



16



## A Dispute over Water

All the *sangha* gathered together in Kapilavastu's monk's hall for  
discussion—

“For these three months we shall take shelter in this monastery.”

Meanwhile farmers<sup>1</sup> needful of water for their canals to start paddy  
transplantation

Saw that the Rohini River was drying up for the lack of rain.

The Shakyas wanted to use whatever water was there for themselves but  
The Koliyas who also needed water since they had not done their planting

Spoke up: “With so little water, since people on both sides cannot plant at  
once

Let us be first to start our transplanting since we don't need much and a  
little will do.”

The Shakyas became furious and replied, “Why should we allow you to  
go first,

Since if your bins alone are full of grain, only with our jewels, gold, or  
silver can we buy it!

Carrying bags and buckets, we cannot come to you for alms like beggars  
We also don't need much water, and we will not take more than required.”

But the Koliyas retorted, “For what reason should we give it to you  
first?”

Rolling up their sleeves and shaking their fists, the Shakyas said, “For this  
reason!”

The Koliya farmers struck their palms together and said—

“We, too, have energy and strength in our arms; we won't let you go first  
either.”

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<sup>1</sup> The poet uses the Newari term for farmer, *juṭhā*.

“We won’t let you have it,” “We won’t let *you* have it.” “Never shall we give it to you.”  
 “Ah, what can you do since we will not yield; as long as there is life, we will not yield.”

“Stand not before us and be off, leprous birds on a plum tree!  
 Why should we demean ourselves by coming to blows with people of your rank?”

These remarks made by the Shākhyas infuriated the Koliyas exceedingly  
 They shook with rage, stamped their feet on the ground, and  
 retorted—

“You who are wretched philanderers and cruel to your own relatives  
 Are worthless and it would be better if you just killed yourselves.”<sup>2</sup>

The Shākhyas replied—“What did you say? Your lives are nearly over now  
 Since we will break your necks before you can run away.”

The Koliyas retorted, “Shut up and be off, while there’s still time for  
 escape!  
 You wretched Shākhyas should not waste your lives for nothing.”

In this way, they screamed abuse and indecent taunts that finally led to an  
 altercation  
 Prompted by youths at the front who started brawling with their  
 opponents.

Those in the rear gnashed their teeth and cried, “Overpower them all, one  
 by one.”  
 One or two were being strangled and pinned to the ground,

Some were flung into the flowing water, others into the mud,  
 Some were seen beating others, using heavy sticks that they swung over  
 their heads.

The cry of “Kick, kick him” mixed with the sound of kicking boots,  
 Then several raised their arms, yelling, “This is unnecessary. Come on,  
 come now.”

Young men with all their might rushed in and shoved their way through  
 the crowd  
 Roaring much like the sound a river makes flowing into the sea.

<sup>2</sup> Lit. “You had best fill up small clay bowls and kill yourselves by drowning in them.”

Shākya could hardly be distinguished from Koliya, so large had the crowd  
grown;  
Even as the night had started to fall, the fighting raged. What to do!

Utterly blinded by their fierce rage, they beat up everyone who appeared,  
“Hey it’s me, it’s me!” some yelled as others shouted “Beat him! Kick him!”

As they all vied with one another in strength, no one there could end the  
fighting  
As it continued until late evening, with people still tripping and falling  
down.

Those who pondered the situation saw no sign of the fight stopping  
And reported this to the agricultural departments of their respective states.

The agricultural secretaries put the problem to their cabinet members,  
Who poured out their fury like flaming fire once the news reached their ears.

Self pride aroused their anger inordinately;  
Now boastful of their heroism, they spoiled in earnest for war.

With their cheeks reddened and blood boiling in their veins  
Each of their faces darkened and wore stern frowns.

Their eyelids fluttered and their eyes cast off fiery looks *pilipili*  
As they gnashed their teeth loudly, sounding like *kiriṅṅi*.

No one there could stay quiet and with their heroic sentiments fully  
aroused,  
One person there rose, held high his strong hand, and said—

“Having been born, we all must die by some cause one day or another  
And since it is certain that after our death we will take birth again,

If we leave behind our good names, they alone will remain forever  
So care not for life that comes and goes like the flowing water of a river.

Let us go forth, having armed ourselves with every sort of weapon  
Then return after repelling or slaying our enemy in battle.

Since Arjuna once fought a *kiritat* fiercely even for a pig<sup>3</sup>  
How can we live in peace now when our enemy threatens us so!

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<sup>3</sup> An incident from the *Mahābhārata*, during the Pandavas’ exile. This is the second invocation  
of the *kiritat*, one of the indigenous peoples of the Himalayas mentioned in the ancient Indic sources.

Just as for the sake of Tilottamā,<sup>4</sup> Sunda and Upasunda laid down their  
lives fighting,  
We must forsake our own happiness to safeguard our dignity and  
reputation!

Just as Rāma fought a great battle for recovering Sītā  
Why should we not fight a battle for upholding our glorious tradition?<sup>5</sup>

“I will, certainly,” said one among them and after another seconded the  
proposal  
Still another readily agreed, saying, “Come, let us ready now for battle.”

Once the call to fight passed unanimously and all including the chief  
minister stood up,  
They soon left the meeting hall for the royal palace at a hurried pace and

Put their proposal to the king, “Without food to eat, no survival is  
possible.  
And since without water, no food crops can be grown, a fight is  
inevitable.”<sup>6</sup>

The wise heroic king listened carefully to their point of view and  
After a minute for pondering it, he expressed his own opinion—

“The decision you have reached is timely and courageous,  
But without an army commander, victory will be uncertain.

Prepara-  
tions for  
War

Therefore a war secretary and able commander must be selected.”  
Saying, “Yes” they chose such persons and after authorizing their roles

And receiving orders from the new commander, all left for their  
homes.

Once it was clear there would be a battle, their wives commenced  
crying.

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<sup>4</sup> A reference to a story in the *Mahābhārata*. Tilottamā is a lovely *apsara*, a heavenly maiden associated with the sun; Sunda and Upasunda are *asuras*, demons who are brothers. After they both become enamored with Tilottamā, they batted and inflicted mortal injuries on each other. Either the poet had misplaced the plot of this story, as it is not really supportive of the Shākya speaker here, or else he is making a subtle point about orators who cite ancient tradition, but do so tendentiously or in ignorance. The story cited is actually a metaphor of the folly of fighting over a possession desired by two parties, like the water in the Koliya-Shākya dispute in this chapter.

<sup>5</sup> The question marks in the poet's text seem to be misplaced, as the quotation must include the second line.

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But after awhile, the valiant *kṣatriya* women patiently  
Equipped all the brave men with their weapons.

Mothers fitted helmets on their heads, elder sisters helped them don their  
armor,  
Jeweled sword sheaths the younger sisters tied around their waists.

How could their wives just remain there doing nothing!  
Having affixed quivers on their right shoulders and set bows on their  
left,

Wiping tears from their eyes, they helped with the shields  
Yet for some unknown reason, they could not hand them their swords!

Even though their husbands prepared to sacrifice not only wealth but  
their lives in battle  
The wives inexplicably could not hand their swords to them.

As they glanced at their beloved husbands and then at the scepter's sharp  
blades  
We are uncertain as to doubts they felt, but with heads bowed they heaved  
long sighs.

The heartfelt emotions were well understood by the mothers-in-law  
there  
Who gave them solace by affectionately placing their hands on their  
shoulders—<sup>6</sup>

“You are the daughters and daughters-in-law of heroic men  
But how can you see them off for battle without handing them their  
swords!

Recall Uttarā who sent Abhimanyu off to the battlefield<sup>7</sup>  
Or similarly recall Sulocanā who sent Meghnada off well-armed.<sup>8</sup>

In the front or behind, no matter where your husbands are,  
A true wife will ever remain wishing the best for her husband.

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<sup>6</sup> Here, the assumed context is the patrilocal extended families, where sons stay home to live in their natal homes, whose wives upon marriage join this family unit, living with her in-laws.

<sup>7</sup> Son of Arjuna, in an episode from the *Mahābhārata* where his wife dresses him for battle.

<sup>8</sup> A similar scene from the *Ramayana*, when Meghanada, son of demon Ravana, is sent off to battle by his wife.

Since it is unsuitable for you to allure your husbands into a net of endless  
romancing,  
We have to survive by drinking our tears, making our husbands happy  
with our love.

Hold back your tears, wait to clean their weapons once they return  
Holding your husbands' swords stained with the blood of our enemies.<sup>9</sup>

After these inspiring words by the mothers-in-law revived up their  
emotions,  
The wives immediately handed the swords to their husbands.

The flashes from their eyes seemed to merge with the swords' flashing  
blades  
As if to say, "If you are short of energy, add ours to your own,"

Mothers put *sikṣā* marks on their foreheads, wishing them well with  
farewell offerings,  
"Return soon, Lords" said the younger sisters, who offered them a hero's  
offering.<sup>1</sup>

Then after the wives gave them small bowls filled with red rice beer,  
And after imbibing this heroic drink and feeling their vitality increase  
tenfold,

All the valiant heroes exited their homes, holding their swords at the  
ready.  
The streets then echoed with a cacophony of trumpets shrilling  
*mālakṣha*<sup>10</sup> notes.

All the soft and low notes in the musical scale—*do, mi, fa, la, si*—except  
*re* and *sol*  
Were heard then, such as in "do, fa, mi, fa, fa, la, do, do, si, do, si, la, fa,  
mi, fa."<sup>11</sup>

Resonating with them was the bass cacophony everywhere from armor  
and weapons  
So heroic sentiment<sup>11</sup> showed off there and pranced like a peacock in a  
thunderstorm.

<sup>1</sup> *Go sagṛā*, a gift of coriander and an egg in anticipation of or showing appreciation for a courageous deed.

<sup>10</sup> A melodic, martial mode.

<sup>11</sup> *Vīra rās*. On this subject, see Part II, Chapter 2, of this volume.

Like its feathers gleamed lances, swords, sickles, hatchets, hammers;  
Before them all was carried an emblazoned flag that fluttered briskly.

On one side resounded horses neighing; on the other, elephants  
trumpeted shatteringly  
To one side, faint dust clouds rose skyward; from the other, the musk<sup>12</sup>  
oozed out.

Spurred by the horsemen, the horses made quick dancing steps  
In tune with them were bells jingling around elephants' necks in glittering  
decoration.

All ears echoed with the rattle of rolling chariots as  
A reconnoiter was done continuously with the aid of signal flags.

Above it all jeweled ornaments worn by charioteers shined and dazzled:  
Flocks of birds flew off in the sky hither and yon, due to their great fright.

The infantry of powerful, valiant soldiers marched in rows through the  
streets  
Stamping their feet in unison with the battle drumbeats.

Some held swords and shields, some held scimitars,  
Some held aloft hatchets, some tall iron hammers.

Some held sharp-edged spades, others carried hooks,  
Some held mace-like pestles and lances with sharp pointed tips.

Some marched by with their freshly sharpened swords in hand,  
Others brandished sharp-honed spades that they held aloft.

The noise of impending battle mingled with the sound of bows being  
strung by archers,  
As if to portend the annihilation of all humanity from the raining down  
of arrows.

Roaring commands kindled enthusiasm in their hearts,  
But meanwhile, the timid were trembling in fear like when the earth  
quakes.

The Shakyas assembled their mighty arms and prepared for battle  
Venturing out of the city that same night fearlessly,

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<sup>12</sup> *Masā*, the discharge that appears from the pores on an elephant's temple when it is excited  
due to fear or sexual stimulation.

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— <sup>12</sup> *Musk*, the discharge that appears from the pores on an elephant's temple when it is excited  
— due to fear or sexual stimulation.

“For earning a livelihood, understand that you must be righteous in all  
 you do so  
 You can always devise completely peaceful means by this principle.

Because those who are vanquished with weapons may rise up yet again  
 Better to win them over by peaceful means so they’ll ever be truly  
 beneficent friends.

Therefore, heroes! Harbor not ill feelings to any beings  
 You must hasten on the path of peace to win happiness and fortune.

Quarreling for no reason other than to fight with others  
 Brings neither happiness nor religious merit, but only anguish.”

So the dispute was ended by *dharma*, and after seeing them all begin  
 paddy planting  
 The Sage returned from there to the Nyagrodha grove named Vāṭikāy.

During his sojourn there for three months, he preached many sermons to  
 the Shākya;  
 The Lord also ordained all the men, leaving Kapilapura with no more.

At the time when the Shākya man Mahānāma of that city was ordained as  
 a monk  
 All the Shākya men had become monks, thus bringing their lineages near  
 to extinction.

Inviting all his troop of monks to accompany him in wandering  
 Sugata traveled across the region and rested when he finally returned to  
 Śhrāvastī.