

540. Sama Jataka

Sovannasam

Cowell No. 540

Two friends of the village near Benares agreed that if one of them had a daughter and the other a son, they would see the two married. It happened that one had a son named Bukulaka and the other a daughter named Parika. The parents prepared to marry them at the age of 16. The two youth however had recently 'descended from the Brahma heaven' and were not interested in marriage. They were forced by their parents to marry anyway, but they did it only in name, never having physical contact and decided to become ascetics. On the command of Sakka, Vissakamma built a hermitage for them with separate huts to retire. Each morning they went together to collect fruits, nuts and roots in the forest and meditate in the afternoon. However, Sakka decided they had to have a son and at an appropriate time Dukulaka simply had to touch the navel of Parika to have contemporaneously a Bodhisatta entering her womb.

A son was born of golden hue, which they named Suvanna-Sama. He was a re-born Bodhisatta. One day, when returning from collecting fruits in the forest a severe storm arose forcing them to take shelter under a tree. A fierce cobra that lived under the tree was infuriated by the presence of the two and rose from his abode to spread them with his venom, blinding them.

Sama rushed to help them extend a long stick and drive them back to the hermitage. From that day Sama took total care of them, usually going to a nearby pond in the evening to collect water accompanied by two deer singled out from a train and that carried the jar on their back. The sixteen-year-old Bodhisattva Sovannasama was nice looking, of golden skin complexion, and devoted to his parents.

Once, King Piliyakkha, out for a hunting mission, saw the footprints of deer and decided to build a shelter in which to lay in ambush, armed with his poisoned arrows.

In the evening, the King saw the boy Sama arriving and exclaimed: "All the time I have been wandering here I have never seen such a beautiful young man before; "Is he a god or a *naga*¹? Now, if I get out from my hiding and ask him if he is a god he will fly up to heaven and if he is a *naga* he will sink into the earth². I have not seen any marvel during my rambling in Himavanta. My ministers will not believe me that I have seen such a creature, and make fun of me; so I will wound it, disable him and then ask my questions".

In the meantime the deer entered the pond and Sama followed them slowly, maintaining absolute calm; he put on his bark garment having thrown his deerskin garment over the shoulder where he positioned the jar filled with water.

This was the right moment - believed the king - to shoot the arrow that penetrated side to side the young boy who fell on the ground; the sand looked like silver compared to his golden body of Sama.

¹Nagas are mythological snakes that can take human form.

² In both events, the King would lose Sama. The only chance to get him was to hit and "disable" the boy.

² With all respect for this sacred story, in modern term it seems possible to perceive a homoerotic touch in the relationship of King Piliyakkha with Sama. The king wanted to have the beautiful youth for himself and eventually to show him as a trophy to his friends. To achieve this, he had to hurt Sama with his powerful arrow.

Dasharatha and Sama. The king was a perverse voyeur and a murderer.

Sama could not imagine why anybody wanted to arm him. Repeatedly asking why this happened to him, what could anybody hope to gain by killing him?³

To excuse himself, king Piliyakkha lied by stating that he wanted to kill the deer, not Sama, but the deer fled in a fight. Sama insisted that nowhere in the Himalayas region was a single deer that would run away from him, being all friends from infancy. At this point, the king confessed the truth.

Not only did he injure an innocent youth, but also he purposely lied to him. He was not aiming at a deer; his arrow was aimed at him. Taken by greed he wanted to take the boy as a prize, and he meant only to wound him so that he could not run away (Cowell Vo. VI: 45, reprint 1995) and be captured.

Sama did not express any resentment or blame for the king's action; instead, amidst his pain, he only worried that he could not take care of his parents anymore. Then he fell unconscious. The King repented and attended to the parents himself.

Through the intercession of his mother in his seventh previous existence, the goddess Bahusodari appeared, miraculously restoring Sama to life. He rose fully recovered from his injury: at the same time, his parents regained their sight.

Sama, as a Bodhisattva, instructed Piliyakkha on the ten duties he had to respect as a warrior king: first towards his parents, then towards his wife and children, friends, ministers and soldiers, township and villages, the ascetics and the animals. The king accepted the teaching and went back to Benares where he distributed several gifts and performed many virtuous actions.

Dasharatha and Sama Jataka I the Ramayana sarga 57 and 58 of the Ayodhyakanda, it is narrated that King Dasharatha was very distressed to have pleased his queen Kaykaey to dethrone Rama and appoint king her so. In a distraught state, the night of the banishment of Rama to the forest, Dasharatha had a flash-vision of an event of his youth, when he was a prince.

The strong resemblance of this episode of the Ramayana with the Sama Jataka (Cowell 540), was already noticed in 1918 by Oldenberg, and by Pollok and Goldman in 1984 : 432.

One night, at the end of the rainy season, he decided to do some exercise with his bow and arrows and went hunting in the forest. He was eager to kill a buffalo or an elephant. Hearing some noises, in total darkness, he believed an elephant was coming to the water hole, and shot his poisonous arrow towards the sound, hitting instead a boy hermit (Brahman) Sama, that had gone to the river to fetch water. The lethal arrow pierced his heart. The victim addressed very strong words toward the prince. He wondered why he was killed, he, an ascetic with matted locks, wearing robes of bark and antelope skin. He was a rishi (Brahman hermit) removed from violence, without sins, living on wild fruits of the forest, with the duty of taking care of his blind parents.

Dasharatha was devastated by his evil crime. In vain he tried to justify his guilt by saying at that time he was "an intemperate youth" and of having committed the act unintentionally". It caused anguish and self-reproach for the rest of his life.

The strong resemblance of the so-called "Dasharata Jataka" to the Sama Jataka (Cowell 540), was already noticed in 1918 by Oldenberg, and by Pollok and Goldman in 1984 : 432, but we are uncertain of the "Dasharata Jata" from Ramayana is identical to the Desharata Jatakas of Cowell the is copied here.

Dasharatha Jataka (Cowell No.461; 1995 Vol. IV: 78) 4

The story is narrated by Lord Buddha in Jetavana to comfort a layperson distraught by the death of his father, neglecting all his duties. The Buddha explains the uselessness of sorrow and the impermanence on earth; as an example, one should look at Rama who was not afflicted by his father's death.

King Dasharatha had thousands of wives, the eldest queen bore him two sons, Rama and Lakkhana (or Lucky) and a daughter named Lady Sita.

When the main queen died, Dasharatha took another wife as queen consort who mothered Prince Bharata. In the excitement, Dasharatha offered her a boon to allow Bharata to become king instead of his senior brother Rama, the true heir. Having to fulfil his boon, Dasharatha, very upset, told Rama and Lakkhana to live in the kingdom because some mischief may fall on them, and return only after 12 years of exile. Sita insisted to join her brothers.

They went to live in the forest, feeding on wild fruits. When Dasharatha died, the queen ordered to appoint Bharata king, but the prince refused and went searching for Rama to invite him to return and become king by taking over the five symbols of royalty (sword, umbrella, diadem, slippers and fan) due to the true king. Rama remained unperturbed, neither worrying nor weeping. He explained his lack of emotions in the understanding of the law of impermanence of things.

Rama resisted Bharata's insistence to return to rule, adding that he had to fill his father's command to receive the kingdom at the end of 12 years. When Bharata asked who will rule in the meantime, Rama presented him with his slippers. With these Bharata, Lakkhana and Sita returned to Benares. The slippers ruled the kingdom, placed on the throne; when the judgment of a case was right, they remain quiet, when wrong the sandals beat upon each other (probably this story of the slippers is apocryphal, a later addition to the Jataka). At the end of the exile, Rama, standing on a magnificent chariot entered the city from where he ruled for thousands of years.

⁴ Cowell acknowledges that this Jataka was firstly edited and translated by Fausboel in 1871.

Illustrations of the Sama Jataka in Cambodia



Fig.1 – **Kampong Trelach Leu**. Very deteriorated scene of the Sama Jataka. The lower part of this picture presents Sama dying on the ground. The upper part of the picture represents King Piliyakkha holding a bow and to his right, the same king kneels in front of Sama's parents. This is probably the oldest mural of this Jataka (12921-25) in Cambodia.



Fig.2 – **Way Bakonk**. Reconstruction of the very damaged mural, executed by RSF (*Restorateurs Sans Frontieres*) in 2009 sponsored by the Swiss company Holcim on the recommendation of Dr V.Roveda since the year 2002. Below is the condition before restoration that was made possible by an APSARA director (Dr Kerya) patiently collecting many pieces on the ground and old photographs. and drawings (Roveda 1999)



The panel with the Sama Jataka in the conditions discovered in 1999 by Vittorio Roveda who eventually obtained full sponsorship for the restoration of the entire vihara, by the Swill company, Holcim specialized in industrial cement.



Fig.3 — **Sisiwat Ratanaram**. In the lowest part of this mural, a boy and a girl are shown running away from the village where their parents had organized their wedding. Then in the night middle-part of the mural, the fierce cobra is spreading venom on Sama's parents making them blind. To the left of this scene, Sama carries a pole on his shoulders with two hanging baskets full of fruits, driving his parents back to the hermitage. Higher up, the most relevant scene is depicted in

two scenes, which are not in chronological sequence. First King Piliyakkha is begging Sama to be forgiven for the crime he committed, painted higher up releasing an arrow to the side of Sama, who is lying on the ground dying. The forest goddess Bahusodari is missing; she will come later to restore Sama to life.



Fig.4 – Wat Ang Chong. Dying Sama. (Mid 20th century) Fig.5 – Wat Sway. Dying Sama (Mid 20th century)



Fig.6 - Wat Pipit (Battambang). The full scene leads to the death of Sama. (First quarter of the 20th century)



Fig 7– Wat Prey Sway Kon. A simple depiction of the Sama Jataka.(early 1900)



Fig8 – **Wat Atvea (Siem reap)** -The parent of the Bodhisatta Sama are blinded by the venom spit by a cobra. during a storm

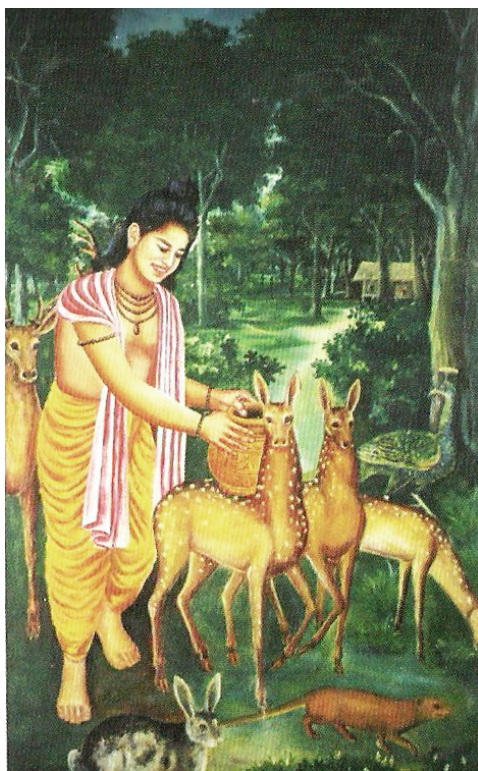


Fig.9. **Bo Veal (Battambang)** - Sama getting ready to go to collect water in the company of his pet deer. Both paintings are from the middle 1900.



Fig.10 – Bo Vieal .- Sama dying with the arrow in his chest by the arrow



Fig.11 – Wat Bo Langka .Sama hit



Fig.12 - Wat Bakong Village. King Piliyakkha trying to excuse himself for shooting the young Sama.



Fig.13- **Wat Chateal** . Sama compassionately carried his blind parents



Fig.14 – **Wat Bo Kraom (Siem reap)**.Sama Jataka



Fig.15 – **Wat Sway (Siem Reap)**. Sama Jataka.

The 3 paintings are after 1975.



Fig.16 - Wat Choteal (Battambang). King Piliyakkha and the Sama's parents sustain the dying Bodhisatta, and the winged goddess Bahusodari intervenes to restore life by removing the poisoned arrow. King Piliyakkha is depicted with the face of an ogre (yakka).



Fig, 17 – Phnom Penh National Museum. A figure of the Sama Jataka from a large painting hanging on the walls of the museum (in 2007), represents an episode of each of the 10 Jatakas (painted probably in the 20th century) Around the end of the 19th century representing the Last Ten on a single painting. was quite popular.



Fig.18 Wat Kra Bao. Another illustration of the Sama Jataka is interestingly painted on wood on a wall of the vihara (painting circa 1960)

Illustrations of the Sama Jataka in Thailand



Fig.17. **Ayutthaya Samdet Buiddhasaiwan chapel.** Mural painting with the figure of Sama laying on the ground and that of the King sitting desperately near him; curiously the figures are defined by the lack of paint. (Late 1600?)



Fig 18 - **Wat Chong Nonsi (Bangkok)** A very dilapidated mural with traces of scenes of the Sama Jataka., To the right of the picture, Sama is moving to the left together with a deer. To the left of the picture, Sama is lying on the ground with an arrow in his back. All the murals of this temple were probably made in early 1600 but restored many times.



Fig 19- **Wat Yai Intharam (Bangkok)**. Sama being hit by the poisonous arrow of King Paliakka. (early 1900)



Fig.20 – **Wat Yai Intaram**. Simple elegant composition of the main events of the Sama Jataka.

Fig.20 - Wat Yai Intaram. Detail of the goddess Bashundari on a tree, before descending to save the life of the dying Sama attended by his parents and King Piliyakkha (early 1900)



Fig.21 – **Wat Matchavat (Bangkok)**. The full story of the Sama Jataka is elegantly painted on a large panel. At the base of the picture, in the early morning twilight of the forest, King Piliyakkha is releasing his poisoned arrow toward Sama who was trying to collect water from the pond, in the company of his deer. To the left lower left part of the panel, Sama is shown lying on the ground attended by his parents and the king (cropped figure). To the right, in a palatial hermitage, Sama's blind parents are brought the bad news by King Philiyakka who promises to guide them to the presence of their dying son. Wild animals are an indication that the hermitage was in the full forest (top picture) painted in mid-1900?



Fig.22 Wat Dararam - In the lower register the king is shooting an arrow at Sama; to the right is the hermitage of Sama with his two blinded parents. In the upper register, King Piliyakkha is bringing the two blinded parents to the site of the incident



Fig.23 – **Wat Saket** – The main events of the Sama Jataka elegantly illustrated king Piliyakkha could kill the boy that he obviously could see. He was his human target.



Fig.24 -**Wat Saket** – detail of the above picture illustrating the moment when Sama is hit by king Piliyakkha's poisonous arrow.



Fig.25 – Bangkok National Library. The main event of the Sama Jataka.



Fig.26 – Bangkok National Library. Sama's blind parents regret the death of their son in the presence of king Piliyakha

Illustrations of the Sama Jataka in Laos



Fig.27 – Wat Maisayaram. (Luang Prabang). Gold stencils representing the main events of the Sama Jataka.



Fig.28 – Wat Manom (Luang Prabang). The usual scene of the Sama Jataka, copied from Thai postcards

Dasharatha and Sama Jataka

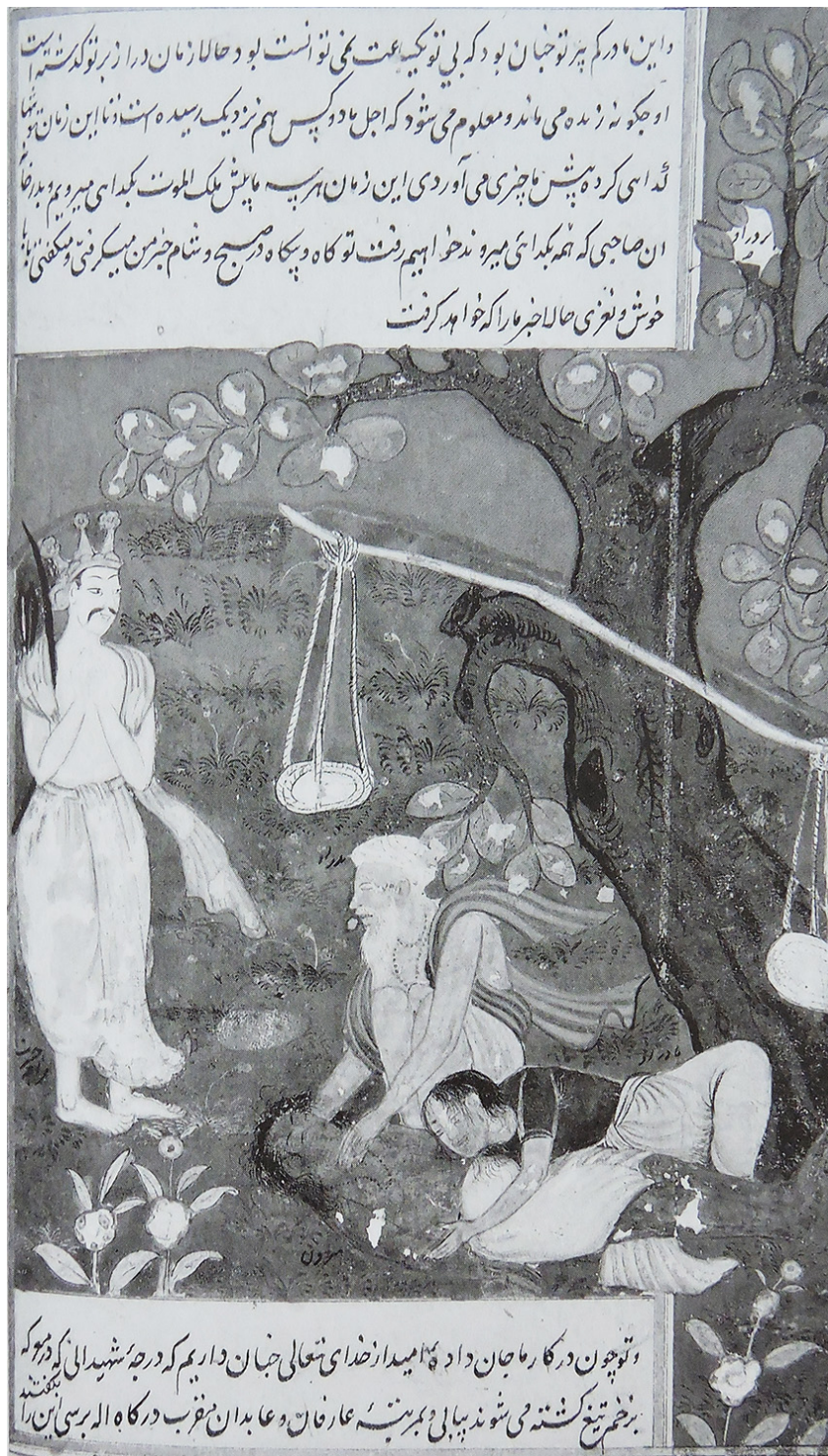


Fig.29 - This Mughal manuscript's page illustrates Dasharatha rising his hands in obeisance to the mourning hermits (man and woman) bent over the body of their young son. On a tree hangs the pole supporting the seats that Sama used to transport his parents after they were blinded. (16th or 17th century India).

Illustrations of the Sama Jataka in Burma



Fig.33 -Dhammarajaka stupa. Glazed plaque showing Sama lying dead on the ground while on the tree the goddess Basundari will come to bring him back to life)(possible interpretation) (11th century (Photograph courtesy of Dr. Pyiet Phyo Kyaw).



Fig.34– Mandalay , Golden Palace . Gilded wood carved with scenes of the Sama Jataka



Fig.35 – Mandalay , Golden Palace . Detail of the above, with The King guiding Sama's parents to the murder scene. Sama is lying on the ground unattended.



Fig.36– **Shwedagon (Yangon)** – painted carved relief with elements of the Sama Jataka. From the left are Sama’s parents as blind hermits sitting in meditation in small pavilions; then they walk away following a rope held by King Paliyakhka. Then Sama is shown, lying on the ground near his deer and a figure trying to extract the arrow from his shoulder (?); the king is shown hunting some deer on one of which a man is riding holding a jar. The various scenes do not respect their chronological sequence and the story could be read from right to left. (Probably 20th century).



Fig.37. Sama carrying his blind parents. Modern postcard purchasable in Yangon.

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Fig 138 -Thailand Postage stamp issued in 1996



Fi.34 - Terracotta plack with a scene of the Sama Jataka with the King shooting an arrow into Sama collecting water for his parents depicted in a small hut, their hermitage (photo V.Roveda)