

NOTES ON THE UDĀNA¹

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The Udāna or 'Inspired Utterances' is the third book of the Khuddaka Nikāya or Minor Collection. It consists of eighty short suttas or discourses of the Buddha, divided into eight groups (*vagga*) of ten suttas each. The title refers to the pronouncement, usually in verse, made at the end of each sutta and prefaced by the words; 'Then, on realising its significance, the Lord uttered on that occasion this inspired utterance' (*atha kho bhagavā etam atthaṃ viditvā tāyaṃ velāyaṃ imaṃ udānaṃ udānesi*). Here it is the Buddha who pronounces them, although others are sometimes so inspired (e.g. in Ud. 2.10 and 3.7). Such utterances also occur elsewhere in the Sutta Piṭaka (e.g. M I 508; M II 104-5, 209; S I 20, 27-8, etc.).

The prose suttas which precede the 'inspired utterances' themselves could be regarded as a kind of commentary, supplying the introductory circumstances to the essential Dhamma-teachings found in the utterances. Because they are introductory, relating circumstances and containing little doctrinal material, they betray their lateness in a variety of ways and strongly suggest they are actually an ancient

1 The present essay was compiled from notes made and problems encountered while preparing a translation of the Udāna. This translation, to which the references herein are made, was published as *The Udāna. Inspired Utterances of the Buddha* (BPS, Kandy 1990), and was reviewed in BSR 9, 1 (1992).

commentary. Sometimes the utterances do not appear to fit neatly into the context in which they are set (e.g. 5.2, 5.5), though in other cases the story and the *udāna*-utterance are integral to each other (e.g. 1.8, 4.5, etc.). Being expressions of the Buddha's teaching, the utterances often allow for a wider interpretation than the circumstances surrounding them suggest and have, moreover, multiple meanings and allusions to the teachings referred to in other portions of the Sutta Piṭaka. The fact is there exists an intricate network of cross-references throughout the Tipiṭaka and no one passage can be studied in isolation. A particular topic or aspect of the teaching found in one place begins to become meaningful only when everything else that has been said about it is known. Everywhere the Dhamma is spoken of in brief and no one place can be pointed to as being exhaustive and definitive of any aspect of the Dhamma. When a topic, word or phrase is come across and occurs apparently nowhere else in the Canon, it always presents the problem of determining its exact meaning and significance. An example would be *kappa*, *āyu-kappa* in 6.1. We have to rely on the Commentary to tell us that *kappa* does not mean the aeon in this context, but the normal human life(*āyu*)-span. However, there is no certainty that it was always so interpreted.

Could the *udāna*-verses once have existed as a collection apart from the introductory sutta, like the verses of the Dhammapada? These verses are also described as Buddha-*udāna*, but the stories supplied to explain when and where they were spoken are found in the Commentary and are not reckoned as the word of the Buddha. In the first *vagga* of the Udāna, the Bodhivagga, the *udāna*-utterances form a group united by the common word 'brahmin' (*brāhmaṇa*), which is obvious when they are read apart from the introductory suttas.

So this *vagga* could well have been called Brāhmaṇavagga, following on from the last *vagga* of the Dhammapada, the preceding work in the Khuddaka Nikāya. Similarly, the second *vagga* has the unifying theme of *sukha*: happiness, bliss. Subsequently there is no obviously discernible theme linking the utterances. However, there is a suggestion of an overall plan to the work as a whole, in that the beginning of the first *vagga* does deal with the start of the Buddha's career beneath the Bodhi tree. Additionally, the final *vagga* contains material also to be found in the Mahāparinibbāna Suttanta of the Dīgha Nikāya, which recounts the last days of the Teacher before he passed away. The first sutta of the sixth *vagga* is also an important episode in the life of the Buddha. It is found in the Mahāparinibbāna Suttanta too and is the beginning of the events leading up to the passing away of the Buddha and contains Ānanda's failure in not requesting him to delay his departure from this world.

As well as being uplifting and inspiring, the stories from the Udāna also reveal much humour. For example, the response of Nanda on being asked to compare those pink-footed nymphs with that Sākyan girl, 'the loveliest in the land'. Again, in the story of Suppavāsā, when the Buddha elicits from her the response that she would like another seven sons, despite the trouble and pain she had to undergo to produce just one — all forgotten in the pride of motherhood! And then there is the incongruity of a new-born baby being able to hold a conversation. These, and other subtle touches, reveal the inspiration, humour, joy and delight — and devout faith too — of those ancient and unknown story-tellers who collected and put together this literature. Also noticeable is their love of puns and allusions, the word-play and the ingenuity involved. Thus in

1.8, the pun on Sangāmaji's name, and, in the 'Bull-Elephant' story (4.5) the play on the word *nāga*, meaning both perfected one and elephant. In this last is also the charming touch of the elephant bringing water 'for the Lord's use' with his trunk. Then there are the similes and parables, like that of the blind man and the elephant (6.4), that are both entertaining and instructive. Although it should be pointed out that this parable is best suited to Jain rather than Buddhist doctrine — a theory of partial truth being somewhat un-Buddhistic — the story is probably older than both Jainism and Buddhism and is still used today by modern Hindu teachers (e.g. by Ramakrishna).

The thought processes of the compilers of the Pāli Canon are also revealed when it is discovered that there is a connection between two adjacent suttas, although this may not be too obvious at first sight. One example in the Udāna is between suttas 5.8 and 5.9 where a reference to Devadatta's schism is followed in the next sutta by the inclusion of a verse that is found elsewhere (e.g. Vin. I, p.349) in the context of the Kosambi rift. Other examples may be found in the Aṅguttara Nikāya. These connections are often so well hidden they need great ingenuity to discover them. They would also constitute necessary aids to memory in an oral literature and an indication of how it was gradually put together, a word or phrase in one sutta acting as a cue or trigger for the next. Also to be found are connections and allusions within the same sutta that are not at first obvious; some so subtle that one could be forgiven for thinking they are accidental rather than deliberate. An example is contained in Ud. 5.4. What is more natural than for little boys, caught out in some misdemeanour ('tormenting fish in a pond') by a passerby, attempting to run away, as is suggested in the last line of the verse:

'If you have done a bad deed or do one now,
You will not escape pain, though you try to flee.'

Another device the ancient compilers of the Canon have employed is the occasional interposing of lines of explanatory narrative prose, or verse that repeats what was previously said in prose. This has been done in the Cunda Sutta (8.5.), heightening the solemnity of the events being described with dramatic effect. This sutta also has a number of curious features. It consists of four separate pieces, actually four short suttas that have been strung together. The composition of *sūkaramaddava*, the Buddha's last meal, has been the subject of continuing controversy from the earliest times and much has been written about it. Although it is thought to have been the cause of the Buddha's sickness, this is not borne out by a careful examination of the commentarial tradition. It was possibly medicinal in nature and acted as a purge and was prepared by Cunda with the purpose of prolonging the Buddha's life. In any case the Mahāparinibbāna Suttanta suggests the Buddha fell ill during the last rains-retreat, prior to informing Māra he would pass away in three months' time and the visit to Cunda's dwelling. The remorse of Cunda was probably because his preparation did not succeed. Another feature of the Cunda Sutta is the sudden appearance of the venerable Cundaka as the Buddha's attendant, whilst the final section reverts to Ānanda again. An intriguing question is whether there is any connection between Cunda the Smith (Cunda Kammāraputta) and the venerable Cunda(ka). Thus, is there a portion of the story missing where Cunda the Smith 'goes forth' and becomes the venerable Cunda or Cundaka? Moreover, are the narrative verses actually fragments of an alternative verse recension of the story? The text we have is very much an edited and

selected version of the whole mass of floating oral material, much of it now lost forever. An example of some of this material is the survival of the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit work, the Mahāvastu, which gives a glimpse of the extent and richness of it. Herein are to be found both prose and verse alternative versions of various tales and episodes within the Buddhist tradition, many of which are absent from Pāli literature altogether².

In the Commentary to the Suppavāsā Sutta (2.8) it is said Koliyaputta was the son (*putta*) of the Koliyan king. However, this is anachronistic as the Koliyans, like the Sākyans their neighbours, formed a republic during the lifetime of the Buddha. As Suppavāsā herself is designated Koliyadhītā ('a Koliyan daughter'), this might then give the impression that they were brother and sister instead of husband and wife! The word *putta* (as also *dhītā*) when used as a suffix to a name, here and elsewhere, seems to mean 'a member of', 'belonging to' or 'one born in', a certain family or clan, rather than the 'son' or 'child' of a particular person. It is used especially by *khattiya* clans such as the Koliyans and Sākyans in whose republic-states³ there was a legislative assembly (*saṅgha*) of leading members, heads of families. These members are called *rājas*, whilst the other

2 I disagree now with my observation in the introduction to the Udāna translation (p.8) that, 'The Udāna is an anthology, many pieces being taken from elsewhere in the Pāli Canon . . .', which is misleading. Neither the Mahāparinibbāna Suttanta nor the Udāna can be pointed to as the original source for those suttas they have in common.

3 These are either truly tribal, ruled by the elected elders of a council, or republican states governed by an aristocratic (i.e. *khattiya*-born) oligarchy.

male members of the clan were the *puttas* or *rājaputtas*, the 'sons' of the *rājas*. That the Buddha was a *rājaputta* would not necessarily mean that he was a 'prince' as the later tradition would have it, the son of King Suddhodana, but merely that he was a member of the Sākyan clan. He was a Sākyaputta or Rājaputta, that is, he belonged to a clan or tribe that was governed by an assembly of *rājas*; a Rajput tribe in modern parlance. A remnant of such a tribe, the Forest Rajputs, still existed in recent times in the foothills of the Himalayas on the borders of Nepal. Their origin had much in common with the ancient traditions recorded in Pāli literature of the origin of the Sākyans, whose home was that very same region.

This system of government of the Koliyans and Sākyans is also reflected in the heavenly worlds with the distinction between 'devas' and 'devaputtas'. The leader of the devas, the *devarāja* of the Tāvatiṃsa (the 'Assembly of the Thirty-three') reveals in the name of 'Sakka' his connection with the Sākyans. Possibly he was originally a tribal god, hero or ancestor, who in later times came to be identified with the Indo-Ariyan thunder-god, Indra. Because of this tribal connection it is appropriate that Sakka should have become the special patron and protector of the Buddhadhama, the teaching of the Great Sage (*mahāmuni*) Sākyaputta Gotama, the Sākyamuni, the Sage of the Sākyans. The devas, it may be gathered, lived an idyllic existence as *rājas*, in aristocratic or 'regal' splendour, attended by retinues of devaputtas, celestial maidens (*devakaññā*) or devadhītās (the 'daughters', also called *accharā* or nymphs), musicians (*gandhabba*), etc. Here, as in the human world which it mirrors, there is to be seen the transition in the actual meaning of the term *rāja*, from the original tribal/republican connotation to the idea of 'kingship', the single rule of a

mahārāja, when kingdoms replaced the tribal territories. References to devatās or devaputtas belonging to 'a Tāvatiṃsa company' (*Tāvatiṃsa-kāyikā devatā*) may be taken to mean referring to this heaven as organised into presumably thirty-three companies or divisions. Each of these are headed by a 'deva' as the leader which, like that of the overall leader Sakka himself, is an office held by that deva and who is replaced upon his decease. The term 'devaputta' then refers to the other members of the various companies under the leadership of a particular deva. These companies also resemble military battalions and are so employed in the mythical warfare that takes place between the devas and the asuras. As well as this warrior/*khattiya* ethos, the Tāvatiṃsa is characterised by its sensual delights which here reach unsurpassed heights of indulgence and perfection.

In the Udāna (3.7) there is a reference to Sakka's consort, Sujā the asura maiden. In 3.2 Sakka is revealed being ministered to by five hundred beautiful pink-footed nymphs (*accharā*) or the *Kakuta-pādānī*, literally, 'the Dove-footed Ones', referring to their delicacy and complexion, rather than any bird-like characteristics. Some texts (e.g. the Burmese⁴) have *kukkuta-* ('chicken'), instead of *kakuta-* ('dove'). In the Commentary (UdA, p.172) it is stated that their feet were of a reddish or pinkish colour 'like the feet of a pigeon' (*pārāpata-pāda-sadisa*), whilst the PTS edition of the Udāna reads *pādinī* instead of *pādānī* - the only reference to these nymphs in the Sutta Piṭaka, making the correct reading difficult to ascertain.

4 Khuddakanikāya I, Chaṭṭhasangāyana ed. 1956.

Some other words and phrases of interest in the Udāna are the following:

sabbattha ekarattiparivāsa (1.10). This seems to mean 'staying one night at each place (upon the journey)'. However, the Commentary takes it to mean 'taking (but) one night to complete the journey', despite *sabbattha* which ought to mean 'everywhere', 'each place'.

In 1.10 also occurs the phrase *gāvī taruṇavacchā*: 'a cow accompanied by a young calf'. This should pose no particular problem, except that Woodward mistranslated the sentence, implying that Bahiya (and also Suppabuddha in 5.3) was killed by 'a calf' instead of 'a cow with a calf'⁵, the latter being more plausible. Normally gentle and inoffensive, a cow can be dangerous and unpredictable when she has a young calf to protect. Woodward's mistake seems to have gone unnoticed for it is found repeated in books and articles by other authors when referring to the deaths of Bahiya and Suppabuddha. Pukkusāti (M 140) and Tambadāthika (DhA II 203f.) were also similarly killed by cows, the former by a cow rushing to protect her calf according to the Commentary (MA V 62).

Janapadakalyāṇī (3.2) meaning 'the loveliest in the land' is taken by the Commentary to be the personal name of the Sākya girl with whom Nanda is infatuated, rather than merely descriptive. One feels the Commentary is stretching a point here but it had to fit the manifestly late and absurd tale of

5 F.L. Woodward, *Minor Anthologies of the Pāli Canon II: Verses of Uplift*, PTS 1935, p.11.

Nanda's going forth as found in DhA.

In 3.9 occurs a list of crafts. The fifth is *muddāsippa*: communicating by gestures. The Commentary is of little help, merely adding 'hand gestures'. Woodward's explanation of it as bargaining by signs or hand-touching employed by merchants⁶ is far-fetched and quite wrong according to the late I.B. Horner in a personal communication. Possibly it may have had a military significance as do the previous crafts, i.e. directing the course of the battle by signalling commands. T.W. Rhys Davids' proposal that *lokāyata* means 'nature lore' has been disposed of by Jayatilleke who has shown that it originally meant 'the art of debate' as a branch of brahminical learning⁷. *Lokāyata* came to mean materialism at the time of the Pāli commentators and, outside Buddhism, it is also used as a term for materialism. It is so described in Haribhadra's *Saddarśanasamuccaya* (8th cent. C.E.) and in the Vedāntin Mahādeva's *Sarvadarśanasamgraha* (14th cent.). There are two distinct readings of the final craft mentioned: (1) *khattavijjā*: political science or statecraft, the craft of the ruling or warrior class (*khattiya*); (2) *khettavijjā*: the knowledge of, or the ability to locate, suitable sites for building upon. There is also a possible reading of *nakhattavijjā* (astrology).

Most translations of the verse beginning *abhūtavādī nirayaṃ upeti* (4.8; also found in DhP 306 and It. 48), render this line: 'The liar goes to hell'. However, this does not clearly differentiate the subject from the person of the next line. That

6 Woodward, *ibid.*, p.38, n.2.

7 K.N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, London 1963, p.48f.

the verse should be translated as:

'The false accuser goes to hell

And he who denies the deed he did . . .'

is suggested by the story of Sundarī's murder (also found in Dhpa) and also the prose of It. 48.

In 5.9 occurs the phrase *saddāyamānarūpā*, 'making an uproar', in the PTS edition of the text. However, on consulting the various readings noted by the texts, none of the Mss used in its preparation actually has this reading. Paul Steinthal, the PTS editor, apparently took *saddāya-* from the Commentary which gives this as an alternative, possibly because he considered his Ms reading meaningless. These various readings are: *padhāya-*, *pathāya-*, *vadhāya-*, *saddhāya-*. More recent Oriental printed editions of the text are of little help in resolving the problem. The Burmese edition has *sadhāya-*, as does the Nālandā edition⁸, and this may be equated with *padhāya-*, because *sa* and *pa* are similar in the Brāhmī script and easily confused. There is a verb *sadh-* (Skt. *śṛdh-*) meaning 'abuse', which ought to give the Pāli present indicative *saddhati*, not *sadhati*⁹. The Udāna Commentary¹⁰ gives the reading *vadhāya-*, meaning 'harm', 'injury', but 'harm by verbal abuse', which seems to be what is intended, would be a peculiar use of the word. To establish the correct form of the text is a complicated problem and cannot be resolved with the material available.

Parūlha-kaccha-nakha-loma: 'with long-grown nails and hair'

8 Khuddakanikāya I. Nālandā Devanāgarī Pāli Series, Bihar Government, 1959.

9 Private communication from K.R. Norman, Cambridge.

10 Both PTS, and Simon Hewavitarne Bequest ed. 1920.

(6.2). Woodward translated as 'with long nails and hairy armpits' ('Verses of Uplift', p.78), and at *Kindred Sayings I* (p.104) it appears as 'with hairy bodies and long nails'. There seems to be uncertainty as to the meaning and derivation of *kaccha*, as either 'marshy land', 'the long grass', etc., growing in such a place, or 'a hollow' such as 'an armpit', etc.¹¹. The whole phrase appears to imply being unkempt, dirty, sweaty and smelly ('hairy = sweaty armpits, caked with dust', etc.¹²). Later in the sutta the king says, '... when they have washed off the dust and mud, are well-bathed and perfumed, and have trimmed their hair and beards . . .', which seems to support this interpretation.

Koñco khīrapako va ninnagaṃ (8.7). I translated, 'as a fully-fledged heron leaves the marshy ground'. However, *khīrapako* actually means 'milk-fed', i.e., 'a suckling(-calf)' and seems hardly appropriate for a bird, although possibly it could refer to a fledgling being fed with regurgitated food by its parents, but far-fetched. The Commentary (UdA, p.427) refers to the notion of certain birds (heron, goose or swan, etc.) having the ability to separate milk from water, leaving the water behind (*ninnaga* = *udaka*). Another possibility is that *koñca* is not a heron at all, but an elephant. See PED *koñca*⁽²⁾: trumpeting (of elephants; also the sounds made by certain water-birds that are similar. cf Milindapañha chap 6, '... an elephant's sound is like a heron's'). *koñca* = *koñcanāda* (*kuñcanāda*). *koñca* / *kuñca* / *kuñja* / *kuñjara*: an elephant.

11 Cf PED *kaccha*⁽¹⁾, *kacchā*⁽²⁾, also *kacchantara*, *upakaccha*, and Skt. *kacchā*, *kakṣa*, *kaca*.

12 This interpretation was suggested to the writer by the late Ven. H. Saddhātissa.

However, it seems best to accept the commentarial explanation here. Although it has not been possible to locate the concept of the milk-drinking heron elsewhere in any Pāli work, it is a known convention in Sanskrit literature¹³. It is used as a simile for accepting the good but rejecting the bad, thus: 'He takes the good utterances (away from the bad) as the goose takes milk from water' (Mahābhārata I 69.10) and, 'The royal goose drinks milk, (but) avoids water' (Subhāṣitaratnaśā, 1374). Therefore, the Udāna passage should be amended to translate as: '(the wise man . . . abandons evil) as the milk-drinking heron leaves the water behind'¹⁴. However, the substitution of 'heron' for the more usual 'goose' (or 'swan') does leave the suspicion that this interpretation may not be entirely correct. Perhaps it would be going too far to consider this as another example of the Pāli redactor's subtle humour!

Sutta 8.6. betrays its lateness by the prophecy about Pāṭaliputta (modern Patna) put into the mouth of the Buddha, concerning its future greatness when it was to become the capital of Magadha and the centre of the Asokan empire. The sudden introduction of the name Pāṭaliputta itself, and also the explanation calling one of the entrances to the city the Gotama

13 That this was a widespread belief is substantiated by the fact that it is actually mentioned in a 9th cent. Chinese (T'ang Dynasty) Buddhist source. After hearing a report of a conversation with the Ch'an master Huang-po, another remarks, 'That swan is able to extract the pure milk from the adulterated mixture . . .' (J. Blofeld, *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po*, London 1958, p.101).

14 This information and the references were supplied by K.R. Norman in a personal communication.

Gate, look very much like a late interpolation.

In conclusion, a word should be added regarding the text and translation of the Udāna. The PTS edition is in a very unsatisfactory state. It was prepared by P. Steinthal in 1885 from three Mss (two Sinhalese and a Burmese), all containing many defects. An attempt was made to improve the text by E. Windisch who produced a list of alternative readings¹⁵. This list was subsequently further improved and added to by F.L. Woodward when he made his edition of the Commentary (1925). Despite these attempts, the fact is that there is still much left to be desired in the text and what is really needed is a completely new edition to replace Steinthal. There are now in existence several Oriental printed editions, such as that contained in the Burmese Chaṭṭhasangāyana edition of the Tipiṭaka (1956), that are more satisfactory or at least 'readable' compared with many portions of the PTS text. This Burmese edition, the Nālandā Devanāgarī edition and the Sinhalese Buddha Jayanti Tripiṭaka Series edition were consulted by the present writer in preparing his translation of the Udāna. The initial purpose of this translation was to 'improve upon' Woodward's 1935 version ('Verses of Uplift') which is unsatisfactory in many respects. However, I have refrained from being overtly critical of Woodward's work for, although many of the errors in his translation have been corrected, this new translation has produced a new crop of errors. These were discovered only subsequent to publication and hopefully may be corrected in a future edition.

15 'Notes on the Edition of the Udāna', JPTS 1890, pp.91-108.