


CHAPTER 11

THE BUDDHA'S ROYAL PATRONS

“A treacherous bog it is, this patronage
Of bows and gifts and treats from wealthy folk.
‘Tis like a fine dart, bedded in the flesh.
For erring human hard to extricate.”

—Mahākassapa Thera Gāthā (1053)

King Bimbisāra

 ing Bimbisāra, who ruled in Magadha with its capital at Rājagaha, was the Buddha's first royal patron. Ascending the throne at the age of fifteen, he reigned for fifty-two years.

When Prince Siddhattha renounced the world and was seeking alms in the streets of Rājagaha as a humble ascetic, the king saw him from his palace and was highly impressed by his majestic appearance and dignified deportment. Immediately he sent messengers to ascertain who he was. On learning that he was resting after his meal under the Pāṇḍavapabbata, the king, accompanied by his retinue, went up to the royal ascetic and inquired about his birthplace and ancestry.

The Ascetic Gotama replied:

“Just straight, O King, upon the Himalaya, there is, in the district of Kosala of ancient families, a country endowed with wealth and energy. I am sprung from that family which by clan belongs to the Solar dynasty, by birth to the Sākya. I crave not for pleasures of the senses. Realising the evil of sensual pleasures and seeing renunciation as safe, I proceeded to seek the highest, for in that my mind rejoices.¹⁶⁴

Thereupon the king invited him to visit his kingdom after his enlightenment.

The Buddha meets King Bimbisāra

In accordance with the promise the Buddha made to King Bimbisāra before his enlightenment, he, with his large retinue of arahant disciples, went from Gayā to Rājagaha, the capital of the district of Magadha. Here he stayed at the Suppatittha shrine in a palm grove.

164. Sutta Nipāta, Pabbajjā Sutta.

This happy news of the Buddha's arrival in the kingdom and his high reputation as an unparalleled religious teacher soon spread in the city. The King, hearing of his arrival, came with a large number of his subjects to welcome the Buddha. He approached the Buddha, respectfully saluted him and sat at one side. Of his subjects some respectfully saluted him, some looked towards him with expression of friendly greetings, some saluted him with clasped hands, some introduced themselves, while others in perfect silence took their seats. As both the Buddha Gotama and the Venerable Kassapa were held in high esteem by the multitude they were not certain whether the Buddha was leading the holy life under or the latter under the former. The Buddha read their thoughts and questioned Venerable Kassapa as to why he had given up his fire-sacrifice. Understanding the motive of the Buddha's question, he explained that he abandoned fire-sacrifice because he preferred the passionless and peaceful state of Nibbāna to worthless sensual pleasures. After this he fell at the feet of the Buddha and acknowledging his superiority said: "My teacher, Lord, is the Exalted One: I am the disciple. My teacher, Lord, is the Exalted One: I am the disciple."

The devout people were delighted to hear of the conversion. The Buddha thereupon preached the Mahā Nārada Kassapa Jātaka¹⁶⁵ to show how in a previous birth when he was born as Nārada, still subject to passion, he converted Kassapa in a similar way.

Hearing the Dhamma expounded by the Buddha, the "eye of truth"¹⁶⁶ arose in them all. King Bimbisāra attained *sotāpatti*, and seeking refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, invited the Buddha and his disciples to his palace for the meal on the following day. After the meal the king wished to know where the Buddha would reside. The Buddha replied that a secluded place, neither too far nor too close to the city, accessible to those who desire to visit him, pleasant, not crowded during the day, not too noisy at night, with as few sounds as possible, airy and fit for the privacy of men, would be suitable.

The king thought that his Bamboo Grove would meet all such requirements. Therefore in return for the transcendental gift the Buddha had bestowed upon him, he gifted for the use of the Buddha and the Sangha the park with this ideally secluded bamboo grove, also known as 'The Sanctuary of the Squirrels.' It would appear that this park had no building for the use of bhikkhus but was filled with many shady trees and secluded spots. However, this was the first gift of a place of residence for the Buddha and his disciples. The Buddha spent three

165. No. 544.

166. See note 111 on page 61

successive rainy seasons and three other rainy seasons in this quiet Veḷuvanārāma.¹⁶⁷

After his conversion the king led the life of an exemplary monarch observing uposatha regularly on six days of the month.

Kosala Devi, daughter of King Mahā Kosala, and sister of King Pasenadi Kosala, was his chief loyal queen. Ajātasattu was her son. Khemā who, through the ingenuity of the king, became a follower of the Buddha and who later rose to the position of the first female disciple of the order of nuns, was another queen.

Though he was a pious monarch, yet, due to his past evil kamma, he had a very sad and pathetic end.

Prince Ajātasattu, successor to the throne, instigated by wicked Devadatta Thera, attempted to kill him and usurp the throne. The unfortunate prince was caught red-handed, and the compassionate father, instead of punishing him for his brutal act, rewarded him with the coveted crown.

The ungrateful son showed his gratitude to his father by casting him into prison in order to starve him to death. His mother alone had free access to the king daily. The loyal queen carried food concealed in her waist-pouch. To this the prince objected. Then she carried food concealed in her hair-knot. The prince resented this too. Later she bathed herself in scented water and besmeared her body with a mixture of honey, butter, ghee, and molasses. The king licked her body and sustained himself. The over-vigilant prince detected this and ordered his mother not to visit his father.

King Bimbisāra was without any means of sustenance, but he paced up and down enjoying spiritual happiness as he was a sotāpanna. Ultimately the wicked son decided to put an end to the life of his noble father. Ruthlessly he ordered his barber to cut open his soles and put salt and oil thereon and make him walk on burning charcoal.

The King, who saw the barber approaching, thought that the son, realising his folly, was sending the barber to shave his grown beard and hair and release him from prison. Contrary to his expectations, he had to meet an untimely sad end. The barber mercilessly executed the inhuman orders of the barbarous prince. The good King died in great agony. On that very day a son was born unto Ajātasattu. Letters conveying the news of birth and death reached the palace at the same time.

167. The Pali *ārāma* means a mere park. There were no buildings when the Buddha accepted this generous gift. At present the term *ārāma* is used in the sense of a monastery with necessary buildings for monks.

The letter conveying the happy news was first read. Lo, the love he cherished towards his first-born son was indescribable! His body was thrilled with joy and the paternal love penetrated up to the very marrow of his bones.

Immediately he rushed to his beloved mother and questioned: "Mother dear, did my father love me when I was a child?"

"What say you, son! When you were conceived in my womb, I developed a craving to sip some blood from the right hand of your father. This I dare not say. Consequently I grew pale and thin. I was finally persuaded to disclose my inhuman desire. Joyfully your father fulfilled my wish, and I drank that abhorrent potion. The soothsayers predicted that you would be an enemy of your father. Accordingly you were named Ajātasattu ("unborn enemy.")

I attempted to effect a miscarriage, but your father prevented it. After you were born, again I wanted to kill you. Again your father interfered. On one occasion you were suffering from a boil in your finger, and nobody was able to lull you into sleep. But your father, who was administering justice in his royal court, took you into his lap and caressing you sucked the boil. Lo, inside the mouth it burst open. O, my dear son, that pus and blood! Yes, your affectionate father swallowed it out of love for you."

Instantly he cried, "Run and release, release my beloved father quickly!"

His father had closed his eyes for ever.

The other letter was then placed in his hand.

Ajātasattu shed hot tears. He realised what paternal love was only after he became a father himself.

King Bimbisāra died and was immediately after born as a deva named Janavasabha in the Cātummahārājika heaven.

Later, Ajātasattu met the Buddha and became one of his distinguished lay followers and took a leading part in the holding of the first convocation.

King Pasenadi Kosala

King Pasenadi Kosala, the son of King Mahā Kosala, who reigned in the kingdom of Kosala with its capital at Sāvattthī, was another royal patron of the Buddha. He was a contemporary of the Buddha, and owing to his proficiency in various arts, he had the good fortune to be made king by his father while he was alive.

His conversion must probably have taken place during the very early part of the Buddha's ministry. In the *Samyutta Nikāya* it is stated that once he approached the Buddha and questioning him about his perfect enlightenment referred to him as being young in years and young in ordination.¹⁶⁸

The Buddha replied—"There are four objects, O Mahārāja, that should not be disregarded or despised. They are a Khattiya (a warrior prince), a snake, fire, and a bhikkhu (mendicant monk).¹⁶⁹

Then he delivered an interesting sermon on this subject to the king. At the close of the sermon the king expressed his great pleasure and instantly became a follower of the Buddha. Since then till his death he was deeply attached to the Buddha. It is said that on one occasion the king prostrated himself before the Buddha and stroked his feet covering them with kisses.¹⁷⁰

His chief queen, Mallikā a very devout and wise lady, well versed in the Dhamma, was greatly responsible for his religious enthusiasm. Like a true friend, she had to act as his religious guide on several occasions.

One day the king dreamt sixteen unusual dreams and was greatly perturbed in mind, not knowing their true significance. His brahmin advisers interpreted them to be dreams portending evil and instructed him to make an elaborate animal sacrifice to ward off the dangers resulting therefrom. As advised he made all necessary arrangements for this inhuman sacrifice which would have resulted in the loss of thousands of helpless creatures. Queen Mallikā, hearing of this barbarous act about to be perpetrated, persuaded the king to get the dreams interpreted by the Buddha whose understanding infinitely surpassed that of those worldly brahmins. The king approached the Buddha and mentioned the object of his visit. Relating the sixteen dreams¹⁷¹ he wished to know their significance, and the Buddha explained their significance fully to him.

Unlike King Bimbisāra, King Kosala had the good fortune to hear several edifying and instructive discourses from the Buddha. In the *Samyutta Nikāya* there appears a special section called the Kosala *Samyutta*¹⁷² in which are recorded most of the discourses and talks given by the Buddha to the king.

168. *Samyutta Nikāya*. 1.64: *Kindred Sayings*, 1, p. 94.

169. An enraged warrior prince, though young, may ruthlessly cause harm to others. The bite of even a small snake may prove fatal. A little fire may produce a conflagration. Even a young monk may be a saint or a Dhamma scholar.

170. *Majjhima Nikāya* ii, No. 120

171. See *Mahā Supina Jātaka*. *Jātaka Translation*—Book 1, pp. 188–192 No. 77.

172. *Samyutta Nikāya* 1, 68, *Kindred Sayings*, i, p. 94.

Once while the king was seated in the company of the Buddha, he saw some ascetics with hairy bodies and long nails passing by, and rising from his seat respectfully saluted them calling out his name to them: "I am the king, your reverences, the Kosala, Pasenadi." When they had gone he came back to the Buddha and wished to know whether they were arahants or those who were striving for arahantship. The Buddha explained that it was difficult for ordinary laymen enjoying material pleasures to judge whether others are arahants or not and made the following interesting observations:

"It is by association (*saṃvāsenā*) that one's conduct (*sīla*) is to be understood, and that, too, after a long time and not in a short time, by one who is watchful and not by a heedless person, by an intelligent person and not by an unintelligent one. It is by conversation (*serivihārena*) that one's purity (*soceyyaṃ*) is to be understood. It is in time of trouble that one's fortitude is to be understood. It is by discussion that one's wisdom is to be understood, and that, too, after a long time and not in a short time, by one who is watchful and not by a heedless person, by an intelligent person and not by an unintelligent one."

Summing up the above, the Buddha uttered the following verses:

Not by his outward guise is man well known.
 In fleeting glance let none place confidence.
 In garb of decent well-conducted folk
 The unrestrained live in the world at large.
 As a clay earring made to counterfeit,
 Or bronze half penny coated over with gold,
 Some fare at large hidden beneath disguise,
 Without, comely and fair; within, impure.¹⁷³

King Kosala, as ruler of a great kingdom, could not possibly have avoided warfare, especially with kings of neighbouring countries. Once he was compelled to fight with his own nephew, King Ajātasattu, and was defeated. Hearing it, the Buddha remarked:

"Victory breeds hatred.
 The defeated live in pain.
 Happily the peaceful live, giving up victory and defeat."¹⁷⁴

On another occasion King Kosala was victorious and he confiscated the whole army of King Ajātasattu, saving only him. When the Buddha heard about this new victory, he uttered the following verse, the truth of which applies with equal force to this modern war-weary world as well:

173. *Kindred Sayings*, part 1, pp. 104–106.

174. *Kindred Sayings*, part 1. pp. 109, 110. Dhp v. 201.

"A man may spoil another, just so far
 As it may serve his ends, but when he's spoiled
 By others he, despoiled, spoils yet again.
 So long as evil's fruit is not matured,
 The fool doth fancy 'now's the hour, the chance!'
 But when the deed bears fruit, he fareth ill.
 The slayer gets a slayer in his turn;
 The conqueror gets one who conquers him;
 Th'abuser wins abuse, th'annoyer, fret.
 Thus by the evolution of the deed,
 A man who spoils is spoiled in his turn."¹⁷⁵

What the Buddha has said to King Kosala about women is equally interesting and extremely encouraging to womankind. Once while the king was engaged in a pious conversation with the Buddha, a messenger came and whispered into his ear that Queen Mallikā had given birth to a daughter. The king was not pleased at this unwelcome news. In ancient India, as it is to a great extent today, a daughter is not considered a happy addition to a family for several selfish reasons as, for instance, the problem of providing a dowry. The Buddha, unlike any other religious teacher, paid a glowing tribute to women and mentioned four chief characteristics that adorn a woman in the following words:

"Some women are indeed better (than men).
 Bring her up, O Lord of men.
 There are women who are wise, virtuous,
 who regard mother-in-law as a goddess, and who are chaste.
 To such a noble wife may be born a valiant son,
 a lord of realms, who would rule a kingdom."¹⁷⁶

Some women are even better than men. "*Itthi hi pi ekacchiyā seyyā*" were the actual words used by the Buddha. No religious teacher has made such a bold and noble utterance especially in India, where women are not held in high esteem.

Deeply grieved over the death of his old grandmother, aged one hundred and twenty years, King Kosala approached the Buddha and said that he would have given everything within his means to save his grandmother who had been as a mother to him. The Buddha consoled him, saying:

"All beings are mortal; they end with death, they have death in prospect. All the vessels wrought by the potter, whether they are baked or

175. Ibid. p. 110

176. *Kindred Sayings*, part 1, p. 111. *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, part 1, p.86.

unbaked, are breakable; they finish broken, they have breakage in prospect.”¹⁷⁷

The king was so desirous of hearing the Dhamma that even if affairs of state demanded his presence in other parts of the kingdom, he would avail himself of every possible opportunity to visit the Buddha and engage in a pious conversation. The Dhammacetiya and Kannakatthala Suttas¹⁷⁸ were preached on such occasions.

King Kosala's chief consort, the daughter of a garland-maker, predeceased him. A sister of King Bimbisāra was one of his wives. One of his sisters was married to King Bimbisāra and Ajātasattu was her son.

King Kosala had a son named Viḍūḍabha who revolted against him in his old age. This son's mother was the daughter of Mahānāma the Sākya, who was related to the Buddha, and his grandmother was a slave-girl. This fact the king did not know when he took her as one of his consorts. Hearing a derogatory remark made by Sākyas about his ignoble lineage, Viḍūḍabha took vengeance by attempting to destroy the Sākya race. Unfortunately it was due to Viḍūḍabha that the king had to die a pathetic death in a hall outside the city with only a servant as his companion. King Kosala predeceased the Buddha.



177. See *Kindred Sayings*, part I, p. 122

178. Majjhima Nikāya, Nos. 89 and 90.