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Subhā Therī,gāthā

The Verses of the Elder Nun Subhā

Theme: The true meaning of seeing

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2006

1 The Thera- and Therī,gāthā

The Thera,gāthā and the Therī,gāthā are two of the fifteen books of the Khuddaka Nikāya, “the Small Collection” of Discourses, also known as the Fifth Nikāya (pañcama,nikāya). While the Thera,-gāthā is a collection of verses of the elder monks (thera), the Therī,gāthā is an anthology of the verses of the elder nuns (therī). In almost every case, they are arhats. These verses are often referred to as “verses of uplift” (udāna) as they are usually uttered at the time of awakening or by way of joyful review.

Various comparative studies have been done on these two important and beautiful texts. Siegfried Lienhard (1975), for example, highlights the striking nature imagery in the Thera,gāthā and the Therī,gāthā, and concludes, by way of a detailed literary analysis, that they draw from the tradition of erotic secular poetry and turn it into a distinctly wholesome Buddhist genre.¹

Kathryn Blackstone points out that the Thera,gāthā employs nature imagery more extensively and in more positive terms than does the Therī,gāthā—which may reflect that nuns are prohibited from forest-dwelling,² while monks are encouraged to seek forest solitude.³

Karen Lang contends that the Therī,gāthā places less emphasis on the impurity of the body than does the Thera,gāthā, where, for example, there is no reference to nuns seeking out cemeteries to meditate on male corpses (1986:78).⁴

Blackstone, on the other hand, notes that while the male composers of the Thera,gāthā tend to emphasize the fonnleness of women’s bodies, the female composers of the Therī,gāthā tend to emphasize the fonnleness of their own bodies (1998:59-81).

Scholars generally agree that it is difficult to know whether these verses were actually composed or uttered by the elders themselves. However, the structure of the poem does provide an indication of the method by which they were constructed.⁵ The verses, for example, are very repetitive, as collated by William Stede, in his listing of “The Pādas of the Thera- and Therī-gāthā.”⁶ Such identical terms, phrases, even lines or stanzas, possibly indicate the existence of a large common pool of refrains and phrases available to the elders.

K R Norman thinks, “It seems likely that some of these verses are very old, perhaps older than Buddhism, for they are found in Jain and Brahmanical literature.”⁷ It was a time before the concept of copyright in ancient India, and any elder or poet could compose his own verses, or freely repeat a verse he has heard, or borrow them from what John Brough calls “the treasure-house of versified tags.”⁸

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¹ Cf Lienhard 1984:75-79.
² For an important reason, see 4(2), Uppala,vaṇṇā, n.
³ The nun Uppala,vaṇṇā is raped in her own cell in Andha,vana (the Dark Forest) by her own cousin, Ānanda, who is in madly love with her. Thenceforth, nuns are forbidden to reside in forests. See below on Uppala,vaṇṇā, 4(2).
⁴ However, Comy to Abhayā’s verses (Thī 35-36) says that she goes to the Sita,vana to observe an object of impurity. The Buddha however causes a holographic image of such an object to appear before. Seeing this, she experiences samvega. Then the Buddha himself appears before him and instructs her. Later, after gaining arhathood, she repeats these instructions in her verses. (ThīA 41).
⁷ Norman, Tha:N xxi.
2 Therī,gāthā as literature

2.1 THE THERĪ,GĀTHĀ AS A TEXT. The Therī,gāthā is an anthology of 522 verses in 73 poems or cantos, numerically arranged in chapters (nipāta), beginning with a group of single verses, and so on up to 14 verses, followed by groups of 20 to 70 verses, and finally the Great Chapter (Mahā,nipāta) in 75 verses. These verses are traditionally said to have been uttered by 101 elder nuns.9

The Therī,gāthā is significant in that it is “the first surviving poetry supposed to have been composed by women in India...[t]he poetically excellent quality of these verses is not matched by Indian poetesses of later periods.” (Hinüber 1996:108).10 Furthermore, as far as we know, “it is the only canonical text in the world’s religions that is attributed to female authorship and that focuses exclusively on women’s religious experiences.” (Blackstone 1998:1).11 Evidence from scholarly research “supports the view that the verses collected together in [the Therī,gāthā] were uttered over a period of 300 years, from the end of the 6th century to the end of the 3rd century BC” (Thī:N xx), that is, from the time of the Buddha up to Asoka.12

2.2 THE THERĪ,GĀTHĀ: A LITERARY EVALUATION. The Subhā Therī,gāthā, a verse narrative from start to end, is one of the most dramatic episodes in Buddhist hagiography. The whole poem employs a highly effective use of dramatic contrast of the worldly or sensual (the rogue) against the spiritual (Subhā). Significantly, the rogue is unnamed: we are really nobody when we are drowned in negative emotions; for it is the way of the crowd and the world. Only in rising out of the crowd and letting go of negative emotions that we become true individuals,13 here represented by the name Subhā, meaning “beautiful.” Then we, too, are truly beautiful.

Kevin Trainor, in his study of the Subhā Therī,gāthā, comments that

Subhā’s verse, one of the longest in the Therī,gāthā, reveals a good deal of literary self-consciousness. Set in the form of a dialogue, the interaction of Subhā and the rogue who accosts her on the path to Jivaka’s mango grove is expressed in a kind of literary fugue,14 with the voices of the two characters following a common theme: an exploration of the nature of the human body. Yet while the two voices share a common subject, they issue forth from two fundamentally discordant views of reality, and it is only at the conclusion of the composition that some sort of harmony is achieved.

(Trainor 1993:63)

Of some literary interest, too, is its sensuous evocation of nature. Indeed, the account here is that of a classic example of how a woman’s spirituality changes the mind of a frivolous youth who intends to seduce, even rape, her.

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9 This number is at best traditional. The “summary” or envoi (uddāna) at the end of the text says that there are 494 verses uttered by 101 nuns (Thī p174). According to Mizuno, the actual number of nuns who spoke the verses is only 73 (1993:81). It should be noted that one of the poems is said to be uttered by a group of 30 nuns (Thī 117-121), another by a group of 500 nuns (Thī 127-132): see Hinüber 1996. It should also be noted that not all the verses in a particular poem are spoken by her. A few of these verses are variously spoken by the Buddha, by monks, by other nuns, even by laymen and laywomen, or by Māra. In the dialogue btw Cāpā and her husband, Upaka (Thī 291-211), the verses are not even connected to a nun! See Thī:N xix for details.


11 There is another collection—the *Iti,vuttaka* (one of the 15 books of the Khuddaka Nikāya)—that is compiled by a woman, Khujj’uttarā, but it is an anthology of the Buddha’s teachings.

12 See also Hinüber 1996: 107.

13 On the “true individual,” see SD 19.3(6.6); also “Me”: the nature of conceit = SD 19.2a.

14 Fugue, here referring to musical piece with repeated themes that answer one another.
A K Warde, in his study of Pali Metre, regards the Subha Therigath as a particularly good example of lyric poetry, apparently a dramatic performance resembling, but antedating, classical Sanskrit drama (1967:136 f). Such verses, in other words, are didactic or instructive. Subha’s story serves as an inspiration for us even today.

3 The two Subhas

3.1 Subha Kammara,Dhit. There are two arhat nuns named Subha in the Therigath. The first is Subha Kammara, dhit (the smith’s daughter). Her father is a rich goldsmith of Rājagaha. One day, she goes to pay obeisance to the Buddha, and after hearing the Dharma from him becomes a streamwinner. Later, she joins the order under Mahā Pajapati. From time to time her relatives try to persuade her to leave the order and return to the world.

One day she composes twenty four verses on the dangers of household life and dismisses them, convinced of her practice. Then, striving for insight, she attains arhatthood on the eighth day (Thī 338-361). The Buddha sees this and praises her in three verses (Thī 362-364). Sakra, along with the gods of Tāvatimsa, visit to honour her (Thī 365; ThīA 236 f). [4(21)]

3.2 Subha Jivak’amba, Vanikā. The Subha whose verses are translated here is called Subha Jivaka, Amba, Vanika, or Subha of Jivaka’s Mango Grove, so called either because the incident recounted in her Therigath occurs there, or because she resides there. Dhamma, pāla, in his Therigath Commentary, says that Subha performed meritorious deeds under previous Buddhas, and so accumulated good karma in various lives for her spiritual liberation.

In her last life, she is born in the time of our Buddha, into an eminent brahmin family of Rāja, gaha. She is called Subha because she is physically beautiful (sobhana, vanna, yutta, ThīA 245). She gains faith as a lay follower after listening to the Teacher in Rājagaha. Later, seeing the danger in sense-pleasures, samvega (a sense of spiritual urgency) arises in her concerning samsara (cycle of life and death). Considering renunciation as being peaceful, she renounces the world under Mahā Pajapati Gotamī.

She devotes herself to the practice of spiritual insight, and in a few days attains the fruit of non-return. One day, as she is going for her noonday siesta in Jivaka’s mango grove, a handsome, drunken rogue, a libertine (dhuttaka), in the prime of youth (the son of a rich goldsmith of Rājagaha), captivated by her beauty, blocks her way, and accosts her. She speaks to him of the various dangers of sense-pleasures and her own inclination to renunciation, but he persists in his advances (ThīA 250). [4(28)]

Even though Subha teaches him the Dharma, he does not repent. The youth confesses that he is infatuated with her beautiful eyes. Learning of this, she plucks out one of her eyes and hands it to him. The youth is utterly shocked, trembling with samvega. Immediately, his passion disappears, and he asks for her forgiveness. Subha then leaves and goes to see the Buddha. And seeing the Buddha, her eye is whole again.

3.3 The main theme of the Subha Therigath. The main theme of the Subha Therigath is that of seeing or vision, of what it means to really see. The climax of the poem is when Subha tears out her eye and gives it to the infatuated rogue, immediately effecting a change of heart in him.

15 Lyric poetry—in ancient Greece, verses sung (to the lyre)—refers to either poetry that has the form and musical quality of a song, or a usually short poem that expresses personal feelings, which may or may not be set to music (The Oxford Companion to the English Language, 1992). It is to be distinguished from dramatic poetry (drama with spoken verse) and narrative poetry (stories told in verse). However, their boundaries are often flexible.

16 Jivaka S (M 55), SD 43.4.


18 Samvega, religious emotion or sense of spiritual urgency, ie, the kind of feeling that arises in prince Siddhattha when he sees the 4 sights = SD 9.7f.

19 It is interesting that while the Christian Bible thrice speaks of plucking out “the eye that offends thee” (Matt 5:29, 18:9; Mk 9:47), we have here an actual case for spiritual reflection.
The physical eye is only useful in its bodily context and proper attention, functioning as the eye-faculty. Taken out of its socket, however, an eye is totally deprived of its beauty and functionality. It is only as useful as what it does. Taken out of its context, it is useless, even fearful and gory. While Subhā uses her eyes wisely, seeing true reality, the rogue has only the eye of sensuality, seeing only false surface reality, and failing to see beyond.

The eye, like the other sense-faculties, indeed, like life itself, is not a collectible: it is to be felt, to be lived. When the rogue finally is given what he lusts for, he realizes that it is not really what he has perceived it to be. He is shocked by what he sees into the window of true reality. However, we are only told that he repents and leaves (ThīA 246): so we do not know whether he benefits further from the drama.

The Subhā story is that of true giving: in a literal sense, she actually gives the rogue what he wants, and in doing so, she not only makes a supreme sacrifice in the spirit of the historical Bodhisattva (who would readily give up even his own life for others). Ironically, although it appears to be a material gift (āmisa,dāna), the effect is that it is really a spiritual gift (nirāmisa,dāna), that is, the highest gift, the gift of the Dharma. She makes him see true reality, or at least a glimpse of it.

3.4 A PARAPHRASE OF THE SUBHĀ THERĪ,GAṬHĀ

3.4.1 The Subhā Therī,gaṭhā is one of the longest of the elder nuns’ verses, the Therī,gaṭhā, and is the only one in the “Group of 30 verses” (tinīsa nipātā). Although Dhammapāla says that Subhā has uttered these verses as her solemn utterance, apparently the opening verse [v366] and the concluding four verses [vv396-399] are those of the Council Elders (saṅgīti,kāra). It is possible, however, that these narrative lines have been added by Dhammapāla himself for proper narrative coherence (that is, if they were not already added during the First Council).

3.4.2 The narrators (said to be the Council Elders) say that while the nun Subhā is on her way alone to Jīvaka’s mango grove for a noonday siesta, a rogue blocks her path and accosts her. Dhammapāla says that the unnamed accoster, a rich goldsmith’s son in the prime of his youth, is not only a rogue with women (ittih,dhutta), but also intoxicated (ThīA 246, 250).

3.4.3 The second verse [v367] reveals that the drunken youth physically coerces her. We could well imagine the worst here: the young drunken rogue is poised to pin the beautiful young nun Subhā down to the ground to rape her.

“What wrong have I done that you stand in my way?” Of course, she has done none, says the Dhammapāla, but he is intent on the perception or mental sign, “A woman!” (ThīA 250). To show that this is not fitting, Subhā protests, reminding him of her religious state, that the Buddha’s teaching forbids such misdeeds [v368], and that they are of opposite minds: his unhinged, hers blemish-free [v369]. The rogue then begins his rationalizing: “You are young and not bad-looking [innocent] (apāpika),” meaning, as Dhammapāla points out, that “only old women or those of bad appearance should go forth.” (ThīA 251).

21 The fact that the accoster is unnamed is significant: it is not the doer but the deed that is of moral significance.
22 The nun Uppala,vaṇṇā, however, was raped in a forest: see [3], under Uppala,vaṇṇā n.
23 On “mental sign” (nimitta), see Nimitta, SD 19.7, esp §71(2), & also Nimitta & anuvyañjana, SD 19.14.
24 Cf (Devatā) Śāmiddhi S (S 1.20), where a devata tries to seduce a young monk (S 1.20/1:8-12), SD 21.4. In the ancient Mesopotamian epic poem, Epic of Gilgamesh (c 2000 BCE), Siduri (an “alewife” or wise female divinity) attempts to dissuade the hero Gilgamesh in his quest for immortality, urging him to enjoy life as it is: “As for you, Gilgamesh, fill your belly with good things; day and night, night and day, dance and be merry, feast and rejoice. Let your clothes be fresh, bathe yourself in water, cherish the little child that holds your hand, and make your wife happy in your embrace; for this too is the lot of man.” Another famous mundane parallel would be the carpe diem (“seize the day”) notion: “Seize the day and place no trust in tomorrow” (carpe diem quam minimum credula postero) (Horace, Odes 1.11). The emphasis in such as saying is on making the most of current opportunities because life is short and time flies. Cf the Bible passages Ecclesiastes 9.7-9 with Isaiah 22.13 & 1 Corinthians 15.32. See also Shakespeare’s poem Carpe Diem (http://www.bartleby.com/106/26.html). Reflect on these passages with a Dharma heart.

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3.4.4 So he bluntly accosts her [v370] with a thinly veiled sexual litany. While the religious find the beauty of nature conducive for spiritual practice, the immoral find the solitude ideal for sensual pursuits [v371]. While the spiritual enjoy the solitude that is conducive for meditation and mindfulness practice, the immoral seek to impose themselves upon it. While the spiritual find harmony with nature, it arouses the immoral’s biological instincts [v372].

3.4.5 Failing to persuade Subhā, the rogue now tries to frighten her, reminding her of the presence of wild beasts in the forest, again referring to them in sexual terms [v373]. He then compares Subhā to a dead object, “a doll made of shining gold,” and an out-of-this-world mythical apsara (again a sensual being), and sings external things in beautiful clothing. Only her external features are valued [v374].

3.4.6 Then the rogue goes into the classic expression of infatuation, ironically claiming that he would “yield” to her power, when the reality is just the contrary. He proposes that they should cohabit in the grove (like the animals?) [v375], in a house with servants [v376], promising her beautiful clothes and ornaments, even vowing to make some himself (as he is a goldsmith’s son, after all) [v377]. Then, he uses a bed imagery, evoking luxury and sensuality [v378].

There is a hint of desperation in what follows: why waste your beauty away and grow old unconsummated? He addresses her as brahma,cārīṇī (celibate woman), finally openly acknowledging her true personal state [v379].

3.4.7 Thinking that he might be ready for the Dharma, Subhā then responds with an instruction on the perception of the body’s foulness (asubha,saññā) [v380], trying to impress on the rogue that his body, too, is of the same foul nature. There is dramatic irony here: Subhā (the beautiful) is practising asubha, the perception of the foul! But the young intoxicated rogue is deaf to the truth, caught in the rut of his beauty-sign, that is, Subhā’s doe-like eyes, and he sings its praises in three verses [vv381-382]. He is effectively drawn to only a part of her person, unable to see her as a whole person. Interestingly, all the eye-imageries the rogue uses allude to the animal (a doe), the non-human (“a kinnari” in the mountains”), the inanimate (gold), or at best a plant (lotus bud). This is clearly the language of a tragic lover.

Dhammapāla explains Subhā’s “doe-like eyes” (akkhīni ca turiyā-r-iva) at some length, saying that the rogue is attracted to Subhā’s very calm, clear and restrained senses. Even at a glance, her eyes exude the five kinds of clarity. The rogue claims that he will always remember her, even when far from sight, but he is merely thinking of “your long eye-lashes, your pure gaze” claiming that “no eyes are dearer to me than yours, O kinnari of gentle eyes!” [v383]. He sees her only in terms of what he could have, rather than what she truly is. By now the rogue is clearly not only physiologically fixated, but mentally intoxicated, too.

3.4.8 Subhā now begins her final appeal of Dharma instructions, and begins by stating the simple fact that the rogue has gone off-track and is totally infatuated in sensually lusting for a renunciant. To lust after her eyes is like taking the moon to be a ball for sport: the eye, after all, functions as the seeing faculty, not a playing. Mt Meru or Sineru here is the mythical axis mundi, the centre of the universe: it is not only impossible for a worldling (like the rogue) to reach it, much less to jump over it!

3.4.9 She announces that she has abandoned all lust: after all, she is a non-returner (ThīA 246) [v385]. Then she goes on to warn the rogue of the dangers of sense-pleasure using the imageries of fire and of poison [v386]: first, lust burns like fire; then it consumes and destroys us just as poison does. It might be possible for a rich handsome youth like the rogue to seduce someone unmindful, that is, ignorant

25 Apsara: see v374b n.
26 “Kinnari” (kinnari), see 375d n.
27 ThīA 254; cf DA 3:397; J 3:344. Elsewhere, this is said to mean that the eye is endowed with five kinds of colour (pañca,vanna,paśada,sampattiya) (MA 3:402; SnA 2:453). The 5 colours probably are blue (nīla), yellow (piṇa), red (lohitaka), light orange-ochre (maṇjeṭṭha) or crystal (phaṇika), and a composite of them (pabhassara) (V 1:25; BA 38; cf M 1:509, 511). The meaning here apparently is that the eyes scintillate with these colours. Cf J 5:165.
28 Non-returner (anāgāmī), i.e, a saint who is liberated by the abandoning of the “five lower fetters,” viz, self-identity view, doubt, clinging to rules and rituals, sensual craving, and ill will: see Kīṭā,giri S (M 70), SD 11.1 (5.1).
of the nature of the five aggregates, or someone who has not seen the embodiment of the Dharma (that is, the Buddha), but not so to seduce a wisely mindful person or a Buddha’s true disciple. Subhā is telling him that it is impossible to seduce someone like her, and any such attempt would have negative moral implications on him [v387].

3.4.10 On a happier note, Subhā describes her spiritual state: she is equanimous and unattached to the world [v388], and as a learner (sekha), she delights in meditating [v389]. She well knows what the physical body is like (it is made up of the four elements and is impermanent, etc), that is, she has overcome the self-identity view [v390].

Verse 390 aptly uses the imagery of puppets, whose strings are controlled by others. The imagery applies on two levels: the social and the spiritual. On a social level, Subhā is stating that she is free from the male-dominated ways of society, of the dehumanizing and delimiting social roles available to women in her times. More specifically, she is hinting to the rogue that she is not falling into a subservient role as the rogue’s playmate or wife.

3.4.11 More importantly, on a spiritual level, she has transcended all notions of sexuality, and is no more controlled by the cords of sense-pleasures nor by unwholesome habits. She declares that she has gone beyond the physical body, knowing it to be a mere mental construction [v391], so that she is no more dictated by her thoughts and is beyond mental projections and labels [v392]. She explains the nature of perception in a series of imageries: it is as unreal as a wall-painting [v393], a dream, a magician’s illusion [v394].

3.4.12 Subhā then zeroes in on the very thing that the rogue is infatuated with: her eyes. Again, she explains them by way of the perception of foulness, reflecting on the eye’s structure and natural characteristics [v395]. In a dramatic turn, she plucks out one of her eyes and hands it to the rogue [v396], who is of course utterly shocked. A thing of beauty is only in its context, but when plucked out of its setting, its true beauty is gone.

The more lust we have for a thing, the more traumatic it is when it turns out to be other than what we perceive it be. Samvega finally arises in the trembling youth, and his passion ceases at once (ThāA 246). Jolted back into sanity, he begs for her forgiveness and declares contrition [v397], finally realizing the true dangers of his trespass [v398], and finally departs (ThāA 246).

3.4.13 Subhā, relieved of her predicament, goes to see the Buddha, and upon seeing him, her eye is whole again [v399]. This verse is interesting on at least two accounts. Firstly, she is “freed from him” (muttā ca tato), which can also be freely rendered as “freed from that,”29 meaning that she is not only liberated from the menacing rogue, but also from the stifling role that sexuality dictates. Throughout her encounter, she never sees herself as a woman or in any sexual manner.30

In fact, she is already a non-returner when the rogue advanced upon her, but now she is free to further pursue full awakening. Secondly, in this closing verse, we see a sharp contrast, a quantum shift, in somatic imagery: from the debate over the corrupt nature of the physical body to the extraordinary qualities of the pure Buddha-body.

3.4.14 The Commentary says that even as she stands there, gazing at the Buddha, she experiences uninterrupted zest (ThāA 246).31 The Buddha, knowing her ripe state of mind, teaches her the Dharma, and then explains a meditation subject to her for gaining the highest path. Letting go of her joy, she immediately cultivates insight and gains arahathood along with the four analytic knowledges.32 Having attained

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29 On “not-that-ness,” see Atummayatā, SD 19.13.
30 She is here a classic example of one who has risen above being a mere woman or any sexual identity: see Saññīgga S (A 7.48/4:57-59), SD 8.7 esp §4.4.
31 Prob just as the Buddha does to the Bodhi tree during the 2nd week after the awakening (MA 2:184; UA 52; BA 8; J 1:77): see Dhamma and Abhidhamma, SD 26.1(5).
32 The 4 analytic knowledges (patisambhidā) are, viz, the analytic knowledges (1) of meanings [true expression of reality] (attha,patisambhidā); (2) of meanings [mental states or truth, ie instructing commensurate with the mental level and state of the listener] (dhamma,patisambhidā); (3) of language [clear and fitting expression of truth] (mirutti,patisambhidā); and (4) of ready wit [effective and joyful expression of truth] (paṭibhāna,patisambhidā) (A 2:160;}

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arhathood, she dwells in the bliss of nirvana. Then reviewing her attainment, recalling her conversation with the rogue youth, utters them as her solemn utterance (udāna) as recounted in the Subhā Therīgāthā. (Thī 366-399; ThīA 245-260)

4 Subhā and the other nuns of the Therīgāthā

The story of Subhā of Jivaka’s Mango Grove is most interesting and unique when compared to the other accounts of early Buddhist women. Let us, in this connection, briefly look at some of remarkable women of the Buddha’s time, as found in the Therīgāthā.33

(1) Abhirūpa, nandā, a beautiful Sakya girl, is made to renounce by her parents, against her own wishes, following the death of her cousin, Cara,bhūta, whom she is to marry. (Thī 19/19-20)

(2) Uppala, vaṇṇā, daughter of a Sāvatthī seth (entrepreneur), has too many suitors, including kings and commoners, all suitable ones. To resolve the problem, her father suggests that she renounces the world. The Vinaya and the Commentaries34 record that she, despite her protestations, is raped in her own cell in Andhavaṇṇa (the Dark Forest) by her own cousin, who is in madly love with her.35 She is blameless as she is an unwilling party (Pār 1,105 = V 3:35). Apparently, it is after this incident that nuns are forbidden to reside in forests (Cv 10,23 = V 2:278).36 (Thī 64/224-235)

(3) Kisā Gotamī. There are 3 versions of her well-known story.37 (Thī 224-235)

(4) Khemā of Sāgala (daughter of the king of the Madda people), king Bimbisāra’s consort, was infatuated with her beauty. The Commentaries say that she attains arhathood on witnessing a holographic sequence (which naturally leads to her becoming a nun).38 The Apadāna however says that this breakthrough occurs only after she has entered the order.39 She is the foremost of the nuns (the right-hand nun), and also foremost of the nuns with great insight (A 1:25). (Thī 52/139-144)

(5) Dhamma, dinnā of Rājavahsa has no difficulty in obtaining her husband’s permission, Visākha, to join the order, as he himself has just decided to do so himself.40 (Thī 12/12)

(6) Therīkā of Vesālī,41 having heard of both the Buddha and Mahā Paśupati, decides to join the order, but is unable to obtain her husband’s consent. Humbly see goes on with her household duties without protest. One day when the curry she is cooking is consumed by the flames, she reflects on this with insight, and gives up wearing ornaments, dressing simply. Her husband is impressed and gives her consent for her renunciation. (Thī 1/1)

Pm 1:119; Vbh 294): in short, this comprises the meaning, the mental state, the word, and the joy of the true teaching.

33 See I B Horner 1930:162-210 (ch 3 pts 1-2) on a similar discussion of the nuns of Thī.

34 But not ThīA, which only says that Māra tries to distract her during her siesta in the sal grove, warning her of the dangers of rogues there (Thī 230-235; also at S 1:131 f with vii).

35 AA 1:355 f; DhA 5,10/2:48 f.

36 Buddhaghosa adds that the Buddha then requests king Pasenadi to build quarters for the nuns within the city (DhA 2:51 f). This incident also gives rise to the question whether an arhat enjoys sense-pleasure, but the answer is clearly no since he/she has no more defilement (DhA 26,18/4:116 f). Thī 224 & ThīA 195 f say that both Uppalā, vaṇṇā and her mother were unwittingly co-wives of the same man (ThīA 196), a fact not attested elsewhere. As such, I B Horner thinks that she is probably different from her namesake of the other Comys (V:H 1:53 n5). It is possible that the AA & DhA accounts have conflated the two Uppalā, vaṇṇās.

37 SD 43.2 (Intro).

38 DhA 4:58 f, 168 f; B 26,19; J 1:15 f.


40 While she is herself an arhat, her husband Visākha is a non-returner. See Cūḷa vedalla S (M 44/1:299-305), 40a.9. Cf Sumedhā (Thī 73/448-522) below, who renounces just before her marriage.

41 It is likely that Therikā, meaning “little sturdy,” is her nickname, since she is of sturdy build (ThīA 5). As such, I do not think its translation as “a certain unknown nun” is warranted.

74 http://dharmafarer.org
(7) Dhammā of Sāvatthī, however, is not so fortunate, as she is unable to obtain her husband’s consent, and obediently remains in the house until his death, after which she renounces the world. (Thī 17/17)

(8) Sundarī, a courtesan of Vesālī, the sister of Nanda (the Buddha’s handsome half-brother), who, like Abhirūpa, is infatuated with her own beauty. She becomes a nun after all her near relatives have joined the order. Her motive is clear: she does not renounce out of faith, but out of love for her kin. However, listening to the Buddha’s teachings, she becomes a stream-winner, and then, an arhat. (Thī 41/86)

(9) Amba, the courtesan of Ujjēnī, is also one of the most beautiful women, having the adopted daughter Oghā (9), Abhaya, (10), Abhaya (11), Purāṇa, (12), and Sirimā. (Thī 19/19-20) (1), is infatuated with her own beauty. She becomes a nun after all her near relatives have joined the order. Her motive is clear: she does not renounce out of faith, but out of love for her kin. However, listening to the Buddha’s teachings, she becomes a stream-winner, and then, an arhat. (Thī 41/86)

(10) Abhaya, Padumavati, the courtesan of Ujjēnī, is also sought after by king Bimbisāra. By her, the king sires a son, Vimala, who, after becoming a monk, teaches the Dharma to her, whereupon she herself decides to join the order. Amba’s poem is one of the most beautiful in religious literature. (Thī 66/252-270)

(11) Abhayā (12), a close friend of Padumavati (Abhaya, (10)), joins the order following her example. (Thī 27/35 f)

(12) Vijayā, too, like Abhayā (11), joins the order, following the example of her close friend, Khemā (4). (Thī 57/169-174)

(13) Cālā, Upacālā and Sisupacālā, Sāriputta’s three sisters, based on wise faith in a trustworthy example, emulate their famous saint brother in joining the order. (Thī 59/182-188, 60/189-195, 61/196-203)

(14) Sumanā, out of filial love for her grandmother, postpones her own renunciation (much as she is inclined to go forth), to take care of her, and only joins the order after her passing, and when she herself is of advanced age. (Thī 16/16)

(15) Purāṇa, a courtesan’s daughter, is made to repent her loose lifestyle by Mahā Moggallāna. She first becomes a lay disciple and then a nun. She is the only one of the five women of loose morals to join the order under such an influence. Hence, her epithet Purāṇa, “the former courtesan,” but personal name is unknown. (Thī 39/72-76)

(16) Aḍḍha, the daughter of a seth (entrepreneur) of Kāśī, and the courtesan of Rāja, gaha. We have no details of why she decides to join the order. The Vinaya only says that hearing the Buddha’s teaching, she decides to renounce the world, but on her way to see the Buddha, she is waylaid by libertines. The Buddha then introduces a special allowance, that is, ordination by proxy. (Thī 25 f; Ap 2:610 f)

(17) Sīhā of Vesālī and niece of Siha Senā, upon hearing the Buddha teaching Sāriputta, joins the order with her parents’ consent. However, even after seven years, she is unable to progress spiritually, despite her efforts. In desperation, she ties a noose around her neck and fastens it to a tree. In that awkward position, she gains insight, and frees herself. (Thī 40/77-81)

(18) Muttā, daughter of Oghātaka, a poor brahmin of Kosala, has a hunchback (vānka) for a husband, and Sumaṅgala, born in to a poor family of Sāvatthī, is married to a rush-plaiter (nalakāra). On renouncing the world, they joyfully free themselves from the drudgery of household work and their respective unappreciative husbands. (Thī 11/11, 21/23 f)

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42 Cf Norman 1983:76.

43 These 5 women evidently are Amba, (9), Abhaya, (10), Abhaya (11), Purāṇa, (12) and Sirimā. The last-named is also a courtesan of Rāja gaha, and who is converted by none other than the Buddha himself (B 36.20; DhA 3:104 f; VvA 74 ff); see Isā, Sirimā, SD 3.8. Cf Lina Eckenstein, Women Under Monasticism 1896:193: see http://www.yale.edu/adhoc/etexts/Eckstn1.htm.

44 Cv 10.22 = V 2.277 f.
(19) **Guttā** of Sāvattī, however, born into a wealthy family and unmarried, actually finds her luxurious life such an unsatisfactory burden that she becomes a nun. However, even as a nun she is unable to meditate, that is, until she receives help from the Buddha. (Ṭhī 56/163-168)

(20) **Isi, dāśī** of Ujjēnī is married to a merchant of Sāketa, but it is a failed marriage from the start. Then follows a string of more failed marriages because none of her husbands finds her desirable. Finally, with her father’s consent, she joins the order. (Ṭhī 72/400-407)\(^{45}\)

(21) **Subhā Kammāra, dhītā** (the smith’s daughter) of Rājagaha [3.1], hears the Dharma from the Buddha and becomes a streamwinner. She leaves the world under Mahā Paśāpattī and, on occasions, her relatives try to persuade her to return to the world. On the eighth day, she becomes an arhat. (Ṭhī 70/338-365)

(22) **Bhaddā Kuṇḍala, kesā**, the daughter of Rājagaha seth, and **Nand’uttarā**, the daughter of a Kammāsa, damma brahmin, are two examples of women (unrelated) who are highly trained intellectually, and who cannot rest until they have found an opening for the exercise of their talents. **Bhaddā**, as a young girl, falls for and marries an ungrateful young thief, who later tries to kill her. She outwits and kills him instead. Then she becomes a Jain nun, practising painful austerities. She has a public debate with Sāriputta at Jeta, vana but is defeated. Later, listening to the Buddha, she becomes an arhat and joins the order. (Ṭhī 46/107-111)

(23) **Nand’uttarā**, a renowned itinerant speaker who meets Moggallāna and is converted by him in debate. On his advice, she joins the order. (Ṭhī 42/87-91)

(24) **Ubbiri**, born into a wealthy Sāvattī family, and because of her beauty, marries the king of Kosala. She bears him a daughter, which pleases the king so much that she is anointed a queen. But the child suddenly dies, and she is distraught. The Buddha appears to her at the charnel ground, and she is freed of her grief. (Ṭhī 33/51-53)

(25) **Kisā Gotami** of Sāvattī is one of the most tragic figures in Buddhist literature. After some difficulty, she finds a husband, and in due course bears him a child. Unfortunately the infant dies and she falls into a profound state of denial, seeking a remedy for him. After the famous mustard-seed episode, she realizes the universal nature of impermanence and death, and is healed. She becomes a nun and in due course awakens to arhathood. (Ṭhī 63/213-223)\(^{46}\)

(26) **Paṭācārā** of Sāvattī is clearly the most tragic figures in Buddhist literature. The overprotected daughter of a Sāvattī seth, she who elopes with her servant boy. She gives birth to two sons, each time in the discomfort of the forest in inclement weather. During her last journey home, she loses all her family—children, husband, brother and parents—within the same day. Understandably, she goes raving mad, but is in due course healed by the Buddha. (Ṭhī 47/112-116)\(^{47}\)

(27) **Sumedhā** of Mantā, vatī is the daughter of king Koṇca of Mantā, vatī.\(^{48}\) Even as a child, she would go with her peers and slaves to hear the Dharma at the nuns’ quarters. As such, she is able to see the dangers of samsara from an early age. Hearing that she is to be betrothed to king Anika, ratta of Vāraṇa, vatī, she decides to go forth, proposing that she would otherwise go on a hunger strike (Ṭhī 460). Hearing that Anika, ratta is coming to see her, she retires to her chamber, cuts off her hair and uses it as her object of meditation of foulness, attaining the first dhyana (Ṭhī 480; ThīA 286). When Anika, ratta meets here, she is already out of her dhyana, doing the perception of impermanence. After she explains her Dharma inclination, Anika, ratta is convinced and invites her to go forth. She goes to the nuns’ quarters and joins the order. Sumedhā is clearly the happiest example of a woman who is clear about her spiritual vocation right from the start, and attains her goal on her own will. She is also accorded the most honoured position as the last of the Therī-gāthā, with the most number of verses.\(^{49}\) (Ṭhī 73/448-522)

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\(^{45}\) For her remarkable story, see Isi, dāśī & Sirimā, SD 3.8.

\(^{46}\) For a detailed study, see SD 43.2.

\(^{47}\) For a detailed study, see SD 43.3.

\(^{48}\) Mantā, vatī is nowhere mentioned except here (Ṭhī 448) and in ThīA 272, 274.

\(^{49}\) Cf Dhamma, dinnā (Ṭhī 12/12) who as a matter of course goes forth, following her husband’s renunciation.
Subhā of Jivaka’s Mango Grove

Verses of the Elder Nun

Subhā of Jivaka’s Mango Grove

[The Council Elders:]

1 While the nun Subhā was going to the delightful Jivaka’s mango grove, a rogue stops her. So Subhā says this to him:

[Subhā:]

2 What wrong have I done to you that you stand in my way? It’s not fitting, sir, that a man should touch a woman gone forth.

3 In my Teacher’s strict teaching, taught by the Sugata [the well-farer], is the blemish-free purified state. Why do you stand in my way?

4 Disturbed is your mind, undisturbed am I; dusted in passion are you, dustfree am I; without any depravity. All my mind is liberated: Why do you stand in my way?

[The rogue:]

5 You are young and not bad-looking [innocent]: | what good is going-forth for you? Throw away your brown robes! Come let us delight in the flowering grove!

6 The trees, their sweetness wafting and flower pollen welling up all around. Early spring is a joyous season! Come let us delight in the flowering grove!

7 And the trees with flowery crests cry out, as it were, when stirred by the breeze.

50 This stanza’s metre is śloka, while all the rest Vaitāliya (AK Warder, Pāli Metre, 1967: 94). This would support the Comy statement that this stanza was added by the saṅgīti, kāra: Therīyā vutta, gāthānām sambandha, dassana, vasena saṅgīti, kārehi ayaṁ gāthā vuttā = “This verse was spoken by those who held the council to show the connection of these verses to the nun.”

51 “Not bad-looking” (apāpikā). From the verse context, it is possible to freely but more accurately render apāpikā as “innocent,” reflecting the rogue’s expressed desire.

52 Madhurañ ca... dumā. Norman: This ca here possibly balances the ca in 372a. “Both the trees... and the trees...” (Horner), or ca and ca give the idea of simultaneity (see Thī:N 481–482n).

53 Norman: “The towering (samuṭṭhātā) trees (dumā) send forth a sweet smell in all directions with the pollen of flowers” (Thī:N), taking samuṭṭhātā as qualifying dumā. Comy: Kusuma, rajena samuṭṭhātā dumā ti ime rukkhā manda, vātēna samuṭṭhāhamāṇā, kusuma, reṇu, jātēna (M vātēna) attano kusuma, rajena (M raje) sayān samuṭṭhātī viya hūtā samantato surabhi vāyonti = ~ means “these trees, by means of a gentle wind, rising up, full of flower pollen, are, as it were, rising up of themselves on account of their own flower pollen, and they exude fragrance all around.” According to SED, both samuddhatā and samuṭṭhātī can mean “raised up, towering” (SED svv), but Comy here seems to take it as “rising up,” and also PED: samuṭṭhahati (sam + utṭhahati), “rises up.” Cf Norman’s alt tr above.

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What delight is there for you, | if you were to plunge alone into the grove? [372]

8 Haunted by hordes of beasts of prey, | and disturbed by bull elephants in rut,\textsuperscript{55} is the forest, remote and fearful, | into which you wish to go without a companion. [373]

9 You’ll go about like a doll of shining gold, | like an apsara\textsuperscript{56} in Citta,ratha.\textsuperscript{57} O incomparable one, you will shine | in delicate Kāsī cloth\textsuperscript{58} and lovely clothes. [374]

10 I’ll yield to your power [I’ll be at your beck and call] | if we dwell in the grove. For there’s none breathing dearer to me than you, | O kimnari\textsuperscript{59} of tender eyes! [375]

11 If you’ll do as I say, | come dwell happily in a house.\textsuperscript{60} Be a dweller of a windfree palace. | Let the women do all your work. [376]

12 Wear delicate Kāsī cloth, | and beautify yourself with garlands and make-up.

\textsuperscript{54} “Stirred by the breeze,” māluteri\textfont{\text{"i}} = māluta (by the wind) + īrita (moved; pp of īreti), “moved by the wind” (Thā 754; Thī 372; Vv 42.2 = 81.6; Pv 11.12.3). See also PED & CPD, sv īrita. PED: Māluta (S 4:218; Thā 104; Thī 372; J 1:167, 4:222, 5:328, 6:189; Vv 902) is the proper Pali form for mārūta, the stem form of maru = Vedic maruta or marutu (wind, air, breeze).

\textsuperscript{55} Comy: Kuṇjara, matta, kareṇu, lolitan ti matta, kuṇjarehi hatthinihi ca migānaṁ citta, tāpanena rukkha, gacch’ā-dinam sākkā, bhājanena ca ālolitan = ~ means “disturbed by bull elephants in rut and cow elephants, animals with tormented minds (burning with lust), and by the breaking of branches of trees, shrubs and so on.” Kuṇjara,-matta, kareṇu can be glossed hatthi, matto, “elephant in rut” (Vv 158). See CPD: ālōlita.

\textsuperscript{56} Apsara or celestial nymph (accharā or dev’accharā) (Ved apsaras = āpa (water) + sarati (flowing with), origin water nymph), a celestial nymph (M 1:253,10, 337,27*, 2:64,10 = V 3:17,22; M 2:64,12; U 22,24; Thī 374; Miln 169,27; J 2:93,7, 5:153,28*, 454,3*, 469,5, 6:269,28*, 289,27*, 590,16*; Vv 94, 152, 318 f (cf MA 2:24,3), 971; DhĀ 3:8, 19; PvA 46). They are said to inhabit the sky, but often visit earth. They are the wives of the gandharvas (gandhabba) or celestial musicians, and have the ability of shape-shifting. They are said to have crimson pigeon-like feet (kakuṭa, pādinī), Comys explain that their feet are redly or crimson as a result of good karma arising from giving alms of massage oil (makkhaṇa), UA 172,8 = Dhā 118,27; AA 1:318,2; Miln 169,27; ~inīyo Dhā 1:423,15; inīnāi, Dhā 1:119,32, 423. The gandharvas inhabit Citta,ratha: see foll n. In Greek mythology, the Naiads are freshwater nymphs (inhabiting fountains, springs, and rivers), Nereids (the seas) and Oceanids (the oceans). As in Indian mythology, the Greek also have Hamadryads (tree nymphs), Dryads (oak nymphs) and Oreads (mountain nymphs). See also Linda Covill, 2005.

\textsuperscript{57} “Citta,ratha.” All the MSS read Cittarathe, except Se which has Cittalate. Both Cittarathe and Cittalate are parks in Tāvatiṁsa (the heaven of the 33 gods). Citta,lātā is better known, and is described as a pleasure garden, 500 leagues wide. It arose through the good karma of Magha’s wife, Cittā (Magha was Sakra’s name in his last birth on earth) (Dhā 1:271-275; J 1:202). The place is so called not only because of its association with Cittā, but also because there are various multicoloured creepers growing there (VvA 94). It is well known for the Āsāvatī creeper (kakṣa, pādinī), Nereids (the seas) and Oceanids (the oceans). As in Indian mythology, the Greek also have Hamadryads (tree nymphs), Dryads (oak nymphs) and Oreads (mountain nymphs). See also Linda Covill, 2005.

\textsuperscript{58} “Kāṣi cloth” (Kāṣika, sukhuma) = 379a, prob “fine muslin” (ThāP 318 ad loc). Kāṣi or Kāṣikā was one of 16 great states (mahā, janapada), with its capital at Bārāṇaśī (Benares). It was well known as a great trade centre, famous for its delicate and expensive muslin (eg J 6:151, 450), and scents (J 1:355).

\textsuperscript{59} “Kimnari” (kimnari, masc kimnara), a mythical being, half human half birdlike, living in the mountains. They are timid but sing and dance beautifully, and have superbly beautiful eyes. They are often identified with kim, purisa (“what person?”) (A 1:77; AA 2:151). Best known account is found in Canda,kinnara J, a past life story of the Bodhisattva and Rāhula, mātā (VA 5:1008; J 1:91, 485,4/282-289; Dhā 1:115; UA 169; ApA 95; VbhA 471). See also Thī 381; J 2:230, 4:252, 283, 5:42, 254, 6:422; Ap 17, 450. In Skt mythology, they are said to be in the service of Kubera: see prec n (Citta,ratha); and the kimnara (masc) are like centaurs, half man, half horse.

\textsuperscript{60} On this pāda, cf 389d.
I will make numerous ornaments | of gold, gems and pearls for you.  

13  Climb into a very costly bed, | decorated with sandalwood, scented with essences,  
    its beautiful canopy well washed of dirt, | with a spread of long-fleeced  
    bedcover and a fresh quilt.  

14  Just as a blue lotus risen up from the water, | enjoyed by no humans,  
    even so, you, brahmacerini, | will come to decay in your own limbs!  

[Subhā:]
15  “What is it that you take to be the essence here, | in what is full of dead things,  
    that fills the cemeteries full?"  
    Having seen this carcass, habitually breaking up, | take care that you do not go out of your mind!  

[The rogue:]
16  Your eyes are like a fawn’s [a doe’s], | like those of a kinnari in the mountains.  
    Gazing at your eyes, | my sensual delight grows all the more.  

17  Gazing at your eyes | in your spotless face like gold,  
    Comparable to a lotus bud, | my sensual delight grows.  

18  Even if you’re gone far away, I shall remember you, |  

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61 The lines here are arranged as cd | ab, ie the second Pali line is tr first.  
62 “Enjoyed by no humans.” Comy: Yathā taṁ amanussa, sevitaṁ ti taṁ ca rakkhasaḥ, pariggaḥitāya pokkharaṇiyā jātattā nimmanussehi sevitaṁ kenaci aparibhuttam eva bhaveyya: ~ means “and through the lack of humans (nimmanussehi) who touch (sevitaṁ) it because it has grown in a lotus pond haunted by rakshasas [demons], it would not ever be enjoyed by anyone” (Thī 254). The cpd amanussa, sevitaṁ is a pun. It literally translates as “re-sorted to by non-humans,” but can be freely rendered as “enjoyed by no humans” or even “untouched by humans,” which is supported by Comy’s gloss, nimmanussehi and which fits the context here better. After all, this is poetry: in fact, one is reminded of these lines from John Gray: “Full many a flower is born to blush unseen, | And waste its sweetness on the desert air” (Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard, 1750).
63 “Full of all things” (kuṇapa, pūrānhi), which Comy glosses as kes’adi, kuṇapa, pūre = “full of dead things, like head-hair, etc.” On kes’adi, kuṇapa, pūre, see Thī:N 453n; cf SA 1:353 (on S 1:236): nimugga kuṇapamhete ti dasa, māsā mātu, kucchi, sānkhāte kuṇapaṁ ete nimugga = “for ten months they are submerged in a corpse, that is, in a mother’s womb”: see S:B 499 n655. Cf kesa, loma, nakha, dant ādīni nānā, kuṇapāṇi (Vism 11.21/345), which appears very similar to comy here, referring to “the apparently dead and therefore corpse-like” parts of the body (Thī:N 380n). Cf Vism 8.81-138/248-265 (details of the 32 body-parts).

For pūra in the sense of “filled,” see PED & BHSD (sv): this is the sense at Thī 253 (puppha, pūrān, “full of flowers”) & Thī 279 (dhīr athu pūre, “a curse on ‘fillings’ [the body!]”). It can also be rendered as “full of, covered by,” depending on the context. Comy on Thī 279: pūre ti ativiya, jegucchehi nānā, kuṇāpehi nānā, vidha, asucihī sampuṇṇaṁ = ~ means “full of extremely disgusting variety of dead things and various types of impurities.” From this we see that pūre is derived from pūra, “filling.” Same derivation given by Comy at Thī 1150: kesa, loma’dino nānā-p, pakārassa asucino pūre paripuṇṇaṁ ~ “full filled with various impurities of various kinds, such as head-hair, body-hair, etc.
64 Comy is silent here; but comy on Thī 502 explains: sara kaṭasimā vaḍḍhante ti punappunāṁ tāsu tāsu jātisv aparāparaṁ upappatiya punappunāṁ kaṭasimā susānaṁ āḷaḥanāṁ eva vaḍḍhante satte anussaraṁ = ~ means “remember (anussara) the beings who are filling the cemeteries (susānaṁ) again and again (punapa-punāṁ) in this and that birth, again and again (aparāparaṁ), through birth again and again’”; cf Thī 456. Norman takes susāna, vaḍḍhane to have the same meaning as bhūmi, vaḍḍhana (J 6:19). In Skt, we find bhūmi, vardhana (lex), meaning “earth-increasing” = corpse (SED sv). See Thī:N 380n
65 “Out of your mind” (vimana): PED (sv vimana) suggests “infatuated” here.
66 Akkhiṇī ca tūriya-r-īva. Comy: Īrī means doe (migī). It means “Your eyes are like a fawn’s” (mīgī-c, chāpāya va te akkhiṇī ti attho) (Thī:N 254).

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your long eye-lashes, your pure gaze.
For no eyes are dearer to me than yours,\(^{68}\) O kimari of gentle eyes!

\[383\]

\[Subhā:\]

19 You wish to go by the wrong path, | you seek the moon for sport.
You wish to leap over Mount Meru, | you long for one who is Buddha-born.\(^{69}\)

\[384\]

20 There is no lust for me anywhere | here in the world with its devas:
I know not what it would be like:
for,\(^{70}\) it has been killed down to the root by “the path.”

\[385\]

21 \(^{71}\) T’s like flaming tongues leaping out\(^{72}\) of a fiery coal pit, |

\(^{67}\) Comy: \textit{saramhase} (M saremhase) \textit{ti aṇñāṁ kiñcī acintetvā tava nayanāni eva anussarāmi} = ~ means “not thinking of anything else, I shall only recall your eyes.” Comy seems to take the verb as an indicative, and since Be and Ce read -\textit{amhase} “we should probably adopt this reading” (Thī:N 383n). Comy: \textit{āyata,panñe ti digha,paṭkume} = ~ means “long eyelashes (pakkhama).” For \textit{panha} (“eye-lid”), see Geiger 1916: 159; Geiger & Norman 2000: §59.1. Comy: \textit{visuddha,dassane ti nimmala,locane} = ~ means “spotless eyes.” Cf \textit{Kaṭṭha,hāra S} (S 7.18): So ‘haṁ \textit{aṅkhiḥ kāsu soma} \textit{adittā, bhāvato sādhīka, porisaṁ aṅgāra,kāsūṁ va, bhavaṁ ekādasahi aggīhi}’ | \textit{Sivāṁ jhāyāṁ ahaṁ brāhmaṇa ravo visārado ti} |: Desireless am I, unattached, [without envy,] disengaged. || In all things, my vision is purified. | Having attained supreme self-awakening, | the auspicious, brahmin, self-confident, I meditate alone. || (S 7.18:1:181), SD 24.7.

\(^{68}\) Comy: \textit{Buddha,sutain} buddhassa bhagavato orasa,diṅgharaṁ = ~ is “a true-born daughter of the Buddha the Blessed One.” For \textit{dhiṅga} applied to a follower of the Buddha, cf Thī 336. In \textit{Thī 63} Mahā Kassapa is described as \textit{putto buddhassa}, glossed as \textit{buddhānubuddhassa, bhāvato sammā, sambuddhassa anujāta, bhūto} (“the one born after the fully self-awakened one, due to his being one awakenend after the Buddha”). For this use of \textit{putta}, see Tha:N 41. \textit{Dhammapāla} describes all elders and nuns as \textit{dhamma, rājassa satthuno orasā mukha, jā puttā} (“the mouth-born sons, children of the Teacher, the King of Dharma”) (ThīA 300). Comy on Thī 336 glosses \textit{orasā} \textit{as tayham urasā manosā jantabhājītāya orasā} (“the son born of high birth, from his breast, his mind”). Ke \textit{Se pathesi} (unmetrical, prob introduced as a gloss?); Be \textit{Ee maggyasati}; \textit{Ce maggyase}. Norman notes that the predominance of the \textit{magga,-yasi} reading, that the verses that we are dealing here with a derivative from a denominative verb from Skt \textit{mrga,} ie *\textit{mrgāvati}, “to hunt,” rather than the direct development from Skt \textit{mārgayati} (Thī:N 384n). I have chosen the Ke Se reading as it makes the most sense in this context.

\(^{70}\) Norman: \textit{Athā} probably means “but” here and in Thī 386. See Tha:N 237. I have rendered it as “for.”

\(^{71}\) Ee: \textit{Inghāla, kuyā} va [Be \textit{Ce Inghāla, kuyāva} ujjhīto | \textit{visa, patto-\textit{r-iva aggato} [Be aggito] kato} [Ce agghato hato]}. Norman thinks that the Be & Ce reading—\textit{Inghāla, kuyā va ujjhīto} | \textit{visa patto-\textit{r-iva aggito kato}—is the correct one: “since there is no evidence elsewhere for -\textit{gh}- in this word (see CDIAL) it is probable that \textit{ingāla}- is the correct reading.” (Thī:N 386n). Comy: \textit{Inghāla, kuyā} \textit{ti angāra, kāsūyā} = ~ means “out of a fiery coal-pit.” Cf \textit{Thā 491} & its Comy: \textit{angāra, kāsū, sadisā mahā bhītāpana \textit{atthena} ti...kāmāti yojanā} = “like a fiery coal-pit, meaning extreme heat: it refers to ‘sensual pleasures.’” Comy on Thā 420 explains: \textit{bhāvam angāra, kāsūva, bhavaṁ ekādasahi aggīhi ādita, bhāvato sādhika, porisaṁ angāra, kāsūm viyā} = “existence is indeed a fiery coal-pit, means that sense-world existence has various dangers, existence that is like a fiery coal-pit deeper than a man’s height on account of the burning of eleven fires” (ThĀ 2:178): the 11 fires here allude to 11 sense-worlds (see SD 4.18 App); cf Mahā \textit{Siṅhā, nāda S} (M 12.37/1:74), \textit{Potaliya S} (M 54.18/1:365). At Mvst 2:149 the same simile is used of women.

\(^{72}\) Comy: \textit{ujjhīto ti \textit{vātī ukkhito viyā yo koci}. Dahaniyā [M dahano] \textit{indhanamo viyā ti atho} = ~ means “like whatever is blown up by the wind.” Norman: "Ujjhīto seems strange, and the inclusion of \textit{ukkhito} in the comy suggests to me that ujjhīto is either a mistake or a by-eform of \textit{ukkhito}, -\textit{jh}-< -\textit{kṣ}-. For Skt \textit{uks} ‘scatter sparks,’ see SED (sv), although Skt \textit{uksīta} occurs only in the meaning ‘sprinkled, moistened’ (see Thī:N 391n).” (Thī:N 386n).
like a bowl of poison, its potency gone [set before the eye].

I see not what it would be: | for, it has been killed down to the root by “the path.”

22 If it were for one unreflective, | or one who has not served the Teacher,
you could have lusted for someone like that— | but having lusted for this one who knows, you will grieve!

23 For in the midst of blame and praise, joy and sorrow, my mindfulness stands firm, knowing that the conditioned is foul, | my mind clings not to anything at all.

24 The well-farer’s disciple am I, | a traveller in a vehicle on the eightfold path
[travelling in the vehicle that is the eightfold path].
The dart is drawn out, free from the influxes— | I delight, having gone into an empty place.

73 Visa, patto-r-iva aggato [Be aggito] kato [Ce agghato hato]. Comy has various readings. Comy (Be): aggito kato ti aggito abhirato app’agghanako kato. Visassa lesam pi asestevā apanihito vināsito tis atta = “made like a fire” means made like having been taken out from the blazing fire. Of poison, the meaning is this: it has been removed, driven out, without leaving behind even a drop of poison. Comy (Ce): agghato hato ti agghato abhihato,-app’agghanako kato, visassa lesam pi asestevā apanihito vināsito tis atta = “its worth destroyed” means with its worth destroyed, devalued of worth.” Comy (Ee): aggato kato ti aggato abhirato app’agghanako kato = “made foremost” means of little value on account of delight in making it foremost.” CPD sv, giving the Skt as agratah kṛtaḥ: “put before (the eyes), ie imagined, figured to one’s self,” quoting this context (Thā 386, 394). I follow CPD, and give an amplified tr. (For other readings of this Comy, see Thā:N 386n). Norman: “The presence of agghanaka in both M and Ce persuade us that we should read agghato with Ce, and translate agghato kato as ‘considered as regards value,’ ie ‘valued as’ (Thā:N 386n). CPD (sv abhihata) prefers abhihata to abhirata. See also CPD sv app’-agghanaka & appendix p545 (aggha). The phrase aggato kataṁ occurs in Thā 394, where its Comy explains aggato as purato, “(put) before (oneself).” On the sandhi -r- see Thā:N 3n.

The imagery of sparks here seems to allude to the one about non-returning, prob an antarā,parinibbhāyī (one who attains nirvana in the intermediate state or between death and rebirth in Suddhāvāsa): see SD 2.17(3); Purisa,gati S (A 7.52/4:70-74), SD 2.17(5); Sa,upadisesa S (A 9.12/4:380), SD 3.3(3). If this were the case, then the Subhā Therī,gāthā (or at least this statement) was composed or added after Subhā’s passing.

74 Comy: satthā vā anupāsito siyā ti satthā vā dhamma,sarirassa adassanena yassa itthiyā anupāsito siyā = ~ means “through not having seen the ‘Dharma body’ [the embodiment of the Dharma, ie the Buddha].”

75 Be Ee Se palobhaya; Ce palohaya. Comy had various readings. Comy (M): palobhassa upachandassa = ~ means “have seduced.” Comy (Be): palobhaya upagaccha = “have lusted for means have approached.” Comy (Ce): palobhaya upacchandayā = ~ means “have lusted for.” Skt upacchand- occurs, in the causative, meaning “entice, seduce” (SED sv). In Skt pralabh- means “to lust after,” and the causative means “to cause to lust after, allure, entice, attempt to seduce” (SED sv), which fits exactly here. For so with 2nd person vb, see Thā:N 24n.

76 “Praise and blame.” Comy: akkuṭṭha,vandite ti akkose vandanāya ca = ~ means “abuse and honour.” For pp used as action words, see Thā:N 261n. Cf akkuṭṭha,vandanā (Sn 702), explained as akkosañ ca vandanāca (SnA 492).

77 Comy: magg’atthaṅgika,yāna,yāyini ti atthaṅgika,magga,saṅkhātena ariya,yāyena nibbāna,puramañ yāyini upagatā = ~ means “travelling, going, in the noble vehicle, that is called the eightfold path, to the city of nirvana.” For yāna as syn of magga, see PED: yāna.

78 Āsava-k,khaya,hāna. The term āsava (lit “inflow, outflow”) comes from ā-savati “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated as taints (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. Mahā Parinibbāna S (D 16) & Abhidhamma lists four āsava: the influx of (1) sense-desire (kāmāsava), (2) desire for eternal existence (bhavāsava), (3) wrong views (dīṭṭha-āsava), (4) ignorance (avijjāsava) (D 16.1.12/2:81, 16.2.4/2:92), Ptn 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §§373 f). These 4 are also known as “floods” (oghā) and “yokes” (yogā). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influx of views) [43] is probably older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10-20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63. The destruction of these āsavas is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: āsava.

79 This serves as Subhā’s reply to the rogue’s invitation to her to “come dwell happily in a house” (376). An “empty place” is one of the places suitable for meditation and spiritual cultivation. For meaning analyses of
25 For I have seen the well painted | puppets and marionettes, hitched up with sticks and strings, and made to dance in various ways. [390]

26 Removed are those string and sticks, not to be found, made into bits and pieces— | where would the mind find a roost? [391]

27 This body of mine, being of such a kind, | exists not without these states. | where would the mind find roost? [392]

28 Just as you when you see | a picture painted on the wall, | perveser is your view: | the perception that they are human is groundless. [393]

suññāgāra, see SD 48.9 (9.1). On other lists of places suitable for meditation, see M 10,4:2: n on “an empty place,” SD 13.3.

80 Ce Se dāraka, cillakāni vā. Ee dāraka, cillakā navā. PED explains pillaka (sv) as “the young of an animal, sometimes used as a term for a child.” Dāraka, pillaka vā ti = ~ means “forms made of wood, sticks and so on.” For dāraka, pillaka in the sense of “doll,” cf dārakā, dhītālākā, “wooden doll” (V 3:126). In our times, “puppets” are used directly manipulated by the hand, while “marionettes” are controlled by sticks, strings, etc.

81 Tanthi ca khilakehi. Comy: khilakehi hattha, pāda, piṭṭhi, kaṇnakā adi, atthāyā ṭhapita, daṇḍehi = “by fixing sticks for the purpose of hands, feet, backs, ears, etc.” The suffix -ka here clearly gives a sense of diminutive.

82 Be Ce panaccakā. Ee panaccitā (“caused to dance”). Comy: vividhaṁ panaccakā [M panaccitā] ti yanta, suṭṭ-ādīnāṁ anāchana [M -chana] vissajjanāṁ adīnā paṭṭhapita, naccaṁ [M -cittaṁ]. Panaccantā [M panaccantānāṁ] viya dīṭṭhā ti yojanā = ~ means “a dancer, set up through the pulling and releasing, etc., of the strings of a mechanism, etc. They are seen to be as if dancing. This is the connection.” Based on this, Norman prefers this reading (Thī: N 390n).

83 Comy: tamha’uddhaṁ tanti, khilake ti samīvesa, visiṭṭha, racanā-[M –rada], visesa, yuttaṁ upādāya rūpaka-, samaññātami tantimhi khilake ca ṭhānato [M paṭṭhānato] uddhaṁ bandhato vissatthe visuṁ karāṇena anānāmaṇi-ṇāṁ viyake tāhiṁ tāhim khipanena paripakkake vikirite = ~ means “if the string and stick, regarded as little forms, assembled by the connecting together of the exquisite arrangement, that is distinguished by its arrangement, are removed from their positions, their bindings are thrown away separately, one after another scattered, strewn, by being thrown in bits and pieces here and there. The pronoun tamha’ can be taken as either tamhī or tamhā. If taken as loc, it should be understood as going with tanti, khilake; but if taken as tamhā, it means “when the string and sticks have been removed from it” (Thī: N 391n).

84 Ee Se paripakkake; Be parikrite; Ce paripakkhite. See prec n. On vikale, Norman notes: “Just as vekalā is opposed in meaning to sākalya at KhpA 187, so I take vikala to be the opposite of sakala. It means ‘without all its parts, not whole, in pieces’” (Thī:N 391n). Cf meanings “mutilated, impaired” in Skt (SED sv).

85 Comy: Avinde [Be na vindeyya] khaḍgaso kate ti, potthaka, rūpassa avayave ḍhanḍitā ṭhānā ṭhānā na vin-deyya [M -eyyaṁ] na upalabhaya [M -eyyaṁ] = ~ means “when the parts of a modelled (potthaka) figure are taken apart, the modelled figure is not to be found, could not be found (upalabhaya)” Norman says that avinde (Ce Ee) is the correct reading, and “I would suggest that the reading of Be [na vindeyya] arose because the gloss had crept into the text” and on the corruption of this text see: Thī: N 391n.

86 Be Ce tathūpamaṁ; Ee tathūpamaṁ. Norman proposes reading tathūpamaṁ dehakam imaṁ (“This little body, being of such a kind”) and a sg form of the vb (na vattati, “does not exist,” for na vattantī) (Thī:N 392n). PED however gives the meaning “limbs” for dehakā (pl), and this is consistent with comy. See ThīA:P 315 n1.

87 Dharmmehi visā na vattati. Comy: “A body does not exist (na vattati) without its parts, (without) the phenomenon of the parts (avayava, dharmmehi). This being so, where would one’s mind find a roost?” (ThīA 258)

88 Addasa cittaṁ bhūtiyā kataṁ. Norman: “(so) the w[i]sdom of men is useless.” Comy: Yathā kuvalena citta, kārena bhūtiyān haritā, lena makkhitam līttaṁ tena lepaṁ datvā kataṁ aḷākhitam cittaṁ itihā, rūpena addasa pas-sṛṣya = “just as you were to see a picture of a woman painted on a wall by a skillful painter, who, having prepared the plaster, has smeared it with yellow pigment.” “Yellow pigment,” haritālā, which PED explains: “yellow orpiment or sulphuret of arsenic (described as the seed or seminal part of Vishna = harer vīryam,” and haritālāka (sv) is “painting the person, theatrical decoration,” in which case, it is likely to be “orpiment yellow” which is a light to
29 Like dreaming of a golden tree, | made to look real like an illusion, you blind one, you run after what is false | as if in a sham show in the midst of a crowd.  

| [394] |

30 It is like a little ball set in a hollow, | with a bubble in the middle, with tears. And eye secretions arise there in various ways, forming lumps in every eye.  

| [395] |

[The Council Elders:]  

31 Plucking it out, Subhā, the one beautiful to behold, | and with detached mind, unattached, said, Come, take you this eye! | She gave it to the man at once.  

| [396] |

brilliant yellow that is darker than empire yellow, also called king’s yellow or mineral yellow. Not in PED. Addasa is an aorist used as an optative: see BHSG: 32.119-124, but see Thī:N 393n.

89 Comy: Mayāni viya aggato katuṇ ti māyā, kārena purato upaṭṭhāpītaṁ [M upadhāvasi vā] māyā, sadisaṁ = ~ means “like an illusion made up by a conjurer before one.” Norman: “It is clear from the explanation that Dhammadāla had the reading aggato, but a reading agghato katuṇ (see Thī:N 386n) would make excellent sense, ie ‘you run towards something valued like (= as valuable as) illusion’.” (Thī:N 394n). I do not follow Comy here. See 386b above.

90 Comy: jana, majjhe-r-iva ruppa, rūpakaṇ ti māyā, kārena mahājana, majjhe dassitaṁ rūpiya, rūpa, sadisaṁ sārāṁ viya upaṭṭhahantam; asārāṁ ti attho = ~ means “like forms of gold (rūpiya, rūpa, sadisaṁ) shown in the midst of a crowd by a conjurer, they appear as if they have substance. The meaning is that they are without substance [essence].” Norman: The ref here is presumably to confidence tricksters who try to deceive credulous bystanders and persuade them to buy what seems to be (ie has the form of) silver [rūpiya] (Thī:N 394n). The Arthāśāstra (2.14) deals with the methods of producing and detecting this kind of frauds. I have rendered ruppa, rūpakāṇ (“false silver”) idiomatically as “fool’s gold.”

91 Comy: Vaṭṭānī-r-īva ti lākhāya gulikā viya = ~ means “like a little ball of lac.” Koṭar’ohitā ti koṭare rukkha,-susire thapiṁ = ~ means “placed in a hollow (koṭare), such as in a hollow tree.”

92 Ce Ee bubbulakā; Beubbulakā. Norman notes that since Skt budbuda (“the pupil of the eye,” SED: nayana) exists, Ee is preferred (Thī:N 395n). Comy: Majjhe bubbulakā ti akkhi, dala, majjhe thīta, jala, bubbula-[M pubbulha, Be pubbula, ]sadisaṁ = ~ means like a water bubble standing in between the eye-lids (of an eye).”

93 Comy: Piḷikoḷikā ti akkhi, gāthaka = “ear-wax.” Akkhi, gāthā is explained as akkhi, mala (‘ear-impurity’) at PVa 198. The Vijaya S (Sn 11) mentions akkhi, gāthaka amongst the impurities oozing from the 9 openings (Sn 197).

94 Comy: ettha jāyati ti etasmin akkhi, mandale ubhosu kofisu visa, gandham vāyantī nibbattati = ~ means “it arises from both ends of this circle [sphere] of the eye, producing a toxic smell.” (ThāA 259)

95 Piḷakoḷikā ti vā akkhi, dalesu nibbattanakā piḷakā vucauṭi = ~ means “what comes out from the eyelids is called ‘secretion’ (piḷakā).” PED, sv kolikā (adj), says that it applies to boils, and in piḷi, koliko (ithī) means, “(a woman) having boils of jujube size,” which cannot be correct; but sv piḷikoḷikā, gives “eye secretion” and refers to JPTS 1884:88 (misprinted as 68). Norman: The tr is prob a reminiscence of such phrases as (piḷikā) kola, mattiyo ahesum (Sn p125), and “since in this context the word must be a noun, I should favour the second of these alternatives” (Thī:N 395n).

96 Comy: vividhā ti ni lādi, mandalāṇaṁ c’eva ratta, pitādinaṁ sattamāṁ putalāṇaṁ ca vasena aneka, vidhā = ~ means “of various kinds, because of circles of cloud grey, etc, and because of the seven membranes [parts] that are red, yellow, etc.” The Atttha, sālinī describes the 7 “membranes” of the eye as follows: “Therein (the eye) are the white, the black, the red, hardness [extension], water [cohesion], fire [heat] and wind [mobility]. The eye is white from the abundance of phlegm, black from that of bile, red from that of blood, hard from the abundance of the earth element, fluid from that of the water element, warm from that of the fire element, and moving from the wind element.” It then goes on to describe how the eye-faculty works (DhsA 307; cf Vism 14.47/445). Although such descriptions are remarkable in terms of scientific observation, their purpose is for the reflection on impermanence, and so on. Comy: cakkhu, vidhā ti cakkhu, bhāvā cakkhu, p.pakārī vā. Tassa aneka, kāla, paggaha, bhāvato pinditī ti sam-uditī = “From their state being connected with various bundles of eye-parts or eye-processes, so that they arise (samuditī) as lumps.”

97 Be Ce Ee asāṅga, mānasā. Se alagga, mānasā. Comy: asāṅga, mānasā ti katthaci pi ārammaṇe anāsatta, cittā = ~ means “with a mind not clinging to any support [sense-object] anywhere.”
And at once his passion ceased, and right there he begged for her forgiveness: Be whole again, brahmacarini [who lives the holy life], such a thing will not happen again!

In violating such a person, in embracing such a blazing fire, I have seized a venomous serpent! Be whole again! Forgive me!

And then freed from him, the nun went before the noble Buddha. Seeing him with the marks of noble merit, her eye became whole again as before.

— evañ —

Abbreviations & Bibliography

[For editions of Therīgāthā, see K R Norman 1971:xv.]

Abbreviations

~ [swung dash or wiggly line] In the commentaries and notes here, it stands for the lemma (headword, phrase, etc), given in bold, which is defined or explained in what follows.


BHS Buddhist Hybrid: see following.


98 Be Ce āsādiya; Ee āhāniya. CPD (sv āsādeti) accepts āsādiya, which Comy glosses as ghaṭṭetvā (“having struck, having offended”).

99 Comy: liṅgiyā ti paṇjaliṇaṇa aggīṇaḷiṅgetvā = ~ means “having embraced a blazing fire, as it were.” PED (sv liṅgeti) says that the absolutive is formed as from the vb *liṅgati. See also BHSD: liṅgita.

100 This is the only case in Tha of a snake imagery referring to the body, and significantly it is uttered by a man in reference to a woman’s body. See Blackstone 1998:74.

101 Comy: tato ti tasmā dhutta,purisā = ~ means “by that rogue of a person.” Norman, however, thinks that there is no reason to take this as the usual “after that, then.” (Thī:N 399)

102 Comy: buddha,varaṁ sammā,sambuddhassa santikaṁ upagacchi upasaṅkamati, “she went up to, approached the noble Buddha, the fully self-awakened one.” It is probable here, notes Norman, that Comy is here taking buddha,varaṁ to mean “the choice one of the enlightened ones, ie best of.” In his review of Thī:N, however, de Jong has given reasons for not taking buddha,varaṁ as a tatpurusha cpd. We can therefore take it to mean “the Buddha, the choice one, ie the excellent Buddha.” (Thī:N 399n)

103 Comy: passiya vara,puñña,lakkhaṇan ti uttamehi puñña,sambhārehi nibbatta,maḥā,purisa,lakkhaṇan disvā = ~ means “having seen him with the great man’s marks, that have arisen through the accumulation of the highest merit.” As Norman has pointed out, the phrase vara,puñña,lakkhaṇa is not very clear, since it can be a tatpurusha or a bahuvrīhi: “the mark of excellent merit” or “the one possessing the mark(s) of excellent merit.” The mark of excellent merit, being singular, can only be a tatpurusha, and in this context refer to Subhā’s blind eye, but it seems odd to say that she is healed when she sees herself. It is more logical that the Buddha heals her when he sees her affliction, “but to assume that passiya goes with Buddhassa in pāda b is straining the syntax. If pāda d had contained a past participle, eg kataṁ, we could have understood tana thus: ‘(by him) having seen…the eye was restored.’ If we could assume that this poem was originally composed in a dialect where ca became ya, we could then take passiya as passi ya = passi ca, and translate: ‘she went to the Buddha, and he saw…her eye was as before.’ In view of my doubts about this verse I translate vara,puñña,lakkhaṇa as a bahuvrīhi, referring to the Buddha.” (Thī:N 399n)
Comy  Commentary (to the Therīgāthā = ThīA, etc). The suffix –A denotes a commentary.

CPD  Critical Pali Dictionary, Copenhagen, 1924.

Ee  European (Pali Text Society) ed (of Pali text): see Pischel 1883b.


Lex  = lexicon; lexx = lexica. A book containing an alphabetical or other systematic arrangement of a considerable number of words in a language or discipline and their definitions (Skt kośa).

M  ThīA (Therīgāthā Commentary), ed E Möller, 1893.

mc  metri causa (on account of metre) lengthening, shortening or modification of a sound or syllable in word to fit the metre. (A “metre” is a measure, long or short, of sound units occurring regularly in verses.


P  Pischel’s ed of Thī, 1883: see Pischel 1883b.

PM  Pali Metre = AK Warder 1967.


Tha:eO  Oldenberg 1883a.

Thī:N  Norman 1971.

Thī:eP  Pischel 1883b.


ThīA:eM  Möeller 1893.


Tib  Tibetan.

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