

544. Narada Jataka

Maha-Narada-kassapa Jataka

Cowell No. 544

also known as the *Preah Noroot or Promanarat Jataka*.

Long ago, a just righteous king Angati was the ruler of Mithila. Amongst his many wives, only the chief queen conceived a daughter of great merit who had aspired to virtue for thousands of years. She was adored by the King who every day sent baskets of flowers, jewellery and coins encouraging her to perform alms. On the night of the full moon festival of the fourth month, all Mithila was decorated and illuminated like Tavatimsa. The king in the best of his robes stood on the balcony of his palace with three of his chief ministers, Vijaya, Sunama and Alata. They questioned the king on how to amuse themselves.

General Alata suggested making war and conquering new lands; Sunama to feasting, dancing and enjoying entertainment; the third, Vijaya suggested asking the advice of the naked ascetics living in the forest. They went to find these ascetics the boss being a man named Guna Kassapa, who in reality was not a true sage but the leader of a group of ascetics, deluded and ignorant men. He jumped at the chance to emphatically declare his nihilistic view to the royal audience, even stating that there was no reason to believe there was anything after death, and that life's deeds are decided by destiny and thus one can as well follow one's desires and seek one's pleasures. Righteousness and unrighteousness were of no consequence; virtues were useless.

Believing this, the king abandoned any efforts to be good and the giving of alms and started a life of luxury taking pleasure in sensual delights. The following day he gave the administration of the kingdom and all powers to the three ministers and declared that he will devote his life entirely to pleasure: food, wine, music and entertainment.¹ His virtuous daughter, Ruja, tried to deliver him from his bad behaviour but to no avail. She repeated her efforts with great determination.

At that time, in the Brahma heavens, a Maha-Brahma named Narada (Bodhisatta) was looking down to earth, and decided to help her. He presented himself to the King as a rich merchant carrying a golden pole on his shoulder from which a golden alms bowl was suspended. To impress even more he appeared suspended in the air before the king and his court. He announced that he was Brahma, descended from the heavens to condemn Angati to hell.

The king said he did not believe in heaven or hell and asked Narada for a loan of 500 pieces of gold. "Foolish king" exclaimed Narada. If he knew he was a virtuous king he would gladly give the money because it would be easier to collect a debt from a man in heaven than a loan from a man bound for hell where no one would dare to go to collect a debt. Narada's allusion not to one but many hells frightened the king and asked to be told the truth and how he could regain his senses. The Bodhisattva advised him to take responsibility for his kingdom and provide for the poor, the hungry, the aged and the Brahmans. Only then could he find the path to heaven.

Narada added a simple allegory: "Your body is the chariot; your mind is the charioteer. Non-harming is the axle; generosity is the decorative covering. The absence of conceit is the yoke; humility is the

¹ Drinking became the trademark of his debauchment.

pole. The restraint of the Five Precepts is the rope. Desire and lust are the evil paths to hell, but, if the horses are well trained, they will follow the straight path of self-control”.

Illustrations of the Narada Jataka in Cambodia



Fig.1 – **Wat Soriya.** A poorly preserved scene of the Narada Jataka. Kink Angada is depicted drinking from a bottle and more bottles are waiting in the courtyard. The cortege at the base of the picture is probably when he went to see the group of naked ascetics.



Fig.2 –**Sisowat Ratanaran**. Distorted photograph of the panel illustrating part of the Narada Jataka. The visual narrative starts from the bottom right quarter when King Angati went to visit the naked false ascetic asking for advice on moral conduct. Being told that everything is ruled by destiny, he started a debauched life of drinking and eating. He is depicted eating and drinking in his royal palace close to his virtuous daughter (to the right of the picture). The top right quarter has been obscured because it belongs to another Jataka (Vidura). Probably painted in the Middle 1900.



Fig.3 – Angati visiting the naked ascetics



RIGHT Fig.4 – **Sisowat Ratanaran**. The Bodhisatta Narada is shown on his way to enter the royal compound, carrying gold to impress King Angati with his superiority and at the same time condemn the king to hell.



Fig.5 – Bakong. Panel of the viihara’s porch (Mid 1900)



Fig.6 – Bakong Village Vihara. (After 1975)



Fig.7 – Kien Sway Krav. The final event of Vidhura converting his executioner on a mountain top (Early 1900).



Fig.8– **Wat Kwedeidong**. King Angati showed his debauched way of living; his ministers at another table important military visitors sitting at another table, full of food and drink (painted after 1975)



Fig.9 – **Wat Aun Kosar**. Narad is flying down from the Brahma heaven to condemn Angati to hell and to help Ruja, the King's daughter to have her father follow a proper moral attitude (painted mural after 1975).



Fig.10 – Wat Prasat Andet. The king is sitting at a lush dining table drinking from a bottle. His generals/advisors sit at another table. To the right, the picture of the photograph of the sponsor is neatly framed (painted after 1975).



Fig.11 - Wat Nokor. In this picture, the landing of Narada is clearly shown, to the surprise of King Angati, while his daughter Ruja is piously praying (after 1975).



Fig.12 - Wat Nokor North (around 1960s)



Fig.13 - Lomgvek, Tep Pranam 1960)



Fig.14 - Stung Trend (before 1960)



Fig.15 - Wat Einkosai (around 1960).

Illustrations of the Narada Jataka in Thailand



Fig.16 – Wat Chong Nonsi -King Angati's royal cortege going to visit the famous naked Brahmin (some murals are date of 1600, others much later due to restorations)



Fig.17 – Wat Chong Nonsi – King Angati in conversation with the ignorant naked Brahmin



Fig.18 – Wat Chong Nonsi. Narada, the great Brahma, descend from his heaven carrying a pumpkin and a water pitcher (not gold as in the Pali version) to convert Angati to moral practices



Fig.19 – **Wat Dararam** - In a pavilion, the king is drinking alcoholic drinks and eating abundant food. To question the meaning of life, once he left his royal palace on a golden chariot, escorted by his army, to go visit the naked ascetic Guna Kassapa, in reality, a false ascetic, a deluded and ignorant man. He gave the nihilistic advice that life deeds are decided by *karma* and one may as well satisfy his desires; virtues are useless. King Angati is painted kneeling in front of Guna in his ample hermitage. Later, painted within a small red cloud, the Bodhisatta Narada descends carrying golden pots (painted over the roof of the royal palace).



Fig.20 – Wat Dararam. Narada, the great Brahma, descend from his heaven carrying golden pots to condemn Angati to hell and help Ruja, the king's daughter, to instruct her father on the right moral practices. She is giving alms in the left pavilion.



Fig.21 – Wat Suwannaram. Narada descends to the Royal Palace where Ruja is praying.



Fig.22 – Was Suwannaram. Detail of Narada (Bodhisatta) depicted in the previous figure, carrying pure gold weights



Fig.23 - Wat Yai Intharam. The complex architecture of the royal compound is dazzling. The Bpodisatta Narada is depicted in a red leaf-shaped halo, and Ruja, protected by a parasol, rises her harm in *anjali*, praying for the Bodhisatta intervention.



Fig.24 – the Bangkok National Library.
The princess enjoying herself in the forest while Narada descends



Fig.25 – Narada. Bangkok National Library.



Fig.26 – Bangkok National Library.

Illustrations of the Narada Jataka in Burma

Always with references to the booklet of Myat (2003: 162), which differs from the Pali text version of Cowell we can make the following identifications:



Fig.27 - Golden Palace Monastery of Mandalay, corner of the balustrade carved in wood and gilded, showing some events of the Narada Jataka.

Unfortunately only half of the panel is in place, making it difficult to interpret the visual narrative. Three figures to the bottom right of the picture belong to the story of Bizaka, who when he was looking for his lost cattle met a monk who was trying to find his way. Because the monk had to ask for directions twice, Bizaka got angry and insulted him as the 'son of a slave'.

The carving shows a man directing two oxen to the right until reaching another man (or monk, Narada?) caressing the head of one of the ox, accompanied by a smaller figure. Most surprising is the small figure (a baby?) lying on the ground. I am unable to interpret this scene; perhaps if the left part of this panel would have been carved it may have given some clue.



Fig.28 – The debauchee king is ruling the kingdom. princess Ruja tried to educate her father, but after he disregarded all Buddhist precepts, Sakka descended from his Heaven carrying precious gold materials to impress t king Angati and condemning him to hell Postcards are available in Yangon.