, flawless, unspotted, untarnished and absolutely pure and chaste life. In the heart of this pre-eminent woman, no passion arises for any man, not even for King Suddhodana."⁵² She tells him thus: "Do not I pray you, O King, desire me with thoughts of sensual delights. See to it that you be guiltless of offence against me who would observe chastity."⁵³ Divine Beings (Devas) who attend on her as she lay on her *right* (propitious) side of the bed say: "Of you will be born, he whose thought is boundless, who is ever undefiled, unsullied by what is foul."⁵⁴ And since he is pure mind he enters her womb without hurting her, and "his body is untouched by the impurities of the womb" and of mucous and blood."⁵⁵ He sits crossed legged in her womb; and is born of Māyā's right side without hurting her. In fact it is wrong, says the text, to say that he is born of parents, for this is simply an illusion. But then a question is asked of the narrator of the text: if this is the case, how did the Buddha have a son, Rāhula, out of his wife, Yasodharā, and did he not have intercourse with her? And now surely we ought to be able to predict the answer: the son's birth was also a pure and undefiled birth. "Now Rāhula, passing from Tusita came down into the womb of his mother, the Ksatriyan maiden, Yasodharā – this, my

pious friend is the tradition.”⁵⁶

The problem of the human nature of the Buddha that bothered the apologists of the Theravāda tradition is simply not there in that of the Transcendentalists though both were bothered by the problem of how a pure being could be born in an impure womb uncontaminated by sexual and childbirth pollution. The final section of the *Mahāvastu* dealing with the attributes of the Buddhas of time past and time future ends in a paean of triumphant exultation:

The conduct of the Exalted One is transcendental, his root of virtue is transcendental. The Seer's walking, standing, sitting and lying down are transcendental. The Buddhas conform to the world's conditions, but in such a way that they also conform to the traits of transcendentalism It is true that they wash their feet, but no dust ever adhered to them; their feet remain clean as lotus-leaves. This washing is mere conformity with the world. It is true that the Buddhas bathe, but no dirt is found on them; their feet remain as clean as lotus leaves. This washing is mere conformity with the world ... Although the Sugatha's [Buddha's] corporeal existence is not due to the sexual union of parents, yet the Buddhas can point to their fathers and mothers. This is mere conformity with the world. From [the earliest Buddha] Dīpankara onwards, the Tathāgatha is always free from passion. Yet, [the Buddha] has a son, Rāhula, to show. This is mere conformity with the world.⁵⁷

Buddhism and Trobriand rebirth

If indigenous debates about spirit entities and procreation are smothered in European representations of native beliefs, not so with Buddhism. Buddhist texts deal with four ways through which life arises: from an egg, from moisture (as with worms and other creatures), from a womb and from spontaneous arising (*opapātika*).⁵⁸ The normal way for humans is through the womb but spontaneous arising, normal for deities except the Buddha whose birth is miraculous, sometimes occurs in respect of humans. By the time the early Buddhist texts were compiled there was no question that, for the most part, conception could

not occur without intercourse and the injection of semen. This probably co-occurred with the development of Ayurvedic medicine which placed considerable emphasis on bodily processes and on experimentation.⁵⁹ The Buddhist form of the rebirth puzzle had to contend with the increasing knowledge of the physiology of the conception, development and birth of the fetus. In general, Buddhists could not believe that the entity about to be reborn could achieve conception without coitus; nevertheless a way out was available through the notion of spontaneous generation that aligns itself with the kind of spirit conception I described in respect of Trobriand.

Yet, this doctrine of spontaneous arising in Buddhism is complicated by its theory of no-soul or *anatta*. If there is no entity like a soul, then what brings about the linkage between one existence and another, and given the technical term, *paṭisandhi*? Because in Buddhism the law of ethical compensation or karma operates, the person who is reborn is neither the same nor different from the person in the previous birth. The rebirth-seeking-entity that moves from one birth to another is the *gandhabba* (Sanskrit, *gandharva*), the "rebirth-linking-consciousness" and not a discrete spirit entity. An early text says that three conditions are necessary for conception to take place: "there must be sexual intercourse between the parents, the mother must be in the proper phase of her menstrual cycle, and a *gandhabba* must be present."⁶⁰ The Buddhist controversy is not about the relevance of physiological conception in normal human rebirth but the more serious one, unthinkable in most rebirth theories, of what gets reborn in the absence of a soul. Thus a variety of philosophical positions have been taken, mostly by non-Theravadins, about an "intermediate-state-being" or *antarā bhava* "existing" between death and rebirth. This intermediate state being (or, for convenience, "the rebirth seeking entity") is then not a stable entity like the soul but like everything in life a product of constantly changing aggregates or *skandhas*. Thus the Buddhist accommodation to the rebirth dilemma of the Trobriand type is to postulate two things: first, there is *something* that moves from one rebirth to another but it is not an entity like a "soul" or spirit. Second,

this entity does not seek a woman of the same clan or kin group which is the case in Trobriand and in virtually every small-scale society that believe in a doctrine of reincarnation (and there are many such societies). The reason is simple: the entity seeking rebirth must find its womb-home in relation to the good and bad ethical actions or karma in its previous births. If in small-scale rebirth eschatologies the soul or spirit goes back into the same kin group this is impossible in Buddhist karma which then introduces a residential dis-location of the rebirth seeking entity. Thus, in Buddhist societies it is rarely that one is born in the same family or kin group, in spite of people's wishes to the contrary; owing to the karma theory they can be born anywhere in the known world of the believer. And this applies both to normal human rebirth and to "spontaneous births" unmediated by coitus.

The references to spontaneous rebirths are scattered all over in the Buddhist literature, early and late, and in the popular traditions affected by it. Consider the thirty-second chapter of the *Mahāvamsa*, the great Pali history of Sri Lanka written around the sixth century, which describes the birth of the Buddhist hero, Duṭṭhagāmaṇi, from the womb of his mother, Vihāra Mahā Devi. Vihāra Mahā Devi told a monk, that in spite of her and her husband performing meritorious actions, she has had no children. "Lo, our happiness is therefore barren!"⁶¹ On the advice of a senior monk the queen went to a dying novice and pleaded with him to be born in her womb promising him "great and beautiful offerings of flowers" along with gifts to the brotherhood of monks. "Then did he desire (rebirth for himself in) the king's family, and she caused the place to be richly adorned and taking her leave she mounted her car and went her way. Hereupon the novice passed away, and he returned to a new life in the womb of the queen while she was yet upon her journey; when she perceived this she halted. She sent that message to the king and returned with the king."⁶² It is clear that not only was the queen barren thus far but also the rebirth-seeking-entity (*gandhabba*) entered her womb when the king was away, thus rendering conception impossible, according to the dominant model of womb conception.

Thus the *Mahāvamsa* clearly implies that Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's birth was a spontaneous (*opapātika*) one unmediated by coitus. But precisely because of this, the *tika* or commentary on the *Mahāvamsa* has to explicitly deny it (the actual debates no longer survive), giving a "long account of the Buddhist concept of birth as a synchronism of three factors: the union of parents, mother's fertility and the presence of a being to be reborn."⁶³

Another famous case from the early Buddhist literature is that of Ambapāli, the beautiful courtesan of Vesāli (Vaisāli) and disciple of the Buddha who had "come spontaneously into being at Vesāli in the gardens of the king."⁶⁴ The texts mention her karmic past through innumerable previous existences and it is clear that Ambapāli's birth, though "spontaneous," was karmically determined. It is therefore implied that while she appeared without parents, she did possess a rebirth connection (*paṭisandhi*) with her previous existences. Though her body form may have emerged in a spontaneous or *opapātika* manner, her spiritual form or *gandhabba* had to have been present. The *Jātaka* or birth stories of the Buddha have many cases of *opapātika* births, for example, the reference to the future Buddha conceived in the barren womb of Queen Candavati on the instructions of the god Sakra along with five hundred deities born in the same manner to the king's ministers.⁶⁵

These kinds of births are quite common in the eschatologies discussed earlier. Sometimes spirit conception is implicit in informant accounts: when Tully River Australians say that a woman gets pregnant because she has been sitting on a fire on which she has roasted a particular species of black bream which must have been given by her prospective husband or by catching a species of bullfrog, we are not dealing with idiots.⁶⁶ Their statements contain implicit ideas of spirit conception that are impossible to articulate to an investigator unfamiliar with local language nuances. So is it with the miraculous births of the goddess Pattini in a flower, in a mango, the tear of a cobra, from lightning, from a shawl and many more forms.⁶⁷ They flout the normal Buddhist idea of conception as defined in the texts and accepted by the people. Yet Pattini herself,

like Ambapāli, is a karmically bound being and she could not have been born in lightning or from a flower without the key component: the *gandhabba* or karma-bound rebirth entity. It is the spiritual element that permits a being to be incarnated in plants and natural phenomena. What you then have in these Buddhist cases are a *minor* tradition of conception but given a technical label -- *opapātika* -- and recognized as a legitimate one. These *opapātika* births entail a form of spirit conception unmediated by coitus and insemination.

Now let me expand our own consciousness by giving some examples from the rebirth traditions in ancient Greece with a brief statement from Empedocles' *Purifications* where, following previous Pythagorean traditions of rebirth, he says, in fragment 180/117: "For before now I have been at some time boy and girl, bush [laurel], bird and a mute fish in the sea."⁶⁸ And in another fragment there is a suggestion that some animal and tree incarnations might even be desirable. "Among animals they are born as lions that make their lairs in the hills and bed on the ground; and among fair-leafed trees as laurels."⁶⁹ Here also the soul seeks all sorts of reincarnations but being reborn as fair-leafed trees and laurels, like the incarnations of the Buddhist goddess Pattini, is surely without sexual intercourse! And so is Plato's wonderful original society in his late text *Timeaus*. This original society simply consisted of men without genitalia; and immoral men in this group were punished by being reincarnated as women, beasts and plants while good males reincarnated in their original form. Therefore, in this first reincarnation souls became embodied without reference to sexual intercourse whatever and *metacosmesis* or the rebirth process occurs at this stage independent of procreation. Afterwards sexual intercourse becomes necessary for procreation but women's womb-passion poses an issue that Plato never raised, namely, whether it was possible for them to conceive without coitus and seminal injection. Souls could also be embodied in plants during the first reincarnation and presumably later on also; this at least is not due to intercourse! Many classicists will disagree with this account because they cannot accept the idea that Plato would believe in such primitive beliefs as reincarnation

and his many references to this phenomenon must surely be allegorical and not literal. Whereas I think Plato was a rebirth fanatic as many Pythagoreans also were and that included Plato's late disciple Plotinus who introduced these theories to Isma'ili Muslims and perhaps to early Christian church fathers.

Conclusion

I started this discussion with a touch of levity and seriousness (Eliot's definition of "wit") and let me end this discussion with mild levity but lot more seriousness. I dealt with several of my friends on the so-called "virgin birth" controversy and having made a brief critique of this argument I presented my own focusing on Trobriand and Buddhist rebirth (and with a swipe at the Greek). I only briefly responded to Mel Spiro's argument that the matrilineal Trobrianders with their denial of physical procreation were afflicted with a higher quantum of oedipal feelings than their patriarchal fellow humans in the West, thus countering Malinowski's thesis that Trobrianders had a "matrilineal complex" where, instead of the son's hatred for the father there was an unconscious hatred of the mother's brother, the key male in matrilineal kinship in general. It is a pity that Malinowski retracted this interesting thesis later, largely owing to the onslaught of dogmatic Freudians like Ernest Jones. Malinowski's was an early attempt to relativize the idea of the Oedipus complex and see it as a form of life with variations in relation to social structure rather than an invariant complex found in every society under the sun. In relation to Hindu India both Robert Goldman, here at Berkeley, and A.K. Ramanujan (another friend who is also no longer with us), argued that instead of the classic Greek form of the complex you have, in Hindu texts, another form where the dominant motif is not patricide but filicide and that fits with the highly patriarchal structure of at least brahmanically influenced society. But in Buddhist texts this is reversed once more and you have the Greek model raising its ugly head owing to, I think, the presence of the nuclear family as the norm and a more

liberal evolution of the female role. Therefore let me present the views of the fifth century Buddhist philosopher, Vasubandhu, who deals in great detail with the entry of the rebirth seeking entity in various wombs including the most desired one, a human rebirth. This spirit entity is immaterial and incandescent and survives by feeding on odours very much like some Inuit [Eskimo] souls, to take an example from another region. The spirit entity says Vasubandhu, arises at the place where death occurs and, depending on its karma, it can seek a variety of rebirths. In human rebirth, the rebirth-linking-consciousness operates thus:

An intermediate being [or rebirth entity] is produced with a view to going to the place of its realm of rebirth where it should go. It possesses, by virtue of its actions, the divine eye. Even though distant he sees the place of his rebirth. There he sees his father and mother united. His mind is troubled by the effects of sex and hostility. When the intermediate being is male, it is gripped by a male desire with regard to the mother; when it is female, it is gripped by a female desire with regard to the father; and inversely it hates either the father, or the mother, whom it regards as either a male or female rival.⁷⁰

The mind of the intermediate being troubled by a "mind of lust or a mind of hatred" attaches itself to where the sexual organs unite "imagining that it is he with whom they unite." Then in the midst of the impurities of blood and semen, it finds a home. " Then the *skandhas* (or aggregates) harden; the intermediate being perishes; and birth arises that is called 'reincarnation' (*praṭisamdhi*): with the male on the right side of the womb and the female on the left."⁷¹ This is followed by a detailed description of the formation of male, female and neuter fetuses in the womb. Then in a brilliant discussion Vasubandhu links eroticism with the second noble truth of Buddhism, *taṇhā*, greed or desire that produces the unsatisfactory nature of existence, or *dukkha*, the first noble truth of Buddhism that in turn must be overcome to achieve salvation. The archetypal desire is the oedipal eroticism of the being about to be born but in Buddhism *taṇhā* is much broader and includes what Nietzsche calls the "will to power,"

which, unhappily for us living today, has changed from the partly creative force of Nietzsche's imagination to a more deadly will that people and nations will not recognize for its destructive nature. Maybe it's time we became Buddhists or perhaps even Trobrianders, a recommendation which, those who endowed the Foerster lectureship, might find not quite what they expected.

Notes

1. In my book, *Imagining Karma: Ethical transformation in Amerindian, Buddhist and Greek Rebirth*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, I substitute the Sanskrit term *ādivāsi* ("ancient residents") for "aborigine" which to me has negative connotations. But in this lecture I retain the usual term "aborigine." Please note that I use the term "native" ironically.
2. M. F. Ashley Montague, *Coming into being among the Australian Aborigines*, London: Routledge, 1937.
3. Phyllis Kaberry, "Virgin Birth" in *Man, Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, ns, 3: 2, 1968: 312. This reference is from the "Correspondence" section of *Man*; Kaberry's detailed ethnography is found in *Aboriginal Woman: Sacred and Profane*, London: Routledge, 1939.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. For the benefit of the Sri Lankan readership, this is a reference to my book *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European mythmaking in the Pacific*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992 and my debates with the Chicago anthropologist Marshall Sahlins and others in the 1990s.
7. E.R. Leach, "Virgin Birth," *The Henry Myres Lecture, 1966, Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland for 1966*, London: Royal Anthropological Institute, 1967, 39-49.
8. Melford E. Spiro, *Oedipus in the Trobriands*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
9. Slobodin, "Kutchin concepts of reincarnation", in *Amerindian Rebirth*:

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- Reincarnation belief among North American Indians and Inuit*, ed. Antonia Mills and Richard Slobodin, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994, 138.
10. Bronislaw Malinowski, "Baloma, spirits of the dead" [1916], in *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*, reprint Boston: Beacon Press, 1948, 195.
 11. Jean-Guy Goulet, "Reincarnation as a fact of life among contemporary Dene Tha," in *Amerindian Rebirth*, 156-76.
 12. Malinowski, "Baloma," 203.
 13. *Ibid.*, 201.
 14. *Ibid.*
 15. *Ibid.*, 204.
 16. Leo Austen, "Procreation beliefs among the Trobriand Islanders", *Oceania*, 5, 102-13.
 17. *Ibid.*, 108-10.
 18. None of Austen's informants, for example, could confirm Malinowski's contention that Trobrianders thought that the artificial dilation of the vagina would do for spirit impregnation. It is likely that this answer was provoked by Malinowski's unrelenting inquiries on the subject, and that natives pushed to the wall were compelled to invent this piece of native custom. Malinowski asserted that the natives dwelt on this topic with "relish" and illustrated this process "diagrammatically." To me the evidence of Malinowski's diary suggests that the ethnographer's own sexual frustrations prompted this line of inquiry and the native "relish" as well as diagrammatic illustrations were initiated by Malinowski himself.
 19. *Ibid.*, 103.
 20. *Ibid.*, 105-06.
 21. *Ibid.*, 107.
 22. *Ibid.*, 110.
 23. *Ibid.*
 24. *Ibid.*
 25. *Ibid.*, 110, my italics.
 26. *Ibid.*, 192 where an informant says that the spirit child enters only during the ceremonial bathing of the child and not during pregnancy or before.

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27. Ibid., 195.
28. Malinowski's views on orthodox beliefs appear in many places, for example, 145 of *Magic, science and religion*, reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1948, where he talks of an "orthodox and definite doctrine" and "speculations not backed up by orthodox tradition;" and on p. 211 in his essay "Baloma", Malinowski thinks that the goal of the ethnographic enterprise is to "give an organic account of their beliefs, or to render the picture of the world from the native perspective."
29. Malinowski, *The father in primitive Psychology*, [1927], reprint New York: Norton, 1966: 41-42.
30. Ibid., 55, 57.
31. Ibid., 60.
32. Ibid., 62, square brackets Malinowski's.
33. Ibid., 64.
34. I said perilously close because of the idea the Buddha was a human being, not the son of god; the latter idea would be impossible for them to accept, given Buddhism's major eschatological premise that there is no Creator God and the world moves not according to a divine plan but in accordance with karma.
35. Discourse on Wonderful and Marvelous Qualities" (*Acchhariyabbhutatthammasutta*), in *The Collection of Middle Length Sayings (Majjhima Nikāya)*, vol. 3, trans., I.B. Horner, Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1990: 163-69.
36. Ibid., 165.
37. Ibid., 167.
38. Ibid., 168.
39. Ibid.
40. Similar statements are repeated in the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*. They are also elaborated further in later texts like the *Jātaka Nidāna* and the *Buddhavamsa*. These latter texts state that the Bodhisattva entered his mother's womb while she was observing the Buddhist vow of celibacy; and reaffirms the fact that Māyā, his mother, must die seven days after his birth.
41. G.P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Nouns*, vol. II, New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 609-10.
42. *Mahāvastu*, vol. 2, trans., J.J. Jones, London: Pali Text Society, 1976, 3.

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43. E.J.Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha*, reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997, 24, n. 1; Oldenberg, *Buddha: his life and doctrines*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1882, 97, note.
44. K.D.P. Wickremasinghe, *The biography of the Buddha*, Colombo: Gunaratne Press, 1972, 3.
45. The *Dhammapada* is a beautiful compendium of Buddhist sayings and the *Aṭṭhakathā* simply means “commentary,” in this case the commentaries on the *Dhammapada*.
46. E.W. Burlingame, trans., *Buddhist legends*, part 3, London: Routledge for the Pali Text Society, 1979, 136.
47. Paul B. Courtright, *Ganesa: Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginnings*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985, 56.
48. *Mahāpadāna Sutta*, in *Dialogues*, II, 10.
49. *Mahāvastu*, II, 14-15
50. In Christianity this doctrine is known as docetism and entails the idea that Christ himself was an illusory body and therefore for example he could not have suffered at the Cross; others, like Valentine and some Gnostics believed in the unreality of Christ’s body, he was not spirit made flesh which is the orthodox position.
51. Wendy Doniger, *Dreams Illusion and Other Realities*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984: 117-18.
52. *Mahāvastu*, II, 13.
53. *Ibid.*, 6.
54. *Ibid.*, 7.
55. *Ibid.*, 21.
56. *Mahāvastu*, I, 121.
57. *Ibid.*, 132-34.
58. *Mahāsīhanāda Sutta* (Greater Discourse on the Lion’s Roar), *Middle Length Sayings*, 1, 97-98; this might be a development of Upanishadic ideas, as in *Chāndogya*, 6.4.3, in Patrick Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 148.
59. For the roots of Āyurveda in Buddhism, see Kenneth G. Zysk, *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India*, New York: Oxford University Press; for Āyurvedic experimentation see, Gananath Obeyesekere, 1992 “Science, experimentation and

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- clinical practice in Āyurveda" in *Paths to Asian Medical Knowledge*, Charles Leslie and Alan Young, eds., Berkeley : University of California Press, 1992, 160-176. For an important critique of Zysk's ideas, see Harmut Scharfe, "The doctrine of the three humors in traditional Indian medicine and the alleged antiquity of Tamil Siddha Medicine," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 119, 4, October-December, 1999, 609-29.
60. James P. McDermott, "Karma and rebirth in early Indian Buddhism," in Wendy Doniger, ed., *Karma and rebirth in classical Indian traditions*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, 169-70.
61. *The Mahāvamsa* [The Great Chronicle], Wilhelm Geiger, trans., London: The Pali Text Society, 1980, 149.
62. Ibid.
63. Ananda W.P. Guruge, translator and editor, *Mahāvamsa* Colombo: Associated Newspapers, 1989, 875.
64. G.P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Nouns*, 1, 155.
65. *Muga Pakkha Jātaka*, Jātaka no. 538, in E.B. Cowell, ed., *The Jataka or Stories of the Buddha's former lives*, 6, H.T. Francis, trans., London: The Pali Text Society, 1981, 2.
66. Montagu, *Coming Into Being*, 131.
67. Obeyesekere, *The cult of the goddess Pattini*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 80-82, 121-27: 230-37.
68. M.R. Wright, trans. and ed. *Empedocles: The extant fragments*, London: Briston Classical Press, 1995, no. 108(117), 275.
69. Ibid., no. 131(127), 290.
70. Louis de la Valee Poussin, *Abhidarmakośabhāṣyam*, 2, translated into English by Leo Pruden, Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1988: 395.
71. Ibid.