

## **Pali Majjhima Nikaya Sutta and Their Parallels Discourses in the Chinese Agamas**

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### **Abstract**

The paper investigates two suttas of the *Majjhima Nikaya* and their parallel discourses within *Chinese Agamas*. Most of the Pali *Majjhima Nikaya Suttas* are available in *Chinese Madhyama Agama*, but few parallels *Suttas* are recorded in other *Agamas*, i.e., *Samyukta Agama*, *Ekottara Agama*, etc. The recorded discourses about one tradition in these two different geographical areas are often quite close. However, in some instances the *Chinese Agama* discourses are providing additional information than the *Pali Majjhima Nikaya* accounts. The study does not claim any literature superior or inferior but it is purely a comparative study of the parallels discourses of *Majjhima Nikaya*. Present study explores few verses of *Sammaditthi Sutta* and *Nandakovada Sutta* of *Majjhima Nikaya*, and their parallels readings within the *Chinese Agamas*.

**Keywords:** Comparative Study, *Majjhima Nikaya*, *Madhyama Agama*, *Sammaditthi Sutta* and *Nandakovada-sutta*.

### **Introduction**

Whatever the Buddha taught to remove suffering is documented in the Pali *Ti-pitaka*. Collection of three baskets or Pitakas, i.e., *Sutta*, *Vinaya* and *Abhidhamma* are called the *Ti-pitaka*. The *Sutta Pitaka* contains religious doctrines and philosophical principles based on psychological ethics that comprises to five Nikayas, i.e., *Digha*, *Majjhima*, *Samyutta*, *Anguttara* and *Khuddaka Nikaya*. The first four *Nikayas* are four individual texts, and the last *Khuddaka*

*Nikaya* contains fifteen individual texts, i.e., *Khuddaka Patha*, *Dhammapada*, *Udana*, *Itivuttaka*, *Sutta Nipata*, *Vimana Vatthu*, *Peta Vatthu*, *Theragatha*, *Therigatha*, *Jataka*, *Niddesa*, *Patisambhida*, *Apadana*, *Buddhavamsa* and *Cariya Pitaka*. The *Vinaya Pitaka* mainly deals with rules and regulations of *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni* order/sangha. It consists of *Prajika*, *Pacittiya*, *Mahavagga*, *Cullavagga* and *Parivara*. And the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* recognised as higher doctrine of the Buddha, expounds the quintessence of his profound teachings. It is composed of seven individual texts, i.e., *Dhammasangani*, *Vibhanga*, *Dhatukatha*, *Puggala Pannatti*, *Katthavatthu*, *Yamaka* and *Patthana*. The study is based on the collection of the middle length discourses of the *Sutta Pitaka*.

The *Majjhima Nikaya* is the collection of middle length discourses of the Buddha's teachings found in the *Sutta Pitaka*. It contains of one-hundred-fifty-two suttas, which is divided into three parts known as 'Sets of Fifty (*pannasa*)'. The last set contains fifty-two suttas. These one-hundred-fifty-two suttas are assembled in fifteen chapters. Out of fifteen, fourteen chapters have ten discourses, and one has twelve discourses. The first set of fifty discourses is authored by Sariputta that is mostly about a *bhikkhu* and a group of *bhikkhu*. These discourses are spoken by disciples and followed by *Mahamoggallana* to an unspecified number of monks at Jeta's Grove monologue. The second set of fifty discourses Ananda is the most prominent speaker that spoken by disciple followed by Sariputta. And in the final set of fifty-two discourses Ananda and Sariputta are main speakers. Generally it is understood that *Majjhima Nikaya* is mainly concerned with the life and itinerary of the Buddha and some of his disciples.<sup>1</sup>

In the parallel of *Pali Nikayas* there are *Chinese Agamas*, i.e., *Dirgha*, *Madhyama*, *Samyukta*, *Ekottara* and *Ksudraka Agama*. The *Dirgha Agama* contains long discourses of *Sutta Pitaka*. It contains thirty sutras in contrast of the thirty-four suttas of the *Pali Digha Nikaya*. The *Chinese Dirgha Agama* contains less discourse than the *Pali Digha Nikaya*. *Madhyama Agama* contains two-hundred-twenty suttas in contrast of the one-hundred-fifty-two suttas of the *Pali Majjhima Nikaya*. The *Pali Majjhima Nikaya* recorded less discourse than the *Madhyama Agama*. *Samyukta Agama* contains connected discourses of the Buddha. *Ekottara Agama* contains numbered discourses of the Buddha. It contains two-hundred-fifty *Pratimoksa* rules for monks. And the *Ksudraka Agama* is a collection of minor discourses of Buddha. These Chinese *Agamas* literatures consider as a parallel to the *Pali Nikayas* Literatures.

The *Madhyama Agama* collection is translated in the fourth century into Chinese by the Indian Monk Gautama Sanghadeva. It contains more discourses than the *Majjhima Nikaya*. The *Madhyama Agama* consists of two-hundred-twenty-two suttas that are assigned to eighteen chapters. Each chapter contains minimum ten suttas although some have considerably more. There are only four chapters, i.e., (i) on king, (ii) on Brahmins, (iii) on pairs, and (iv) on analyses are common between *Majjhima Nikaya* and *Madhyama Agama*.<sup>2</sup> The contents of these four chapters are also different. According to Bhikkhu Anaalayo, "in fact most of the discourses in

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<sup>1</sup>Law, B. C. (2000). *A History of Pali Literature*. Varanasi: Indica Books. 645.

<sup>2</sup>Anaalyo, Bhikkhu. (2011). *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikaya, Volume 1*. Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation. 8.

the *Majjhima Nikaya* and *Agama* are arranged in different way.”<sup>3</sup> Numbers of parallels to *Majjhima Nikaya* discourses are not occur in the *Madhyama Agama*. For example, ninety-six full parallels to *Majjhima Nikaya* discourses are found in the *Madhyama Agama*, thirty-six full parallels to the *Majjhima Nikaya* discourses are found in the *Ekottarika Agama*, twenty-five full parallels to the *Majjhima Nikaya* discourses are found in *Samyukta Agama*, and only one full parallel to *Majjhima Nikaya* discourse is found in the *Dirgha Agama*. It should be noted that the both *Majjhima Nikaya* and *Madhyama Agama* contains middle length discourses, than how parallel discourses which is not in the *Madhyama Agama* may considered as middle length discourses. These one-hundred-fifty-eight parallels discourses of *Majjhima Nikaya* are found within four main *Chinese Agamas*. However, at times two or even three *Agama* parallels discourses are recorded to a single Pali Sutta, while some *Majjhima-nikaya* discourses do not have any full parallel in the Chinese Agamas.<sup>4</sup>

With these facts the paper does a comparative study of the *Majjhima Nikaya* two discourses, i.e., *Sammaditthi Sutta* and *Nandakovada Sutta*, and their parallel readings within *Chinese Agamas*. The *Sammaditthi Sutta* is about the Right View by Sariputta. The Sutta contains about the wholesome and the unwholesome, nutriment, the four noble truths, the twelve factors of *Paticcasamuppada* and the taints. The *Nandakovada Sutta* is begins with referring that Mahapajapati Gotami with a group of nuns had approached Buddha and requested him for instructions to them. Thereafter Sutta spells Buddha inquire from Ananda and found out that Nandaka had not been willing to take his turn at giving dhamma to the nuns. Indeed, Buddha told Nandaka he should go and give them dhamma. To do comparative study the paper first present some verses of both the *Pali Majjhima Nikaya Suttas* thereafter the study suggests what *Chinese Agamas* parallel discourses are suggesting and adding additional information.

### **Sammaditthi Sutta**

*Sammaditthi Sutta* is the discourse on ‘Right View’<sup>5</sup>. It is exposition by Sariputta. The Sutta has two *Chinese* parallel found in the *Madhyama Agama* and *Samyukta Agama*. The study restrict to the *Madhyama Agama* (MA 29) parallel. The *Pali Sammaditthi Sutta* (MN 9) few verses in translation<sup>6</sup> are:

1. “Thus Have I Heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Savatthi in Jeta’s Grove, Anathapindika’s Park. There the venerable Sariputta addressed the bhikkhus thus: “Friends, bhikkhus.” – “Friend,” they replied. The venerable Sariputta said this:
2. ““One of right view, one of right view,’ is said, friends. In what way is a noble disciple one of right view, whose view is straight, who has perfect confidence in the Dhamma, and has arrived at this true Dhamma?”

<sup>3</sup>Anaalyo, Bhikkhu. (2011). *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikaya, Volume 1*. Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation. 8.

<sup>4</sup>Anaalyo, Bhikkhu. (2011). *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikaya, Volume 1*. Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation. 10-11

<sup>5</sup>It is translated as Perfect View in Pali text Society Edition. The editor further suggested Right or Perfect as synonyms.

<sup>6</sup>The translation is taken form: Nanamoli, Bhikkhu & Bodhi, Bhikkhu. (1995). *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society

“Indeed, friend, we would come from far away to learn from the venerable Sariputta the meaning of this statement. It would be good if the venerable Sariputta would explain the meaning of this statement. Having heard it from him, the bhikkhus will remember it.”

“Then, friends, listen and attend closely to what I shall say.”

“Yes, friend,” the bhikkhus replied. The venerable Sariputta said this:

3. “When, friends, a noble disciple understands the unwholesome and the root of the unwholesome, the wholesome and the root of the wholesome, in that way he is one of right view, whose view is straight, who has perfect confidence in the Dhamma and has arrived at this true Dhamma.

4. “And what, friends, is the unwholesome, what is the root of the unwholesome, what is the wholesome, what is the root of the wholesome? Killing living beings is unwholesome; taking what is not given is unwholesome; misconduct in sensual pleasures is unwholesome; false speech is unwholesome; malicious speech is unwholesome; harsh speech is unwholesome; gossip is unwholesome; covetousness is unwholesome; ill will is unwholesome; wrong view is unwholesome. This is called the unwholesome.

5. “And what is the root of the unwholesome? Greed is a root of the unwholesome; hate is a root of the unwholesome; delusion is a root of the unwholesome. This is called the root of the unwholesome.

6. “And what is the wholesome? Abstention from killing living beings is wholesome; abstention from taking what is not given is wholesome; abstention from misconduct in sensual pleasures is wholesome; abstention from false speech is wholesome; abstention from malicious speech is wholesome; abstention from harsh speech is wholesome; abstention from gossip is wholesome; un-covetousness is wholesome; non-ill will is wholesome; right view is wholesome. This is called the wholesome.

7. “And what is the root of the wholesome? Non-greed is a root of the wholesome; non-hate is a root of the wholesome; non-delusion is a root of the wholesome. This is called the root of the wholesome.

8. “When a noble disciple has thus understood the unwholesome and the root of the unwholesome, the wholesome and the root of the wholesome, he entirely abandons the underlying tendency to lust, he abolishes the underlying tendency to aversion, he extirpates the underlying tendency to the view and conceit ‘I am,’ and by abandoning ignorance and arousing true knowledge he here and now makes an end of suffering. In that way too a noble disciple is one of right view, whose view is straight, who has perfect confidence in the Dhamma, and has arrived at this true Dhamma.”

Despite these there are some additional information’s are recorded in the *Chinese Madhyama Agama* discourse; MA 29. Some of are: (i) *Majjhima Nikaya* sutta recorded this as ‘discourses on right view’ but in the *Chinese Madhyama Agama* (MA 29) reported it is as ‘discourse on *Mahakotthita*’. (ii) The *Pali Majjhima Nikaya* (MN 9) discourse recorded location of discourse as ‘Jeta’s Grove at Savatthi’ but the *Chinese Madhyama Agama* (MA 29) states about the ‘Rajagaha’. (iii) *Majjhima Nikaya Sammaditthi Sutta* (MN 9) begins with Sariputta

addressing monks on his own initiative, however according to the *Chinese Madhyama Agama* (MA 29) discourse it was Sariputta who had visited Mahakotthita on order to ask the same question. But according to Anaalayo, in the both version of discourse the, “question that led to the delivery of the discourse was about the implications of being endowed with right view and of having achieved perfect confidence in the teaching, expressions that stand for the attainment of stream-entry.”<sup>7</sup> (iv) Both discourses are affirming that understanding of wholesomeness and unwholesomeness, together with their respective roots is Right view. But the Pali *Majjhima Nikaya Sammaditthi Sutta* (MN 9) account listed ten wholesome and unwholesome course of actions and the Chinese *Madhyama Agama* (MA 29) states same ten courses of action in terms of body, vocal, and mind actions. And (v) the Pali *Majjhima Nikaya Sammaditthi Sutta* (MN 9) concluding by saying abandoning the underlying tendencies to lust, to irritation, and to the conceited view ‘I am’, together with overcoming ignorance and making an end of dukkha but the *Chinese Madhyama Agama* (MA 29) does not end with recommending these.

**13.** “Saying, “Good, friend,” the bhikkhus delighted and rejoiced in the venerable Sariputta’s words. Then they asked him a further question: “But, friend, might there be another way in which a noble disciple is one of right view whose view is straight, who has perfect confidence in the Dhamma, and has arrived at this true Dhamma? “There might be, friends.

**14.** “When, friends, a noble disciple understands suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the way leading to the cessation of suffering, in that way he is one of right view...and has arrived at this true Dhamma.

**15.** “And what is suffering, what is the origin of suffering, what is the cessation of suffering, what is the way leading to the cessation of suffering? Birth is suffering; ageing is suffering; sickness is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering; not to obtain what one wants is suffering; in short, the five aggregates affected by clinging are suffering. This is called suffering.

**16.** “And what is the origin of suffering? It is craving, which brings renewal of being, is accompanied by delight and lust, and delights in this and that; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for being, and craving for non-being. This is called the origin of suffering.

**17.** “And what is the cessation of suffering? It is the remainder-less fading away and ceasing, the giving up, relinquishing, letting go, and rejecting of that same craving. This is called the cessation of suffering.

**18.** “And what is the way leading to the cessation of suffering? It is just this Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view...right concentration.

This is called the way leading to the cessation of suffering.

**19.** “When a noble disciple has thus understood suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the way leading to the cessation of suffering. ...he here and now

<sup>7</sup>Anaalayo, Bhikkhu. (2011). *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikaya, Volume 1*. Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation. 67

makes an end of suffering. In that way too a noble disciple is one of right view...and has arrived at this true Dhamma.”

Despite the *Pali Majjhima Nikaya* (MN 9) accounts there are some additional information's recorded in the *Chinese Madhyama Agama* discourse. Some of are: (i) After the treatment of wholesomeness and unwholesomeness as a way of having right view, the next alternative way of having right view in the both Chinese and Pali versions of discourse into nutriment. After presenting nutriment the *Pali Majjhima Nikaya* (MN 9) discourse turns into the four noble truths as its next item. However, the *Chinese Madhyama Agama* (MA 29) discourse first takes up the three influxes, after which they also turn to the four noble truths. (ii) In the Chinese version of discourse (MA 29) three influxes appears right after the treatment of wholesomeness and unwholesomeness but it is in *Pali Majjhima Nikaya* (MN 9) discourse occur at the end of the entire exposition. And, (iii) the *Pali Majjhima Nikaya* (MN 9) discourse listed sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair in its definition of dukkha. However, the *Chinese Madhyama Agama* (MA 29) takes up being separated from what is liked and associating with what is disliked.<sup>8</sup>

Rest of the sutta is presenting twelve member formula of *paticcasamuppada* in *patiloma* order. In these, differences are also recorded and the additional information by *Chinese Agama*. Without going in further investigation of the Sutta the paper move to the *Nandakovada Sutta* of *Pali Majjhima Nikaya* (MN 146) and it's full parallel in the *Chinese Samyukta Agama* (SA 276). This sutta is highly important within the collection of middle length discourses, because it is only one spoken about bhikkhunis/nuns. Scholars for past two decades or so on are referring this sutta as non-egalitarian Buddhist attitude towards women, because Buddha refuses to give dhamma to Women. But if we take the *Chinese Samyukta Agama* (SA 276) Buddha gives dhamma to bhikkhunis/nuns twice.

### **Nandakovada Sutta**

The Sutta reports Bhikkhu Nandaka given teachings to the Bhikkhunis. The *Pali Majjhima Nikaya* (MN 146) discourse has a parallel in the *Chinese Samyukta Agama* (SA 276). It is the discourse on an instruction by Nandaka to Nuns. The *Nandakovada Sutta* (MN 146) begins with referring that “Mahapajapati Gotami, followed by a group of nuns, had approached the Buddha and requested an instruction. On inquiring from Ananda, the Buddha found out that Nandaka had not been willing to take his turn at teaching the nuns, where on the Buddha told Nandaka that he should go and give them a teaching.”<sup>9</sup> The *Pali Nandakovada Sutta* (MN 146) few verses in translation<sup>10</sup> are:

1. “Thus Have I Heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Savatthi in Jeta’s Grove, Anathapindika’s Park.

<sup>8</sup>Anaalyo, Bhikkhu. (2011). *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikaya, Volume 1*. Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation. 68-69

<sup>9</sup>Anaalyo, Bhikkhu. (2011). *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikaya, Volume 1*. Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation. 832.

<sup>10</sup>The translation is taken from: Nanamoli, Bhikkhu & Bodhi, Bhikkhu. (1995). *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

2. Then Mahapajapati Gotami together with five hundred bhikkhunis<sup>11</sup> went to the Blessed One. After paying homage to the Blessed One, she stood at one side and said to him: “Venerable sir, let the Blessed One advise the bhikkhunis, let the Blessed One instruct the bhikkhunis, let the Blessed One give the bhikkhunis a talk on the Dhamma.”

3. Now on that occasion the elder bhikkhus were taking turns in advising the bhikkhunis, but the venerable Nandaka did not want to advise them when his turn came. Then the Blessed One addressed the venerable Ananda: “Ananda, whose turn is it today to advise the bhikkhunis?”

“Venerable sir, it is the venerable Nandaka’s turn to advise the bhikkhunis, but he does not want to advise them even though it is his turn.”

4. Then the Blessed One addressed the venerable Nandaka: “Advise the bhikkhunis, Nandaka. Instruct the bhikkhunis, Nandaka. Give the bhikkhunis a talk on the dhamma, Brahmin.”

Despite the *Pali Majjhima Nikaya Nandakovada Sutta* (MN 146) accounts there are some additional information recorded in the *Chinese Samyukta Agama* (SA 276). Some of are: (i) The *Chinese Samyukta Agama* (SA 276) discourse agree with the *Pali Majjhima Nikaya* (MN 146) account that a group of *bhikkhunis* (without referring any name) with Mahapajapati Gotami had approached the Buddha for instructions. However, *Chinese Samyukta Agama* (SA 276) discourse provides a listing of the names of several eminent bhikkhunis/nuns, i.e., Chanda, Mintuo, Moluopo, Patacara, [Sela] Alavika, Khema, Nanmo, Kisagotami, Uppalavanna, etc. and not clearly states about the number of five hundred *bhikkhunis*.<sup>12</sup> (ii) According to *Majjhima Nikaya* discourse (MN 146) Mahapajapatai Gotami remained standing: she stood to one side. Standing to one side, and spoke like this to the Blessed One, but the *Chinese Samyukta Agama* (SA 276) explicitly affirms that she sat down and spoke to the Buddha for give dhamma to bhikkhunis. (iii) The *Pali Majjhima Nikaya* (MN 146) states that Buddha does not teach bhikkhunis but the *Chinese Samyukta Agama* (SA 276) states that the Buddha teaches the dhamma to the *bhikkhunis* twice. (iv) The *Pali Majjhima Nikaya Nandakovada Sutta* (MN 146) states that the Buddha without giving any explanation to anyone appointed Nandaka to give dhamma to *bhikkhunis*. However, *Samyukta Agama* (SA 276) discourse reported that Buddha gave explanation to senior *bhikkhus*: because of his advanced age he is no longer able to teach the dhamma to the bhikkhunis. Indeed, from now on, monks, those of you who are senior virtuous elders should give instructions to the bhikkhunis. Such an injunction given by the Buddha to the monks is not recorded in the *Pali Majjhima Nikaya Nandakova-Sutta* (MN 146).<sup>13</sup> And (v) Both the *Pali Majjhima Nikaya* (MN 146) and *Chinese Samyukta Agama* (SA 276) discourse are reported that Nandaka was not willing to teach dhamma to the *bhikkhunis*. The *bhikkhunis* therefore visits again to the Buddha and asked to give them teaching. A second visit by Gotami and companion

<sup>11</sup>The number five hundred could be symbolic, indicating a large group of women.

<sup>12</sup>Anaalayo, Bhikkhu. (2010). “Attitudes Towards Nuns: A Case Study of the Nandakovada in the Light of its Parallels,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Volume 17. 334.

<sup>13</sup>Anaalayo, Bhikkhu. (2010). “Attitudes Towards Nuns: A Case Study of the Nandakovada in the Light of its Parallels,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Volume 17. 336.

is not reported in the *Nandakova-Sutta* (MN 146), but her second visit is reported in the *Chinese Samyukta Agama* (SA 276). On their second visit the Buddha gave them another talk, which is not recorded in the *Pali Nandakovada Sutta* (MN 146).

The *Pali Majjhima Nikaya Nandakovada Sutta* (MN 146) and its parallels discourse (SA 276) reports that Nandaka went next day to bhikkhunis, engaged them in a question and answer session on the six senses, their object, and the corresponding type of consciousness. The rest of Sutta verses are about the dhamma taught to bhikkhunis by Nandaka.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper we investigated two *Pali Majjhima Nikaya* discourses: (i) *Sammaditthi Sutta* (MN 9) and (ii) *Nandakovada Sutta* (MN 146) and their parallel discourses in the *Chinese Agama*. For the *Sammaditthi Sutta* we investigated parallel discourse recorded in the *Chinese Madhyama Agama*. The Sutta has two Chinese parallel found in the *Madhyama Agama* and *Samyukta Agama* but the paper is restrict to the *Madhyama Agama* (MA 29). For the *Nandakovada Sutta* we investigated parallel discourse recorded in the *Chinese Samyukta Agama* (SA 276) that explicitly affirms Buddha gave dhamma to *bhikkhunis*. Both *Chinese Agama* parallel discourses suggested additional information than *Pali Majjhima Nikaya* discourses.

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