

2

Devatā Saṃyutta

The Connected Discourses on Devatas | S 1.1-1.10/1:1-5 (Verses 1-19)

Theme: The connected discourses on devas

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2008, 2011, 2018

1 Summary**1.1 THE DEVATĀ SAṂYUTTA**

The **Devatā Saṃyutta** (the connected teachings on deities) deal with verses uttered by deities or devas to the Buddha, and his responses to them [4]. **SD 54.2** contains annotated translations of S 1.1-1.19, equally divided into two parts of 10 suttas each, that is, SD 54.2a (**Naḷa Vagga**) and 54.2b (**Nandana Vagga**), with the exceptions of **the Māna,kāma Sutta** (S 1.9) and **the (Devatā) Samiddhi Sutta** (S 1.20), which have been translated elsewhere.¹

1.2 TABLE OF CONTENTS**S 1 Sa,gāthā,vagga [3]****S 1.1 DEVATĀ SAṂYUTTA** (The connected discourses on deities) [4]

S 1.1.1²	Verses	Naḷa Vagga	Short title of Suttas	SD 54.2
S 1.1.1.1 (S 1.1)	1	Ogha,taraṇa Sutta	The flood-crossing	SD 54.2a
S 1.1.1.2 (S 1.2)	2	Nimokkha Sutta	The emancipation	SD 54.2b
S 1.1.1.3 (S 1.3)	3-4	Upanīya Sutta	Reaching	SD 54.2c
S 1.1.1.4 (S 1.4)	5-6	Accentī Sutta	Time flies	SD 54.2d
S 1.1.1.5 (S 1.5)	7-8	Katī,chinda Sutta	Cutting what?	SD 54.2e
S 1.1.1.6 (S 1.6)	9-10	Jāgara Sutta	Awake	SD 54.2f
S 1.1.1.7 (S 1.7)	11-12	Appaṭivīdita Sutta	Not penetrated	SD 54.2g
S 1.1.1.8 (S 1.8)	13-14	Susammaṭṭha Sutta	Badly confused	SD 54.2h
S 1.1.1.9 (S 1.9)	15-16	Māna,kāma Sutta	The fondness for conceit	SD 20.15(4.4)
S 1.1.1.10 (S 1.10)	17-19	(Devatā) Arañña Sutta	The forest	SD 54.2i

S 1.1.2

		Nandana Vagga		SD 54.3
S 1.1.2.1 (S 1.11)	20-21	Nandana Sutta	The Nandana grove	SD 54.3a
S 1.1.2.2 (S 1.12)	22-23	(Devatā) Nandati Sutta	Delight	SD 54.3b
S 1.1.2.3 (S 1.13)	24-25	Natthi,putta,sama Sutta	No equal to a son	SD 54.3c
S 1.1.2.4 (S 1.14)	26-27	Khattiya Sutta	The kshatriya	SD 54.3d
S 1.1.2.5 (S 1.15)	28-29	Saṇamāna Sutta	Murmuring	SD 54.3e
S 1.1.2.6 (S 1.16)	30-31	Niddā,tandī Sutta	Drowsiness and lethargy	SD 54.3f
S 1.1.2.7 (S 1.17)	32-34	Dukkara Sutta	Difficult to practise	SD 54.3g
S 1.1.2.8 (S 1.18)	35-36	(Nandana) Hirī Sutta	Moral shame	SD 54.3h
S 1.1.2.9 (S 1.19)	37-41	Kuṭikā Sutta	A small hut	SD 54.3i
S 1.1.2.10 (S 1.20)	42-50	(Devatā) Samiddhi Sutta	Samiddhi	SD 21.4

¹ Respectively, SD 20.15(4.4) and SD 21.4.

² This column gives the traditional sutta numbering as given in the Burmese canon (Be). The sutta numbering in the Pali canons of Sri Lanka (Ce = Ceylonese ed), Thailand (Se = Siamese ed), and the Pali Text Society (PTS) (Ee = European ed) generally agree but with some variations. [2.1.2.1]

1.3 The above list of suttas [1.2] have been translated with notes in this chapter (SD 54.2). The remaining chapters of **the Devatā Saṃyutta** are, briefly, as follows:

S 1.1.3	(S 1.21-30)	Satti Vagga	The sword group	10 suttas
S 1.1.4	(S 1.31-40)	Satullapa,kāyika Vagga	The Satullapa host group	10 suttas
S 1.1.5	(S 1.41-50)	Āditta Vagga	The burning group	10 suttas
S 1.1.6	(S 1.51-60)	Jarā Vagga	The old age group	10 suttas
S 1.1.7	(S 1.61-70)	Addha Vagga	The “weighed down” group	10 suttas
S 1.1.8	(S 1.71-81)	Chetvā Vagga	The “having slain” group	11 suttas

On the translation of *vagga* here as “group,” see (2.1.2.4).

2 Saṃyutta Nikaya³

2.1 LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS

2.1.1 History

2.1.1.1 The Saṃyutta Nikāya (“the connected collection”) is the third of the 5 divisions or “collections” (*nikāya*) of the Sutta Piṭaka. **The 5 collections** (*pañca, nikāya*) are:

- (1) **Dīgha Nikāya** “the long collection”
- (2) **Majjhima Nikāya** “the middle-length collection”
- (3) **Saṃyutta Nikāya** “the connection collection”
- (4) **Aṅguttara Nikāya** “the numerical collection”
- (5) **Khuddaka Nikāya** “the small collection”: 15 books: the Sutta Nipāta, the Dhammapada, etc.

2.1.1.2 Traditionally, it is said that at the 1st Council, the Saṃyutta Nikāya was entrusted to Mahā Kassapa and his pupillary lineage (*nissitaka*) (DA 1:15,8). This was probably the beginning of the system of “reciters” (*bhāṇaka*), who shared the recitation, hence, preservation, of the Dharma amongst themselves. The Commentaries mention reciters of the 1st 4 Nikāyas—the Dīgha, the Majjhima, the Saṃyutta and the Aṅguttara—and the Jātaka-*bhāṇakas* and Dhammapada-*bhāṇakas*.⁴ [2.1.2.6]

2.1.1.3 Chinese translations of the Saṃyutta Nikāya exist in a couple of texts. The longest version corresponds roughly to the Saṃyukta Āgama (雜阿含經 zá āhán jīng) (T99; 50 fascicles or rolls; 1,362 sutras) of the Sarvāstivāda translated by Guṇabhadra (求那跋陀羅 qiú nà bá tu ó lu ó, 435-443 CE) from south India.⁵ There is also a Shorter Saṃyukta Āgama (別譯雜阿含經 bié yì zá āhán jīng) (T100; 16 fascicles; 364 sutras) of the Kaśyapīya school.⁶ Then, there is one fascicle of only 27 sutras (T101, previously unattributed) translated by An Shigao (安世高 ān shì gāo, c148-180 CE).⁷

³ Reading list: (1) Hinüber, *A Handbook of Pali Literature*, 1996:35-38; (2) Dictionary of Pali Proper Name (DPPN): Saṃyuttanikāya; (3) Encyclopaedia of Buddhism (Ency Bsm): sv; (4) S:B 21-42; (5) Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism (PDB): Saṃyuktāgama & Saṃyuttanikāya.

⁴ See Adikaram, *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, 1946:24-32 & Norman, *Pali Literature*, 1983:8 f.

⁵ This number of sutras for T99 & T100 are from Lamotte 1988:154.

⁶ See Marcus Bingenheimer, *Studies in Āgama Literature, with special reference to the Shorter Chinese Saṃyuktāgama*. 2011.

⁷ See Paul Harrison 2002.

Winternitz, in his *History of Indian Literature*, notes that **the Sa,gāthā,varga** (有偈篇 *yǒu jì piān*) in the 3 Chinese versions of Saṃyuktāgama contains **318 sūtras**. Of this number, 244 coincide with those of the Pali text (1933 n2). Modern comparative studies of the Saṃyuktāgama in relation to the Pali suttas have been done by scholars such as Analayo.⁸

2.1.1.4 Buddhaghosa compiled the traditional commentary on the Saṃyutta, entitled **Sār’attha-p,-pakāsini** (“proclaimer of the meaning of the essence of good”) (SA).⁹ Its Subcommentary (*ṭīkā*) is called **Līn’attha-p,pakāsini** (“proclaimer of meanings for the dull”; SAT) is ascribed to the south Indian commentator, Dhammapāla. It also contains a subcommentary to the Jātakas.¹⁰

2.1.2 Structure

2.1.2.1 The Saṃyutta Nikāya is divided into **5 main chapters** (*vagga*) or “books,” which are subdivided according to subject matter into **56 “subject chapters”** (*saṃyutta*) in the Burmese canon (Be), which is followed by the Pali Text Society (the “European” edition or Ee) in its editions and translations. The Sinhalese canon (Ce for “Ceylonese” edition) counts only 54 subject chapters.

The difference arises from Ce treating **the Abhisamaya Saṃyutta** (S 13) as a subchapter of **the Nidāna Saṃyutta** (S 12), and **the Vedanā Saṃyutta** (S 36) as a subchapter of **the Saḷ-āyatana Saṃyutta** (S 35). G A Somaratne says that this is “an error in counting” (Ency Bsm 7:688). Bodhi, in his translation of the Saṃyutta, explains: “None of these allocations seems justifiable, as these minor saṃyuttas have no explicit thematic connection with the topics of the larger saṃyuttas into which the Sinhalese tradition has incorporated them.” (S:B 54)

2.1.2.2 The collection derives its title from this classificatory system. **The 5 main chapters** (*-vagga*, conjoined as a compound) [2.1.2.3] are devoted to the following themes and named accordingly:

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Chapter 1 | Sa,gāthā,vagga (on texts with verses), suttas with verse (<i>sa,gātha</i>); [3] |
| Chapter 2 | Nidāna,vagga (on causal connection, <i>nidāna</i>), suttas that deal primarily with epistemology and psychology, that is, based on dependent arising (<i>paṭicca,samuppāda</i>); |
| Chapter 3 | Khandha,vagga (on the aggregates, <i>khandha</i>), on the 5 aggregates; |
| Chapter 4 | Saḷ-āyatana,vagga (on the 6 sense-bases, <i>saḷ-āyatana</i>), dealing with the 6 conditions for consciousness; and |
| Chapter 5 | Mahā,vagga (the great chapter), suttas mainly dealing with key teachings: the noble eight-fold path (<i>ariya aṭṭh’āṅgika magga</i>), dhyana or mental absorption (<i>jhāna</i>), the focuses of mindfulness (<i>satipaṭṭhāna</i>), and the 4 noble truths (<i>ariya,sacca</i>). |

2.1.2.3 Each of these main chapters (*vagga*) [2.1.2.2] has about 10 **saṃyuttas** or “connected teachings. The 1st is called **Devatā Saṃyutta**, “the connected teachings on deities” [4]. This saṃyutta is further divided into 8 subchapters or Vaggas. Here, we will examine the suttas of its 1st 2 Vaggas, that is, **the Naḷa Vagga** (S 1.1-1.10), SD 54.2a-i,¹¹ and **the Nandana Vagga** (S 1.11-1.20), SD 54.3a-i¹² [1.2].

⁸ See, eg, Analayo, *Saṃyukta-āgama Studies*, Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing Co, 2015.

⁹ See Hinüber 1996:112-123.

¹⁰ Hinüber 1996:167.

¹¹ **Māna,kāma S** (S 1.10) has been omitted since it has been tr elsewhere (SD 20.15(4.4)).

¹² **(Devatā) Samiddhi S** (S 1.20) has been omitted since it has been tr elsewhere (SD 21.4).

These saṃyuttas are divided into subchapters, called *vagga*. For convenience, this term is spelt as “Vagga” [2.1.2.2], separately with an initial capital, as in **the Naḷa Vagga** (comprising S 1.1-1.10) and **the Nandana Vagga** (S 1.11-1.20).

In 4 saṃyuttas of the Saḡāthā,vagga—(3) **the Kosala** (S 3), (4) **the Māra** (S 4), (6) **the Brahma** (S 6) and (11) **the Sakka** (S 11)—the last Vagga contains only 5 suttas, that is, half the standard number--these are called “pentads” (*pañcaka*).

The next 4 saṃyuttas of the Saḡāthā,vagga are its shortest—(5) **the Bhikkhuṇī** (S 5), (8) **the Vaṅḡisa** (S 8), (9) **the Vana** (S 9), and (10) **the Yakkha** (S 10)—comprising only a single vagga, which is, as such, identical with the saṃyutta itself, such as **the Moggallāna Saṃyutta** (S 4.6) = **Moggallāna Vagga** (S 40.1-40.11); **the Citta Saṃyutta** (S 4.7) = **Citta Vagga** (S 41.1-41.10); and **the Gāmaṇi Saṃyutta** (S 4.8) = **Gāmaṇi Vagga** (S 42.1-42.13).¹³ In this case, we may refer to them either way, but strictly speaking, it’s best to refer to them as Vaggas, like the Vaggas in the other saṃyuttas.

2.1.2.4 Each **Vagga** (subchapter), as a rule, has 10 suttas, but in reality, they can number from as few as 2 (eg, **Sāmaṇḡaka Vagga**, S 4.5) to as many as 60 (eg **Satthi Peyyāla Vagga**).¹⁴ We can thus take *vagga* as literally meaning “**group**,” used to denote both a “main chapter of connected teaching” as well as a “subchapter” of suttas within that main chapter. Hence, it is possible, even helpful, to translate *vagga* (subchapter) as “**group**,” such as **the Reed Group** (Naḷa Vagga, S 1.1-1.10), **the Nandana Group** (Nandana Vagga, S 1.11-1.20)—or we can simply use their original Pali names—Naḷa Vagga, Nandana Vagga, and so on.

2.1.2.5 The two largest saṃyuttas, **the Khandha Saṃyutta** (S 22) and **the Saḷ-āyatana Saṃyutta** (S 35)—on account of their key themes—are so large that they introduce another category or division. These 2 saṃyuttas are further divided into “sets of 50s” (*pañṇāsaka*, quinquigintads; or, simply, fifties).¹⁵ This figure is not fixed since they usually have more than 50 suttas. The 4th fifty of **the Saḷ-āyatana Saṃyutta**, for example, contains 93 suttas, including a group (*vagga*) of 60 suttas. Such suttas are mostly very short or abridged listings (*peyyāla*) of variations on a theme.

The Khandha Saṃyutta (the connected teachings on the aggregates), because of its size, is further divided into 3 sets of 50s, that is, **Mūla,pañṇāsaka** (the 1st 50), **Majjhima,pañṇāsaka** (the middle 50) and **Upari,pañṇāsaka** (the last 50). Each of these pañṇāsaka has 5 Vaggas with 10 suttas each—but with many variations. We simply need to accept their arrangements (and remember them), since they may appear confusing at times with their divisions and subdivisions, especially at S 5:497-505..

2.1.2.6 The main reason for such an arrangement of the suttas was to facilitate a recital (*sajjhāya*,¹⁶ *saṅgāyanā* or *saṅgīti*) of the collection from memory by lineages of “reciters” (*bhāṇaka*)¹⁷ [2.1.1.2]. This was before the Pali Canon was written down, which already started at least in Asokan times. It is likely that the Canon, as we have it, was finalized during Asoka’s time (268-232 BCE). [2.2.1]

2.1.2.7 Although the Saṃyutta Nikāya as a text has been finalized by Asoka’s time, the various traditions (especially the Sinhalese, the Burmese and the Siamese) have their own final arrangements of the

¹³ Feer, the Saṃyutta (Ee) editor, remarks that “this variety of use is an inconvenience which, nevertheless, is not practically seriously troublesome” (S 1:viii).

¹⁴ For a breakdown of the Saṃyutta by Vaggas and suttas, see S:B 24 f.

¹⁵ In Majjhima Nikāya, the suttas are divided into sets of 50s called *pañṇāsa*.

¹⁶ See eg “to work on reciting,” *sajjhāyam karoti*, D 3:241; A 3:22; J 5:54. Cf “non-recital is the taint of texts [mantras],” *asajjhāya,malā manta* (Dh 241).

¹⁷ DA 13,23 f, 15,2-13. See Endo 2013:48 f.

suttas.¹⁸ One key reason for this difficulty is because of the sheer size of the whole Saṃyutta. It is almost twice as long as the Dīgha Nikāya: the former has 100 “recital cycles” (*bhāṇavāra*) against 64 cycles of the latter.¹⁹

The Saṃyutta Nikāya manuscript tradition is completely different from that of the first two Nikāyas (the Dīgha and the Majjhima), where the text is given in full, and only passages repeated verbally have been omitted at times. The Saṃyutta, on the other hand, “can be shrunk into a skeleton to be expanded again starting from the key words.”²⁰

These 2 difficulties—the sheer size of the Saṃyutta and the prevalence of “skeleton texts”—are amongst the key reasons for the variations in the total number of Saṃyutta suttas [2.2.1].²¹

2.2 THE SUTTAS OF THE SAṂYUTTA NIKĀYA

2.2.1 Scholars estimate that the Saṃyutta Nikāya as we have it today was probably compiled between 200 and 400 CE, that is, during emperor Asoka’s time. Traditionally, the Saṃyutta Nikāya is said to consist of a total of **7,762 suttas**.²² Assuming that the Saṃyutta Nikāya available to the Commentators and the one we have today are identical, it is difficult to see how the Commentators had come to such a large tally of suttas.

The roman-script Ee (edited by Léon Feer, 1884-1898), in contrast, counts only **2,889 suttas** (S 5:viii). Bodhi, in his translation (S:B) counts a total of **2,904 suttas**.²³ The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism, however, lists only **2,872 Saṃyutta suttas** (PDB 765 f). These variations in the totals must have arisen from the different ways the sutta-abridgements (*peyyāla*) are expanded in full. Moreover, most Saṃyutta versions tend to abridge Vaggas 2-5 considerably. Each tradition abridges them in their own way, giving only the keywords (*mātikā*) which need to be expanded in full without giving clear instructions on how to do this.²⁴ [2.1.2.7; 2.2.2]

Notably, too, the Chinese version (T99) has only **1,362 suttas** [2.1.1.3].

2.2.2 As a rule, suttas have no name or are untitled.²⁵ In the printed editions (in roman script) of our times, **the sutta titles** are given at the start of the suttas. Such titles usually come from the colophon (end-remark) in the form of a mnemonic verse (*uddāna*), summarizing the contents of the sutta-group or *vagga*.

The traditional uddānas can sometimes be quite cryptic. Helpfully, the 6th Council (*chaṭṭha saṅgāyanā*) Burmese canon often assigns fuller and more meaningful titles. Even then, we often have two or more suttas with the same name, such as **the Hiri Sutta** (S 1.18 + Sn 2.3) and **Samiddhi S** (S 1.20 + 4.22).

¹⁸ See, eg, Feer’s difficulty in putting together the last Saṃyutta *vagga* (S 5)—“I have combined the two systems [Be and Ce] as well as I could” (S:Ee 5:vi,3)—and thus “may have created a kind of phantom text” (Hinüber 1996: 36,21 ff (§70).

¹⁹ A “recital cycle” or simply “recital” or “cycle” (*bhāṇavāra*) is basically a round of recital, at the end of which the reciter/s will rest. The term is def in the “new subcom to DA” (DANṬ:Be 1:91.*-12*; cf Sadd 1131: 5.3.3.1; Hinüber 1995b. See Hinüber 1996:8 (§12 n29).

²⁰ Such “skeleton texts” exists in other oral traditions, too, such as that of the Jains: see Alsdorf 1928:27; cf Frauwallner 1956:173.

²¹ On these difficulties, see Hinüber 1996:36.

²² VA 1:18,9 f; DA 1:23,16 f; SA 1:2,25 f; Gandhavarṃsa 56.

²³ S:B 23; for “A breakdown of the Saṃyutta Nikāya by Vaggas and Suttas,” see S:B 24-26.

²⁴ Ency Bsm 7:689.

²⁵ There are exceptions, where the sutta name/s are mentioned in the suttas themselves, such as **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1,148), SD 25.2.

In the SD series, we have “disambiguated” (made unique) the first as **the (Nandana) Hiri Sutta** (S 1.18) and **the (Sutta Nipāta) Hiri Sutta** (S 2.3), respectively; and the second as **the (Devatā) Samiddhi Sutta** (S 1.20) and **the (Māra) Samiddhi Sutta** (S 4.22).²⁶ Other suttas with the same titles have been similarly disambiguated to reflect either their location in the Nikayas or their theme so that they are easily remembered and recognized.

2.2.3 As regards the location of teachings given in the Saṃyutta, many of its suttas are explicitly given at **Sāvattthī**. In fact, F L Woodward, a translator of the Saṃyutta, has observed that no less than 736 suttas of the Saṃyutta locate themselves there. Hence, Woodward concludes that the Nikāya may have been compiled there.²⁷

2.2.4 The verses of the Saḡāthā Vagga often recur or have parallels elsewhere in the Pali Canon. Many of these verses are found in the Vinaya²⁸ and other 4 Nikāyas. They are also found in the 5th Nikāya—the Khuddaka—for example, in the Theraḡāthā, the Therīḡāthā, the Sutta Nipāta, the Dhammapada and the Jātakas. These verses are also quoted in paracanonical texts such as the Milinda,pañha,²⁹ the Peṭakôpa-desa, and the Netti-p,pakaraṇa.³⁰

A significant number have parallels in the vast corpus of non-Pali Indian Buddhist literature, such as the Patna and Gāndhārī Dharmapadas, the Udānavarga, the Mahāvastu, and even the much later Yogâ-cāra,bhūmi.³¹

Some of the Saṃyutta verses, especially those attributed to the deities, devas or nonhumans were part of a pre-Buddhist popular tradition of gnomic verses [3.1.2]. Other verses belonged to a common pool of Buddhist didactic verses whose contexts were recalled by sutta-compilers, or were provided with familiar contexts such as those found in the Saḡāthā,vagga.

3 Saḡāthā Vagga³²

3.1 GENRE

3.1.1 The Saḡāthā Vagga (the chapter or texts with verses) (S 1) opens the Saṃyutta Nikāya. The genre of the whole of this Vagga is known as **geyya**, “that which should be recited”; also called “recitations” or “songs.”³³ Almost all the suttas of this Vagga has at least a verse, usually more.

3.1.2 It is likely that the verses uttered by the deities come from a popular tradition of **gnomic verses** [3.1.2] that are “well spoken” (*subhāsita*),³⁴ like the English proverbs and pithy saws and sayings characteristic of many cultures [3.2.4.3]. Some of them come from a common pool of Buddhist didactic verses [2.2.4].

²⁶ See S 1.18 (SD 54.3h); S 1.20 (SD 21.4); S 2.3; S 4.22 (SD 36.11).

²⁷ S:B xviii. See Hinuber 1996:38 (§75).

²⁸ V 2:306,34, where Uposatha Saṃyutta is mentioned but it actually refers to Uposatha Khandhaka (V 1:107,17 f). See VA 1299,20; *uposatha,paṭisaṃyutte*, VAṬ:Be 3:454,10; cf V:H 5:427 n1, and G Roth, *Bhikṣuṇī-Vinaya*, 1970 XL I).

²⁹ Eg Miln 137, 242, 377, 379.

³⁰ On these titles, see DPPN; Ency Bsm & PDB.

³¹ For a list of these “external” parallels, see S:B 1971-1982 Concordance 1 (B). For concordances of other parallels, see S:B 11967-1985.

³² S:B 69-73.

³³ *Geyya* is the 2nd of a sutta list of the “9 limbs of the Teacher’s teaching” (*nav’aṅga satthu,sāsana*): see **(Catukka) Appa-s,suta S** (A 4.6) + SD 51.16 (2).

³⁴ See SD 3.5 (1.1.1).

3.1.3 Hence, the Sa,gāthā Vagga is completely different from the other Saṃyutta Vaggas (subchapters). In fact, it is, in some respects, closer to **the Sutta Nipāta. The Vaṅḡsa Saṃyutta** (S 8),³⁵ for example, contains the first part of the verses ascribed to Vaṅḡsa in **the Thera,gāthā** (Tha 1209-1279), while the second part of these verses is shared with **the Vaṅḡsa Sutta** (S 2.12).³⁶

3.2 STRUCTURE AND FORM

3.2.1 Structure

3.2.1.1 The Sagāthā,vagga is so called because all the suttas in this vagga (main chapter) contains verses, at least one, usually more. The vagga is divided into 11 saṃyuttas, thus totalling 271 suttas. Most of these saṃyuttas are subdivided into several subchapters or Vaggas (“groups”), usually with 10 suttas each (but this is not always the rule) [2.1.2.4]. In the 1999 PTS (2nd) edition of the Saṃyutta,³⁷ the Sa,-gāthā,vagga (S1:Ee2)³⁸ numbers the suttas consecutively throughout the entire collection, from 1 to 271.

3.2.1.2 The number of verses varies from edition to edition, depending on differences in readings and on the way that the lines (*pāda*) form stanzas. A poem of 12 lines, for example, as might be divided into either 2 stanzas of 6 lines each, or 3 stanzas of 4 lines each. These variations in versification, however, does not, as a rule, affect their contents (the verse lines).

Ee2 the (2nd European or PTS edition) of the Sa,gāthā,vagga (S 1) is the only one that numbers the verses, and gives a total of 945. This numbering is followed by Bodhi (S:B) and by Piya Tan (SD) in their translations of the Saṃyutta.³⁹ Many of the verses recur several times in the Saṃyutta Nikāya, usually within the Sagāthā,vagga itself, and occasionally elsewhere.⁴⁰

3.2.2 Non-humans and the Dharma. Of the **11 saṃyuttas** in the Sa,gāthā,vagga, 8 centre on encounters between the Buddha or his disciples and non-humans (beings from other planes), as follows:

		<u>connected teachings on</u>	<u>non-humans</u>
S 1	Devatā Saṃyutta [1.2]	deities (<i>devatā</i>)	deities (<i>devatā</i>)
S 2	Deva,putta Saṃyutta	young devas (<i>deva,putta</i>)	devas (specifically, young devas)
S 4	Māra Saṃyutta	Māra	Māra, the embodiment of bad [evil]
S 5	Bhikkhuṇī Saṃyutta	nuns	Māra the bad one
S 6	Brahma Saṃyutta	brahmas	brahmas (gods of the form world)
S 9	Vana Saṃyutta	the forest	deities (<i>devatā</i>)
S 10	Yakkha Saṃyutta	yakshas	yakshas (natural spirits)
S 11	Sakka Saṃyutta	Sakra	Sakra, king of the devas

3.2.3 Key terms. Here we shall briefly examine the key terms for non-humans as found in the above titles of saṃyuttas.

³⁵ S 8/1:185,3-196,22.

³⁶ See Hinüber 1996:38 (§74) & 49 (§96).

³⁷ A note in the PTS “List of Issues 2009” says “The 1999 2nd ed of Vol 1 by G A Somaratne is out of print” (p18; online Catalogue, 2018:17). Is this a polite way of suggesting that the vol is not up to the mark?

³⁸ 1893 ed by L Feer, rev by Peter Jackson, Bristol: Pali Text Soc, 2014.

³⁹ However, on verses **S 70, 128, 815**, see S:B 69 + nn 53, 96, 573. Apparently, they originally are not found in the Saṃyutta.

⁴⁰ See S:B 1967-1970 (Concordance 1 A).

3.2.3.1 (1) Devatā (deity) is feminine⁴¹ and, grammatically, an abstract noun, meaning “deity” (as used in theistic circles), a sense that is never found in the Pali canon. It simply means “deity” as a divine being⁴²—a synonym for *deva*, “god.” The Vimāna, vatthu Commentary defines *devatā* as “young devas (‘deva’s sons’), brahmas, young female deities (‘deva’s daughters’)” (*devatā ti devaputto pi brahmā pi devadhītā pi vuccati*, VvA 21). It seems to be a generic term for all divine beings, devas and brahmas.

Technically, *devatā* means “the condition or state of a deva,” that is, “divinity, deity; a divine being, a fairy.” The term here comprises all beings (plural) that are styled devas, a long list of which is given in **the Cūḷa Niddesa**. Basically, whatever that is sacred to one is a “deity”: to the respective disciples, the naked ascetics, the Jains, the matted hair ascetics, etc are deities; to beast and bird votaries, those beings are deities; then, there are those who worship specific deities; those worship fire, serpents, harpies, yaksha, asuras, gandharvas, the great kings, the moon and the sun as deities; those who worship Indra, Brahma, devas, the quarters—so, too, kshatriyas and brahmins. “To whomever they make offerings, those are their deities (*ye yesaṃ dakkhiṇeyyā te tesaṃ devatā’ti*).” (Nc:Be 48)⁴³

Briefly, we can summarize these deities into **5 categories**, thus:

- (1) ascetics;
- (2) domestic animals (elephants, horses, cows, cocks, crows);
- (3) physical forces and elements (fire, stone, etc);
- (4) lower gods (terrestrial deities) (*nāgā, supaṇṇā, yakkhā, asurā, gandhabbā*);
- (5) higher gods (inhabitants of the *deva,loka* proper) the 4 great kings, Canda, Suriya, Indra, Brahma, to which are added the 2 aspects of the sky-god as *deva,devatā* (votive deities) & *disā,devata* (deities of the quarters).⁴⁴

More commonly, however, the term **devatā** applies to beings of the sense-world heavens and also of earth-bound deities (gaiads),⁴⁵ earth-deities (or land-deities) (oreads),⁴⁶ sea-sprites (nereids),⁴⁷ forest-deities (oreads),⁴⁸ tree-deities (dryads),⁴⁹ or water-deities (naiads).⁵⁰ (In such terms, often the term

⁴¹ “Feminine” here is only a grammatical category (an abstract n in -tā), but can refer to either gender: see below.

⁴² *Devatā* is also source for the Filipino word *diwata*, Tagalog for “deity,” which assumed a theistic form with the rise of Catholic Christianity in the Philippines: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bathala>.

⁴³ *Devatānan’ti ājivaka,sāvakanānā ājivakā devatā, nigaṇṭha,sāvakanānā nigaṇṭhā devatā, jaṭila,sāvakanānā jaṭilā devatā, paribbājaka,sāvakanānā paribbājakā devatā, aviruddhaka,sāvakanānā aviruddhakā* [Se *avaruddhaka,sāvakanānā avaruddhakā*] *devatā, hatthi,vatikānānā hatthī devatā, assa,vatikānānā assā devatā, go,vatikānānā gāvo devatā, kukkura,vatikānānā kukkurā devatā, kāka,vatikānānā kākā devatā, vāsu,deva,vatikānānā vāsu,devo devatā, bala,deva,vatikānānā baladevo devatā, puṇṇa,bhadda,vatikānānā puṇṇa,bhaddo devatā, maṇi,bhadda,vatikānānā maṇi,bhaddo devatā, aggi,vatikānānā aggi devatā, nāga,vatikānānā nāgā devatā, supaṇṇa,vatikānānā supaṇṇā devatā, yakkhā,vatikānānā yakkhā devatā, asura,vatikānānā asurā devatā, gandhabba,vatikānānā gandhabbā devatā, mahārāja,vatikānānā mahā,rājāno devatā, canda,vatikānānā cando devatā, sūriya,vatikānānā sūriyo devatā, inda,vatikānānā indo devatā, brahma,vatikānānā brahmā devatā, deva,vatikānānā devo devatā, disā,vatikānānā disā devatā, ye yesaṃ dakkhiṇeyyā te tesaṃ devatā’ti—khattiya,brāhmaṇā devatānānā.*

⁴⁴ On the “deities of the quarters,” see SD 4.1 (2).

⁴⁵ A gaiad (a neologism from Gk *gaia* or *ge*, “mother earth”) is a terrestrial or earth-bound deity (*bhumma devatā*, VA 1:255; MA 4:37; SA 1:28; AA 1:261; KhpA 120; UA 67; SnA 1:300, etc; or *bhumatṭha,devata*, AA 5:59; PmA 2:417). *Bhumma,devatā* is a very common comy term. See **Subha Thī** 374 n (SD 20.7).

⁴⁶ “Earth-gods or land-gods,” *vatthu,devata*, viz, the 4 great kings (*cātum,mahā,rājika*): Pv 4.1; PvA 17.

⁴⁷ “Sea-sprites” (*samudda,devatā*): J 2:112 passim.

⁴⁸ “Forest-gods” or wood-nymphs(*vana,devatā*): M 1:306.

⁴⁹ A dryad is an arboreal or tree-bound or plant-bound deity (*rukkhā,devata*, M 1:306; J 1:221; MA 1:306; SA 4:302; J 1:340; ThaA 1:178; PvA 5).

⁵⁰ Naiads are rarely mentioned in Pali literature and seem to occur only in Jātaka Comy: J 2:423 f, 5:3.

“nymph,” in a generic sense, may also replace “deity.”) A variety of the first two kinds of deities are mentioned in **the Gilāna,dassana Sutta** (S 41.10) as: “park deities, forest deities, tree deities, and deities inhabiting herbal plants, fruit trees, grass, and old trees, lords of the forest.”⁵¹

(2) *DEVATĀ* AS GODLINESS. When we examine the Buddha’s teachings on the gods, such as in **the (Majjhima) Saṅgārava Sutta** (M 100), SD 10.9, we seemingly see the Buddha accepting the existence of “gods.” If we take the teachings of **the Patta Kamma Sutta** (A 4.61) and **the Ādiya Sutta** (A 5.41), we may even conclude that he is promoting deva-worship.⁵² But this is clearly against the spirit of the Buddha Dharma that highlights the impermanence of all the gods and heavens.⁵³

The Buddha’s “open attitude” towards the gods is to accommodate the popularity of the notion so that believers in God or in gods are not excluded from the chance to reach the path. Hence, the Buddha uses the term *devatā* in its broadest sense to encompass all of the heavens—god, devas and brahmas—especially in terms of the moral virtue and good karma. This is clearly attested in, such as in **“the recollection of deity”** (*devatā’nussati*).⁵⁴

Like the many Pali key words, *devatā* is a polysemic⁵⁵ term: it means (1) deities (plural; as a generic term for all gods, devas and brahmas), and (2) deity (a singular abstract noun, meaning “deity, godliness, divinity”). It is the 2nd sense—*devatā* as “godliness or divinity”—that we must understand *devatā’nussati* so that it is in keeping with the drift of the Dharma as taught by the Buddha.

This is, then, a meditation of the wholesome deeds and virtues of such deities of the sense-world, brahmas of the form world, and devas of the formless world. This meditation acts as a bridge for theistic neophytes to wean themselves off externalizing their locus of control and internalizing it into self-reliance.⁵⁶ *Devatā* may mean all things to all man, but its purpose is singularly clear: the practice should bring us closer to the path of awakening.⁵⁷

3.2.3.2 Deva,putta (masculine), sometimes anglicized as “devaputra” (same as the Sanskrit), literally “sons of gods,” may also mean “young devas.”⁵⁸ There is also the rare form *deva,dhītā*, “young female deity”—who appears in **the (Devatā) Samiddhi Sutta** (S 1.20) [4.1.4.1]. However, as used in the suttas, they probably refer to newly reborn devas or “junior devas” or those of lower status in the sense-world heavens.⁵⁹ Their relative lifespans are, however, much longer than humans and most other sense-world beings.

Due to their relative proximity to the human world, they are more likely and more often to visit the Buddha, usually during the middle watch of the night.⁶⁰ Despite such communications, they do not, as a rule, attain the path, but they often act more like neighbours dropping in to have a chat with the Buddha.

3.2.3.3 Brahma is the anglicization of *brahma*, a “high god,” inhabiting any of the 4 form-dhyana realms. The eldest of the brahmas (*jeṭṭha(ka),mahā,brahmā*)⁶¹ in this universe is said to be Sahampati

⁵¹ *Ārāma,devata vana,devata rukkha,devata osadhī,tina,vanas,patīsu adhiatthā devata*. See S 41.10,2 (SD 16.16).

⁵² Respectively, A 4.61,12 (SD 37.12) + A 5.41,5 + SD 2.1 (2+3).

⁵³ See esp SD 54.3a (4.3).

⁵⁴ SD 15.13.

⁵⁵ On the vitality of polysemy in the Buddha’s teaching, see SD 1.1 (4.4.5); SD 10.16 (1.3.1-1.3.2; 2.2).

⁵⁶ See SD 52,1 (18.3.2+18.4.2).

⁵⁷ Further, see SD 54.3a (3.6.5.4).

⁵⁸ SD 15.13 (2.6); SD 50.13 (1.3.2.4) n on *devatā*.

⁵⁹ *Deva,putta* as a junior god, as in ref to the 4 great kings (*cātum,mahā,rājika*), see **Acchariya,abbhuta S** (M 123,-8.2), SD 52.2.

⁶⁰ On the locations of these divine beings in the Buddhist cosmos and other details, see SD 1.7 (App).

⁶¹ DA 2:467,9.

(who is a non-returner), whose best known role is that of inviting the newly awakened Buddha to teach the Dharma.⁶² The Buddha and his arhats are known to visit the 1st-dhyana brahma realm and teach the brahmas, usually comprising their leader Mahā Brahmā and his retinue (*brahma, parisā*) and assembly (*brahma, parisajja*).⁶³ Their relative life-spans are much longer than those of the devas in the sense world.⁶⁴

3.2.3.4 Yakkha (Skt yakṣa) is, in ancient mythology, a tutelary nature spirit, commonly serving as guardians of the earth, of trees and the treasures hidden there. They possess supernatural powers—including the ability to fly, to change their appearance, and to disappear—which they can employ for good or for bad. They often appear in the suttas as benevolent protectors of and messengers for the Buddha and his disciples.

The most famous of them is Vajira, pāṇī, “the thunderbolt-bearer,” who accompanies the Buddha as his bodyguard.⁶⁵ They are often mentioned to be among the Buddha’s audience, with some even attaining streamwinning. There are also demonic yakṣas, especially the female yakshas (*yakkhinī*) who are known to devour infants and corpses, and are subdued by the Buddha, an arhat or Bodhisattva (in the Jātakas). The northern continent of Uttara, kuru and the island of Sri Lanka were considered to be abodes of yakshas.⁶⁶

3.2.3.5 Māra literally means “death,” and is Death personified, an antithesis of all that is good, especially mental cultivation, the spiritual life and progress on the path of awakening. Māra is often portrayed as the perennial distractor in the suttas. **The (Sutta Nipāta) Padhāna Sutta** (Sn 3.2/449) relates his appearance as a yaksha to discourage the Bodhisattva from his struggle.⁶⁷ In fact, ever since the Bodhisattva renounced the world, Māra shadows him to seek the slightest fault in him.⁶⁸ Just before the great awakening, Māra launches a massive effort to unseat the meditating Buddha-to-be under the Bodhi tree (BA 8).

He often attempts to disrupt the Buddha’s teaching;⁶⁹ and to terrify meditating monks⁷⁰ and nuns;⁷¹ even to enter the body of an arhat to cause him pain.⁷² He enthusiastically invites Buddha to pass away on a number of occasions.⁷³ He prevents the wanderer Nigrodha and others from converting to the spiritual life.⁷⁴ He is powerful enough to appear amongst the 1st dhyana brahmas and distract them, as recorded in **the Brahma Nimantanika Sutta** (M 49).⁷⁵ Essentially, Māra represents all our weaknesses, especially those that hinder, interrupt or taint us from spiritual progress or to make any effort in that direction, such as aspiring for streamwinning in this life itself.⁷⁶

⁶² See eg **Brahma Nimantanika S** (M 49,6), SD 11.7; **Aruṇa, vatī S** (S 6.14,10), SD 54.17; SD 12.2 (2).

⁶³ SD 49.8b (14). For suttas related to Brahmā, see SD 11.7 (6).

⁶⁴ Sahampati appears in S 6.1, 2, 3, 10, 12, 13; 11.17; 22.80; 47.18, 43; 48.57. On Sahampati, see SD 49.3 (1.5.2). For details on early Buddhist cosmology, see SD 57.10.

⁶⁵ See Ency Bsm: yakkha. On the yaksha Vajira, pāṇī, see SD 21.3 (4.2).

⁶⁶ SD 21.3 (4.2.5); SD 51.11 (3.1.1.2).

⁶⁷ Sn 3.2/449 + SD 51.11 (3).

⁶⁸ See **Satta, vassa S** (S 4.24), SD 36.5.

⁶⁹ See **Kassaka S** (S 4.19), SD 43.9.

⁷⁰ See esp **Māra Saṃyutta** (S 4/1:103-127).

⁷¹ See **Bhikkhunī Saṃyutta** (S 5/1:128-135).

⁷² **Māra Tajjanīya S** (M 50), SD 36.4 (2.3).

⁷³ See eg **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16,3.4), SD 9.

⁷⁴ See **Udumbarikā Sīha, nāda S** (D 25,24), SD 1.4.

⁷⁵ See SD 11.7 (8).

⁷⁶ See **Māra**, SD 61.8.

3.2.3.6 Sakka (Skt *śakra*; anglicized as Sakra, called “the lord of the devas,” *devānam-inda*) is a leading Buddhist divinity identified with the Vedic god **Indra** (P *inda*) with whom he shares many epithets. **Indra** was the personified powers of nature such as fire, the sun, rain and thunderstorm. His weapon was the thunderbolt (*vajra*). In fact, he was a powerful warring god.

The ancient brahmins composed hymns to invoke such gods, of which there were 33. Of the 1,028 Ṛgveda hymns, 289 were composed glorifying him (the most verses for any Vedic god). Clearly, he was the most popular of the Vedic gods. However, in later Hindu mythology, (clearly, on account of his strong Buddhist assimilation), Indra/Sakra was (and is) regarded as being inferior to the new triad of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesvara (later Siva). However, he is still the chief of all the other gods.⁷⁷

(2) As a **Buddhist divinity**, Sakra is less war-like and worldly. The suttas and commentaries tell us that, on account of keeping 7 vows, including those of filiality, respect and truthfulness,⁷⁸ he was reborn as “**Sakra**, the king of the gods” (*sakka devānam inda*).⁷⁹ Clearly, he is the most popular of the Buddhist deities.

(3) In **early Buddhist mythology**, Sakra is the leader of the gods of **the heaven of the 33** (*tāva, tim̐sa*), which they, as “the new deities” (*abhinava, deva. puttā*), took over from **the asuras**.⁸⁰ On discovering the old gods were given to drink, when they were intoxicated, he had them cast out of heaven into the great ocean. The asuras took abode at Mt Sineru’s foot,⁸¹ from which grew the “wish-fulfilling trumpet-flower tree” (*citta, pāṭali*).⁸²

(4) Whenever **the Citta, pāṭali tree** blossomed, the asuras recalled the coral tree (*parichattaka*) that they had left behind in Tāva, tim̐sa. Then, they made preparations for battle with Sakra and the devas to try to regain their erstwhile heaven.⁸³ This was how the on-going belligerence between devas and the asuras began.

(5) Both Brahmā, the highest of the Vedic gods, and **Indra**, the most popular of the Vedic gods, became a disciple of the Buddha. **Brahma** is a non-returner; **Sakra** (Indra) a streamwinner. In the Ṛgveda, Indra’s title of *purandara*, “destroyer of cities,” is mentioned at least 11 times.⁸⁴ As a Buddhist, he is now known more amicably as **purindada**, “the one who gave offerings before” (*pure pure dānaṃ adāsi*).⁸⁵ With their buddhicization, Brahma and Sakra, disappeared from the Vedic pantheon or were not worshipped.⁸⁶

(6) Both **Brahma and Sakra** dutifully appear, often playing leading roles in key events of the life of the Bodhisattva and Buddha—such as the birth,⁸⁷ the great renunciation,⁸⁸ the awakening and teaching

⁷⁷ See Dowson, *Classical Dictionary of Hindy Mythology*, 1879:125.

⁷⁸ **Vata, pada S** (S 11.11/1:228), SD 15.13(2.3) (abr) + SD 54.12; DhA 2.7a/1:263-266.

⁷⁹ *Sakka devānam inda*: D 1:217, 2:229, 232-234, 236-230, 270, 275; M 1:252, 254 f; S 1:221-228, 239, 4:201, 270 f; A 3:370, 4:163; U 30; V 1:38.

⁸⁰ On Sakra’s origin story (how Magha became Sakra), see **Mahāli, pañha Vatthu** (DhA 2.7/1:263-281). Cf the story of Zeus and the Olympian gods revolting against the Titans (the old gods) led by Cronos, overthrowing them, and banishing them to Tartarus: see SD 39.2 (1.2.1).

⁸¹ See **(Bodhi, pakkhiya) Rukkha S 3** (S 48.69/5:238), where the *citta, pāṭali* is said to be the foremost tree of the asuras (SD 88.21).

⁸² DhA 1:272. On Sakka and his 33 friends, see SD 39.1 (2.2).

⁸³ DhA 1:280.

⁸⁴ ṚgV 1.102.7c, 1.109.8a, 2.20.7a, 3.54.15c, 5.30.11c, 6.16.14c, 7.6.2c, 8.1.7c, 8.1.8a, 8.61.8c, 8.61.10a.

⁸⁵ **Sakka, nāma S** (S 11.12/1:229,8); DhA 1:264,9.

⁸⁶ Understandably, from the Puranic period, both these gods stopped being worshipped by the brahmins to forestall Buddhist influence.

⁸⁷ J 1:53. See SD 52.1 (3.3).

⁸⁸ When, during the great renunciation, the Bodhisattva throws his cut hair into the sky, Sakra catches it and enshrines it: SD 52.1 (8.1.1.1; 9.1.1; 10.2).

the Dharma,⁸⁹ the descent at Sankassa,⁹⁰ and the great parinirvana.⁹¹ **The Sakka Saṃyutta** (S 11), the shortest of the saṃyuttas, nevertheless has 25 suttas relating to him.⁹² Sakra, then, is one of the leading deities in early Buddhism.⁹³

3.2.4 Subject matter of Sa,ḡāthā,vagga

3.2.4.1 The subject matter of **the Sa,ḡāthā,vagga** is mostly ethical, and generally deals with the Buddhist vision of truth and reality. Many of the verses are of a question-and-answer (catechetical) nature. Some are riddles (eg, **Kati,chinda Sutta**, S 1.5, SD 54.2e); while others are puns (eg, **Nandati Sutta**, S 1.12, SD 54.3b).

The puns (*śleṣa*),⁹⁴ as a rule, follow a “mirror” rule, playing on the polysemy or double or multiple meanings, usually secular and the spiritual. **The Nandati Sutta** (S 1.12), for example, plays on the word *upadhi*, “acquisitions,” accumulation of things. One without *upadhi* (material acquisitions) does not rejoice; but one free of *upadhi* (clinging which attracts material grasping) truly rejoices (SD 54.3b).

3.2.4.2 Sometimes, both a secular and a spiritual answer works for the same question, as in **the Vuṭṭhi Sutta** (S 1.74). The question of what is the best of things that rise (a seed) and things that fall (rain), can also be knowledge and ignorance, respectively.

In suttas where only a spiritual answer is given to a question, it is probable that the secular answer has been omitted, forgotten or simply does not apply, leaving only the paradoxical spiritual answer. The fact that some of the verses are also found in Jain literature attests to their universal appeal, coming from a popular tradition of gnomic verses.⁹⁵

3.2.4.3 Oskar von Hinüber notes that parts of **the Sa,ḡāthā,vagga** (S 1) “seems to be very old, actually very near to Vedic texts.”⁹⁶ Such an episode is that of Sakra and the devas battling with the asuras in the Sakka Saṃyutta, as related in **the Suvīra Sutta** (S 11.1).⁹⁷

⁸⁹ **Buddha Vandanā S** (S 11.17/1:233 f), relates that once, in Jetavana, Sakra praises the Buddha to be “like the moon on the 15th day” (S 918*), Brahma Sahampati corrects him, inviting the Buddha to teach the Dharma (S 919*) (SD 86.1). **Mahāvastu** has a parallel account, locating it at the goatherd’s banyan tree (*aja,pāla nigrodha*), just after the great awakening (Mvst 3:315 f; tr Mvst:J 3:304 f). The latter context clearly fits the Sutta better. **Brahmā Sahampati S** (S 48.57) records another such visit by Sahampati to the Buddha (SD 86.10).

⁹⁰ This is at the end of the 7th rains, on the Buddha’s return from Tāvatiṃsa: **Deva,rohaṇa V** (DhA 14.2) @ SD 27.5b (3.2.1).

⁹¹ Both **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,6.10.2), SD 9, & **Parinibbāna S** (S 6.15/1:158) give an almost identical account of Brahma’s verse (S 608*) and Sakra’s verse (S 609*) after the Buddha’s passing away.

⁹² On Sakra, see DPPN sv; Ency Bsm sv. For a summary of Sakka Saṃyutta (S 11), see Marasinghe 1974:139-145.

⁹³ For scholarly studies on Sakra’s role in early Buddhism, see: K Arunasiri 2006, P R Barua 1967:183 f, M Bingenheimer 2008:153, P P Godage 1945, M A Gokuldas De 1951:77-79, J G Jones 1979:174-177, J N Kinnard 2004a, M M J Marasinghe 1974:146, J Masson 1942:45-52, T Rahula 1978:164 f and J-M Verpoorten 2010:178-180.

⁹⁴ On *śleṣa*, see SD SD 10.6 (8.7) & DEB sv.

⁹⁵ *Kenassu’bbhāhato | kenassu parivarito (keṇa abbhāhao logo | keṇa vā parivārio) & Maccunābbhāhato loko | jarāya parivārito (maccunā’bbhāhao logo | jarāe parivārio)*. The lines within (round brackets) are the Prakrit found in the Jain Uttarajjhayaṇasutta (Uttjhs 14.22 f; tr H Jacobi, *Gāina Sūtras*, Oxford, 1895:65). On gnomic poetry and wisdom, see Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, 1933, 1972 index sv. On gnomes, see **Sādhu S** (S 1.33), SD 22.10c (1.1).

⁹⁶ Hinüber 1996:38 (§74).

⁹⁷ S 11.1/1:216,4-240,14.

The Vepacitti Sutta (S 11.4) recounts another interesting duel between Sakra and Vepacitti, the king of the asuras, not of weapons or martial skill, but of battling one other with “well-spoken” (*subhāsita*) verses [3.1.2] before “referees,” that is, some councillors (*pārisajja*).⁹⁸

3.3 SUTTAS OF THE SA,GĀTHĀ VAGGA

3.3.1 The Ogha,taraṇa Sutta (S 1.1), the 1st sutta of the Devatā Saṃyutta [SD 54.2]) has a short introduction relating a deity visiting the Buddha and asking a question. **The Nimokkha Sutta** (S 1.2), the 2nd sutta has an abridged introduction, while the 3rd and subsequent *suttas* in the Vagga merely state that a deity utters the verse or verses.

Similarly, the 1st sutta of the 2nd Vagga has an introduction, while the 2nd and 3rd suttas have only a single sentence of introduction. The rest of the Vagga consists simply of verses, which, since they are located in the Devatā Saṃyuta, are presumed to have been uttered by a deity. A similar pattern can be seen in the ensuing Vaggas.

4 Devatā Saṃyutta⁹⁹

4.1 DEVATĀ SAṂYUTTA: an overview [3.2.2]

4.1.1 Teacher of the gods

4.1.1.1 The Devatā Saṃyutta, “the collection on deities” [1.2], is the very first set of 81 suttas, of which 19 have been translated here [SD 54.2]. It is a record of dialogues between the deities or devas and the Buddha. These verses are not only diverse but often very piquant. From the internal recurrences of some of the verses, they were clearly also popular themes for public discourses during the Buddha’s time. In Sri Lanka, for example, the verses are often used as the bases for sermons.

4.1.1.2 The deities (*devatā*) [3.2.3.1], on approaching the Buddha, their moral and spiritual senior, as a rule, **salute** the Buddha in the manner traditionally done by brahmins,¹⁰⁰ royalty¹⁰¹ and divine beings,¹⁰² that is, by the right-kneed lotus salutation: *by arranging his upper robe over one shoulder, kneeling down on his right knee on the ground, and raising his hands, palms together in lotus gesture*.

4.1.1.3 Not saluting the Buddha at the right time is regarded as a transgression, that is, a socially and morally wrong attitude, and a sign of ignorance—as shown in **the Ujjhāna,saññī Sutta** (S 1.35).¹⁰³ This Sutta depicts the deities (clearly young or junior devas), who realizing their fault, fell down to the ground and “prostrated themselves with their heads at the Blessed One’s feet” (id)—this is **the full prostration**.¹⁰⁴ It is likely that all young or junior devas show their respect to the Buddha in this manner. The right-kneed lotus salutation is probably done only by leading gods, as mentioned above.

⁹⁸ S 11.4/:222,21-224,14.

⁹⁹ See S:B 73-75.

¹⁰⁰ The brahmins: Ārāma.daṇḍa (A 2.37/1:67, SD 113.12); Kāraṇa,pālī (A 5.194/3:239, SD 45.11).

¹⁰¹ Such as king Pasenadi (S 3.11/1:78, SD 14.11).

¹⁰² Such as Brahma Sahampati (D 14,2/2:37, SD 49.8a; S 6.1/1:137, SD 12.1; A 4.21/2:21, SD 12.3); Sakra (S 11,22/-1:238, SD 54.16)

¹⁰³ S 1.35/1:24 (SD 86.15).

¹⁰⁴ Technically known as the “5-pointed prostration” (*pañc’aṅga patitṭhita*): see SD 52.1 (14.1.2.2).

4.1.1.4 The 7th of the 9 virtues of the Buddha is that he is “**the teacher of devas and humans**” (*sathā,deva,manussānam*).¹⁰⁵ The “devas” here represents “non-humans” whose minds, like the human, are capable of being directed to true reality and understanding it. With this capacity and readiness, they are able to, at least in some way, benefit from the Buddha as teacher.

Although humans are generally said to be the best candidates for awakening due to their experience of both pleasure and pain, and hence their capacity for learning,¹⁰⁶ **devas and brahmas**, too, when they properly direct their minds, are able to attain the path—as in the cases of Brahmā Sahampati (a non-returner)¹⁰⁷ and Sakra (a streamwinner).

4.1.3 Dialogue topics

4.1.3.1 The deities usually visit the Buddha in the stillness of **the middle watch** (between 10.00 pm and 2.00 am), while the rest of their world is in slumber. The deities approach the Buddha for as many reasons as there are the deities: they recite verses in praise of the Buddha, ask him questions, request instructions, seek to win approval of their views, even to challenge or taunt the Buddha. The general idea is clear: The deities regard the Buddha as someone wise and worthwhile communicating with, even learning from.

4.1.3.2 Even when the deities do not question the Buddha but voice **an opinion**, the contrast is always evident between the deities’ viewpoints, reflecting their limited range of knowledge, and the wisdom of the Buddha who understands things well beyond their ken. Such a situation is evident from **the Nimokkha Sutta** (S 1.2/3*), SD 54.2b, and **the Upanīya Sutta** (S 1.3/6*), SD 54.2c.

Sometimes a group of deities express their views, but the Buddha outshines them with responses of greater depth and significance, raising their awareness from the mundane to the spiritual—as in **the Sabbhi Sutta** (S 1.31/78*-84*), SD 34.15, and **the Sadhu Sutta** (S 1.33/95*-101*), SD 22.10c.

In several suttas, the verses merely state the deity’s personal view, presented in the context of a conversation the deva. The Buddha, with his silence, tacitly endorses them, as in **the Pajjuna,dhītā Sutta** (S 1.39/136*-140*). Similarly, there are occasions a deity praises the Buddha in verse—such as in **the Eka Mūla Sutta** (S 1.44/147*)¹⁰⁸ and **the Anomiya Sutta** (S 1.45/148*).

4.1.3.3 Beginning with **the Jarā Sutta** (S 1.51/183*), the suttas follow a standard format: the deities pose a series of **riddles** which the Buddha answers to their satisfaction. The best known of them is clearly the riddle, “Having slain what, does one sleep soundly?” (S 223*) in **the Chetvā Sutta** (S 1.71). The Buddha replies that it is when one has slain anger (S 224*).

4.1.3.4 **Humour** is clearly evidently in **the Vuṭṭhi Sutta** (S 1.73), where a deity asks the Buddha a series of questions in verse, apparently mundane in intent (S 229*). Before the Buddha can reply, another deity cuts in with his own answers, but still of a mundane tenor (S 230*). Finally, the Buddha has his say, uplifting the dialogue spiritually (S 231*).

4.1.4 Nature of the dialogues

4.1.4.1 In almost all the accounts of visits by deities in the Saḡāthā,vagga, there is no mention of either their names or their sex. There are, however, a few exceptions. In two suttas of the same name—

¹⁰⁵ See SD 15.7 (3.7).

¹⁰⁶ See **Khāṇa S** (S 35.135), SD 53.24; SD 52.1 (2.2.3).

¹⁰⁷ See **(Majjhima) Ghaṭikāra S** (M 81) + SD 49.3 (1.5.2).

¹⁰⁸ SD 2.2.5(1.2).

the Pajjuna, dhītu Suttas 1 (S 1.39) and **2** (S 1.40)—the two Kokanadā sisters, daughters of the rain god, Pajjunna (Skt *parjanya*),¹⁰⁹ visit the Buddha and praise him and his Dhamma.¹¹⁰

Where the verses are identified, they are usually uttered by well known individuals. The 2 verses of **the (Devatā) Nandati Sutta** (S 1.12), the first of which was spoken by an anonymous deity (S 22*), SD 54.3b, recurs in a sutta of the same name, **the (Māra) Nandati Sutta** (S 4.8) as S 461*, but ascribed to Māra. This very same pair of verses (S 461* f)—the first uttered by Māra and the second, its reply by the Buddha—are found in the ancient ballad, **the Dhaniya Sutta** (Sn 33* f), SD 50.20.

The (Devatā) Samiddhi Sutta (S 1.20) relates how a female deity tries to seduce a handsome young monk, Samiddhi, in a grove. Her sex is deduced from the female construction *sā devatā*, “the deity” (S 1:9,3) and the Sutta’s commentary, which says that she is a young earth-bound¹¹¹ female deity (*deva, -dhītā*), inhabiting the grove (SA 1:40,6) (SD 21.4).

Similarly, the 3 verses of **the Jetavana Sutta** (S 1.48) spoken by Anātha, piṇḍika reborn as a deity (S 156*-159*) recur in **the Anātha, piṇḍika Sutta** (S 2.20) as S 312*-315*. The two are actually the same sutta recounting the deity Anathapiṇḍika’s visiting the Buddha. While the former, with verses only, are located in **the Āditta Vagga** (S 1.48, *devata anātha, piṇḍika*) of the Devatā Saṃyutta (S 1), the latter, with an introduction and conclusion, is found in the eponymous **Anātha, piṇḍika Vagga** (S 2.2) of the Deva, -putta Saṃyutta (S 2).

4.1.4.2 In **the Devatā Saṃyutta**, we are rarely told which realms the deities come from. But there are exceptions, such as the heavenly host of those “extolling of the good” (*sat’ullapa, kāyika deva*) in the first 4 suttas (S 1.31-34) of **the Sat’ullapa, kāyika Vagga**, and the brahmas of the pure abodes (*suddh’āvāsa, kāyika deva*) in **the (Devatā) Samaya Sutta** (S 1.37), SD 86.12. The Commentaries to the Sutta in the Saṃyutta often provide some details to the origins of these deities.

4.1.4.3 With our growing vision and imagination of the cosmos, especially with the popularity of “space science fiction,” such as Star Trek, Star Wars and Stargate, it is easier for people of our time to accept the idea of humans or human-like beings and aliens, including aliens who are more advanced than us in significant ways. Such aliens, if they exist, could have communicated with the Buddha and the early arhats. It would be interesting to know how the Pali suttas would be read and interpreted in the future when we have alien contact and extraterrestrial communication.

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¹⁰⁹ *Parjanya* means “rain, raincloud,” sometimes identified with Indra, and to whom 2 hymns, Ṛgveda 5.83 + 7.101 are dedicated.

¹¹⁰ Respectively, SD 86.16+17.

¹¹¹ A gaiad [3.2.3.1]