Aruṇa,vatī Sutta

Theme: The Buddha Dharma spreads beyond time and space
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1 Sutta summary and highlights

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY AND PARAPHRASE

1.1.0 Background readings. For background readings on the cosmology of the Aruṇa,vatī Sutta, see SD 54.1 (2); on Buddhist mythology, see Myth in Buddhism, SD 36.1; Buddha as myth SD 36.2; also SD 2.19 (1); SD 51.11 (3.1.1).

1.1.1 The Aruṇa,vatī Sutta (S 6.14) records Sikhī Buddha (the 5th past buddha from our Buddha Gotama) bringing his right-hand monk Abhibhū with him on a visit to the brahma world [§7]. There, at the Buddha's request, Abhibhū teaches the Dharma to Brahma, Brahma's retinue and the brahma assembly [§10].

When the traditionally minded brahmas disapprove of Abhibhū, a disciple, speaking before his own teacher, the Buddha suggests to Abhibhū to display a psychic wonder to convince the brahmas of his own abilities. Abhibhū teaches the Dharma to the brahmas, displaying various aspects of his power of transformation (vikubbanā, iddhi),1 to the amazement of the brahmas [§14].

1.1.2 Abhibhū then tells the Buddha of his ability to transmit his voice from the brahma world to all over the "1,000 world system" (that is, our immediate universe and beyond)² [§16]. The Buddha then invites him to demonstrate that ability [§17]. Abhibhū's utters 2 verses so that they are heard all over the 1,000 world system, including their monastery [§18; 1.2].

1.1.3 The Buddha then returns with Abhibhū to the monastery [§19], where the Buddha asks the monks about Abhibhū's teaching "transmission" [§§21-24]. The Sutta closes with the Buddha praising Abhibhū, to the delight of the monks [§§25-26].

1.2 ABHIBHU'S VERSES

1.2.1 The verses uttered by Abhibhū recur in the Thera,gaṭhā, where they are ascribed to the elder Abhbā, (Tha 1147 f), which is clearly another form of his name³ [2.3]. The Samyutta Commentary tells us that Abhibhū specifically chose as his theme personal action (purisa,kāra) and effort (viriya) because he knew that the topics would commend itself to all his hearers, human and non-human. (SA 221 f)

1.2.2 Abhibhū’s pair of verses, beginning “Ārambhattha, nikkhamattha, yuñjatha buddhasāsane,” says that Commentary, are often quoted in the Tipiṭaka (SA 1:222,2). However, a digital search of the VRI Chaṭṭha Saṅgayanā CD only listed their occurrences in the Aruṇa,vaṭī Sutta (S 6.14), the Thera,gaṭhā (Tha 256 f), in paracanonical works (Miln 245; Peṭk 71; Nett 40-42) and most often the Commentaries.⁴ This

1 On the power of transformation, see SD 54.1 (1.3).

2 On the “1,000 world system,” see SD 54.1 (2.1.2.2).

3 PmA 663-666 gives an account of Abhibhū, similar to that in Aruṇamvaṭī S (S 6.14), SD 54.17.

4 More than 10 times: AA 1:37, 2:338; UA 384; ItA 2:151; ThaA 2:105; NmA 2:408; PmA 1:44, 3:664; PugA 246; DhsA 146.

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possibly shows that the sutta collection as we have it today does not record all the teachings of the Buddha or that a substantial section of the Canon has been lost during transmission.

1.2.3 Buddhaghosa tells us that the elder Milakkha Tissa of mediaeval Sri Lanka, heard a novice in Pācīna, pabbata (Eastern Hill) recite the Aruṇavatī Sutta. Listening to the verses, he attained meditative bliss, and felt that they had been taught to encourage diligent monks like himself to exert themselves with diligence. He exerted himself and became a non-returner. Soon afterwards, he became an arhat (AA 1:37).

2 Names in the Aruṇa, vatī Sutta

2.1 ARUṆA, VATĪ

2.1.1 City and country

2.1.1.1 Aruṇa, vatī was the city and the country of king Aruṇa or Aruṇavā, father of Sikhī Buddha. Hence, it was also the birthplace of Sikhī Buddha (B 21.15). From Aruṇa, vatī, Sikhī and his right-hand disciple, Abhibhū, went to the brahma world to teach brahma, Brahma’s retinue and the brahma assembly ([§7], as recorded in the Aruṇa, vatī Sutta (S 6.14).

There is in Maharashtra, India, a river named Arunavati. It originates from Sangvi village and merges with the Tapi river near Uparpind village in Shirpur tehsil (sub-district), in Dhule district of Nashik Division, Maharashtra. The river flows mostly only during the monsoon. The Arunavati and Tapi flow through the city of Shirpur (50 km from the city of Dhule).

The coincidence of mythology and geography is interesting, but considering that Sikhī lived millions of years in the past, we must imagine that earth movements would have changed over time. Hence, the association is only by name and hagiology—a pious attribution at best.

2.1.1.2 The city was probably known as Aruṇa, pura. The Apadāna says that the courtesan Amba, pālī, was, in a past life, born there into a brahmin family, and where she angrily cursed a pure-minded liberated nun.6

This city is also mentioned in the Therīgāthā Commentary (ThīA 66,16), which, however, calls king Aruṇa’s chief queen Abhayā of Ujjenī (ThīA 41,17). She renounced with her mother, Abhaya, mātā, out of love for her (ThīA 41,25).

2.1.2 King Aruṇa

2.1.2.1 The Mahā'padāna Sutta (D 14) and the Buddha, vaṁsa say that king Aruṇa (as he is called there) was Sikhī’s father and Pabhā, vatī (Aruṇa’s chief queen) his mother.7 Elsewhere, however, he is called Aruṇavā (as here at S 6.14), such as in the Commentaries8 and in the Jina, kāla, māli (Jink 18), a 16th-century Thai biography of the Buddha.9

2.1.2.2 According to the Apadāna, at that time, Salāla, pupphiya Thera was, as a layman, a confectioner in Aruṇavatī (Ap 1:218). King Aruṇa’s queen is here given as the future nun Uppala, dāyikā (Ap 601, –  

5 Located on National Highway 3, running from Agra in Uttar Pradesh to Mumbai, Maharashtra.
7 D 14.1.12(2)/2:7; SD 49.8a; B 21.15; ThīA 41,17; J 1:41,29 ≈ D 2:7,1; PmA 3:663.
8 AA 2:337,4; BA 243,5 (Arunavata), 245,29.
9 See SD 52.1 (1.0.1.1) (6).
The king is called Aruṇava (Ap 517,21), and his queen called the future nun Satt,uppala Mālikā (ThīA 42,5*).

2.2 Sikhī

2.2.1 Birth. Sikhī Buddha was the 5th past buddha from our Buddha Gotama,10 the 2nd of the 7 buddhas,11 and the 23rd of the 28 buddhas.12 According to the Mahā’padāna Sutta (D 14), he lived 31 aeons or world-cycles ago.13 The Buddha,vaṁsa Commentary gives details about Sikhī (B ch 21).

He was born in the Nisabha pleasure-garden (uyyāna) in Aruna,vatī to the kṣhatrya king Aruna or Aruṇavā and queen Pabhāvatī [2.1.2.1]. He was called Sikhī (the crest of a flame) because his crown-protruberance (unhīsa) stood up like a flame (sikhā) (BA 243).14

2.2.2 Home life. The lifespan in Sikhī was 70,000 earth years. For 7,000 years,15 the young Sikhī lived in his 3 pleasure-palaces called Sucanda, Giri and Vahana (B 21.16), but called respectively Sucandaka,siri. Giri,yasa and Nāri,vasabha in the Commentary (BA 243,10). There he lived in luxury and pleasure with 24,000 women entertainers. His wife was Sabba,kāmā, and their son was called Atula. (B 21.17)

2.2.3 Renunciation. Upon seeing the 4 sights,16 Sikhī left home on an elephant, and practiced austerities17 for 8 months (B 21.18).18 His last meal before his awakening was milk-rice given by the daughter of the Seth Piyadassī of Sudassana market-town (nīgama). The grass for his seat under the Bodhi-tree was given by Anoma,dassī. His Bodhi-tree was a puṇḍarīka or “white mango.”19

2.2.4 Buddhahood. After awakening, Sikhī Buddha gave his first discourse to a huge gathering (a hundred thousand crores) in the Migācīra park near Aruna,vatī (BA 244). He performed the “twin wonder” (yamaka paṭihāriya) under a campaka tree near Suriya,vatī.

Abhibhū and Sambhava were his foremost pairs of disciples amongst the monks (B 21.20), and Akhilā or Makhilā and Padumā among the nuns (B 21.21). His personal attendant was Khemānake. His chief lay patrons were Sirivaddha and Canda (Nanda) among the male lay followers, and Cittā and Suguttā among female lay followers (B 21.22).

2.2.5 Special qualities

2.2.5.1 Traditionally, it is said that people in those remote times were huge and long-lived. Sikhī, it is said, stood at 70 cubits20 (31.5 m = 103 ft) high (B 21.23), and he lived to the age of 70,000 years,21

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10 See SD 36.2 (3.4.3).
11 On the 7 buddhas, see SD 49.8b (Table 1.0.4).
12 See SD 36.2 (3.4.3).
13 D 14,1.4/2;2,14-16): SD 36.2 (3.4.3).
14 Cf Mvst 3:246.
15 For relative heights, household life durations and lifespans of the 25 buddhas, see B:H xxxii.
16 On the 4 sights, see SD 52.1 (7).
17 On the Gotama’s austerities, see SD 52.1 (13.2).
18 For the means by which the buddhas left home and the durations of their austerities, see B:H xxxvi.
19 DA 2:416. For the Bodhi-trees of the 25 buddhas, see B:H xli-xlvi.
20 “Cubit” (rotana): SD 4.17 (1.2.2); SD 30.9 (3.1). A cubit is about 45 cm (1.47 ft). On this measurement, see also B:H xxii.
21 VA 1:190,11.
passing into final nirvana in the Duss’ärāma\textsuperscript{22} or Ass’ārāma\textsuperscript{23} in Silavatī (BA 247). The stupa erected over his relics was 3 fathoms (yojana)\textsuperscript{24} in height, that is, about 54 m (177 ft) high.\textsuperscript{25} We must imagine such dimensions reflected, in relative terms, those of other humans or beings of those mythical times.\textsuperscript{26} Such a myth testifies to the fact that the Buddha Dharma applies to all times and places, where there is the ability and willingness to learn.

2.2.5.2 It is said that Sikhī Buddha held the Pātimokkha recitation only once in 6 years.\textsuperscript{27} The Aruṇa,vatī Sutta (S 6.14) records Sikhī Buddha bringing his right-hand disciple Abhibhū on a visit to the brahma world. As Bodhisattva, Sikhi was Arindama, king of Paribhutta (B 21.9; BA 245).

2.3 Abhibhū

Abhibhū was the right-hand chief disciple of Sikhī Buddha.\textsuperscript{28} In the Aruṇa,vatī Sutta (S 6.14), it is said that Sikhī Buddha brought him along to the brahma world and, at the Buddha’s request, did so with various psychic displays [§14]. While remaining in the brahma world, he transmitted his teaching audibly to reach the monks of his monastery back on earth [§16].

In fact, it is said that, his teaching thus spreaded very far throughout a 1000-world system, that is, well beyond our own world system.\textsuperscript{29} The verses uttered by Abhibhū recur, in the Thera,gāthā, ascribed to the elder Abhibhūta (Tha 1147 f), which is probably another form of his name.\textsuperscript{30}

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**Aruṇa,vatī Sutta**

*The Aruṇa,vatī Discourse*

_S 6.14_

1 Thus have I heard.
At one time, the Blessed One was residing in Anātha,piṇḍika’s park monastery in Jeta’s grove, outside Sāvatthī.

2 There, the Blessed One addressed the monks: “Bhikshus!”\textsuperscript{31}

3 “Bhante!” the monks replied to the Blessed One.

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\textsuperscript{22} B:Be 21.28; Be+Ce Comys.
\textsuperscript{23} Thūpv 16; Jtkm 18.
\textsuperscript{24} A fathom (a height or width measurement) is a “lesser yojana,” which is 1.8 m = 6 ft: SD 47.8 (2.4.4).
\textsuperscript{25} B 21.28; BA 247; cf D 2:7, 3:195f; S 2:9; J 1:41, 94; DhA 1:84; Divy 333.
\textsuperscript{26} On Buddhist mythology, see SD 2.19 (1); SD 51.11 (3.1.1).
\textsuperscript{27} DhA 3:236,19; cf VA 1:190.
\textsuperscript{28} The left-hand disciple was Sambhava. D 14,1.9/2:5; J 1:41; B 21.20.
\textsuperscript{29} See (Tika) Abhibhū S (A 3.80), SD 54.1 (1.2).
\textsuperscript{30} PmA 663–666 gives an account of Abhibhū, similar to that in Aruṇa,vatī S (S 6.14), SD 54.17.
\textsuperscript{31} Bhikkhavo.
Sikhī Buddha and Abhibhū

Aruṇavatī and Sikhī

4 The Blessed One said this:

5 There was, in the past, bhikshus, a king named Aruṇavā whose royal city was called Aruṇavatī.

Bhikshus, the Blessed One Sikhī, the Blessed One, the arhat, fully self-awakened one, dwelt dependent on the royal city of Aruṇavatī.

6 Now, bhikshus, the foremost pair of disciples of the Blessed One Sikhī, the arhat, fully self-awakened one, an auspicious pair, were called Abhibhū and Sambhava.

Sikhī and Abhibhū in the brahma-world

7 Then, bhikshus, the Blessed One Sikhī, the arhat, fully self-awakened one, addressed the monk Abhibhū:

‘Come, brahmin, let us go to a certain brahma-world until it is time for our lunch.’

8 ‘Yes, bhante,’ the monk Abhibhū replied to the Blessed One Sikhī, the arhat, fully self-awakened one.

9 Then, bhikshus, the Blessed One Sikhī, the arhat, fully self-awakened one, and the monk Abhibhū, just as a strong man, having stretched his bent arm or bent back his stretched arm, thus disappeared from Aruṇavatī and appeared in that brahma-world.

Abhibhū teaches Dhamma to the brahmas

10 Then, bhikshus, the Blessed One Sikhī, the arhat, fully self-awakened one, addressed the monk Abhibhū:

‘Brahmin, would you like to give a Dharma talk to Brahma, Brahma’s retinue and the brahma assembly?’

11 ‘Yes, bhante,’ bhikshus, the monk Abhibhū replied to the Blessed One Sikhī, the arhat, fully self-awakened one, and he instructed, inspired, roused and gladdened them with a Dharma talk.

12 But then, bhikshus, Brahma, Brahma’s retinue and [156] the brahma assembly were annoyed,

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32 This opening quote-marks ends at §25.
33 On Aruṇavatī, see (2.1).
34 Sikhissa kho pana bhikkhave bhagavato arahato sammā, sambuddhassa abhibhū, sambhavāh nāma sāvaka, yugam ahosi aggam bhadda, yugam. The duo are mentioned at B 15.20; BA 245,30; J 41,30.
35 The Buddha addresses Abhibhū as “brahmin,” brāhmaṇa, throughout. This is clearly where the Buddha naturally adapts the apppellative brāhmaṇa to mean “monk” (bhikkhu). Buddha, vaṇīsa Comy says that both Sikhī’s foremost disciples, Abhibhū and Sambhava, are “royal princes” (raja, putta) (BA 244,18): see SD 54.1 (1.2.3).
36 Āyāma brāhmaṇa yena aṁññataro brahma-loko tenupasaṅkamissāma yāva bhattassa kālo bhavissatīti.
37 Paṭibhātu brāhmaṇa tāṁ bhrahmuno ca brahma, parisāya ca brahma, pārisajjānaṁ ca dhammi, kathā’ti. On paṭibhātu … tam, see SD 54.3e (2.1.3.2).
38 On the stages of teaching, see Mahā Suññata S (M 122), SD 11.4 (4.3).
39 “Brahma’s retinue” (brahma, pārisa) is one of the 3 categories of brahmas: the other 2 being Mahā Brahma himself and Brahma’s ministers (brahma, pūrūhita). “The brahma assembly” (brahma, pārisa) is generic term for all classes of brahmas and forms one of the 8 assemblies [companies] (aṭṭha paṇi-sa): those of kshatriyas, of brahmins,
protested and complained: \(^{40}\)

‘How strange, sir! How odd, sir! How could a disciple teach Dharma in the presence of the teacher!’\(^{41}\)

Abhibhū performs miracles

13 Then, the Blessed One Sikhī, the arhat, fully self-awakened one, addressed the monk Abhibhū: ‘Brahmin,’ (says the Blessed One,) ‘Brahma, Brahma’s retinue and the brahma assembly are protesting, “How strange, sir! How odd, sir! How could a disciple teach Dharma in the presence of the teacher!”

Well, then, brahmin, stir up more spiritual urgency in Brahma and amongst Brahma’s retinue and the brahma assembly!’\(^{42}\)

14 ‘Yes, bhante,’ bhikshus, the monk Abhibhū replied to the Blessed One Sikhī, the arhat, fully self-awakened one.

Then, he taught the Dharma

with his body visible; with his body invisible;

with the lower half of his body visible but the upper half invisible;

with the upper half of his body visible but the lower half invisible.\(^{43}\)

15 Then, bhikshus, the hearts of Brahma, Brahma’s retinue and the brahma assembly were struck with wonder: \(^{44}\)

‘It is amazing, sir! It is wonderful, sir! How great the power, how great the might of the recluse!’\(^{45}\)

Abhibhū’s powers

16 Then, the monk Abhibhū said to the Blessed One Sikhī, the arhat, fully self-awakened one: ‘Indeed, bhante, I recall having made such a statement in the midst of the monks’ sangha, thus:

“Avuso, while remaining in the brahma-world, I can make my voice known throughout the thousand-fold world-system”点头.

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\(^{40}\) Tatra sudāṁ bhikkhave brahmā ca brahma, parisā ca brahma, pārisajjā ca ujjhāyanti khīyanti [Be khīyanti] vi-pācenti.

\(^{41}\) Acchariyaṁ vata bho, abbhutaṁ vata bho, kathaṁ hi nāma satthari sammukhī, bhūte sāvaka dhammaṁ desessati. The exclamation acchariyaṁ vata bho, abbhutaṁ vata bho has been tr contextually.

\(^{42}\) Tena hi tvam brāhmaṇa bhiyyoso mattāya brahmānaṇaḥ ca brahma, parisāḥ ca brahma, pārisajje samveṭhīti. For details on Abhibhū’s power of transformation (vikubbanā, iddhi), see Pm 22.23/2:210,14-30; explained in Vikubbana Niddesa (PmA 663,23-666,4).

\(^{43}\) Dissamānena’pi kāyena dharmam desesi; adissamānena’pi kāyena dharmam desesi; dissamānena’pi hetthinema upadāha, kāyena adissamānena uparimena upadāha, kāyena dharmam desesi; dissamānena’pi uparimena upadāha, kāyena adissamānena hetthinema upadāha, kāyena dharmam desesi. For details on Abhibhū’s power of transformation (vikubbanā, iddhi), see Pm 22.23/2:210,14-30; explained in Vikubbana Niddesa (PmA 663,23-666,4).

\(^{44}\) Acchariyaṁ vata bho, abbhutaṁ vata bho, kathaṁ hi nāma satthari sammukhī, bhūte sāvaka dhammaṁ desessati; the verb viññāpetuṁ, “to make known,” is infinitive of vijānāti, “to know, understand.” It cannot be tr as “to be heard,” which is sāveti or sāvetuṁ, “to cause to hear”; suṇāpeti or suṇāpetuṁ, “to cause to be heard”: apparently, only sāveti is found in the
17 ‘This is the time, brahmin! This is the time, brahmin! While remaining in the brahma-world, make your voice known throughout the thousandfold world-system!’

18 ‘Yes, bhante,’ the monk Abhibhū replied to the Blessed One Sikhī, the arhat, fully self-awakened one, and, as he remained in the brahma-world, uttered these verses:

Abhibhū’s verses

18.2 Ārabbhathāṅkaṃ nikkhamathanā
yuñjathad dhunātha maccunosa
naḷ’āgāravi kuñjaro. [157]

18.3 Yo imasmiṃ dhammaṃ viṇaye
appamatto vihassati
pahāya jātiṃ, saṃsāram
dukhkhas’āntamaṃ karissatiṃ.

19 Then, bhikshus, the Blessed One Sikhī, the arhat, fully self-awakened one and the monk Abhibhū, just as a strong man, having stretched his bent arm or bent back his stretched arm, thus disappeared from the brahma-world and appeared in Aruṇavatī.

The monks hear Abhibhū’s verses

20 Then, bhikshus, the Blessed One Sikhī, the arhat, fully self-awakened one addressed the monks: ‘Did you, bhikshus, hear the verses uttered by the monk Abhibhū, as he remained in the brahma-world?’

21 ‘Indeed, bhante, we heard the verses uttered by the monk Abhibhū, as he remained in the brahma-world!’

22 ‘And what, bhikshus, were the verses you heard being uttered by the monk Abhibhū, as he remained in the brahma-world?’

Canon. On the infinitive, see Warder, Introduction to Pali, 1963, 3rd ed 2001:134-136. See SD 54.1 (1.1.2). On “the thousandfold world” (sahassadhāloka), see Kosala S 1 (A 10.29.2), SD 16.15.

47 Etassa brāhmaṇa kālo, etassa brāhmaṇa kālo, yaṃ tvām brāhmaṇa brahma,loke ṭhito sahassī,loka, dhātuṃ sarena viññāpeyyāsitī. This is one of the very rare occasions when it is the Buddha who makes this request; usu it would be another monk: see, eg, (Tika) Abhibhū S (A 3.80.9), SD 54.1.

48 This incident is mentioned by Ānanda in (Tika) Abhibhū S (A 3.80), where the Buddha describes the types of universes, and that his “voice” can be known throughout a 3 thousand great thousandfold world-system (SD 54.1).

49 Comy: The elder asked himself what kind of Dharma-teaching would be pleasing and agreeable to everyone, and he realized that all devas and humans each praise their own personal effort (purisa, kāra). Thus, he taught a discourse concerning effort (viriya, patisanyutta). (SA 1:221 f). These 2 verses are ascribed to Abhibhūta Thera (Tha 256 f) and qu at Kvū 203. Verse 18.2 (Tha 256) is qu at Miln 245 without attr. Attr to Gotama at Divy 300, and to a deva at Divy 569. See Miln: H 2:51 n5. On multiple ascription, see Tha:N xxi (§5).

50 All MSS & Comy ārabbhathā; Be ārambhathā.

51 Be nikkhamatha; Ce Ee & Comy nikkhamatha.

52 This elephant figure also found at Tha 1147, 1149.

53 Tha 257 vihessati.

54 Alt “giving up the cycle of births.”
23 ‘We, bhante, heard the verses uttered by the monk Abhibhū, as he remained in the brahma-world, thus:

23.2 Rouse yourself! Go forth! Devote yourself to the Buddha’s teaching!
    Shake off death’s army as an elephant does to a hut of reed!

23.3 Who, in this Dharma-Vinaya dwells with diligence,
giving up birth and samsara, will make an end of suffering!

24 Thus, bhante, we heard the verses uttered by the monk Abhibhū, as he remained in the brahma-world.’

25 ‘Sadhu, sadhu, bhikshus! It is good that you, bhikshus, heard the verses uttered by the monk Abhibhū, as he remained in the brahma-world.’\textsuperscript{55}

26 The Blessed One (Gotama) said this. The monks, satisfied, rejoiced in the Blessed One’s word.

— evam —

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\textsuperscript{55} The narrative by the Blessed One Gotama, which begins at \$5$, ends here.