

Background to *Buddha's Aunt*,

Buddha's Aunt is a monologue theatre piece, a little over an hour in length. The setting is in the vicinity of modern Nepal, some 2,500 years ago. The speaker is Pajapati, an elderly woman of 97 years, who is preparing for her birthday celebration, and reliving the events of her long life. Pajapati (**Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī**) was the aunt of the historical Buddha, who raised Siddhartha after the early death of his mother. She is also credited with organizing marches of women, demanding their right to follow Siddhartha and participate fully in his teaching. Eventually, the Buddha (who had seemed sympathetic to the requests) and his followers (who had resisted them), agreed to their participation, and the tradition of Buddhist nuns began.

I was familiar with the outlines of Pajapati's life from my experiences of Buddhism. I had also heard many tales from my husband and his family involving ashram life, a connected school, and the Auroville community project in southern India. (Illuminating; especially the commentary from a feisty Irish artist, my late mother-in-law.) Even so, I did not set out to write *Buddha's Aunt*. Instead, one day, the first part of the script welled up from my unconscious mind; I scrambled to write it down, and then continued with on the story. In the excerpt here, Pajapati is chuckling over the methods she has used to ensure that Things are Done as She Wishes.

Thanks to the Little Apple Women in Theatre Festival, and the gifted director Judith (Sparky) Roberts, I was able to present it in Eugene, Oregon, in 1998, to an excellent reception. Circumstances have interfered with certain plans for productions with actors more skilled than I—If there is a Pajapati in waiting among the UCSC community, I'll be happy to send you a script!

Diane Barratt Walton

[Diane Barratt Lucas, at Cowell]

Schull, County Cork, Ireland

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