

MOTIVATING THE CHILDREN FOR READING *JĀTAKA* TALES

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Introduction:

Today, it is an obvious fact that almost all moral, cultural and religious values of the society are rapidly eroded. The huge number of crimes such as abduction, homicides, suicides, rapes and robberies substantiates the above fact. This pathetic and tragic situation drastically goes up day by day and absolutely affects the existence of the human beings and their future. It is an apparent fact that at present, the students of schools, universities and *Dhamma* schools are not interested in reading. Instead of going to *Dhamma* schools on Sundays, some children are forced to attend their tuition classes by their parents. This is really a very pathetic situation of the nation. Hence, it is the duty of the authorities concerned to pay their special attention to this miserable situation. Reading *jātaka* tales should be made compulsory for all the children in Sri Lanka, through which reading habit can be inculcated and ultimately their morality can be promoted. They can easily learn many lessons from *Jātaka* Tales, which will correct their behaviour to a greater extent. For example, we must, from the very beginning of life, learn how to be true and faithful in life. The *Seriwanija Jātaka* quite obviously highlights this fact. When we closely observe the behavior of two traders, *Kachchaputa* and *Seriwanija*, we realize the way how the good and honest trader is blessed and admired and how the unscrupulous trader suffered and lost his life. Furthermore, we also can learn the evil consequences of excessive greed through the *Swarnahansa Jātaka*. The wife of the dead husband is not satisfied with the golden feather she gets from the swan. She wants all of them at once and kills the bird and tries to obtain them at once. However, all the golden feathers then become normal feathers. There are such people in our society today, who are excessively greedy and self-possessive. There are many such *Jātaka* Tales in the collection of *Jātaka*

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Tales, which amount to 547 stories. My point of view is that when the children are motivated to read the selected tales, they learn how to control their needs and behavior. Instead, today they watch only the TV programs that arouse their emotions to be involved in detrimental activities, which will ultimately destroy both society and themselves.

Objective of the Study:

The primary objective of the present study was to motivate the students of schools, universities and *dhamma* schools to read *Jātaka* Tales so that they will inculcate virtues for a religious and pious life. The secondary objective was to encourage their respective teachers to be involved in this meritorious activity, which will lead our children to shape their lives according to the lessons they learn from *Jātaka* Tales.

Methodology:

The entire research was based on both primary and secondary data. Discussions were conducted with learned monks and elderly people, who are veteran in *Jātaka* Tales. Sermons based on various *Jātaka* Tales were also carefully listened to and necessary data were collected. Regarding the secondary data, most relevant *Jātaka* Tales were closely studied so that their moral and ethical values were extracted.

Literature Review: *Jātaka* tales originated from multiple sources and have a multitude of authors. Like other Buddhist literature, many stories can be divided into "Theravada" and "Mahayana" canons.

Many *Jātaka* Tales are about the earlier lives of the Buddha. They are presented in the form of animal fables, which teach us morality and ethical behavior.

Jātaka tales reveal the previous lives of the Buddha in two ways, both human and animal form. The future Buddha is portrayed as a king, a god or an elephant. However, in whatever form the Buddha is depicted, he exhibits some virtues that will promote the human mind.

A.K. Warder says that the *Jātaka* Tales were written during an early period, that describe the previous lives of the Buddha, but, much less biographical information about the Buddha's own life has been revealed.

There are 547 *Jātaka* Tales, which are all closely associated with good human qualities. They will make a person's life more ethical and moral. The following are selected *Jātaka* Tales, which deal with ethics and morality in one's life. The Ass in the Lion's Skin (Sihacamma *Jātaka*), The Cock and the Cat (Kukuta- *Jātaka*), The Foolish, Timid Rabbit (Daddabha *Jātaka*), The Jackal the Crow (Jambhu-Khadaka- *Jātaka*), The Swan with Golden Feathers (Suvannahamsa *Jātaka*), Seriwaniya *Jātaka*, The Jackal and the Otters (Dabbhapuppha *Jātaka*), The Lion and the Woodpecker (Javasakuna *Jātaka*), The Ox Who Envied the Pig (Munika- *Jātaka*), The Ox Who Won the Forfeit and The Turtle Who Couldn't Stop Talking (Kacchapa *Jātaka*).

Discussion and Conclusion:

It is a well-known fact that books, films and teledramas can easily change a man's mind for favorable or detrimental things. Of them, reading plays a very significant role in a person's mind. As far as *Jātaka* tales are concerned, it is sure that majority of *Jātaka* tale readers, can easily change their minds for favorable things. In other words, virtues can easily be inculcated in their minds. At present, we can see many immature young girls are easily trapped due to the lies and flattery made by some bogus boys in the present society. For narrow benefits, they flatter the young girls, who later get into troubles and sometimes they lose their valuable lives. When we examine the *Jātaka* Tale, "The Jackal and the Crow" or "Jambhu-Khādaka-*Jātaka*", this fact is obvious. If the students are motivated to read such stories, it is assumed that the young girls get never trapped in their vicious boyfriends' evil tactics. In this *Jātaka* Tale, the jackal flatters the crow and ultimately, the crow gets caught. This is a well-known story among the common people today. There are many such stories such as The Ass in the Lion's Skin (Sihacamma - *Jātaka*), The Cock and the Cat (Kukuta- *Jātaka*),

The Foolish, Timid Rabbit (Daddabha *Jātaka*), The Swan with Golden Feathers (Suvannahamsa *Jātaka*), Seriwaniya - *Jātaka*, The Jackal and the Otters (Dabbhapuppha *Jataka*), The Lion and the Woodpecker (Javasakuna - *Jātaka*), The Ox Who Envied the Pig (Munika- *Jātaka*), The Ox Who Won the Forfeit and The Turtle Who Couldn't Stop Talking (Kacchapa- *Jātaka*) , which can shape the lives of the young people so that they will be able to lead an ethical and moral life. Each and every story adds more virtues to the lives of the young people. Today, we can observe many young culprits, who are involved in violent and criminal activities, which are extremely detrimental to the society. Hence, encouraging the children to read the *Jātaka* tales is a great national contribution and this meritorious act will prevent young generation from violence, irregularities, malpractice, corruption and so called all evil and obnoxious activities.

Keywords: reading, *Jataka* Tales, moral and cultural values, eroded

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