(Sa,gāthā) Sāriputta Sutta
The (Sa,gāthā) Discourse on Sāriputta  |  S 8.6
Theme: Effective sutta teaching and listening
Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2021

1 Sutta summary and significance

1.1 SUMMARY AND HIGHLIGHT

1.1.1 The (Sa,gāthā) Sāriputta Sutta (S 8.6) is a brief but insightful look at the elder Sāriputta teaching Dharma to a ripe and ready audience. As the elder Vaṅgīsa watches the wisest of the elders teaching Dharma, he is inspired with praises for Sāriputta in 3 verses [§§731-733].

1.1.2 Sāriputta and Vaṅgīsa

1.1.2.1 It is well known that the elder Sāriputta is declared by the Buddha to be the wisest of all the monks,¹ but just as prominent is the elder’s compassion. In the (Khandha) Devadaha Sutta (S 22.2), for example, the Buddha states that “Sāriputta is a helper in two ways: by giving material help (āmisāṅgagāha) and by giving help in Dharma (dhammāṅgagāha).”²

The Commentary on S 22.2 elaborates on Sāriputta’s great compassion. Early in the morning, while the monks are on their almsround, he would inspect the monastery grounds, clearing refuse and keeping things in order. Then, he would visit the sick to comfort them and attend to their needs, and so on.³

1.1.2.2 The sutras record a number of occasions when he visits the sick and admonishes them. He instructs the monk Samiti,gutta, dying of leprosy, on the 5 aggregates, with the ending of which suffering ends, too. Following the elder’s instruction, Samiti,gutta cultivates insight and becomes an arhat, as recorded in the Thera,gātha and its Commentary.⁴

The (Sotāpatti) Anātha,piṇḍikā Sutta 1 (S 55.26) records his giving bedside counselling to the painfully sick Anātha,piṇḍika, reminding him that as a streamwinner, he is assured of salvation.⁵ On a later occasion, when the layman is dying, as recorded in the Anātha,piṇḍik’ovāda Sutta (M 143), the elder instructs him so that, upon dying, he is reborn in Tusita (as a streamwinner).⁶

The Dhānañjāni Sutta (M 97) records a curious case where Sāriputta counsels the dying brahmin Dhānañjāni on the 4 divine abodes. The Buddha then tells Sāriputta that the brahmin has died, and is reborn in a brahma heaven. This is an interesting lesson on the uncertainty of death: the Dharma should be properly taught in a practical way as soon as a person is ready to listen.⁷

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¹ “Bhikshus, the foremost of my monk disciples who have great wisdom is Sāriputta” (etad aggam bhikkhave mama sāvakānam bhikkhūnam mahāpaññānam yad idam sāriputto, A 1.189/1:23,18). For a detailed biography, see Nyanaponika & Hecker, Great Disciples of the Buddha, 2003 ch 1.
² S 22.2/3:5-9 (SD 46.2). SA 2:256,20-257,17.
³ Sāriputta’s compassion: Sacca Vibhaṅga S (M 141,5), SD 11.11; SD 34.1 (3.2.2.1).
⁴ Tha 81; ThaA 1:186,7-23.
⁵ S 55.26/3:258-263 (SD 23.2a).
⁶ M 143/ (SD 23.9).
⁷ M 97,38/2:195 f (SD 4.9).
1.1.2.3 Sāriputta is also renowned for his gratitude and patience. Having heard the Dharma for the first time from Assaji, Sāriputta relays the teaching to Moggallāṇa. Having become streamwinners, they both approach their teacher, Sañjaya, informing him about the Buddha, but Sañjaya is caught up with his own sect and followers.8

Another case of Sāriputta’s gratitude concerns the ordination of the poor old brahmin Rādha. On account of his poverty and neglect by his own children, Rādha seeks refuge in the Jetavana, serving as a temple hand. In due course, he wishes to go forth, but no monk would ordain him, that is, except for Sāriputta, who recalls his having put a ladleful of rice into the elder’s almsbowl.9

1.1.3 Masters of ready wit

The Buddha speaks of 4 kinds of “poets” (kavi) or “creative artists” in the (Catukka) Kavī Sutta (A 4.231), thus:

SD 58.7(1.1.3)  (Catukka) Kavī Sutta

The (Fours) Discourse on Poets • A 4.231/2:230
A 4.5.3.11 = Aṅguttara Nikāya 4, Catukka Nipāta 5, Pañcama Paṇṇāsaka  3, Sucarita Vagga10

Cattaro’m bhikkhave kavī.  Bhikshus, there are these 4 kinds of poets.
Katame cattāro?  What are the four?
Cintā,kavi sutā,kavi, attha,kavi, paṭibhāna,kavi.  The imaginative poet, the interpretive poet, the reflective poet, the inspirational poet.
Ime kho bhikkhave cattāro kavīti  These, bhikshus, are the 4 kinds of poets.

—evaṁ—

1.1.3.1 Buddhaghosa, in his Aṅguttara Commentary, explains the 4 terms as follows:

(1) Who, having thought, composes verses: he [this] is called an “imaginative poet.”
   yo cintetvā kavyaṁ karoti, ayaṁ cintā,kavi nāma

(2) Who, having heard (learned) it, does (creates) it: he is called an “interpretive poet.”
   yo sutvā karoti, ayaṁ suta,kavi nāma

(3) Who, based on some matter,11 creates: he is called a “reflective poet.”
   yo ekaṁ atthaṁ nissāya karoti, ayaṁ attha,kavi nāma

(4) Who, himself [intuitively] creates spontaneously [ex tempore], like the elder Vaṅgīsa, is called an “inspirational poet.”
   yo taṁ khaṇaṁ yeva vaṅgīsa,thero viya attho patibhāṇena karoti, ayaṁ paṭibhāna,kavi nāma
   (AA 3:211,9-13)12

8 On Sāriputta meeting Assaji: SD 42.8 (1.2). On Sāriputta & Moggallāṇa: Piya Tan, The Buddha and His Disciples, [2002] 2013 ch 5; Gir’aggā, samajjā: SD 52.2f (1.4). On Sañjaya, see Sāmañña,phala S (D 2,31+n), SD 8.10.
9 SD 51.15 (1.2.1.3); Rādha-t,thera Vatthu (DhA 6.1), SD 52.2e(2); AA 1:327-331; ThaA 3:101. On his arhathood, (Arahatta) Rādha S (S 22.71), SD 80.11.
10 Be ducarito vaggio.
11 “Who makes sense of some matter.”
12 DA 1:95,24 f (DAPT 1:168,5-12) = UA 205,20 f; cf Hinüber, Handbook of Pali Literature §81 (also §107); also Hinüber, Untersuchungen zur Mündlichkeit früher mittelindischer Texte der Buddhisten, AWL 5, 1994b:35.

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(1) Although the Sutta uses the verb cintetvā, “having thought,” its idiomatic sense in English would be something like “having minded” it, or better, “having felt” it, that is, having a direct and spontaneous experience of it, in a poetic sense. We would at once think of Vaṅgīsa as being such a poet in a modern “imaginative” sense. Yet, after further examination, we should understand that secular poetry tends to appeal more to our sensual imagination. Vaṅgīsa is an “artist of the mind” (cintō,kavi); hence, he is better said to be an imaginative poet or inspirational poet.

The former might well have been the case with Vaṅgīsa before his arhathood, when he was prone to being sensually lustful. However, as an arhat, being liberated, even as a poet, he would be lust-free. Hence, Wordsworth’s Romantic definition of poetry [1.1.5.2] would not correctly describe the nature of Vaṅgīsa’s poetry. However, T S Eliot’s modernist definition of poetry would be relatively closer to characterizing it [1.1.8.2].

The imaginative poet, then, is exemplified as a wholesomely creative person: a scholar, teacher, writer, musician, artist, poet, dancer, actor, worker. His creativity arises from his cultivation of any of the 5 faculties: faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom. He may not be an arhat, or even reached the path, but he has joyful wise faith, unrelenting spiritual effort, habitual mindfulness of the impermanence of things, wholesome mental concentration, and insightful wisdom of his own being and life as a whole.

(2) The interpretive poet (suta,kavi) seems to be an “artist of learning,” since suta has the sense of “listening” as the basis for learning, and the terms suta (“heard”) and bahu-s, suta (“heard much”) respectively mean “learned” and “deeply learned.” Broadly, this refers to one who loves good learning for its own sake, a kind of “Renaissance man” in the positive sense. This is not some status we hold for our measurable level of learning, but rather a state of accessible wisdom we have and show to anyone seeking truth and beauty.

In a narrow sense, this is a philosopher, one who loves thinking and reasoning, not for its own sake, but as tools for better self-understanding, personal development and mental joy. I have in mind here the ideal Buddhist or Dharma-spirited philosopher. He is a Dharma teacher who teaches us to have clear reasoning (good sense) and the courage to think about the teachings for their truth, to experience them and feel their beauty, their joy: in short, to truly live the Buddha Dharma.

Amongst the Buddha’s noble disciple, he is exemplified by the streamwinner, Ānanda, a socially engaged scholar and teacher of the Dharma.

(3) The reflective poet (atttha,kavi) seems to be similar to the interpretive poet; in fact, their skills overlap, since they both are masters of learning. We may perhaps see the interpretive poet as a master of sutta-based Dharma while the reflective poet is a master of Dharma-spirited meditation. If the former speaks eloquently of the teachings as truth and beauty experienced through our daily experience (seeing, hearing, etc), the latter inspires us with the teaching on a mental level. In either case, the poet teaches us to feel, directly experience the Dharma, to live it: through our daily life and through our thoughts and visions respectively.

Amongst the noble disciples, he is exemplified by Sāriputta, who is able to present the Dharma in novel ways of which the Buddha himself approves. [1.1.5.1]

(4) The inspirational poet (patṭibhāna,kavi) has the qualities of all the previous 4 kinds of poets, and his special quality is that of habitually engaging with whomever and whatever that shines in the Dharma, the truth and beauty of true reality. Like the Romantic poet, he is one who overflows with powerfully

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13 See (Vaṅgīsa) Ānanda S (S 8.4): SD 31.7 (3.5).
beautiful feelings, and is moved to express this joyfully to others in appreciation of their goodness, to inspire joy in them. He is exemplified by the elder Vaṅgīsa, and also the elder Mahā Koṭṭhita [1.1.4.1].

1.1.3.2 Dhammapāla, in his Udāna Commentary, elaborates on these terms in his explanation of the term, “the craft of poetry” (kāveyya, sippa), in the Sippa Sutta (U 3.9), thus:

“The craft of poetry” (kāveyya, sippa): The craft of composing verses (kabba) belonging to the 4 types of poets, such as the imaginative poet and so on, by way of one’s own imagination, by way of that heard or acquired from another, by way of import such that: ‘This is its import; so I will construe it’; or by way of inspiration arising on the spot, after seeing some verse, to the effect that ‘I will compose a poem that is the counterpart thereof.’

For, this was said by the Blessed One: “There are, bhikshus, these 4 kinds of poets: (What are the four?) The imaginative poet, the interpretive poet, the didactic poet, the inspired poet.” [UA 1:205,14-22]. We shall continue later with our analysis of kavi and kabba below [1.1.6].

1.1.4 The 4 analytical insights (paṭisambhidā)

1.1.4.1 The foremost of the monk disciples who have the 4 analytic skills or insights (catu, paṭisambhidā) is declared by the Buddha to be Mahā Koṭṭhita. However, most arhats are said to be skilled in these 4 analytic skills, which are the hallmarks of an accomplished Dharma teacher—and we must add today: sutta translators—that is, as follows:

(1) the analytic skill in meanings attha paṭisambhidā
(2) the analytic skill in teachings dhamma, paṭisambhidā
(3) the analytic skill in language nirutti, paṭisambhidā
(4) the analytic skill in ready wit paṭibhāna, paṭisambhidā.

1.1.4.2 The elder Sāriputta, as the wisest of the monks, is, of course, also the one most accomplished in the analytic skills (paṭisambhidā-p, patta). In the (Sāriputta) Paṭisambhidā Sutta (A 4.173), he declares that he is able to fully master the skills within a fortnight of his ordination. We can essentially see, in the (Sa,gāthā) Sāriputta Sutta (S 8.6) how these skills apply in his teaching, thus:

(1) the analytic skill in meanings (attha paṭisambhidā)
   S 731a: “wise, profoundly wise”
   S 731c: “of great wisdom”

(2) the analytic skill in teachings (dhamma, paṭisambhidā)
   S 731b: “skilled in what is the path and what is not the path”
   S 732ab: “he teaches briefly, he speaks in detail”

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14 U 3.9/32,3 (SD 69.5).
16 A 1.218/1:24. This is owing to his skill in teaching as recorded in Mahā Vedalla S (M 43, SD 30.2): SD 28.4 (4).
17 Such arhats are said to be “accomplished in the analytic insights” (paṭisambhidā-p, patta): SD 56.15 (1.2.1.5).
18 See SD 28.4 (4); SD 41.6 (2.2); SD 58.1 (5.4.2.13).
19 A 4.173/2:160 + SD 28.4 (4.5).
(3) the analytic skill in language (niruttii, paṭisambhidā)
S 731d: “teaches the Dharma to the monks”
S 732c: “his voice, like that of a mynah bird”
S 733b “his sweet voice”
S 732e “pleasant to the ear, lovely”

(4) the analytic skill in ready wit (paṭibhāṇa, paṭisambhidā)
S 732d “pours forth discourse of insightful wit”

1.1.4.3 The 3rd verse, S 733, focuses on the Dharma itself and its wholesome effect on the audience. “As he teaches them, they listen to his voice.” Hearing the Dharma in this manner, they are “joyful, the mind uplifted ... the monks give ear” to the Dharma. While it is true that Sāriputta is a great teacher, what makes him truly great is the Dharma that he teaches. When he teaches the Dharma, we are blessed with a clear vision of the Dharma, which, when we pursue diligently with right practice, will bring us to the path (not to merely glorify the teacher, as in the case of a cult Guru or worldly teacher).

1.1.5 Suttas showing their preacher’s ready wit

1.1.5.1 In the case of Sāriputta, this skill in ready wit (paṭibhāṇa, paṭisambhidā) is characterized by the elder’s penchant for presenting teachings in a novel insightful manner, as exemplified in the Mahā Hatthi, padôpama Sutta (M 28), a masterpiece in Dharma discourse, where he shows how the 5 aggregates arise through each of the 4 elements by way of dependent arising, and then declaring how, “he who sees dependent arising sees dharma; he who sees dharma sees dependent arising.”

1.1.5.2 The elder Vaṅgīsa, declared by the Buddha to be the foremost of those with ready wit (paṭibhāṅnavantānair) (A 1:24,21), is gifted with the ability to spontaneously compose inspired verses, such as on the occasion of this Sutta. This quality is, like that of Sāriputta’s mentioned [1.1.5.2], skill in ready wit, one of the 4 analytic skills [1.1.3.1]. In the case of Vaṅgīsa, his ready wit takes the form of spontaneous versifying.

The elder Vaṅgīsa’s 71 verses form the longest chapter of the Thera, gātha (Tha 1209-1279). They closely correspond with the verses in the Vaṅgīsa Saṁyutta (S 8), “the connected teachings on Vaṅgīsa.” The Sutta Nipāta preserves the verses of the Vaṅgīsa Sutta (Sn 2.12/59,12-62) which corresponds with Tha 1263-1278 (that is, Sn 343-358, without the prose).

1.1.5.3 Vaṅgīsa’s verses are not merely sayings in verse (like many other verses in the Saṁyutta, especially those in its 1st chapter, the Sāgātha Vagga). They are poetic works of great aesthetic skill and beauty, worthy of its own honoured place in Indian poetry and religious literature. The suttas recount his worldly life as a poet and “skull-tapper” even before he was a monk. Even as a monk, he still struggles with sexual feelings, as recounted in the (Vaṅgīsa) Ānanda Sutta (S 8.4). However, after becoming an arhat, these raw lust and exuberant sensuality sublimate into natural

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and subtle beauty and profound truth. Hence, the first few suttas of the Vaṅgīsa Saṁyutta (S 8.1-4) relate his struggle with sensual lust, his vulnerability for female charms, and his firm courageous dedication to the path of training.

His poems also unabashedly relate his tendency to self-pride (like any talented poet), and his efforts to gain self-mastery. As he matured in his monastic life, he often extolled the Buddha in verse. On one occasion, the Buddha requested him to compose a verse ex tempore (the Paro,sahassa Sutta, S 8.8). His other poems praise the great elders whom he himself admires: Sāriputta (the (Vaṅgīsa) Sāriputta Sutta, S 8.6), Moggallāna (the (Vaṅgīsa) Moggallāna Sutta, S 8.10) and Kōṇḍañña (the Kōṇḍañña Sutta, S 8.9).

The last sutta in the Vaṅgīsa Saṁyutta, is a long poem, the (Arahatta) Vaṅgīsa Sutta (S 8.12), also found in the Sutta Nipāta (Sn 2.12). Partly autobiographical, it ends with Vaṅgīsa declaring that he has become an arhat of the 3 knowledges.

1.1.5.4 We can see Vaṅgīsa’s ready wit (paṭibhāṇa) working with the Dharma from his 3 verses in the (Sa,gāthā) Sāriputta Sutta [§6731-733] below. In the 1st verse, he praises the teacher, the 2nd verse the teaching, and the 3rd the effect of the teaching on us (the audience).

The 1st verse [§731] praises Sāriputta as an arhat and teacher. He is profoundly wise in the liberated sense. Hence, he knows the true path from the false one, and teaches the true path for the benefit of his audience. Although the teacher is praised here, this is on account of the teaching that he is giving. In other words, the teacher is not a person, but the wholesome action (teaching) that he does, the good that he does and shows others. This is the essence of the teaching of non-self.

The 2nd verse [§732] is about how Sāriputta teaches: sometimes he gives a brief teaching, sometimes a detailed teaching. Whichever way he teaches, his voice is sweet and captivating (attention-grabbing). Even when we are not drawn to his voice, when we listen carefully, we have the benefit of his insightful wit: he teaches pure Dharma. When we listen to this, we feel “the joy of Dharma” (dhamma,veda) [1.1.5.5].

In the 3rd verse [§733], we see the effects and benefits of listening to the teaching. As they listen to his captivating voice, their minds are engaged with the teaching. They are joyfully uplifted by this meeting of truth and beauty, directly engaged with a vision of true reality since their minds are fully focused on what they are hearing: the true teaching. This is “the joy of purpose” (attha,veda), that is, the joy of a vision of the path and knowing that we are heading that very way. [1.1.5.5]

1.1.5.5 For a better understanding of what has just been explained about Sāriputta’s verses [1.1.5.4], we should examine (or review) the attha,veda dhamma,veda pericope, such as that found in the (Chakka) Mahānāma Sutta (A 6.10), that is, this passage:

1 Mahānāma, a noble disciple whose mind is straight, uju,gata,citta
2 gains inspired knowledge in the goal [the meaning of Dharma], attha,veda
3 gains inspired knowledge in the truth [the Dharma], dhamma,veda
4 gains gladness connected with the Dharma; pāmuñja
5 when he is gladden, zest is born; pīti
6 when the mind is zestful, the body is tranquil; passaddhi
7 the tranquil body feels happy; sukha
8 when one is happy the mind becomes concentrated.27 samādhi
9 This, Mahānāma, is called a noble disciple (ariya,sāvaka).28

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27 On this attha,veda passage, cf the nīvarṇa, pahiṇa passage at Sāmañña,phala S (D 2,76/1:73), SD 8.10n for other refs.
he dwells impartial (sama-p, patta) amongst partial [vicious] people;
he dwells unafflicted (avyāpajjhā) amongst afflicted people;
as one who has entered upon the Dhamma stream,29
he cultivates (the recollection of the 3 jewels and on moral virtue). (A 6.10), SD 15.330

(1) The Sutta speaks of us as the “noble disciple” (ariya, sāvaka), spiritual models, as those with “a straight mind,” that is, we keep our mind on the practice. In this case, we reflect on the qualities of the Buddha (our teacher), the Dhamma (the true teaching), the noble sangha (those who have reached the path, that is, the arhats and those who have reached the path), and the goodness of moral virtue.
(2) The disciple reflects on the meaning (attha) of this and rejoices. Those on the path who are not yet arhats, see themselves as keeping to the goal (attha), and rejoice in the truth that they are sure of awakening. Here, attha is polysemous: it means both “meaning” and “goal.” Knowing this—the meaning and the goal that is Dhamma—is inspired knowledge.
(3) This also refers to the Dharma as truth, we know that it reflects true reality. This, too, is inspired knowledge.
(4) Such inspired knowledge—the joy of knowing what is true and beautiful—arouses gladness (pāmuja): simply a joy in knowing the Dhamma.
(5) As we mentally hold this joy, it grows exuberantly into zest (pīti).
(6) Our whole body is filled with joy, yet calmed by this inner tranquillity (assaddhi),
(7) which settles further, clearing up our mind until it is fully concentrated (samādhi).
(8) This is not just a passing phase, but a pervasive and persistent happiness which opens our heart
(9) as noble disciples who accept ourself, and
(10) others unconditionally, impartially (sama-p, patta).
(11) Hence, we are able to live and work in an unafflicted (avyapajjhā), fully wholesome way,
(12) those who live in the Dharma joyfully,
(13) habitually mindful of the 3 jewels, living in wise faith, morally virtuous [going back to 1].

1.1.6 Kavi and kabba

1.1.6.1 The terms kavi or kavi [1.1.6.1], and kabba [1.1.6.2] need further analyses. We will first examine the word kavi (kavi) [ts]. The Critical Pali Dictionary (CPD) only says that kavi means “poet”; Cone’s Dictionary of Pali defines it as “a thinker; a poet; a maker of verse.” The point remains, then, that we cannot render kavi simply as “poet,” since, as we shall note, there are secular poets and poetry [1.1.8] and Buddhist poets and poetry [1.1.8].

1.1.6.2 Now let us look deeper to see if we can further define what a kavi is, especially in terms of the 4 kinds of “poets” (kavi), according to the (Catukka) Kavi Sutta (A 4.231) [1.1.3]. The fact that this Sutta uses the word kavi in this broad sense shows that we cannot apply to Vaṅgīsa or any of the arhat poets, or even Buddhist poetry, especially early Buddhist poetry.

28 “Noble saint” refers to any of the 4 kinds of aryas, viz, the streamwinner (sot‘āpanna), the once-returner (sakadāgāmi), the non-returner (anāgāmi) and the arhat. Here the streamwinner is meant. On the saints, See Kīṭāgiri S (M 70), SD 11.14(5).
29 “The Dharma stream,” dhamma, sota. Obviously here, the Buddha is referring either to streamwinning or one on the way to become one. For details, see SD 3.2 (A 5.202) n & SD 3.14 (A 6.44) n.
30 See (Agata, phala) Mahānāma S (A 6.10, 2.3 f) + SD 15.3 (4); SD 10.16 (3.4.3.2); SD 16.7 (2).
Let us look again at the 4 kinds of poets and explore our definitions and ideas further, and perhaps, in that process, refine them, too. Now, we have the following kinds of poets, of whom we can define or describe further as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>literal meaning</th>
<th>figurative translation</th>
<th>descriptive translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) cintā,kavi</td>
<td>the mind poet</td>
<td>“imaginative poet”</td>
<td>poet; philosopher; artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) suta,kavi</td>
<td>the “heard” poet</td>
<td>“interpretative poet”</td>
<td>scholar; writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) attha,kavi</td>
<td>the meaning poet</td>
<td>“reflective poet”</td>
<td>lexicographer; mystic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) paṭibhāṇa,kavi</td>
<td>the poet of ready wit</td>
<td>“inspirational poet”</td>
<td>the Buddhist poet</td>
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(1) **The “mind/heart poet”** (cintā,kavi) uses his mind or heart to explore his field and expresses him imaginatively, through ideas, images, figures, visions, or any of the physical senses, that is, as the tools of his imagination and expression. We would classify the secular poet in this category. However, if his explorations and expressions are limited to his mind, then, he would be a philosopher, a thinker, one who investigates ideas and tells us about them. The most imaginative person or type in this category would be the artist, that is, one who studies truth and reality, and creates or expresses beauty; this, of course, includes the painter, the musician, the dancer and the actor.

(2) **The “heard” poet** (suta,kavi) works with knowledge and tradition which he interprets in educational, entertaining, even healing, ways. In fact, suta, “the heard,” simply signifies any kind of learning, especially educational learning. Hence, he is the scholar, especially one who loves learning and teaching. Hence, he works with what he hears, with words and language. If he loves writing and relating stories, then, he is a bard, a writer.

(3) **The “meaning” poet** (attha,kavi) tries to “make sense” of whatever he experiences. He reflects the true reality that he sees and senses around (his experiences) and within himself (his thoughts and feelings). Narrowly, he is the lexicographer, who defines, or rather records, the way we use words: he sees what is behind words and language. If he relates to us what he sees and senses beyond words, some higher meaning or purpose in our lives, then, he is a mystic. If he does this in a wholesome way, he is a Dharma teacher, a meditator who teaches.

(4) **The poet of ready wit** (paṭibhāṇa,kavi) is the traditional Buddhist poet, especially one who expresses truth and beauty in words, and does so spontaneously, like the arhat Vaṅgīsa. In this case, we define such a poet by his verses. However, we can also include eloquent speakers of Dharma whose prose teachings have a poetic beauty, which he expresses naturally and wholesomely. In either case, this is the kind of poet who readily inspires us with Dharma joy and induces us to practice the Dharma.

Clearly, none of these are definitions, but rather descriptions of truth and beauty are expressed in some “poetic” way, that is, as truth and beauty that move us in good or towards good. It is, of course, possible that, often enough—more often outside of the Buddha’s teaching or against it—we may see secular, even worldly, versions of such poets, especially when they use Buddhism merely as the tool of their poetry and expression.

Historically, this classification is of technical interest to modern scholars. They see this classification of poets as an early attempt to form a theory of poetics. [1.1.7]

1.1.6.3 All that we have discussed in connection with kavi may be summed up as kabba (Skt kavya), “poetry,” or technically, “ornate poetry.” This abstract noun has a broad sense covering poetry, whatever is versified, expressed poetically, or whatever is considered “creative.” Although we have described the 4
kinds of poets in wholesome terms, *kabba* is not naturally used in that sense. It usually has a vaguely pejorative sense of something worldly.

**The Subodhālaṅkara** [1.1.7.1] has this bahuvrihi (*P* *bahu*-b, *bīhi*, a possessive compound). 

31 *kabba*, *nāṭaka*, *nikkhitta*, *netta*, *citta* (mnf), “whose eyes and mind are inclined towards, or occupied with poetry and dance, or dramatic performance; *kabba kavi*, *janā* *yāṁ* *kiñci* *racayant’etiṁ* *na vimhaya*, *karaṁ* *paraṁ* (Subodh 6). This is clearly not the domain of Vinaya-based and Dharma-spirited monastic Buddhism, but is clearly a secular field of the arts for the laity.

**1.1.7 Buddhist poetry, poetics and prosody—an overview**

**1.1.7.1 Pre-modern Indian poetry** may be broadly categorized into 3 overlapping periods:

(1) the Vedic period (c2000-500 BCE),
(2) the Middle Indo-Aryan period (600 BCE-400 CE), and
(3) the classical period (400-1200 CE).

Early Buddhist poetry falls under (2). 

33 In traditional Indian literature and poetry, there is neither a collective nor a special term for poetics or prosody} [1.1.7.10]. Such works are simply known by their titles, such as the *Subodhālaṅkāra*, on poetics, and the *Vuttodaya*, on prosody, both by Saṅgharakkhita of Sri Lanka (late-12th century). The latter is the only traditional work on Pali metre extant. They can, however, be all conveniently subsumed under the broad category of the Sanskrit term *kāvya* (*P* *kabba*) [1.1.6.3]. These are, however, late Sri Lankan works from the mediaeval period.

37 **1.1.7.2** In almost every sutta or early Buddhist text there is likely to be at least a verse, usually more. Early Buddhist poetry often represents not only the most ancient of Indian poetry, but also their most beautiful and spiritual. The oldest poetic Pali works are preserved in the *Sutta Nipāta*, that is, the 16 suttas of the *Aṭṭhaka,vagga* (*Sn* ch 4) and the 16 suttas of the *Pārāyaṇa,vagga* (*Sn* ch 5); and the *Khagga,-visāṇa Sutta* (*Sn* 1.3), on the early Buddhist eremites. it also has the *Dhaniya Sutta* (*Sn* 1.2), renowned for its great rustic beauty.

Early suttas in verse, such as those preserved both in the *Sutta Nipāta* and the *Majjhima Nikāya*, include the *Sela Sutta* (*Sn* 3.9 = *M* 92) and the *Vāseṭṭha Sutta* (*Sn* 3.9 = *M* 98). 

38 The *Sa,gāthā,vagga* (*S* ch

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31 A bahuvrihi (Skt *bahu*vṛihi; *P* *bahu*-b, *bīhi*, “having much rice”) is a possessive compound arising from the formula, “(one) having a B that is an A,” eg, one whose (A) whose feet (B) are bare, ie, “barefoot”; also blockhead, graybeard. Pali examples are *khiṇ’āsava* (*yassa* so), “one whose influxes are destroyed,” an arhat; *dīgha, jānu*, “one whose knees are long, long-kneed.”

32 CPD: *kabba*.


1.8.1.6 Saṁyutta Nikāya 1, Sagāthā Vagga 8, Vaṅgīsa Saṁyutta 1, Vaṅgīsa Vagga

1), which opens the Saṁyutta Nikāya, are closely related to Vedic verse, and most of them are pre-Buddhist that are used to express or reflect Buddhist teachings.

1.1.7.3 Vaṅgīsa’s spiritually open and moving poems, preserved in his Thera,gāthā (Tha 1209-1279), are also found in the Saṁyutta (S 8) and the Sutta Nipāta (Sn 1.12) [1.1.5.2]. These verses give us rare glimpses into very early Indian poetry otherwise totally lost. It seems that these verses often mirror the secular poetry of the times, and in some cases, images from love lyrics were replaced with religious imagery. Poetical embellishments (ālāṅkāra) found in much later poetry are found here for the first time.

The Therī,gāthā, the verses of the elder nuns, are especially known for their poignant humanity and natural beauty (such as those of the elder Subhā Jīvak’amba, vanika, the Subhā Thī, Thī 366-399). Historically and culturally, it is the first surviving poetry composed by Indian women, such as the lament of Ambapālī, courtesan turned nun (Thī 252-270), which, with dark humour, speaks of the decay of her beauty; and Muttā, of the joy in being rid of an unpleasant husband (Thī 11). The quality of these poems is unmatched by any later works.

According to Hinüber, the form of the single stanzas of the early Buddhist verses is not only the precursor of later muktaka-poetry as found in the Mahārāṣṭrī verses of Hāla (2nd/3rd century), but is also completely different from Vedic literature. This again testifies to a very abrupt break between Vedic and the Middle Indic traditions. It gives us some idea of the highly valuable and beautiful poetry that once flourished in ancient India.

1.1.7.4 The canonical Jātakas are all in verses, and their stories, related in its Commentary, constitute a huge collection of the earliest of Indian fables and folk tales. The prose commentary is essential to relate the story behind the verses for the 1st 500 jatakas. From the Visāti Nipāta (the book of twenties) onwards, a new type of jataka begins. They are small epics long enough to be understood without any help of the prose commentary. Some of these longer jatakas recur in the Sanskrit epics, the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyana, “They are of utmost importance far beyond Theravāda for the literary history particularly of the epics in ancient India.”

1.1.7.5 The Dhammapada is a collection of 423 verses (in slokas, 4 lines with 8 syllables each), and is popularly quoted—and translated, often badly—on account of its apparent simplicity and pithiness. However, it contains verses that exemplify the “intentional” use of language. Of special interest and difficulty is Dh 97. This kind of language is a kind of “literary shock therapy,” of which another example is found in Dh 294. Words take on an opposite sense to jolt us into a spiritual sense of things, a profound joy or an uplifting vision. Figurative language of great beauty and spirituality to express freeing the mind of thoughts and views is found in Dh 348 and 283.

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41 See Lienhard 1975; cf 1989:75-79.
42 Thī 366-399 (SD 20.7).
43 For an impressive survey of Skt works by women, see Chaudhuri 1939-43.
47 SD 26.11 (6.5).
48 See Dh 97 SD 10.6 esp (5).
Besides the Pali Dhammapada, this popular verse anthology is found in a number of other canonical languages:

- the Gândhārī Dharmapada, edited Brough, 1962, also called the Khotan Dhammapada;
- the Prakrit Dharmapada, based on Senart’s Kharoṣṭhi MS, with text, translations and notes by Barua and Mitra, 1921;
- the Udāna,varga, edited Bernhard, 1965.

1.1.7.6 The Udāna,varga is a Sanskrit work of the Sarvāstivāda with about 1050 verses, including scholia (uddāna), in 33 chapters (varga). It is probable that the Pali Dhammapada, the Sanskrit Udāna, varga and the Gândhārī Dharmapada had originally about 360 verses in common. However, they also have their own unique differences.

It is interesting that the commentator Dhammapāla says (UA 3,23-28) that the majority of the Buddha’s verses of uplift (udāna) are in the Dhammapada [1.1.7.5]; and we have noted that the Sarvāstivāda version of the Dhammapada is entitled Udāna,varga. Dhammapāla also states (UA 3,12) that the verses of the elder monks (thera) and elder nuns (therī) are not udānas, but “lion-roars” (siha,nāda).

The Iti,vuttaka (thus said) was said to have been compiled by a laywoman, Khujj’uttarā. It has 112 suttas arranged in 4 books (nipāta), subdivided into chapters (vagga); and, like the Udāna (with 8 vaggas of 10 udanas each), is a mixture of prose and verse. The Iti,vuttaka prose is not intended as a narrative, as in the Udāna, but the prose and verse complement one another, so that the teaching (doctrine or admonition) is present partly in the prose, partly in the verse.

1.1.7.7 The last few canonical texts in verse we will consider are the Apadāna, the Buddha,vaṁsa and the Cariyā,piṭaka, the last 3 books of the Khuddaka Nikāya, the 5th and last canonical Pali collection. These 3 works are all hagiographical, dealing with the past lives of the Buddha and the arhats. The details to the verses are given in their Commentaries: the Visuddha,jana,vilāsinī (author unknown), the Madhur’-attha,vilāsālinī (by Buddha,datta) and the Param’attha,dīpanī 7 (by Dhamnma,pāla).

While the Jātakas relate past lives of the Buddha, the Apadāna relate the past lives of the arhat monks and arhat nuns, thus:

1. Buddhâpadāna a praise of the Buddha and their respective fields
2. Pacceka,buddhâpadāna the Buddha answers Ānanda’s questions of buddhas who do not teach
3. Therā,apadana 55 vaggas of 10 Apadanas each spoken by monks
4. Therī,apadana 4 vaggas of 10 Apadanas each spoken by nuns

This collection is a kind of supplement to the Thera,gātha and the Therī,gāthā, and also parallel the Jātaka relating the Buddha’s past lives. The last 2 poems of the Thera,gāthā—those of Moggallāna (Tha 1146-1208) and of Vaṅgīsa (That 1209-1279) are, in fact, of Apadāna nature.

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53 See SD 8.6 (8.2); SD 15.11 (1.3.3.1); SD 57.19b (1.2.2).
55 This content betrays Mahāyāna influence; hence, the text’s lateness. See Bechert, “Buddha-field and transfer of merit in a Theravāda source,” 1992a:102.
56 Only the verses in this section are in triṣṭubh.

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Its Sanskrit version, the Avadāna, is found in Tibetan and Chinese, indicating that it was common to both the Theravāda and the Sarvāstivāda. Hence, they are quite early or based on early sources, since they show signs of Mahāyāna influence.

The Buddha,vaṁsa is a hagiography of 24 buddhas leading up to that of the historical Gotama Buddha. The narratives of these buddhas are basically the same, differing only in the details, such as, how they renounce, the kind of tree they awaken under, their chief disciples, and so on. This is a “narrative serialization” of the buddhas, that is, they (more or less) follow one another in different times (buddha,kāla) but never encounter one another.

Like the Apadāna, the Buddha,vaṁsa, too, is found in the Sarvāstivāda, which means that they are early in the pre-Mahāyāna sense. However, we see the development of the Bodhisattva and the Buddha doctrines in them. The text closes with details of the Buddha’s early life, especially the events of the 1st 7 weeks.

The Cariyā,piṭaka, the last book of the Khuddaka Nikāya, consists of 35 Jātaka-type stories given in verses, arranged in 3 chapters (vagga), to illustrate each of the 10 perfections (pāramī): those of giving (dāna), moral virtue (sīla), renunciation (nekkhamma), determination (adhiṭṭhāna), truth (sacca), loving-kindness (mettā), and equanimity (upekkhā). Apparently, accounts related to the last 3 perfections were lost, or perhaps, the idea was aborted. Anyway, this idea seemed to have been influenced by the 6 perfections (pāramitā) of early Mahāyāna.

1.1.7.8 Here, we will briefly look at 2 works of popular religious stories, clearly aimed at instilling a diligence in not committing keeping any bad karma that would fruit in some suffering state, such as that of the pretas, as exemplified by the stories of the Peta,vatthu, and to live a morally virtuous life of goodness and charity, as exemplified by the heavenly beings in the Vimāna,vatthu. These 2 works were clearly late, considering their contents of almost simplistic piety, and their literary quality is not as high as the verse works mentioned earlier.

In the Khuddaka Nikāya, the Vimāna,vatthu appears first as book 6 (in the Burmese listing). From the unremarkable metre, scholars conclude that the work (probably post-Buddha) is likely to be one of the last to be admitted into the canon.

The theme of the stories is clearly old—do good and we go to heaven—and also simplistic, but useful for the edification of those who, for any reason, may not appreciate the older suttas and stories. Out of this dark heaven of tiny twinkling stars that are heavenly mansions (vimāna), at least one star does shine brilliantly, that is, the Chatta Māṇavaka Vatthu (Vv 5.3/881*-904). Its first 2 verses are popularly sung to a ”goose-step” tune, by the laity in Sri Lanka as a hymn of the 3 refuges, even put to music.

The Peta,vatthu, the 7th book of the Khuddaka Nikāya, like Vimāna,vatthu, with which it is often paired, was probably added during Asoka’s time, before the canon was closed. Many of the stories relate the painful fruits of wicked deeds that turn us into pretas. Here, the term peta takes on more than just

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57 Norman 2983b:89-92; Hinüber 1996:60 f.
58 On the development of this belief, see Brill’s Ency of Buddhism Online (BEB): Buddhas of the past and of the future: Southeast Asia.
61 Winternitz does not think highly of them: “Die beiden höchst underfreulichen, glücklicherweise wenig umfangfreichen Werke” (the 2 most unpleasant, fortunately, not very extensive works). 1912:77. Sentiments not repeated in the tr 1933:98.
64 See Norman 1983b:71 f; Hinüber 1996:50 f.
the sense of “departed one,” but suggests a state of suffering that we are caught in karmically. At least one story stands out as instructing the Dharma-spirited way of regarding the departed, that is, the Tirokuḍḍa Sutta (Pv 1.5/14*-25*), and is incorporated into the Khuddaka, pāṭha [1.1.7.7].

1.1.7.9 Finally, there are the late canonical verses, known as the Khuddaka, pāṭha. Although this book is placed first in the Khuddaka, pāṭha, since they represent what a novice should first learn and know. It is simply an anthology of existing materials (except for one), that is, the following 4 topics and 5 suttas:

(1) the 3 refuges for “refuge-going” (saraṇa, gamana) V 1:22,15-20, etc SD 45.11 (3)
(2) the 10 training rules (dasa, sikkhāpada) for monastic novice V 1:83,32-84,2, etc
(3) the 32 parts of the body (dva-t, tims’ākāra) for meditation Pm 1:6.31-7.7 SD 19.16
(4) the boy’s questions (kumara, pañīha), the 10 key teachings A 10.27/5:50,22-54,13 SD 58.1
(5) the Maṅgala Sutta, on blessings Sn 46 f258*-269*) SD 101.5
(6) the Ratana Sutta, recollections on the 3 jewels Sn 2.1 (222*-238*) SD 101.2
(7) the Tirokuḍḍa Sutta, on dealing with the departed Pv 1.5 (14*-25*) SD 2.7
(8) the Nidhi, kanda Sutta, on the treasure trove (good karma) Sn 1.8 (143*-152*) SD 38.3

The suttas seem to have a liturgical purpose; perhaps. For the instruction and edification of the laity in terms of rituals in some organized form. Khp 1-6 and 9 are found in the same sequence in the Paritta, where there are 2 texts placed between texts 4 and 5, placing the Tirokuḍḍa Sutta and the Nidhi, kanda Sutta as Paritta 8 and 9. We may thus assume that both Khp and Parit originated by expanding a common urtext in different ways. Unlike the Khuddaka, pāṭha, the Paritta is still used in popular Buddhism.

1.1.7.10 With such a wealth of beautiful and inspiring poetry, understandably the Buddhists would produce works on poetics and prosody. Unlike hermeneutics, which is about the meaning and interpretation of a text, poetics pertains to understanding how a text’s different elements come together and produce certain effects on the reader: it is the theory of literary forms and literary discourse. In a narrow sense, it is the literary criticism that deals with the nature, forms and laws of poetry.

The Buddhist classic on poetics is Saṅgharakkhita’s Subodhālaṅkāra [1.1.7.1] in 370 verses. It deals with the art of poetry under 5 heads: faults in composition; their avoidance; verbal ornamentation; rhet-

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65 On the evolution of the peta, see SD 57.10 (3.2.5).
66 Khp 7 = Pm 1.5 (SD 2.7).
67 Only 31 parts are listed in the suttas, eg, Giri-māṇanda S (A 10.60,6), SD 19.16.
68 “The great questions (maha, pañīha), SD 58.1 (5.2.7.2).
69 Khp 8,9* is qu by Kvu 351,18*-21* (§148). This seems to show that (8) is an old independent text only found in this collection.
71 The Parittas are listed in CPD I (Epi) p93* f. Other protective texts incl Jayamaṅgalā Gāthā (Hinuber 1996 4.5.2), Mahā, dibba, manta (BSOA 28, 1965:61-80) and jina, pañījara [SD 54.18 (2.3.1.4)]. See Skilling 1992, biblio. The Paritta is also discussed in Schalk 1974. Comy: Sār’attha, samuccaya (Parita: Hinüber 1996 2.9.1,1). Ce (SHB XXV) 192; also called Catu, bhāna, vār’at’thakathā seems to be extracted from the Comys on the respective texts. On the date of Parita: Upasaka, janālakāra, ed Saddhatissa, 1965:35.
73 Gandh 61,15-19; the Vuttodaya author is generically said to be Vuttodaya,kara, “the Vuttodaya creator.” Subodhālaṅkāra, ed & tr G E Fryer, JAS 44 1875:91-125.
orical figures; elegance of sound (rasa) and the art of making verse sound pleasant. There is a tiṅkā (sub-commentary) on the Subodhalankara, ascribed to Vacissara.74

Sāṅgharakkhita also wrote a book on Pali prosody, entitled Vuttodaya.75 It seems to be the only original work on Pali metre extant.76 It consists of 136 verses, or sections of stanzas, arranged in 6 chapters, first dealing with general definitions and symbols, and then with all the metres known to him, including mattā, chanda, gana-c, chanda and all the varieties of akhara-c, chanda. However, he does not seem to have been aware of the Old āryā metre. He relied entirely on Sanskrit prosody, borrowing their terms and adapting them. Occasionally, he uses a sentence from Pingala turning it into Pali with little change.77 There were several commentaries on the Vuttodaya, including a tiṅkā by Vepullabuddhi of Pagan (Gandhv 64,27).78

1.1.8 Secular poetry and Buddhist poetry

1.1.8.0 We have briefly discussed the nature of early Buddhist poetry and of kabba [1.1.6]. Here, we will very briefly take a couple of glimpses at secular poetry, especially western poetry [1.1.8.1] and modernist poetry [1.1.8.2]: how these two differ, and how they both differ from early Buddhist poetry.

1.1.8.1 One of the leading Romantic poets, William Wordsworth (1770-1850), writes in his introduction to the 2nd edition of Lyrical Ballads (1800): “Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.”79 Since poetry deals with feelings, it is always tricky when it comes to definitions, since feelings are to be directly felt; they are subjective, and thus defy any technical definition.

Hence, it’s easier to speak of “descriptions,” rather than definitions, of artistic creation. Even then, Wordsworth’s descriptions of the process of poetry seemingly contradict one another. The description above suggests that poetry comes from feelings and emotions rather than conscious effort. However, he later gives another description of poetry which highlights the importance of conscious reflection, that poetry is “emotion recollected in tranquility” (307).

In contrast to his 1st description, which says that poetry arises spontaneously, this 2nd description implies that poets must enter a calm, rational state of mind in order to write poetry. The ambiguous use of language in Wordsworth’s poems, particularly in “Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey” and “Lines Written in Early Spring,” both written in 1798, show the tension between rationality and imagination. The apparent contradictions between rational thought and non-rational feelings in Wordsworth’s Lyrical Ballads thus suggest that we must reconcile, or simply accept, both these views on the creation of poetry. After all, we are supposed to simply enjoy poetry.

1.1.8.2 The Irish poet, T S Eliot (1888-1965), a central figure in Modernist poetry, in his Tradition and the Individual Talent (1919) rejects Wordsworth’s definition or description of poetry. He holds the view that a writer should be impersonal and his writings should be devoid of personal emotion and feelings. Powerful emotions may arise in the mind, but the poet doesn’t react immediately.

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74 Gandhv 62,6: Malalasekera, Pali Literature of Ceylon, 1928:204.
76 Malalasekera 1928:198.
77 Malalasekere id.
Eliot, in his most famous poem, *The Waste Land* (1922), uses the Buddhist imagery of the fire sermon, the Āditta Pariyāya Sutta (S 35.28), to depict the dark sentiments of post-World War 1 Britain. In Eliot’s view, our emotions burn us like the fires of lust, hate and delusion in the Sutta, and we are helpless to put them out. To do that we have to return to early Buddhism.\(^\text{80}\)

1.1.8.3 James Joyce (1882-1941) heavily uses Buddhist ideas in his most difficult and final work, *Finnegans Wake* (1939). It is framed in a samsaric cycle: the book’s very last sentence hooks back to its first word, so that reading simply starts over. At the book’s opening, Joyce versifies the 12 links of dependent arising, thus:

“In the ignorance that implies impression that knits knowledge that finds the nameform that whets the wits that convey contacts that sweeten sensation that drives desire that adheres to the attachment that dogs death that bitches birth that entails the ensuance of existentiality.”\(^\text{81}\)

1.1.8.4 It’s often fascinating, at least exotic, to see how great literary luminaries apply Buddhist ideas and teachings in their work. However, we should not have the naïve notion it is really Buddhism that we are reading in the great literary work. Buddhist aspects have been relegated, seconded, to convey an idea or sentiment of the author.

In Eliot’s *The Waste Land* [1.1.8.2], for example, the “fire sermon” is appropriated by him not to piously present the dangers of the effects of greed, hate and delusion, but to highlight the consuming darkness of the aftermath of World War 1 on Britain expressed through poetry. The effect is dramatic and compelling. However, it is not Buddhism: it is T S Eliot.

Similarly, when Joyce uses the samsaric effect of the 12 links of dependent arising in the opening of *Finnegans Wake* [1.1.8.3], adjusting the cycle, putting ignorance in the 1\(^{\text{st}}\) and the last link (it is suffering that is the original last link); in fact, the last 3 links are reversed, giving the effect of an unending cycle. This is samsaric in the Joycean sense, but it is not actually in the early Buddhist texts.

We fairly tolerate all this as literary licence; we may even peddle such literary cameos as overtures to the real thing. But that’s the point: we need to present the original teachings in their fullness. It’s fine for Buddhism to serve as Cinderella, and pumpkins may turn into carriages, and mice into footmen, but the wicked stepmother and ugly stepsisters remain as they are. Cinderella has to be with Prince Charming to live happily ever after. This is called the *Cinderella effect*.

If literature engages the services of Buddhism with a literary sense of respect, modern psychology tends to conscript Buddhism to serve the Emperors of Psychology. Buddhism is that little boy who keeps shouting that the Emperor is naked, but who dare not laugh at an Emperor. The boy is sent for therapy and then thrown into the scullery. The exploitation there is sadder and the Buddha often ends up being killed by Zennists.\(^\text{82}\)

1.2 The *aṭṭhi,katvā pericope*

1.2.1 Deep listening

1.2.1.1 The highlight of the (Sa,gāthā) Sāriputta Sutta is “the *aṭṭhi,katvā pericope,*” a stock passage that describes the nature of “deep listening” or fully engaged attention to the Dharma, “He listens to the Dharma, fully attentive, fully receptive, all ears, minding it, directing his whole mind [heart] to it” (*aṭṭhi,katvā [aṭṭhiṁ katvā] manasi katvā sabba,cetaso samannāharitvā ohita,soto dhammaṁ suṇāti*).

\(^{80}\) A 35.28/4:19-20 = Mv 1.21 (V 1:34 f): SD 1.3 (1.2.3).


\(^{82}\) On psychotherapy and Buddhism, see SD 7.9 (1.3.2).

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Literally, this reads: “he listens to the Dharma, driven by purpose [intent on the meaning], gives ear, fully attentive, directing his mind totally to it.”

1.2.1.2 The Sutta describes the Dharma being taught by an experienced Dharma teacher, a true practitioner, an awakened renunciant, an arhat, the elder Sāriputta, the wisest of the monks (other than the Buddha himself). The Buddha declares him to be the foremost of those disciples with great wisdom (A 1:189/1:23). [1.1.2.1]

However, it is not the teacher that defines this pericope, but the teaching. Hence, even when an ordinary teacher teaches the sutta with respect and wisdom, the wholesome effect is still there, that is, when we “listen to the Dharma, fully attentive, fully receptive, all ears, minding it, directing his whole mind [heart] to it.”

This phrase is analysed as follows:

- \(\text{āṭṭhi}, \text{katvā} [\text{āṭṭhiṁ katvā}]\) making (the Dharma, the goal) his purpose  
- \(\text{manasi katvā}\) minding it  
- \(\text{sabbo}, \text{cetaso samannāharitvā}\) attending to it with all his mind [heart]  
- \(\text{ohita}, \text{soto}\) (“with ear directed,” from \(\text{odahati}\)) all ears  
- \(\text{dhammaṁ suṇāti}\) he listens to the Dharma

1.2.2 Cultivating the 5 faculties

1.2.2.1 Through this “deep” listening of the Dharma, especially when it is taught by the arhats, the audience will surely benefit in terms of cultivating their spiritual faculties (indriya) of faith (\(\text{saddhā}\)), effort (\(\text{viriya}\)), mindfulness (\(\text{sati}\)), concentration (\(\text{samādhi}\)) and wisdom (\(\text{paññā}\)). These will, in turn, help them progress to attain the path in this life itself.

The faith of the audience inspires them with a deep sense of purpose. Effort arises in them even as they keep their mind focused on the teaching. With mindfulness, the audience receives the flow of Dharma into their hearts since they are “all ears,” listening without any distraction. As a natural fruit of this mental openness and spiritual readiness, wisdom arises in them even as they listen, and grows in due course.

1.2.2.2 A more detailed description, in practical terms, of how this deep listening of the Dharma helps in our spiritual development is by way of the stages of discipleship (\(\text{sāvakatta}\)), described in SD 58.1 (1.2.1.3).

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83 M 65,32/1:445 (SD 56.2), 134,6/3:201 (SD 109.11); S 4.16/1:113 (SD 61.11), 8.6/1:189 (SD 58.7, qv), 46.38/-5:95 (SD 41.10).

84 \(\text{Odahati (+ odheti)}\), “places (in); lays down; applies; directs, \(\text{odahati sotam}\), “gives ear attentively,” V 1:9,14). Cf \(\text{oharati}\) which also gives \(\text{ohita}\) but with a different sense (as in \(\text{ohita, bhāra}\), “laid down the burden”).

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At one time, the venerable Sāriputta was staying in Anātha,piṇḍika’s park monastery in Jeta’s grove, outside Sāvatthī.

Now, at that time, the venerable Sāriputta was instructing, inspiring, rousing and gladdening the monks with a Dharma talk, speaking in a polished, fluent, articulate manner, expressing well its meaning.

And those monks were listening to the Dharma, fully attentive, fully receptive, all ears, minding it, directing their whole mind to it.

Then, it occurred to the venerable Vaṅgīsa: [1.1.5.2]

“...venerable Sāriputta is instructing, inspiring, rousing and gladdening the monks with a Dharma talk, speaking in a polished, fluent, articulate manner, expressing well its meaning...

And those monks are listening to the Dharma, fully attentive, fully receptive, all ears, minding it, directing their whole mind to it.

What now if I were to praise the venerable Sāriputta to his face with suitable verses.”

Then, the venerable Vaṅgīsa rose from his seat, arranged his upper robe over one shoulder and, raising his hands joined in lotus gesture towards the venerable Sāriputta, said to him:

“An inspiration has come to me, avuso Sāriputta! An inspiration has come to me, avuso Sāriputta!”

“Then, express your inspiration, avuso Vaṅgīsa.”

Then, the venerable Vaṅgīsa praised the venerable Sāriputta to his face with suitable verses, thus:

Wise, profoundly wise, skilled in the path and what is not the path. Sāriputta, of great wisdom, teaches the Dharma to the monks.

He teaches briefly, he speaks in detail. His voice, like that of a mynah bird, pours forth discourse of insightful wit.

85 On this stock phrase, see Pārileyya S (S 22.81,9+ n) SD 6.1.
86 “Speaking in as polished ... the meaning,” poriyā vācāya visuṭṭhāya anelagalāya atthassa viññāpaniyā.
87 Te ca bhikkhū aṭṭhī, katvā [Be aṭṭhīṁ katvā] manasi katvā sabba, cetaso samannāharitvā ohita, sotā dhammaṁ suṇanti: M 65,32/1:1445 (SD 56.2), 134,6/3:201 (SD 109.11); S 4.16/1:113 (SD 61.11), 8.6/1:189 (SD 58.7), 46.38/5:95 (SD 41.10). DPI 37 aṭṭhī katvā ... suṇāti: “Making himself a seeker of meaning, he gives ears [sic] and listens to the Dhamma with full attention, directing his mind totally towards it.” On how this builds up the 5 faculties (indriya), see SD 58.2 (1.2.1.2).
88 Yaññunnāhaṁ ayasmantarā sāriputtaṁ sammuḥkā sarūpāḥ gāthāḥ abhitthaveyyan’ti.
89 “Mynah” or “myna,” sālika (also sālika, sāliya, or -ā), the mynah or thrush, Turdus salica (Skt sārikā), or Common myna, Acridotheres tristis (J 1:421, 429, 3:202, 203, 5:8 madhu,sāliya, 6:425 sāliyā).
As he teaches them, they listen to his sweet voice. Joyful, the mind uplifted by his delightful voice, pleasant to the ear, lovely, the monks give ear.”

— evaṁ —

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90 Comy paraphrases line c as if it contained an inherent verb hoti and treats line d as an independent sentence with patibhānam as subject. It seems more fitting, however, to take nigghoso in line c as the subject of udiyyati and patibhānam as its object. Comy explains the simile: “The elder’s sweet voice, as he teaches the Dharma, is like the voice of a mynah bird when, having tasted a sweet ripe mango, it strikes up a breeze with its wings and emits a sweet sound.” Comy glosses the verb with utṭhatati, and paraphrases with an intransitive sense: “Inspired discourse rises up (from him) endlessly, like waves from the ocean.” This implies that Comy reads udiyyati, the Be reading of Tha 1232.