

THE DECONSTRUCTIVE NATURE OF EARLY BUDDHIST VERIFICATION

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This research examines the two interpretations of the early Buddhist notion of verification offered by K.N. Jayatilleke (*Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963) and Frank J. Hoffman (*Rationality and Mind in Early Buddhism*, 1987). Jayatilleke interprets the notion of verification in early Buddhism in a manner akin to the empiricist tradition of Western philosophy. On the other hand, Hoffman while arguing against Jayatilleke, claims that the nature of verification in early Buddhism is analogous to "religious experience" found in Western theistic religions.

Jayatilleke underscores the constant appeal to direct sensory experience in early Buddhist discourses but does not adequately discuss the possible embeddedness of ordinary sensory experience. Hoffman equates the early Buddhist means of verification to "religious experience" in the sense of Western theistic religions as he does not notice the early Buddhist disclosure that even meditative experiences including extrasensory abilities called *abhinna* can be embedded.

In this paper I will argue that these two interpretations fail to recognize a fundamental aspect of the early Buddhist notion of verification, that is, its inherent deconstructive nature. In my view verification in early Buddhism requires a deconstruction, in a way of penetration, of the embedded layers of experience. The early Buddhist discourses reveal that both cognitive and non-cognitive factors of one's personality are greatly influential in the making of one's experience. Both ordinary sensory experiences and heightened meditative experiences are embedded in the layers of various factors of human personality, i.e., habitual conceptual framework, inherent presumptions, inner urges. As such, neither direct ordinary sensory experiences nor meditative experiences are treated uncritically in early Buddhism. Therefore both types of experiences are to be thoroughly scrutinized and deconstructed in verification of empirical reality. Thus deconstruction of the embedded layers of experience is necessarily an inherent aspect of the notion of verification in early Buddhism.