Journal of English Literature and Cultural Studies

jelcsjournal 2023, 3 (4), 1–8

Original Research

doi: 10.26655/JELCS.2022.4.1

The Buddha in Sophocles' King Oedipus: An Intertextual Analysis

Ranaweera Kalu Arachchige, Newton Rathnasiri

CTL, OISE, University of Toronto

Corresponding Author: Newton Rathnasiri

E-mail: newton.ranaweera@gmail.com

Article Citation: Arachchige, R. K. & Rathnasiri, N. (2023). The Buddha in Sophocles' King Oedipus: An Intertextual Analysis , *Journal of English Literature and Cultural Studies, 3* (4): 1–8.

Received Date: July 2, 2022
Accepted Date: December 5, 2022
Online Date: March 16, 2023

Publisher: Kare Publishing

E-ISSN: 2667-6214

ABSTRACT

Academics especially in Sri Lankan argue that Greek myths and legends have had influence on Buddhist stories: Jataka tales, Theri Gata (Psalms of older Buddhist nuns) and even Mahavansa (a Sri Lankan historical chronicle). However, this article asserts that there is evidence in Sophocles King Oedipus to argue that the Buddha's life story and key Buddhist concepts have influenced pre-Christian Greek philosophy and literature, especially Sophocles' King Oedipus. When reading the text with the notion that there could be intertextual relations or new texts are built on the existing texts and discourses, the reader may see that Sophocles' play contains incidents that remind them the special occasions of the Buddha's life, his utterances and the key Buddhist concepts such as the truth of suffering, cessation of suffering, the three poisons (greed, hatred and delusion), and finding the truth within one's own self. The present intertextual study explored only the special occasions of the Buddha's life to make it more focused and found that Sophocles alludes to the Buddha's life story in his attempt to raise a moral culprit to a moral hero with higher moral values. This article, however, acknowledges that one needs to cross-check the other historical and philosophical references when claiming that Sophocles has had influence from the Buddha's life story in King Oedipus.

Keywords: The Buddha's life story, Sophocles, King Oedipus, Buddhist concepts, Quest of truth.

1. Introduction

My close reading of King Oedipus over the past 15 years with diverse groups of adult students suggests to me that there is an intertextual relationship between King Oedipus (429 BC) and The Buddha's life story (625 - 545 BC). This intertextual relationship varies from having references in the text in terms of special occasions in the Buddha's life to his central concepts: truth of suffering, the causes of suffering (three poisons: craving, hatred, ignorance), cessation of suffering and finding the truth within one's own self. The allusions to the Buddha's life story and the Buddhist concepts occur in the play in terms of plot structure, characterization, and thematic development.

When reading between the lines, the reader can trace allusions in the play to the Buddha's life story. Buddhists believe that Asitha, a sage, at prince Siduhath's (The Buddha's name before his enlightenment) naming ceremony declared that if Siduhath would remain at home he would become a powerful monarch whereas if he would leave home he would become the Buddha. We can see a similar declaration in the Sophoclean play, King Oedipus. Buddhists also believe that the Buddha's birth, enlightenment (as Siduhath) and his passing away occurred on a full moon day. Similarly, evidence in Sophocles' play suggests that Oedipus' birth, discovery of his identity and his symbolic death, occurred on a full moon day.

Finally, Buddhists believe that the Buddha asked his first followers (Bhikkhus) to walk from one village to another guiding other human beings to cross the sea of samsara. He practically enacted his talk by walking from village to village, guiding people until he breathed the final sip of breath, at the age of 80. We can see the Buddha's philosophic motto of life being symbolically suggested when Oedipus says to Teiresias, "To help his fellow-men / With all his power is man's most noble work" (314-315).

We need to cross-reference with historical and philosophical sources to see whether it was Sophocles who had had inspiration from the Buddha's life stories that he had heard in his time (5th century BC) or it was the Buddhist writers (in the 5th century AD and thereafter) who had influence from *King Oedipus* when developing the Buddhist literature. Though we may argue for both sides of the case, it would not be rational to argue that the key concepts of Buddhism (i.e., the four wheels of truth) were developed in Buddhism with the influence from Sophoclean play. Additionally, if it were found that Sophocles had inspiration from Buddhism and Buddha's life stories when developing the plot structure, characterization and the central themes of the play, the western popular tale that the East and West stood wide apart as opposite poles (being not known to each other throughout history, until Europeans began their civilization mission in 17th - 20th centuries) would be deconstructed (Malkin, 2004).

To focus my exploration of the influence of Buddhist concepts and the Buddha's life story and the Buddhist concepts in Sophocles' play, *King Oedipus*, I raised the following questions:

a. What are the probable allusions to the Buddha's life story and the Buddhist concepts that one may find when reading Sophocles' play, *King Oedipus*?

b. Who got inspiration from whom: Is it Sophocles or Buddhist writers, or both?

c. If there are any allusions to the Buddha (or the Buddhist concepts in the play), what could be the probable reasons why Sophocles used such allusions?

2. Reciprocal Influence

There is a lack of research on the influence of Buddhism or the Buddha's life story on Pre-Christian Greek literature or philosophy, especially Sophoclean play, *King Oedipus*. There are vague references that the 5th century BC Greek philosophers' (including Thales, Pythagoras and Plato) teachings represent some thoughts that were alien to the 5th century BC Greek thought (Knighton, 1848; Seldeslachts, 2007). By comparing some concepts by Thales, Pythagoras and Plato with the Buddhist concepts, Knighton (1848) vaguely argues that those key Greek philosophers should have learned Buddhism in Egypt.

Similarly, some Sri Lankan stories (including *Jataka* tales, Psalms of Buddhist nuns, and even *Mahavansa*, the Sri Lankan historical chronicle) are found to have been influenced by Greek myths, including the Oedipus myth (Peris, 1980, 2011). The story about Mata (an older nun) that Uppavanna tells, while expressing her pleasure at being a Buddhist nun, is a replica of the Oedipus tale (David, 1909). Personally, I find Mata's tale stand closer to the Sophoclean play than the popular Oedipus myth because Mata's tale is well-crafted to evoke the reader's deep emotions and to convince them that they are wallowing in delusion. The Oedipus-type Mahadeva, an Indian Mahayana Buddhist monk, is a much-quoted tale (Mair, 1986). While Mata's tale closely resembles the pathos and higher moral values that Sophocles develops in his play, Mahadeva (the Indian tale) is depicted as a criminal, imposter and a charlatan (Mair, 1986). One may also see Oedipus' influence on *Mahavamsa*, Sri Lanka's historical chronicle and some Buddhist *Jataka* tales (Peris, 1980, 2011; Obeysekera, 1989). Though the quoted papers assert more about how Greek myths have had remarkable impact on Asian and particularly Sri Lankan texts, there are limited number of research papers that discusses the influence of Buddhism on pre-Christian Greek philosophy or plays (Ranaweera, 2021).

3. Intertextuality

For my exploration of this study, I used intertextuality or text-to-text relationship as a methodological tool because textual evidence suggests that new texts and discourses are built on the existing texts and discourses (Johnston, 2013). The term, intertextuality, refers to different forms of relations between two or more texts (Leslic-Thomas, 2005). It may vary from "most direct repetitions to most indirect allusions" to existing or previous texts or discourses (Johnston, 2013). What it means is that when reading texts, we can hear "new discourse echoe[ing] past discourses" (Johnston, 2013, 229). We can see Hemingway, for example, effectively playing with intertextuality in *Old Man and the Sea*. We can trace allusions to Homer's *The Iliad*, Sophocles' *King Oedipus*, Aristotle's *Poetics* and the *Bible*. The text itself is complex in its form because we cannot identify the *Old Man and the Sea* as a novel nor a short story. Hemingway gets help from *The Iliad* in terms of the style of language. Instead of long, complex sentences, we can see Hemingway using simple or compound sentences by joining them with coordinating conjunctions. This style reminds us of the oral quality of language that we can see in Homer's *The Iliad* that was meant for listening by the general interlocutors. Interestingly, Hemingway uses Jesus Christ as the central symbol throughout the story to raise Santiago to a moral hero with higher moral values.

Moreover, even the reader's conceptual understanding builds on the existing knowledge or prior schemas (Carrel & Eisterhold, 1983). Oedipus (the one in the legend) had been conceived by the 5th century Greeks as a moral culprit (an abominable, wretched and mean person), but Sophocles portrays him to be a moral hero. Therefore, his fifth century BC Greek spectators needed a living moral hero at the time as a model to build their conceptions of Sophocles' unconventional moral hero. The Buddhist world knows about a similar unconventional moral hero, Angulimala, whom the Buddha raised to a great moral hero. Provided that the 5th century Greeks had trade relations with people in the East (especially with people in *Helabima* or present-day Sri Lanka), we can assume that they had been well-aware of the Buddha's life story and the key concepts in Buddhism.

The initial metaphor that Wordsworth uses in "Daffodils" is an example of how poets help readers to move from familiar/concrete to abstract understanding. In the initial line, "I wandered lonely as a cloud," Wordsworth uses a lonely, isolated cloud that floats without any destination to go as a metaphor for the reader to comprehend the speaker's psycho-emotional status. Without this real-life reference, the reader may find it rather abstract to understand the significance of the scene (a host of daffodils) to the speaker.

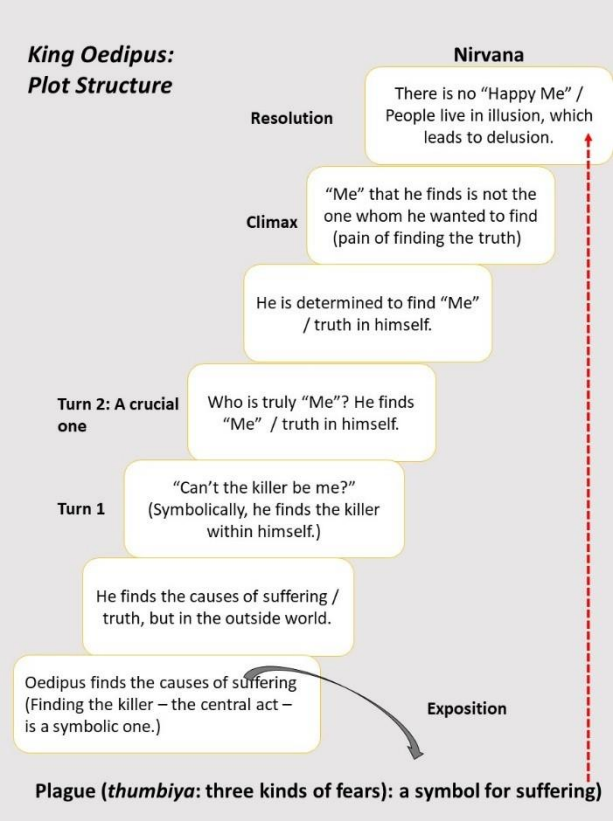
Similarly, Sophocles should have got help from such references or allusions to other previous or existing texts (stories about famous people, beliefs, philosophical concepts) to build on his tragic hero in *King Oedipus* and facilitate the spectators to understand his novel interpretations.

4. Findings

4.1. The Buddha's Life Story & Plot Structure

A close exploration of the plot structure in Sophocles' *King Oedipus* may suggest to the reader that either Sophocles or the Buddhist scholars have had inspiration from either Buddhism or Sophoclean play. The play's central plot structure focuses on Oedipus' attempt to find the killer of Laius (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1: *King Oedipus: Plot structure*



He first finds the killer outside, then inside and soon he tries to find his own identity. Oedipus' attempt to find the killer in the external world can be considered as a symbolic act. What he truly finds is the truth, yet he begins his search, as any truth seeker does due to inexperience, in the external world while having instructions from the expert others. However, soon he realizes that truth does not lie in the outside world, but it lies within his own self. Symbolically, the hints he gets in his conversations with Teiresias, Creon and Jocasta convince him that he should search for the killer within himself. This scenario resembles the Buddhist concept of exploring the world within one's own self. His journey of self-discovery symbolizes one's quest of truth, which is a well-known concept to the Buddhist

world. This assumed Buddhist concept of self-discovery or search for truth within oneself climaxes when the Theban elders declare, immediately after Oedipus comes to know his identity in his conversation with Laius' shepherd:

> All the generations of mortal man add up to nothing!
> Show me the man whose happiness was anything more than illusion
> Followed by disillusion.
> Here is the instance, here is Oedipus, here is the reason
> Why I will call no mortal creature happy.
>
> (Watling, 1199-1205)

Additionally, when closely reading and analyzing the Sophoclean play's plot structure we can see several close references to the Buddha's life.

4.1.1. Corinthian Messenger & Asitha's forecasts.

Asitha declared that prince Siduhath would become an all-powerful monarch in the whole island of *Dambadiva* (a much-disputed Buddha's homeland, among Buddhists) if he would remain a laity. If he would leave the palace, Asitha predicted that Siduhath would become the Buddha. Similarly, the Corinthian Messenger in *King Oedipus* reveals that Corinthians have decided to make Oedipus the king "of all the isthmus" (936). What he says suggests to the reader that he would become a powerful monarch only if he moves back to Corinth. What he says also implies that if Oedipus remains in the Thebes (his home), he would come to know the truth about his own identity.

Since Sophocles develops Oedipus' quest for truth as the central plot, we understand that his discovery of self is similar to Siduhath's quest for truth and ultimately attaining Buddhahood. The only difference is that it was predicted that Siduhath would become the Buddha if he had left home whereas Oedipus would come to know the truth if he would remain in the Thebes (his home). We could see another interesting word play in *King Oedipus* when the Corinthian messenger meets and greets Jocasta.

> Jocasta: What news? And from whom?
> Messenger: From Corinth. You cannot but be glad
> At the message - though you may also be distressed.
> Jocasta: What is it that can have such power to please and grieve?
>
> (929-934)

In this dialogue, Messenger asserts that he has come with a good message. He says that Jocasta would feel happy but warns that sometimes the message may make Jocasta sad. We can hear a similar conversation between Asitha and King Suddhodana (Siduhath's father) in Siduhath's naming ceremony. Asitha, on seeing infant Siduhath, smiled first and then cried. Suddhodhana asked why he had both smiled and cried at the same time. Then Asitha said that Siduhath would become a powerful king if he would remain at home, or he would become the Buddha if he would leave home. If Siduhath would remain at home and would become the all-powerful monarch, then Suddhodhana and the family could feel pleased, but if he would leave home they would feel so unhappy. The situation is somewhat similar in *King Oedipus*. If Oedipus moves back to Corinth and becomes the king, Jocasta and all others can feel pleased (because then Oedipus does not need to continue his quest for truth), but if he remains at home and finds the truth that would be a disaster for him and for his family.

On entering Oedipus' palace, the Corinthian Messenger greets Jocasta and all the house, stating, "Blessing attends her, / And all her house, true consort of such a man" (925-926). This may remind the Buddhists of *Nibbutha* verses that Kisagotami (a niece to Siduhath) recited the following verse, seeing Siduhath riding his horse:

> *Nibbutha nuna sa matha*
> *Nibbutha nuna so pitha*
> *Nibbutha nuna sa nari*
> *Yassayan idiso pathi.*
>
> (Hazra, 1982, p. 11)

This verse literally means that the mother, father and the wife of such a pre-eminent man as Siduhath would have peace in heart. Similarly, through the contextual understanding, the reader knows that Oedipus, while he was in Corinth, "rose to be a person of some pre-eminence" (777). Therefore, when the Corinthian messenger wishes Jocasta and her household for Jocasta being the wife of Oedipus (that pre-eminent man) we understand that there is not much difference between what is contextually meant in the two scenes. As Johnston (2013) suggests we cannot understand the meaning of one's utterance by isolating it from the larger socio-political, cultural or philosophical context.

4.1.2. Oedipus' Birth, Self-Discovery & Symbolic Death

It is well known that Siduhath was born and attained the Buddhahood and the Buddha's passing away occurred on a full moon day. Similarly, Oedipus' birth, self-discovery and his

symbolic death occurs on a full moon day.

We get the first evidence that Oedipus was born, and he would die on the same day of the year when Teiresias (being angered by Oedipus amidst their conflict) says, "This day brings you your birth; / and brings you death" (437). This statement suggests to the spectators that Oedipus is going to hear about his birth, and he is going to die the same day. He blinds his own eyes, or he metaphorically dies immediately after discovering his identity. Buddhists celebrate the Buddha's birth, becoming the Buddhahood and passing away on the same day, the full moon day of May every year. Even the Theban elders say that they are going to celebrate Oedipus' birth while thanking Cithaeron, a mountainous place, for facilitating his assumed birth. Their act of singing and dancing in veneration of the mount Cithaeron is ironic and strange because Oedipus was not born on Mount Cithaeron. He was born in the palace of Thebes but later was discarded for death in Cithaeron. One may take this as a distant hint to assume that even Siduhath ought to have been born in such a mountainous grassland.

4.1.2.1. Oedipus' Self-Discovery.

Sophocles develops self-discovery as the central plot in the play. In the beginning, the playwright uses Oedipus' act of finding the assassin of the former king, Laius, as a symbolic quest, which soon turns into a quest of self. In other words, Oedipus tries to find the killer (his own identity or the truth) within himself. The conflict of this self-discovery develops to its climax in the conversation between Jocasta, Corinthian Messenger and Oedipus. In order to rid off Oedipus' fear of marrying his mother, Corinthian Messenger reveals that Polybus and Merope are not Oedipus' true parents. He further reveals that Oedipus (as an infant) was given to him by one of Laius' shepherds. The Theban elders say that Jocasta should know about the shepherd better. Realizing the hint of Oedipus' identity, Jocasta implores Oedipus not to continue his quest, and she leaves the place in a frenzy since she fails to stop Oedipus. There is a reference to one of the Buddhist concepts in how Jocasta acts here and says, "Such things / Must be forgotten, if life is to be endured" (981-982). Buddhism, similarly, asserts that living in the present moment (rather than worrying about the past or future) is a better option for peaceful living (Rahula, 1959). Immediately after she leaves, Oedipus says the following to show that he is determined to get the truth unravel at any cost:

> Let all come out,
> However vile! However base it be,
> I must unlock the secret of my birth.
> The women, with more than woman's pride, is shamed
> By my low origin. I am the child of Fortune.
> The giver of good, and shall not be ashamed.
> She is my mother; my sisters are the Seasons;
> My rising and my falling march with theirs.
> Born thus, I ask to be no other man
> Than that I am, and will know who I am.
>
> (1075-1085)

Oedipus' determination reminds Buddhists how Siduhath sat under the Bodhi tree with determination that he would not get up until he discovered the truth or attained enlightenment. Buddhist writers personify Siduhath's psycho-emotional conflict at the foot of the Bodhi tree by enlivening those emotions as an army of evil forces that stood against him ceasing the cycle of birth and rebirth and continuous suffering. Buddhists believe that Siduhath sacrificed all his material wealth, personal comfort and pleasure for spiritual achievement. At this moment, we know that Oedipus would lose his crown and human relationships that he has acquired for fifteen years if he is proved to be a slave born. However, as Siduhath did, Oedipus is determined to find the truth at any cost. This is not the first time that Oedipus rejected the crown. When he left Corinth, he left everything: his parental love, emotional comfort, security and his right to the crown. When the Corinthian Messenger comes with the message that Corinthians have decided to make him the king, he refuses it, saying that he cannot go back to Corinth until his mother lives. On the first two occasions, he refuses the crown for fear of committing sins or harming others. This time, he refuses the crown over his true identity or finding the truth. What is more important for him is not material wealth but truth. Similarly, Siduhath refused the crown and all his material wealth, pleasure and comfort and started living as an ascetic. In Siduhath's tale, Asitha predicted that Siduhath would become a *Sakvithi* (an all-powerful monarch) and Suddhodana (Siduhath's father) took all measures to keep him happy and make him strive to become a great king. However, Siduhath sacrifices everything, as Oedipus does, for the sake of truth or attaining the Buddhahood. On this occasion therefore we do not find any difference between Oedipus' determination to discover his true identity and Siduhath's determination to attain enlightenment or to find the truth.

Immediately after Oedipus declaring his determination to find the truth about himself, the Theban elders (Chorus) begin to sing:

> If my prophetic eye fails not, **tomorrow's moon**
> Makes known to all the earth
> The secret of our master's birth

Cithaeron's name shall fill
Our song; his father, mother, nurse was she,
And for this boon
To our great King, praised shall Cithaeron be
Phoebus our Lord, be this according to thy will
(1086-1093).

While we see just the word, "moon" in Watling's (1947) translations, in some other translations, "moon" is written as "full moon" (Green, 1975, 1246; Kitto, 1962, 1089). Thus, Theban elders' song suggests that Oedipus was born on a full moon day. Similarly, the conversation between Oedipus, Corinthian Messenger and Laius' Shepherd, Oedipus' determination and the Theban elders' song suggest that Oedipus discovers the truth on the same day, a full moon day.

4.1.2.2. Oedipus' death.

We can assume that Oedipus' symbolic death occurs on the same day, a full moon day, because we know that he blinds his own eyes immediately after his self-discovery. Being a truthful man, Oedipus considers death as a meaningless option. In response to the Theban elders' utterance that "It would have been better to die than live in blindness" (1369), Oedipus says:

Could I want sight to face this people's stare?
No! Hearing neither! Had I any way
To dam that channel too, I would not rest
Till I had prisoned up this body of shame
In total blankness. For the mind to dwell
Beyond the reach of pain, were peace indeed
(1368)

His response may take the spectator to a different plain, beyond the physical world that is known to us. If he had any means, he says, he would blot out the channel of hearing, too, and prison his whole body in "total darkness". If we take what Oedipus says at this moment by isolating it from the underlined philosophical implications, we may identify it as a meaningless utterance. However, what Oedipus says next, "For the mind to dwell / Beyond the reach of pain, were peace indeed" (1388) sounds very much like the Buddhist concept of *nirvana*. Teiresias' forecast in the scene of *agon* or conflict suggests that Oedipus is to die on the day that he discovers his birth. The whole scenario implies that Oedipus' birth, discovery of identity or self-realization and (symbolic) death occur on the same day, a full moon day.

4.1.3. Parental Love

The following conversation between Oedipus and the Theban elders reminds the Buddhists of a conversation between the Buddha and Suddhodana over Rahula's (Siduhath's eight-year-old son) ordination as a monk.

Oedipus:	O and again
	That piercing pain,
	Torture in the flesh and in the soul's dark memory.
The Theban Elders:	It must be so; such suffering must needs be borne
	Twice; once in the body and once in the soul.

In this conversation, Oedipus reveals that pain begins in his physical body and then it pierces through flesh, cartilage and pins his heart. In Suddhodana's rebuke to the Buddha, he says something very similar. The Buddha's response to Suddhodana also sounds very similar to what the Theban elders say in this conversation.

4.1.4. Philosophic Motto of Life

The Buddha told the first congregation of Sangha or his first gathering of followers to go from village to village, guiding people to cease the three poisons: greed, hatred and delusion, and cross the sea of suffering. He practically walked his talk for forty-five years from the day of becoming the Buddha until his passing away by spending every minute to guide and help the needy to cease the three poisons (*thumbiya*): greed, hatred and delusion. Sophocles' play begins with a plague (hunger, death and fear from evil spirits), the symbolic three poisons (*thumbiya*). Oedipus soon promises the Thebans that he would do anything to help them and, in his conversation with Teiresias, he declares his motto, "To help his fellow-men / With all his power is man's most noble work". From this moment onward, Oedipus does everything possible to free the Thebans from the plague: suffering, the *samsaric* plague. He sacrifices his crown, his bodily and emotional comfort, close human relationships and finally his own eyes to liberate the suffering.

5. Discussion

In its finding section, this article sought a response to the first question, **a)** What are the probable allusions to the Buddha's life and Buddhist concepts that one may find when reading Sophocles' *King Oedipus*? We found some probable similarities between the Buddha's life story and the plot structure of Sophocles' *King Oedipus*. As Ranaweera (2021) argues *King Oedipus*' plot structure resembles one's search for truth. It is one's journey into the inner self to identify who he really is. Oedipus discovers this "self" and who he discovers is not the one whom he intended to find. This unexpected discovery heightens his misery. One's agony of suffering, according to Buddhism, heightens when he finds what he wanted to rid off rather than what he desired to embrace (Ranaweera, 2021). I argue that we can interpret Oedipus' discovery of the incest with the closest blood relative as one's symbolic journey into his own previous births. Oedipus, in that sense, is a time traveler or one who uses his psychic powers to reflect his own history, previous births. If we had this psychic ability and explored our own "self", we may uncover more gruesome and horrible truths (Ranaweera, 2021).

We did strive to find probable influences of Buddhist concepts in our finding section because that should be discussed in a separate article. Additionally, a few other writers found and discussed some of the concepts: truth of suffering, cessation of suffering, three poisons and the plot structure (Ranaweera, 2021).

A question that we need to discuss in detail in this section is, **b)** Who got inspiration from whom: Is it Sophocles or Buddhist writers, or both? Sophoclean play was written in 429 BC or about 116 - 120 years after the Buddha's pass away. Therefore, it is probable that Sophocles would allude to special incidents in the Buddha's life (the then utmost moral, intellectual, spiritual, philosophical hero in the world) in his attempt to elevate Oedipus, a known moral culprit, to a higher level of morality. Marilai (2018) argues that Pericles (Athenian political leader at Sophocles' time) has been embodied in Oedipus' character. However, reader may not find a tyrant in Oedipus' character. His argument then implies that the Buddhist writers developed the Buddha's life story copying incidents from Sophocles' play.

However, if there were only a allusions to the Buddha's life story, we could assume that it is the Buddhist writers who have alluded to Sophocles *King Oedipus* when writing the Buddha's life story in the 5th century AD and thereafter when writing *Mahavamsa*, *Jataka* stories or *Theri Gatha* (Psalms by the elderly Buddhist nuns). There is assumed evidence that *Mahavamsa*, *Jataka* tale or *Theri Gatha* writers have alluded to Oedipus in their compositions (David, 1909; Peris, 2011, Obeysekera, 1989). However, there are allusions in plenty to the Buddha's life story and some key Buddhist concepts. However, those allusions that we find in the Sophoclean play contextually reveals the Buddhist concepts embedded in them.

Additionally, we cannot claim that the countries in the far East and the fifth century BC Greece had been two distinctly different worlds that stood far apart, not known to each other. There is written evidence that the two worlds had some trade relations using the sea silk route (Munasinghe & Fernando, 2016; Melinda, 2018). Even Egypt had been a trade zone where traders from the far East met with the traders from the Greek world (Knighton, 1845). Sophocles himself had been widely travelled, educated, and an elite who held a higher post (Marilai (2018)). He should have met those traders from the East or heard about the heroic tales about the Buddha who lived only a century ago.

The other question that we need to discuss in this section is **c)** If there are any allusions to the Buddha (or the Buddhist concepts in the play), what could be the probable reasons why does

Sophocles use such allusions?

This question raises our attention to whether Sophocles alludes to special occasions of the Buddha's life and whether it has any impact on the meaning of the play. We cannot consider the events used in a play as isolated, meaningless ones that are restricted to particular occasions. We consider that every incident in a play is special, and they shed light on characterization, plot and thematic development.

The 5th century BC Greek playgoers had been fully aware of the Oedipus legend that Sophocles used as the subject matter of the play. Therefore, they would not have wanted to see Sophocles enacting the Oedipus myth/legend on the stage. Instead, they should have wanted to see how Sophocles would interpret the legend.

The character portrayal, thematic and plot development become meaningful when they are related to the incidents or characters that the spectators are familiar with. For example, when the spectators feel that Oedipus' birth, discovery of self-identity and physical death remind them of incidents of a known person and the special incidents of that person's life, they feel pleasure of seeing the scenes. The incidents, characters or ideas get meaningful when they are somehow related to the spectators' personal, social, geopolitical and philosophical experiences.

Moreover, Oedipus in the legendry tale had been identified by the spectators as a mean, abominable, wretched man. Sophocles protests the social judgement by reasoning out why and in what conditions Oedipus had happened to commit those crimes. By questioning, he elevates Oedipus to the status of a hero with the highest moral values. When raising him to such a high status, Sophocles could use a similar person with higher moral status at the time so that he could convincingly convey the intended meaning to the spectators. There was at the time such a person with higher moral values. That was the Buddha, and Greek spectators should have heard about him in their sea travels.

6. Conclusion

If there were one or two similar incidents in the play, we can assume that they are coincidences because two people in two different locations may have the same thought simultaneously. However, our exploration in the text suggests that there are several direct references as well as indirect allusions to the Buddha's life story. Corinthian Messenger's encounter with Jocasta suggests to the spectators two special incidents in the Buddha's life. One is Kisagotami's recitation of *nibbutha* verses (the verses of blessing) and Asitha's prediction that Siduhath would either become an all-powerful monarch (if he remains at home) or he would become the Buddha (if he leaves home). Oedipus' birth, discovery of self-identity or exploration of truth and his physical death occurs on a full moon day. The Buddha's birth, becoming the Buddha and his pass away occurred on a full moon day. Moreover, Buddhists celebrate these three occasions on the full moon day of May in every year. Similarly, the Theban celebrate Oedipus' birth by singing and dancing. Teiresias utterance in the scene of conflict suggests that Oedipus' birth and death would occur on the same day. Additionally, we come to know that even his discovery of self-identity occurs on the same day. Also, following the Buddha's motto in his life, Oedipus declares that helping other human beings is the motto in his life too. Finally, both the Buddha and Oedipus spend every minute in their life helping other human beings.

References

D.S.A Munasinghe, & D.C.V., & Fernando., (2016). Trading relations between ancient Sri Lanka and Greek and Rome. *Oracle,* VII(1), 35-37.

Patricia A. Carrel, & Joan C. Eisterhold., Schema theory and ESL reading pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly,* 17(4), 553-573, 1983.

Rhys, David., *Psalms of the early Buddhists*. Pali Text Society, 1909.

Kirinde, Dhammananda., *What Buddhist believe* (5th ed.). Taiwan, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 1993.

Kanai, L. Hazra., *History of Theravada Buddhism in South-East Asia with special reference to India and Ceylon*. New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Lit., 1982.

Barbara, Johnston., *Discourse Analysis* (2nd Ed.). MA: USA, Blackwell Publishing, 2013.

William, Knighton., The history of Ceylon from the earliest period to the present time with an appendix, containing an account of its present condition. Longman, 1945.

Andrea, Lesic-Thomas., Behind Bakhtin: Russian formalism and Kristeva's intertextuality. *Paragraph,* 28: 1-20, 2005.

Victor, A. Mair., An Asian story of the Oedipus type. *Asian Folklore studies,* 45, 19-32, 1986.

Irad, Malkin., Postcolonial concepts and ancient Greek colonization. Modern Language Quarterly, 65(3), 341-364, 2004.

Arne, Marilai., The double-tongued author: Re-reading Sophocles, Thomas Hardy, and Eduard Vilde, *Interlitteraria,* 23(2), 321-329, 2018.

Melinda, Szekely., Serendipity: The Roman discovery of Taprobane3, *International Journal of Euro-Mediterranean Studies*, 11(2), 49-60, 2018.

Gananath, Obeysekere., The conscience of the parricide: A study in Buddhist history. *Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 236 – 254, 1989.

Merlin, Peris., Greek motifs in the Jatakas. *Journal of Asiatic Society Sri Lanka Branch New Series,* 25, 136-183, 1980/81.

Merlin, Peris., Yonasabhagavatthu: That Greek enclave in Anuradhapura. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka,* 57, 1-18, 2011.

Franz, F. Schwarz., Pliny the Elder on Ceylon. *Journal of Asian History*, 8(1), 21-48, 1974.

Walpola, Rahula., *What the Buddha taught*. New York, NY: Grove Press, 1959.

Newton Ranaweera., Sophocles, *King Oedipus*: A Buddhist talk in drama form. *The Journal of Language, Literatures and Linguistics,* 38-45, 2021

Erik, Seldeslachts., Greece, the final frontier? The Westward spread of Buddhism. In Anne Heirman & S. P. Bumbacher (eds.), *The Spread of Buddhism* (pp. 131-166), Boston, Brill, 2007.

Sophocles., *The Theban plays*. EF Watling trans. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1947.

Sophocles., Antigone, Oedipus the King & Electra. H. D. F. Kitto trans., Oxford University Press, 1962.

Sophocles., *Oedipus Rex* (*Oedipus the King*). Robert Fagles trans., New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1982.