

Impact of self-illusion on its owners

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Abstract

There has been a controversial statement, namely that sakkāya-diṭṭhi has an ability to lead its owners to the woeful abodes in the Anguttaranikaya-aṭṭhakathā. Although some Buddhist scholars agree with the commentator, some reject that statement. The primary purpose of this study is to explore whether sakkāya-diṭṭhi influences rebirth-linking in the woeful abodes with reference to the Buddhist literature not only because there are various opinions related to the impact of sakkāya-diṭṭhi presented by different scholars but also because sakkāya-diṭṭhi's result is not as obvious as Natthika-diṭṭhi, Ahetuka-diṭṭhi and Akiriya-diṭṭhi among sixty-two wrong views mentioned in Brahmajāla-sutta of dīghanikaya. In this study, the textual analysis will be made based particularly on Pali canons, its commentaries, sub-commentaries and, in particular, many Burmese Buddhist literatures. The findings reveal that some Buddhist scholars claim that self-illusion (sakkāya-diṭṭhi) can be a factor for beings to be reborn in the woeful abodes whereas others stated that it can possibly have the lowest potential for being reborn in the woeful planes. It is assumed that this study may help the readers understand the specific impact of self-illusion (sakkāya-diṭṭhi) viewed by well-known Buddhist scholar monks. It is hoped that this research will contribute to the solution of the problematic issues from various perspectives related to sakkāya-diṭṭhi called self-illusion.

Key words: Sakkāya-diṭṭhi, self-illusion, rebirth-linking, woeful abodes

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Introduction

There are thirty planes in which beings will be reborn in the next existence according to Theravada Buddhism. Some people are reborn in the heavenly abodes because of their good deeds in the past life and some are reborn in certain woeful planes due to their unwholesome actions. However, the noble ones, such as stream winners (Sotapanna), once returners (Sakadāgami), non-returners (Anāgami) and the noble ones (Ariya) will not be reborn in the four lower worlds any more since they have already uprooted self-illusion (Sakkāya diṭṭhi) through insight (Vipassanā ñāṇa). While the noble ones will never be reborn in the woeful abodes, beings with underlying self-illusion carry potentials to be flung down into woeful abodes.

According to the commentator, as expressed in his statement in Anguttara commentary, self-illusion has an ability to sink the person holding self-illusion and the wrong view into woeful planes. Based on this statement, one may conclude that every worldling will definitely go to one of the woeful abodes in the future life because of the function of self-illusion (sakkāya-diṭṭhi). However, there are evidences in the Buddhist Canon where the person harbouring self-illusion is not always destined to be reborn in the woeful planes but can potentially go up to the fine material sphere planes (Rūpavācāra Bhūmi). For instance, there is an event in Dhammapada Atthakatha recounting about a being who could reach to the fine material sphere plane in spite of self-illusion. In this discourse, on hearing the dhamma talk, a hen died and became a princess, the daughter of king, due to paying attention and listening to the Dhamma. One day, she attained the first Jhāna after contemplating on the maggots she saw in the toilet as impurities which resulted in her rebirth in a fine material sphere plane. At the end of her life span in the fine material sphere plane, she was reborn in a woeful plane as a pig.² Thus, it is obvious that in spite of harbouring sakkāya-diṭṭhi, one can be reborn in higher abodes while there is no guarantee of not falling back to the woeful abodes. The aim of this study is to investigate whether self-illusion can definitely result in a person being reborn in the sorrowful planes.

Ven Ñānissara, regarding the disadvantages of self-illusion, stated it according to Pali canon as follows:

“There are only two destinations, hell and animal world for persons holding wrong view”.³

As a matter of fact, Ven. Nanissara did not add his own opinions since the above statement is a direct quote of the teaching of the Buddha of Silakkhandha Vagga in Dīghanikāya. For this reason, the problem whether self illusion (sakkāya-diṭṭhi) produces the rebirth linking consciousness of the beings in the woeful planes or not is not solved yet.

Similarly, Ashin Indācāra presented his view related to self-illusion in his thesis as follows:

“However, if one professing sakkāya-diṭṭhi dies with the death proximate sense of ‘My sakkāya diṭṭhi is true’ shall truly fall into the woeful abode”.⁴

² Dh-p-a 332

³ A study of mental and physical phenomena from the perspective of insight knowledge, p-50

⁴ Papincatayar Thonepar, (1996), p-206

Although Ashin Indācāra focused on the fact that self illusion (sakkāya diṭṭhi) can absolutely result in its owners being reborn in a certain woeful plane in the next life, his statement is limited because he referred to self illusion (sakkāya diṭṭhi) at the nearest period of death as the reason for rebirths in woeful abodes. The question arises as to what happens as a result of self illusion (sakkāya diṭṭhi) at other points in a person's life and not just during death-proximate moments.

There are a lot of statements related to self illusion (sakkāya diṭṭhi) in the Theravada Buddhist literatures. However, it has yet to be confirmed whether self-illusion can send people to the miserable planes or not. Similarly, the renowned Venerable Buddhist scholars namely Lone Taw Sayadaw, Te Taw Sayadaw, Ledi Sayadaw, Mogok Sayadaw, Tabayin Sayadaw and Ashin Indācāra also presented their different views on sakkāya diṭṭhi. Even in their views, there arose a controversy on the result of self-illusion (Sakkāya Diṭṭhi). Therefore, it is essential to explore whether rebirth linking consciousness of the woeful planes can be produced by self-illusion or not. This research tried to investigate whether sakkāya-diṭṭhi influences rebirth-linking in the woeful abodes or not. It also discussed various opinions related to the impact of sakkāya-diṭṭhi presented by different influential Theravada Buddhist Sayadaws.

Method

This study entitled “Impact of the self-illusion on its owner” applies textual methods (canonical methods) to prove whether self-illusion can really result in its owners being reborn in one of the woeful planes in the future lives. This controversy arises due to the commentator's statement: **“All types of wrong views including the twenty sorts of self-illusion cannot result in people being reborn in the blissful planes (Sugati Bhūmi) but absolutely pull them down to certain woeful abodes (Duggati Bhūmi).”**⁵ There are sixty-two kinds of wrong views in accordance with Brahmajāla sutta (the Discourse of Supreme Net) taught by the Buddha. Among them, it is said that deniers of the causes (Ahetuka diṭṭhi), deniers of the deed (Akiriya diṭṭhi) and deniers of the reality (Natthika diṭṭhi) are called Niyatamicchādiṭṭhi which means three evil views with fixed destiny. Therefore, they can hinder both of the path to the heavenly abodes and the path to Nibbāna whereas another kind of wrong view (Dasa vatthukata) can only block the path to Nibbāna, and not the path to the heaven. Moreover, the twenty types of wrong views based on self-illusion do not affect the path to heavenly abodes, but only the way to Nibbāna.

However, the commentator explained – contrary to the above statements – in the Inguttaranikāya aṭṭhakathā that the person who is endowed with any type of wrong view including the twenty types of wrong view can be pulled down to the four lower worlds (Apāya Bhūmi) by self-illusion (sakkāya-diṭṭhi) based on the Buddha's speech that is “Micchaddiṭṭhiyā bhikkhave sappannagata sattha kayassa bheda param maraṇa apayam duggatam vinipātam

⁵ Anguttara Aṭṭhakathā-369

nirayam uppajjanti⁶” in the Pali cannon, which means ‘Everyone who possesses the wrong view can be reborn in hell – meaning that holders of wrong views can certainly be blocked from the path to Nibbāna but not from the heavens but opportunities exist for him to fall down to the woeful abodes occasionally. His direct definition is that all kinds of wrong view including self-illusion (sakkāya-diṭṭhi) can throw those people into hell. The example which he depicted is that if the tiny stone equal to mung bean by size is dropped into water, it will definitely sink in it. According to commentator’s definition, it can mean that everyone who professes self-illusion (sakkāya-diṭṭhi) will definitely go to hell due to their wrong views. As a matter of fact, it is obvious that self-illusion (sakkāya-diṭṭhi) can be the reason for being in the woeful planes which is proved by Sotāpatti Magga persons not falling into the woeful abodes after discarding sakkāya-diṭṭhi.

The statements that had been written by the Burmese Buddhist scholars in the various books are treasures for the Buddhism to trace the worst impact of self-illusion on its owners. The followings are statements by scholars on self-illusion:

1. Firstly, Te Taw Sayadaw, the State Ovāda Cariya and an adviser in Myanmar literature, holding the title ‘Aggamaha Saddhammājotikadhaja’ stated his views thus:
 “Mere misconception of this is my Khanda, this Khanda is me, this Khanda is eternal does not carry heavy sin which can result in rebirth in the woeful abode nor can it hinder or deter one from the journey to the sugati”.⁷
2. Lone Taw Sayadaw, a famous monk renowned as Sīripawarasudhammabhilankāra, presented a statement similar to that of Te Taw Sayadaw.
 “Thus stated in the literature, out of the 62 diṭṭhis (wrong views), sassata diṭṭhi and uccheda diṭṭhi are apāyagamaniya (liable to woeful abodes) if resulting in kammic fruitions. The remaining diṭṭhis shall be noted as not being apāyagamaniya (liable to woeful abodes) if they do not result in kammic fruitions.”⁸
3. Unlike Te Taw Sayadaw and Lone Taw Sayadaw, the comment on self-illusion presented by Ashin Indācāra in his master’s thesis can be found as follows:
 “However, if one professing sakkāya diṭṭhi dies with the death proximate sense of ‘My sakkāya diṭṭhi is true’ shall truly fall into the woeful abode.”⁹
4. Ledi Sayadaw who received the title of Aggamahāpaṇḍita presented by the Government of India in 1911C.E. and the degree of D. Litt by the University of Rangoon described sakkāya diṭṭhi as follows:
 “Therefore, beings with sakkāya diṭṭhi in their mind even though existing in the Zenith Abode of Bhavagga shall fall in their multitude to the woeful abodes.”¹⁰

⁶ Anguttara nikāya, Vol.1.pg-33

⁷ Sakkāya Diṭṭhi huthi (Dhamma buha publication, 2014),pg.75,76

⁸ Pakiṇṇaka visajjhanakyamī 2010, pg-663

⁹ Ashin Indācāra, Papanatayar thonepa, (1996), pg- 206,

¹⁰ Anatta Dīpani, (Mikhin Ayeyarwady publication,) pg-100,101,

5. With regard to self-illusion, Mogok Sayadaw, Ven. U Vimala who was a meditation teacher and recognized as an Arahant, answered thus:

“Only when the illusions of women, men, I and you disappear, sakkāya diṭṭhi and vicikicchā, the main root for the woeful abode shall die.”¹¹

6. The statement presented by Tabayin Sayadaw who was the third Principal of Shwe Kyin Sāsana and completed the very difficult degree of Abhivamsa read thus:

“If not clear from atta diṭṭhi, the lineage to the woeful abodes is not yet severed. If not clear from atta diṭṭhi, worldlings remain in the sphere of the woeful abodes; once clear from atta diṭṭhi, sojourners in the supramundane sphere go beyond the sovereignty of woeful abodes.”¹²

Based on the above statements, the first and second Buddhist scholars, namely Te Taw Sayadaw and Lone Taw Sayadaw, clearly stated that self-illusion lacks the ability to send a person down into the four lower worlds whereas the third monk, Ashin Indācāra deals with the specific situation and period that someone can be sent to those planes by self-illusion. Likewise, the fourth scholar, Ledi Sayadaw, recognized self-illusion as the major cause of being reborn in the four lower worlds. However, Mogok Sayadaw and Tabayin Sayadaw who are the fourth and fifth scholars, declared that self-illusion is similar to the roots and heritage of woeful planes.

It would be better if the stream winner (Sotāpanna) was served in this study because the self-illusion was already uprooted by him and there is no connection with the woeful planes. Unfortunately, they never reveal themselves as stream winners not only because the Buddha did not give them permission to announce to others saying ‘I am a stream winner’ but also because they do not adore the attention of others as the ordinary people do.

Results

The document research method is applied in this study to grasp the answer of the question “whether self-illusion is the factor which can result in being reborn in the four lower worlds”. As mentioned above, the six Buddhist scholar monks presented their views related to self-illusion in various books. According to Te Daw Sayadaw, self-illusion which holds the view “These aggregates are mine, these aggregates are myself and this is permanent” is neither a serious offence nor does it produce rebirths in the four lower worlds. With regard to this statement, it would be based on the statements of commentator and Ledi Sayadaw because the former scholar stated that only the nihilism (Natthika-diṭṭhi), the inefficacy of action view (Akiriya-diṭṭhi) and the acausality view (Ahetuka-diṭṭhi) are the violated actions

¹¹ U San Tin, ဗုဒ္ဓ၏အပါယ်ဝိတ်တရား (The sermon for blocking the way to woeful abodes), (1993, January), pg-89

¹² Tabayin Sayadaw, ပရမတ္ထစက္ခုကျမ်း (paramatthacakkhukyam), (2005), pg- 62,

(Kammapatha).¹³ And those, the later scholar added that the remaining wrong views including the twenty types of wrong views of self-illusion are the mere actions.¹⁴ Moreover, Ledi Sayadaw explained the differences between the violated actions (Kammapattha) and mere actions (Kammameva) that only the violated actions can produce the rebirth—linking consciousness.¹⁵ However, it is remarkable that self-illusion is recognized as a very slight offence by Te Taw Sayadaw and asserts that it cannot produce rebirth linking (Patisandhi) in the woeful plane. Similarly, Lone Taw Sayadaw also shares the same view with Te Taw Sayadaw. These two Sayadaws share the view that self-illusion, compared to nihilism (natthika diṭṭhi), the inefficacy of action view (akiriya diṭṭhi) and the causality view (ahetuka diṭṭhi), is not as serious.

Self-illusion, said by Ashin Indācāra, will definitely pull down the beings into those planes if the self-illusion is death-proximate kamma (asanna kamma). This comment comes from the statement of Abhidhammattha-Vibhāvani that is “when there is no weighty kamma, and a potent death-proximate kamma is performed, this kamma will generally take on the role of generating rebirth”.¹⁶

Among the last three scholar monks, the first scholar, Ledi Sayadaw said the beings can fall down to the four lower worlds from the realm of neither perception nor non-perception (Nevasaññānāsaññāyatana Bhūmi) as long as they harbour self-illusion. The statement of Tabayin Sayadaw that ‘Self-illusion is the realm of the woeful planes’ corresponds to one of the statements in Khuddaka Nikaya:

“Together with his attainment of seeing (Nibbāna)
There are three things that are given up:
Embodiment view, uncertainty, and
Whatever (grasping at) virtue and practices there is.
He is free from (rebirth in) the four lower worlds.”

It means that the person who has uprooted the three things, namely, embodiment, (sakkāya-diṭṭhi) uncertainty (Viccikicchā) and fruitless practices (sīlabbata-parāmāsa) no longer goes down to the four lower worlds whereas the person associated with those has connection with those abodes. Therefore, it is assumed that there is the danger of woeful plane where there is self-illusion (sakkāya-diṭṭhi).

Similarly, the statement, the root of the woeful abodes, told by the **Mogok** Sayadaw is probably based on the following quotes.

“Herein, unwholesome kamma excluding restlessness produces rebirth-linking in the woeful plane.”¹⁷
“Dependent on kammic formations arises consciousness: that is, the kammic formations- the twenty-nine wholesome and unwholesome volition- conditions the arising of the thirty-two kinds of resultant consciousness.”¹⁸

¹³ Atthasalini, pg-144

¹⁴ Paramattha-dipani,pg-295

¹⁵ Paramattha-dipani,pg-269

¹⁶ A comprehensive manual of Abhidhamma,pg-204

¹⁷ A comprehensive manual of Abhidhamma, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi,pg-210

¹⁸ A comprehensive manual of Abhidhamma, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi,pg-296

They all indicate that self-illusion (sakkāya-diṭṭhi) can arise in rebirth-linking in the four lower worlds because self-illusion (sakkay-diṭṭhi) involved in the twelve types of unwholesome cittas which can lead to the woeful planes.

Although there are several scholastic viewpoints on whether sakkāya-diṭṭhi results in the rebirth-linking consciousness in the four lower worlds or not in future existences, a definitive claim is that the danger of woeful planes can spring from the wrong view of self-illusion, no more concerned with the beings who have uprooted it and the persons who have cut off the view of self-illusion. Therefore, it could be understood that self-illusion and the four lower worlds are linked to each other. And, noble ones are completely free from those dangers. For this reason, it should be assumed that self-illusion is the foundation of being reborn in the woeful planes and it facilitates the person to commit the various bad deeds or unwholesome Kammās.

In accordance with the facts mentioned before, the first two scholars, Te Taw Sayadaw and Lone Taw Sayadaw, recognized self-illusion as an offence which has no ability to give rebirth linking in certain miserable abodes in the next life whereas the third scholar, Ashin Indācāra, said self-illusion can definitely result in its owner being reborn in those planes if it is awakened in the mind at death proximate moments. Kilesa as a rule has three stages, namely anusaya (underlying kilesa), pariyuṭṭhāna (awakened kilesa) and vitikkama (active kilesa). This scholar is probably referring to the second stage pariyuṭṭhāna (awakened kilesa) which can result in one being reborn in the woeful abode. However, the former scholars, Te Taw Sayadaw and Lone Taw Sayadaw added that an individual will definitely goes down the four lower worlds when the evil view with fixed destiny (Niyata) happens in the mind based on self-illusion. Thus, it can be concluded that self-illusion is one of the offences which could not generate the fruit in the woeful abodes directly as much as the wrong view with fixed destiny (niyata) could. By contrast, the last three scholars – Ledi Sayadaw, Mogok Sayadaw and Tabayin Sayadaw – assert that people who have self-illusion are always related to the sufferings of woeful planes thereby linking self-illusion firmly with rebirths in the woeful abodes.

In conclusion, all those scholars accept the view that every being including the beings in the highest abode have not yet abandoned the danger of woeful planes and only the noble ones have escaped from those dangers.

Discussion

This study “The impact of self-illusion on its owners” attempts to explore whether self-illusion could be the definite or indefinite cause which gives rise to the rebirth-linking consciousness in the woeful planes. As there are various statements on whether the rebirth linking consciousness in woeful planes can be created by self-illusion or not, it is critical to examine self-illusion with special reference to the canonical texts, commentaries and sub-commentaries. As mentioned above, the first scholar monk, Te Taw Sayadaw and the second scholar monk, Lone Taw Sayadaw state that mere self-illusion is incapable of making one to

be reborn in woeful abodes because they recognize self-illusion as merely action (Kamma), but not the unwholesome course of action (Kammaṭṭhā) – accompanied by intention, understanding of pros and cons, effort and resultant action constitute Kammaṭṭhā – fruition of action.

Unlike those two scholar monks, the third scholar monk, Ashin Indācāra explained: “if the view of self-illusion came to the mind as death proximate kamma (Āsanna-kamma), it will definitely send one to the woeful planes” because he probably believes that self-illusion as the unwholesome course of action (kammaṭṭhā).

Similarly, the last three scholar monks, namely Ledi Sayadaw, Mogok Sayadaw and Tabayin Sayadaw, remark that self-illusion is one of the factors for beings to be reborn in the four lower worlds. Therefore, as stated by the Sayadaws, self-illusion and being reborn in the woeful planes are connected.

Based on the previous statements of the six Buddhist scholar monks, the statements of the first scholar monk and second scholar monk, Te Taw Sayadaw and Lone Taw Sayadaw, show the lowest potential for being reborn in the woeful planes because of self-illusion. Unlike those two scholar monks, Ashin Indācāra states that self-illusion is bound to result in being reborn in the woeful abodes. Similarly, the view that self-illusion can be a factor for beings to be reborn in the woeful abodes is held by the last three scholar monks, namely Ledi Sayadaw, Mogok Sayadaw and Tabayin Sayadaw. Therefore, their views are considered to be relatively moderate concerning self-illusion.

Based on the findings discussed above, it can be concluded that although the two Buddhist scholars Te Taw Sayadaw and Lone Taw Sayadaw reject the commentator’s statement, the remaining four, Ashin Indācāra, Ledi Sayadaw, Mogok Sayadaw and Tabayin Sayadaw probably agree with him.

This study deals with only the views of six scholars on sakkāya-ditṭhi and its impact on its owners and only the textual method was applied in analyzing the statements. It is suggested that more comprehensive research that covers a wide range of statements made by Buddhist scholars should be analyzed by using mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative methods to result in more reliable and significant findings.