

**KUṆĀLAJĀTAKANIDĀNAṀ**  
**THE INTRODUCTION TO THE**  
**STORY OF THE CUCKOO**  
**(OR: THE BUDDHA GOES TO WAR)**  
**(FROM KUṆĀLAJĀTAKAVAṆṆANĀ, JĀ 536)**

TRANSLATED BY

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**INTRODUCTION**

Although the story recorded here is not found in the Pāḷi Canon, nor to my knowledge, anywhere in the Canonical texts of the other schools, it has a certain verisimilitude that gives it some authenticity. At the very least it is hard to think that it has been made up by fablers.

It is found in several places in the Pāḷi Commentarial texts. It forms the basis for the Story of the Cuckoo, which is what is translated here; then it is told in more or less the same words as the Introduction to the Mahāsamayasutta of the Dīghanikāya (also in the Commentary to a shorter version of that Discourse found in Sagāthavagga, SN 1.37); and in abbreviated form in the Dhammapada Commentary to verse 197, which opens the Sukhavagga.

The story, which is of resource shortages is, in our days, very topical. There is a river dividing two clans, one of whom is the Buddha's own Sākiyan clan. The supply of water from the river is drying up at the end of the Hot Season, and the two clans, who normally have enough to share the water, start to argue and want to keep all the remaining water for themselves alone.

The Buddha sees what is happening and out of compassion decides to go and tell some moral stories to the potential protagonists, pointing out the disastrous consequences of conflict and the benefits of harmony. Although the two sides are angry with each other as soon as they see the Buddha they give up the fight; and after he has instructed them they are even more convinced and offer their sons up to the Sangha.

It wouldn't be hard to substitute 'oil' for 'water', and 'nations' for 'clans' and we would have a turned an old tale into a modern drama. One of the main morals of the story, and one that cuts deep, is that water is never worth more than blood; and nor is oil, of course, a lesson that would be well-learned if it were applied today.

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**Sākiya-Koliyā kira Kapilavatthunagarassa ca Koliyanagarassa ca antare**

Between Kapilavatthu and Koliya, the (capital) cities of the Sākiyans and the Koliyans,<sup>1</sup> it seems,

**Rohiṇīṃ nāma nadiṃ.**

there was a river named the Rohiṇī.

**Ekeneva āvaraṇena bandhāpetvā sassāni karonti.**

Having bound the river in with a dike<sup>2</sup> they grew their crops.

**Atha Jeṭṭhamūlamāse, sassesu milāyantesu,**

Then in the month of Jeṭṭha,<sup>3</sup> when the crops were withering away,<sup>4</sup>

**ubhayanagaravāsikānam-pi kammakarā sannipatiṃsu.**

the workers from both cities assembled together.

**Tattha Koliyanagaravāsino vadiṃsu:**

There those who dwelt in Koliya city said:

**“Idaṃ udakaṃ ubhato nihariyamānaṃ na tumhākaṃ na amhākaṃ pahossati,**

“This water is not enough for both you and us to carry away,

**amhākaṃ pana sassam ekena udakeneva nipphajjissati,**

(but) our crops will mature with a single watering,

**idaṃ udakaṃ amhākaṃ dethā.” ti**

(therefore) give us this water.”

**Kapilavatthunagaravāsino vadiṃsu:**

Those who dwelt in Kapilavatthu city said:

**“Tumhesu koṭṭhe pūretvā ṭhitesu,**

“After you have filled your stores,

**mayam rattasuvaṇṇanīlamaṇikāḷakahāpaṇe ca gahetvā,**

taken our red gold, blue jewels and black coins,

**na sakkhissāma pacchipasibbakādihatthā tumhākaṃ gharadvāre vicarituṃ,**

we will not be able, with hand-baskets and sacks in our hands, to wander to the doors of your houses,

**amhākam-pi sassam ekeneva udakena nipphajjissati,**

(but) our crops will mature with a single watering,

**idaṃ udakaṃ amhākaṃ dethā” ti.**

(therefore) give us this water.”

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<sup>1</sup> These were two clans (*gotta*) in North-East India, who had established themselves just under the Himālayan mountains on the border of what is now Nepal.

<sup>2</sup> This exact meaning is not given in PED., which says: *shutting off, barring out, withstanding*; nt. *hindrance, obstruction, bar*.

<sup>3</sup> This normally falls in June, which is towards the end of the dry season in northern India.

<sup>4</sup> Locative absolutive construction.

**“Na mayam dassāmā!” ti**

“We will not give!”

**“Mayam-pi na dassāmā!” ti**

“We will not give either!”

**Evam kalaham vaḍḍhetvā eko uṭṭhāya ekassa pahāram adāsi,**

After the quarrel had grown one of them rose up and gave another a blow,

**so pi aññassā ti, evam aññamaññam paharivā,**

and he to another, thus after striking one another,

**Rājakulānam jātim ghaṭṭetvā, kalaham vaḍḍhayimsu,**

and offending against the birth of the Kingly families, the quarrel grew,

**Koliyakammakarā vadanti:**

and the Koliyan workers said:

**“Tumhe Kapilavatthuvāsike Sākiyādārake gahetvā, gajjatha!**

“Having siezed you people of Kapilavatthu, sons of the Sākiyans, you can roar away!

**Ye soṇasiṅgālādayo viya attano bhaginīhi saddhim vasimsu!**

Like dogs and jackals and others you have cohabited with your own sisters!<sup>5</sup>

**Etesam hatthi-assādayo ca phalakāvudhāni ca amhākam kiṃ karissantī?” ti**

What will they do to us with their elephants and horses, their shields and swords, and so on?”

**Sākiyakammakarā pi vadanti:**

The Sākiyan workers also said:

**“Tumhe dāni kuṭṭhino dārake gahetvā, gajjatha!**

“Now having siezed you sons of lepers, you can roar away!

**Ye anāthā niggatikā tiracchānā viya Kolarukkhe vasimsu!**

Like helpless and miserable animals they dwelt in Jujube trees!

**Etesam hatthi-assādayo ca phalakāvudhāni ca amhākam kiṃ karissantī?” ti?**

What will they do to us with their elephants and horses, their shields and swords, and so on?”

**Te gantvā tasmim kamme niyuttāmaccānam kathesum,**

Having left that place they related all that was done to the appointed councillors,

**amaccā rājakulānam kathesum.**

and they related it to the ministers of the Kingly clan.

**Tato Sākiyā: “Bhaginīhi saddhim samvāsikānam thāmañ-ca balañ-ca dassessāmā!” ti**

Then the Sākiyans said: “We will show them the power and strength of those who cohabited with their sisters!”

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<sup>5</sup> This is referring to their mythical origins; in the reply below the Sākiyans return the insult in a similar way by referring to the supposed origins of the Koliyans.

**yuddhasajjā nikkhamiṃsu.**

and that day they went out to fight.

**Koliyā pi: “Kolarukkhavāsīnaṃ thāmañ-ca balañ-ca dassessāmā!” ti**

The Koliyans also (said): “We will show them the power and strength of those who dwell in Jujube trees!”

**yuddhasajjā nikkhamiṃsu.**

and that day they went out to fight.

**Apāre panācariyā: “Sākiyakoliyānaṃ dāsīsu udakatthāya nadiṃ gantvā.**

Other teachers (say): “Slaves of the Sākiyans and Koliyans, after going to the river for water,

**cumbaṭāni bhūmiyaṃ nikkhipitvā,**

and placing their head-rolls<sup>6</sup> on the ground,

**sukhakathāya sannisinnāsu.**

sat around having a pleasant conversation.

**Ekissā cumbaṭaṃ ekā sakasaññāya gaṇhi,**

One of them took another’s head-roll, thinking it her own,

**taṃ nissāya mama cumbaṭaṃ, tava cumbaṭaṃ,-ti**

and because of this, saying: (This is) my head-roll, this is your head-roll,

**kalahe pavatte kamena ubhayanagaravāsīno dāsakammakārā,**

gradually a quarrel broke out between the slave-workers who dwelt in both cities,

**ceva sevakagāmaḥojakāmacca-uparājāno cā, ti**

and also between the servants, headmen, ministers and princes,

**sabbe yuddhasajjā nikkhamiṃsū” ti vadanti.**

and that day they all went out to fight.”

**Imamahā pana nayā purimanayo va bahūsu Aṭṭhakathāsu āgato,**

But the former explanation has come down in many of the ancient Commentaries,

**yuttarūpo cā ti sveva gahetabbo.**

and it is considered suitable to uphold it.

**Te pana sāyanhasamaye yuddhasajjā nikkhamissantī. ti**

And so that day in the evening time they will go out to fight.

\* \* \*

**Tasmiṃ samaye Bhagavā Sāvattthiyaṃ viharanto**

Then at that time the Gracious One was living near Sāvattthī,

**paccūsasamaye lokāṃ volokento**

and towards the time of dawn he was looking around the world

**ime evaṃ yuddhasajje nikkhante addasa.**

and saw these (groups) going out to battle that day.

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<sup>6</sup> These are rolls of cloth placed on the heads upon which are carried pots and the like.

**Disvā, “Mayi gate ayamā kalaho vūpasamissati nu kho udāhu no?” ti upadhārento:**

Having seen (it), considering: “With my going (there) will this quarrel be pacified or will it not?”

**“Aham-ettha gantvā kalahavūpasamattham, tīṇi Jātakāni kathessāmi,**

(he knew): “Having gone there for the purpose of pacifying the quarrel, I will relate three Stories

**tato kalaho vūpasamissati.**

and the quarrel will be pacified through that.

**Atha sāmaggidīpanatthāya dve Jātakāni kathetvā Attadaṇḍasuttaṃ desessāmi.**

Then, for the purpose of illustrating (the benefits) of concord, after relating two Stories I will teach the Discourse on Taking up a Stick.

**Desanaṃ sutvā, ubhayanagaravāsino pi**

(Then) having heard that teaching, those people who dwell in both cities

**aḍḍhatiyāni aḍḍhatiyāni kumārasatāni dassanti,**

will give two-hundred and fifty young men each,

**aham te pabbājessāmi, mahanto samāgamo bhavissati,” ti sannitṭhānam-akāsi.**

I will make them go forth, and there will be a Great Assembly,” at the conclusion.

**Pāto va sarīrapaṭijagganaṃ katvā,**

Then, after taking care of his body in the morning,

**Sāvattiyaṃ piṇḍāya caritvā, piṇḍapātaṭikkanto.**

and entering Sāvattihī for alms, he returned after the alms round.

**Sāyanhasamaye Gandhakuṭito nikkhamitvā kassaci anārocetvā,**

In the evening time, after leaving the Perfumed Cottage without having told anyone,

**sayam-eva pattacīvaram-ādāya,**

taking his robe and bowl,

**dvinnam senānam antare ākāse, pallaṅkam ābhujitvā,**

in the sky between the two armies, after folding his legs crosswise,

**tesam samvegajananattham, divā andhakāram kātuṃ,**

to make it dark during the day, for the purpose of giving them spiritual anxiety,

**kesaramsiyo vissajjento nisīdi.**

he sat there emitting rays from his (dark-coloured) hair.

**Atha nesam samvigamānasānam attānam dassento**

Then seeing their minds were anxious

**chabbaṇṇā Buddharasmiyo vissajjessi.**

he emitted the six-coloured Buddha rays.

**Kapilavattuvāsino Bhagavantam disvā,**

Having seen the Gracious One those who resided at Kapilavattu,

**“amhākaṃ nātiseṭṭho Satthā āgato,**

\* after thinking: “The Teacher, our foremost relative has come,

**diṭṭho nu kho tena amhākaṃ kalahakāraṇabhāvo?” ti cintetvā,**

has he seen the reason for our dispute?”

**“Na kho pana sakkā Satthari āgate**

(understood): “It is not possible, now the Teacher has come

**amhehi parassa sarīre satthaṃ pātetuṃ,**

to attack the bodies of others with spears,

**Koliyanagaravāsino amhe hanantu vā bajjhantu vā!” ti āvudhāni chaḍḍesuṃ.**

let the people dwelling in Koliya kill or capture us!” and they threw aside their weapons.

**Koliyanagaravāsino pi tatheva akaṃsu.**

The people dwelling in Koliya also did the same.

**Atha Bhagavā otarivā ramaṇīye padese,**

Then the Gracious One, having descended (from the sky) in that delightful place,

**vālukapuline Paññattavarabuddhāsane nisīdi,**

sat down on the appointed noble Buddha seat in a sandy bed,

**anopamāya Buddhasiriyā virocamāno.**

with his unmatched Buddha-glory shining.

**Te pi Rājāno Bhagavantam vanditvā, nisīdiṃsu.**

Those Kings, having worshipped the Gracious One, sat down.

**Atha ne Satthā jānanto va: “Kasmā āgatattha, Mahārājā?” ti pucchi.**

Then the Teacher, knowingly, asked: “Why have you come, Great Kings?”

**“Neva, Bhante, nadidassanattāya, na kīlanattāya,**

“Not for seeing the river, venerable Sir, not for play,<sup>7</sup>

**apica kho pana imasmiṃ pana ṭhāne saṅgāmaṃ paccupaṭṭhapetvā āgatamhā” ti.**

but having got ready for battle in this place, we have come.”

**“Kiṃ nissāya vo kalaho Mahārājā?” ti**

“This dispute is on account of what, Great Kings?”

**“Udakaṃ nissāya, Bhante.” ti**

“On account of water, venerable Sir.”

**“Udakaṃ kiṃ agghati Mahārājā?” ti**

“What is water worth, Great Kings?”

**“Appagghaṃ, Bhante.” ti**

“(It has) little worth, venerable Sir.”

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<sup>7</sup> These are datives having infinitive sense.

**“Pathavī nāma kiṃ agghati, Mahārājā?” ti**

“And what is earth worth, Great Kings?”

**“Anagghā, Bhante.” ti**

“(It is) priceless, venerable Sir.”

**“Khattiyā kiṃ agghanti Mahārājā?” ti**

“What are Nobles worth, Great Kings?”

**“Khattiyā nāma anagghā, Bhante.” ti**

“Nobles are (also) priceless, venerable Sir.”

**“Kasmā anagge Khattiye nāsetha, Mahārājā? ti**

“Why would you destroy Nobles, Great Kings?”

**Kalahasmiñ-hi assādo nāma natthi.**

There is certainly no satisfaction in this quarrel.

**Kalahavasena hi Mahārājā,**

Because of a quarrel, Great Kings,

**ekāya rukkhadevatāya kāḷasīhena saddhiṃ**

a certain tree god and a black lion

**baddhāghāto sakalam-pi imaṃ kammaṃ anupatto yevā” ti**

were bound by anger reaching through the whole aeon,”

**vatvā Phandanajātakaṃ kathesi.**

and having said (that), he related the Phandana Tree Story.<sup>8</sup>

*[A branch of a tree falls on a lion while he is lying under it, and he blames the tree spirit. He finds a cartwright looking for wood and guides him to the tree which he starts to chop down. The tree spirit convinces the wright that the skin of a lion is good for the rim, and he kills the lion. That way they both die.]*

**Tato: “Parapattiyena nāma Mahārājā na bhavitabbaṃ.**

After that (he said): “There should certainly not be, Great Kings, this relying on (the word of) another.

**Parapattiyā hi hutvā, ekassa sasassa kathāya,**

Having relied on another, through the tale of one hare,

**tiyojanasahassavittthate himavante catuppadagaṇā**

a (great) crowd of four-footed (animals) stretching three thousand leagues

**mahāsamuddaṃ pakkhandino ahesuṃ,**

have jumped into the great ocean,

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<sup>8</sup> Jā 475; which tree this is is unclear, according to F&F it may be the *Gardenia turgida* tree; PED identifies it as a *Dalbergia*. I summarise the story below, but nothing in the comm. would lead us to believe the foes fought for an aeon.

**tasmā parapattiyena na bhavitabban,” ti**  
therefore one shouldn't rely on (the word of) another,”

**vatvā, Daddarajātakaṃ kathesi.**  
and having said (that), he related the Thud Story.

*[A wood-apple fruit<sup>9</sup> falls near where a hare is resting and he thinks an earthquake is coming, so he runs away. Other animals see him fleeing and asking why, learn that an earthquake is coming, so they all flee too, but all that happened, as the Bodhisatta shows, is that a fruit fell!]*

**Tato: “Kadāci, Mahārājā, dubbalo pi**  
After that (he said): “Sometimes the one who is weak, Great Kings,

**mahabbalassa randhaṃ passati;**  
sees the strong one's fault;

**kadāci mahabbalo pi dubbalassa randhaṃ passati,**  
sometimes the strong one sees the weak one's fault,

**laṭukikā hi sakuṇikā Hatthināgaṃ ghātesī,” ti**  
therefore a quail bird once slaughtered a Nāga elephant,”

**vatvā, Laṭukikajātakaṃ kathesi.**  
and having said (that), he related the Quail Story.<sup>10</sup>

*[A quail pleads with an elephant to be careful of her brood, but the elephant stomps on them and charges off. The quail befriends a crow, a fly and a frog. The first pecks out the elephant's eyes, the second lays maggots in them and the third croaks and thereby deceives the elephant into falling over a precipice.]*

**Evaṃ kalahavūpasamatthāya tīṇi Jātakāni kathetvā,**  
Thus having related three Stories to pacify the quarrel,

**sāmaggi-paridīpanatthāya dve Jātakāni kathesi.**  
to illustrate (the value of) concord he related two Stories.

**“Samaggānañ-hi Mahārājā koci otāraṃ nāma passitum na sakkoti” ti,**  
“There is no one able to find fault in concord, Great Kings,”

**vatvā, Rukkhadhammajātakaṃ kathesi.**  
and having said (that), he related the Righteous Tree Story.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This is a hard-skinned fruit (from the tree *Aegle marmelos*), that would make a fair noise when it dropped.

<sup>10</sup> Laṭukikajātakaṃ, Jā 357.

<sup>11</sup> Rukkhadhammajātakaṃ, Jā 74.

*[Tree spirits are given the chance to relocate their residences. Some stay in groups in the forests, other choose to live solitary near to villages and towns where they can get good offerings. When storms rage over the land the solitary trees are destroyed, while the communal ones survive.]*

**Tato: “Samaggānaṃ Mahārājā koci vivaraṃ passituṃ nāsakkhi.**

After that (he said): “Nobody was able, Great Kings, to find an opening when there was concord.

**Yadā pana aññamaññaṃ vivādam-akaṃsu,**

But when a dispute had arisen amongst one another,

**atha ne eko nesādaputto jīvitakkhayaṃ pāpetvā, ādāya gato.**

then one hunter’s son, having destroyed their lives, took them away.

**Vivāde assādo nāma natthī,” ti**

There is certainly no satisfaction in disputes,”

**vatvā, Vaṭṭakajātakaṃ kathesi.**

and having said (that), he related the Quail Story.<sup>12</sup>

*[A hunter is always catching quails, one of whom has the bright idea that when the nets are thrown they should put their necks through the holes and all fly off together. All goes well and they escape the hunter, until one day they fall into a quarrel and he carries them all off.]*

**Evaṃ imāni pañca Jātakāni kathetvā,**

Thus having related these five Stories,

**avasāne Attadaṇḍasuttaṃ kathesi.**

at the end he related the Discourse on Taking up a Stick.<sup>13</sup>

*[Fear arises from one who has taken up a stick, look at people arguing, I will explain my spiritual anxiety, the way I experienced it:  
Having seen this generation trembling like fish in little water,  
Having seen how they are opposed to each other fear came upon me.  
The world is without essence, agitated in all directions,  
Wishing for a place of safety for myself, I saw nowhere that was free,  
Having seen how they are opposed to the end, I became detached,  
Then I saw a dart<sup>14</sup> here, hard to see, resting in the heart,  
Affected by this dart one runs about in all directions,  
Having pulled out the dart, one does not run nor sink.]<sup>15</sup>*

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<sup>12</sup> There are three Vaṭṭakajātakaṃ in our present text, Nos. 35, 118 and 394, but this is identified by the sub-commentary as being Jā 33, which is known to us as Sammodamānajātakaṃ.

<sup>13</sup> Only the first 5 of 20 verses are translated here.

<sup>14</sup> The dart of craving.

<sup>15</sup> Comm: *sink into the four floods.*

**Atha Rājāno pasannā: “Sace Satthā nāgamissa,**

Then the Kings, being pleased, (said): “If the Teacher had not come,

**mayam aññamaññam vadhitvā, lohitanadiṃ pavattayissāma,**

having slaughtered each other, we would have set flowing a river of blood,

**Satthāram nissāya no jīvitam laddham!**

because of the Teacher we have received (back) our lives!

**Sace pana Satthā agāram ajjhāvasissa,**

If the Teacher had lived in the house,

**dvisahassadīpaparivāresu catumahādīparajjam hatthagataṃ abhaviṣṣa,**

the four great island kingdoms, surrounded by the two-thousand islands would have gone into his hand,

**atirekasahassam kho panassa puttā abhaviṣṣamsu,**

and he would have had more than a thousand children,

**tato Khattiyaparivāro va avicarissa.**

and would have gone about with a retinue of Nobles.

**Tam kho panesa sampattim pahāya nikkhamitvā, sambodhim patto.**

But after giving up his fortune and going forth, he attained Complete Awakening.

**Idāni pi khattiyaparivāro va vicaratū!” ti**

Now he should go around with a retinue of Nobles also!”

**ubhayanagaravāsino aḍḍhateyyāni aḍḍhateyyāni kumārasatāni adamsu,**

and those who dwelt in the two cities gave two-hundred and fifty young men each,

**Bhagavā te pabbājetvā Mahāvanam agamāsi.**

and the Gracious One, having given them the going-forth, returned to the Great Wood.