

10

Bilaṅgika Sutta

The Discourse to Bilaṅgika | S 7.4

Theme: The bad karma of harming the innocent returns to its source

Translated by Piya Tan ©2017

1 Sutta significance

1.1 SUMMARY

The **Bilaṅgika Sutta** (S 7.4) is a short discourse telling us how the brahmin Bilaṅgika Bhāra,dvāja is very upset that his three elder brothers—Dhanañjāni, Akkosaka and Asur’indaka—have been converted and renounced as monks under the Buddha. He visits the Buddha to confront him, but is too angry to say anything (SA 1:230). The Buddha then admonishes him on the futility of anger, and he, too, converts, renounces and, in due course, becomes an arhat.

1.2 BROTHERS

Bilaṅgika is one of the younger Bhāra,dvāja brothers. The council elders gave him the epithet **bilaṅgika** because he gained great wealth by selling pure and properly prepared congee (*suddhañ ca sambhāra,yuttañ ca kañjikam*) (SA 1:230). *Bilaṅga* is a synonym of *kañjika* (SAT:Be 1:257). We know almost nothing else about him.

1.3 RELATED TEACHINGS

1.3.1 The verses

The only verse of **the Bilaṅgika Sutta** (S 623) recurs as the second of two verses (S 53-54) uttered by the Buddha to a deva in **the Phusati Sutta** (S 1.3.2), thus:

SD 50.10(1.3)

Phusati Sutta

The “It Touches” Discourses • S 1.3.2/1:13 [S:B 1.22]

Theme: The bad karma of harming the innocent returns to the doer

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| <p>1 <i>Nâphusantaṃ phusanti ca
phusantaṃ ca tato phuse
tasmā phusantaṃ phusati
appaduṭṭha,padosinan’ti</i></p> | [S 53] | <p>It touches not who touches not,
but it will touch the one who touches.
Therefore, it touches the one who touches,
the one who wrongs the harmless.</p> |
| <p>2 <i>Yo appaduṭṭhassa narassa dussati
suddhassa posassa anaṅgaṇassa
tam eva bālaṃ pacceti pāpaṃ
sukhumo rajo paṭivātaṃ’va khitto’ti</i></p> | [S 54] | <p>When one wrongs a harmless man,
a pure person, free from blemish—
the same bad will fall back on that fool himself
like fine dust thrown against the wind.</p> |

1.3.2 Commentary and related verses

1.3.2.1 The verse **S 53** is a riddle which hinges on the two senses of **phusati**, “it touches,” thus: (1) to commit a particular karma; here, the unwholesome act of wronging an innocent person, and (2) to reap the fruit of that karma when it ripens.

1.3.2.2 In the **Kokāliya Sutta** (Sn 3.10), verse **S 623**, recurring as **Sn 622**, refers to the monk Kokāliya's abusive and false accusation of Sāriputta and Moggallāna.¹ A different and more violent background story is found in the **Koka Sunakha, luddaka Vatthu** (DhA 9.9), the story of Koka the dog-hunter.²

1.3.2.3 Dhammapada verses **Dh 137-140** refer to the karmic fruits of harming the innocent. Their background recounts how the arhat Moggallāna, in a past life killed his own blind parents. The fruit of this past karma ripens in his being clubbed to death even as an arhat, but he passes away totally untroubled into nirvana.³

2 The Bhāra,dvāja clan

2.1 ORIGINS OF THE CLAN

2.1.1 Three of Bilaṅgika's elder brothers—Dhanañjānī, Akkosaka and Asur'indaka⁴—all arhat monks, are the respective subjects of the first three suttas of the **Brāhmaṇa Saṃyutta** (of the arhats) [2.2]. They all belong to the famed **Bhāra,dvāja clan**. Some 20 individuals of this clan are mentioned in the Pali canon [2.2].

2.1.2 The word *Bhāradvāja* is a Sanskrit compound, derived from "*bhara(d) and vāja(m)*," meaning "bringing about nourishment."⁵ Bhāra,dvāja was mentioned as being one of the 10 ancient Vedic seers (*iṣī*) in the **Te,vijja Sutta** (D 13), the **Caṅkī Sutta** (M 95), the **(Brahma,vihara) Subha Sutta** (M 99), **Doṇa Brāhmaṇa Sutta** (A 5.192) and the **Saññoga Sutta** (A 7.48).⁶ This was probably Bhāradvāja Bārhaspatya, who, with his family of students (*guru,kula*), were said to have authored the sixth book of the Ṛgveda.⁷

2.2 BHĀRADVĀJA IN THE SUTTAS

2.2.1 Individuals named Bhāra,dvāja

2.2.1.1 **Bhāradvāja** is the name of an ancient brahmin clan [2.1]. About 20 individuals belonging to this clan are mentioned in the Pali canon. In **Rājagaha**, the eldest of the Bhāra,dvāja family is married to a Dhanañjānī brāhminee, a pious disciple, and later becomes an arhat.⁸

Unlike the other brahmins, this eldest of the Bhāra,dvāja family in Rājagaha is unnamed. The Dictionary of Pali Proper Names (DPPN) lists him as "Bhāradvāja Thera (3)." Following the nick-naming of the other Bhāra,dvāja brahmins who became arhats, we may provisionally—for convenience of reference—call him **Jeṭṭha Bhāra,dvāja**, which simply means "the eldest Bhāra,dvāja."

¹ This story is found in **Kokālika S** (S 6.10) but without the verse. A different but more violent background story is found in **Koka Sunakha, luddaka Vatthu** (DhA 9.9/3:31-33) on **Dh 125** (see DhA:B 2:282-284). On the karmic fruits of harming the innocent, see Dh 137-140.

² DhA 9.9/3:31-33 on **Dh 125** :: DhA:B 2:282-284.

³ See **DhA 10.17/3:65-71**; J 522 intro (J 5:123-126) with significant differences (such as where he is said to have spared his parents' lives, and for 6 successive days, he rises into the air to escape his assassins).

⁴ SAṬ:Be 1:257.

⁵ Thaneswar Sharma, *The Bharadvajas in Ancient India*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991:58-60.

⁶ D 13,13/1:238 (SD 1.8); M 95,13/2:169 (SD 21.15); M 99,9/2:200 (SD 38.6); A 5.192/3:224 (SD 36.14), A 7.48/-4:61 (SD 8.7). See also Darab Dastur Peshotan Sanjana, "Gotama in the Avesta," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain* 30,2, 1898:391-394.

⁷ Stephanie Jamison & Joel Brereton, *The Riqveda: 3-volume Set*. Oxford: Oxford Univ Press, 2014:1680-1681.

⁸ See **(Brāhmiṇī) Dhanañjānī S** (S 7.1), SD 45.5.

2.2.1.2 Jeṭṭha Bhāra,dvāja's brothers—**Akkosaka, Asur'indaka, Bilaṅgika** and Saṅgārava—follow him in converting to the Buddha Dharma, and becoming arhats in due course. [2.2.2]

2.2.1.3 Several other Bhāradvājas, living in Sāvattihī, visit the Buddha there, join the order, and become arhats. They are **Ahiṃsaka, Jaṭā** and **Suddhika**. [2.2.2]

Aggika joins the order at Veḷuvana, **Sundarika** on the banks of the Sundarikā, and **Bahu,dhītika** in a forest tract in Kosala. [2.2.2]

Kasi Bhāra,dvāja,⁹ **Nava,kammika**¹⁰ and **Kattha,hāra**¹¹ are lay disciples. Note here that there are not actual names, but job-related names: *kasi*, “the ploughman”; *nava,kammika*, “the renovator”; *kattha,hāra*, “the wood carrier.”

2.2.1.4 One of the best known members of the Bhāra,dvāja clan is the elder **Piṇḍola** of Kosambī also belongs to the Bhāra,dvāja clan. **Piṇḍola** is a well known arhat, the interlocutor of **the Piṇḍola Bhāra,-dvāja Sutta** (S 35.127), the subject of an Apadāna and a Dhammapada story.¹²

2.2.1.5 The 16-year-old brahmin youth, **Kāpatika** or **Kāpaṭhika** meets the Buddha at Opasāda. This occasion, when he declares himself a follower of the Buddha is recorded in **the Caṅkī Sutta** (M 95).¹³

2.2.1.6 The Jātakas mention a number of Bhāra,dvāja brahmins, a few of whom are royal chaplains (*purohita*). **The Kaliṅga,bodhi Jātaka** (J 479) speaks of a **Kāliṅga Bhāra,dvāja** brahmin, the chaplain of king Cūḷa Kaliṅga.¹⁴

The Sambhava Jātaka (J 515) mentions the purohita **Sucīrata**, of king Dhanañjaya Koravya.¹⁵

The Phaṇḍana Jātaka (J 475) tells the story of a Bhāra,dvāja who is a brahmin carpenter.¹⁶

The most notorious of the Bhāra,dvāja is surely **Jūjaka**, the villain of **the Vessantara Jātaka** (J 547).¹⁷

2.2.1.7 The **Vinaya** mentions the Bhāradvāja clan, along with the Kosiya, as a low clan (*hīna,gotta*).¹⁸ This is, of course, from brahminical perception. By the time the Vinaya was compiled (late in the Buddha's life or soon after), Bhāra,dvāja brahmins have become monastics or Buddhists in significant numbers, so that the mainstream brahmins would have disapproved of them.¹⁹

2.2.2 Suttas with Bhāra,dvāja in their titles

The very first chapter of the Brāhmaṇa Saṃyutta—the **Arahanta Vagga**—contains 10 suttas (S 7.1-10) recording the conversion and arhathood of various members of the Bhāra,dvāja clan. They are listed along with the first sutta of the following **Upāsaka Vagga** (S 7.11):

(1) Dhanañjānī Sutta	S 7.1/1:160 f	= 7.1.1	SD 45.5	A wife's faith converts her husband
(2) Akkosaka Bhāra,dvāja S	S 7.2/1:161-163	= 7.1.2	SD 84.2	Anger belongs to the angry
(3) Asur'indaka Sutta	S 7.3/1:163 f	= 7.1.3	SD 97.7	Disadvantages of harsh speech
(4) Bilaṅgika Sutta	S 7.4/1:164	= 7.1.4	SD 50.10	Do not throw dust into the wind
(5) Ahiṃsaka Sutta	S 7.5/1:164	= 7.1.5	SD 50.21	Harmless in name and in truth

⁹ **Kasi Bhāra,dvāja S** (S 7.11/1:172 f = Sn 1.4), SD 69.6.

¹⁰ **Nava,kammika S** (S 7.17/1:179 f), SD 50.34.

¹¹ **Kattha,hāra S** (S 7.18/1:180 f), SD 24.7.

¹² **Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja S** (S 35.127), SD 27.6a(2.4) & **Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja** (SD 27.6a); **Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja ThaAp** (Ap 3.8,1-3), SD 27.6a(1.2.2); **Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja Vatthu** (DhA 14.2,2a @ Dh 185), SD 27.6a(2.5).

¹³ M 95/2:169 f (SD 21.15).

¹⁴ J 479/4:228-236.

¹⁵ J 515/5:57-67.

¹⁶ J 475/4:207-211.

¹⁷ J 547/6:520-581.

¹⁸ V 4:6. Cf **Aggañña S** (D 27,2-4), SD 2.19; DA 3:860.

¹⁹ For an example of how mainstream brahmins disapproved of Buddhist brahmins, see **Aggañña S** (D 27,3/3:81), SD 2.19.

(6) Jaṭā Sutta	S 7.6/1:165	= 7.1.6	SD 50.22	Cutting the inner tangle
(7) Suddhika Sutta	S 7.7/1:165 f	= 7.1.7	SD 50.23	Spiritual purity is the highest
(8) Aggika Bhāra,dvāja Sutta	S 7.8/1:166 f	= 7.1.8	SD 22.9	A true renunciant is not for hire
(9) Sundarika Sutta	S 7.9/1:167-170	= 7.1.9	SD 22.3	Arhats are worthy of offerings
(10) Bahu,dhītara Sutta	S 7.10/1:170 f	= 7.1.10	SD 50.24	Having nothing is true happiness
(11) Kasī Bhāra,dvāja Sutta	S 7.11/1:172 f ²⁰	= 7.1.11	SD 69.6	The saint's right livelihood

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The Discourse to Bilaṅgika

S 7.4

1 At one time, the Blessed One was dwelling in the squirrels' feeding ground in the Bamboo Grove, outside Rāja,gaha.

2 Now, the brahmin Bilaṅgika Bhāra,dvāja heard thus:

"It is said that a brahmin of the Bhāra,dvāja clan has gone forth from the house into homelessness before the recluse Gotama."

3 Angry and annoyed, he approached the Blessed One and stood in silence at one side.²¹

4 Then, the Blessed One, knowing the thoughts in the brahmin Bilaṅgika Bhāra,dvāja's mind, spoke in verse to the brahmin Bilaṅgika Bhāra,dvāja, thus:²²

5	<i>Yo appaduṭṭhassa narassa dussati suddhassa posassa anaṅgaṇassa tam eva bālaṃ pacceti pāpaṃ sukhumo rajo paṭivātaṃ'va khitto'ti</i>	[S 623]	When one wrongs a harmless man, a pure person, free from blemish— the same bad will fall back on that fool himself like fine dust thrown against the wind.
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Bilaṅgika joins the order

6 When this was said, the brahmin Bilaṅgika Bhāra,dvāja said this to the Blessed One:

"Excellent, Master Gotama! Excellent! Master Gotama!

Just as if one

were to place upright what had been overturned,

were to reveal what was hidden,

were to show the way to one who was lost, or

were to hold up a lamp in the dark so that those with eyes could see forms,

in the same way, in numerous ways, has the Dharma been made clear by the Blessed Gotama.

I go to the Blessed Gotama for refuge, to the Dharma, and to the community of monks.

May the Blessed Gotama give me the going-forth (*pabbajjā*), give me the ordination (*upasampadā*)."

²⁰ = Sn 1.4/1:12-16 (SD 69.6).

²¹ Comy says that he is so angry that his three brothers have renounced as monks that he is unable to speak (SA 1:230): see (1.1). Compare Bilaṅgika's silence to Potaliya's angry silence of conceit: SD 44.1 (2.1).

²² In **Phusati Sutta** (S 1.3.2), this verse is the second of the Buddha's two verses to a deva (S 1.3.2/1:13). See (1.3).

7 And the brahmin Bilaṅgika Bhāra,dvāja clan received the going-forth and the ordination in the Blessed One's presence.

Bilaṅgika becomes an arhat

8 THE FULL ARHATHOOD PERICOPE²³

Then, not long after he was ordained, the venerable Bilaṅgika Bhāra,dvāja, dwelling alone, aloof, diligent, exertive, and resolute, in no long time at all, right here and now, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge, attained and dwelled in the supreme goal of the holy life, for the sake of which sons of family rightly go forth from the household life into homelessness.

9 THE ARHAT'S REVIEW KNOWLEDGE

He directly knew:

“Birth is destroyed,
the holy life has been lived,
done what is to be done,
there is no more of this state of being.”²⁴

And the venerable Bilaṅgika Bhāra,dvāja became one of the arhats.

— evaṃ —

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²³ For details, see **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,56.2+56.3), SD 7.14.

²⁴ On this para and the next (the attainment of arhathood), see **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,56.2/1:203) n, SD 7.14.