

THE JATAKA BODHISATTA

By the word *Jataka* is meant a birth-story of the Buddha, each of which the Buddha is said to have narrated in the course of some situation or other in which he then went on to equate the principal characters of that past life with the characters who were present in the circumstances of the present life. This context of the present life is known as the *paccuppannavatthu*, while the equation of the characters of the *jataka* proper (or past-life story) with the characters of the present life is the *samodhana*. The Buddha himself is in the *samodhana* equated with the best of these characters of the past-life - or, if there be none who can even remotely be identified with him, he is then identified with someone who observed that past-life happening, such as a tree-deity or water-deity.¹

Each *jataka* as a whole is itself commentarial upon a stanza or stanzas which collectively constituted the canonical *Jataka Pali*, while these commentarial stories, 547 in number, constituted that wondrous compendium known as the *Jatakathavannana*.

All this is of course well known to scholars.² But even though the form and language of these stories have been closely examined and commented upon, a great deal remains to be studied of the content of the *jatakas* - not the least of these being the concept of the Bodhisatta which they give rise to between themselves, not to mention its consistency with the ethic of Buddhism. The result of such an inquiry should indeed be very illuminative and, as I find, will reveal to a great extent the fact that many, if not most, of the stories that have reappeared as *jatakas* have been drawn into Buddhist literature from alien sources, and then obviously sit rather uncomfortably in their new context.³

¹ A list of these, with the number of times the Buddha was born as each, was first made by Rev. Spence Hardy; see his *A Manual of Buddhism: Its Modern Development*, London (1853) p. 100. See also T.W. Rhys-Davids *Buddhist Birth Stories*, London (1897) Index, Table VII. A revised list, with references to the particular *jatakas* in each instance, will be found in J.G. Jones *Tales and Teachings of the Buddha: The Jataka Stories in relation to the Pali Canon*, London (1979) pp. 15-19.

² See M. Winternitz *A History of Indian Literature*, vol. II Calcutta (1933) p. 123 - 126. He says the Buddhist monks were recruited from all classes and professions, and when they became monks, endeavoured to connect what they had learnt or heard with the monkish and purely religious traditions. "The Buddhist preaching monks crammed into the *Jataka Book* everything that pleased them and their audience". See also p. 153 f.

Two important Buddhist beliefs have been used by the several authors who invented or adopted stories from other sources as jatakas to link them with the Buddha as accounts of his past births and thus bring them within the fold of Buddhist teaching. The first of these is of course the belief in rebirth - and not just rebirth as a human being but as animals or other forms of beings, not excepting devas and Sakka himself. The second is the power attributed to the Buddha himself (who is always the narrator of these past-birth stories) to recall the former lives of himself as well as others.

What the Buddha then purports to recall in any given circumstances is not the whole of the relevant past life, but, as is the case with the *paccuppannavatthu* of the respective present life, *an incident or episode in that past life*. Etymologically, then, the term *jātaka* (which appears to be a diminutive of *jāta* = 'life'), when taken with the evidence of every single story that passes as such, implies an episode or event reminisced by the Buddha Gotama of one of his past lives, the occasion being expressed as the *paccuppannavatthu* thereof. The precise sense is therefore neither caught up in Kern's definition of *jataka* as "a little story"³ nor Rhys-Davids' "birth-let", ("birth-er", "birth-anea")⁴ but lies somewhere between the two - i.e., a (little) story involving a (part, episode or event) in a birth - more specifically by its use, in a past birth of the Buddha. It will be found that in most cases this recollection of the Buddha is evoked (factitiously) by the similarity of that event of the past life to the situation in the present. Not only so; for when we take the *samodhana* into consideration, the principal characters of the present life are found to be the very same as of the past life, even when they were then not just human beings but even animals and the like.⁵

³. See Winternitz *op.cit.* p. 113, n. 1. Speyer *Jatakamala* p. xxi agreed with Kern *Der Buddhismus* vol. I, p. 328.

⁴. *op.cit.* introd. p. 1; see Editorial Note p. v.

⁵. A remarkable (though so far unremarked) phenomenon, which makes the *jataka* comparable to the fable, is the way it operates. The principal figures in a given situation are projected into a similar situation (in a previous life) but as other beings, usually animals, and the resultant observation underscored. The *samodhana* makes the equation of characters, which in the fable is usually left to be inferred. Note however that all these previous existences, even with transmuted characters, are played against an Indian scenario hardly different from that of the *paccuppannavatthu*, and that then they both relate to the period of the Buddha a century or two before the *jatakas* were composed. On this see R. Fick (*Societe Gliederung in nordostlichen Indien zu Buddha's zeit*, p. vi - vii) and Hofrath Buhler (Georg Buhler *Indian Studies* No. 5, Vienna 1895) quoted by Rhys-Davids *Buddhist India*. Calcutta (6th ed, 1955) p. 111 - 113. If anything should underline for us the quality of "mythos" of these past-life stories, notwithstanding their claim to be the Buddha's recollections, it is their very opening formula "Once when Brahmadata was ruling in Benares" used in

The lesson is thus manifested, often enough, not as by cause and effect (or action and reaction), i.e., as the fruit of *karma*, as one would expect of Buddhist doctrine, but strangely by the technique of fable - parallelism, which then serves the audience of the Buddha as an object lesson for the comprehension and evaluation of the issue to which the present situation has given rise. If the drama called for retaliation, retribution or re-education, this was usually meted out within that past life itself without spilling over to the present one.

A good example of this is the *Nacca Jataka* (No. 32), which the Buddha used to show that in a previous life too a luxurious being had suffered a great loss owing to his disgraceful behaviour. For, a monk who was charged with possession of excessive apparel before the Buddha and threw away even that which he was wearing and fled the *dhamma* naked, was then a proud peacock whose exposure of himself (while dancing in joy at being chosen husband by a fair gosling) had lost him his bride.⁶

Indeed such parallelism can go to the extent that the past circumstances are no different from the present circumstances which evoked the recollection. This is found in great exactness in the *Udapana Dusaka Jataka* (No. 271). A jackal fouls the water of a well from which the Brethren drink; the novices pelt him with stones and drive him away. The Buddha observes that just the same thing had happened in a previous life of his - the only difference being that he was then able to speak to the jackal and have the jackal answer him back (again a feature of fable, only once found in the *paccuppannavatthu*). The lesson we have then is no more than that it was a characteristic with jackals to befoul the water of which they had drunk.

Fable works in this way, providing a parallel, often with talking animals, which gives the model objectivity as well as a touch of the curious, while at the same time striking off a lesson applicable to the present human situation.

This, we find, is the general nature of the Aesopic fables, many of which have been drawn upon for the jatakas. One of the earliest (which is also worth mention because it is attributed to the fabulist Aesop himself) is a good example. It tells of how a fox, fallen into a gully, refused to let a hedgehog remove the fleas from his body, saying that should he do so, a hungrier set would take the place of these, who had now drunk their fill, and suck him completely dry. Aesop used this fable in Samos in plea for an officer whom the citizens wished to put to death for embezzling the funds of the

around 394 occasions to introduce the *jataka*.

⁶ I have examined this *jataka* along with its Greek parallel, the historical anecdote of the marriage of Agariste in Herodotus (vi.127 - 130) in my "Herodotus in the Jatakas" *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* vol. VIII (1982) p. 43 - 51.

state.⁷

The circumstances in which each such Aesopic fable could be narrated was later to be provided in the form of brief *promuthion* (if given before the fable) or *epimuthion* (if given after the fable), which told the moral of the fable in such a way as to be an index for those who were looking for a fable to use upon a particular situation. Such indication of the context in which a particular fable could be used as a parallel (brief though it be in the Aesopica) is akin in function to the more expansive *paccuppannavatthu* of the jatakas, which gives the circumstances in which the Buddha is supposed to have effectively narrated this or that *jataka* - and which may now be used in his sermon by a preacher bent on illustrating a particular moral issue. They were thus meant to provide the Buddhist monks in the same way that the *promuthia* and *epimuthia* came to serve Greek orators or other literati when, for one reason or another, they felt obliged to fall back on illustration in the course of their expositions.⁸ Often enough thus the same or a similar *paccuppannavatthu* can give rise to two or more different *jatakas*, just as much as similar *jatakas* may originate from different present-birth circumstances. Occasionally the *jataka* concerned does not even seek to conceal this fact and openly refers backwards or forwards to the relevant *jataka* or a relevant *paccuppannavatthu*.

It is clear enough that the *jatakas* constituting the *Jatakathavannana* are a compendium of fables, folk stories, stories and anecdotes drawn from various sources and indiscriminately attributed to the Buddha as his past-life reminiscences, much as fables, proliferated in Greece after Aesop, were hung on his name. At the same time it is evident that not only the past-birth stories but even the present-life circumstances of the several *paccuppannavatthu* have been figmented - and this latter, with a view to providing occasion for the effective, meaningful and dramatic narration of the former. Indeed, it would appear that, if both *jataka* and *paccuppannavatthu* were not imagined together, the *paccuppannavatthu* were more often created to give context to the former than vice-versa.

⁷ 'The Fox and the Hedgehog' in Aristotle *Constitution of the Samians*, (fr. 573 Rose). It must be this fable that is referred to in his *Rhetoric* ii. 20.

⁸ 'The Fox and the Hedgehog' and one other, 'The Eagle and the Dung-Beetle', attributed to Aesop himself, were used by the fabulist in speeches. Other fables are prefaced as having been used by such orators as Demosthenes and Demades and by the poet Stesichorus in speeches. The collection attributed to Demetrius of Phaleron was possibly for this purpose, as one may surmise from the *Progymnasmata* of the rhetor, Hermogenes, whose old age may have overlapped the youth of Babrius. Hermogenes, in his *Peri Idion* ii. 12.3, mentions a *dekamuthia* (ten-book set of fables) of a contemporary, Nicostratus, which was surely for the rhetor's purpose. W.G. Rutherford (*Babrius*, London (1883) introd. p. xi) conjectures that the fables of Babrius in choliambic were no more than a verse translation of the fables of the ten books of Nicostratus.

If any jataka stories are then to be referred back as historically authentic (meaning by this that they might be attributed to the Buddha himself as were the parables to Christ) they cannot include all those which are in the *Jataka Book* now included in the canon. They would rather be such episodes as were in existence before then and which were responsible for the identification of this category called *Jatakam* in that very ancient division, found already in the Nikayas of Buddhist literature into nine classes. Rhys-Davids points out that in none of these previous births is the Buddha an animal; he is identified with either a famous sage or teacher of olden times.⁹ He also points out that these oldest forms have, for the most part, no framework and no verse.¹⁰

As E.B. Cowell¹¹ had also briefly noted, the original intention of these birth-stories would have been to provide illustration and example in support of doctrine, (we may add) while at the same time providing entertaining variety to hard discourse and weighty analytical exposition. As evidence of this quality of the audience's enjoyment of such stories is the Rev. Spence Hardy's observation that the Sinhalese of his sojourn in Sri Lanka were accustomed to listen to them the livelong night without any apparent weariness and that a great number of the jatakas were familiar even to the women.¹²

Buddhist belief in the commonality of all living creatures, together with the acceptance of rebirth as an universal fact assisted in the accommodation of the remarkable phenomenon found in fable, of animals who thought, spoke and behaved like men, while also retaining characteristics of their own distinctive natures - this fabulous feature now being treated realistically in the jatakas.¹³

⁹ *op. cit.* p. 108, reiterated in p. 115. But see *Vinaya Pitaka* iv. p. 5-6, where the Buddha identifies himself with the bull, Nandivisala (cf. *Nandivisala Jataka* (No. 28). However, it is admitted that some portions of this text are of a later date.

¹⁰ *loc. cit.*

¹¹ ed. *The Jataka*, Delhi (Reprint 1973) preface p. vii.

¹² *op. cit.* p. 101.

¹³ The involvement of animals in rebirth with human beings does not *ipso facto* endow them with the thought, behaviour and speech (in classical Pali or whatever) of humans. This is obviously a dimension of fable. Except for the single instance, when Bhaddavatika, she-elephant of King Udena, addressed the Buddha in the *Dalhadhamma Jataka* (No. 409), there is hardly any instance of this unrealistic feature of animals conversing or interacting like humans, with humans, not to mention, among themselves. It may also be noted that in this rare instance too the matter of the *jataka* proper is hardly different from that of its *paccuppannavatthu*.

Notwithstanding this, I find that from such a huge collection of stories as are found in the *Jatakathavannana*, very few have come to be popular in the use to impart Buddhist values or Buddhist doctrine. The reason is that, even if the primary and basic motive in the production of the jataka stories was this very thing, the purpose had only very loosely been observed by the authors when they created or adopted stories as jatakas, being more induced by the intrinsic literary and imaginative qualities of the plots than their concordance with Buddhist ethics. In extreme cases, thus, morals have had to be forced upon the story, or the story itself twisted or otherwise adapted to a Buddhist teaching or value, while, if there was no way of equating any of a story's characters to the Buddha to make it a past-life experience of his as the Bodhisatta, he was made (as we stated earlier) a non-participant observer of the interesting episode which made the story. Several of these still remain pure fable, and it is as fable that these can best be used, notwithstanding the blatant attempts to "Buddhistize" (Winternitz) them.

Of both sorts are a number of fables derived from the Greek Aesopica. These, in spite of their localization of details, inversion, conjoining or partial use of motifs, shift of focus, exaggeration or identification of features, change of characters etc. are still easy of identification as derivative from the respective Greek originals.

Notable among such fables were a dozen or so identified by Joseph Jacobs; but several others have since been pointed to, so that the number has grown considerable. Some of these are *The Calf and the Ox* (= *Munika Jataka* (No. 30) and the *Sāluka Jataka* (No. 286)), *The Bald Man and the Fly* (= *Makasa Jataka* (No. 44) and *Rohini Jataka* (No. 45)), *The Goose that laid the Golden Eggs* (= *Suvannahamsa Jataka* (No. 136)), *The Fox with the Distended Stomach* (= *Sigala Jataka* (No. 148)), *The Ass in the Lion Skin* (= *Sihacamma Jataka* (No. 189)), *The Eagle, the Jackdaw and the Shepherd* (= *Viraka Jataka* (No. 204)), *The Tortoise and the Eagle* (= *Jambu-khadaka Jataka* (No. 294) and the *Anta Jataka* (No. 295)), *The Fox and the Grapes* (= *Vaka Jataka* (No. 300)), *The Wolf and the Heron* (= *Javasakuna Jataka* (No. 308)), *The Lion and the Hare* (= *Chulladhanuggaha Jataka* (No. 374)), *The Goatherd and the Wild Goats* (= *Dhumakari Jataka* (No. 413)), *The Wolf and the Lamb* and *The Cat and the Cock* (= *Dipi Jataka* (No. 426)).

Not only did Greek fables thus serve for the motifs of several jatakas, but there are also several myths and historical anecdotes. Amongst myths has been used the fall of Icarus (= *Migalopa Jataka* (No. 381) and *Gijjha Jataka* (No. 427)), Minos' search for Daedalus (= 'The Gem-prasna' of the *Maha Ummagga Jataka* (No. 546)), the Hippolytus-Phaedra affair (= *Maha Paduma Jataka* (No. 427) and *Bandhanamokkha Jataka* (No. 120)), the punishments of Oknus and the Water-Carriers of Hades (= the seventh and eighth dreams of the *Mahasupina Jataka* (No. 77)), the fate of Danae and her son, Perseus (in the *Ghata Jataka* (No. 454)), not to mention lesser details exploited from some others. Similarly, we have from the historian Herodotus the motifs of the marriage of Agariste (= *Nacca Jataka* (No. 32)), the Intaphernes episode (= *Uchchanga Jataka* (No. 67)), the stories of Arion and of Polycrates' ring (= *Macch-Uddana Jataka*

(No. 288)) and a detail from the life of Aesop himself (= *Manicora Jataka* (No. 194)). Reference is also popularly made to a reflection of the Rhampsinitus story in Herodotus - but I fear I have so far not been able to identify this in any of the jatakas.¹⁴

To the Bible can be traced, apart from one or two fables and details of fables in the jatakas, the plot of the *Maha Paduma Jataka* (No. 427) in the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife (= *Genesis* 39. 1- 23) and also the famed judgement of Mahosadha in 'The Son-prasna' of the *Maha Ummagga Jataka* (No. 546), in the judgement of Solomon (*Kings* 3.12-28). It would also be observed that the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife just mentioned is followed by dreams and dream-interpretations (*Genesis* 40. 1-23) the like of what makes the *Mahasupina Jataka's* dreams and interpretations.

All these Greek and Hebrew stories antedate the corresponding jatakas which have common motifs with them. How many other such stories from other nations, not to mention indigenous stories of India herself, gave rise to jatakas we cannot even begin to surmise. But the difficulty experienced by their respective jatakists eking Buddhist moral values out of them or the awkwardness with which they then sit in a Buddhist context is obvious enough to evidence their importation from alien other sources.

In the light of these observations must be viewed the conception of the Bodhisatta that the individual jataka stories, and indeed the jataka stories collectively, would yield to a critical study. For, the Bodhisatta character that emanates from them is surprisingly inconsistent with the *Buddha dhamma* and the accepted personality of the Buddha himself.

To take some very obvious cases - the Bodhisatta, who in the *Sasa Jataka* (No. 316) offered his own flesh to a mendicant brahmin, having desired for such a one to do so, throws a firebrand and drives a monkey who was miserably cold and sought his fire in the *Makkata Jataka* (No. 173); in the *Adiccupatthana Jataka* (No. 175) the Bodhisatta is similarly responsible for having a monkey seeking food driven away - after which, like himself in the erstwhile occasion, the ascetics who do so go on to practise mystic ecstasy and attain the Brahma heaven! In some jatakas the Bodhisatta's inability to take revenge by himself is looked after by others or simply circumstances, the result being intended to gratify the hearers, if not the Bodhisatta. See for instance the

¹⁴. ii. 121. See for instance W.R. Halliday *Greek and Roman Folklore*, London etc. (1927) p. 107 - 108 and also his *Indo-European Folk Tales and Greek Legend*, Cambr. (1933) p. 49. He writes, "The story which appears in the Jatakas and in other Indian collections, is evidently old in the East: it is one of the tales which passed with Buddhism from India to Tibet and China. The motif appears in a Sri Lankan Folk-tale, which Parker entitles 'The Thief called Harantika'; see his *Village Folk-Tales of Ceylon*, London (1914) p. 41 - 42, and variant p. 43 - 46. W. Goonetilleke gave the story in *The Orientalist*, vol. 1, p. 59.

Saccamkira Jataka (No. 73), in which the king, who is malicious to the Bodhisatta, is killed by the people when the Bodhisatta tells them what he had done for the king and they see how the king is repaying the favour; or the *Manicora Jataka* (No. 194), in which, when the king's servants strike off the head of the innocent Bodhisatta, it is found to be the king's - while the Bodhisatta himself is consecrated king by a *deus-ex-machina*-like appearance of Sakka.

Despite the fact that the monkey, being most humanlike, is well regarded in India, the Bodhisatta himself having been born as one eleven times (the most as any animal), the occasions in which the animal's rascality is recognized in the jatakas is by no means rare. Thus, in the jataka which comes between the *Makkata* and the *Adiccupatthana*, the *Dubhiya-Makkata Jataka* (No. 174), the monkey gets his revenge of the Bodhisatta by making faces at him and then dropping excrement on his head. But when he does so again, when the Bodhisatta is a patient buffalo in the *Mahisa Jataka* (No. 278), the Bodhisatta's wish for revenge (which he cannot himself accomplish) is satisfactorily executed by another buffalo, a fierce one, upon whom the monkey does the same, who shakes him to the ground, drives his horn into his heart and tramples him to mincemeat under his hoofs.¹⁵ In the *Visavanta Jataka* (No. 69), on the other hand, the Bodhisatta, as a doctor who threatens to throw a snake into the fire (and indeed makes a fire to show his intention) if he will not take back the poison he had injected into a man, not only does not do so, but when the snake obligingly crawls towards the fire, bars the way and saves him!

In the *Asatamanta Jataka* (No. 61) we find the Bodhisatta, short of killing his own mother, causing her death - even knowing she was going to die that very day - and doing so deliberately just to prove the point to a young brahmin that, no matter how old they be, women are lascivious and vile by nature. (The detail of his awareness that his mother was fated to die on the day she does is purportedly in mitigation of his culpability otherwise of her death - though it surely only does the opposite, rendering her death tantamount to murder!) In the *Saliya Jataka* (No. 367) the Bodhisatta throws a snake at a poor doctor, which kills him; and when the Bodhisatta and his young friends are accused of murder, in the next jataka, the *Takasara* (No. 368), he teaches his friends how to bluff the king by keeping a calm demeanour. In another jataka which, like the *Asatamanta*, is bent on showing the despicable nature of women (no doubt to reassure monks of the wisdom of their enjoined celibacy), the Bodhisatta encompasses the seduction of a girl through what proves to be a highly entertaining, though quite

¹⁵ The Bodhisatta as the patient buffalo anticipates, and indeed looks forward to what he cannot do himself being done for him by another, observing, "And if he does it to any fierce Buffaloes, they will destroy him indeed. When some other has killed him, I shall be delivered both from the pain and from the blood-guiltiness." Here again, *jataka* and *paccuppannavatthu* are the same, except that where they are buffaloes in the former, they are elephants in the latter.

diabolic plot - the whole exercise being as cruel a way of proving that no woman is chaste, as he, in the *Asatamanta Jataka* had established for the young brahmin there at the expense of his own mother, and (as we saw) on the very day he knew she was fated to die. In the *Satapatta Jataka* (No. 279) the Bodhisatta is born a brigand (here the fault is in his horoscope) as he is in the *Kanavera Jataka* (No. 318), and lived by robbing. In the *Litta Jataka* (No. 91) he is a gambler who poisons the dice, which a sharper was in the habit of popping in his mouth and pretending it was lost, and in *Culla Paduma Jataka* (No. 193) he is a king who orders the clubbing to death of his wife's paramour and the shearing off of her nose and ears before killing her. Both these decisions attributed to the Bodhisatta occur in the verse stanzas (*gatha*) of the respective jatakas, of which the jatakas themselves are but commentary, and indeed should be the logical and dramatic conclusions of the stories, though the Bodhisatta is made to relent and, in either case, spare his rivals.

Not so however in the *Sigala Jataka* (No. 132), in which the Bodhisatta, as a young lion, makes a jackal burst his heart and die for having courted his sister; yet this same it is who so famously as Vessantara had given over his young children to a pitiless brahmin (and his wife to another - who, thank heaven proved to be Sakka himself) in his quest for higher things. In the *Sabbadatha Jataka* (No. 241) he is not again animal but in fact king Brahmadata's chaplain, who not only causes the death of all the animals in the forest but initiates the practice of eating dried meat - there was so much flesh his achievement had provided the people!¹⁶ But if in this jataka he got the animals themselves to kill themselves for him, in the *Kakkata Jataka* (No. 266) the Bodhisatta, as an elephant, uses his mate to woo a giant crab to let go of his leg, and then, together with the other elephants, tramples him to death. And in the *Bilara Jataka* (No. 128), as king of the rats he goes even further, himself leaping at a jackal's throat and tearing asunder his wind-pipe, so that he dies.¹⁷

Several jatakas are, in this vein, meant to show the Bodhisatta as full of practical wisdom, foresight, resourcefulness and other such politically admirable though ethically dubious qualities, being at the expense of the Buddha's acclaimed *metta* and *karuna*, and even if all the while those whom he worsted (and popular among these is cousin Devadatta) deserved to be dealt with otherwise in terms of the *dhamma*. Not the least among these devices we find him resorting to is lying - as in the thumping lie he

¹⁶. See Winternitz *op.cit.* p. 128. He only remarks as un-Buddhistic the Bodhisatta's instructions to fetch the meat and eat it, and what they cannot, to dry it. The innumerable deaths of animals that he caused, even if indirectly, should be even more un-Buddhistic.

¹⁷. Though the jataka proper deals with a jackal, both the title and the *gatha* refer to a cat. If his story was inspired by an Aesopic cat and mice fable, the inconsistency may reflect from the fact that the Greek cat (*ailouros*) was some kind of weasel.

told as a monkey to the crocodile Devadatta in the *Vanara Jataka* (No. 342) and the *Sumsumara Jataka* (No. 208) of his having left his heart upon a tree, which the crocodile's wife yearned to eat, while in the variant, the *Vanarinda Jataka* (No. 57), he tricks a same Devadatta crocodile into opening his mouth, which makes him shut his eyes, then vaults to safety over the very fellow's back. And yet the Devadatta's desire for the Bodhisatta's heart was for no less than to satisfy the pregnancy desire (*dohada*) of his dear wife¹⁸ - which, I have not the least doubt, the Bodhisatta of the *Sasa Jataka* would have willingly obliged!

Examples of this nature put the moral of many a *jataka* story in the category of fable - moral, teaching, as do the Aesopic fables, survival, helping of friends or returning kindnesses, outwitting of one's enemy, obtaining revenge, getting out of difficulty, putting others into difficulty, achieving one's ends, displaying leadership or intellectual brilliance - and so on, all by resort to hook, if not crook. Little wonder then that certain of the *jatas* reflecting on the Bodhisatta cannot bear being imparted in sermon with a degree of ethical sincerity - for which, as also observed earlier, the *Jatakam* form of teaching had its origin. To consider these stories then vehicles of Buddhist morality, and indiscriminately, is to be simplistic and naive. Notwithstanding a grudging Buddhist intention into which most of them have been recurred, their original primitive folk or fable nature is evident.

Certain of the *jatas*, however, appear pragmatic and motivated to monkish considerations. To this category belong a whole lot of *jatas*, notably the *Kunala Jataka* (No.536), which, like the *Asatamanta* aforementioned, lash out at women as lecherous, treacherous and covetous, notwithstanding example after example of men who are a great deal worse. This warning against women is, however, in contrast to two *jatas* at least which cleverly condone drink and the consumption of meat. The lesson of the *Valodaka Jataka* (No. 183) is that, as the Bodhisatta himself is made to enunciate, misbehaviour after liquor is a matter of birth and upbringing rather than the quantum or potency of the liquor imbibed - which is indeed a somewhat diabolical intensification of the precept in favour of those who wish to indulge themselves in drink rather than a warning against loss of self-control through taking intoxicants. For, the observation is made to be made by the Buddha upon the occasion when some pages of his adherents lost their self-control and misbehaved - the parallel in the past life adverting to some donkeys that had acted similarly after having drunk just the second strainings of the grape after the far more potent juice had been indulged in with no such after-effects by some noble war-horses.

*Appam pivivāna niḥñajacco
so majjati tena janinda puṭṭo,
dhorayhasī ca kulamhi jāto
na majjati aggarasam pivivā ti.*

¹⁸. Discussed by me in 'Two Monkey Tales', *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, vol. XX (1994), p. 31 - 47.

The low-born churl, though he but taste and try,
 Is floricsome and drunken by and by:
 He that is gentle keeps a steady brain
 Even if he drain the most potent liquor dry.

The same kind of subtle extension of the precept from what appears reluctant condonation to positive authorization is found in the case of flesh-eating as well. For, in the *Telovada Jataka* (No. 246) the Bodhisatta, induced to eat fish (*macchamamsa*) by his guest, the Naked Ascetic, Nathaputta, and charged, "This food was prepared on purpose for you, by killing living creatures. Not upon my head is the wrong, but upon yours!" (*idaṃ maṃsaṃ tumhe yeva uddissa pāṇe māretvā kataṃ, idaṃ akusalaṃ mā amhākam eva tumhākam pi hotīti*), and declaimed the first stanza of the jataka:

*Hantvā jhatvā vadhitvā ca deti dānaṃ asaṅṅato,
 edisaṃ bhattam bhuñjamāno so pāpena upalippatīti.*

The wicked kills, and cooks, and gives to eat:
 He is defiled with sin that takes such meat.

replies as follows:

*Puttadāram pi ce hantvā deti dānaṃ asaṅṅato
 buñjamāno pi sappañño na pāpena upalippatīti.*

The wicked may for gift slay wife or son,
 Yet, if the pious eat, no sin is done.¹⁹

The vehemence, indeed the violence of the Buddha's assertion here in backing up his exemption on flesh-eating is tantamount to even admitting cannibalism, let alone the flesh of other creatures, and is hardly in accord with the (reluctant, if reasonable) condonation that underlines the conditions of the exemption, not to mention the character of the Buddha himself.²⁰

¹⁹. Translations are those of W.H.D. Rouse in the Cowell ed.

²⁰. There are those who strongly believe that, far from himself dying after a meal of pork (*sukramamsa*), the Buddha could not have condoned the consumption of flesh-food on any grounds, preaching as he did, compassion for all creatures, and spurning, as did Pythagoras, the professions of hunter and fisherman. Such critics suspect the exemptions, as in the 'Jivaka Sutta' of the *Majjima Nikaya* as interested interpolations. See, for instance, Roshi Philip Kaplan *To Cherish All Life: A Buddhist View of Animal Slaughter and Meat Eating*, Rochester, New York (1981) p. 29 f.

The *Telovada* links with the *Valovada*, not only by the superficial similarity of their nomenclatures, but by the fact that the *paccuppannavatthu* of the latter, though its *jataka* proper is concerned with misbehaviour resulting from drink, brings up the matter in the *paccuppannavatthu* thereof through an instance of meat-eating, not alcoholism!

Already, however, I have deviated from the point I wished to make - viz., that the *jatakas* are merely a collection of folk stories, fables, myths and historical anecdotes from various lands, rehandled and adapted to Buddhist stories as best as could be, to supply narrative elucidation of some teaching or other that a monk may require, both for the enlightenment of his audience as well as providing a degree of relaxation within learned discourse. But more especially I have sought to show that the attraction of most of them can often run contrary to such a noble intention, presenting, as some may, among other misrepresentations, a picture of the Bodhisatta which will hardly hold together with the professions of Buddhist doctrine and the personality of the Buddha Gotama as has been popularised for us from other biographical or doctrinal sources.

What the *jatakas* thus amount to are, then, as Rhys-Davids calls them, "the oldest most complete and most important collection of folklore existent",²¹ which, while excellent as literature, are only broadly Buddhist in their nature. That they are to any extent genuine past-birth experiences of the Buddha, brought to light by his power of past-birth recollection, is thus not possible to be maintained as an educated view - and much less as an educated Buddhist view. To go beyond this and indiscriminately accept them as reflecting the Bodhisatta character would indeed be positively naive - if it were not also positively damaging of it.

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²¹. *Buddhist Birth Stories* introd. pp. iii-iv.