

## UDĀNA OR BUDDHA'S INSPIRED UTTERANCES

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*Udāna* is the third book of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*, the last of the five *nikāyas* in the *Sutta Pitaka*. It consists of eight *vaggas*, with ten *suttas* in each, 80 *suttas* in total.<sup>1</sup> Similarly to some other books of the Pāli Canon, in this collection each *sutta* is a combination of prose and verses called *udānas*, inspired utterances or uplifting utterances. Prose introductory described the situation that motivated Buddha to communicate his inspiration. In only two cases *udānas* were not spoken by the Buddha, but by Venerable Bhaddiya (*sutta* 2:10) and Sakka, king of gods (*sutta* 3:7). Also, except *suttas* 6:8, 6:10, 8:1, 8:3, 8:4 and 3:10, where *udānas* are in prose, all other contain two or four verse stanza, which are composed mostly in ordinary metres like śloka, triṣṭubh or jagatī . Based on these sayings (*udāna*), which usually conclude *suttas* and make their climax, the whole collection has got its name.

There is an interesting simile made by Dhammapāla, author of the *Udāna* commentary (*Paramatthadīpani*), which vividly explains the meaning of the word *udāna*:

“Herein: *Udāna (Udānaṃ)*: an *Udāna* in what sense? In the sense of *udānana* (upsurging). What is this that (goes) under the name of an *Udāna*? A pronouncement (*udāhāro*) caused to rise up through a thrill of joy. For just as whatever substance that is to be measured, such as oil and so on, the *māna* is not able to take, that goes on its way overflowing (same), is spoken of as its surplus, and whatever water a pond is not able to take, that goes on its way engulfing (things), is spoken of as a flood, so, in that same way, is that particular pronouncement (made) irrespective of (whether there be any) recipient (present), as it emerges outside via the speech-door after failing to remain within as the excess of whatever explosion of thought, caused to rise up through a thrill of joy, the heart's interior is not able to contain, spoken of as an *Udāna*.”<sup>2</sup>

Such an interpretation of the meaning is related to another fact. Namely, according to ancient Indian physiology, three or five airs circulate throughout the human body. The *Udāna* is the name for the one that always goes upward, from throat (heart) into the head.<sup>3</sup>

As for the Pāli canonical literature, *udāna* is one of the nine forms (*navāṅga*) listed in the Canon as types of exposition in which Buddha taught. The others are *sutta* (discourses), *geyya* (recitation), *veyyākaraṇa* (exposition), *gātha* (stanza), *itivuttakaṃ* (thus said), *jātaka* (birth stories), *abbhutadhamma* (marvelous phenomena), and *vedalla* (analysis). This classification predates the one with *nikāya* division and today we have three books in the Pāli Canon with the same names: *Udāna*, *Itivuttaka* and *Jātaka*.

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1 It is interesting that Buddhaghosa, in one of his commentaries (*Papançasudani* II, 106, 8-28) mentions 82 *suttas* containing stanzas, wrongly identifying term *udāna* with the book being analyzed here. As A. K. Norman remarks: “...it is more likely that it refers to a general type of literature, of which the *Udāna* is an example. In this connection it is of interest to note that Dhammapāla states that the majority of the Buddha's *udānas* are in the *Dhammapada*... the Sarvāstivādin version of the *Dhammapada* is entitled *Udānavarga*.”

2 Masefeld (1994), p. 2.

3 Williams (1872), p. 153.

Eight chapters of the *Udāna* collection have the following titles: 1. *Bodhi vagga*, 2. *Mucalinda vagga*, 3. *Nanda vagga*, 4. *Meghiya vagga*, 5. *Soṇa vagga*, 6. *Jacchanda vagga*, 7. *Cūḷa vagga* and 8. *Pāṭaligāmiya vagga*. These chapters got their titles mainly according to the first sutta in each of them and very often there is no strong connection between the prose parts of the suttas inside one chapter. On the other hand, analysis of the verses gives us some more insight into the guiding principle of the *Udāna* redactors for grouping available material. For example, in the first chapter, *Bodhi vagga*, the word collocation is quite obvious. Therefore, a more appropriate title would be *Brāhmaṇa vagga*, since all the verses contain word *brāhmaṇa*, an ideal which Buddha keeps in high esteem. The common theme of the second chapter is *sukkhā* (happiness), as this word occurs in the nine *udānas*, while in the next chapter all of them have a word *bhikkhu* (monk). The *Nanda Vagga*, contains a well known sutta about the Buddha's cousin Nanda, who the Buddha takes to the heaven. While it is not unusual in the Canon for the Buddha and his enlightened disciples to visit heavenly worlds, this is maybe unique case in the whole Tipitaka that the Buddha by his own power brought someone else among devas. In the fourth chapter the term connecting all stanzas is *citto* (mind).

Unfortunately, the verses in the second half of the collection are not so well connected and there are less stanzas with a common term. So four of them in the fifth chapter has *pāpa* (evil) and five in the sixth chapter has *dassino/diṭṭhi* (viewer/view). While several stanzas in the seventh chapter has words related to water, only two have *ogham* (flood). In the last chapter most of the verses refer to *nibbāna*, but there is only one expression which occurs two times: *anto dukkhassā* (inside suffering).

How strong was this principle of grouping suttas according to the common word in the verses, especially in the first four chapters, can be seen through one example. The first chapter contains four suttas which describe the Buddha immediately after Enlightenment (1.1-4). Surprisingly, *Mucalinda sutta*, which thematically belongs to the same stream of events and tells the story of the *nāga* king protecting Buddha from the storm, is not part of the first chapter. Instead, it found its place in the second chapter. This seems even more strange if we know that in the Vinaya Piṭaka<sup>4</sup> all these suttas are grouped together. The reason for that might be the fact that verses in the *Mucalinda Sutta* do not contain the word *brahmana*, but *sukkhā*, which is binding principle for the suttas in the second chapter.

This principle of separating suttas which are otherwise close regarding their content is noticeable in some other cases. For example, *Mahākassapa sutta* (1:6) and *Sakkudāna sutta* (3:7), very similar by telling about 500 devas wishing to give *dāna* to Mahākassapa, are in the separate chapters. The same applies to the *Rāja sutta* (2:2) and the *Piṇḍapātika sutta* (3:8), where monks are reproached by the Buddha for engaging in mindless chatter. Of course, there are a few more examples like this, where content of the sutta's prose part was not the guiding principle in organizing suttas into chapters. And again discrepancy between first four and the last four chapters of the collection is visible. Namely, in the last four chapters suttas similar by the content of the prose part are in the same chapter. Thus the *Paṭhamalakuṇḍakabhaddiya sutta* (7:1) and the *Dutiyalakuṇḍakabhaddiya sutta* (7:2) follow each other in the seventh chapter. The same applies to the first four, as well as the last two discourses in the last chapter.

The internal structure of the *Udāna* shows one more interesting feature. It is evident that the stanzas in the successive suttas inside one chapter have more words in common. For example, in the first chapter and besides verses in the first three suttas, which are almost identical, verses of the fourth and the fifth sutta share a word *dhamma*. Further on, common word in the stanzas in the fifth and sixth sutta is *khīṇa*. Verses in the sixth and seventh sutta have close terms *saka* (one's own) and

<sup>4</sup> *Vinaya Piṭaka*. I.1-3

*anañña* (not other), while in seventh and eight sutta there are semantically close terms *pāragū* (gone beyond) and *mutta* (released). Further on, the ninth and the tenth sutta contain two words of the same meaning: *udaka* and *āpo* (water). Such repeating of semantically identical or close words in successive verses is known as concatenation. This is often used mnemonic device in oral traditions, which helped reciters to memorize the text. Application of this device is known not only in Buddhism, but also in other Indian religious traditions.

Minute analysis of the text by the contemporary scholars led to the conclusion that probably verses, especially in the first four chapters, made a nucleus of the *Udāna* collection, while the prose parts were added later. This hypothesis is supported by several arguments. The first one is language analysis of the verses and the prose, which shows characteristics of the different phases in development of the Pāli language. Another argument is the presence of concatenation. Namely, this mnemonic device has a meaning only when recited parts follow each other, but not when they are interspersed with the prose parts. If *Udāna* had the present form from the beginning, there would be no point to introduce concatenation. Finally, interesting insights can be gained by comparing *Udāna* with its counterparts in the other Buddhist Canons. One of them is the *Udānavarga*, from the Sarvastivādin Canon, text preserved in the so-called Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit. This is much larger collection, consisting of more than thousand *udānas* and grouped into 33 chapters. Interestingly, although it contains all stanzas from the Pāli *Udāna*, the *Udānavarga* doesn't contain prose introductions or comments on the verses at all.

Turning to the content of the *Udāna*, it can be seen that the prose sections are mostly short, story-like and their style is rather simple. On the other hand, among the *Udāna* verses we find some of the most enigmatic of the Buddha's sayings in the whole Canon. For example, his description of *nibbāna* in the sutta 8:1:

*There is that sphere, monks,  
where there is no earth, no water, no fire, no air,  
no sphere of infinite space, no sphere of infinite consciousness,  
no sphere of nothingness, no sphere of neither perception nor non-perception,  
no this world, no world beyond, neither moon nor sun.  
There, monks, I say there is surely no coming,  
no going, no persisting, no passing away, no rebirth.  
It is quite without support, unmoving, without an object,  
– just this is the end of suffering.<sup>5</sup>*

It is interesting how this *udāna* is rephrased and summarized in the *Udānavarga*:

*That place where the elements are not found I know.  
There is neither space nor consciousness, no sun nor moon;  
No coming, no going, no rebirth, no passing away.  
It is without support or object - this is called the end of suffering.<sup>6</sup>*

The short summary of the chapters is as follows:

Chapter 1: Describes some of the events that happened right after the Buddha's Enlightenment, while he was still dwelling in the vicinity of the *bodhi* tree. There he contemplated the chain of causation (*paticca-samuppāda*). The rest of the chapter pictures some of the leading Buddha's

<sup>5</sup> Ānandajoti (2008), p. 275-276.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 276.

disciples inquiring about the criteria to achieve the highest ideal of *brāhmaṇa*, “in whom fetter has been destroyed”. Also, we see some practitioners of the other traditions, doing ascetic practices and mistakenly believing to be supportive of the liberation. The last discourse in this chapter is well known *Bāhiya sutta*, perhaps the earliest formulation given by the Buddha on the subject of sense restraint. Buddha advises Bāhiya to regard all the sense-experiences merely as the objective phenomena. That much was enough for him to attain arahantship. The same teaching Buddha later gave to Mālun̄kyaputta (SN 35:95). It is curious that only this single chapter ends with the following formula: “This is also an Udāna spoken by the Lord – so was there [this some] heard by me”.<sup>7</sup> This formula connects *Udāna* with the *Itivuttaka*, which has this formula at the end of each sutta. It may happen that the same situation was with *Udāna*, but at some point redactors of the Pāli Canon decided to eliminate it. Details which invite such conclusion are contained in the commentary, where this formula is explained at the end of the first sutta (where it doesn't exist in the text we know today). Also, commentator Dhammapāla says that the formula appears in some other places in the collection: “In some of these same books this (canonical) Pali is seen, viz. “This, too, is an Udāna uttered by the Lord. Thus was there heard by me”.<sup>8</sup>

Chapter 2: Continues with the story about Buddha after his Enlightenment, at the point where it was interrupted in the first chapter. Now the Buddha is at the *muḥalinda* tree and protected from the storm for seven days by the nāga king. This discourse stands out from the rest in this chapter, which mainly present us with snapshots of the ordinary life: some children torment a snake at the road, busy lay followers of the Buddha do not have time to visit him, troubles of certain *paribbājaka* to obtain what is necessary for his pregnant wife, mourning of the desperate father over the death of his only son and the Buddha's blessing help a woman to deliver baby after seven years of pregnancy(!)

Chapter 3: Second sutta in this chapter is also well known story about the Buddha's half brother Nanda, who being disillusioned about his own practice and longing for his wife, wants to disrobe. The Buddha applies rather unusual remedy by taking Nanda to the Tāvātimsa heaven among heavenly nymphs. Enchanted by their beauty and after promise to be in their company after attaining jhānas, Nanda regains his enthusiasm for the practice. Later on, ashamed by his own lustful thoughts, Nanda takes right direction of his practice and becomes an arahant. In suttas 3:3, 3:6 and 3:8 the Buddha deals with misdeeds of untrained monks. The first sutta is one among several cases of the Buddha being annoyed by the negligence of his disciples, which was a cause to dismiss them. In the second sutta the Buddha rebukes the monk who can't restrain his speech and in the third one monks who are overwhelmed by their greed. The last sutta in the chapter is another description of the Buddha after Enlightenment.

Chapter 4: This chapter starts off with well known *Meghiya Sutta* (found also in AN 9:3, except final verses), the Buddha's ode to spiritual friendship and its role in facilitating spiritual attainments. The occasion for this advice was his personal attendant Meghiya's insistence on going for a solitary retreat into the nearby forest, despite Master's opposing that. And again, in the rest of the chapter, we see cases of gregarious and noisy monks (sutta 4:5), who forced Buddha to seek seclusion. There he is accompanied by the elephant who left his own herd in search for peace. *Sundarī Sutta* (4:8) gives us really unusual and disturbing insight into the relationships between competing *samaṇa* groups of the Buddha's time, where some of them didn't abstain even from a murder as a mean to eliminate competitors and obtain honor and gain for themselves only.

Chapter 5: Opening sutta here (found also in SN 3:8) is a charming vignette on marital relations

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7 Masefield, p. 16.

8 Masefield, p. 77.

between king Pasenadi and his wife Mallikā, but also about the wisdom showed by the queen. Later, in a conversation with king Pasenadi, the Buddha supports Mallika's claim that there is none more dear to us than ourselves. Sutta 5:3 gives account on the leper Suppabuddha, who on seeing crowd of people mistakenly thinks some food is being distributed. After coming closer, discovers that the Buddha is teaching Dhamma. Out of curiosity, the beggar sits and listens to the sermon. At the end of it, inspired by the gradual teaching, he becomes a stream enterer. Unfortunately, as in the case of Bāhiya (sutta 1:10), he was killed in an accident right after that.

Chapter 6: Here we find an *ūdāna* (6:1) related to the *Mahāparinibbāna sutta*<sup>9</sup> and the Buddha's relinquishment of the life force. This is well know dialogue between the Buddha and Ānanda at the Cāpāla Shrine. Although in this conversation the Buddha was hinting, for three times, at the possibility of living for the whole *kalpa*, if asked to, his personal assistant didn't understand that. At least, that's what the sutta says. But this is a little bit strange, because exactly Ānanda is the one who describes the whole event. So the sentence: "Yet, even such a gross sign being given, with such a gross show being made by the Lord, the venerable Ānanda was unable to penetrate..." is kind of puzzle. This chapter also contains a sutta (6:4) with the famous simile of the blind men and the elephant. When asked, each of them explains how they imagine the elephant which were able only to touch, but not to see. The Buddha compares those blind men with the followers of other traditions, who endlessly quarrel about different theories and opinions, not having direct experience about them.

Chapter 7 contains discourses whose topics cover excessive attachment to the sensual pleasures by the inhabitants of Sāvatti (7:3) or a miracle done by the Buddha at the village of Mallas named Thūṇa (7:9). This episode is similar to the one in *Cunda Sutta* (8:5), actually parallel to the same episode in the *Mahāparinibbāna sutta*, when very sick and thirsty Master asks Ānanda to fetch some water from the Kakudhā river. In few other short, stereotyped suttas Buddha sees some of his disciples, like Venerables Bhaddiya, Aññāta Koṇḍañña or Mahā Kaccāna, and being inspired by their earnest meditative efforts or the attainments, praises their purity.

Chapter 8: The four suttas on *nibbāna* open the final chapter of this collection. In one of them (8:3) one finds so often cited the following enigmatic passage:

"There exists, monks, that which is unborn, that which is unbecome, that which is uncreated, that which is unconditioned. For if there were not, monks, that which is unborn, that which is unbecome, that which is uncreated, that which is unconditioned, there would not be made known here the escape from that which is born, from that which is become, from that which is created, from that which is conditioned. Yet since there exists, monks, that which is unborn, that which is unbecome, that which is uncreated, that which is unconditioned, there is therefore made known the escape from that which is born, from that which is become, from that which is created, from that which is conditioned."<sup>10</sup>

This chapter contains a few other very interesting discourses. One of them (8:5) is about famous episode of the last Buddha's meal with the blacksmith Cunda, another parallel with the *Mahāparinibbāna sutta*. The other sutta (8:9) dramatically narrates how Dabba Mallaputta, when time for his *parinibbāna* approached, self-cremated himself by rising up into the air. The last discourse in the *Udāna* collection is Buddha's comment on this miraculous event, actually a praise to all of his liberated disciples:

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9 Walshe (1995), p. 245-246.

10 Masefield (1994), p. 160.

'Just as, for that hammered with an iron-hammer that has progressively died down, though the fire continues to blaze, a destiny is not known, so for those who are properly liberated, for those who have crossed the flood that is the bond of sense desires, for those who have reached the happiness that is undisturbed, there is not to be made known a destiny."<sup>11</sup>

As we saw, the *Udāna* starts with the events right after the Buddha's enlightenment and ends with the story of his last meal. This is indication that this collection was structured with the plan. We also showed that first four chapters have clear internal connections, through concatenation or thematic unity of the individual chapters. In the second part of the collection, organizational principle of the material is not so easy to identify, which may signal later additions. We also saw that several topics connect this collection with other parts of the Pāli Canon, particularly with the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* and *Vinaya Piṭaka*.

It is obvious that texts collected in the *Khuddaka Nikāya* belong to different strata in the development of the Pāli Canon. And for the *Udāna*, especially verses, we can say that together with some parts of *Sutta Nipāta*, *Dhammapada* or *Thera-* and *Therīgatha* belong to the oldest layers of the Canon. Thus, this small collection of discourses give us the closest possible view into the Buddha's timeless teachings.

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<sup>11</sup> Masefield (1994), p. 183.