

The Royal Women according to Buddhist Jatakas

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Abstract - There are several ways to understand the Buddhist perspective on women's status in society. Examining how the position of women in religious and secular life in India evolved before to and after the advent of Buddhism might help determine the extent to which the Buddha's teachings caused a dramatic transformation in society. If the Buddha's teaching accords women a different position than men, as many other faiths do, it will be fascinating to see how this plays out. It is feasible to investigate if a person's predetermined gender affects how far down the Buddha's path they go. In order to avoid skipping even the slightest suggestion of the royal ladies in the Jataka stories, we have attempted to include all pertinent episodes and subject matter.

Keywords - Royal women, Buddhist, Jataka tales

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INTRODUCTION

Many female characters with a royal or aristocratic background are mentioned in the Jatakas. While hundreds of identities arrive in this manner, just a few play significant roles. A few of them show up in various forms, situations, and scenarios. As a result, many of the Jataka tales' female protagonists will have to serve as our guides. The same characters will be mentioned several times in the book, each time in a new situation that calls for a different treatment. Women who are connected to the royal family in some way also number in the hundreds. Some of them are princesses from different royal families, while others are queens of prominent monarchs of the time.[1]

We should also highlight many more strong female personalities who are not monarchs in the traditional sense. But they also can't be lumped in with regular folks. It's important to note that many female characters from the royal house and the class of nobility will bear sometimes various roles, like their role as queens and nobles or as faithful followers and organizers of the faith of Buddhism, because our basic source of reference is the pull of the Jatakas, which invariably have a distinct religious and sectarian association. In various times and places, Mallika, the chief queen of King Prasenajit of Kosala, is referred to as Sujata of the Sujata Jataka, the Kinnari in the Bhallatiya Jataka, and Queen Sambula of the Sambula Jataka. Prasenajit was her spouse for all three pregnancies. The same identity, Mallika, has been ascribed to all of these manifestations.[2]

Kings like Bimbisara and his son Ajatsatru of Magadha, Prasenajit of Kosala, Udena of Kosambi, and Pradyota of Avanti were all significant figures in the region during Gautama Buddha's lifetime. In hindsight, their queens get starring roles in the Jatakas because the Buddha retold the Jatakas often in front of his disciples. Sometimes, the current queens were mistaken for the women referred to in the Jatakas. Although the queens of the four major monarchs are highlighted, many more queens of lesser states are also included. According to traditional Indian custom, the king's court would have been without a queen without her.

According to the Jatakas, rulers also often had several queens. This may represent the reality that there was only ever one monarch in a country but numerous queens. When power and prestige are shared, the latter inevitably loses some of its significance. One of the queens is nearly always identified as the head queen, however. It is undeniable that the chief queen was the most powerful member of the royal family, as shown by her position of authority over the other queens. It's reasonable to assume that the chief queen had the authority, respect, and self-assurance of something like a subking because of her position of power.[3]

A chief queen's word apparently carried a lot of weight beyond the palace walls. Mallika, queen of Prasenajit of Kosala, is well known to have sometimes wielded more sway than her husband. Similarly impressive was Kosala Devi, queen of Bimbisara in Magadha. When Ajatsatru, the son usurper, did not approve of her visiting her husband

Bimbisara in prison, her power in the kingdom was so great that she was not stopped.

KINGDOMS OF ROYALTY

There is a mention of Queen Mallika in the Bhallatiya Jataka. Disputes arose around the subject of marital rights. Queen Mallika & Prasenajit had a fight. Mallika had gotten under the king's skin, and he was not happy. It was clear he did not want to interact with her in any way. As soon as Buddha heard about it, he and his monks headed towards the palace. He was revered and welcomed by King Prasenajit. He prepared delicious meals for the Buddha and his disciples. Soon after finishing his breakfast, Buddha sat off to one side. About Mallika, he enquired of Prasenajit. Buddha was briefed about the dispute by Prasenajit. It was Buddha who brought Mallika and Prasenajit together again.[4]

The above-mentioned Jataka paints a picture of the queen's role in the palace and the wider community. Mallika, as queen, was treated with utmost deference by the court of King Prasenajit. Yet, she was an integral component of the king's good deeds because of her reputation for generosity and her prominence in the public eye. At the palace of Prasenajit, when Buddha was being fed. There was no sign of Mallika. The master questioned the king about the motivation. This demonstrates the significance of the queen's role, since the people naturally anticipated her presence alongside the monarch at all big events. The fact that Buddha himself interceded lends credence to the tale, demonstrating that even a religious guru of Buddha's stature acknowledged Mallika's rightful place as queen.

This occurrence sheds information on the Jatakas' portrayal of women's elevated position. As the Rajasuya ritual was not complete without the queen. The Sambula Jataka mentions the queen's extreme fidelity to the king. When the king was in difficulties, the queen would step in and aid. The royal family was treated with utmost courtesy both inside and outside the palace. In this Jataka, the queen's rank and role are elucidated via a narrative. Sotthisena, king of Benares, married Sambula.[5]

Because of his leprosy, Sotthisena was forced to abandon his kingdom and seek refuge in the woods. And Queen Sambula accompanied him on his journey. She was really devoted to taking care of him. She decided to take a shower one day. A Yakkha grabbed her. Yakkha warned that he would have to take her away. She was so devout that she warmed Sakka's seat. The Yakkha were terrified by his arrival and his thunderbolt. She was running late getting back to her house. Sotthisena was curious about her devotion. He flat-out refused to accept her word. Sambula did the right thing and spoke the truth. She vowed to be loyal and that was all. She sprayed Sotthisena with water. Healing had taken place in full. He relocated to the city of Benares, where he once

again assumed the throne. Women's roles in that era's society are reflected in the work.

Sambula's loyalty and honesty toward her spouse were unwavering. The Vessantara Jataka tells us that Queen Maddl was a very loyal monarch. The name of Sivi's new monarch, who replaced his late father King Sanjaya, was Vessantara. When Sanjaya ruled Sivi, he chastised his son, Prince Vessantara, and then exiled him to Vankagiri at the behest of the populace. Princess Maddl, Vessantara's wife, requested that she and their two children come with him on his travels after he said goodbye to his parents. This Jataka paints an image of a queen who is dedicated to her marriage. Royal wives gave up their perks and followed their husbands down the road they knew was best for the state and its citizens, despite the fact that it was not popular.[6]

The queen Maddl is mentioned in the Vessantara Jataka, and her unwavering devotion to her spouse is shown by her decision to leave her castle and join him in the wilderness. The Putabhata Jataka presents a similar portrait of a queen, one who is devoted to her king and who is much adored by him. 9. The tale of Dasaratha Jataka is quite similar to that of the Ramayana. Marayada Purshotam Rama, the name given to the enlightened Lord Rama in the Ramayana, imparts his wisdom to the reader. His exemplary wife, Devi Sita, gave up her life of luxury in the palace to walk barefoot with him. There were numerous challenges she had to overcome throughout her fourteen years spent in the bush.

The same event is retold in the Dasaratha Jataka, shedding insight on the queen's role in the palace and presenting contrasting portraits of the royal females. There is Sita, who reflects as a devoted wife and selfless princess, and there is another wife of King Dasaratha, who exemplifies a self-centered, out-of-control queen in the palace and among the royal family and who was eventually responsible for the death of her husband. Ramapandita, Lakkhana, and Sita are the three offspring of King Dasaratha in the Jataka of the same name.[7]

After his queen passed away, he married again and had a son with her; Bharata was his son's name. Bharata's mother made a claim to the throne for him when he was seven years old using a boon she had received from the monarch. This news shocked and terrified the king. As a result, he abandoned them in the woods for a total of fourteen years. This Jataka tale, retold with a Buddhist twist but retaining many of the same elements, is meant to instruct the masses on the virtues and vices associated with female characters. These include loyalty, selflessness, love, and chastity on the one hand, and avarice, deceit, and ingratitude on the other. The positive and terrible elements of women's nature are examined together in a single narrative¹⁰. The number of female characters identified from the Jatakas increases when one points to Yasodhara,

but only if they have some distinguishing trait or are given a prominent role.

Yet no discussion of powerful women in history would be complete without including Yasodhara, the wife of Gautama Buddha. There are several Jatakas that feature her. It's fascinating that Yasodhara, the Buddha's wife, is constantly identified as a royal or important woman in many of the Jatakas. Furthermore, Gautama Buddha was a prince, and his wife was a high-ranking royal lady. Although Suddhodana, king of Kapilavastu and father of the Gautama Buddha, having just lost his principal queen Maya at the birth of his son, she was often referred to as the queen.

Of course, he also had a powerful queen in the form of Gautama's stepmother Maharajapati. When it came to the royal family, however, Yasodhara was considered queen and Maharajapati was treated as the queen mother. There can be no question that Yasodhara's personality is one of the shining examples of ancient Indian ladies. When she was married, she was from an aristocratic family but not a royal one. Yasodhara was selected as the Gautama's wife because of her beauty and brilliance, and she continued to demonstrate her independence of character even after becoming a member of the royal family and assuming a position of prominence. As Buddha went for enlightenment, she gave up the luxuries of royal life and lived as a strict ascetic.[8]

She just ate once daily. Many Jatakas, including the Aditta Jataka, Abbhantara Jataka, Kurudhamma Jataka, Dasaratha Jataka, and Vessantara Jataka, all have characters named Yasodhara. But, at the conclusion of all these Jatakas, she was revealed to be Yasodhara, the wife of Gautama Buddha. SambidaJcitaka, Vessantara Jataka, and Dasaratha Jataka all have stories of royal wives leaving their palaces to go barefoot after their husbands. Those queens who were loyal and supportive of their husbands are portrayed in these Jataka tales. There are several allusions from Indian culture before the Jatakas that suggest that queens were never pampered in the luxurious life of palaces, but were instead ever willing to surrender their advantages. The Rdmayano language. As her husband was exiled, Devi Sita was adamant that she go with him.[9]

The Mahcibharata's Kunti, whose husband's name was Pandava, withdrew to the woods, where she joined Draupadi and the other Pandava queens. Pativrata and Mahdbhagd are renamed as STta, Kunti, and Draupad in these epic texts. The fact that a princess like Anula was able to become an upasika—a position often reserved for men—is a significant historical fact. Devanampiya - Tissa's brother and subking, Mahanaga, married Anula, the daughter of Ceylon's king, Mutasiva. She was one of five hundred ladies who listened to Mahinda preach the Petavatthu, the Vimanavatthu, and the SaccaSamyutta and thereafter entered the stream. Some time later, after

hearing Mahinda's discourse at the Mahameghavana, she and others decided to become Sakadagams and petitioned the king for ordination. Sanghamitta was sent to facilitate their ordination. A daughter of King Asoka of the Mauryans, she was a powerful political figure in her own right. Anula and her friends followed the Ten Precepts and stayed in the Upasika Vihara till Sanghamitta arrived.[10]

ROYALTY AND NOBILITY

The Jatakas include a wide variety of female characters, including those who are not members of the royal family but yet play important roles. They can be lumped along with other women of the aristocracy. The word "nobility" is used to describe folks who are not of royal blood but are also not commoners. Families of businessmen, prominent public figures, and sometimes women of independent means make up the bulk of this group.

It's remarkable to see these types of individuals depicted in the Jataka tales, given their designated positions in society. Depending on the situation, they may or may not have a good name. One thing all of them have in common is that they were connected to the Buddha in one of his reincarnations before or after his birth as Gautama Buddha. In this group, Amarapall comes first, since he is called Therigatha in Buddhist writings. She served as Vaisali's courtesan. The topic is also discussed in a few more Buddhist stories. Amarapall had a prominent position in society and was closely linked to the aristocracy. Because of this, she was also elevated to the ranks of the aristocracy. She was stunningly attractive, making her the object of desire for many powerful and wealthy men. To make a long story short, she grew enamored with the Buddha's teachings and wanted to become a devotee. The most notable of Amarapall's numerous holdings was its mango orchard. She gave the Buddha the mango orchard to use as his home base whenever he visited the city.[11]

It's remarkable that Buddha accepted the payment from Amarapall, a public lady with a less-than-stellar reputation, and that she afterwards became one of his most devoted followers. Amarapall's good deeds are described at length in several stories found in Buddhist scriptures. The stories show that women may rise beyond the negative stereotypes that society attaches to them if they have enough money and religious faith. Amarapall was a wealthy woman with a deep religious commitment, making her a rarity even among Buddhists. She benefited from the Buddha's favor, as well as that of maybe several influential early Buddhists. Kali, a prostitute, is mentioned in the Buddhist text Takkariya Jataka.[12]

She worked as a Benarasi courtesan. Every day, she brought in a thousand coins. She has zero respect for human beings. Being a well-known public figure, she was given wide latitude in her chosen

field. A son of a businessman was one of her regulars. He spent a thousand gold pieces a day to be in her presence. On one occasion, he was unable to pay the 104 rubles, and as a result, she took the clothing that the merchant's son had been given as per tradition. He was forced to go nude while on the town. Even among the administrative staff, she commanded respect. A reprimand for her rudeness to patrons was out of the question.[13]

A principal courtesan is mentioned in the Kanavera Jataka. She had a position of great sway in the public sphere. Her name was Sama. She was widely regarded as the best courtesan in town. She found herself romantically involved with a notorious thief. The provincial governor ordered his detention and eventual execution. She offered the provincial governor a thousand gold pieces as a bribe. She used all of her cunning to get a young man who was infatuated with her stand in for the thief. Nevertheless, the thief betrayed her. She was quite creative in her efforts to find him. She bribed a group of itinerant musicians to perform a series of stanzas as they moved from one city block to the next. Nagarsobhin, a prostitute of Benares, is mentioned again in the Sulasa Jataka, where her nightly rate was listed at a whopping one thousand rupees. Sattuka, a thief, also called Benares home. The king's troops came and took him away one day to put him to death. Sulasa fell for him and paid the head guard to let him go. He plotted his murder. Sulasa was able to deduce his true motives. She patiently awaited the right moment to execute him. One day, she pushed him over the edge, and he was killed instantly under her weight. It has been noted that public women, particularly the reviled prostitutes, tended to be quite wealthy, giving them the power to not only impose conditions to clients but also to punish or shame them.[14]

Powerful courtesans bribed the governor and his henchman and meddled in court cases to satisfy their own desire. They were the elites of society because of their wealth, status, and charisma. They mixed with the elite and cultured members of society. Thus, they made up a sizable portion of the aristocracy back then. They have been referenced several times in the Jataka tales in the context of various significant events, some of which are directly tied to the Buddhist context of the socioeconomic environment of the day, while others are only indirectly related. Women who had connections to the royal court or the economic, social, or religious life of the state had a privileged status throughout history, from the Vedic to the later Vedic periods.

Titles such as NagarasobhinT, Nagaravadhu, and JanapadaKalayanT were bestowed to courtesans in ancient times. In literature, courtesans were never vilified or shamed. A extensive list of occupations, including prostitute, is included in the Milindapanha. The societal norms of the time allowed for this occupation. Bindumati, Ambapalf, Sulasa, sffma, and Vimala Padumavati all became Buddhists. Finally, they became arahts. Ambapali gained notoriety as

one of the order's most devoted followers. As the name suggests, Mahaummagga Jataka details the many instances in which women played significant roles in government. The wives of Nobles sometimes assisted their husbands with governmental policymaking. Mahosadha, a councilor of the monarch of Mithila, married Amaradev. The lady he married, Amaradevi, was a clever and discerning person. She thwarted many plans of Mahosadha's opponents.[15]

One day, they took a bunch of stuff from the palace and couriered it to her. She took them in, and she had affairs with each one of them. She made them suffer by taking the stolen stuff to the monarch to accuse them of theft. Her tireless efforts saved Mahosadha from assassination attempts and earned him praise at court for the vanquishing of the palace's foes. The name of the woman Amradev is mentioned in the Mahaummagga Jataka. Her husband, Mahosadha, was a member of the royal court of Mithila, and he was her counselor. Everyone started loving Amradev. She helped her spouse thwart his opponents in a major way. AmradevT serves to illustrate two key concepts. One is that she exemplifies a woman of the noble class who rose to the position of a member of the royal family via her own merits. Second, Amradevi was significant because she was able to provide her husband advice on how to thwart the enemy' plans.[16]

This demonstrates her keen diplomatic sense, and it's significant that women's advice in this area was given prominence in the family and the kingdom back then, which is a remarkable acknowledgement of the thinking capacity of women. Vidhura Pandita Jataka sheds insight on the status of women of Noble families and classes. Mrs. Vidhura Pandita, whose name was Anujja. Varuna's daughter desired Vidhura's heart to treat her mother's sickness, so she called upon her hundreds of boys to say their last goodbyes. Despite everything, Anujja, Vidhura's wife, is shown as a strong and courageous person. The preceding data allows us to establish that the women of the Noble classes had husbands who worked in state administration or had significant positions in the society of Nobles.[17]

They supported their spouses in their efforts to fulfill their civic responsibilities and aided them in any way they could. This teaches us that women contributed significantly to the state's activities as well. These women, together with their husbands, gave their lives for the sake of the country. The king and queen held Anujja in high regard, and this served as a powerful emblem of the respect and admiration that is shown to ladies of noble birth. Women in Noble households were undoubtedly strong, smart, and religious. Women who married into the nobility naturally developed an interest in politics. Visakha is another renowned Buddhist lady from an aristocratic family. Migaramata was another name for her. In her free time, Visakha participated in a number of altruistic endeavors. Her significance as a worshipper from the is emphasized in many Jatakas

with lengthy and varied mentions. Respected and powerful ancestry. Not only does she come from a wealthy family, but her kind nature and influential position also make her a frequent source of praise for her selfless deeds to those in need.

The Jatakas' depiction of Visakha is compelling evidence that women from the Nobility had a role in administrative matters. Visakha was born to the city's most prominent trader, Dhananjaya Sethi. As her husband's family, they were prominent merchants. Migarasethi was her husband's dad. She was a devout devotee of the Buddha and a goddess in her own right. She devoted her life to Buddha worship and did all she could to assist the monks and nuns she knew. She was given a position of responsibility in the monastery's management. She was Buddha's go-to girl for sisterly disputes, and he always took the time to personally get her opinion. When it came to running the Buddhist monasteries, she was a major player.[18]

CONCLUSION

Buddhist priests and nuns similarly disseminated doctrine in accessible, native languages. As a result, the general public gained a deeper comprehension and correct application. It was at this time that several Buddhist canonical books, such as the Jatakas, were written. In this discussion, we have addressed the place of royal women, including queens and princesses. To that end, the privileged status of aristocratic women in several fields was taken into consideration. Several of the Jatakas tales include allusions to the queens who had governmental positions. They were sometimes consulted by the King on issues of great complexity and importance in the administration of the Kingdom. The kings often followed the advice of their queens. A number of sources attest to the fact that queens had an active role in political debates. The Vedic and post-Vedic period literature provides us with a window into the history of early Indian culture.

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