ARADHANĀ THAM: 'INVITATION TO TEACH THE DHAMMA'

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Abstract

In Thailand, one of the main vehicles for the dissemination of knowledge about Buddhism is the sermon. This was especially so in the pre-modern period of limited literacy, and it is still so today. In formal contexts, whether in a temple or elsewhere, before a monk preaches a sermon a lay follower will recite a Pāli verse inviting him to do so.

The verse recapitulates a key event in the career of the Buddha. After his awakening, the Buddha was reluctant to teach the Dhamma that he had discovered: profound and subtle, who could understand it? But the mighty deity Brahmā appeared before the Awakened One and assured him that his teaching would not be fruitless, that there existed beings with the capacity to understand. The Buddha surveyed the world and realized that this was so; he agreed to teach, opening wide the gateway to the deathless. Recognizing that beings have the potential to realize and to benefit from the Dhamma, out of compassion he went on to teach for forty-five years, bequeathing the legacy of the Saddhamma. After his death, the Saddhamma was transmitted orally by monks and nuns for several centuries, before being written down and transmitted in the form of the Tipitakas of the several Buddhist schools. It may be said without exaggeration — at least from the viewpoint of traditional Buddhology — that the existence of the Tipitakas, the collections of the Buddha’s teaching, depends on Brahma’s request.

Thus, the significance of Brahma’s request cannot be gainsaid: without it, there would be no Buddhism. In recognition of this, the request is ritually re-enacted by the recitation of the ‘arādhana tham’ verse, inviting a member of the order, the saṅgha, to give a sermon. The paper discusses both the stanza that is recited today and a second stanza that has fallen into disuse. It is a preliminary study of a daily ritual elaboration of a fundamental, multivalent event in the narrative of the transmission of the Dhamma.

I

In Siam today, before a monk preaches the Dhamma, a lay follower recites a verse inviting him to do so. The verse and the ritual act are called arādhana tham: 'invitation [to teach] the Dhamma.'¹ In Suat mon plaæ chabap ho phra samut wachirayæn, a collection of Pāli chants with Thai translation dating to the first or second reign of the Ratanakosin Era (that is, the late 18th or early 19th century) which was published in book from RE 128 (CE 1910), it appears as follows:²

brahmā ca lokādhipati
sahampati

Unless otherwise specified, references to Pali texts are to the editions of the Pali Text Society.

¹This practice does not seem to be followed in Sri Lanka or Burma.

²Suat mon plaæ chabap ho phra samut wachirayæn, reprinted for the royalty sponsored cremation of Phra Mahārāja-mangalatilaka (Bunrütan Puññako) and Phra Debasirudhiphâna (Ubon Nandako) at Wat Thepsirin (Debasirindrävälsa), 25 December 2542 [CE 1999], pp. 336-37.

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The classical source of the verse is the Buddhavamsa, where it is the first stanza. The Buddhavamsa version differs in two places: in line b it has anadhivarana in place of adhivara, and in line d it has desehi in place of desetu. Both versions of the verse are unmetrical: line b, with 12 syllables in Sutam mon plae and 13 in Buddhavamsa and line c with 13 syllables. Line c can easily be improved by eliding the final long 'a' in sattā and the following initial 'a' in appa- to make sant'idha sattā'parajakkhātikā. This gives us three Indravamsa line (a,c,d).

I am grateful to Lance Cousins for identifying the canonical model of the brāhma ca lokādhīpata verse, to Steven Collins for identifying the problem, and to Prapod Assavavirulhakarn for pointing to the solution.

The editions consulted do not show any significant variants: Pali Text Society (London, 1974) p.1.4; Syāmarattha Tepītaḵañ (Bangkok, 2523 [1980]) Vol.33 p.403.5; Mahaculatepītaḵañ (Bangkok, 2500[1957]) Vol. 33 p.435;Dhammanagiri-Pali-Gantihamala Vol. 58 (Igppturi, 1998) p. 287. The verse also occurs in the Brahmanahasanaparivatta of the Pathmanmasambodhi, with anadhivarana and desetu: this may be a more immediate source.

The variant form of the verb in line d — desehi/desetu — need not detain us, since it does not affect the metre. It is the variant in line b that poses a problem. Which is more appropriate, adhi-vara, 'pre-eminent' or an-adhi-vara, 'unexcelled', 'without superior'?

Either form is possible semantically. One might argue that anadhivara is excessive, but our literature delights in superlatives, especially as epithets for the Exalted One, the one beyond epithets. Neither adhi-vara or its negative an-adhi-vara seem to be attested in classical or Buddhist Sanskrit (the latter in the sense of the various Sanskrit[s] used by Buddhists, rather than the Middle Indic dialect alone), so no help is forthcoming from these sources. (An) adhivara may be unique to Pāli, but given the fact that so many Buddhist Sanskrit works remain unindexed, and the possibility that Jaina or other Prakrits may have the word, this remains to be proven.

In classical Pāli texts adhivara seems to occur only with the negative prefix: that is, adhivara alone may be a ghost word. The negative anadhavara occurs only a few times, in works belonging to the Khuddakankāya. In verse 9 of Buddhavamsa it is an epithet of Gotama: satt' uttamo anadhivaro vināyako. The

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commentary explains: \textit{adhivaro} n’assa atti anadhivaro. In the \textit{Kalingabodhipgata}\textit{ka}, it is an epithet of all Buddhas:

\textit{idha anadhivara} Buddha\n
\textit{abhisaamuddha virocanti}

(idha refers to the Bodhimagda, the site of the ‘seat of victory’, where all Buddhas awaken).\footnote{Jātaka 479 v. 69cd (PTS ed. IV 233.15)} In \textit{Vimānavatthu} the word is used seven times in the \textit{Sirimāvimaṇḍa} (16:2d, 3d, 4c, 8b, 9b, 11b, 12a). In all cases but one it is an epithet of the Tathāgata.\footnote{The term is given as an epithet of Buddhas at \textit{Abhidhānapadīka} (registered also in Childers’ \textit{Dictionary of the Pali Language}, p. 30a). (Following a different hermeneutical trail, an old Pāli-Thai dictionary gives two meanings for \textit{anadhivara}: space [ākāṣa] and nibbāna: \textit{Gambhir phra abhidhānasab}, Bangkok, 2571, p.13.)} The exception is v. 4c, where \textit{anadhivara} describes the \textit{iddhi} of Sirimā.\footnote{Superlative adjectives are essential to the poetic fabric of the \textit{Sirimāvimāṇa}: nearly every verse has one or more, for example \textit{para} (1a,6c,8c,9d,13d), and \textit{vara}, \textit{anoma}, \textit{anuttara}.}

But the question of which term is appropriate is beside the point, because \textit{adhivara} is attested only in \textit{Suat mon pIae}. Since \textit{Suat mon pIae} itself states that the verse is in \textit{Indrāvaṃśa}, it is easy to conclude that the prefix was dropped in an (unsuccessful) attempt to solve the metrical problem. Other chanting books, however, resolve the problem differently, by indicating in print how the line should be pronounced in order to fit the metre. Different chanting books and ritual manuals do this differently, according to prevailing printing conventions.

The conventions in question are the use of the graphic symbols \textit{danḍagāṭa} and \textit{bindu}, both equivalent in function to the Sanskrit \textit{virāma}. The \textit{Suat mon pIae} of 1910 and the \textit{Royal Chanting Book} dated RS 130 (CE 1912, p. 284: see figs.1,2.) uses the \textit{vañjhakāra} or \textit{danḍagāṭa} above consonants which are to be read as medials with the inherent ‘a’ suppressed. Later editions, such as the \textit{Royal Chanting Book} published in BE 2468 (1925, p. 338: see fig. 3) or the current edition of BE 2538 (CE 1995, p. 373) use the dot or \textit{bindu} below the consonant to indicate the same thing. Chanting books that use ‘popular Pāli orthography’ use the \textit{mai} \textit{han akat} and \textit{visanchani} with the same result (fig.4).

In line b of our verse, the first syllable is lengthened by placing the \textit{danḍagāṭa} above or \textit{bindu} below the ‘t’ of ‘kata’. This indicates that the first syllable is to be read as if it were long: \textit{kat} instead of \textit{ka}. Next, the first three syllables of \textit{‘anadhivaram’} are elided to make \textit{‘anadhivaram’}. With these ingenious changes, the line may be recited as a 12-syllble \textit{Indrāvaṃśa}, and the verse is now metrical:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Brahmā ca lokābhipati sahampati}
  \item \textit{kat/ aṁ-ja-li an-āhi-va-r aṁ-a-yā-ca-tha}
  \item \textit{sant’ idha sattā pparajakkhajāti kā}
  \item \textit{desētu dharmam anukamp’ imām pajām.}
\end{itemize}

This we may translate as:

\textit{Brahmā Sahampati, Lord of the}
AraṇḍhanāThām: ‘Invitation to teach the Dhamma’

Universe
Palms pressed in homage, beseeched the Unexcelled One:
‘Here there are beings with little dust in their eyes:
May the Dhamma be taught: take pity on these beings.’

II
The verse refers to an event in the life of the Buddha, related in the Pāsarāsītsutta (or Ariyapariyesanasutta) of the Majjhimanikāya, the Brahmasaṃyutta of the Saṃyuttaṇikāya,10 and the Mahāvagga of the Vinaya.11 Seated beneath the Bodhi tree, the newly Awakened One reflected that he had reached awakening with difficulty, that the Dhamma he had realized was profound and difficult to see, and that it would be wearisome if he taught the Dhamma and no one understood him. ‘When the Blessed One reflected in this manner, his mind inclined toward inactivity, not towards teaching.’

This was a disaster. Buddhas do not appear in the world every other day: they are as rare as the rare udumbura flower. Luckily Brahmā Sahampati was quick to grasp the gravity of the crisis: ‘Alas, the world is lost, the world is ruined’, he thought, and instantly vanished from his heaven and appeared before the Tathāgata. Raising his hands, palms, pressed together, he implored the Ten-

10 Sāmyutta Nikāya I 136-138, Ayācanam.
11 Vinaya I 4-7, Brahmavaṃśakathā. The turn of events is common to most for all biographies of the Buddha, for example the Sarvāstivādin Catuṣpariṣṭāsūtra from Central Asia, the (Mūla-) Sarvāstivādin Vinaya in Tibetan translation, the Lokottaravādin Mahāvastu, and the Lalitavistara (Chapter 25, Adhyāyānāparivarta ).

powered One to teach the Dhamma:

Sir, may the Blessed One teach the Dhamma! May the Sugata teach the Dhamma! There are beings with little dust in their eyes; they will fall away if they do not hear the Dhamma. There will be those who understand [if taught] (desetu bhante bhagavā dhamman, desetu sugato dhamman, santi sattā aparajakkhajītiṁ assavanatā dhammassa parihāyanti, bhavissanti dhammassa aṇṇātara).

The Sugata realized that this was so, and decided to teach.

This was a defining event in the history of Buddhism: without it, there would be no Buddhism. Indeed, a similar event must occur in the career of any Buddha, past or future, as seen for example in the Mahāpadānasutta, in which Mahābrahmā requests the Buddha Vipassi to teach,12 or in the careers of other past Buddhas related in the Buddhavamsa Commentary.13 The request is variously termed ajjhesana, dhammajjhesana, dhammāyācana, brahmāyācana, etc. According to the Buddhavamsa Commentary, Mahābrahmā’s request to teach the Dhamma is one

12 Dighanikāya II 37.
13 See e.g. I.B. Horner (ed.), Madhuratadvālāsaṁhitā nāma Buddhavamsatathākata of Bhadantacarīya Buddhadatta Mahāthera (London: The Pali Text Society, 1978) pp. 124.19 (Dīpankaśa); 133.34 (Kondañña); 145.8 (Mangala); 154.10 (Sumana); 161.25 (Revata), 167.29 (Sobhita), etc. The rule is stated explicitly in Milinda-panha (234.11) api ca mahārāja sabbesam tathāgatānaṁ dhammatā esā yaṁ brahmunā āyācitā dhammanām desenti.
of the thirty things common to all Buddhas. Commentaries also aver that all Buddhas hesitate to preach. This is not included in the thirty dharmatā, but goes without saying that the hesitation is a prerequisite for Brahmā's request.

The Buddha's hesitation to teach and Brahmā's request give narrative expression to a key point: the teaching will be fruitful because there exist beings 'with little dust in their eyes' (apparajakhajāttika) - beings with the potential to awaken, like lotus buds ready to blossom. Later, after the passing of the first rainy season, it is because these beings exist that the Buddha sends the first group of monks out to teach the Dhamma 'for the good of the multitudes, for the happiness of the multitudes, out of compassion for the world, for the good, the happiness, and benefit of gods and humans'. On his deathbed the devoted lay-follower Anāthapiṇḍika requests Sāriputta to teach profound teachings to white-clad householders, because 'there exist sons of good family with little dust in their eyes'.

Today, every time the verse is recited Brahmā's request is re-enacted, and Buddhism begins again, recharged. A common event that regularly takes place in temples throughout the country partakes of the life of the Master, the specific becomes archetypal. Dare one suggest that the inviter becomes Brahmā, the monk becomes Buddha?

III

Requesting the Buddhas to teach the Dharma is one of the limbs of the Unsurpassed Offering (anuttara-pūjā), a liturgy that is an essential component of Mahāyāna practice to this day. An early version is given in verse 10 of the Bhadracarī:

ye ca daśadiśi lokapradīpā,
bodhivibuddha asaṅgata-prāptāḥ
ītān ahu sarvād āhyāsāmi nāthāṁ
cakru anuttara vartanatāyai

And those beacons for the world, in the ten directions — those who have realized enlightenment and non-attachment — I beseech those protectors to turn the peerless

14 Mahābrahmuno dhammadesaṅatthāya oṣyanam: ed.I.B.Horner pp. 298-299; Syamaṃṭhassa Tepiṭakaṭṭhakathā Vol.44 (Bangkok: Mahāmakuṭārajāvyādiyālaya 2535 [1992]) p. 544.
15 See e.g. Buddhavamsatthakathā (Horner, p. 9.34, Syamaṃṭhṭha, pp. 17-18); Jātakakidāna in Jātaka 181.
16 For interesting excurses on the subject see Milindapañha 232-234 and the Most Venerable Mingun Sayadaw Bhaddanta Vicittāsārābhivamsa, The Great Chronicle of Buddhās, The State Buddha Sāsana Council's Version, Vol. Two, Part Two, translated by U Ko Lay and U Tin Lwin, ([Yangon]: Ti=Ni Publishing Center, 1994) pp. 1-6. The reasoning of these texts does not much differ from that of the Upāyakauśalyasūtra: see Mark Tatz (tr.), The Skill in Means (Upāyakauśalya) Sūtra (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1994) §125, p.70
17 Vinaya 1.20-21.
18 Anāthapiṇḍikā undersattva, Majjhimānikāya III 261, tena hi bhante sāriputta gihinam oṭāvavasānaṃ varūpi dhammā kathā paṭibhātu. Sānti hi bhante sāriputta kuluputtā aparajakhajāttikā assavatā dhammassa parāhāyanti, bhavissanti dhammassa aṭṭhataro.
19 See Sāntideva, The Bodhicaryāvatāra, translated by Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) pp. 9-13.
The entreaty is given by Śāntideva in his Bodhicaryāvatāra:

"Holding my hands together in reverence, I beseech the perfect Buddhas in every direction, 'Set up the light of the Dhamma for those falling into suffering in the darkness of delusion'."

The Thai ārādhanā is part of a public ritual, an interaction between laity and monastics. The anuttara-piṭṭā may be public or private, and is often a component of daily personal recitation. A fundamental ideological difference is that the entreaty in the anuttara-piṭṭā is spoken by an individual in the first person, and is addressed not to a member of the sangha but to the Buddhas of the ten directions. That is, it presupposes the present, simultaneous, and pervasive existence of multiple Buddhas, a concept rejected by Theravādins (and certain other schools) from an early date.

IV
To return to Theravādin tradition: The Buddhavamsa Commentary recognizes that the first verse of its text poses an historical (or hagiographical) problem. Tradition reports that Buddhavamsa was spoken by the Buddha in the Nigrodhārāma at Kapilavatthu at the request of Sāriputta. Why bring in Brahmā Sahampati and the events under the Bodhi tree?

ettha ekam samayam bhagava
rajagha viharati veluvane
kalandakaniwepe ti adisutantesu
viya ekam samayam bhagavā sakkesu
viharati kapilavatthusmiṃ
nigrodhārāme. atha kho āyasmā
sāriputto yena bhagavā ten'
upasankami

upasankamitvā bhagavanto
buddhavamsaṃ apucchi ti.
evam ādīṇa nayena nidānam
avaivā kasmā brahmā ca
lokādhipati sahamapi karaṇaṃ
anadhivaram ayacathā ti ādīṇa
nayena nidānāṃ vuttan ti.
vuccate. bhagavato
sabbadhammadesanākārana
bhuṭṭāya brahmuno
dhammadesanāyacanāya
sandassamattham vuttan ti.

Herein [an objection is raised:] 'Why do you not give a prose introduction (nidāna) of the type which begins "At one time the Blessed One dwelt at Rājagaha in the Veḷuvana, the Kalandakanivāpa", as in the Suttantas, [in this case] "At one time the Blessed One,

20 Nepalese Buddhist Sanskrit and translation from Gregory Sharkey, Buddhist Daily Ritual: The Nītya Puja in Kathmandu Valley Shrines (Bangkok: Orchid Press 2001) pp. 314-315.
21 Śāntideva, The Bodhicaryāvatāra, Chap. 3 verse 4.
22 The Buddhavamsa is a uniquely Theravādin text, unknown to other schools; the list of Buddhas and other specific features of the text are also unique. Other schools and their own traditions, which share a common ideology but differ in many details. Hence the specific problem addressed in this section applies only to Theravādin, perhaps even more specifically Mahāvihāravāsin, textual tradition.
23 Buddhavamsatthakathā, PTS edition, 5.22-30; Bhūmibalo ed. (Bangkok, 1979) pp. 10.12-11.12; Sarīmaratthassa Tepiṣṭakathakaṭhā (Bangkok, 2534) pp. 9.14-10.4; Dhammagiri-Pāli-Ganthamālā (Igatpuri, 1998) Vol. 66 p. 7.7-12. PTS reads tattha for ettha āpucchi for apucchi against all other editions.
was dwelling among the Sakkas in the Nigrodhārāma at Kapilavatthu. Then Venerable Sāriputta went to where the Blessed One was. Arriving before the Blessed One, he asked about the lineage of Buddhas. Why do you state instead that "Brahmā Sahampati, Lord of the Universe/Palms pressed in Hom-age, besecheed the Unexcelled One", etc.? [ The commentator] replies: 'The verse was spoken [by Ānanda at the first Samgīti] in order to demonstrate that Brahmā's request for the teaching of the Dhamma is the cause of all the Blessed One's teaching of the Dhamma.'

V

The commentator's statement that 'Brahmā's request for the teaching of the Dhamma is the cause of all the Blessed One's teaching of the Dhamma' adequately explains the adaptation of the Buddhavamsa verse to request sermons up to the present. The recitation version (that is, the verse with desētu rather than desēhi) is recited throughout Siam when monks are invited to preach. It is given (with variants, as we have seen) under the title 'Invitation to preach the Dhamma' (ārādhana dhamma) in the Royal Chanting Book dated RS 130, and in all subsequent chanting books and ritual manuals that I have seen.

All of these texts give the one verse only. But the oldest collection of chants available at present, the Suat mon plae from the first or second reign, gives a second stanza:

\[ sādhamma bherim vinaya ca kayam suttā ca bandham a b h i d h a m m a c a m m a m ṛ ākotayanto catusaccadandam pabodha neyya parisāya majjhe. \]

The body of the drum of the Saddhama is the Vinaya, The thongs are the Sutta, the drum-head is the Abhidhamma: Striking it with the drum-stick of the Four Truths Amidst the assembly, awaken those ripe for realization.

The verse plays on a metaphor found in a succeeding event in the Pāsarāsi sutta and Mahāvagga. En route to Varāṇasi, where he will teach his former five companions in asceticism, the All-knowing One meets an Ājivaka, Upaka by name. When Upaka asks what he is about, the Kinsman of the Sun answers with verses that end with:

\[ dhamma cakkam pavattetum gacchāmi kāsīnām purām andhabhūtaṃ lokasmin āhaṇī 'matadundubhiṃ I am going to the city of the Kasis, to turn the Dhamma wheel. \]

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24 See Buddhavamsaṭṭhakathā, PTS edition, p. 11.2-12.
25 This statement applies to the old text entitled simply Ārādhana dhamma. A longer version, Ārādhana dhamma yamun bistara, included in the Royal Chanting Book (2538 ed. pp. 399-401), gives the brahmā ca lokāhīpa verses followed by 26 lines composed by King Rāma IV.
26 The first three pūdas are Indravajrā, the last Upendravajrā.
27 The thongs are cords wrapped around the body of the drum, used for tuning.
28 The stanza is in Śloka metre.
In a world become blind, I will strike the drum of the undying.

The commentary explains the phrase 'I will strike the drum' as 'I will beat the drum of the undying to cause [those blinded by folly] to gain the eye of Dhamma'. It is this drum that the monk beats when he gives a sermon.

\[29\] \textit{Papañcasūdanī, dutiyo bhāgo, mūlapaṇḍasavaṇṇanā, Mahāmakaṭarā-javidyālaya, 255.2 āhaṅnīṁ amatadundubhīn ti dhāmmacakkupatilābhāya amatābhērīṁ paharissāṁ ti gacchāmi. For the form āhaṅhi see William Geiger, \textit{A Pāli Grammar}, translated into English by Batakrisna Ghosh, revised and edited by K.R. Norman (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1994) 153.2. The PTS edition of the Mahāvagga has āhaṅhi amatadudr(!) ubhīṁ, of the Pāsarāsisutta/Ariyapariyesanasutta, āhaṅchaṁ amatadundubhīṁ. The Syamarathta editions have ahaṅnīṁ amatadudubhīṁ and āhaṅnīṁ amatadundubhīṁ respectively. The Syamarattha edition of the Pāsarāsisutta and the PTS edition of Mahāvagga have andhabhūtasmi; other editions have andhabhūtasmi.}
Figure 1. Árādhana Tham from Suat mon plae chabap ho phra samut wachirayan

Figure 2. Árādhana Tham from Royal Chanting Book, RS 130.

Figure 3. Árādhana Tham from Royal chanting Book, BE 2468.

Figure 4. Árādhana Tham from Phrakhru Sankhitwisuth (ed.), Nangsru monphitti phrom khamplae (Bangkok: Liang Siang n.d.) p. 277.