



NAḶNIKA'S STORY
THE SEDUCTION OF AN INNOCENT

JĀ 526 TRANSLATED BY ĀNANDAJOTI BHIKKHU

Naḷinikā's Story

(or: The Seduction of an Innocent)

Naḷinikājātakavaṇṇanā (Jā 526)

Translated by Ānandajoti Bhikkhu

Introduction

The story is an interesting, if highly improbable, fable: a sage lives alone in the Himālayas, there is semen in the urine he passes, and a deer who happens to eat the grass in that place gets pregnant from it. A human boy is later born to the deer and he is brought up in complete seclusion from mankind, and most importantly, from womankind.

The boy's ascetic power becomes so great that Sakka in his heaven is worried by it and causes a drought to occur in the country and blames it on the boy. He then convinces the King to send his daughter to seduce him and to break his power. The King and his daughter accept Sakka's reasoning and in good faith - and for the benefit of the country - agree to the plot.

The girl dresses up as an ascetic and while the Father (the Bodhisatta) is away gathering roots and fruits in the forest, she manages to seduce the boy, who has never seen a woman before, though she does so with a completely unbelievable story.

Through their revelling the boy does indeed lose his powers, the girl then makes off, and when his Father returns the boy who has become infatuated with his new friend, tells him all about it, only to be instructed and rebuked by his Father, and repent his actions.

What happens next seems not to have interested the story-teller as, apart from the fate of the boy, who regains his former powers, he

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doesn't inform us. Once the boy had his powers back Sakka's seat must have glowed again, but whether he let it be, or stood up for a lifetime is not revealed.

It is interesting to note that this is not the only story of Isisīṅga that appears in the Jātakas, there is another, and somewhat similar, story just a few pages before, and which is referred to in our story. That is Jātaka 523, the Alambusājātaka, but there Sakka chooses a heavenly nymph to seduce the ascetic.

The outcome is the same, the sage is seduced, repents and Sakka is thwarted, but for some reason he does not seem upset, in fact he grants a boon to the seductress. The stories are, of course, in neither case, to be taken seriously, it is not in the logic of their events, but in their telling, that the story-teller has won his friends.

The story also appears in the Mahāvastu (Jones' translation pp. 139-147), but Ekaśṛṅga, as he is known there, is the Bodhisattva, and Nalinī is Yaśodharā in an earlier existence. There is a variation in the story as without his knowing it, Ekaśṛṅga is married to the girl and has to take up his responsibilities, eventually becoming the King and having 32 children.

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The story is also known to the Hindu epics the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata, with many further variations. In the former Ekaśṛṅga was the chief priest when the king Dasaratha performed a sacrifice in order to gain children, and as the consequence there were born Rāma, Bhārata, and the twins Lakṣmana and Śatrughna!

Because of its sexual content the Pāḷi version of the story has never been translated in full before. In the English version presented here the word-analysis is omitted as it only makes sense in the context of the Pāḷi text.

Ānandajoti Bhikkhu

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[The Occasion]

“The country is dried up.”¹

Now while the Teacher was living in Jeta's Wood he told this about the seductions of a former wife.² And in regard to this story, he asked the monk what was the cause of his dissatisfaction, and he said: It is because of my former wife.

“Monk, this one has been unbeneficial to you in the past also, and having lost the absorptions because of her, you came to a great calamity,” and after saying that he told a story about³ the past.

* * *

In the past, when King Brahmadata was ruling in Bārāṇasī, the Awakening One was born in a noble and wealthy brāhmaṇa family, and when he came of age he learned a craft.

¹ The Commentary on the Jātakas always begin by quoting a line from the first verse to be explained.

² Lit: *former second*.

³ Lit: *produced, brought up, fetched*, figuratively it is used in these contexts to mean he recited or told a story about the past.

Later, after going-forth in the Seer's ordination and attaining the absorptions and deep knowledges, he made his dwelling in the area of the Himālayas.⁴

Then at the place where the Seer was urinating, one deer ate grass mixed with semen and drank the water. So much was her mind bound to him that, when she became pregnant, after going somewhere and eating the grass there, she wandered around in the neighbourhood of his hermitage.

The Great Being after examining the facts understood the reason. Afterwards she gave birth to a human boy. The Great Being brought him up with a Father's love,⁵ and named him Isisiṅga, the Seer's Horn.

Now when he had come of age his Father gave him the going-forth and taught him the preliminary meditation exercise.⁶ In no long time, he attained the absorptions and the deep knowledges and amused himself with the bliss of absorption, and had awful power and great resolve.

⁴ *Himavanta* means possessed of snows; *Himālaya* means the region of snow; they both refer to the same mountainous area around the north of India.

⁵ Lit: *with one having love for a child (or son)*.

⁶ Kasiṅga meditation is a concentration exercise on a coloured disk.

Because of the power of his virtue Sakka's dwelling place shook. Reflecting, Sakka knew the reason for it, and thinking: I will break his virtue through some means or other, for three long years he prevented rain in the whole kingdom of Kāsī, until the kingdom was as though burnt by fire.

With an unsuccessful harvest the people became oppressed by famine, and they blamed it on the impurity of the King. Then they stood at the King's window and asked: Why is this? saying: “Great King, for three years the sky-god hasn't rained, and the whole kingdom is dried up, people are suffering, make the sky-god rain, King.”⁷

The King established the virtuous practices and maintained the fast-day, but was still unable to make the rain fall down.

Then in the middle of the night, Sakka entered and illuminated the royal chamber, and stood in the air. The King, having seen him, asked:

“Who are you?”

“I am Sakka,”

“What have you come for?”

⁷ The word *deva* in Pāḷi carries a number of meanings: a *god* or *deity*, *the sky*, *a rain cloud*, *a king*. Here they are asking the King (*Deva*) to make the sky (*deva*) rain.

“Does the sky-god rain on your kingdom, Great King?”

“He doesn't rain.”

“But do you know the reason for it not raining?”

“I do not know.”

“Great King, in the area of the Himālayas lives an ascetic named Isisinga who has awful power and great resolve. When the sky-god rains regularly he becomes angry and glares at the sky, therefore the sky-god does not rain.”⁸

“But now what is to be done in this case?”

“When his power is broken, the sky-god will rain.”

“But who is able to break his power?”

“Your daughter, Great King, Naḷinikā is able. After summoning her, send her to him saying: After going to such and such a place, break the ascetic's power.”

Then, after advising the King, he returned to his own place in Heaven.

⁸ This is a deception of the part of Sakka, of course, and he is basically tempting the King to do what he next suggests through this false information.

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The King on the following day discussed it with his ministers, and summoning his daughter, he spoke the first verse:

“The country is dried up, and the Kingdom will be destroyed,
Come, Naḷinikā, do you go and bring the brāhmaṇa for me.”⁹ ¹⁰

Having heard that, she spoke the second verse:

“I cannot bear suffering, King, and I have no skill in roads,
How will I go through a wood inhabited by elephants?”

Then the King spoke two verses:

“You can go through this prosperous country with an elephant and
a chariot,
And with a wooden raft - you can go like this, Naḷinikā.
Go and take with you elephants, horses, soldiers and nobles,
By your beauteous form you will bring him under your control.”

Thus he spoke with his daughter about what shouldn't be spoken of in order to protect his Kingdom. She accepted the proposition saying: It is good.

⁹ Both the King and the daughter are seen to be acting in good faith in order to save the Kingdom, so this is by no means a simple seduction story.

¹⁰ Note that in this version I have omitted the word analysis which only makes sense along with the Pāḷi words it is explaining. See the Text and Translation section for the full text.

[The Seduction]

Then having given her all she required, he sent her off with the ministers. The ministers took her and arrived at the borderlands and set up the camp there, and having the King's daughter taken up they entered the Himālayas with a forester who knew the path, and in the morning-time arrived near to the area of the Seer's hermitage.

At that time the Buddha-to-be left his son behind in the hermitage, and had himself entered the wilds looking for various kinds of fruit.

The forester approached his hermitage, and standing near that lovely place, pointed it out and spoke two verses to Naḷinikā:

“Marked by the sign of the plantain, surrounded by the Himālayan
birch,¹¹

Here is seen Isisiṅga's delightful hermitage.

Here is seen the smoke of a fire,

I think it is emitted from the very powerful Isisiṅga's sacred fire.

When the Bodhisatta entered the wilds, the Ministers surrounded the hermitage and stood guard over it, then they made the King's daughter take the guise of a Seer, fully clothed with a golden bark-robe, and decorating her with all decorations, made her take a pretty yo-yo fastened with a string, and sent her to the hermitage, while they

¹¹ The *bhūrja* or *bhojpatr*, which is also known in English as the Himalayan birch or Jacquemon tree, *Betula utilis* D.Don.

themselves stood outside keeping guard. Amusing herself with the yo-yo she entered the end of the walking path.

At that time Isisiṅga was sitting on a stone bench at the door of the leaf-hut. Seeing her coming he rose in fear and trembling, and entering the leaf-hut, he stood inside. After going to the door of the leaf-hut she amused herself nearby.

The Teacher explaining the meaning further spoke three verses:

“Having seen her coming, adorned with jewelled earrings,
Isisiṅga fearfully entered the leaf-covered hermitage.
She amused herself with her yo-yo at the door of the hermitage,
Revealing her limbs, she displayed her secret charms.

After seeing the yogini amusing herself with the yo-yo at the leaf-hut,

And coming forth from the hermitage, he spoke these words:

‘Hey! What is the name of the tree such a fruit comes from?

Having thrown it afar it returns, it doesn't go away from you.’ ”

Then she spoke this verse about the trees:

“My hermitage, Holy Sir, is close to Gandhamādana,¹²

There are trees on the mountain that such a fruit comes from,

¹² The name of a mountain in the Himālayas, the exact location of which is unclear; the name means *intoxicating with its fragrance*.

Having thrown it afar it returns, it doesn't go away from me.”

Thus she spoke a falsehood.

Having faith, and thinking: This is an ascetic, he made a friendly welcome and spoke this verse:

“Come, good Sir, eat in this hermitage,
Receive what I can give of foot-oil and food,
Please sit, good Sir, here in this hermitage,
Eat, good Sir, the roots and fruits.”

She entered the leaf-hut and while sitting on the reed mat her golden bark-robe fell in two and her body was uncovered. The ascetic, having never before seen a woman's body, thinking: This is a wound,¹³ said this:

“What is this in between your thighs
It appears so dark and slippery,
Declare to me that which I ask about,
Why is it your genitals enter into a cavity?”

Then deceiving him she spoke this pair of verses:

“While I was roaming in the woods in search of roots and fruits,
I came across a bear, very fierce in appearance,
He ran up and fell upon me with violence,
He pushed me down and pulled off my penis.

¹³ ChS: *vaṇṇo*, [this is] beautiful.

This wound is therefore itching and irritating,
I do not receive any comfort at any time,
You are able, good Sir, to remove this itch,
When asked, dear Sir, please do this good thing for a brāhmaṇa.

Believing the lies about her condition, thinking: If I can make you happy in this way, having looked at the area, he spoke the next verse:

“Your wound appears to be deep and red,
It is big, fresh and smells like it's decaying,
I will make you some remedial decoction,
Like that, good Sir, you will be at perfect ease.”

After that Naḷinikā spoke this verse:

“Not through a charm-remedy, or a remedial decoction,
Nor through medicine, Holy One, will the itch go away,
Please remove the itch gently with your penis,
Like that I will come to be at perfect ease.”

Thinking: This is the truth he speaks, not knowing that through engaging in sexual intercourse virtue is broken, and the absorptions are lost, being ignorant and having never seen a woman before, because she spoke of medicine, he engaged in sexual intercourse with her.

Then his virtue was broken and his absorptions were lost.

After having sexual intercourse two or three times, they became tired and left the leaf-hut and descended into the lake and washed themselves. Having eased his fatigue and sitting again in the leaf-hut,

still thinking: This is an ascetic, he asked about her residence and spoke this verse:

“From here, good Sir, where is your hermitage?
Do you, good Sir, take delight in the wilds?
Do you have abundant roots and fruits?
Do you, good Sir, not risk injury from predators?

Then Naḷīnikā spoke four verses:

“From here straight in the northerly direction.
The river Khemā moves through the Himālayas ,
On the bank of that river is my delightful hermitage,
If you like, good Sir, you can come and see my hermitage.
Mango, Sal, plum, and rose-apple trees,
The Cassia, and the blossoming trumpet-flower tree,
All around the bird-men sing,
If you like, good Sir, you can come and see my hermitage.
There are Palmyra and roots and fruits for me,
Well-endowed with beauty and good scent,
That portion of the land is indeed well-endowed,
If you like, good Sir, you can come and see my hermitage.
Abundant roots and fruits are there,
Endowed with beauty, scent and taste,
But when hunters come to that district I say:
Do not take from here my roots and fruits.”

Having heard that, the ascetic, wanting to wait until his Father had returned, spoke this verse:

“My Father has gone searching for roots and fruits,
He will return here at evening time,
We both can go to your hermitage then,
After Father has come back from collecting roots and fruits.”

Because of that she thought: “Having grown up just in this monastery he doesn't know my femininity, but his Father, after seeing me, understanding, and saying: What did you do here? and hitting me with his carrying pole, will break my head. Therefore before he comes it is good for me to go, my work in coming here is finished.”

Telling him the way to come to her, she spoke the next verse:

“There are many other well-disposed sages,
Royal sages, living along the road,
Please ask them about my hermitage,
They will guide you to my neighbourhood.”

Then making her getaway and leaving the hermitage, she said to him: You wait (here), and she went back to the road she had arrived on with the ministers. Then after taking her back to the camp, they eventually reached Bārāṇasī.

Sakka was satisfied that day and made the sky-god rain down on the whole of the kingdom, and because of that there was plenty of food in the country.

After she had left, the ascetic Isisinga's body developed a fever. Trembling he entered the leaf-hut and covered himself with his bark cloth and lay down grieving.

[The Sons' Praise]

After coming in the evening the Awakening One, not seeing his son, said: Where has he gone? And after putting down his carrying pole and entering the leaf-hut, he saw him lying there and said: Dear, what has happened? and while rubbing his back, he spoke three verses:

“You have no broken firewood, you have not brought the water,
You have not attended to the fire, what are you thinking of, lazy
one?

Broken firewood and the sacrificial fire,
You, an ascetic, peacefully living the Holy life,
Preparing my stool and setting up water -
Previously you delighted in excellence.

But now you have no broken firewood, you have not brought the
water,
You have neglected the fire, and the food is not ready,
And today you do not converse with me,
Why are you wasting away and suffering?

After hearing his Father's words, he spoke about the reason:

“There came here a yogi, a Holy One,
Very beautiful, slender, he leads,

Neither too tall nor too short,
That venerable one had very black hair.

Being beardless and youthful,
On his neck was something shaped like our support bowl,
With two bumps on his blessed chest,
Like resplendent golden globules.¹⁴

His face was very beautiful,
Having ears hanging down with curled tips,
Which glittered when that youth walked around,
As did the well-fastened ball of locks on his head.

Also he had four fastenings,
Blue, yellow, red and white, Which flew about when that youth
walked around,
Like a flock of parrots in the rainy season.

He does not wear a girdle made of grass,
It is no normal covering for the ascetic,
It glitters, while clinging between his buttocks,
Like flashes of lightning in the firmament.

¹⁴ The *tinduka* (or *tiṇḍuka*) is a fruit tree. Flora and fauna describes the *tiṇḍuka* thus: *a medium-sized evergreen tree with spreading branches sometimes reaching almost to the ground, a fragrant white flower and globose fruit covered with soft red velvety hair.*

Without thistles and without stalks,¹⁵
Beneath the navel, around his waist,
Without striking them they always play,
Dear Father, the fruit of what tree are these?

His locks are very beautiful,
Having many sweet-smelling curls on top,
The two sides of his head were divided in a lovely fashion,
Oh, that my locks might be like that!

But when his locks fall down,
They are endowed with a beautiful scent,
Like a blue lotus pervading the wind,
So this hermitage is perfumed by his hair.

Even the dust of his body is very beautiful,
The dust on my body is not of such a kind,
He emits a perfume bestirred by the wind,
Like a blossoming wood at the height of the hot season.

He throws the fruit of a tree upon the earth,
Having a good form, pleasant and beautiful,
Thrown it comes back to his hand,
Dear Father, what sort of fruit is that?

¹⁵ Both of these words are obscure and therefore the meaning is unclear. PED (s.v. *vaṅṅa*): *avaṅṅa* (of *thana*, the breast of a woman) not on a stalk (i. e. well-formed, plump).

His teeth are very beautiful,
Pure, even and like noble pearls,
They gladden the mind when uncovered,
Does he not eat vegetables with them?

Smooth, flowing, swift and soft,
Straight, not haughty or fickle was his speech,
His cry was pleasant like the sweet sound of the cuckoo,
Stirring the heart, it surely delights my mind.

A full sound, not speaking too much,
Surely not applied to study of the texts,
I desire to see him again and again,
That young man, whom I called my friend.

He had a wound that was very smooth of all sides,
Broad, well-made, looking like a wet leaf,
With that the youth, having covered me over,
Pressed down his open thighs with his buttocks.

Shining, bedazzling and illuminating,
Like flashes of lightning in the firmament.
His soft arms had glossy down,
His beautiful round fingers were resplendent.

Having smooth limbs, and short bodily hair,
His long fingernails were red at the tips,
Embracing me with his soft arms,
Beautiful, delighting, he attended to me.

Like the cotton of trees, resplendent,
Having very golden palms, round and beautiful skin,
Having been touched by those soft hands,
Though he has gone from here, Father, they still torment me.

He surely did not carry a pole and basket,
He surely did not break his firewood,
He surely did not cut down a tree with an axe,
There were no callouses on his hands.

A bear had caused his wound,
He said to me: please make me happy,
What I did for him was my pleasure,
And he said: I am happy, Pious One.

This rug made with creeper leaves
Is scattered all about by me and by him.
Then weary, after delighting in the water,
We ran back again to the leaf-hut.

Father, today we did not recite the mantras,
Nor offer the fire-sacrifice, nor the extended sacrifice,¹⁶
Nor can I eat those roots and fruits,
Until I see that Holy One again.

¹⁶ SED: *yajñā-tantra, n. extension of a sacrifice.*

For sure you will know, Father,
In what place that Holy One lives,
Let me go quickly to that place, Father,
Do not let me die in your hermitage!

The wood has beautiful blossoms, I have heard,
Resounding with birds, inhabited by flocks of birds,
Let me go quickly to that wood, Father,
Before I forsake my life in this hermitage.

[The Father's Advice]

After hearing the nonsense of that nonsensical child, the Great Being, knowing: His virtue will be broken by this woman, advised him with six verses:

“In this resplendent wood,
Inhabited by heavenly musicians, gods and angels,
Where the sages are always dwelling,
You must not become discontent.

Some are friends, and then some are not,
They have love for your relatives and friends,
But this one is contemptible: he who does not know,
For whom there should be devotion, or from whence he came.¹⁷

¹⁷ I.e. one who does not know his lineage, which was the way to establish his status in ancient India.

Through living together friends are connected again and again,
That friend who is not met with, through non-association is
destroyed.

If you will see this Holy One again,
If you will talk with this Holy One again,
Just as a successful harvest by the great waters,
So this ascetic virtue will be quickly taken away.

If you will see this Holy One again,
If you will talk with this Holy One again,
Just as a successful harvest by the great waters,
So this power will be quickly taken away.

There are beings, Dear, living in this
World of men having different forms,
A wise man does not associate with them,
Through contact with them the Holy life is destroyed.”

Having heard his Father's speech, thinking: It seems she is a demoness,
afraid and his mind repulsed, he made him forgive him, saying:
“Father, I will not go, forgive me.”

After comforting him he said: Come, young man, develop friendliness,
compassion, gladness and equanimity, and he explained the
development of the (four) spiritual states. Having practiced in that
way he again attained the absorptions and the deep knowledges.

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After giving this Dhamma teaching, and showing the Truths, he made the connection and at the conclusion of the Truths that dissatisfied monk was established in the fruition of Stream-Entry.

The Buddha said: at that time Naḷinikā was his former wife, Isisīṅga was the dissatisfied monk, and I was the Father.

Naḷinikā's Story is Finished

The story is an interesting, if highly improbable, fable: a boy is born to a deer and is brought up in complete seclusion from womankind. The boy's ascetic power becomes so great that Sakka in his heaven is worried by it and causes a drought to occur in the country and blames it on the boy. He then convinces the King to send his daughter to seduce him and to break his power.