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Antā Sutta

The Discourse on the Ends | S 22.103

Theme: “Self-identity” in the light of the 4 noble truths

Translated by TAN Beng Sin (Piya Tan) ©2005, 2023

1 Sakkāya, diṭṭhi

1.1 DEFINITIONS

1.1.1 The compound **sakkāya, diṭṭhi** (self-identity view)¹ is made up of *sakkāya* (self-identity) and *diṭṭhi* (view). As evident from this Sutta, **sakkāya** is a term for the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k, khandha*), or more technically, the 5 aggregates of clinging (*pañc’upādāna-k, khandha*), that is, the aggregates of those still with clinging (referring to the unawakened).² The term *sakkāya* comes from *sat + kāya*, and literally means “the existing body (as an assemblage),” the body (assemblage) of existent phenomena serving as the objective basis for clinging.

It is also possible and instructive to read the prefix *sa(k)-* as *saṃ-* (“self”); thus we have “self-body” or “the body as self.” “Body” here is figurative, referring to an assemblage.

Here, **Bodhi** makes a useful note on terminology:

Most translators render it [as] “personality,” a practice I followed in [the Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha] (departing from Ven Nāṇamoli, who rendered it, too literally in my view, [as] “embodiment”). But since, under the influence of modern psychology, the word “personality” has taken on connotations quite foreign to what is implied by *sakkāya*, I now translate it as “identity” (a suggestion made to me by Ven Thanissaro Bhikkhu). *Sakkāya-diṭṭhi* accordingly becomes “identity view,” the view of a self existing either behind or among the five aggregates.

(S:B 53)

1.1.2 The term **diṭṭhi** (Skt *dṛṣṭi*) means “view, belief, dogma, theory, speculation, especially false theory, groundless or unfounded opinion” (PED). Wrong view (*diṭṭhi*, or more specifically, *micchā, diṭṭhi*) is rejected by the Buddha as *pāpa, diṭṭhi*³ or *pāpika, diṭṭhi*, both meaning “evil view.”⁴

In the case of *sakkāya, diṭṭhi*, the wrongness is in one’s identifying with the body/mind or any part thereof as some kind of abiding self. Hence, this is a case of “**self-identity view**,” which is itself a blanket term that can arise in any of 20 ways [1.2, esp 1.2.5].

1.1.3 Another term for “wrong view” is **micchā, diṭṭhi**,⁵ the opposite of which is *sammā, diṭṭhi*, “right view.”⁶ The indeclinable prefix **sammā**⁷ means “thoroughly, properly, rightly; in the right way, as it ought to be, best, perfectly” (PED), also “fully, supreme,” as in *sammā, sambuddha*, “the fully self-awakened

¹ A 6.89/3:438, 10.76/5:145; Sn 231 (cf KhpA 188); Nc 271 (20 types as *diṭṭhi, lepa*, “smearing, plastering, coating”).

² **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44,2/1:299), SD 21.7.

³ A 8.10/4:172.

⁴ V 1:98, 323; Dh 164. Its opp is *bhaddika diṭṭhi* (good view) (A 10.103/5:213; It 26).

⁵ M 117/3:71; S 6.5/1:145, 14.12/2:153 (caused by ignorance); Dh 167, 316; Nc 271; Vbh 361, 389.

⁶ V 1:10; M 46/1:315, 77,21/2:12, 78,14/2:29, 84/2:87, 117/3:72; S 12.15/2:17, 45.9/5:11, 45.14/5:14, 45.49/5:30 f, 56.49/5:458 f; Nc 485; Vbh 104 f.

⁷ Cognate with Ved *samyac* = *samyak* & *samīś*, “connected, in one.”

one” or “the supreme Buddha.”⁸ In this sense, all arhats are *buddha*, “awakened.”⁹ The term *buddhānubuddha* (*Buddha + anubuddha*)¹⁰ refers to the Buddha and those who come “after” (*anu-*) him, that is, those who have truly followed, namely, the saints of the path.

1.2 THE 20 SELF-VIEWS

1.2.1 The Buddha’s second discourse, **the Anatta,lakkhaṇa Sutta** (S 22.59), contains this important *anicca-dukkha-anattā* formula, and climaxing with a reflection on non-self, thus:

“Therefore, bhikshus,

(1) any kind of **form** whatsoever,

whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near¹¹—all forms should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’¹²

(2) any kind of **feeling** ...

(3) any kind of **perception** ...

(4) any kind of **formations** ...

(5) any kind of **consciousness** whatsoever,

whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—all forms should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

(S 22.59,17-21/3:68), SD 1.2

1.2.2 It is the attainment of this vision that distinguishes the noble disciple (*ariya,sāvaka*) from the unstructured worldling (*assutavā puthujjana*).¹³ The unawakened ordinary person, unlike the true disciple, tends to see the aggregates in 4 wrong ways, and is obsessed by his wrong view—this is formulated in **the attānudiṭṭhi formula**, thus:

⁸ D 2,8/1:49; M 27,11/1:179; S 1:47, 2:69, 3:184, 5:343; Vism 198 f (*buddhānussati*).

⁹ Eg A 4:449.

¹⁰ Tha 1, 679, 1246.

¹¹ See S 22.48/3:47 (SD 1.2). This classification of the aggregates is explained in detail in the Vibhaṅga and briefly in the Visuddhi,magga: “**internal**” = physical sense-organs; “**external**” = physical sense-objects; “**gross**” = that which impinges (physical internal and external senses, with touch = earth, wind, fire); “**subtle**” = that which does not impinge (mind, mind-objects, mind-consciousness, and water); “**inferior**” = unpleasant and unwholesome sense-experiences [sense-world existence]; “**superior**” = pleasant and wholesome sense-experiences [form & formless existences]; “**far**” = subtle objects (“difficult to penetrate”); “**near**” = gross objects (“easy to penetrate”) (Vbh 1-13; Vism 14.73/450 f; Abhs 6.7). “Whether or not the details of the Vibhaṅga exposition are accepted as valid for the *nikāyas*, it seems clear that this formula is intended to indicate how each *khandha* is to be seen as a class of states, manifold in nature and displaying a considerable variety and also a certain hierarchy” (Gethin 1986:41). See also Gethin 1986: 43-46.

¹² *N’etaṃ mama, n’eso ’ham asmi, na mēso attā ti*. This threefold formula is the contrary of “the 3 graspings” (*ti,vidha gāha*), that is, of view (*diṭṭhi*), of craving (*taṇhā*), of conceit (*māna*) (MA 2:111, 225): here applied to the 5 aggregates [17-21]. A brief version, “There can be no considering that (element) as ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘I am’” (*ahan ti vā maman ti vā asmi ti vā*) is found in **Mahā Hatthi,padōpama S** (M 28/1:184-191 §§6b-7, 11b-12, 16b-17, 21b-22). These three considerations represent, respectively, the 3 kinds of **mental proliferation** (*papañca*), of self-view (*sak-kāya diṭṭhi*), of craving (*taṇhā*) and of conceit (*māna*) (Nm 280; Vbh 393; Nett 37 f). In **Anatta,lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59,-12-16/3:68), the formula is applied to the 5 aggregates, & in **Pārileyya S** (S 22.81/3:94-99), to the 4 primary elements. See also **Rāhula S** (A 4.177/2:164 f). See **Pārileyya S**, SD 6.16 (5).

¹³ S 3:18 f; cf S 3:16.

he regards form, feeling, perception, formations, or consciousness, as self;
 or, he regards self as possessing form, etc,
 or, he regards form, etc, as in self,
 or, he regards “I am form; form is mine,” etc. (M 3:188, 227; S 3:3, 16, 96; conflated)¹⁴

When listed in full, this formula gives 20 wrong views by which the unawakened worldling falls short of the saint’s vision.

1.2.3 In both the Suttas and the Abhidhamma, these twenty wrong views regarding the aggregates are used to define the nature of self-view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), that is, the wrong view that the body is a permanent entity.¹⁵ Although these wrong views generally define an unawakened worldling, more significantly, they are said to be absent from the 4 dhyanas (*jhāna*) and the first 3 formless attainments (*samāpatti*).¹⁶ In the **Mahā Māluṅkyaputta Sutta** (M 64) and the **Jhāna Sutta** (A 9.36), it is stated that:

Whatever there is in form, in feeling, in perception, in formations, in consciousness, he sees those states as impermanent ... as *non-self*. He turns his mind away from those states and directs it to the deathless element

If he persists in that,¹⁷ he attains the destruction of the mental influxes.¹⁸ But if he does not attain the destruction of the mental influxes because of desire for the Dharma, that delight in the Dharma, then with the destruction of the five lower fetters¹⁹ [connected with the lower realms of existence], he is spontaneously reborn [becomes a non-returner, reborn in the pure abodes]²⁰ and there attains final nirvana without ever returning from that world.

This is the path, the way, to the abandoning of the 5 lower fetters.

(M 64,10-15/1:436 f = A 9.36/4:422-424;²¹ cf A 2:128 (×2), 130 (×2))

1.2.4 However, as noted in the **Khemaka Sutta** (S 22.89), one may not regard the 5 aggregates as self (*attā*) or as belonging to self, but, as the monk Khemaka himself declares, this does not mean that one is an arhat. This is because even after the destruction of the 5 lower fetters, there still remains a residue of

¹⁴ For a full list of 20 wrong views related to this, see **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44.7.2/1:300) n, SD 40a.9.

¹⁵ M 1:300, 3:17 f; S 3:102; Dhs 182.

¹⁶ In the case of the formless attainments, only the 4 formless aggregates apply. The form aggregate, for example, is not included in the object of insights for the basis of contemplation.

¹⁷ *Etam santam etam paṇitam*.

¹⁸ “Mental influxes,” *āsava*, ie those states that keep us mentally defiled and caught in the rut of rebirth and suffering, viz, the influxes of: (1) sense-desire (*kām’āsava*), (2) existence (*bhav’āsava*), and (3) ignorance (*avijjāsava*). In the later set of 4, that of views (*diṭṭhi*) is added as the 3rd influx, totalling 4 influxes. See SID: āsava.

¹⁹ That is, the first 5 of the 10 fetters (*dasa,saṃyojanā*), which are: (1) personality view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) persistent doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rules and rites (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa, rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa, rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61, A 5:13, Vbh 377). In some places, no. 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the “lower fetters” (*orambhāgiya saṃyojana*), and the rest, the “higher fetters” (*uddhambhāgiya saṃyojana*).

²⁰ That is, reborn in the **pure abodes** (*suddh’āvāsa*), the 5 highest heavens of the form world (*rūpa, loka*) inhabited only by non-returners who assume their last birth to become arhats and attain nirvana. These worlds are Āviha (“Non-declining”), Ātappa (“Unworried”), Sudassā (“Clearly Visible”), Sudassī (“Clear-visioned”) and Akaṇiṭṭhā (“Highest”) (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46). It should be noted that one could become a non-returner in this world itself, and upon dying, be reborn in the pure abodes.

²¹ **Jhāna S** (A 9.36) contains an archer parable not found in **Mahā Māluṅkyaputta S** (M 64), SD 21.10.

the conceit “I am,” of the desire “I am,” and of the latent tendency “I am.” Only when one has totally uprooted the notion that “I am” the aggregates does one become an arhat.²²

1.2.5 Another important application of the 20 self-views is found in **the Satta-ṭṭhāna Sutta** (S 22.57), that is, in the detailed explanation of the point that *in whatever diverse ways ascetics or brahmins view the self, they all view the 5 aggregates of clinging or one of them.*²³ In other words, the 20 self-views cover all the views that one can have regarding the 5 aggregates; there are none besides.

Gethin adds a cautionary note:

Now, a number of scholars have drawn attention to the fact that the *nikāyas* fail to categorically deny the *attā* and declare only that the *khandhas* are *anattā*.²⁴ Yet, when this is taken in the context of the former statement, it must be added that the *nikāyas* refuse to allow the *attā* as a meaningful concept apart from the five *khandhas*, that is, apart from views or notions of the *attā* that are ultimately to be abandoned. The *attā* is in this way squeezed out [of] the *nikāyas*’ ultimate frame of reference, and deliberately confined to the level of speculations and views.

This can be seen, up to a point, as a challenge to those *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas* who maintained views concerning the *attā* to explain the exact nature of that *attā*. Their response seems to have been to accuse the Buddha of declaring the destruction of the existing being, or to demand an answer to the question of whether or not the Tathāgata exists after death. The Tathāgata is untraceable (*ananuvejja*), the question of his existence or not after death is unexplained (*avyākata*), was the reply.²⁵ (1986:45 f)

1.2.6 Another set of twenty wrong views, called **the sakkāya, diṭṭhi views** or the self-identity views, are mentioned in **the Pārileyya Sutta** (S 22.81), which relates how an uninstructed ordinary person tends to regard any of the 5 aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness) in any or all of these ways:

- (1) as the self, or
- (2) the self as possessing the aggregate, or
- (3) the aggregate as in the self, or
- (4) the self as in the aggregate. (S 22.81/3:97 f), SD 6.1; Dhs 1003

1.2.7 The Mahā Puṇṇama Sutta (M 109)²⁶ and **the Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta** (M 44),²⁷ too, list these 20 self-identity views in connection with the 4 aggregates. **The Paṭisambhidā, magga** illustrates the 4 basic modes of the self-identity view in connection with form in this way. One might wrongly regard form as self in the way that a burning oil-lamp’s flame is identical to the colour of the flame. Or one might wrongly regard self as possessing form, just as a tree possesses a shadow. Or one might wrongly regard form as

²² S 22.89/3:126-132 (SD 14.13).

²³ S 22.57/3:61-66 (SD 29.2).

²⁴ Eg E Conze, *Buddhism—Its essence and development*, 2nd ed pbk, Oxford, 1978:39 & EJ Thomas, *History of Buddhist Thought*, London, 1933:101 n2. (Gethin’s fn)

²⁵ M 1:140; S 3:119; cf S 3:124, where Māra searches in vain for the consciousness of a monk who has just attained arhatness and then died. The most extensive treatment of this aspect of the *khandha* is found in **Avyākata Saṁyutta** (S 4:374-403). On this whole question, see S Collins, *Selfless Persons*, Cambridge, 1982:117-138. (Gethin’s fn)

²⁶ M 109,10/ 3:17 f (SD 17.10).

²⁷ M 44,7 f/1:300 (SD 40a.9).

in self, as the scent in the flower. Or one might wrongly regard self as in form, as a jewel in a casket.²⁸ These self-identity views have been abandoned by the streamwinner.

2 Meanings of *anta*

2.1 DICTIONARY MEANINGS

The Pali dictionaries give a range of meanings for *anta* (pl *antā*) [ṣ3]. Here I have culled the main meanings and usages of *anta* from the Critical Pali Dictionary (CPD) and Cone's A Dictionary of Pali (DP), giving only the canonical usages:

- (1) (ts)²⁹ (lit & fig) end, limit, conclusion; edge, boundary; extreme.
 1. the outmost end of something, extremity: *kāya, bandhanassa* ~, "the end of a body-cord (belt)" (V 2:136); in the phrase, *n'eva antaṃ na koṭṭim passati (jānāti)* (AA 1:268; ThaA 2:53), metaphorical, "not to see where to begin, to be unable to unravel, to be at a loss."
 2. (a) border, edge (V 1:47, of a *cīvara*, "outer robe"; opp *bhoga*, "body (of the robe)"). (b) boundary, frontier (J 6:23).
 3. extreme, contrast; pl opposing or different principles: *dve ~ā ... na sevitabbā*, "the two extremes not to be taken up" (V 1:10,10 = S 1:62,27* = 5:421,2 ≠ 4:330,28); cf *anta-g, gāhikā diṭṭhi*, "the view that grasps at extremes" and *majjhimā paṭipadā*, "the middle way."
 4. end, limit, interruption, discontinuance: *~o n'atthi*, "no end to" (gen).
- (2) (n) (Skt *antra, āntra*) bowels, entrails, intestines (denoting now the whole alimentary canal, now the guts, or esp the rectum): *kesā ... ~am anta, guṇaṃ* (head-hair ... large intestines, small intestines) (Khp 3 (p2,7) = D 3:293,15 = 3:104,26 = M 1:57,18 = 185,19 = Vbh 82,12).
- (3) (mfn, ts) end: *~kara*, "making an end," one who puts an end to (gen): *dukkhass'~o*, "an end of suffering" (D 2:123,11*; M 1:47,25 vl *antaṃ, karo*; Sn 337; It 18,5*); *dukkhassa ~kiriya*, "for making an end of suffering" (V 1:13,1; S 4:93, Sn 454).
- (4) (m, ts) death: *~ka*, lit "end-maker," referring to death personified as Māra the evil one, or a designation of the god of death (Yama, sometimes identified with Māra): *~o vasavatti ... Māro*, "the end-maker, the overlord, Māra" (V 1:21,21); *~kenādhipanassa*, "seized by the end-maker" (S 1:72,14* = Dh 288; Comy: *maraṇena abhibhūta*, "under the power of death," DhA). [For other senses of *antaka*, see DP sv.]
- (5) (mfn) (Skt *antya*) last, ultimate; worst, mean, contemptible.
 1. last, ultimate: *~m-antaṃ*, the most remote, in so *~m-antan'eva sevati*, "he seeks the most remote (area)" (D 3:38,13).
 2. worst, mean, contemptible: *~am idaṃ ... jīvikaṃ yad idaṃ piṇḍolyaṃ*, "this is the lowest form of livelihood, that is, alms-collecting" [abusive usage] (S 3:93,4).

2.2 COMMENTARIAL EXPLANATIONS

The Commentary on the Antā Sutta glosses *anta* as *koṭṭhāsa*, meaning "a share, a portion, a division; a group, a faction" (DP), and notes that the sutta interprets the 5 aggregates by way of the 4 noble truths (SA 2:332). This commentarial sense is not found in the above definitions (or in any dictionary) and is apparently an interpretation rather than a definition of *anta*, which here clearly refers to the extent or limit of the 5 aggregates. After all, the limits of the 5 aggregates are *the living being* themselves, who is made up of "portions," that is, the aggregates.

²⁸ Pm 2.50, 74, 77, 90 = 1:144 f.

²⁹ ts = tatsama, meaning the word is spelt the same way both in Sanskrit and in Pali.

2.3 BEST POSSIBLE MEANING

Here, for *anta*, we have adopted the meanings of “end” or “corner,” that is, the 4 ends or corners that are the noble truths, which form a group of 4 or 4 divisions, as explained in the Commentary [2.2].

Fortuitously, “end” (in English) also has the sense of “goal.” *The Dictionary of Pali Proper Names* lists S 43.44 as **the Anta Sutta** (with *anta* in the singular), but this is not attested anywhere else. Interestingly, this same text is named in the Tipiṭakas of Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand, and in the PTS edition as **the Parāyaṇā Sutta** (S 43.44/4:373), the Discourse on the Goal, on the Buddha teaching of the goal or end of the training, as well as the way to attain it.

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Antā Sutta

The Discourse on the Ends

S 22.103

- 1 Originating in Sāvattḥī.

The 4 ends

- 2 Bhikshus, there are these 4 ends.³⁰ What are the four? [158]
- 3 (1) The end that is self-identity. *sakkāy’anta*
 (2) The end that is the arising of self-identity. *sakkāya,samuday’anta*
 (3) The end that is the ending of self-identity. *sakkāya,nirodh’anta*
 (4) The end that is the way leading to the ending of self-identity. *sakkāya,nirodha,gāmini-p,paṭipad’anta*

The end that is self-identity

- 4 And what, bhikshus, is **the end that is self-identity**?
 The answer to this should be: the 5 aggregates of clinging.
- 5 What are the five? They are namely:

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| (1) the aggregate of clinging that is <u>form</u> ; | <i>rūp’upādāna-k,khandha</i> |
| (2) the aggregate of clinging that is <u>feeling</u> ; | <i>vedan’upādāna-k,khandha</i> |
| (3) the aggregate of clinging that is <u>perception</u> ; | <i>saññ’upādāna-k,khandha</i> |
| (4) the aggregate of clinging that is <u>formations</u> ; | <i>saṅkhār’upādāna-k,khandha</i> |
| (5) the aggregate of clinging that is <u>consciousness</u> . | <i>viññāṇ’upādāna-k,khandha</i> |

- 6 This, bhikshus, is called the end that is self-identity.

The end that is the arising of self-identity

- 7 And what, bhikshus, is **the end that is the arising of self-identity**?³¹

³⁰ “Ends,” *antā*: see Intro (2), esp (2.3).

³¹ *Sakkāya,samuday’anta*.

8 It is this craving that leads to renewed existence [rebirth], accompanied by pleasure and lust, seeking pleasure here and there; that is to say,³²

- | | |
|---|----------------------|
| (1) the craving for sensual pleasures, | <i>kāma,taṇhā</i> |
| (2) the craving for existence, | <i>bhava,taṇhā</i> |
| (3) the craving for non-existence [for extinction]. | <i>vibhava,taṇhā</i> |

9 This, bhikshus, is called the end that is the arising of self-identity.

The end that is the ending of self-identity³³

10 And what, bhikshus, is **the end that is the ending of self-identity**?

11 It is the utter fading away and ending of that very craving—giving it up, letting it go, being free from it, being detached from it.³⁴

12 This, bhikshus, is called the end that is the ending of self-identity.

The end that is the way leading to the ending of self-identity³⁵

13 And what, bhikshus, is the end that is the way leading to the ending of self-identity?

14 It is this very noble eightfold path, that is to say,

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| (1) right view, | <i>sammā,ditṭhi</i> |
| (2) right thought [right intention], | <i>sammā,saṅkappa</i> |
| (3) right speech, | <i>sammā,vācā</i> |
| (4) right action, | <i>sammā,kammantā</i> |
| (5) right livelihood, | <i>sammā,ājīva</i> |
| (6) right effort, | <i>sammā,vāyāma</i> |
| (7) right mindfulness, | <i>sammā,sati</i> |
| (8) right concentration. | <i>sammā,samādhi</i> |

15 This, bhikshus, is called the end that is the way leading to the ending of self-identity.

16 These, bhikshus, are the 4 ends.

— evaṃ —

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³² Comy to **Bhāra S** (S 22.22, SD 17.14): “Seeking delight here and there” (*tatra,tatrābhinandinī*) means having the habit of seeking delight in the place of rebirth or among the various objects, such as forms. “**Craving for sense-pleasures**” (*kāma,taṇhā*) means lust for the five cords of sense-pleasures. Lust for form-sphere existence or formless-sphere existence, attachment to dhyana, and lust accompanied by the eternalist view: this is called “**craving for existence**” (*bhava,taṇhā*). Lust accompanied by the annihilationist view is “craving for annihilation” (*vibhava,-taṇhā*). (SA 2:264). **Bodhi**: “This explanation of the last two kinds of craving seems to me too narrow. More likely, craving for existence should be understood as the principal desire to continue in existence (whether supported by a view or not), craving for extermination as the desire for a complete end to existence, based on an underlying assumption (not necessarily formulated as a view) that such extermination brings an end to a real ‘I.’” (S:B 1052 n38)

³³ *Sakkāya,nirodh’anta*.

³⁴ *Yo tassā,y’eva [or tassa-y-eva] taṇhāya asesā,virāga,nirodho cāgo paṭinissaggo mutti anālayo*.

³⁵ *Sakkāya,dukkha,nirodha,gāmini,paṭipad’anta*.