Ja 339 — Baveru Jātaka

English translation by H. T. Francis and R. A. Neil.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol3/ja339.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

Original edition: Cambridge University Press, volume 3, 1897

Pinned source revision: https://github.com/suttacentral/sc-data/commit/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

Scope: Complete numbered source article from the traditional Jātaka commentary; canonical verses appear in story context. This is not a verse-only edition.

Changes: Converted the pinned SuttaCentral HTML article to plain text; removed inline print page-reference labels and normalized whitespace. The original source retains references.

Text

“Before the crested peacock,” etc.—This story was told by the Master when at Jetavana, of certain heretics who lost their former gains and glory. For the heretics who before the Birth of Buddha received gain and honour, lost the same at his Birth, becoming like fireflies at sunrise. Their fate was discussed in the Hall of Truth. When the Master came and inquired what was the topic the Brethren were discussing in their assembly, on being told what it was, he said, “Brethren, not now only, but formerly too, before the appearance of those endowed with virtue, such as were without virtue attained to the highest gain and glory, but when those who were endowed with virtue appeared, such as were devoid of it lost their gain and glory.” And with this he told a legend of bygone days.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta came to life as a young peacock. And when he was fully grown, he was exceedingly beautiful and lived in a forest. At that time some merchants came to the kingdom of Baveru, bringing on board ship with them a foreign crow. At this time, it is said, there were no birds in Baveru. The natives who from time to time came and saw this bird perched on the top of the mast, said, “Mark the colour of this bird’s skin. Look at its beaked mouth at the end of its throat, and its eyes like jewel-balls.” Thus singing the praises of this crow they said to these merchants, “Sirs, give us this bird. We have need of it, and you can get another in your own country.”

“Then take it,” they said, “at a price.”

“Give it us for a single piece of money,” they said.

“We will not sell it for that,” said the merchants.

Gradually increasing their offer the people said, “Give it us for a hundred pieces of money.”

“It is very useful,” they replied, “to us, but let there be friendship between us and you.” And they sold it for one hundred pieces.

The natives took it and put it in a golden cage and fed it with various kinds of fish and meat and wild fruits. In a place where no other birds existed, a crow endowed with ten evil qualities attained the highest gain and glory. The next time these merchants came to the kingdom of Baveru, they brought a royal peacock which they had trained to scream at the snapping of the fingers and to dance at the clapping of the hands. When a crowd had gathered together, the bird stood in the fore part of the vessel, and flapping its wings uttered a sweet sound and danced.

The people that saw it were highly delighted and said, “This king of birds is very beautiful and well-trained. Give it to us.”

The merchants said, “We first brought a crow. You took that. Now we have brought this royal peacock and you beg for this too. It will be impossible to come and even mention the name of any bird in your country.”

“Be content, Sirs,” they said, “give this bird to us and get another in your own land.”

And raising the price offered they at last bought it for a thousand pieces. Then they put it in a cage ornamented with the seven jewels and fed it on fish, flesh and wild fruits, as well as with honey, fried corn, sugar-water and the like. Thus did the royal peacock receive the highest gain and glory. From the day of his coming, the gain and honour paid to the crow fell off. And no one wanted even to look at it. The crow no longer getting food either hard or soft, with a cry of “Caw, caw,” went and settled on a dunghill.

The Master, making the connexion between the two stories, in his Perfect Wisdom repeated these stanzas:

Before the crested peacock had appeared,

Crows were with gifts of fruit and meat revered:

The sweet-voiced peacock to Baveru came,

The crow at once was stripped of gifts and fame.

So man to divers priests due honour paid,

Till Buddha the full light of Truth displayed:

But when the sweet-voiced Buddha preached the law,

From heretics their gifts and praise all men withdraw.

After uttering these four stanzas, he thus identified the Birth: “At that time the Jain Nathaputta was the crow, and I myself was the royal peacock.”

The Jātaka, or Stories of the Buddha’s Former Births, edited by E.B. Cowell, published by The Cambridge University Press.

Vol. 1, translated by Robert Chalmers, 1895.

Vol. 2, translated by W.H.D. Rouse, 1895.

Vol. 3, translated by H.T. Francis and R.A. Neil, 1897.

Vol. 4, translated by W.H.D. Rouse, 1901.

Vol. 5, translated by H.T. Francis, 1905.

Vol. 6, translated by E.B. Cowell and W.H.D. Rouse, 1907.

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Prepared for SuttaCentral by Bhikkhu Sujato.