

8

THE THUNDERING SILENCE

1. MONASTICISM AND MILITARISM	2
Bimbisāra	2
2. ŚRENIKA BIMBISĀRA	2
(a) Magadha	2
(b) Rājagṛha	3
3. BIMBISĀRA'S FAMILY	3
4. BIMBISĀRA AND THE BUDDHA	4
5. BIMBISĀRA'S DEATH	4
6. AJĀTAŚATRU	5
7. THE SIX SECTARIAN TEACHERS	6
8. AJĀTAŚATRU AND THE BUDDHA	7
(a) Welfare of nations	7
(1) Conditions of non-decline of the Vṛjīs	7
(2) The conditions for the non-decline of the Saṅgha:	8
(b) Ajātaśatru's wrath	8
9. The Buddha's deMISE	9
(a) Ajātaśatru's grief	9
(b) Ajātaśatru's political victories	9
10. The First Buddhist Council	10
11. KOŚALA AND PRASENAJIT	10
12. DAHARA SUTTA	11
13. ATTA, RAKKHITA SUTTA	11
14. JAṬILA SUTTA	12
15. RĀJĀK'ĀRĀMA	14
(a) Bharu Jātaka	14
(b) Puggala Sutta	14
(c) Appamāda Sutta I	15
16. MALLIKĀ	15
(a) The Kummāsa, piṇḍa Jātaka	15
(b) The Mallikā Sutta	15
(c) Dhītā Sutta	16
17. DHAMMA, CETIYA SUTTA	16
18. PRASENAJIT'S DEVOTION TO THE BUDDHA	17
19. PRASENAJIT'S TRAGIC DEATH	18
20. CONCLUSION	18
READING LIST	19

8

THE THUNDERING SILENCE

Bimbisāra, Ajātaśatru and Prasenajit

1. MONASTICISM AND MILITARISM

There are two forces that shape our world, whether it was the Buddha's India or our present world. Those forces are **war and peace**. War and violence began, apparently, when the human species have learned how to use tools with their hands and lived in groups, the bigger the groups the greater the violence amongst them. The large-scale and long-term occurrences of such life-threatening conflict accompanying the quest for power and territorial expansion is called **war**. The predominance of a military or warrior class, and their ideologies and implementation of warfare to gain power and territory is called **militarism**.

Around the 6th century BCE, India saw the rise of the military class comprising the *kṣatriya* (*khattiya*), the nobles or barons of ancient India. The other classes were the brahmins (*brāhmaṇa*), the commoners and merchants (*vaiśya/vessa*), and the serfs and artisans (*śūdra'sudda*). Outside these classes were the *mleccha*, the untouchable dark-skinned pre-Aryan indigenous peoples. India of the Buddha's time was dominated by the warrior class, and it was a time, over 2,500 years ago, when the roots of **imperial India** and the beginnings of modern militarism first appeared and grew.

This militarism was largely fomented by the ancient Indian caste system introduced by the invading Aryan priests to regulate society into a sort of Indian **feudal system**. Like Mahāvīra, the founder of Jainism, the Buddha, too, came from the warrior caste. In renouncing the world, they broke away from the caste system, and in their teachings offered spiritual liberation to all without the need for mediating priests. As it were, man could now communicate directly with God and gods. Indeed, in the case of Buddhism, humans could, through their own effort, go beyond castes and priests, to achieve the highest spirituality beyond even God and gods.

At this very same time when militarism was on the rise in India, its very opposite—**monasticism**—also reached a high point. In this sense, the Buddha arose as a pacifist, one who is against war and militarism. Although the Buddha came from the warrior caste, he discovered that the best alternative to violence and war is **the unshakable inner peace of the mind**.

Bimbisāra

2. ŚREṆĪKA BIMBISĀRA

(a) Magadha

Political struggle during the Buddha's time was centred around **the control of the Ganges Valley**. The states or "countries" (*janapada*) of Kāśī, Kośāla, Magadha and the Vṛjī confederacy fought for this control for a century until **Magadha** (south Bihār) emerged victorious, mainly due to its excellent geographical location that controlled the lower Ganges. The first kings of Magadha belonged to the Haryāṅka family (Buc 11.2), which was haunted by a dark shadow—that of **parricide**. In order to gain the throne more quickly, the crown princes regularly put their fathers to death.

The greatest success in the unification of the central Gangetic plain was carried out by the ambitious **king Śreṇika Bimbisāra** (Seṇiya Bimbisāra, 60-8 BBE = 546-494 BCE; or c.558-491 BCE) who acceded to the throne at the age of 15, around 543 or 546 BCE (according to modern scholars). Bimbisāra carried out a policy of **matrimonial alliances** and contracted unions with the Madra (Madda) ruling families in Kośala and Vaiśālī (capital of the Licchavī republic). His marriage to Kośala,devī ensured him of the possession of part of the district of Vārāṇasī. After defeating king Brahmadaṭṭa, he annexed Aṅga—his territory then came to be called **Aṅga-Magadha**—which gave him free access to the Ganges Delta which was valuable in terms of potential coastal and maritime trade. Neighbouring forests yielded timber for building and elephants for the army. Revenue also came from the fertile lower Gangetic plain and the river trade.

More land was cleared but the agrarian settlements were probably small because ancient literature mention that journeys from one town to another had to be made through long stretches of forest paths. Most important of all, Magadha had rich deposits of **iron ore** which gave her the lead in technology. Under Bimbisāra, rudimentary ideas of **land revenue** developed. Each village had a headman who was responsible for collecting taxes, and another group of officials supervised the collection and conveyed the revenue to the royal treasury. The Buddha adopted Bimbisāra's standard coin, the *kārṣāpaṇa* (P. *kahāpaṇa*; Amg *karisāvāṇa*) in the formulation of rules involving money (VA 297).

(b) Rājagṛha

The capital of Magadha was **Rājagṛha** (Rājagaha), one of the six chief cities in the Buddha's time--- the others were Campā, Śrāvastī (Sāvattihī), Sāketa, Kauśāmbī (Kosambī) and Vārāṇasī (D 2:147). Rājagṛha was a beautiful city surrounded by five hills forming a natural defence. It was 5 leagues from the Ganges and watered by the rivers Tapodā and Sarpinī (Sappinī). The city comprised two parts: the ancient hill fortress, **Girivraja** (Giribbaja) (VvA 82; cf. D 2:235) and the new section. Bimbisāra abandoned the old city because of frequent fires there. Fears of attack by the king of Vaiśālī (Vesālī) hastened the building of new section of the city at the foot of the hill. This new section, that we know as Rājagṛha, was also called Bimbisāra,puṛī and Magadha,pura (SnA 2:584). Bimbisāra was one of the earliest Indian kings to emphasize an efficient government and his reign saw the beginnings of **an Indian administrative system**.

The Bamboo Grove (Veṇuvana/Veḷuvana), the first monastery (donated by Bimbisāra), was located in Rājagṛha. By the Buddha's Final Nirvana, there were 18 large monasteries there (VA 1:9), the main ones, besides the Bamboo Grove, being those on Vulture's Peak (Gr̥dhra,kūta Parvata/Gijjha,kūta,pabbata), Vaibhāra Rock (Vaibhāra,vana/Vebhāra,vana, at the foot of which is the Saptaparṇa Guhā/Satta,paṇṇa Guhā), the Indra,śaila Cave (Indra,śaila Guhā/Indasāla Guhā), and a mountain cave on the slopes of the Sarpasūṇḍika (Sarpasūṇḍika Prāgbhāra/Sappa,soṇḍika Pabbhāra) in the Sīta,vana (Cool Forest).

3. BIMBISĀRA'S FAMILY

Bimbisāra's chief queen was **Kośala,devī**, daughter of Mahā Kośala and sister of Prasenajit. For her marriage, she received a village in Kāśī as bath-money as part of her dowry. Her son was **Ajāta,śatru** (Ajāta,sattu). He had other wives as well: Kṣemā (Khemā) and Padmavatī (Padumavatī). **Kṣemā** was very conscious of her beauty and would not visit the Buddha for fear that he would disparage it. Bimbisāra then had some poets sing the glories of Veṇuvana, as a result of which she was persuaded to visit it. (AA 1:341)

At Veṇuvana, as soon as she sees the Buddha, he projects to her **a holographic sequence** of a celestial nymph fanning him. As she gazes, entranced by her beauty, the nymph quickly metamorphoses through the stages of life until she becomes an old hag, falls and disintegrates into the dust of death. Then listening to the Buddha exhort on the vanity of lust, she becomes an Arhant. With the consent of Bimbisāra, she joins the Order and becomes foremost of those nuns with great wisdom and the right-hand nun (A 1:25; DhA 4:168 f.; B 26.19; J 1:15 f.; Dīpv 17,9).

Padma,vatī (Paduma,vatī) was a courtesan of Ujjayinī (Ujjenī). Bimbisāra, hearing of her great beauty, had her brought to Rājagṛha to be the “belle of the city” (P. *nagara,sobhiṇī*). She bore him a son, **Abhaya Rāja,kumāra** who later joined the Order and became an Arhant. Hearing him preach, she too became an Arhant and joined the Order. On his account, she went by the filinym of **Abhaya,mātā** (Mother of Abhaya) (ThiA 31 f.).

Bimbisāra had an affair with **Āmra,pālī** (Amba,pālī), the famed courtesan of Vaiśālī. She bore him a son, **Vimala Kauṇḍinya** (Vimala Koṇḍañña) who became a prominent elder monk (ThaA 1:145 f.).¹ Hearing him preach, she herself renounced the world and reflecting on her own aging body she gained Arhantship (ThiA 205-207.) [Chapter 9].

4. BIMBISĀRA AND THE BUDDHA

The Buddha was five years older than Bimbisāra, and it was not until 15 years after his accession that Bimbisāra heard the Buddha preach and was converted. Although some Buddhist chronicles claim that the parents of both Bimbisāra and the Bodhisattva were friends (Mṭ 137; Dīpv 3:50 ff.), they only met for the first time at **Pāṇḍava Parvata** (Paṇḍava Pabbata), soon (probably within the year) after the Great Renunciation, as evident from **the Pabbajjā Sutta** (Sn 405 ff.; J 1:66; DhA 1:85; Rockhill 27) [1:2c, 2:13].

Their second famous meeting was at **the Supraṭṭha Caitya** (Supaṭṭha Cetiya) in the Sugar-cane Grove (Yaṣṭi,vana-udyāna/Laṭṭhi,van’uyyāna), shortly after the Great Enlightenment. It was during this second meeting that Bimbisāra donated the Bamboo Grove to the Buddha and the Sangha (V 1:35 ff.; DhA 1:88; AA:SHB 1:166; BA 21).

Bimbisāra was a devotee of the Buddha for a period of 37 years. Tradition has it that he not only did his best for the growth of the Teaching but also set a good example himself by keeping the Uposadha precepts on six days of each month (PvA 209). At the request of king Bimbisāra, the Buddha introduced **the weekly conclave** of the Order, saying: “I allow you, monks, to assemble together on the fourteenth, fifteenth and eighth days of the fortnight.” (V 1:101 f)

Later, when some people remarked that the monks who had gathered together, sat in silence “like dumb pigs” (*mūga,sūkara*), and suggested that they spoke Dharma (like other religious), the Buddha allowed such an assembly **to speak Dharma**. However, in due course, while meditating in seclusion, he decided that it would be good idea for them **to recite the Prātimokṣa** (V 1:101-104).

It is said that Bimbisāra had the power of judging the status of anyone just by his voice, as in the case of the treasurer Kumbha,ghoṣaka (DhA 1:233). Nothing is said in the Buddhist scriptures about Bimbisāra’s destiny, except that he made a wish to become a Once-returner (D 2:206).

5. BIMBISĀRA’S DEATH

Bimbisāra’s tragic death was caused by his own son, **Ajātaśatru**. Even before the birth of Ajātaśatru, soothsayers had predicted that he would bring about the death of his own father. Learning of this, Kośala-devī went to Madra,kukṣi (Madda,kucchi), a park near Rājagṛha, at the foot of Vulture’s Peak, to abort the child, but failed (SA 1:77; cf J 3:121 f.). The king heard of this and forbade her to go there again.

When the child was born, Bimbisāra showed him the greatest affection. The prince was given the nickname “**Ajāta,śatru**” because soothsayers had predicted of his enmity against his own father even before his birth, that is, he is the “unborn” (*ajāta*) enemy (*śatru/sattu*). A more generous etymology, however, is one meaning that he would have no enemies (DA 1:133 ff.; J 3:121 f.; D:RD 2:78 f.). According to

¹ Tha 64 contains a riddle ascribed to him.

Tārānātha, the 16th century Tibetan Buddhist historian, his personal name was **Kṣema,darśin** (*Indian Historical Quarterly*, 3:508).

However, when the prince came of age, **Devadatta**, seeking to further his own ambitions, won over the impressionable young Ajātaśatru with a show of psychic manifestations [7:5]. He proposed that Ajātaśatru kill Bimbisāra and take over the throne while he himself would take over the leadership of the Sangha from the Buddha. When Ajātaśatru tried to kill Bimbisāra, he was discovered and brought before the king.

Against the advice of his ministers to have Ajātaśatru executed, Bimbisāra, at the age of 65, after 52 or so years of rule (around 491 or 493 BCE), instead abdicated in favour of his ambitious son. When Ajātaśatru ascended the throne of Magadha without killing Bimbisāra, Devadatta chided him, “You are like a man who puts a skin over a drum in which is a rat!” (DA 1:135-137). At Devadatta’s instigation, Ajātaśatru imprisoned his father who was left to die from starvation, since no weapon could kill him (probably because he was a Stream-winner).

Bimbisāra was imprisoned in a hothouse (*tāpana,grha/tāpana,geha*) with orders that no one but Ajātaśatru’s mother could visit him. During her visits, she hid in her dress a golden vessel filled with food for him. When she was discovered, she hid food in her head-gear; after that, in her footwear. When all these ploys failed, she washed herself in scented water and then smeared her body with the four kinds of sweetness (P. *catu,madhura*): curds, honey, ghee and molasses.² Bimbisāra licked the food off her body.

In the end, she was forbidden to visit the king, who then occupied his time by pacing up and down in his cell in meditation. Hearing of this, Ajātaśatru sent barbers to cut open his feet, fill the wounds with salt and vinegar, and burn them with coals. Bimbisāra accepted his punishment without any resentment. In due course, he died a slow painful death and was reborn in the realm of the Four Guardian Kings (P. *cātumm,mahā,rājika*) as a yaksha name **Janavasabha**, in the retinue of Vaiśravaṇa (Vessavaṇa). **The Janavasabha Sutta** (D 18) records an account of the yaksha’s visit to the Buddha. According to **the Saṅkicca Jātaka**, even in a past life, Ajātaśatru had murdered his father (J 5:262 ff.).

Ajātaśatru

6. AJĀTAŚATRU

Ajātaśatru (8 BB-24 AB; 493-462 BCE) married **Vajrā** (Vajirā), daughter of Prasenajit, king of Kośala. She bore Ajātaśatru a son, **Udāyi,bhadra** (Udāya,bhadda). Ajātaśatru grew up to be a noble and handsome youth. Devadatta was at that time looking for ways of taking revenge on the Buddha, and seeing in the prince a very desirable weapon, he exerted all his strength to win him to his side. Ajātaśatru was greatly impressed by Devadatta’s psychic power, and became his devoted follower.

Ajātaśatru’s friendship with Devadatta and consequent hostility against the Buddha and his Order probably found ready support from those who were overshadowed by the Buddha’s growing fame, such as the Jains. It is therefore not surprising to find a different version of Bimbisāra’s death in **the Nirayavali Sutra** of the Jains who have tried to free Ajātaśatru from the guilt of parricide.

According to the Jain Sutra, **Kūṇika/Koṇika** (as they called Ajātaśatru) ordered his father’s imprisonment owing to some misunderstanding. Realizing his mistake, Ajātaśatru rushed to the prison with an axe

² Dīgha Abhinava,ṭīkā Be 2:114.

intending to hack through his father's fetters. But Bimbisara, thinking that his son had murderous intentions, took his own life rather than allow his son to be a parricide.³

On the day that Bimbisāra died, a son was born to Ajātaśatru, which greatly pleased him, Ajātaśatru's mother seized the opportunity to relate to him **his father's profound love for him**. As a child, when Ajāta-śatru had an abscess on his finger, his father, although administering justice at that time, personally soothed the child by holding the festering finger in his own mouth. The abscess broke, but as Bimbisāra was holding court, he could not spit, so he swallowed the discharge. (DA 1:138)

On his accession, Ajātaśatru implemented his father's plans to realize the trade potentials of the Ganges delta within thirty years. He strengthened the defences of Rājagṛha, the capital of Magadha. He also ordered a small fort, **Pāṭali,grāma**, to be built on the Ganges to repel possible attack of the Vṛjīs from the other side of the river Ganges. [9b]

7. THE SIX SECTARIAN TEACHERS

Later, Ajātaśatru, no longer under the evil influence of Devadatta, begins to fear retribution at the hands of his own son, Udāyi,bhadra. **The Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D no. 2) says that one beautiful serene moonlit night, he hopes that his peace of mind could be restored by some saintly ascetic or brahmin. Ajātaśatru, however, lacks faith in the six heterodox sectarian teachers (*gaṇin*),⁴ namely:

- (1) **Pūraṇa Kāśyapa (Purāṇa Kassapa)** (died c. 503 BCE). A Materialist who taught “naturalistic amorality” or the doctrine of non-action (*akriya,vāda/akiriya,vāda*), that is, the absence of merit or effect (*kriyā/kiriya*) in any virtuous action and of demerit in even the worst crimes, except that everything was determined by natural causes.
- (2) **Maskarin Gośāla or Gośālī,putra (Makkhali Gosāla)** (died c. 488 BCE) was the leader of the **Ājīvaka** or wandering ascetics founded in Kośala (west of Vṛjī) in 489 BCE. He taught a kind of fatalism or philosophical determinism (*niyati,vāda*), formulating an elaborate and fantastic system of births, conduct and karma, but denied all responsibility for actions; he admitted the fact of evil, but that purification came through transmigration, not by any action of the individual.
- (3) **Ajita Keśa,kambala (Ajita Kesa,kambali)**. He taught the doctrine of nihilism (*uccheda,vāda*) which believed that there is no karma; man consisted of the four elements, and when he died and was cremated, the elements returned to their places. He taught that at death, there was “cutting off” or annihilation. He was the most prominent Lokāyata (Materialist) school, but the founder of this school is the legendary Bṛhaspati.
- (4) **Kakuda Kātyāyana (Kakudha Kāccāyana or Pakudhaka Kātiyāna)**. He taught the doctrine of “one or the other” (*anyonya,vāda/aññoñña,vāda*), by which he explained that there were seven indestructible bodies: earth, water, fire, air, happiness, pain, and life or soul; there is no killer nor causer of killing: if man split a head of another, he was making a hole with his sword between the seven indestructible bodies. His ideas were the forerunner of the Vaiśeṣika doctrines.
- (5) **Nirgrantha Jñāti,putra or Mahāvīra (Nigaṇṭha Naṭaputta)**. The founder of Jainism, he taught that karma was a film or cloud deposited on the soul which became the soul's corporeal prison. Their practice is known as the restraint of four precepts (P. *catu,yāma,samvara,vāda*): (1) not to kill; (2) not to steal; (3) not to tell lies; and (4) not to own property and to observe celibacy. All of these practices prevent karma from arising. The Jains appear to have originated by seceding from the Ājīvakas under Mahāvīra the Jina.
- (6) **Samjayin Vairatī,putra (Sañjaya Belaṭṭhaputta/Belaṭṭhiputta)**. He taught agnosticism or skepticism (*vikṣepa,vāda/vikkhepa,vāda*) and refused to make a positive or a negative statement on any points, including the above. His notion was probably that knowledge was not necessary, even dangerous, for salvation. [5:10b]

³ Ency Bsm: Ajātasattu.

⁴ See for example Warder, 1970:39-42; Hirakawa 1990:15-19.

From an overall view of 6th century BCE India, one can surmise that it was a **period of intellectual unrest and religious ferment** encouraged by social instability. The influence of the brahmins were at low ebb mainly because they were unable to satisfactorily answer life's fundamental questions nor provide spiritual satisfaction to the growing urbanized intelligentsia. The new radical thinkers gathered their own following and spent their time discussing the issues of the day, and rivalled each other in swaying public opinion and support. It was in such a situation that the Buddha was born into.

At the opening of the *Sāmañña,phala Sutta*, Ajātaśatru's doctor, **Jīvaka Kumāra,bhṛtya** (Jīvaka Komāra,bhacca), informs him that the Buddha is at that time in the Mango Grove with 1,250 monks. With a large retinue, Ajātaśatru goes to see the Buddha in the dead of the night. As they approach the monastery, the king fears an ambush for the strange silence in the air. Nevertheless, they all soon come before the Buddha. Even then, it seems that he is still thinking of himself, so that on his one and only visit to the Buddha, his purpose is to find out **the advantages of an ascetic life** (*śrāmaṇya,phala/sāmañña,phala*).

At the end of the discourse, Ajātaśatru, feeling remorseful, confesses his wrong against his own father, Bimbisāra (8 years before the Buddha passes away), and asks the forgiveness of the Buddha. After Ajātaśatru has left, the Buddha tells the monks that had Ajātaśatru not killed his father, he would have attained Stream-winning on that very occasion (D 1:86). Anyway, after this visit to the Buddha, Ajātaśatru is finally able to sleep again, having been unable to do so ever since he killed his father. Upon his death, Ajātaśatru is reborn in a suffering state but, in the distant future, he would attain final salvation as a **Pratyeka Buddha** named Vidita,visesa or Vijitāvī (DA 1:237 f.)

8. AJĀTAŚATRU AND THE BUDDHA

(a) Welfare of nations

After Ajātaśatru had murdered his own father, king Bimbisāra, **Prasenajit of Kośala and the Vṛjīs** banded together against him. Ajātaśatru first battled his own uncle Prasenajit and won, but later lost in another battle and was taken as prisoner by Prasenajit who, however, freed him and gave him his daughter Vajrā in marriage. As dowry, she received a village in Kāśī that had been the pretext for the war.

During the Buddha's last year, Varṣakāra warned him of Ajātaśatru's plans to attack the Vṛjīs. The Buddha then expounds "**the 7 conditions for non-decline**" (*aparihāṇiya,dharma/aparihāṇiya,dhamma*) on a secular as well as religious level.

(1) Conditions of non-decline of the Vṛjīs

These conditions of non-decline of the Vṛjīs (*Vajjī aparihāṇiyā dhammā*, D 2:73; A 4:15) keep the Vṛjīs prosperous and progressive, that is, they are **the conditions for a nation's welfare**:

- (1) They hold frequent and well-attended meetings.
- (2) They meet together in harmony, disperse in harmony, and go about their duties in harmony.
- (3) They do not authorize what not been authorized already, and do not abolish what has been authorized.
- (4) They honour, respect, esteem and salute the elders amongst them, and consider them worthy of listening to.
- (5) They do not forcibly abduct others' wives and daughters and compel them to live with them.
- (6) They honour, respect, esteem and salute the Vṛjī shrines at home and abroad, not withdrawing proper support previously given.
- (7) They properly provide for the safety of Arhants so that such Arhants may come in future to live there and those already there may dwell in comfort.

(D 2:73; A 4:15)

At the conclusion of this teaching, Varṣakāra remarks: “Venerable Gotama, if the Vṛjīs keep to even one of these principles, they may be expected to prosper and not decline, far less all seven! Certainly the Vṛjīs will never be conquered by king Ajātaśatru by force of arms, but only through persuasion (*upalāpana*, i.e. diplomacy) and setting them against one another.” (D 2:77). In due course, however, when the Buddha is in the Great Wood, he prophesizes how the Licchavī would be conquered by Ajātaśatru (Kaliṅgara Sutta, S 20.8) [10:10c].

(2) The conditions for the non-decline of the Saṅgha:

After Varṣakāra has left, the Buddha instructs Ānanda to assemble all the monks in Rājagṛha for his further instructions, this time on the progress of the Saṅgha itself. When the monks are assembled, he expounds to them four more sets of conditions for the welfare of the Saṅgha, i.e. **the conditions for the non-decline of the Saṅgha** (P. *bhikkhu aparāhaniyā dhammā*, D 2:79; A 4:21), and further four sets of teachings, namely:

Seven good qualities (*sapta saddharma/satta saddhamma*, M nos. 8, 53; A 7.63), called “the complete equipment required for insight”.

Seven factors of enlightenment (*sapta bodhyaṅga/satta bojjhaṅga*).

Seven perceptions (*saṃjñā/saññā*), i.e. in terms of meditation.

Six conditions (*śāraṇīya, dharmā/saraṇīya, dhamma*, M 48; A 6.11-12) [6:7].

We shall here only look at the first set of **the conditions for the non-decline of the Saṅgha**, that is the monastic counterpart of the secular conditions for the progress of monastics:

- (1) They hold frequent and well-attended meetings.
- (2) They meet together in harmony, disperse in harmony, and go about their duties to the Saṅgha in harmony.
- (3) They do not authorize what not been authorized already, and do not abolish what has been authorized, but train themselves in accordance with the prescribed training-rules.
- (4) They honour, respect, esteem and salute the elders of long experience and long standing, the fathers and leaders of the Order, and consider them worthy of listening to.
- (5) They do not fall under the influence of craving.
- (6) They delight in forest lodgings.
- (7) They establish themselves in mindfulness with this thought, “Let virtuous comrades in the holy life (P. *peśala sabrahmacarī/pesalā sabrahmacarī*)⁵ who have not come, come here, and let those virtuous comrades who are already here live in comfort.”

(D 2:79; A 4:21)

(b) Ajātaśatru’s wrath

Ajātaśatru apparently had a vile temper. Once a certain **Upaka**, the son of Maṇḍika, and a supporter of Devadatta, came to find out whether the Buddha would praise or blame him. Ajātaśatru thinking that he presumed to abuse the Buddha after the latter had severely censured Devadatta, exclaimed: “What a pestilent fellow is this salt worker’s boy! A scurrilous shameless rogue! To think that he should presume to revile the Blessed One, the Arhant, the Perfect Self-enlightened One! Away with you, Upaka! Let me see you no more!” (A 2:182; Woodward’s tr. A:W 2:190). The Commentary adds that the king had him taken by the scruff and dragged away.

It was during Ajātaśatru’s reign that the two chief disciples passed away. After **Maudgalyāyana** was savagely clubbed to death, Ajātaśatru sent out his spies to uncover the murderers who, when caught, con-

⁵ According to Buddhaghosa, *pesala* = *piya, sīla* (SnA 475).

fessed that they were contracted by some naked ascetics of the Nirgaṇṭha sect (the Jains). The furious king had 500 Nirgaṇṭha ascetics buried waist-deep in the courtyard and their heads ploughed off (DhA 2:66 f.).

9. THE BUDDHA'S DEMISE

(a) Ajātaśatru's grief

Ajātaśatru's contrition over his parricide apparently sublimated him into a faithful devotee in the Buddha and his Sangha. His faith grew over the years and he became increasingly attached to them. When the Buddha finally passed away, his ministers took the greatest care in breaking the sad news to him. On the pretext of protecting the king from the fatal attacks of a bad dream, they placed him in a tank "filled with the four kinds of sweetness" [5] and then broke the devastating news to him. (DA 2:605 f.)

Ajātaśatru fainted and had to be immersed into a further two tanks and the announcement repeated before he realized the import of the incident. His despair was extreme, recalling in tears the virtues of the Buddha and he visited those places that the Buddha had sanctified by his presence. After some difficulties, he obtained his share of the Buddha relics (with seven other claimants) and had them enshrined in a stone stupa in Rājagṛha (D 2:167) [10:22e].

(b) Ajātaśatru's political victories

The very year of the Buddha's passing, Ajātaśatru's ministers, **Varṣakāra and Sunidha**, had built the fortified village of Pāṭalīgrāma on the right bank of the river Ganges (V 1:228; D 2:72 f.; U 87).⁶ Ajātaśatru then went on to annex Kāśī and Kośala, but still had to subdue the Vṛjī confederacy. The war that Ajātaśatru waged against **the Vṛjī confederacy** (especially the Licchavīs of Vaiśālī and the Mallas of Kuśinagarī and Pāpā) continued for many years. The pretext for the conflict was either the refusal of Ceṭaka, king of Vaiśālī, to restore to Ajātaśatru a necklet which had once belonged to Bimbisāra, or a dispute which had arisen between the Licchavīs and Ajātaśatru over the joint exploitation of a diamond mine on the banks of the Ganges.⁷

The Vassakāra Sutta (A 4:16 ff) and the introduction to the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 2:72 ff.) record Varṣakāra consulting the Buddha regarding the Vṛjīs' strength [8a]. Ajātaśatru applied his cunning through his prime minister, Varṣakāra, who pretended that he had barely escape with his life from Ajātaśatru. Having been given refuge and hospitality at Vaiśālī, Varṣakāra lived there for three years, secretly sowing dissension amongst the Vṛjīs.

Three years after the Buddha's passing, **king Ceṭaka of Vaiśālī** mobilized the 18 republican rulers (*gaṇa,rāja*) of Kāśī and Kośala together with the Licchavīs and Mallas in an effort to resist the attack of his southern neighbour. By that time, Varṣakāra's subterfuge of lies and slanders had effectively disunited the Vṛjīs and Ceṭaka's troops. The poor began to hate the rich, and the strong looked down upon the weak.

When the time was right, Ajātaśatru swooped down on the Vṛjīs. The weak Licchavīs refused to stand against him and said: "Let the strong Licchavīs go forward and crush him." Finally, Vaiśālī was taken by means of catapults and heavy chariots of the Magadhans. Ajātaśatru easily destroyed Vaiśālī and massacred its inhabitants, but many escaped.

⁶ By the time Ajātaśatru's son, Udāyi.bhadra, became king the capital of Magadha had moved from Rājagṛha to Pāṭalīgrāma. Between the mid-4th and the late 1st century BCE, **Pāṭalīputra** was the capital of the three successive Magadha dynasties: the Nanda, Maurya, and Śuṅga, and also of the Gupta empire (beginning in early 4th century). Pāṭalīputra occupies roughly the same area as modern Patna.

⁷ Lamotte 1988:92.

However, it was only after sixteen years that the Vṛjīs finally fell under his sway. Since then, the most important Vṛjī tribe, **the Licchavīs**, remained subdued for many centuries until the 4th century CE, when they would regain their power under the Imperial Guptas, with Candragupta I marrying Kumāra,devī, a daughter of the Licchavīs and became the mother of Samudragupta (DA 99; JASB 17 1921:269-271).

10. THE FIRST BUDDHIST COUNCIL

Two months after the Buddha's Final Nirvāṇa, when **the First Council** (the Council of Rājagṛha) was held at the Satta,paṇṇī Cave (Satta,paṇṇī Guhā), Ajātaśatru undertook to be its royal patron (SA 1:9 [6:25]. **The Samanta,pāsādikā**, the Vinaya Commentary, gives an interesting account of how Ajātaśatru became the royal patron of the First Council:

The Elders had all the monasteries repaired during the first month and informed the king: “Maharajah, the repairs to the monasteries are completed. We now wish to recite the Dharma and Vinaya.”

“Very well, venerable sirs, do so with full confidence. **Mine is the wheel of power** (*ājñā,cakra/āñā,cakka*), **let yours be the Wheel of Truth** (*dharma,cakra/dhamma,cakka*). Command of me, venerable sirs, whatever you wish me to do.”

“A place for the monks who make the recital of the Dharma to assemble, Maharajah.”

“Where shall I build it, venerable sirs?”

“It is proper that you build it at the entrance to **the Satta,paṇṇī Guhā** on the side of the Vebhāra mountain, Maharajah.”

“So be it, venerable sirs.”

(VA 1:10)

The Satta,paṇṇī Cave, so called because of a *saptaparṇī* tree (*Aristonia scholaris*) growing nearby, was located on the slope of the Vaibhāra Hill, one of the five hills surrounding Rājagṛha. Cunningham (1871: 531) identifies it as the modern-day Son Bhāṇḍār Cave.

The Mahāvamsa says that Ajātaśatru lived for only 24 years after the Buddha's passing away, bringing the total length of his reign to 32 years (Mahv 2:31 f). Modern scholars say that he died around 459 or 462 BCE (i.e. around the same age). Ajātaśatru was said to have been murdered by his own son, **Udāyibhadra** (Mahv 4:1). After a series of ineffective rulers, his dynasty was replaced by that of Śīśunāga of the Śaiśu,nāga or Licchavī dynasty.

Prasenajit

11. KOŚALA AND PRASENAJIT

Under **king Mahā Kośala** (J 2:237, 403, 4:432, SA 1:120), the kingdom of Kośala (the present-day province of Oudh) had expanded to the district of Vārāṇasī in the south and the Nepalese Terai (occupied by the Śākya), to the north. His son, **Prasenajit** (Pasenadi) was a contemporary and friend of the Buddha. Just as king Bimbisāra was the Buddha's supporter in Magadha, Prasenajit, king of Kośala, was his patron at Śrāvastī. Bimbisāra had, in fact, married a sister of Prasenajit, and when he was killed, she died of grief. The revenue of Kaśī was allocated as part of her dowry, but after Bimbisāra's murder, Prasenajit gave away his daughter to Ajātaśatru with the revenue of the village in question as her wedding gift.

As a ruler, Prasenajit did his best to reform his administration, such as attempting to get rid of bribery and corruption in his court (but here he apparently had little success) (SA 1:74, 100). He valued the companionship of wise and good men like Pokkharasādī and Cankī, to each of whom he respectively gave the villages of Ukkaṭṭhā and Opaśāda free of all taxes. He set up alms-hall which were always open to anyone in need of food or drink (U 2.6).

Prasenajit's commander-in-chief was Bandhula, chief of the Mallas. Afraid that he might become too powerful, the king had him and his 32 sons exterminated through a contrivance with corrupt ministers. In his place, Prasenajit put his nephew **Ḍirgha Cārāyaṇa** (Dīgha Kārāyaṇa), who understandably harboured secret vengeance against him. [17]

12. DAHARA SUTTA

According to the Tibetan sources, Prasenajit became the Buddha's disciple in the second year of the Ministry (Rockhill 49). **The Dahara Sutta**⁸ records this first meeting, at which we find the king referring to the Buddha as being young in years. Prasenajit says that when he asks the six famous teachers [7] whether they have been enlightened, none of them claim so. "So why then should Master Gotama [make such a claim] when he is so young in years and has newly gone forth?"

The Buddha replies that there are **four things that should not be despised and disparaged as "young"**, that is, a kshatriya (warrior noble), a snake, a fire, and a monk. A kshatriya should not be despised as being "young" because one day he might become king and exact harsh punishment on one. A snake should not be despised as "young" because it might attack one. A small fire should not be despised because when it becomes big it might burn one or cause destruction. A monk should not be despised as "young",

381 For if a monk of perfect virtue
Burns on with the fire [of his virtue],
One does not gain sons and cattle,
Nor do one's heirs acquire wealth.
Childless and heirless they become,
Like stumps of palmyra trees.

(S 3.1 = 1:68-70, paraphrased)

Here we see the Buddha's wry humour (speaking at the level of the listener) as he gently chides an unbelieving young kshatriya invoking the archetypal Indian figure of the maligned holy man who deliberately inflicts a curse on his enemies (see, for example, the Samuddaka Sutta, S 11.10 = 1:227 f.). Such grave consequences arise through one's own unwholesome intentions (for a virtuous monk would never curse anyone). At the end of the discourse, Prasenajit declares himself a follower of the Buddha.

13. ATTA,RAKKHITA SUTTA

One day, Prasenajit reports to the Buddha his reflection while he was "alone in solitude", as recorded in **the Atta,rakkhita Sutta**:

Here, Venerable Sir, while I was alone in solitude, a reflection arose in my mind thus: "**Who now protect themselves and who leave themselves unprotected?**" Then, Venerable Sir, it occurred to me, "Those who engage in misconduct of body, speech and mind leave themselves unprotected. Even though a company of elephants may protect them, or a company of cavalry, or a company of chariot troops, or a company of infantry, still they leave themselves unprotected." For what reason? Because their protection is external, not internal; therefore, they leave themselves unprotected.

But **those who engage in good conduct of body, speech and mind protect themselves**. Even though no company of elephants protect them, nor a company of cavalry, nor a company of chariot troops, nor a company of infantry, still they protect themselves. For what reason? Because their protection is internal, not external; therefore, they protect themselves.

So it is, Maharajah! So it is, Maharajah!

⁸ Called the Kumāra,ḍṛṣṭānta Sūtra in the Tibetan tradition, Rockhill 49.

(S 3.5 = 1:73, abridged)

The Kosala Saṃyutta, from which the Atta,rakkhita Sutta comes, contains another short inspiring sutra based of Prasenajit’s reflection with a similar structure, that is, **the Piya Sutta** (S 3.4), where a different question is asked but the same answer applies:

Here, Venerable Sir, while I was alone in solitude, a reflection arose in my mind thus: “**Who now treat themselves as dear (*priya/piya*) and who treat themselves as a foe (*apriya/appiya*)?**” Then, Venerable Sir, it occurred to me: “Those who engage in misconduct of body, speech and mind treat themselves as a foe. Even though they may say, ‘We regard ourselves as dear (P. *piyo no attā ‘ti*)’, still they regard themselves as a foe.” For what reason? Because of their own accord, they act towards themselves in the same way as a foe might act towards a foe. Therefore, they treat themselves as a foe.

But **those who engage in good conduct of body, speech and mind treat themselves as dear.** Even though they may say, “We regard ourselves as a foe (P. *appiyo no attā ‘ti*)”, still they regard themselves as dear. For what reason? Because of their own accord, they act towards themselves in the same way as a dear person might act towards one who is dear. Therefore, they treat themselves as dear.

So it is, Maharajah! So it is, Maharajah!

(S 1:71 f.)

The Buddha then utters the follow verses that reflect the occasion:

- 385 If one regards oneself as dear
One should not yoke oneself to evil,
For happiness is not easily gained
By one who does a wrongful deed.
- 386 When one is seized by the End-maker [Māra]
As one discards the human state,
What can one call truly one’s own?
What does one take when one goes?
What follows one along
Like a shadow that never departs?
- 387 Both the merit and the evil
That a mortal does right here:
This is what is truly one’s own,
This one takes when one goes;
This is what follows one along
Like a shadow than never departs.
- 388 Therefore one should do what is good
As a collection for the future life.
Merit is the support for living beings
[When they arise] in the other world.

(S 1:72, slightly revised from S:B 1:168)

14. JAṬILA SUTTA

Even after becoming the Buddha’s disciple, Prasenajit, however, still does not fail to show respect to the followers of other faiths as recorded in **the Jaṭila Sutta** (S 3.11), which is repeated in **the Ossajjana Sutta**, except for the verses (U 6.2). Once the Blessed One is dwelling in the Mansion of Mṛgāra’s Mother (Mṛgāra,mātuḥ Prāsāda/Migāra,mātu Pāsāda) in the Eastern Park (Pūrv’ārāma/Pubb’ārāma), outside the

eastern gate of Śrāvastī. After his evening retreat, the Buddha emerges and sits by the outer gateway of the Mansion. Then king Prasenajit comes to see him.

Now on that occasion, seven matted-hair ascetics (*jaṭila*), seven Jain monks (*nirgraṇṭha/nigaṇṭha*), seven naked ascetics (*acela*), seven loin-clothed ascetics (*eka,sāṭaka*, “single-robed”) and seven wanderers (*parivrājaka.paribbājaka*), carrying their bundles of requisites pass by not far from the Buddha.

Then king Pasenadī of Kosala rose from this seat, arranged his upper robe over one shoulder, knelt down with his right knee on the ground, and raising his joined hands in reverential salutation towards them, he announced his name three times: “Venerable sirs, I am Pasenadī, king of Kośala....”
(S 1:78)

Then, not long after the ascetics have left, according to the Saṃyutta, the king remarks to the Buddha: “These ascetics, Venerable Sir, are Arhants and those on the path to Arhantship!” In the Udāna account, however, Prasenajit asks the Buddha whether these ascetics are “amongst those who are Arhants or on the path to Arhantship”.⁹

The Buddha replies that it is difficult for a householder like the king who enjoys family life, sense-pleasures and wealth to know whether people like these ascetics are Arhants or on the path to Arhantship. The Buddha then goes on to list **the ways in which one can truly know another**:

Only one who is attentive, not one inattentive; by the wise, not the dullard; and only after a long time, not a short time:

- (1) By living together with someone, his **moral conduct** (*śīla/sīla*) [of body, speech, mind] is known;
- (2) By dealing with someone, his **honesty** (*śaucya/soceyya) is known;
- (3) In adversities, a person’s **fortitude** (*sthāma/thāma*) is known;
- (4) Through discussion with someone, his **wisdom** (*prajñā/paññā*) is known;

(S 1:78 f. = U 65 f.; discussed in detail in the Thānāni Sutta, A 4.192 = 2:187-190)

Prasenajit is delighted at the Buddha’s discourse. Then he confides in the Buddha:

These, Venerable Sir, are **my spies**, undercover agents, coming back after spying out the country. First, information is gathered by them and then I will make a decision. Now, Venerable Sir, when they have washed off the dust and dirt and are freshly bathed and groomed, with their hair and beard trimmed, clad in white garments, they will indulge themselves with the five cords of sensual pleasure that are provided to them.

Then the Buddha, reflecting the occasion, uttered these verses:

A man is not easily known by outward form
Nor should one trust a quick appraisal,
For in the guise of the well controlled
Uncontrolled men move in the world.

Like a counterfeit ear-ring made of clay,
Like a bronze half-cent coated with gold,
Some move about in disguise:
Inwardly impure, outwardly beautiful.

(S 1:79)

⁹ Cf. Śāriputra’s lion-roar recorded in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta and the Sampāsadanīya Sutta and the Buddha’s response [5:25c].

One should not strive all over the place.
One should not be another's man.
One should not live depending on another.
One should not make a business of Dharma.

(U 66)

According to Ireland, the last verse from the Udāna means that a monk should not emulate the unwholesome actions of these king's men by doing the work of a spy. As an ascetic is able to travel about freely, he could be misguided into doing such work. The Buddha apparently is **warning against wrong livelihood** and expressing his disapproval of misusing the outward signs of religion for such a wrong purpose as gathering information for a king to use for military and political ends. (J.D. Ireland, U:I 143 n15)

15. RĀJĀK'ĀRĀMA

(a) Bharu Jātaka

The Commentaries have an interesting account of how Prasenajit comes to build the **Rājāk'ārāma**, his first (and only) monastery for the Buddhists, located in front of the Jetavana in Śrāvastī. It is said that the other ascetics, jealous of the Buddha's popularity, desire their own monastery close to the Jetavana. To make sure their wish is realized, they bribe Prasenajit with 100,000 pieces of money.

The Buddha discovers their intention through the great uproar they make while preparing the preliminaries for the building. The Buddha, fearing endless dissensions that would attend such a proximity of rivals, sends Ānanda to see the king to have it stopped, but the king refuses to see Ānanda, nor, later, the chief disciples, Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana. (It is said that this ill-intentioned discourtesy led his losing his throne before his death.)

The Buddha himself then goes to see Prasenajit, who entertains him to a meal-offering. At the end of the meal, the Buddha preaches **the Bharu Jātaka** (J 213), gently warning him of the evil of bribery and creating opportunity for virtuous people to quarrel amongst themselves. Prasenajit is filled with remorse and have the ascetics expelled. Realizing that he has never built a monastery for the Buddha and his monks, he goes on to build the Rājāk'ārāma for them. (SA 3:283 f.; J 2:170).

(b) Puggala Sutta

The sutras often record the Buddha reminding the king of Kośala to walk on the right path. One of the most famous exhortations is on the four kinds of persons as recorded in **the Puggala Sutta** (S 3.21), which is also found in the Puggala Paññatti (Pug 4.19); but in the Dīgha (D 3:233) and the Aṅguttara, the list is given without similes or verses (A 4.85 = 2:85):

Maharajah, there are these **four kinds of persons found in the world**. What four?

The one heading from darkness to darkness.

The one heading from darkness to light.

The one heading from light to darkness.

The one heading from light to light.

The one heading from darkness to darkness is a person born in some low, poor, or difficult family, who is ugly, sickly, handicapped, disabled in some way; but he continues to engage in evil conduct of body, speech and mind. As such, he is reborn in a suffering state.

The one heading from darkness to light is a person born in similar unfortunate circumstances, but engages in good conduct of body, speech and mind. As such, he is reborn in a happy state.

The one heading from light to darkness is a person born in some high, wealthy and good family, who is good-looking, healthy, graceful, able; but he engages in evil conduct of body, speech and mind. As such, he is reborn in a suffering state.

The one heading from light to light is a person born in some high, wealthy and good family, who is good-looking, healthy, graceful, able; and he continues to engage in good conduct of body, speech and mind. As such, he is reborn in a happy state. He is like one who crosses over from palanquin to palanquin, horseback to horseback, from elephant to elephant, or from mansion to mansion.

(S 1:93-96; Pug 4.19; D 3:33; A 2:85; abridged)

(c) **Appamāda Sutta I**

Once at Śrāvastī, Prasenajit asks the Buddha: “Is there, Venerable Sir, one thing which secures both kinds of good, the good pertaining to the present life and that pertaining to the future life?”

“There is,” the Buddha replied. “**Diligence** (*apramāda/appamāda*). Maharajah. Just as the footprints of all living beings that walk fit into the footprint of the elephant, and the elephant’s footprint is declared to be their chief by reason of its size, so diligence is the one thing which secures both kinds of good, the good pertaining to the present life and that pertaining to the future life.” [Cf. 5:29]

(S 3.17 = 1:86 f. abridged.)

16. MALLIKĀ

(a) **The Kummāsa,piṇḍa Jātaka**

The story of the virtuous and beautiful **Mallikā**, the daughter of the chief garland-maker of Śrāvastī, is told in the Introduction to **the Kummāsa,piṇḍa Jātaka** (J 415). When she is 16, she brings three rice-dumplings (*kulmāṣa/kummāsa*) in her flower-basket. As she is leaving town for the flower-garden, she meets the Buddha and his Order. She gives the three dumplings to him and salutes him at his feet, taking her joy as object of meditation.

The Buddha then smiles, and Ānanda asks him for the reason. The Buddha replies that through the merit of her offering she would that very day become the chief queen of the king of Kośala. Mallikā leaves for the flower-garden and happily goes about her work singing.

Now on that very day, Prasenajit loses a battle with Ajātaśatru and flees in defeat. As he rides on his horse, he hears Mallikā singing, and so her karma ripens. When the king sees that she does not run away but approaches him and takes hold of the bridle at the horse’s nose. When, on asking her, the king learns that she is not married, he dismounts and being wearied with wind and sun, rests on her lap. Then, on rising, she brings Mallikā to his palace and marries her, making her chief queen, becoming the subject of the city’s talk. (J 3:406)

(b) **The Mallikā Sutta**

The Mallikā Sutta (S 3.8) gives a heart-warming account of feminine wisdom. One day, while they are on the upper terrace of the palace, Prasenajit asks Mallikā: “Is there, Mallikā, anyone more dear to you than yourself?” He expects that she would say: “You are dearer to me than myself.” Then, he would say the same thing, and that way they would strengthen their bond of mutual love. But Mallikā answers in all honesty (P. *sa,rasen’eva*): “**There is no one, Maharajah, more dear to me than myself.** But is there anyone, Maharajah, more dear to you than yourself?”

“For me, too, Mallikā, there is no one more dear than myself.”

Then Prasenajit having left the palace, visits the Buddha and relates to him his conversation with Mallikā. Understanding the import of the occasion, the Buddha utters this verse:

Having traversed all the quarters with the mind,
One finds none anywhere dearer than oneself.
Likewise, each person holds himself most dear.
As such, one who loves himself should not harm others.

(S 1:75 = U 47)¹⁰

(c) **Dhītā Sutta**

Once in Śrāvastī when Prasenajit is with the Buddha, a messenger arrives to inform the king that queen Mallikā has given birth to a **daughter**. Prasenajit, however, is displeased with the news, thinking, “I elevated queen Mallikā from a poor family to the rank of queen. If she had given birth to a son she would have won great honour, but now she has lost that opportunity.”

The Buddha, noticing that Prasenajit is displeased, utters these verses:

408 A woman, O lord of the people,
May turn out better than a man:
She may be turn out to be wise and virtuous,
A devoted wife, revering her mother-in-law.

409 The son to whom she give birth
May become a hero, O lord of the land.
The son of such a blessed woman
May even rule the realm.

(S 1:86)

This daughter that Mallikā gives birth to is most likely the **princess Vajrī** (Vajīrī) (M 2:110), who is later married to king Ajātaśatru of Magadha, after the two kings are reconciled. (S:B 407 n238)

17. DHAMMA,CETIYA SUTTA

The Dhamma,cetiya Sutta (the Discourse on the Monuments to the Dharma, M 89) records the tragic end of king Prasenajit. While the Buddha is residing in the town of Medataḷumpa (v.l. Medaḷumpa; or Ulumpa, DhA 1:356), king Prasenajit visits him. At that time, both the Buddha and the king were 80 years old (that is, during the last year of the Ministry). Prasenajit and his retinue make a journey of three leagues (some 30 km) from Nagaraka (also in Śākya country) to Medataḷumpa.

When Prasenajit arrives at the monastery, the Buddha is in his Fragrant Chamber. Leaving his sword, turban and royal insignia with **Dīrgha Cārāyaṇa** [11], his commander-in-chief, Prasenajit goes alone quietly and knocks on the Buddha’s cell door. When the Buddha appears, he profusely shows his respect to the Buddha.¹¹ “But, Maharajah, what reason do you see for doing such supreme honour to this body and for showing such friendship?” Prasenajit then goes on to compare his experiences with meeting the Buddha’s disciples and meeting the followers of other sects.

...Venerable Sir, kings quarrel with kings, nobles with nobles, brahmins with brahmins, householders with householders; mother quarrels with child, child with mother, father with child, child with father; brother quarrels with brother, brother with sister, sister with brother, sister with sister, friend with friend.

¹⁰ Cf. S:B 401 n212 for an allusion to the Upanishads.

¹¹ It is at this point that Dīrgha absconds with the regalia to make Virūdhaka king [19].

But here I see monks living in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, **blending like milk and water**, looking at each other with kindly eyes. I do not see any other assembly elsewhere with such concord.

Again, Venerable Sir...I have seen some recluses and brahmins who are lean, wretched, unsightly, jaundiced, with veins standing out on their limbs, such that people would not look at them again...

But here I see monks **smiling and cheerful**, sincerely joyful, plainly delighting, their faculties fresh, living at ease, unruffled, subsisting on what others give, abiding with mind [as aloof] as a wild deer's... Surely, these venerable ones have certainly realized the great and full significance of the Blessed One's teaching.

(M 1:121)

Prasenajit then speaks of his hectic royal life and duties (in spite of his absolute power), and in contrast, how peaceful and orderly, the Order of Monks is: "It is wonderful, it is marvelous how an assembly can be so well disciplined without force or weapons! Indeed, I do not see any other assembly anywhere else so well disciplined."

Prasenajit then speaks of his two inspectors (*sthapati/thapati*), **Ṛṣidatta (Isidatta) and Purāṇa**:¹²

...[who] eat my food and use my carriages; I provide them with a livelihood and bring them fame. In spite of this, they are less respectful to me than they are towards the Blessed One. Once, when I had gone out leading an army and was testing these inspectors, Isidatta and Purāṇa, I happened to put up in very cramped quarters. Then these two inspectors, Isidatta and Purāṇa, after spending much of the night talking Dharma, lay down with their heads in the direction where they had heard that the Blessed One was staying, and with their feet towards me! I thought, "This is wonderful! This is marvelous!..."

Again, Venerable Sir, the Blessed One is a kshatriya and I am a kshatriya; the Blessed One is a Kośalan and I am a Kośalan; the Blessed One is 80 years old and I am 80 years old. Since that is so, I think it proper to do such supreme honour to the Blessed One and to show such friendship.

(M 2:124 f.)

When the king has left the Buddha informs the Sangha that the king has uttered "monuments to the Dharma" (*dharmacaitya/dhamma, cetiya*), that is, words of reverence to any of the Three Jewels. This apparently is a layman's version of the lion-roar (*siṃha, nāda/sīha, nāda*).

18. PRASENAJIT'S DEVOTION TO THE BUDDHA

From the sutras and stories, we can deduce that Prasenajit is a devoted disciple and admirer of the Buddha. When he meets the Buddha, he would bow his head down to his feet, covering them with kisses and stroking them (M 2:120). It is said that that Prasenajit goes to see the Buddha thrice a day, sometimes with only a small bodyguard. Prasenajit's devotion to the Three Jewels is attested by **the Kosala Saṃyutta**, a whole *saṃyutta* in his name, the third Connected Collection of the Chapter With Verses (Sagāthā Vagga) of the Saṃyutta Nikāya, comprising a total of 25 discourses (S ch. 3).

In **the Aggañña Sutta**, the Buddha explains why Prasenajit is so devoted to him:

King Pasenadi of Kosala knows: "The ascetic Gotama has gone forth from the neighbouring clan of the Sakyans." Now, the Sakyans are vassals (*anuyukta/anuyutta*) of the king of Kosala. They offer him humble service and salute him, rise and do him homage and pay him fitting service.

¹² Ṛṣidatta and Purāṇa. At the time of their deaths both were declared by the Buddha to be Once-returners. (A 6.44 = 3:348).

And just as the Sakyans offer the king humble service...so likewise does the king offer humble service to the Tathāgata, thinking: “If the ascetic Gotama is well-born, I am ill-born; if the ascetic Gotama is strong, I am weak; if the ascetic Gotama is pleasant to look at, I am ill-favoured; if the ascetic Gotama is influential, I am of little influence.”

Now it is because of honouring the Dharma, making much of the Dharma, esteeming the Dharma, doing reverent homage to Dharma, the king Pasenadi does humble service to the Tathāgata and pays him fitting service.

(D 3:83; cf. D 1:60 for respect shown to ascetics in general.)

19. PRASENAJIT’S TRAGIC DEATH

While Prasenajit was conversing with the Buddha (as reported in the Dhamma, cetiya Sutta) [17], Dīrgha Cārāyaṇa thought, “Previously, after conferring in private with the recluse Gotama, the king arrested my uncle and his 32 sons. Perhaps this time he will arrest me.” Dīrgha, who was in secret collusion with his son **Virūḍhaka** (Viḍudabha), then absconded with the retinue and the royal insignia entrusted to him. The royal insignia, which included the fan, parasol and sandals, were rushed to the capital, Śrāvastī, where Virūḍhaka was enthroned. (MA 3:352; J 4:151; DhA 1:356)

The forlorn Prasenajit, left only with a horse and a female servant, rushed to Rājagṛha to get the help of his nephew, Ajātaśatru. It was rather late when he arrived at Rājagṛha and the city gates were closed. Exhausted he lay down in a hall outside the city, and died of exhaustion and exposure in the night. Ajātaśatru arranged for him a grand funeral but did nothing to Virūḍhaka who had just ascended the throne. (MA 2:753 f.; J 4:131).

When Virūḍhaka became king, he remembered his grudge against the Śākya that began when he discovered that his mother, the Śākya Vṛṣabha, kṣatriyā, was actually of low birth. His father, Prasenajit, had not been aware of this fact when he married her. It is said that Virūḍhaka nearly exterminated the Śākya. The Buddha had perceived Virūḍhaka’s intentions. However, on discovering the consequence of the karma of the Śākya in poisoning the waters of the river, decided not to frustrate Virūḍhaka’s expedition. [7:21]

Virūḍhaka set up camp on the dry bed of the river Aciravatī. However, during the night, a sudden swelling of the waters drowned him and a large part of his army. He was succeeded by his son, **Uttara-sena**, who claimed part of the Buddha’s relic together with the other claimants.

Later legends claim that those who escaped the massacre founded towns and kingdoms in the Himalayas, on the banks of the Ganges, or in Northwest India. According to Xuanzang, one of the Śākya escaped to Udyāna (in extreme northwest India) and became king there. In the 6th century, the monk Vimokṣa, prajñā or Vimokṣa, sena claimed to be a descendent of a Śākya who had been saved from the massacre.

20. CONCLUSION

The success of Buddhism as a world religion has its roots in the contributions of these three kings, especially of **Bimbisāra**, whose enlightened reign “inspired a new form of flexibility that loosened social barriers and the hold of outmoded tribal customs, particularly in the resurgent urban areas of culture” (Lannoy, 1971:13). The state of Magadha was further unified by the establishment of a new type of **army**. Where formerly there were only armed tribes, Bimbisāra’s army owed allegiance to him alone and was the main support of his absolute power. The army also ensured **protection of trade-routes and right of private ownership** among commercial entrepreneurs. This is something new in Indian history.

Despite his political might, Bimbisāra showed great spiritual strength by abdicating in favour of his own ambitious son, **Ajātaśatru**, and suffered in silence from his son’s atrocities against him, out of great

love for him. Ajātaśatru, in his turn, could not find any peace ever since he murdered his own father. The silence that he encountered during first meeting with the Buddha as a parricide deafened him with fear, but after that opened his mind to spirituality as recorded in **the Sāmañña,phala Sutta** and his patronage of the First Buddhist Council. The tragic Prasenajit enjoyed greater moments of inner silence ever since he became the Buddha's follower.

Through their royal patronages, these world men of the world, wielders of **the wheel of power** (*ājñā,cakra*) supported the progress of the Buddha's **wheel of truth** (*dharmā,cakra*) [10]. They were an essential part of the great Indian social revolution that changed not only India forever, but also the world. It is a social and spiritual storm whose centre is a thundering silence that is still being heard today and that continues to grow.



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