

The Rohinī River Dispute and the Buddha's Peaceful Intervention: A Timeless Model of Conflict Resolution

Author:

Prof. Dr. Saw Htut Sandar (Myanmar)

Professor & Advisor, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī Subharti School of Buddhist Studies,
Ras Bihari Bose Subharti University (RBBSU), Dehradun, India

Abstract

This article discusses the conflict between the kingdom of Sakya and the Koliya clans, about the ancient Rohinī River water, and how the Buddha intervened to solve that problem. This is a classic example of how to settle an argument between two people without violence. It was talking about how the Buddha's peaceful, kind, and understanding communication could be handled as a model for promoting peace in our society.

It was stated in important Buddhist texts like the Dhammapada, Sutta Nipāta, and Jātaka tales from the Tipitaka. People, including us, still face problems like political division, environmental issues, and conflicts over resources today. This remarkable ancient event is linked to these issues even now.

Keywords:

Buddha, conflict resolution, Rohinī River, peacebuilding, diplomacy, non-violence

1. Introduction: The Mahāsamaya and Its Symbolism

According to the history of Theravāda Buddhist tradition celebrates Mahāsamaya Day is celebrated on the Full Moon Day of Jetṭhā (June), and this day honors the huge gathering of people and heavenly creatures like Devas and Brahmas to honor and listen to the Dhamma from the Buddha. The main point of this story is how the Buddha stepped in to stop a fight between the Sakya and the Koliya clans that was about to turn deadly event due to the Rohini River water. This story is not just a tale; it shows how the Buddha was a moral diplomat and teacher. It also gives us a useful model for resolving conflicts via ethical participation and compassionate communication based on Buddha's teachings.

2. The Rohinī River Conflict: Environmental Scarcity and Human Ego

While the Buddha was dwelling at Sarvasti in his fifteenth Vassa, Kapilavatthu (Sakya region) and Koliya became the center of a dispute because of the sharing of Rohini River water, which marked the border between those two ancient countries. Both sides were in serious need of irrigation water because of a long drought. In the past, the water was shared by damming the river and taking turns. But when the water levels dropped, fights turned into violent clashes between troops and ministers from both kingdoms. The reason for the conflict was a lack of water.

3. The Buddha's Intervention: Ethical Leadership in Action

For that dispute, the Buddha, known for his supreme wisdom (*dibbacakkhu*), arrived at that place by his supreme power of *Jhana*. He came from the Jetavana Monastery in Sāvattṭhī and showed up above the battlefield. His bright presence with compassion stopped both armies

right away. He asked both kingdoms a simple but deep question: "Which is more valuable, water or human life?"

Their answers were, "The Buddha, Human life is more valuable than water," which made them think more deeply. The Buddha reminded them that they were all related to King Okkāka, which appealed to their sense of family and humanity. His involvement turned a violent conflict into a time of coming together and waking up from their ignorance and greed.

4. Teaching Through Stories: Jātaka Tales and Moral Reflection

Then, the Buddha delivered the five *Jātaka* stories and one *sutta* to make his point clearer. Each story taught a lesson about meaning and strife, as well as the benefits of working together.

The first *Jataka* is ***Rukkha Dhamma Jātaka***, which is a story in which trees and nature are important for learning moral or spiritual lessons. They teach people how to live in balance with nature, be thankful for it, and use natural resources wisely.

The second *Jataka* is ***Vattaka Jātaka***, which means a baby quail that is stuck in a forest fire remembers its good acts (*kamma*) and tells the truth about them. Some references said that the fire moves away and doesn't kill it. The main point is that being honest and having good morals protects us, and danger can't stop a small being with strong morals.

The third one is ***Latukika Jātaka***. The meaning of that *Jataka* was that a mother quail with no wings to fly away warns an elephant not to harm her chicks; however, the elephant ignores her and steps on them. The mother prays to *devas*, and through nature and karmic consequences, the elephant eventually dies.

The fourth one is the Earth and the water fight over who is better for the world in the ***Pathavī Udaka Jātaka***. The *Bodhisatta* thinks that both are important and that they should work together.¹ Moral: People must work together and respect each other. Everything in the world is important and has a place.²

About ***Phandana Jātaka***- The *Phandana Jātaka*, also known as *Jataka* tale 475, is a Buddhist story about a tree deva and a lion who fight because a branch falls on them. The Buddha told the Sakyans and Koliyans this story to end their fight and show how important peace and understanding are. Moral: Be smart and don't just believe what you see. Even when it comes to sacred things, you need to think critically.

Attadaṇḍa Sutta (Sn 4.15) talks about how attachment can be harmful and how important it is to work on being peaceful and not violent. It talks about how desire and attachment cause a lot of strife and pain in the world. People who learn this *sutta* are reminded to give up sensual pleasures, train for their freedom, and live a truthful, thoughtful, and non-aggressive life. The morals and facts in these stories helped both leaders and ordinary people to understand the Dhamma. Buddha preached stories to help people learn how to be good and to protect the community.

¹ https://www.daemen.edu/sites/default/files/documents/Iconoclast_2016.pdf

² <https://justsuminspiration.com/2020/02/27/your-body-is-here-but-your-mind-is-somewhere-else/>

5. Reconciliation Through Renunciation: Royal Youths Become Monks

After hearing the Dhamma from the Buddha, each kingdom offered 250 royal boys to be ordained as a sign of peace and change. The Buddha helped these 500 royal family members to become monks, and they went on retreat to the Mahāvana Forest, which is close to the foot of the Himalayas. There, the Buddha delivered the *Mahā-Kuṇāla Jātaka*,³ which taught about how physical pleasures are temporary and how important it is to give up things you want. This act of peace-making was both a symbolic and a real way to channel the energy of young people toward spiritual growth.

6. Contemporary Relevance: Buddhist Diplomacy in the Modern World

The Buddha's peaceful teachings on the Rohinī problem show how to be an ethical leader, how to work with others, and how to use nonviolent diplomacy. These are all very important ideas for today's world. The Buddha's lessons can be used to solve any problem, from water issues to political conflicts: "Hatred is never satisfied by hatred in this world." Hatred can only be calmed by not having it. This is a law that will never change (Dhammapada, v. 5).

Today, when resources are limited, racial tensions are rising, and political violence is common, we can learn from this old knowledge. The Buddha taught us to listen with kindness, talk things out instead of fighting, and put people's dignity above financial gain.

Conclusion

The real event of the Rohinī River is more than simply a memory; it teaches us something important now. The Buddha taught people how to blend spiritual insight with moral thinking and doing things. His approach illustrates that being honest, taking turns being accountable, and talking things out calmly can help people work through even the most serious problems.

The Buddha's actions at Rohinī can help leaders and communities find spiritual peace in a world that is seeking long-term means to sustain peace. His diplomatic approach, which is both delicate and robust, nonetheless brings about peace and understanding.

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Mingun Sayadaw. *The Great Chronicle of the Buddha (Mahābuddhacarita)*. Translated by U Ko Lay, Vipassana Research Publications, 2008.

³ The teaching of the Kuṇāla Jātaka was followed by that of the Mahāsamaya Sutta. This Jātaka was related in order to destroy the discontent that rose in the hearts of the Sakyan youths, kinsmen of the Buddha, who, having entered the Order, were troubled by the thought of the wives they had left behind. The Buddha, therefore, took them to the Himavā, showed them the magnificent beauty of the region, particularly the miraculous splendours of the Kuṇāladaha, and there taught them. At the end of the Jātaka, they all became Arahants. We are told that that very day they became Arahants (J.v.412-56; also, DA.ii.674ff; AA.i.173).

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