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An Analysis of *Tathāgata* in the Context of  
*Tisarāṇa*

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## Abstract

‘*Tisarāṇa/Triśarāṇa*’ (the threefold refuge) represents one of the fundamental tenets of Buddhism as outlined in early Pāli scriptures, constituting an integral aspect of Buddhist ritual observance. Within the Buddhist tradition, *Tiratana* or *Ratanattaya* denotes the three principal objects of veneration: the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṃgha.

This formula, recited during numerous lay and monastic rituals, involves a formal declaration wherein the practitioner takes ‘refuge’ (*sarāṇa/śarāṇa*) in each of the three jewels for protection or acknowledging the ideal refuge along the path to awakening and emancipation. When it is said that the practice of the Buddha’s teachings begins with taking refuge, a significant question naturally arises: ‘*Why do we need a refuge?*’ In this context, the epithet *Tathāgata* will be examined as a fundamental expression of Buddhist faith and practices.

In the framework of *Tiratana* and *Tisarāṇa*, the terms Buddha and *Tathāgata* are often used interchangeably in Buddhism, but they have distinct meanings. This raises the inquiry into how the epithet *Tathāgata* is frequently incorporated into the *Tisarāṇa* formula in various contexts.

The present essay focuses on three aspects of this epithet:

1. The historical significance of *Tathāgata* in the context of *Tiratana* and *Tisarāṇa*.
2. The essential connection and interpretation of *Tathāgata* in *Dhamma* and *Samgha*.
3. Based on the above two aspects, how the term *Tathāgata*, often applied as an epithet to the Buddha, is extended to both the *Dhamma* and *Samgha*.

Some early canonical references (Sn 236-238; Khp 5-6: 15-17; DN II 155,19-156,3; AN III 35,8-36,14; SN I 220, 17-32; Vv 837-841) show that *Tathāgata* is the designation for the Buddha, the *Dhamma*, and the *Samgha* simultaneously. Several other post-canonical sources (Netti 176,12-15) suggest that the emergence of a *Tathāgata* is a precursor to the arising of *Tisarāṇa*.

The specific meanings of these crucial terms, how they relate to one another, and exactly how each one is to be venerated are all thoroughly

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explored in traditional commentaries. Buddhaghosa, in his *Paramatthajotikā* I-II (Khp-a 195,<sup>29</sup>-196,<sup>1-19</sup>; 170,<sup>19</sup>-179; and Sn-a I, 278,<sup>10</sup>), expounds on the meaning of the *Tathāgata* in *Dhamma* and *Samgha* and further in a superior sense as a part of *Tiratana*. Another explanation, found in *Paramattha-Dīpanī* I-II (It-a I 117,<sup>8-18</sup>; Ud-a 153,<sup>16-32</sup>) by Dhammapāla, will also be explored.

This study seeks to examine these commentarial explanations to establish a deeper understanding of *Tathāgata*'s role within *Tisarāṇa*. Subsequently, through a comprehensive survey of canonical and commentarial analyses, this study explores the precise contextual use of the term *Tathāgata* and its intricate relationship with *Dhamma* and *Samgha*. It further delves into how *Tathāgata*, as an exemplary refuge, plays a fundamental role in *Tisarāṇa* from ancient practices to the present, continuing to guide the universal pursuit of awakening, peace, and liberation.\*

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## 1. Introduction

*Tiratana* (three jewels) and *Tisarāṇa* (threefold refuge) consist of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Samgha, in which Buddhists seek refuge for awakening and liberation. In this context, the terms Buddha and *Tathāgata*

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are often used interchangeably in Buddhism, though they have distinct meanings. This distinction raises an inquiry into how the epithet *Tathāgata* is frequently incorporated into the *Tisarāṇa* formula across various contexts.

This study explores how the epithet *Tathāgata* is intricately connected to *Tisarāṇa* and how it functions alongside the other two members—*Dhamma* and *Samgha*—in guiding and supporting practitioners on the Buddhist path.

In a new investigation in DoP, II, Cone (2010, 285-86, s.v. *Tathāgata*) discusses the meaning and use of *Tathāgata*, citing various canonical references.<sup>1</sup> Notably, in category 4, *Tathāgata* is mentioned as “a designation of the dhamma and the saṅgha.” However, Cone included only the canonical and commentarial references without delving into their details. Considering this, a more detailed discussion of this perspective is necessary.

This paper delves into the multifaceted concepts of *Tathāgata* within Pāli canonical texts, uncovering pertinent interpretations related to *Tisarāṇa*. It emphasizes the importance of *Tathāgata* in early Buddhist thought, where it is regarded as unique and closely linked to the practice of *Dhamma*. Sources will be drawn from DN, MN, SN, AN, Sn, It, Khp, Vv, Bv, Ap, Vism, and certain post-canonical texts such as *Netti*. Commentarial sources will also be discussed to deepen our understanding of this issue.

While many studies have been conducted on interpreting the word *Tathāgata*, a definitive exploration within the context of *Tisarāṇa* remains

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<sup>1</sup> Cone (DoP II:2010, 285-86, s.v. *tathāgata*) categorized these as follows:

1. *the designation of a buddha*  
     *used* (i) by Gotama (a) of buddhas generally, (b) specifically of himself  
         (ii) by others (a) of buddhas generally, including Gotama  
                             (b) of Gotama specifically
2. *a designation of an arhat*
3. *a creature, a sentient being*
4. *a designation of the dhamma and the saṅgha*

necessary.<sup>2</sup> This paper, while referencing previous studies, seeks to further investigate the meaning of *Tathāgata* within the *Tisaraṇa* formula.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Historical Significance

*Tisaraṇa* or *Saraṇattaya* represents one of the fundamental principles of Buddhism. Within this principle, the term *saraṇa/saraṇa* (refuge) plays a crucial role and is worthy of careful investigation, particularly in the context of various commentarial explanations.

The concept of *saraṇa* is deeply rooted in early Buddhist teachings. From ancient times to the present, taking refuge has served as the gateway to the Buddha's dispensation. When it is said that the practice of the Buddha's teachings begins with taking refuge, a significant question naturally arises: '*Why do we need a refuge?*'

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<sup>2</sup> Several scholarly studies on the origin of the term *Tathāgata* are significant. Among them, Chalmers's (1898, 103-115) and Thomas's (1936, 781-788) investigations are important for the etymological origin and sources. The comparative perspective of early Jain and other sources has been discussed by Jacobi ([1884] 1964), Mizuno (1957, 41-50), Schubring (1962), Watanabe (1979, 674-675), Nagasaki (1991, 25-49), Endo (1990; 1996; [1997] 2002, 195-206), and Anālayo (2008, 277-283).

For a general investigation of *Tathāgata*, see also the works of Hopkins (1911, 205-209), Anesaki (1921, 202-204), Thomas (1933, 151; 1936, 781-788), Jayatilleke (1963), Fujita (1977); Bodhi (1978), Harvey (1983, 35-52), Takasaki (1987, 54-55), Bond (1987, 352-354), Hirakawa (1990), Norman (1993, 162), Gombrich (1980; 2009, 151), Gnanarama (1997, 230-241), Kumoi (1997, 374); Manda (2005); Cone (2010, 285), Habata (2015b, 176-196), Saito (2020) and Mori (2023).

In this context, I have briefly discussed specific scholarly observations in my previous paper. For further details, see Juti Rakkit (2023, 83-87).

<sup>3</sup> In my previous article, I explored two aspects of the term *Tathāgata*: First, in the highest sense, in what way does it refer to the Buddha? Secondly, how is it used to refer to a 'sentient being' (Pāli *satta*, Skt. *sattva*) in different contexts? For more details, see Juti Rakkit (2023, 79-114).

Building on my previous article, this paper further investigates the term *Tathāgata*, specifically in the context of *Tisaraṇa*. It examines how *Tathāgata* is applied to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṃgha extensively within the framework of *Tisaraṇa* and how this understanding guides sentient beings towards awakening.

Before delving into a detailed analysis, it is essential to understand the meaning of *saraṇa*. The term *saraṇa* is commonly translated as ‘refuge’, ‘protection’, or ‘shelter’ [PED, 697]. While these translations offer a general understanding, the nuances of this term within Buddhist thought require deeper exploration. In this regard, several instances of the term *saraṇa* in various commentarial explanations are particularly interesting.

Commentators such as Buddhaghosa and Dhammapāla have provided various interpretations of *saraṇa*, each adding layers of meaning that enrich profound understanding of this concept.

Firstly, let us examine Buddhaghosa’s interpretation of *saraṇa* in the context of ‘going for refuge’<sup>4</sup>:

Now [in relation to] ‘**going etc.**’ [going for refuge to (*tiratana*) etc.<sup>5</sup>]: ‘refuge (*saraṇa*)’ means ‘to destroy’ [or ‘to kill’].<sup>6</sup> [When people have] gone for refuge, then by that very going for refuge, [it] destroys, dispels, removes, and ceases [their] fear, anguish, suffering, bad destination [on rebirth], and defilement, [this is] the meaning; this [refuge] is the exact designation [name] of “three jewels (*ratanattaya*)”. (Khp-a 16, 10-13)<sup>7</sup>

Buddhaghosa further provides two distinct meanings of *saraṇa*<sup>8</sup>:

<sup>4</sup> In Buddhaghosa’s commentarial explanations, the section on ‘going for refuge’ (*saraṇa-gamana*) is discussed in the following texts: Khp-a (*Paramatthajotikā*), DN-a (*Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*), and MN-a (*Papañcasūdanī*). These commentarial passages on the topic are largely consistent, with only minor variations across the texts. For more on the life and works of Buddhaghosa, see von Hinüber (1996) and Baba (2008).

<sup>5</sup> VRI Burmese edition reads as: *saraṇagamanādisu*

<sup>6</sup> According to PED (1979, 731, s.v. *himsati*) ‘*himsati*’ has two meaning 1. to hurt, injure; 2. to kill. Ñāṇamoli ([1960] 1978, 8) translates: “it combats, thus it is a refuge” [*himsati ti saraṇam*]. See, also footnote 13.

<sup>7</sup> Khp-a 16, 10-13; [also parallel in] DN-a 230,24-25; MN-a I, 132,2-5; AN-a II,108,15-18: *idāni gamanādisu. himsati ti saraṇam, saraṇagatānaṃ ten’ eva saraṇagamanena bhayaṃ santāsaṃ dukkhaṃ duggatiṃ parikkilesaṃ himsati vidhamati nīharati nirodheṭi ti attho, ratanattayass’ ev’ etaṃ adbhivacanaṃ.*

<sup>8</sup> Additionally, Buddhaghosa links *saraṇa* to mindfulness (*sati*) and to *anussati* (recollection), interpreting it as “to remember,” a point that is discussed in section 4. This connection emphasizes the role of conscious recollection in the practice of

‘Refuge’ (*saraṇa*) means ‘to remember’. The meaning is: [it] destroys, vanishes, fear. (MN-a II, 278, <sup>30-31</sup>)<sup>9</sup>

‘Refuge’ (*saraṇa*) means ‘to crush’.<sup>10</sup> The meaning is: [it] destroys, vanishes, fear. (DN-a I, 265, <sup>13</sup>)<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, Dhammapāla offers a slightly different interpretation in It-a II:

‘Refuge’ (*saraṇa*) means ‘to destroy’ [or ‘to kill’]. [This refuge] destroys, vanishes, and eliminates - all misfortune, suffering of bad destination [four lower worlds - animal, ghost, demon or evil spirit, and hell], all suffering of cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*), [this is] the meaning. (It-a II, 44, <sup>1-3</sup>)<sup>12</sup>

These etymological<sup>13</sup> and commentarial insights into *saraṇa* provide a foundation for understanding how this term functions within the broader

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taking refuge. Such interpretations reveal that *saraṇa* is integral to both the protective and mindfulness aspects of the Buddhist path, serving as a source of protection and as a focal point for mental discipline. This perspective further suggests that taking refuge is not only about seeking protection but also about cultivating mindful awareness, which guards the mind against fear. Buddhaghosa’s common definition of this term is found in texts such as:

“*saratī ti satī*” – “mindfulness (*satī*) means: to remember.”

[Sn-a I, 147, <sup>10</sup>; SN-a I, 252, <sup>27</sup>; Sp-I, 151; also parallel: Nidd I-a 45; Paṭi-a I, 189; etc.]

Furthermore, in Vism 464, <sup>25-26</sup>, it is elaborated:

“With it (*satī*), they remember, or it itself remembers, or it is just mere remembering (*saraṇa*), thus it is mindfulness (*satī*).”

Vism 464, <sup>25-26</sup>: *Saranti tāya, sayam vā saratī, saraṇamattam eva vā, esā ti satī.*

<sup>9</sup> MN-a II, 278, <sup>30-31</sup>: *Saratī ti saraṇam. Bhayaṃ hiṃsati, viddhamsetī ti attho.*

<sup>10</sup> PED, MW, and BHSD do not have any entry for the term ‘*sariṇāṭī*’.

<sup>11</sup> DN-a I, 265, <sup>13</sup>: *sariṇāṭī saraṇam bhayaṃ hiṃsati viddhamsetīti attho.*

<sup>12</sup> It-a II, 44, <sup>1-3</sup>: *Hiṃsati-ti saraṇam. Sabbam anatham apāya-dukkham, sabbam saṃsāra-dukkham hiṃsati vināseti viddhamsetī-ti attho.*

In this section and others, the term ‘*saṃsāra*’ is mentioned, which is often translated as ‘wandering,’ viz., the “cycle of rebirth.” For further details, see Deleanu 2020, 3, §1.2.

<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, etymologically, in Sanskrit, there are three derivations of the word *śaraṇa/saraṇa*: (1.) √*śr*-‘crush’; (2.) √*śr*-‘resort’ [see √*śri*] (3.) √*śr*-‘flow.’ (Whitney 1885, pp. 176, 179, 189).



framework of *Tisaraṇa*. Commentators explain the meaning of *saraṇa* not through linguistic derivation but through its functional role in protecting and liberating the individual.<sup>14</sup>

While Buddhaghosa's interpretation emphasizes *saraṇa* as 'to remember', and 'to destroy' [or 'to crush'] both interpretations are tied to the idea of dispelling or eradicating fear, suffering, and defilements. On the other hand, Dhammapāla focuses on the outcome of taking refuge—the eradication of all misfortune and suffering that perpetuate the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*). This perspective highlights how refuge acts both as a protective shield and as a means of liberation from adverse conditions and rebirth. In essence, taking refuge in Buddhism is not merely about seeking protection;

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Again, in *A Dictionary of The Pāli Language*, Childers ([1875] 2005, 463; s.v. *saraṇa*) provides two meanings: 1. Remembrance; 2. Refuge, protection, salvation; Nirvāṇa; a protector; a house, home; killing.

According to the PED, *sarati/saraṇa* has several meanings [PED, 697-98 s.v. *saraṇa*, *sarati*]. The verb *sarati* [pr. 3 sg.] has three roots with the following meanings:

Sarati<sup>1</sup> [sr̥ given by Dhṛp 248 as “**gati**”] to go, flow, run, move along;

Sarati<sup>2</sup> [smṛ, cp. **smṛti**=sati; Dhṛp 248 “**cintā**”] to remember;

Sarati<sup>3</sup> [śr; Dhṛp 248: **hiṃsā**] to crush.

As mentioned above, PED suggests these etymological meanings based on a Pāli etymological text. According to this *Pāli Dhātupāṭha* and the *Dhātumañjūsā*, the following meanings are noted: “248. sara gati-hiṃsā-cintāsu” (Andersen and Smith 1921, 15,4).

PED (697) also identifies two notable root meanings:

Saraṇa<sup>1</sup> (nt.) [cp. Vedic śaraṇa protection, shelter, house] shelter, house; refuge, protection; especially the three refuges — the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Brotherhood.

Saraṇa<sup>3</sup> [fr. **smṛ**; i. e. sarati<sup>2</sup>] (nt.) remembrance; -tā (f.) remembering.

<sup>14</sup> The above-mentioned term *sati*, rooted in √**smṛ**, is also connected with the terms, such as *anussati/anusati* and *anussarati*. According to DoP, I, 140, 143: *anusati* f. [S., *BHS* *anumṛti*], remembrance, recollection, calling to mind; *anussarati*<sup>1</sup>, pr. 3 sg. [anu<sup>1</sup> + sarati<sup>2</sup>; S. anu√sr̥], follows, pursues; conforms oneself to; *anussarati*<sup>2</sup>, pr. 3 sg. [anu<sup>1</sup> + sarati<sup>3</sup>; S. anu√smṛ], remembers, recollects, calls to mind; reflects upon.

*Anusati* is connected with *Buddhānussati*, which is discussed in section 4. For further details, see footnote 76.

it is also about cultivating a mental state that actively wards off fear and defilements. Both perspectives emphasize the central role of *saraṇa* in Buddhist practice, illustrating how this concept functions both as a protective shield and as a liberating force within the framework of *Tisarāṇa*.

The significance of *Tisarāṇa* lies not only in its role as a fundamental principle but also in its historical continuity, serving as the cornerstone of Buddhist practice from ancient times to the present day. This continuity underscores the enduring relevance of *saraṇa* in guiding practitioners at the very beginning of their practice. We will now investigate this historical foundation with reference to both early canonical texts and commentarial interpretations.

Buddhaghosa raises five key questions regarding the three refuges. Let us examine these questions as explained by Buddhaghosa in Khp-a as follows:

[As to the first stanza to begin with],<sup>15</sup> these three refuges, (1) by whom were pronounced? (2) where were pronounced? (3) when were pronounced? (4) why were pronounced? and (5) why, although they were not [the words] stated by the *Tathāgata* at the beginning, were they stated here from the beginning?<sup>16</sup> [These are] the five questions. (Khp-a 13,31-14,2)<sup>17</sup>

By answering these five questions, Buddhaghosa (Khp-a 14, 2-20) explains the foundational aspects of the pronouncement of the three refuges. These questions elucidate the origin and significance of the three refuges in

<sup>15</sup> *Saraṇattayaṃ*: the beginning chapter of the *Khuddakapāṭha* (Khp).

<sup>16</sup> Here, the fifth question indicates that after the Buddha's enlightenment, his first utterance was another verse, not the *Tisarāṇa*. That is why this question arises. The Buddha's first utterance was:

“*yadā have pātubhavanti dhammā ātāpino jhāyato brāhmaṇassa, ath' assa kaṃkhā vapayanti sabbā yato pajānāti sahetudhamman'*” *ti*. (Vin I, 2, 3-6; Ud 1,18-20; Khp-a 13,7-10).

<sup>17</sup> Khp-a 13,31-14,2 : *idaṃ Saraṇattayaṃ kena bhāsitaṃ, kattha bhāsitaṃ, kadā bhāsitaṃ, kasmā bhāsitaṃ, avuttam pi cādito Tathāgatena kasmā idhādito vuttam ti pañca pañhā*.

Buddhist practice. To fully comprehend their importance, it is necessary to understand the background of these five key questions.

- (1) **By whom:** [Three refuges were] pronounced by the Exalted One, not by his disciples, Sages (*isī*), or deities.
- (2) **Where:** [Three refuges were] pronounced at Benares (Sārnāth) in the Deer Park at Isipatana (Rṣipatana).
- (3) **When:** After venerable Yasa,<sup>18</sup> together with his companions, attained arahantship, [while] the sixty-one Arahants were performing the teaching of Dhamma for the benefit of the many people in the world,
- (4) **Why:** For the purpose of entering monastic life (*pabbajjā*) and full ordination (*upasampadā*).<sup>19</sup>
- (5) **Why is this stated here at the beginning?** This ninefold teaching of the Masters<sup>20</sup>, having compiled [together] with the three *Piṭakas* for the way of [the serial order of] the recitation by the former teachers, since this is the way by which gods and humans enter the teaching (*sāsana*), whether they become lay-followers or monastic life (*pabbajjā*); consequently, as it is the way of entry into the teaching

<sup>18</sup> Yasa was the first 7th arahant, after the five monks.

<sup>19</sup> These steps are essential for both monks and nuns as they start their religious life:

“*evaṃ ca pana bhikkhave pabbājetabbo upasampādetabbo: paṭhamam kesamassuṃ ohār(āp)etvā kāsāyāni vatthāni acchād(āp)etvā ekamsaṃ uttarāsaṅgaṃ kārāpetvā bhikkhūnaṃ pāde vandāpetvā ukkuṭikaṃ nisīdāpetvā añjalim paggaṇhāpetvā ‘evaṃ vadehī’ ti vattabbo: **buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, saṃghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi***” ti (Vin I, 22,10-22).

<sup>20</sup> *navaṅgaṃ satthu sāsanaṃ*: this ninefold teachings or dispensation of the Buddha are consisted of:

1. Discourses (P. sutta; S. sūtra), 2. Aphorisms in mixed prose and verse (P. geyya; S. geya), 3. Expositions (P. veyyākaraṇa; S. vyākaraṇa), 4. Verses (gāthā), 5. Utterance or meaningful expressions (udāna), 6. Sayings [this was said] (P. itivuttaka; S. itivṛttaka), 7. Tales of previous lives (jātaka), 8. Marvelous events (P. abbhutadhamma; S. adbhutadharma), and 9. Questions and Answers or works of great extent (P. vedalla; S. vaipulya/vaitulya). MN I 133,24-25; AN II 103,10-11; 178,12-14, etc.

For details: DoP-I, 369-370 (s.v. itivuttaka); Mayeda (1964,11-42); von Hinüber (2009, 159-173).

(*sāsana*), it is stated here [initially] at the beginning in the Minor Readings (*khuddakapāṭha*), [this] should be understood. (Khp-a 14, 2-20)<sup>21</sup>

In the context of *Tisaraṇa*, it is noteworthy that the first act of taking refuge involves the terms ‘*dvevācika*’ and ‘*tevācika*’.<sup>22</sup> Let us explain these terms in detail, along with their historical significance.

According to early canonical records in the *Vinaya Mahāvagga* (Vin I 4, 23-26), soon after the Buddha’s enlightenment, Tapussa and Bhallikā were

<sup>21</sup> Khp-a 14, 2-20:

*kena bhāsitaṃ ti*, — *Bhagavatā bhāsitaṃ na sāvakehi na isīhi na devatāhi* ;  
*katthā ti*, — *Bārāṇasiyaṃ Isipatane migadāye* ;  
*kadā ti*, — *āyasmante yase saddhiṃ sahāyakehi arahattaṃ patte ekasaṭṭhiyā arahantesu bahujaṇahitāya loke dhammadesanaṃ karontesu* ;  
*kasmā ti*, — *pabbajjattaṃ ca upasampadattaṃ ca*,  
*kasmā c’ idhādito vuttaṃ ti*, — *idaṃ ca navaṅgaṃ satthu sāsanaṃ tīhi piṭakehi saṅgaṇhītvā vācanāmaggaṃ āropentehi pubbācariyehi, yasmā iminā maggena devamanussā upāsakabhāvena vā pabbajitabhāvena vā sāsanaṃ otaranti, tasmā sāsanaotarassa maggabhūtattā idha Khuddakapāṭhe ādito vuttaṃ ti nātappaṃ*.

<sup>22</sup> Several dictionaries define these terms along with early canonical records, as follows:

DoP, II, 345, 454:

*dvevācika*: using or involving two utterances or proclamations;

*tevācika*: [from *tī* + *vāca*], using or involving three utterances or proclamations;

Again, in PED, s.v. *dvevācika*: pronouncing (only) two words, viz. Buddha & Dhamma (cp. *tevācika*, saying the whole *saraṇa* — formula).

The term *dvevācika* records the *saraṇa* as involving only the Buddha (Bhagavant) and the Dhamma, but not the Saṃgha, as seen in the following passage:

Vin I 4, 23-26: *ete mayaṃ, bhante bhagavantam saraṇam gacchāma dhammaṃ ca, upāsake no bhagavā dhāretu ajjatagge paṇupete saraṇaṃ gate ’ti. teva ca loke pathamam upāsakā ahesum dvevācikā.*

In contrast, the term *tevācika* records the complete *Tisaraṇa*:

Vin I 16, 35-17, 1: *es’ ahaṃ bhante bhagavantam saraṇam gacchāmi, dhammaṃ ca, bhikkhusamghaṃ ca, upāsakaṃ maṃ bhagavā dhāretu ajjatagge paṇupetaṃ saraṇaṃ gataṃ ti. so’ va loke pathamam upāsako ahoṣi tevāciko.*  
 Vin I, 18, 24-27: *etā mayaṃ bhante bhagavantam saraṇam gacchāma dhammaṃ ca bhikkhusamghaṃ ca, upāsikāyo no bhagavā dhāretu ajjatagge paṇupetā saraṇaṃ gatā ’ti. tā’ va loke pathamam upāsikā ahesum tevācikā.*

the first *dvevācika upāsakas*. Tapussa and his friend Bhallikā, merchants from Ukkalā, were on their way to Rājagaha when they saw the Buddha under the Rājāyatana tree, eight weeks after his enlightenment. Encouraged by a deity who was once their relative, they offered the Buddha rice-cakes and honey. They became the first lay disciples of the Buddha. Their formula of refuge mentioned, at that time only in the Buddha and the Dhamma, not the Saṃgha, as it had not yet been established. Thus, they were called *dvevācika-upāsaka*, meaning they took refuge in only two jewels: the Buddha and the Dhamma. The first *dvevācika upāsikā* is not found in the canon before the formation of the first Saṃgha.

After the Saṃgha was established at Isipatana (Sarnath, Varanasi) by the Buddha, the first *tevācika upāsaka*, or lay devotee who took refuge in three jewels, was the father of Yasa Thera.<sup>23</sup> He was then called *tevācika upāsaka*.

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<sup>23</sup> Vin I, 15-19:

Yasa was the seventh arahant, achieving enlightenment early in the Buddha's career, shortly after the Buddha and the first five monks. Here is a summary of Yasa's enlightenment story:

Yasa was the son of a wealthy treasurer in Bārāṇasī. He lived in luxury with three seasonal mansions, he felt distressed one night upon seeing his attendants sleeping disorderly. He left his house, exclaiming, "What distress! What danger!" The Buddha saw him and called out, "Come Yasa, here is neither distress nor danger." Yasa joyfully took off his slippers and sat beside the Buddha. The Buddha taught him gradually, explaining the four noble truths, and Yasa realized the Dhamma.

Yasa's father, searching for him, also met the Buddha, who taught him the Dhamma. Yasa's father became the first lay disciple to take the threefold refuge (*tevācika upāsaka*), while Yasa listening nearby, became an Arahant. His father asked him to return home to his grieving mother. However, Yasa had lost interest in household life, and the Buddha allowed him to join the Saṃgha.

The next day, the Buddha and Yasa visited Yasa's home at his father's invitation. After the meal, the Buddha taught Yasa's mother and other household members, who all became his followers, becoming the first female disciples to take the threefold refuge (*tevācikā upāsikā*).

The first *tevācika upāsikās* were the mother and the former wife of Yasa Thera. The terms ‘*dvevācika*’ and ‘*tevācika*,’ as discussed above, consistently signify taking refuge together in three jewels—the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṃgha.

## 2.1 The Emergence of *Tathāgata* as a Part of *Tiratana*

In Buddhism, the historical connection of the term *Tathāgata* with the *Tiratana* is significant in several ways.<sup>24</sup> Several post-canonical texts suggest that the emergence of a *Tathāgata* is the reason for the arising of the *Tiratana*, also known as the *Tisarāṇa*.

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Inspired by Yasa, his friends Vimāla, Subāhu, Puṇṇaji, Gavampati, and fifty others joined the Saṃgha and became arahants. For more details: DPPN, II, 685-87; Upasak, C.S. (1975, 50-51).

<sup>24</sup> Nakamura ([1980] 1987), Bodhi (1981), Nārada ([1988] 2010), Endo ([1997] 2002), and Anālayo (2008, 2021) have discussed *Tisarāṇa* elaborately in relation to *Tathāgata*. Nārada explains that in taking refuge in the Triple Jewel, Buddhists view the Buddha as the guide, the Dhamma as the path, and the Saṃgha as living examples of the way of life. He further elaborates *ratana* is composed of three syllables—*ra*, *ta*, and *na*. *Ra* means to attract, *ta*, to cross, and *na*, to lead; due to their ability to attract, help cross *saṃsāra*, and lead to *Nibbāna*. (Nārada [1988] 2010, 406, note 37).

Similarly, Prasād (2017, 472) remarks: Faith in the Buddha is required because he is fully enlightened, supreme goodness, has excelled in virtues, is a spiritual teacher par excellence, his teachings are beneficial, he is actively compassionate, and so on. Faith in the Dhamma is required for its transformative power and is a source of peace, happiness, and harmony. Lastly, faith in the Order (Saṃgha) is necessary because it is an oasis of purity in the corrupt society, a community of the ideal practitioners of the Dhamma, and a living source of inspiration and guidance. Furthermore, Dutt (1957) and Silva (1989) compare the concept of *sarāṇa* to the *Bhakti* tradition. Dutt (1957, 200-201) explains: The idea of *sarāṇa* itself is essentially characteristic of a *Bhakti* cult. It is the devotee’s self-surrender to the Lord, as emphasized in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (Ch 18 v. 66): “Give up all *dharma*s and take *sarāṇa* in me alone. From all sins will I deliver thee.” Over against it, is the idea of primitive Buddhism that the devotee’s only refuge must be the *Dhamma*. Not self-surrender, but self-reliance — to be ‘a light (or island) unto one’s own self’ (*atta-dīpā*), — is conceived to be the gist and effect of the Buddha’s teaching.

According to Netti (152, 23-30), a *Tathāgata* is described as the one who reveals the path that was previously unarisen, unproduced, and undeclared. These texts also state that the qualities and true nature of these three jewels are immeasurable and beyond comprehension, emphasizing their profound and timeless significance. This illustrates the profound impact of the *Tathāgata*'s presence in the world, underscoring the timeless significance of his teachings and the community that follows his path.

Now, let us examine how these explanations are presented in the texts, with precise references to how the term *Tathāgata* is intrinsically connected to *Tiratana*.

Monks, with the arising of a *Tathāgata*, worthy one and perfectly-awakened one, in the world, there is the arising of the three jewels<sup>25</sup>: Buddha (the enlightened one) jewel, the *Dhamma*<sup>26</sup> (the doctrine) jewel, and the *Samgha* (the community or order) jewel. [and, if it is asked] 'What is the measure of the three jewels?'<sup>27</sup> that is unanswerable. (Netti 176, 12-15)<sup>28</sup>

In the Nett-(a)-ṭ [Nettivibhāvinī (VRI edition)], it is also explained this is unanswerable because the subject of the three jewels' qualities is unthinkable.

Monks, with the arising of, because of the arising of the worthy one, perfectly-awakened one, and a *Tathāgata*, in the world, there is the arising of the three jewels. The arising of the Buddha Jewel occurs in the future. It is said [that] since one Buddha jewel continues, another Buddha jewel does not arise [in this duration] in the future. The arising of

<sup>25</sup> Notably, in this passage, the PTS edition reads 'uppādā', which can be instrumental singular, while the VRI Burmese edition interprets it as nominative singular. See also Netti 176,13.

<sup>26</sup> PTS edition appears to contain a typographical error (*phammaratanassa*), which I corrected here.

<sup>27</sup> This paragraph could be divided into two sentences in a question-answer pattern. Ñāṇamoli ([1962] 1977, 231, [Netti, trans.]) also mentioned that: "901/2 Read probably . . . *saṅgharatanassa*' (end of quote). *kiṃ-pamāṇāni tīṇi ratanāni? ti idaṃ avisaṃjanīyaṃ*. (new para.)."

<sup>28</sup> Netti 176, 12-15: *Tathāgatassa bhikkhave arahato sammāsambuddhassa loke uppādā tinnam ratanānam uppādā buddharatanassa dhammaratanassa samgharatanassa kiṃ pamāṇāni? Tīṇi ratanāni ti. Idaṃ avisaṃjanīyaṃ*.

*Dhamma* Jewel occurs, the arising of *Saṃgha* Jewel occurs. [Thus], the three jewels arise.

When asked, ‘What are the measures of these three Jewels [in terms of] qualities?’ One should not answer [specifying] those three jewels qualities, [saying] ‘This is their limit.’ [It is] the meaning. [Nett-(a-)ṭ, 171, 36-40]<sup>29</sup>

Both passages above repeatedly emphasize that when a *Tathāgata* appears, the three jewels—Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṃgha—also emerge. The Dhamma and Saṃgha arise together with the *Tathāgata*, but the Buddha Jewel only appears after the previous one has ceased. This highlights the close connection between the three jewels and the unique timing of the Buddha’s appearance, while also clarifying the distinction between *Tathāgata* and Buddha, and their nuanced significance within the *Tisarāṇa* formula.

## 2.2 The Significance of *Tathāgata* within the *Tisarāṇa* Formula

The Significance of *Tathāgata* within the *Tisarāṇa* formula can be found in many early Pāli canonical texts. This section aims to investigate the several applications of the term *Tathāgata* in this context by examining passages from different early *Nikāyas* and other scriptural references.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> In Nett-(a-)ṭ, 171, 36-40 [Nettivibhāvinī, 171, 36-40 (VRI edition)]:

*Bhikkhave, arahato sammāsambuddhassa tathāgatassa loke uppādā uppādahetu tinnam ratanānam uppādo sambhavati, āyatim buddharatanassa uppādo sambhavati, ekassa buddharatanassa dharamānakkhaṇena hi aññassa buddharatanassa anuppajjanato āyatinti vuttaṃ, dhammaratanassa uppādo sambhavati, saṅgharatanassa uppādo sambhavatīti tīni ratanāni. “Tāni tīni ratanāni guṇato kiṇṇpamāṇānī”ti pucchite sati tāni tīni ratanāni guṇato etaparimāṇānīti na vissajjītabbānīti yojanā.*

<sup>30</sup> For a general overview and further investigation into the *Tisarāṇa*, see Nyanaponika (1949), Dutt (1957), Bodhi (1981), Silva (1989), and Skilling (1992, 1996).



The final days of the Buddha are pivotal in clarifying essential aspects of Buddhism, as documented in the *Mahāparinibbāna suttanta* (DN 16), the longest discourse in the Pāli canon. As its title suggests, this *sutta* describes the events and final instructions given by the Buddha before his passage into *Mahāparinibbāna*. The narrative includes numerous sermons on topics related to the *Tathāgata*, each carrying profound historical significance.

The conversation between the Buddha and Ānanda is particularly important from a historical perspective. In this dialogue, the Buddha clarifies how the *Tiratana* (three jewels) should be understood after his *Mahāparinibbāna*.

Let us investigate one of the significant occurrences of this matter from this *sutta*:

Then, venerable Ānanda said to the Exalted One thus: ‘It is wonderful, Bhante (Sir)! It is marvelous, Bhante! Bhante, I believe (faithful) that in this assembly of monks, there is not even one monk who has doubts or uncertainty about the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṃgha, the path, or the path of progress.’

‘Ānanda, you speak with faith. Here, Ānanda, *Tathāgata*’s knowledge<sup>31</sup> indeed that: ‘in this assembly of monks, there is not even one monk who has doubts or uncertainty about the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṃgha, the path, or the path of progress. Ānanda, even the last of these five hundred monks, who is a Stream-enterer, incapable of falling into states of the underworld [rebirth in place of misery], and is sure to attain full awakening.’

After that, the Exalted One addressed the monks: Now, monks, I declare to you: “Volitional actions (all conditioning factors) are of the nature to decay, strive on with heedfulness.” This is the final word of *Tathāgata*. (DN II 155,<sub>19</sub>-156,<sub>3</sub>)<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> PTS edition appears to contain a typographical error (Ñāṇam), which I corrected here. Commentary further explains: DN-a II 593,<sub>25</sub>: *Ñāṇam evā ti nikkāṇḍhabhāva-paccakkhakaraṇa-ñāṇam* [‘Knowledge’ is precisely that: the state of being without doubt, making it directly perceptible].

<sup>32</sup> DN II 155,<sub>19</sub>-156,<sub>3</sub>; Parallel also : AN II 79-80:

By way of comparison, the corresponding passage in the Chinese *Dīrghāgama* at T 1, 26b11-21, and in the Sanskrit fragment version (Waldschmidt 1951, 392-394, §42.4-12) reveals subtle nuances that differ slightly from various perspectives.<sup>33</sup>

*Atha kho āyasmā Ānando Bhagavantam etad avoca: 'Acchariyaṃ bhante abbhutaṃ bhante! Evaṃ pasanno ahaṃ bhante imasmiṃ bhikkhu-saṃghe, n'atthi eka-bhikkhussa pi kaṅkhā vā vimati vā Buddhe vā dhamme vā saṃghe vā magge vā paṭipadāya vā' ti.*

*'Pasādā kho tvam Ānanda vadesi. Nāṇam eva h' ettha Ānanda Tathāgatassa: "N'atthi imasmiṃ bhikkhusaṃghe, n'atthi eka-bhikkhussa pi kaṅkhā vā vimati vā Buddhe vā dhamme vā saṃghe vā magge vā paṭipadāya vā. Imesaṃ hi Ānanda pañcannaṃ bhikkhu-satānaṃ yo pacchimako bhikkhu so sotāpanno avinipāta-dhammo niyato sambodhi-parāyano' ti.*

*Atha kho Bhagavā bhikkhū āmantesi: 'Handa dāni bhikkhave āmantayāmi vo: "Vayadhammā saṃkhārā, appamādena sampādethāti."*

*Ayaṃ Tathāgatassa pacchimā vācā.*

<sup>33</sup> The passage reads as follows:

T 1, 26b11-21: 阿難白佛言。我信此衆皆有淨信。無一比丘疑佛法衆疑於道者。佛告阿難。我亦自知今此衆中最小比丘。皆見道迹不趣惡道。極七往返必盡苦際。爾時世尊即記荊千二百弟子所得道果。時世尊披鬱多羅僧出金色臂。告諸比丘。汝等當觀。如來時時出世。如優曇鉢花時一現耳。爾時世尊重觀此義。而說偈言右臂紫色佛現如靈瑞去來行無常現滅無放逸是故比丘。無爲放逸。我以不放逸故自致正覺。無量衆善亦由不放逸得。一切萬物無常存者。此是如來末後所說。

In the Sanskrit fragment version Waldschmidt 1951, 392-394 (§42.4-12):

42.4 *athāyusmān ānando bhagavantam idam avocat |*

42.5 *yathā khalv ahaṃ bhadanta bh(agavato bhāṣitasyārtha)m (ā)j(ān)āmi nāsti kāścid asyāṃ pariṣady ekabhiṣur api yasya syāt kāṅkṣā vā vimatir vā buddhe vā dharme vā saṅghe vā duḥkhe vā samudaye vā nirodhe vā mārge vā |*

42.6 *sādhv sādhu ānanda prasādena tvam evaṃ vadasi | ta(thāgatasya tv an)uttare jñānadarśanaṃ pravartate |*

42.7 *yāvanāḥ khalu bhikṣavo 'syāṃ pariṣadi sanṇisaṇṇāḥ sannipatitā nāsti kāścid atra ekabhiṣur api y(asya) syāt kāṅkṣā vā vimatir vā buddhe vā dharme vā saṅghe vā duḥkhe vā samudaye vā nirodhe vā yāvan mārge vā |*

42.8 *api tu karaṇīyam etat tathāgatenā yathāpi tat paścimāṃ janatāṃ anukampamānaḥ |*

42.9 *atha bhagav(ān svakāyād uttarāsaṅgam ekān)te vivṛtya bhikṣūn āmantrayate |*

These passages from Pāli, Sanskrit, and Chinese texts share a common message despite slight variations in their use of the *Tiratana*, the number of assembled monks, and the final teaching of ‘*appamāda*’. They highlight a strong faith in the *Tiratana* and emphasize the final teaching on the impermanence of all things.

Another important point is the Buddha’s use of the epithet *Tathāgata* with special significance, often referring to himself in the third person as *Tathāgata*. This usage clarifies the importance of *Tathāgata* within the *Tisaraṇa* formula, demonstrating its deep connection to the *Dhamma* and *Samgha*.

This final teaching underscores the central role of the *Tathāgata* in guiding monks on their path, reinforcing the importance of taking refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Samgha as the true path to liberation. It thus further clarifies the distinction between *Tathāgata* and Buddha, and their nuanced significance within the *Tisaraṇa* formula.

Let us explore another significant occurrence of the epithet *Tathāgata*, focusing on its close connection with *Tisaraṇa* and the Five Precepts, as profoundly reflected in the *Dhamma* and *Samgha* from the *Cundī sutta* in AN.<sup>34</sup>

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42.10 *avalokayata bhikṣavas tathāgatasya kāyam | vyavalokayata bhikṣavas tathāgatasya kāyam | tat kasmād dhetoh | durlabhadarśanā y(asmāt tathāgatā) arhantaḥ samyaksambuddhās tadvyathodumbare puṣpam |*

42.11 *aṅga bhikṣavas tūṣṇīm bhavata vyavadharmāḥ sarvasamskārah |*

42.12 *iyaṃ tatra tathāgatasya paścimā (vācā |)*

<sup>34</sup> Cundī was a princess. According to the Commentary (AN-a III, 243,<sub>10-11</sub>), she was the daughter of Bimbisāra. Her name occurs in a list of eminent *upāsikās*. For more details, see DPPN-I, 880.

Once, Princess Cundī visited the Buddha at the Kalandakanivāpa in Veḷuvana, Rājagṛha, where the Buddha preached to her the *Cundī sutta*.<sup>35</sup> In this *sutta*, she asked the Buddha whether those who take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṃgha and observe the five precepts would be reborn into a happy condition after death. She sought further clarification on this matter. The Buddha explained that the *Tathāgata* is the best of beings, the *Dhamma* that leads to *Nibbāna* is the best of teachings, and the *Tathāgata*'s disciples (*Saṃgha*) represent the best field of merit and virtues. The conversation between the Buddha and Princess Cundī was recorded as follows:

Bhante, my brother, whose name is Prince Cunda, he has said thus: 'Whenever a man or a woman has gone for **refuge to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṃgha**, and abstains from the killing living beings, from taking what is not given, from sexual misconduct, from false speech, and from indulging in liquor, and intoxicants, the basis for heedlessness, with the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn only in a good destination, not in a bad destination.' I ask the Bhante, the Exalted One: 'Bhante, what kind of teacher, should one have faith in, so that, with the breakup of the body, after death, one is reborn only in a good destination, not in a bad destination?'

What kind of Dhamma...? What kind of Saṃgha...? (AN III 35, 8-22)<sup>36</sup>

Then, the Buddha answers Cundī's questions as follows:

<sup>35</sup> The context of this *sutta* is also parallel to AN II 34, 11-35,2; It 87,15-88,17; Netti 188,5-19; etc.

<sup>36</sup> AN III 35, 8-22:

2. *Amhākaṃ bhante bhātā Cundo nāma rājakumāro, so evam āha: 'yad eva so hoti itthi vā puriso vā buddham saranam gato dhammam saranam gato saṅgham saranam gato, pāṇātipātā paṭivirato, adinnādānā paṭivirato, kāmesu micchācārā paṭivirato, musāvādā paṭivirato, surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānā paṭivirato, so kāyassa bheda parammaraṇā sugatiṃ yeva upapajjati no duggatin' ti, sāhaṃ bhante Bhagavantam pucchāmi: 'kathaṃrūpe nu kho bhante Satthari pasanno kāyassa bheda parammaraṇā sugatiṃ yeva upapajjati no duggatiṃ, kathaṃrūpe dhamme pasanno .... kathaṃrūpe saṅghe pasanno ... no duggatin' ti?*

Cundī, among whatever **sentient beings** there may be – footless, two-footed, four-footed, or many-footed; with form or formless; percipient, non-percipient, neither percipient nor non-percipient—***Tathāgata* is called foremost among them**, namely: the worthy one (*arahant*) and the perfectly-awakened one (*sammāsambuddha*). Cundī, those, who have faith in Buddha, have faith in what is foremost. Moreover, for those with faith in the foremost, the result is foremost.

Whatever ***Dhammas*** there may be— conditioned or unconditioned—dispassion [absence of lust, desire, greed] (***virāga***)<sup>37</sup> **is called foremost among them**, that is the eradication of pride, the removal of thirst, the uprooting of clinging (attachment), the cutting off of round (rebirth), the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, *Nibbāna*. Cundī, those, who have faith in dispassion (*virāga*), in *Dhamma*, have faith in what is

<sup>37</sup> In this regard, a particularly significant verse referenced in many canonical texts and commentaries is:

Dhp 273,c: ***Virāgo seṭṭho dhammānaṃ***. [the best of mental states (*Dhamma*) is free from passion/lust].

(This verse parallels in various texts: DN-a III, 745; MN-a I, 231; Dhp-a III, 403; It-a I, 167; Patis-a II, 139; Netti 188; Peṭ 56; and many other commentaries).

Commentary on this verse Dhp-a III, 403,<sup>8-14</sup>, explains that:

*Virāgo seṭṭho dhammānaṃ* ti “yāvataṃ bhikkhave dhammā saṃkhatā vā asaṃkhatā vā virāgo tesāṃ dhammānaṃ aggamaṃ akkhāyati” ti. vacanato sabbadhammānaṃ nibbānasaṃkhatō virāgo seṭṭho, *dvipadānaṃ ca cakkhumā* ti sabbesaṃ pi devamanussādibhedānaṃ dvipadānaṃ pañcahi cakkhūhi cakkhumā *tathāgato* va seṭṭho. [in footnote 19] *ca-saddo sampiṇḍanatto, arūpadhamme sampiṇḍeti. Tasmā arūpadhammānampi tathāgato seṭṭho uttamo.*

Again, Another significant phrase is found in the *Nikāya*:

*‘etaṃ santaṃ etaṃ pañitaṃ yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho sabbūpadhipatiṇissaggo taṇhakkhaya virāgo nirodho nibbāna’nti.*

— Often nearly synonymous with *nibbāna*, in the description of which it occurs frequently in the following formula: *taṇhakkhaya virāgo nirodha nibbāna*, e. g. SN I, 136; Vin I, 5; AN II, 118; It 88, etc.

In Peṭ 56: *Tiṇimāni, bhikkhave, aggāni – buddho sattānaṃ, virāgo dhammānaṃ, saṅgho gaṇānaṃ. Ayaṃ thavo.*

According to PED entries, 634 and 567 (s.v. *rāga* and *virāga*) define:[detachment or absence of lust, desire, greed.]

[vi+rāga] absence of *rāga*, dispassionateness, indifference towards (abl. or loc.) disgust, absence of desire, destruction of passions; waning, fading away, cleansing, purifying; emancipation, Arahantship.

foremost. Moreover, for those with faith in the foremost, the result is foremost.

Whatever *Samghas* or group there may be— the *Samgha* of *Tathāgata*'s **disciple is called foremost among them**, that is, the four pairs of persons, the eight types of individuals [persons]<sup>38</sup>—this *Samgha* of the Exalted One's disciples [which is] worthy of hospitality, worthy of gifts, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverent salutation, the unsurpassed field of merit of the world. Cundī, those, who have faith in *Samgha*, have faith in what is foremost. Moreover, for those with faith in the foremost, the result is foremost. (AN III 35,<sub>23-36,14</sub>)<sup>39</sup>

The above conversation between the Buddha and Princess Cundī highlights the profound significance of taking refuge in the *Tisaraṇa*. Faith in the *Tiratana*, combined with observing the five precepts, ensures a favorable rebirth.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> *aṭṭha purisapuggalā*: DN III 255,<sub>3-6</sub> : *Sotāpanno, sotāpatti-phala-sacchikiriya paṭipanno; sakad-āgāmī, sakadāgāmī-phala-sacchikiriya paṭipanno; anāgāmī, anāgāmī-phala-sacchikiriya paṭipanno; arahā, arahattāya paṭipanno*. See also AN IV 204,<sub>6-9</sub>; Ud 56,<sub>22-25</sub>.

There is a well-known list of four types of noble persons, from stream-enterer (*srotāpanna*) to once-returner (*sakadāgāmin*), nonreturner (*anāgāmin*), and worthy one (*arhat*). This list is then subdivided into eight types or grades of noble persons according to their respective attainment of the paths and fruits of the noble path (*āryamārgaphala*).

<sup>39</sup> Same *Cundī sutta*; AN III 35,<sub>23-36,14</sub>:

*Yāvātā Cundī satta apadā vā dvipadā vā catuppadā vā bahuppadā vā, rūpino vā arūpino vā, saññino vā asaññino vā nevasaññināsaññino vā, Tathāgato tesam aggam akkhāyati araham sammāsambuddho. Ye kho Cundī buddhe pasannā, agge te pasannā, agge kho pana pasannānaṃ aggo vipāko hoti.*

*Yāvātā Cundī dhammā saṃkhatā vā asaṃkhatā vā, virāgo tesam aggam akkhāyati, yad idaṃ madanimmadano pipāsavinayo ālayasamuggahato vaṭṭupacchedo taṇhakkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ. Ye kho Cundī virāge dhamme pasannā, agge te pasannā, agge kho pana pasannānaṃ aggo vipāko hoti.*

*Yāvātā Cundī saṅghā vā gaṇā vā, Tathāgatasāvakaṣaṅgho tesam aggam akkhāyati, yad idaṃ cattāri purisayugāni aṭṭha purisapuggalā, esa Bhagavato sāvakaṣaṅgho āhuneyyo pāhuneyyo dakkhiṇeyyo añjalikaraṇīyo anuttaraṃ puñṇakhettaṃ lokassa. Ye kho Cundī saṅghe pasannā, agge te pasannā, agge kho pana pasannānaṃ aggo vipāko hoti.*

<sup>40</sup> As Skilling (1992, 112) explains, “The very act that defines a Buddhist is the ‘taking of refuge’ (*śaraṇa-gamana*) in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha,

In this context, the epithet *Tathāgata* is integral to the *Tisarāṇa* because it is closely connected to its principles. The *Tisarāṇa* leads to the best outcomes, signifying that among all sentient beings, the *Tathāgata* is foremost; among all *Dhammas*, dispassion (*virāga*) is foremost; and among all group, the *Samgha* of the *Tathāgata*'s disciples is foremost. If one takes refuge in what is foremost, the results will naturally be the foremost as well.

### 3. The Contextual Analysis

#### 3.1 *Tathāgata* within the *Tiratana*: Special Reference to Sn Verses 236-238

The *Ratana sutta*,<sup>41</sup> (Discourse on the Jewel), is one of the most popular and widely recited Buddhist texts in various Buddhist traditions, especially

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and the formula of the 'triple refuge' opens virtually all Buddhist rites, including the recitation of *parittā*. A verse in the *Mahāsamaya-sutta* states that "they who go for refuge in the Buddha will not fall into lower realms: leaving behind their human form [at death], they swell the ranks of the gods" (*DN II 255,3-5: ye keci buddham saranam gatāse, na te gamissanti apāyam; pahāya mānusam deham devakāyam paripūressanti*).<sup>42</sup> See also footnote 45.

<sup>41</sup> *Ratana sutta* appears in an early collection of scriptures in the Sn as the first *sutta* of the *Cūlavagga* and the sixth *sutta* in the Khp. It is also one of the most frequently recited *parittās*. It is included in a post-canonical anthology of *parittā* (protection texts), which refers to specific discourses delivered by the Buddha believed to offer protection to those who either recite the *sutta* or listen to its recitation.

The *sutta* holds a special place in Buddhist practice because of its protective qualities. Its enduring popularity can be attributed to this protective aspect. For further details, see DPPN II, 157-58.

According to PED (426), *Parittā* [fr. pari+trā, cp. *tāṇa*, *tāyati* & also *parittāna*] refers to protection, a safeguard, or a protective charm, often in the form of a palliative or amulet (Vin II.110, IV.305). Various forms of *parittā* are mentioned in the scriptures, including personal protection (*atta-parittā*) and protective chants or amulets (AN II.73, Ja I.200).

Some well-known *parittās* include those found in Mil.150,27-50,1: *Puna Bhagavatā parittā ca uddiṭṭhā, seyyathidaṃ: Ratanasuttam Khandhaparittam Moraparittam Dhajaggaparittam Ātānāṭiyaparittam Aṅgulimālāparittam*. among others (DN III.195; SN I.218; Ja II.33; Vism 414).

in Theravāda regions. The theme of the *sutta*, as is clear from the title, is the exaltation of the three *Ratanas*, Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṃgha.

The *Ratana sutta* is often recited for its protective and blessing properties, aiming to bring peace, prosperity, and well-being to individuals and communities. Its verses highlight the virtues and qualities of the Buddha, the profound and liberating nature of the Dhamma, and the exemplary conduct and achievements of the Saṃgha.

The origin story of the *Ratana sutta* is shared among different Buddhist traditions.<sup>42</sup>

According to several commentaries,<sup>43</sup> it was taught at Vesālī, on the occasion of the Buddha's visit at the invitation of the Licchavi people, who asked Buddha to save the city from various dangers.<sup>44</sup> The Buddha first taught the *sutta* to Ānanda and asked him to go around the city with the Licchavi princes, reciting the verses and sprinkling holy water from the Buddha's begging bowl. This ritual scared away the evil spirits and cured the people's illnesses.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The *Ratana sutta* has parallel verses in the Skt. *Mahāvastu* (I, 290 ff.), both of which trace back to three calamities—plague, evil spirits, and famine—in the city of Vesālī. While the details have minor differences, the core narrative remains consistent. The *sutta* is mentioned in the *Mv.* (I.290 ff.), where it is referred to as *svastyayanagāthā*. See further in *Mv.* trans. p. 242. Notably, there is no analogous recension in the Chinese translations of the Āgamas. See, also footnote 51.

<sup>43</sup> Sn-a I, 278,10; Dhp-a, III,436-444; Khp-a, 157-164. For more details: DPPN II,709-10

<sup>44</sup> According to Dhp-a III, 436-444, it is connected to a similar event mentioned in verse Dhp-290.

<sup>45</sup> Skilling's (1992,1996) analysis reveals connections between the concept of 'taking refuge' and *rakṣā/rakkhā*—meaning 'protection' or, more specifically, 'protective text'—which is closely related to the well-known Pāli term *paritta* (Skt. *paritāṇa*). The concept of *rakṣā/rakkhā* appears in various forms throughout Buddhist literature. A distinguishing feature of the *rakṣā* literature is its practical use; it was memorized and recited for specific purposes by both monks and lay followers from a very early date. These texts were integral to the daily lives of both monks and laypeople, serving as tools for protection and well-being. Skilling (1992, 174) also compares early *parittā* lists across various Buddhist schools, highlighting the similarities and differences in their practices.



They then gathered in the city hall with offerings and welcomed the Buddha. Not only the people of Vesālī but also the *devas* from two heavenly realms, led by Sakka, attended the assembly. The Buddha taught the *Ratana sutta* to this large crowd.<sup>46</sup>

The structure of *Ratana sutta* reflects its dual purpose: first, to invoke the protection and blessings of the *devas*, and second, to extol the virtues of the central elements of Buddhist practice. By beginning with a plea for divine protection and ending with a declaration of celestial reverence, the *sutta* bridges the human and divine realms, underscoring the significance of the *Tiratana* (*Ratanatraya*) in both earthly and heavenly contexts. This organization provides a comprehensive view of the *sutta*'s thematic elements, demonstrating its role in both invoking support and affirming the foundational aspects of Buddhist belief.

The *Ratana sutta* can be divided into three parts, i.e. I. (Sn 222-223), II. (Sn 224-235), and III. (Sn 236-238). This *sutta* begins with the initial stanzas (Sn 222ac-223a), which are an invocation to beings/spirits (*bhūtas*), asking them to listen to the discourse and treat people kindly. The following

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In his conclusion (p. 168), Skilling notes:

“The chanting of certain auspicious verses or texts for protection against disease and malignant spirits and for the promotion of welfare was no doubt a “*pan-nikāya*” practice, common to all branches of the *saṃgha* from an early date; indeed, on the internal evidence of texts like the *Dhvajāgra* and *Āṭānāṭika Sūtras*, the practice should predate the early schisms. The two sūtras just referred to are both *parittas* and *Mahāsūtras*; the *Ratana-sutta* is a *paritta*, a *svastigāthā*, and the key element of a *Pañcarakṣā* text. In some schools or communities the practice of *rakṣā* developed further with the use of *mantras* or *vidyās*, by the beginning of the Common Era at the very latest.”

See also footnote 40.

<sup>46</sup> Another account, mentioned by Buddhaghosa (Khp-a, 165,<sup>15-16</sup>: *Apare pana vadanti: ‘‘ādito pañc’ eva gāthā Bhagavatā vuttā, sesā parittakaraṇasamaye Ānandattherenā’’* ti), says that in the assembly, the Buddha only taught the first five verses, while Ānanda had already recited the rest earlier. This *sutta* was initially used to protect Vesālī from three calamities: plague, evil spirits, and famine. Subsequently, it became the most famous of the Buddhist protection chants.

stanzas are declarations of truth (*saccavajja* or *saccakriyā*, Sn 224-235),<sup>47</sup> extolling the virtues of the Buddha (Sn 224c, 233c-234c), the Dhamma (Sn 225c, 226c), and the Saṃgha (Sn 227c-232c, 235c), and wishing for safety through these truths.<sup>48</sup>

Verses on the *Samgha* emphasize the noble qualities of the eight noble persons, a stream-enterer's qualities, abandoning the three lower fetters and released from the four bad rebirths, and actions they cannot perform, etc.

It is interesting to note that the final closing three verses (Sn 236-238) correspond to the epithet *Tathāgata*. These final blessings uniquely apply the epithet *Tathāgata* to all three jewels (Buddha, Dhamma, Saṃgha), not just the Buddha.

Let us investigate these three closing verses:

- 236.** Whatever beings are gathered here, whether of the earthly or those in the sky, let us pay homage to the *Tathāgata*, Buddha, honoured by *devas* and humans. May there be well-being.
- 237.** Whatever beings are gathered here, whether of the earthly or those in the sky, let us pay homage to the *Tathāgata*, Dhamma, honoured by *devas* and humans. May there be well-being.
- 238.** Whatever beings are gathered here, whether of the earthly or those in the sky, let us pay homage to the *Tathāgata*, Saṃgha, honoured

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<sup>47</sup> This is typically expressed through the phrase '*etena saccena suvatthi hotu*' Sn 224-235 (by this truth, may there be well-being). This phrase is often found at the end of verses, invoking the power of truth to bring about protection, blessings, or well-being.

<sup>48</sup> As Jayawickrama (1977, 100-101) pointed out: "the invocation of blessings in the *sutta* is in the form of a *saccakriyā* (asseveration by truth) viz. *etena saccena suvatthi hotu*. A remarkable feature of the poem is the evidence of a growth of a complete Buddhist doxology.

The invitation extended to the *bhūtas* to join in the worship of the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṃgha (who are honoured by gods and men *devamanussapījita*) not only betrays the popular nature of the *sutta* but shows that its composition had taken place when worship formed an essential factor in the religion."

by *devas* and humans: may there be well-being. (Sn 236-238; parallel also Khp 5-6: 15-17)<sup>49</sup>

In It-a, Dhammapāla (It-a I, 117,<sub>11-17</sub>; also parallel in Ud-a 153,<sub>16-32</sub>), uniquely applies the epithet *Tathāgata* to all three jewels—Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṃgha—rather than limiting it to just the Buddha, as follows:

‘Let us pay homage to the *Tathāgata*, Buddha, honoured by *devas* and humans. May there be well-being’ and so on, in [respect to] the perfectly awakened one.

‘Let us pay homage to the *Tathāgata*, Dhamma, honoured by *devas* and humans. May there be well-being’ and so on, in [respect to] the Dhamma.

‘Let us pay homage to the *Tathāgata*, Saṃgha, honoured by *devas* and humans. May there be well-being’ and so on, in [respect to] the Saṃgha. (It-a I, 117,<sub>11-17</sub>)<sup>50</sup>

There are several variations<sup>51</sup> and opinions for translating these final verses among contemporary scholars, each offering a unique perspective on

<sup>49</sup> Sn 236-238; parallel in several other texts, including Khp 5-6: 15-17; Ud-a 153,<sub>19-29</sub>:

**236.** *Yānīdha bhūtāni samāgatāni*  
*bhum māni vā yāni va antalikkhe,*  
*tathāgatam* *devamanussapūjitaṃ*  
*Buddham* *namassāma, suvatthi hotu.*

**237.** *Yānīdha bhūtāni samāgatāni*  
*bhum māni vā yāni va antalikkhe,*  
*tathāgatam* *devamanussapūjitaṃ*  
*Dhammam* *namassāma, suvatthi hotu.*

**238.** *Yānīdha bhūtāni samāgatāni*  
*bhum māni vā yāni va antalikkhe,*  
*tathāgatam* *devamanussapūjitaṃ*  
*Samgham* *namassāma, suvatthi hotū ti.*

<sup>50</sup> It-a I, 117,<sub>11-13</sub>: *Tathāgatam* *devamanussa-pūjitaṃ*  
*Buddham* *namassāma, suvatthi hotū-ti ādisu sammāsambuddhe.*

It-a I, 117,<sub>14-15</sub>: *Tathāgatam* *devamanussapūjitaṃ*  
*Dhammam* *namassāma, suvatthi hotū-ti ādisu dhamme.*

It-a I, 117,<sub>16-17</sub>: *Tathāgatam* *devamanussapūjitaṃ*  
*Samgham* *namassāma, suvatthi hotū-ti ādisu samghe.*

<sup>51</sup> The *Ratana sutta* has parallel verses in the Sanskrit Mv. A Sanskrit version of this *sutta* can be found in Mv -1.295.8-13 [Sanskrit Verse 19 (Pāli Verses Sn 236c-

the term *Tathāgata*. Norman's (2001, 30, 213) interpretation is particularly noteworthy for its clarification from a commentarial standpoint. He views the term as an implicit extension of the Buddha's attributes rather than a direct reference to the *Dhamma* and *Samgha*, suggesting that *Tathāgata* does not apply to these two but instead follows the pattern established in verse 236.<sup>52</sup>

In contrast, Bodhi's (2017, 195, 1437) translation takes a different approach. Bodhi suggests that *Tathāgata* is an adjectival compound that qualifies all three objects of veneration—Buddha, Dhamma, and Samgha—in distinct ways. He notes that while *Tathāgata* can mean either 'thus come'

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d; 237c-d; 238c-d)]. In this version, the last three verses are combined into one verse, as follows:

*Mv* -1.295.8-13:  
*yo dharmacakram abhibhūya lokam*  
*pravartayati sarvabhūtanukampitam /*  
*etādṛśam devamanuṣyaśreṣṭham*  
*buddham namasyāmi susvasti bhotu /*  
*dharmam namasyāmi susvasti bhotu*  
*saṃgham namasyāmi susvasti bhotu*  
*manuṣyato vā amanuṣyato vā //*

<sup>52</sup> Norman (2001, 213) comments on the interpretation of these verses:

"237-38. I assume that *tathāgata* does not refer to *dhamma* and *saṅgha*, but the pattern of these two verses has been based upon 236. I therefore understand 'and'".

Norman's (2001, 30) translation of these verses is as follows:

236c-d: let us revere the *Tathāgata* honoured by devas and men, the Buddha.  
 May there be well-being.

237c-d: let us revere the *Tathāgata* honoured by devas and men, [and] the Doctrine. May there be well-being.

238c-d: let us revere the *Tathāgata* honoured by devas and men, [and] the Order. May there be well-being.

In Norman's earlier (1984, 39) translation of Sn, the verses were translated differently:

237c-d. revere the Dhamma (-path thus trodden) for: *tathāgataṃ dhammaṃ*).

238c-d. revere the Samgha (thus gone along the path) (for: *tathāgataṃ saṃgham*).

or ‘thus gone,’ it is translated as ‘thus gone’ in relation to all three in his translation.<sup>53</sup>

While Norman focuses on excluding the *Dhamma* and *Samgha* from being directly referenced as *Tathāgata*, it is possible, according to the commentary on these verses, that the term *Tathāgata* can indeed be applied to the *Dhamma* and *Samgha* in a similar manner. Observations by Jayawickrama (2001, 92) and Bodhi (2017, 195) support this perspective. Particularly when considering the grammatical consistency across the verses, where *Tathāgata* is used as an accusative singular to describe each object of veneration. This consistency reinforces the idea that *Tathāgata* can be extended to the *Dhamma* and *Samgha*, suggesting that these verses pay homage to the *Dhamma* and *Samgha* as ‘thus gone/come,’ just as they do to the Buddha.

Interestingly, how the *Dhamma* and *Samgha* can be understood as ‘thus gone/come’ will be discussed with commentarial understanding (Sn 236-238) in the next section (3.2).

Furthermore, another significant verse from the *Ratana sutta* (Sn 224) highlights the expanded significance of the Buddha Jewel in relation to the *Tathāgata*. The verse states:

Whatever treasure [exists] here or elsewhere, or whatever is the sublime jewel in the heavens, that is not equal to a *Tathāgata*. This sublime jewel is too **in the Buddha**; by this truth, may there be well-being. (Khp 3-4, Sn 224)<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Bodhi (2017, 195) translates the verses as follows:

236c-d: we pay homage to the thus-gone Buddha,  
venerated by devas and humans: may there be safety!  
237c-d: we pay homage to the thus-gone Dhamma,  
venerated by devas and humans: may there be safety!  
238c-d: we pay homage to the thus-gone Samgha,  
venerated by devas and humans: may there be safety!

<sup>54</sup> Sn 224, Khp 3-4, the jewel discourse (*Ratana sutta*):

*Yaṃ kiñci vittaṃ idha vā huraṃ vā,  
saggesu vā yaṃ ratanaṃ pañītaṃ,  
na no samaṃ atthi Tathāgataṃ,—*

Based on this verse, Buddhaghosa elaborately explains how the Buddha Jewel (*Buddha-ratanam*) is connected with *Tisaraṇa*, particularly in relation to the *Tathāgata*, emphasizing the meaning of ‘Superior/Supreme.’<sup>55</sup> He categorizes this explanation into five specific attributes, each concluding with the phrase: “*Tathāgatasamaṃ ratanam natthi*” (Khp-a 170-179) [There is no jewel equal to the *Tathāgata*]. This phrase is repeatedly used by Buddhaghosa to emphasize the unparalleled nature of the *Tathāgata* as the Supreme Jewel, superior to all other treasures.

Continuing from the discussion of the three significant closing verses (Sn 236-238a, c), the terms ‘*bhūta*’ and ‘*deva*’ are repeatedly mentioned, and their meanings are essential for a detailed review in the context of reverencing the *Tiratana*. These terms hold subtle yet profound implications, particularly in how they relate to reverence for the *Tathāgata* within the *Tiratana* framework.

The term ‘*bhūta*’ is intriguing, as it carries multiple meanings and is used in various contexts within Buddhist scriptures.<sup>56</sup> According to the

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*idam pi Buddhē ratanam paṇītaṃ,  
etena saccena suvatthi hotu.*

Parallel verses can also be found in the Sanskrit *Mv* -I, 290,19-291,3:

*imasmim vā loke parasmim vā punaḥ  
svargeṣu vā yaṃ ratanaṃ praṇītaṃ /  
na taṃ samaṃ asti tathāgatenā  
devātidevena narottamena /  
imam pi buddhē ratanam praṇītaṃ  
etena satyena susvastī bhotu.*

<sup>55</sup> Khp-a 170, 9-10 : “*cittikataṃ mahaggaṇ ca atulaṃ dullabhadassanaṃ  
anomasattaparibhogaṃ ratanaṃ tena vuccatī*” *ti*.

(1) Much admired, (2) excellent in value, (3) Inestimable/incomparable, (4) rarely seen, and (5) Superior sentient being make use of it; because of that, what the ‘jewel’ is to be called. (Khp-a 170, 9-10).

Further Explanation, Khp-a 170,18-22: *Na no samam atthi Tathāgatenā* *ti*: *na*-iti paṭisedhe, *no*-iti avadhāraṇe, *samaṃ* *ti* tulyaṃ, *atthī* *ti* vijjati, *Tathāgatenā* *ti* *buddhena*; Kiṃ vuttaṃ hoti: yaṃ etaṃ vittaṃ ca ratanaṃ ca pakāsitaṃ, ettha ekam pi buddharatanena sadisaṃ ratanaṃ n’ ev’ atthi.

<sup>56</sup> Etymologically, ‘*bhūta*’ is the past participle of *bhavati*, derived from the root √bhū. *bhavati* [*S. bhavati*], *hoti*, *bhoti*, (pr. 3 sg. *bhavati*, *hoti*).

commentary (MN-a I, 31,<sub>24-32,3</sub>),<sup>57</sup> Buddhaghosa expanded the interesting meaning of this term into seven categories,<sup>58</sup> reflecting its complexity with

The DoP III, (s.v. *bhūta*) provides several interpretations of the term, including:

- 1. (i) (mfn.) become, come into being; been; being, being like;
- (ii) (m.n.) what exists, any living being or creature (including plants);
- 2. (mfn.) [BHS *bhūta*], true; real; based on truth;
- 3. (m.n. and f.) a spirit; a malevolent spirit, a demon;
- 4. (n.) an element, esp. one of the four fundamental elements.

<sup>57</sup> MN-a I, 31,<sub>24-32,3</sub>: *Tatthāyaṃ bhūtasaddo pañcakkhandhaamanussa-dhātu-vijjamāna-khīṇāsava-satta-rukkhādisu dissati. ‘Bhūtam idam ti, bhikkhave, samanupassathā’ ti* (MN.I. 260) *ādīsu hi ayaṃ pañcasu kkhandhesu dissati. ‘Yānīdha bhūtāni samāgatāni’ ti* (Sn. 222) *ettha amanussesu. ‘Cattāro kho, bhikkhu, mahābhūtā hetū’ ti* (SN.III.101) *ettha catusu dhātūsu. ‘Bhūtasmiṃ pācittiyan’ ti* (Vin. IV. 25) *ādīsu vijjamāne. ‘Yo ca kālaghaso bhūto’ ti* (Ja. II. 260) *ettha khīṇāsave. ‘Sabbe va nikkhipissanti bhūtā loke samussayan’ ti* (DN.II.157) *ettha sattesu. ‘Bhūtagāma-pātavyatāyā’ ti* (Vin. IV. 34) *ettha rukkhādisu. Idha pañāyaṃ sattesu vattati, no ca kho avisesena. Cātumahārājikānaṃ hi heṭṭhā sattā idha bhūtā ti adhippetā.*

<sup>58</sup> The meanings of the term *bhūta* in the above passage (above footnote 57), according to PED, 507-8, (s.v. *bhūta*), are as follows: [pp. of *bhavati*, Vedic, etc. *bhūta*] grown, become; born, produced; nature as the result of becoming.

- (1) animate nature as principle, or the vital aggregates (the 5 *khandhas*), with ref. MN I.260;
- (2) ghosts (*amanussā*) Sn 222;
- (3) inanimate nature as principle, or the elements (the 4 *dhātus*) SN III.101 (*mahābhūtā*);
- (4) all that exists, physical existence in general (*vijjamānaṃ*) Vin IV.25 (*bhūtaṃ*);
- (5) what we should call a simple *predicative* use, is exemplified by a typical dogmatic example, viz. ‘*kālaghaso bhūto*,’ where *bhūta* is given as meaning *khīṇāsava* (arahant) Ja II.260;
- (6) all beings or specified existence, animal kingdom (*sattā*) DN II.157;
- (7) the vegetable kingdom, plants, vegetation (*rukkh’ ādayo*) Vin IV.34 (as *bhūta-gāma*).

— Meanings:

1. *bhūtā & bhūtāni* (pl.) beings, living beings, animate nature Sn 35 (expld at Nidd, II 479 as 2 kinds, viz. *tasā & thāvarā*, movable & immovable; SN. II.47 (*K.S.* II.36) mind and body as come-to-be; Dh 131 (*bhūtāni*), 405; MN I.2 sq. (*paṭhavī, āpo*, etc., *bhūtā, devā, Pajāpatī* etc.), 4; MN-a I.32. The pl. nt. *bhūtāni* is used as pl. to meaning 2; viz. inanimate nature, elements, usually enumerated under term *mahā-bhūtāni*.

early canonical references. In these three verses (Sn 236a-238a), the meanings of *bhūta* are fundamentally connected to humans, non-humans, and the natural world as a whole. Each interpretation deepens our understanding of *bhūta*, and by examining how it relates to the concepts of existence, nature, and truth, we can gain a more nuanced interpretation of the verses under discussion.

Turning to another term ‘*deva*.’ In Buddhist cosmology, many world systems exist, each with its own set of *devas* (gods).<sup>59</sup> The Buddha taught that *devas*, like all beings in *saṃsāra*, are subject to death and rebirth. While *devas* have longer lifespans than humans, they are still finite. When a man dies, that is the end of his existence in that life, and his successor takes his

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2. (nt.) nature, creation, world MN, I, 2 (*bhūte bhūtato sañjānāti* recognizes the beings from nature, i. e. from the fact of being nature).

<sup>59</sup> In the classification of *devas*, three categories are enumerated. In MN-a I, Buddhaghosa explains the term *deva* as follows:

MN-a I, 33,<sup>20-26</sup>: *Tattha dibbanti pañcahi kāmaguṇehi, attano vā iddhiyā ti devā. Kīlanti jotenti vā ti attho. Te tividhā: sammutidevā, upapattidevā, visuddhidevā ti. Sammutidevā nāma rājāno, deviyo, kumārā. Upapattidevā nāma Cātumahārājike deve upādāya tatuttariṃ devā. Visuddhidevā nāma arahanto khīṇāsavā.*

According to PED, 329 (s.v. *deva*), the meaning of *deva* is as follows:

Lists of popular gods are to be found, e. g. at DN II.253; III.194. — A current distinction dating from the latest books in the canon is that into 3 classes, viz.

1. *sammuti-devā* (conventional gods, gods in the public opinion, i. e. kings & princes),
2. *visuddhi-devā* (beings divine by purity, i. e. of great religious merit or attainment like Arahants & Buddhas),
3. *upapatti-devā* (being born divine, i. e. in a heavenly state as one of the *gatis*, like *bhūma – devā*, etc.).

Under the third category, seven groups of gods are listed, including the *Cātumahārājikā*, *Tāvatiṃsa* (with Sakka as chief), *Yāmā*, *Tusitā*, *Nimmānaratī*, *Paranimmīta-vasavattī*, and *Brahmakāyikā devas*.

DoP-II, 435-36 (s.v. *deva*) further explains:

1. the various groups of gods:
  - (i) a deity; a god; (ii) the sphere of the gods; a godlike state; (iii) godlike; a godlike person; (iv) (the god of) the sky and atmosphere; rain-cloud; (v) a king (very often voc: ‘your majesty’);
2. heavenly, divine; belonging to the *devas*.



place. When the king of the *devas*, Sakka dies, another Sakka immediately replaces him.

There appear to be few records in the Pāli canon where the Buddha is directly asked, ‘*Do devas exist?*.’ Norman (1991, 1-8) analyzes this matter in his article, “*The Buddha’s view of devas.*” There seem to be only two passages in the canon where the Buddha is asked direct questions about the existence of *devas*: the *Kaṇṇakathala-sutta* (MN II 125-133) and the *Saṅgārava-sutta* (MN II 209-213). Norman’s analysis also highlights some textual and translation issues in the PTS edition of these *suttas*. The text suggests correcting the *sutta* by changing ‘*atthi devā*’ (*devas* exist) to ‘*atthi adhidevā*’ (super-*devas* exist) to make the meaning clearer in three sentences. This change clarifies that the Buddha acknowledged the existence of super-*devas*, which implies the existence of regular *devas*. Saṅgārava, a Brahmin, questioned the Buddha about this, and the Buddha explained that it is already widely accepted that *devas* exist.

Returning to our main discussion point, this investigation sheds light on the connection between humans and *devas*, particularly in relation to the epithet *Tathāgata*. In the aforementioned final three verses (Sn 236-38c), the phrase ‘*devamanussapūjitaṃ*’ is intricately connected to ‘*satthā devamanussānaṃ*,’ another significant epithet of the Buddha. Here, ‘*devamanussānaṃ*’ refers to both human beings and various groups of non-human deities or gods (*devas*). In these phrases, it is particularly noteworthy that while other belief systems often view gods/deities as the saviors of humans, Buddhism uniquely positions the Buddha as the teacher of both gods and humans, emphasizing unparalleled guidance that benefits all beings who follow his teachings.

Thus, in these verses, the phrase ‘*Tathāgataṃ devamanussapūjitaṃ*’ (Sn 236-38c-d) is closely connected to ‘*satthā devamanussānaṃ*,’ indicating that the term *Tathāgata* is deeply intertwined with the Dhamma, or teachings,

which are revered not only by sentient beings but also by the entire natural world as a whole.

### 3.2 Interpretation of *Tathāgata* in *Dhamma* and *Samgha*

Building on the previous discussion (Sn 236-238), this section will further explore the interpretation of *Tathāgata* within the context of *Dhamma* and *Samgha*. As mentioned previously, understanding how the *Dhamma* and *Samgha* can be viewed as ‘thus gone/come’ will be examined through commentarial interpretations of these three closing verses (Sn 236-238).

Let us first delve into Buddhaghosa’s traditional interpretation of the Buddha as *Tathāgata*, particularly in the context of ‘thus gone/come’:

Here, the Buddha is called ‘thus gone/come’ (*tathāgata*) because, he has thus come to (*tathā āgata*) [reached] with those who<sup>60</sup> earnestly strive for the sake of the benefit of the world, [in these ways] they should come (*āgantabbam*); and, as [he has] thus gone to (*tathā gata*) [in these ways] they should go (*gantabbam*); as [he has] thus understood to (*tathā ājānato*) [in these ways] they should understand (*ājānitabbam*); as [he has] thus known to (*tathā jānato*) [in these ways] they should know (*jānitabbam*); and, as whatever, [he has] thus spoken to (*gadanato*), what is real. [Therefore, he is] called ‘thus gone/come’ (*tathāgata*).

And, since he is extremely honored by *devas* and human beings with outwardly produced accessories [such as] flowers, incense, etc., and with inwardly produced practice of Dhamma in accordance to Dhamma and so on. Therefore, Sakka,<sup>61</sup> the ruler of *deva*, having combined the whole assembly of *deva* with himself, has said: ‘Let us pay homage to the Buddha, *Tathāgata*, honored by *devas* and human beings. May there be well-being.’ (Khp-a 195,<sub>29</sub>-196,<sub>1-9</sub>; and Sn-a I, 278,<sub>10</sub>)<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> It refers to various Buddhas. Murakami, and Oikawa (2009, 293) mentioned this in the Japanese translation as [諸仏]. See also footnote 63.

<sup>61</sup> For further discussion on Sakka’s position and his devotion to the Buddha and his teachings, see the next section 3.3, and footnote 69.

<sup>62</sup> Khp-a 195,<sub>29</sub>; 196,<sub>1-9</sub>; and Sn-a I, 278,<sub>10</sub>:

*Tattha, yasmā buddho, yathā lokahitattāyā ussukkaṃ āpannehi āgantabbam, tathā āga(ta)to, yathā ca etehi gantabbam, tathā gata, yathā etehi ājānitabbam, tathā ājānato, yathā jānitabbam, tathā jānato, yañ ca tath’ eva hoti, tassa gadanato tathāgato ti vuccati,*

Second, continuing from this interpretation, Buddhaghosa further elaborates on how the *Dhamma* and *Samgha* can also be understood as ‘thus gone/come’:

Then, in [the case of] the *Dhamma*, since [firstly] ‘the *Dhamma* as the path’ (*maggadhamma*), as [one] should go with the conjoined power of [the mental] tranquility (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*) by eradicating the faction of defilements, [in these ways], thus gone. [Second] ‘the *Dhamma* as *Nibbāna*’ (*nibbānadhamma*) as gone penetrated by wisdom [in such a way one] succeed towards the destruction of all suffering, Buddhas and others [in these ways], thus gone.<sup>63</sup> [Therefore, it too] is called ‘thus gone/come’ (*tathāgata*).

And, then, the *Samgha* too, as thus gone by practicing each path [respective four paths] for their own welfare, [in these ways], they should go. [Therefore, it too] is called ‘thus gone/come’ (*tathāgata*).

Therefore, in the remaining two verses, it is also said: ‘Let us pay homage to the *Tathāgata*, *Dhamma*. May there be well-being. Let us pay homage to the *Tathāgata*, *Samgha*. May there be well-being.’

(Khp-a 196,<sup>10-18</sup>; and Sn-a I, 278,<sup>10</sup>)<sup>64</sup>

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*yasmā ca so devamanussehi pupphagandhādīnā bahi nibbattena upakaraṇena dhammānudhammapaṭipattādīnā ca attani nibbattena ativiya pūjito, tasmā Sakko devānaṃ indo sabbaṃ devaparisaṃ attanā saddhiṃ sampiṇḍetvā āha: tathāgataṃ devamanussapūjitaṃ Buddhaṃ namassāma, suvatthi hotū ti.*

<sup>63</sup> Notably, the PTS edition reads as “*buddhādīhi tathā ga(ta)to*”, while the VRI Burmese edition reads as “*buddhādīhi tathā avagato*”. By following VRI Burmese edition, Bodhi translates this as “realized in the same way as was done by the buddhas and others”. See further in Bodhi (2017, 707, 1438, note 1000) and DoP, II, by Cone 2010, 286 s.v. *tathāgata*, (4. a designation of the dhamma and the saṅgha).

<sup>64</sup> Khp-a 196,<sup>10-19</sup>; and Sn-a I, 278,<sup>10</sup>: *Yasmā pana dhamme maggadhammo, yathā yuganaddhasamathavipassanābalena gantabbaṃ kilesapakkhaṃ samucchindantena, tathā ga(ta)to, nibbānadhammo, yathā gato paññāya paṭividdho sabbadukkhavighātāya sampajjati, buddhādīhi tathā ga(ta)to tathāgato ti vuccati,*

*yasmā ca saṃgho pi, yathā attahitāya paṭipannehi gantabbaṃ, tena tena maggena tathā gatato tathāgato ti vuccati,*

*tasmā avasesagāthādāyeva pi tathāgataṃ Dhammaṃ namassāma suvatthi hotu, Saṃghaṃ namassāma suvatthi hotū ti vuttaṃ.*

Buddhaghosa's above interpretation of *Tathāgata* as 'thus gone/thus come' extends beyond the Buddha to include the *Dhamma* and *Samgha*. This is a crucial point, emphasizing the profound interrelationship in the pursuit of the destruction of all suffering. This perspective reinforces the idea that the path to liberation is reflected in the qualities and actions of the *Dhamma*, both as 'the path' (*magga-dhamma*) and as '*Nibbāna*' (*nibbāna-dhamma*). Similarly, the *Samgha* is referred to as 'thus gone/thus come', as they follow the path for their own liberation and to assist others.<sup>65</sup>

### 3.3 Investigating the Role of *Tathāgata* in *Tisaraṇa*

This section aims to explore the role of *Tathāgata* within the *Tisaraṇa* formula and how this role establishes a causal connection between *Dhamma* and *Samgha*, forming a unified source of refuge. Specifically, we will examine how this refuge functions as a secure and perfect sanctuary.

The *Dhajagga sutta*<sup>66</sup> is a significant text in the Theravāda tradition, frequently recited for protection and mental strength.<sup>67</sup> Its teachings are relevant to both monastic and lay practitioners seeking to cultivate a fearless mind and unwavering faith in the *Tiratana*. The *Dhajagga sutta*<sup>68</sup> is closely

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<sup>65</sup> Additionally, regarding the above viewpoint, in the article '*Buddhadhātu, Tathāgatadhātu, and Tathāgatagarbha in the Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*,' the term *Tathāgata* is discussed in the context of *Tisaraṇa*. In a conversation between the Buddha and Kāśyapa, the term *Tathāgata* is repeatedly used to emphasize the unity of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Samgha as a source of refuge. As it (2015b, 180) points out, "the Buddha himself is also the Dhamma, he is also the Samgha. The Tathāgata himself is the Triple Refuge." Furthermore, see Habata (2015b, 178-181).

<sup>66</sup> The *Dhajagga sutta* (SN I, 218,25-220,32) is the third *sutta* in the *Sakka-Samyutta*, which is the eleventh section of the SN (SN I, 216-42). This section has twenty-five short discourses related to Sakka.

<sup>67</sup> It is also one of the most frequently recited *parittās*, alongside the *Ratana sutta*, which is discussed in section 3.1 (see footnotes 40 and 45). For a comparative discussion and early listings of *parittās*, see Skilling (1992, 174).

<sup>68</sup> *Dhajagga* [Skt. *Dhvajāgra*] is a compound word (*dhaja*+*agga*): *dhaja* (flag or banner) and *agga* (top or crest).

PED (334) defines *dhaja* as a flag, banner, mark, emblem, sign, or symbol, and *agga* as the top of a standard. Although the commentary on this *sutta* does not

connected to the concept of *Tisaraṇa*, as it explicitly instructs monks to recollect the *Tiratana* when faced with fear, aligning with the practice of seeking refuge in the triple jewels. The *sutta* emphasizes the unique qualities of the *Tiratana* that make them reliable refuges, free from fear, passion, hate, and delusion.

The *sutta* narrates how Sakka,<sup>69</sup> the king of the *devas*, led his forces into battle and advised them to look at the crest of his banner to dispel their fears. The Buddha recounts this event to the monks, explaining that Sakka advised the *devas* to look at the crest of his standard (*dhaja*) to overcome fear during a battle with the demons (*asuras*). If that did not work, they were instructed to look at the crests of the standards of other *deva*-kings (*devarājan*):

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gloss the compound *dhajagga*, the term appears in other texts, such as AN III 89, where it is explained as referring to the top of a flag raised on the backs of elephants, horses, or chariots, symbolizing a position of prominence or victory. The commentary on (AN-a III, 267,<sup>22-23</sup> states: *Dhajaggaṃ ti hatthi assapiṭṭhesu vā rathesu vā ussāpitaṇaṃ dhajānaṃ aggaṃ* (*Dhajagga* refers to the crest of flags raised on the backs of elephants, horses, or chariots).

Bodhi translates *Dhajagga* as ‘the crest of the standard’ (SN trans., p. 319, with footnote 611 on p. 490). This term symbolizes a perspective of prominence or a high point, often used in a symbolic context.

<sup>69</sup> In Buddhism, Sakka is the ruler of the *devas* (heavenly beings) in the *Tāvātimsa* heaven and a devoted follower of the Buddha. He is almost always referred to as “*devānaṃ indo*,” the chief (or king) of the *devas*. A significant dialogue between Sakka and the Buddha, where Sakka attains the stage of stream-entry (*sotāpanna*), is found in the *Sakkapañha Sutta* (DN II, 263-89). Although this collection does not detail the Buddha’s direct encounters with Sakka, it includes stories about Sakka’s actions and conversations, as recounted by the Buddha. These stories, often presented as fables, always convey a moral lesson. In the final three *suttas* in the *Sakka-Samyutta* (SN I, 216-42), which is the eleventh section of SN, the Buddha highlights Sakka’s patience and forgiveness as exemplary qualities for the bhikkhus to emulate.

Sakka’s devotion to the Buddha and his teachings are renowned. He consistently supported the followers of the Buddha in their efforts to attain the goal.

Sakka was present in Vesālī when the Buddha visited the city to alleviate its plagues. His presence helped dispel the evil spirits, facilitating the Buddha’s mission. (For more details, see Sn-a I, 278,10; Dhp-a, III, 436-444; Khp-a, 157-164. DPPN II, 709-10; also, refer to section 3.1).

*Pajāpati*, *Varuṇa*, and *Īsāna*. However, since these deities (*devas*) were not free from lust, hate, and delusion, the fear might not be entirely dispelled.

In contrast, the Buddha instructs the monks that if they experience fear in the forest, under a tree, or in a secluded hut, they should recollect the Buddha, Dhamma, or Saṃgha. Unlike the deity (*deva*), the *Tathāgata* is free from lust, hate, and delusion and is thus a perfect refuge. Recollecting the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṃgha helps to abandon any fear or terror.

Let us examine the significance of passages from this *sutta*:

Here, for what reason? Because, Bhikkhus, the ***Tathāgata***, the Arahant, the perfectly awakened one, is free from passion/lust (*vītarāga*),<sup>70</sup> free from hatred (*vītaḍosa*), free from delusion (*vītamoha*); [he is] brave, unafraid, not fearful, not running away.

This is what the Blessed One said. Having said this, the Well-gone One, the Teacher, further said this:

In a forest, at the root of a tree, or in an empty hut, Bhikkhus, you should recollect the fully-awakened one, no fear will then arise to you.

If you can not recollect the **Buddha** [awakened one], the foremost in the world, leader of men; then you should recollect the *Dhamma*, [which] leads to salvation, [and] is well-explained.

If you can not recollect the ***Dhamma***, [which] leads to salvation, [and] is well-explained; then you should recollect the ***Saṃgha***, the unsurpassed field of merit.

Bhikkhus, thus [for those who] take **refuge** to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṃgha; fear, afraid or any terror will never arise. (SN I 220, 17-32)<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *vītarāga* is connected with *rāga* and *virāga*, which is discussed in section 2.2. For further details, see footnote 37.

<sup>71</sup> SN I 220, 17-32:

17. *Taṃ kissa hetu* || || ***Tathāgato*** *hi bhikkhave araham sammāsambuddho vītarāgo vītaḍoso vītamoho abhīru acchambhī anutrāsī apalāyī ti* || ||

18. *Idam avoca Bhagavā* || *idaṃ vatvāna Sugato athā-param etad avoca satthā* || ||

*Arañhe rukkhamaḷe vā* || *suññāgāre vā bhikkhavo* ||  
*anussaretha sambuddham* || *bhayaṃ tumhākaṃ no siyā* || ||  
*No ce buddham sareyyātha* || *lokajettham narāsabham* ||

These verses emphasize the term *Tathāgata* as embodying the state of being ‘free from lust/passion, hatred, and delusion’ (*vītarāgo vītadoso vītamoho*) and his bravery and fearlessness. Although the closing verse uses terms like ‘fear, dread, or terror’ (*bhayaṃ vā chambhitattaṃ vā lomahaṃso*) synonymously, it refers to the removal of any kind of suffering through the recollection of the *Tiratana*.<sup>72</sup> This highlights the limitations of *devas*, how the *Tathāgata*’s compassion continues to aid sentient beings, how the *Dhamma* provides the path, and how the *Samgha* guides practitioners as living examples. The practice of recollection (*anussati*) serves here as a direct method to connect with the qualities of *Dhamma* and *Samgha*.

Furthermore, the significant passage above establishes a causal connection between the *Tiratana* as a unified source of refuge. In this connection, the *Tathāgata*’s role in *Tisaraṇa* represents an ideal refuge on the path to salvation, the *Dhamma* provides the method, and the *Samgha* offers support and guidance along the way, forming a complete and interconnected system. The passage further emphasizes a tiered approach to practice: first, focusing on the Buddha; if that is difficult, focusing on the *Dhamma*; and as a last resort, focusing on the *Samgha*. This approach acknowledges different learning styles and allows individuals to find their most effective method.

#### 4. *Tathāgata* as an Expression of Faith, Recollection, and Practice

The term *Tathāgata* is frequently invoked in prayers when taking refuge in the *Tiratana*. According to the Pāli scriptures, it is often interchangeable with other epithets in the context of *Buddhānussati*/*Buddhānussmṛti*

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*atha dhammaṃ sareyyātha || niyyānikaṃ sudesitaṃ || ||*  
*No ce dhammaṃ sareyyātha || niyyānikaṃ sudesitaṃ ||*  
*atha saṅghaṃ sareyyātha || puñṇakkhettaṃ anuttaraṃ || ||*  
*Evam buddhaṃ sarantānaṃ || dhammaṃ saṅghaṃ ca bhikkhavo ||*  
*bhayaṃ vā chambhitattaṃ vā || lomahaṃso na hessatī ti || ||*

<sup>72</sup> Buddhaghosa and Dhammapāla’s etymological and linguistic interpretation of *saraṇa*, as discussed in section 2, is also closely connected to these verses. For more details, refer to footnotes 7, 9, 11, 12.

[recollection of the Buddha's (greatest virtues)]. This practice remains common across all Buddhist traditions, underscoring the central role of the relationship between seekers of salvation and the awakened teacher who guides them. Focusing on the qualities of the awakened one is believed to help aspirants move closer to realizing those qualities themselves.

Early disciples showed profound devotion to the *Tathāgata*, as evidenced in many texts. They understood the *Tathāgata* not only as the awakened teacher but also as a gateway to the Buddhist path through the practices of taking refuge and *Buddhānussati*. This discussion will further explore the references to the *Tathāgata* in the context of taking refuge, focusing on canonical passages where the term *Tathāgata* is a key concept in both faith and practice.

Let us examine some significant passages frequently cited in the *Nikāya* texts. One such passage states:

Here, monks, a noble disciple is faithful; he has **faith in the enlightenment/awakening of the *Tathāgata***: 'Thus, indeed, the Blessed One is worthy, perfectly awakened, endowed with knowledge and conduct, the well-gone, knower of the world, unsurpassed trainer of persons to be tamed, the teacher of devas and humans, the awakened One, the Blessed One.' Monks, this is called the power of faith. (AN III, 2,5-9, III 10,<sup>26-29</sup>, 53,<sup>14-16</sup>, 65,<sup>13-17</sup>; IV 3,<sup>16-20</sup>, V 15,<sup>9-13</sup>; SN V 196,<sup>27</sup>; 395; DN II, 115,<sup>13</sup>)<sup>73</sup>

A similar expression is also found in another typical passage in AN, which states:

Here, Mahānāma, a noble disciple, **recollects the *Tathāgata***: "The Blessed One is worthy, perfectly awakened...[same as above]." At the time, Mahānāma, when a noble disciple recollects the *Tathāgata*, at that time his mind is not possessed by lust/passion, his mind is not possessed by hatred/ anger, and his mind is not possessed by delusion, at that time his mind indeed becomes upright with reference (undertaken) **to the**

<sup>73</sup> AN III, 2,5-9, III 10,<sup>26-29</sup>, 53,<sup>14-16</sup>, 65,<sup>13-17</sup>; IV 3,<sup>16-20</sup>, V 15,<sup>9-13</sup>; SN V 196,<sup>27</sup>; 395; DN II, 115,<sup>13</sup>; and they are frequently referenced in many commentaries:

*Idha bhikkhave ariyasāvako saddho hoti, saddahati Tathāgatassa bodhim 'iti pi so Bhagavā araham sammāsambuddho vijjācaraṇasampanno sugato lokavidū anuttaro purisadammaśārathi Satthā devamanussānaṃ buddho Bhagavā'ti. Idam vuccati, bhikkhave, saddhābalaṃ.*



***Tathāgata***. (AN III, 285,<sub>3-11</sub>; V,<sub>11-19</sub>)<sup>74</sup>

Buddhaghosa discusses several significant passages in *Vism*, citing various quotes from the four *Nikāyas*, such as the *Mahānāma sutta* (AN III, 284), *Sambādhokāsa sutta* (AN III, 314), and *Upasatha sutta* (AN I, 207,<sub>5</sub>). Among these, in the *Sambādhokāsa sutta*, Venerable Mahākaccāna describes *Buddhānussati* as the realization of purification in the ultimate sense for a noble disciple, thus:

It is wonderful, friends! It is marvelous, friends! As far as the attainment [awakening] has been discovered in crowding (obstruction)<sup>75</sup> by the Blessed One who knows, sees, is worthy, and is perfectly awakened; for the purification of sentient beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearing of (physical) pain and grief (mental suffering), for the attainment of the true way, for the realization of *Nibbāna*, that is to say, the six bases of recollection. What are the six?<sup>76</sup> Here, monks, **the noble disciple recollects the *Tathāgata*** in this way: That the Blessed one is worthy....[same as AN III, 2,<sub>6-9</sub>.] here, some sentient beings become purified with the mental states (*dhammā*) in such a way (*Vism* 227,<sub>8</sub>)<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> AN III, 285,<sub>3-11</sub>; V,<sub>11-19</sub>: *Idha Mahānāma ariyasāvako Tathāgatam anussarati* – ‘*iti pi so bhagavā araham ... buddho bhagavā’ ti. Yasmiṃ Mahānāma samaye ariyasāvako Tathāgatam anussarati, nev’ assa tasmīṃ samaye rāgapariyuṭṭhitam cittam hoti, na dosapariyuṭṭhitam cittam hoti, na mohapariyuṭṭhitam cittam hoti, ujugatam ev’ assa tasmīṃ samaye cīttam hoti Tathāgatam ārabbhā.*

<sup>75</sup> “the attainment [awakening] has been discovered in crowding (obstruction)” (*sambādhe okāsādhigamo anubuddho*): the term *sambādha* refers to pressure, inconvenience from crowding, and obstruction (PED, 1979, 693). PED, defines ‘*okāsādhigamo*’ simply as ‘finding an opportunity’ (PED, 1979, 163 s.v. *okāsa*). Ñāṇamoli (1975) 2010, 223, translated this phrase as ‘the realization of the wide-open in the crowded [house life].’

<sup>76</sup> There are several early and later lists of ‘*anussati*’, ranging from six to ten subjects, with the later list expanding to ten subjects. The CPD, I (226), defines: *anu-ssati, f.* [sa. anu-smṛti; the spelling anu-sati is metrical in Ap 69,18 (Buddha<sup>o</sup>)], *thinking of, calling to mind, recollection (as a systematic exercise; Vism 197-228, six: Buddha-<sup>o</sup>, dhamma-<sup>o</sup>, saṃgha-<sup>o</sup>, sīla-<sup>o</sup>, cāga-<sup>o</sup>, devatā<sup>o</sup>, ib. 229-94, four: maraṇa-<sup>o</sup>, kāyagatā sati, ānāpāna sati, upasama sati (punappunam saraṇato anu-saraṇavasena ~i, ).*

Again, PED 45, defines: *Anussati* as remembrance, recollection, thinking of, and mindfulness.

For further details, see footnote 13, 14.

<sup>77</sup> *Vism* 227,<sub>8-14</sub>, VRI §165: [The Pāli texts in italics are quotations by Buddhaghosa from AN III 314,<sub>21-315,8</sub>.]:

Buddhaghosa further explains another passage in the *Gedha sutta* (AN III, 312), emphasizing that a noble disciple should purify his mind through recollections to attain ultimate purification:

Monks, here, **a noble disciple, recollects *Tathāgata*** in this way: That Blessed One is...[same as AN III, 2,<sup>6-9</sup>,] such a time his mind becomes entirely upright. He has renounced, got free from, and emerged from greed.<sup>78</sup> Monks, greed is a designation for the five objects of sensual desire. Monks, in this case, some sentient beings, also achieve purity by making this [recollection] basis. (Vism 226, <sup>29</sup>, VRI §165)<sup>79</sup>

Let us now explore another significant occurrence of the epithet *Tathāgata*, focusing on its close connection with *Tisaraṇa*.

In Vv, in the section on *Rajjumālāvimāna* (Rajjumālā's mansion),<sup>80</sup> Rajjumālā explains her former birth when asked by a deity (*devatā*). She

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*acchariyaṃ, āvuso, abbhutaṃ, āvuso, yāvañ c' idam tena Bhagavatā jānatā passatā arahatā sammāsambuddhena sambādhe okāsādhigamo anubuddho sattānaṃ visuddhiyā sokaparidevānaṃ samatikkamāya dukkhadomassānaṃ atthaṅgamāya ñāyassa adhiḡamāya nibbānassa sacchikiriyāya, yad idam cha anussatiṭṭhānāni. Katamāni cha? Idh' āvuso, ariyasāvako Tathāgatam anussarati...pe... evam idh' ekacce sattā visuddhidhammā bhavanti ti.*

<sup>78</sup> In PED, *gedha* is defined as greedy desire. It is often connected with craving and worldly attachment, as well as associated with desire, jealousy, envy, etc. (PED 1979, 253, s.v. *gedha* and *gedhī*).

<sup>79</sup> Vism 226,<sup>29</sup> -227,<sup>4</sup>; VRI §165: [The Pāli texts in italics are quotations by Buddhaghosa from AN III 312,<sup>7-16</sup>.]:

*idha, bhikkhave, ariyasāvako Tathāgatam anussarati: iti pi so Bhagavā...pe... ujugatam ev' assa tasmim samaye cittaṃ hoti, nikkhantaṃ muttam vuṭṭhitaṃ gedhamhā. Gedho ti kho, bhikkhave, pañcann' etaṃ kāmaguṇānaṃ idh' adhivacanaṃ. Idam pi kho, bhikkhave, ārammaṇaṃ karitvā evam idh' ekacce sattā visujjhanti ti.*

<sup>80</sup> Here is a summary of Rajjumālā's enlightenment story:

Rajjumālā was a slave in the village of Gayā. Her mistress disliked her and treated her badly. One day, unable to bear her life any longer, Rajjumālā went to a nearby village to commit suicide. There, she found the Buddha, who was waiting for her, and he taught her four noble truths. Rajjumālā became a Stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*), reaching the first stage towards enlightenment. She then returned to her mistress. After hearing Rajjumālā's story, the mistress visited the Buddha and became his follower.

The Buddha explained that in a previous life, their roles were reversed. The current mistress had been a slave and had vowed revenge for the cruelty she had suffered. Rajjumālā was freed from her suffering and, after her death, was reborn in *Tāvātimsa*, a heavenly realm.

describes how she met and took refuge in the *Tathāgata* as a result of the meritorious deeds she performed as a human being. Rajjumālā states:

The *Tathāgata*, having spoken to me with soft words; he said to me, ‘Rajjumālā! go to the *Tathāgata* for refuge’. [837]

I heard his voice, [which was] gentle, meaningful, pure, tender, soft, lovely, and dispels all grief. [838]

The *Tathāgata*, compassionate toward all the world, knowing [that] my mind was prepared, had faith, and mentally pure, and instructed me. [839]

He said to me, this is suffering, this is the origin of suffering, this is the cessation, and the path leading directly to the deathless. [840]

Standing firm in the advice of the compassionate and meritorious one, I attained the deathless, peace, *Nibbāna*, the unchanging state. [841]<sup>81</sup>

The epithet *Tathāgata*, as used in this context, highlights the great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*) of *Tathāgata*, who is always ready to save sentient beings from affliction, a theme that recurs throughout the Pāli scriptures. Rajjumālā’s narrative indicates that the epithet *Tathāgata* is used here in the sense of the commonly translated meaning of ‘**thus come**.’ Dhammapāla further explains this in his commentary:

*He, the Tathāgata, with soft words: with gentle speech. Rajjumālā, having addressed me: having talked. ‘Go to the Tathāgata for refuge’: [who is] thus come and so on; to the Tathāgata: to the*

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Further details: Vv-a, 206ff; DPPN-II, 706.

<sup>81</sup> Vv 837-841:

*So maṃ mudūhi vācāhi ālapitvā tathāgato  
Rajjumāle ti maṃ voca saraṇaṃ gaccha tathāgataṃ. [837]  
Tāhaṃ giram suṇitvāna nelaṃ atthavatiṃ sucim  
saṇhaṃ muduṃ ca vagguṃ ca sabbasokāpanūdanaṃ. [838]  
Kallacittaṃ ca maṃ ṇatvā pasannaṃ suddhamānaṃ  
hito sabbassa lokassa anusāsi tathāgato. [839]  
Idaṃ dukkhaṃ ti maṃ voca ayaṃ dukkhassa sambhavo  
ayaṃ nirodho maggo ca añjaso amatogadho. [840]  
Anukampakassa kusalassa ovādamhi ahaṃ tñhitā  
ajjhagā amataṃ santiṃ nibbānaṃ padam accutaṃ. [841]*

perfectly-awakened one. ‘Go for refuge’ he said to me: [thus he] spoke: [this is] the interpretations. ( Vv-a 213,<sup>32</sup>214,<sup>4</sup>)<sup>82</sup>

Furthermore, in Bv, in the section on the *Dīpaṅkara Chronicle*, we find another reference where the term *Tathāgata* is used in connection with taking refuge along with the five and ten precepts:

The *Tathāgata* established some [people] in coming for **refuge**,  
Some are in the five precepts (moral habits), others are in the tenfold precepts. (Bv 21:189, p.21)<sup>83</sup>

A similar verse is also found in Ap, uttered by Abhaya Thera<sup>84</sup>:

The *Tathāgata* established some [people]<sup>85</sup> in coming for **refuge**,  
Some are established in precept, [some are] in the best ten ways of actions.<sup>86</sup> (Ap II, 502, <sup>15-16</sup>)<sup>87</sup>

Here, in the above two verses, *sīle dasavidhe* and *dasakammappaṭṭha* differ slightly from the five and ten precepts, but the above explanation shows an alternative practice (*sīla*) alongside taking refuge in *Tiratana*.

According to Nakamura ([1980] 1987, 84), *Buddhānussati/Buddhānussmṛti* primarily leads to *samādhi*. This practice became very important in later Buddhism. He identifies four aspects of this practice.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Vv-a 213,<sup>32</sup>214,<sup>4</sup>: *So Tathāgato mudūhi vācāhi saṅhāya vācāya Rajjumāle ti maṃ ālapitvā āmantetvā saraṇaṃ gaccha tathāgatan ti tathā āgato ti ādinā Tathāgataṃ sammāsambuddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchā ti maṃ avoca abhāsī ti yojanā.*

<sup>83</sup> Bv 21:189, p.21: *Saranāgamane kañci nivesesi Tathāgato kañci pañcasu sīlesu sīle dasavidhe paraṃ.*

<sup>84</sup> Ap II, 502-504: *Abhayattherassa apadāna*: a historical monk, commonly known as Abhayarājakumāra, “Abhaya the Royal Prince,” because he was the son of King Bimbisāra of Rajgir. (DPPN I, 127-28).

<sup>85</sup> VRI Burmese edition reads as: *kiñci*

<sup>86</sup> *dasakammappaṭṭha*: SN II, 167,<sup>34</sup>168,<sup>17</sup>; AN V 57,<sup>31</sup>; Vin V, 138,<sup>14</sup>: A fundamentally Buddhist term: a set of ten good, meritorious (*kuśāla*) actions consisting in avoidance of ten bad, demeritorious (*akuśāla*) actions, three of body, four of speech, and three of mind; for a total of ten. See more, PED, 194 (s.v. *kamma*); BHSD, Edgerton, 1953,170. (s.v. *kammappaṭṭha*).

<sup>87</sup> Ap II, 502, <sup>15-16</sup>:

*Saranāgamane kañci nivesesi Tathāgato kañci sīle nivesesi dasakammappaṭṭhame.*

<sup>88</sup> “The first step of adoration of Buddha is shown in the formula of “Adoration to Buddha” (*namo .... sambuddhassa*). Buddha became an object of adoration and

The above references indicate that the practice of *Buddhānussati* is closely associated with the epithet *Tathāgata*, which is used to purify the mind of defilements and prepare it for advanced meditation. These four aspects are closely connected with the epithet *Tathāgata* as an object of meditation.

Therefore, the canonical phrases discussed above clearly show that the epithet *Tathāgata* was used very early as an expression of faith, recollection, and practice.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

This paper has investigated three main aspects: (1) the historical importance of *Tathāgata* in the context of the *Tiratana* and *Tisaraṇa*; (2) how *Tathāgata* relates to the *Dhamma* and *Samgha*; and (3) how the term *Tathāgata*, typically used for the Buddha, can also apply to the *Dhamma* and *Samgha*.

This study first explored the historical significance of *saraṇa* within the *Tisaraṇa* formula. Rather than simply translating ‘*saraṇa*’ as ‘refuge,’ the analysis reveals a deeper, more functional and soteriological meaning. Buddhaghosa and Dhammapāla explain *saraṇa* not through linguistic derivation, but through its protective and liberating role. Buddhaghosa emphasizes the dual aspects of *saraṇa* of ‘remembering’ and ‘eradicating suffering and defilements,’ while Dhammapāla focuses on the outcome of taking refuge—the eradication of misfortune and suffering that perpetuate the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*). Together, these perspectives highlight the central role of *saraṇa* in Buddhist practice as both a protective force and a means of release from suffering within the framework of *Tisaraṇa*.<sup>89</sup>

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also of meditation. The term “*buddhānussmṛti*” in early Buddhist scriptures had four meanings: (1) meditation on the virtues of Buddha; (2) hearing the name of Buddha; (3) repetition of the name of Buddha; and (4) meditation on the figure of Buddha.” Nakamura ([1980] 1987, 84).

<sup>89</sup> See above footnotes 7, 9, 11, 12.

The investigation further examined the historical connection of *Tathāgata* within the framework of *Tisaraṇa* and *Tiratana*. When a *Tathāgata* arises, all three jewels emerge together, emphasizing their relational and contextual significance in guiding practitioners on the path to liberation. This unique timing highlights the relational unity of the three jewels.<sup>90</sup>

Further discussion is that the Buddha frequently refers to himself as *Tathāgata*, often in the third person, within the *Tiratana* formula. This suggests that *Tathāgata* carries more profound implications beyond merely being an epithet for the Buddha. It represents the essence of the *Dhamma* and *Samgha* as well, further emphasizing the relational unity of the three jewels.<sup>91</sup>

This study also analyzed the final three verses (Sn 236-238) of the *Ratana sutta*, which apply the epithet *Tathāgata* not only to the Buddha but also to *Dhamma* and *Samgha*. While Norman's opinion excludes the *Dhamma* and *Samgha* from being directly referred to as *Tathāgata*, this study further investigated the commentarial interpretations which suggest that the term *Tathāgata* can indeed be applied to *Dhamma* and *Samgha* in a similar way.<sup>92</sup> Buddhaghosa and Dhammapāla extend the meaning of *Tathāgata* to encompass *Dhamma* and *Samgha*, emphasizing that the term can permeate all three jewels. Buddhaghosa, in particular, explains that *Tathāgata* applies to the *Dhamma* in two ways: first, as the path (*magga-dhamma*), where one combines the powers of tranquility (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*) to eliminate defilements. In this way, one 'goes' along the path. Second, as *Nibbāna* (*nibbāna-dhamma*), it is the state reached through wisdom, leading to the complete end of suffering. Those who achieve this state, including Buddhas, are said to have 'thus gone' or 'thus come.' Similarly, the *Samgha* is referred to as *Tathāgata*, as they follow the path for their own liberation

<sup>90</sup> See above footnotes 28, 29.

<sup>91</sup> See above footnotes 32, 36, 39.

<sup>92</sup> See above footnotes 49, 50, 52.

and to assist others, thus being called ‘thus gone’ or ‘thus come.’<sup>93</sup>

This paper investigated another significant passage that establishes a causal connection between the three jewels as a unified source of refuge. The practice of recollection (*anussati*) helps practitioners connect with these qualities, forming a complete and interconnected system of refuge.<sup>94</sup> Within this context, the *Tathāgata* represents the ideal refuge on the path to salvation, the *Dhamma* provides the method, and the *Samgha* offers support and guidance. The passage further emphasizes a tiered approach to practice: first, focusing on the Buddha; if that is difficult, focusing on the *Dhamma*; and as a last resort, focusing on the *Samgha*. This approach acknowledges different learning styles and allows individuals to find their most effective method.<sup>95</sup>

In essence, this study deepens the understanding of *Tathāgata*’s role within the *Tisarāṇa* formula, showing that it encompasses not only the Buddha but also the *Dhamma* and *Samgha*. This holistic interpretation highlights the unified nature of the three jewels in guiding practitioners on the path to awakening or liberation, reaffirming the central role of the term *Tathāgata* in both historical and doctrinal contexts.

## Abbreviations and Citations

In this paper, the Pāli quotations of the *Nikāya* texts are all from the Pāli Text Society (PTS) editions. Some post-canonical texts, such as the *Nettipakaraṇa*, *Peṭakopadesa*, *Visuddhimagga*, and commentaries, are also from PTS editions. The *Nettivibhāvinī* [Nett-(a-)] is from the VRI edition. In some cases, parallels from the VRI edition of Pāli literature have also been consulted to verify some textual and doctrinal issues. The VRI editions are based on the *Chattā Saṅgāyana* editions published by VRI at Dhamma Giri, Igatpuri, India. The Pāli quotations appear in bold and underlining have been added for emphasis where needed. All translations from primary sources are mine, unless otherwise stated. I often refer to existing English translations when translating Pāli passages.

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <b>AN</b>   | <i>Āṅguttara Nikāya</i>   |
| <b>AN-a</b> | <i>Āṅguttara Nikāya-aṭṭhakathā</i> ( <i>Manorathapūraṇī</i> by Buddhaghosa) |
| <b>Ap</b>   | <i>Apadāna</i>  |
| <b>Bv</b>   | <i>Buddhavaṃsa</i>  |

<sup>93</sup> See above footnotes 62, 64.

<sup>94</sup> See above footnotes 73, 74, 77, 79, 81, 83, 87.

<sup>95</sup> See above footnote 71.

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| <b>BHSD</b>       | Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary, F. Edgerton, 1953  |
| <b>CPD</b>        | <i>A Critical Pāli Dictionary</i> by V. Trenckner <i>et al.</i>   |
| <b>Dhp</b>        | <i>Dhammapada</i>   |
| <b>Dhp-a</b>      | <i>Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā</i> by Buddhaghosa   |
| <b>DoP</b>        | <i>A Dictionary of Pāli</i> by Margaret Cone  |
| <b>DN</b>         | <i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>   |
| <b>DN-a</b>       | <i>Dīgha Nikāya-aṭṭhakathā</i> ( <i>Sumaṅgala-vilāsinī</i> by Buddhaghosa)  |
| <b>DĀ</b>         | <i>Dirgha-āgama</i> (Chinese, T 1)  |
| <b>DPPN</b>       | <i>Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names</i> by G.P. Malalasekera.  |
| <b>It</b>         | <i>Itivuttaka</i>   |
| <b>It-a</b>       | <i>Itivuttaka-aṭṭhakathā</i> ( <i>Paramattha-Dīpanī</i> II by Dhammapāla)   |
| <b>Ja</b>         | <i>Jātaka</i>   |
| <b>JPTS</b>       | Journal of the Pāli Text Society.   |
| <b>Khp</b>        | <i>Khuddakapāṭha</i>  |
| <b>Khp-a</b>      | <i>Khuddakapāṭha-aṭṭhakathā</i> ( <i>Paramatthajotikā</i> I by Buddhaghosa)   |
| <b>KN</b>         | <i>Khuddaka Nikāya</i>  |
| <b>Mil</b>        | <i>Milindapañha</i>   |
| <b>MN</b>         | <i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>  |
| <b>MN-a</b>       | <i>Majjhima Nikāya-aṭṭhakathā</i> ( <i>Papañcasūdanī</i> by Buddhaghosa)  |
| <b>MW</b>         | <i>Sanskrit-English Dictionary</i> by Monier-Williams, Monier   |
| <b>Mv</b>         | <i>Le Mahāvastu: Texte sanscrit publié pour la première fois et accompagné d'introductions et d'un commentaire</i> , 3 vols., Paris: Impr. Nationale, Senart, Émile., ed., 1882, 1890, 1897.<br>Trans.=The Mahāvastu by J.J. Jones (3 Vol.) 1949, 1952, 1956. |
| <b>Nett</b>       | <i>Nettipakaraṇa</i>  |
| <b>Nett-a</b>     | <i>Nettipakaraṇa-aṭṭhakathā</i>   |
| <b>Nett-(a)-t</b> | Nettivibhāvanī (VRI edition)  |
| <b>Nidd I</b>     | <i>Mahāniddesa</i>  |
| <b>Nidd I-a</b>   | <i>Mahāniddesa-aṭṭhakathā</i> ( <i>Saddhammapajjotikā</i> by Upasena)   |
| <b>Nidd II</b>    | <i>Cullaniddesa</i>   |
| <b>Nidd II-a</b>  | <i>Cullaniddesa-aṭṭhakathā</i> ( <i>Saddhammapajjotikā</i> by Upasena)  |
| <b>PED</b>        | <i>Pāli-English Dictionary</i> by Rhys Davids and Stede   |
| <b>PTS</b>        | Pāli Text Society   |
| <b>Paṭis</b>      | <i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i>  |
| <b>Paṭis-a</b>    | <i>Paṭisambhidāmagga-aṭṭhakathā</i> ( <i>Saddhammapakkāsinī</i> by Mahānāma)  |
| <b>Peṭ</b>        | <i>Peṭakopadesa</i>   |
| <b>Skt</b>        | Sanskrit  |
| <b>SN</b>         | <i>Saṃyutta Nikāya</i>  |
| <b>SN-a</b>       | <i>Saṃyutta Nikāya-aṭṭhakathā</i> ( <i>Sārattha-ppakāśī</i> by Buddhaghosa)   |
| <b>Sn</b>         | <i>Suttanipāta</i>  |
| <b>Sn-a</b>       | <i>Suttanipāta-aṭṭhakathā</i> ( <i>Paramatthajotikā</i> II ) by Buddhaghosa   |
| <b>Sp</b>         | <i>Samantapāsādikā</i> ( <i>Vinaya-aṭṭhakathā</i> ) by Buddhaghosa  |
| <b>T</b>          | Taishō edition (SAT)  |
| <b>Ud</b>         | <i>Udāna</i>  |
| <b>Ud-a</b>       | <i>Udāna-aṭṭhakathā</i> ( <i>Paramattha-Dīpanī</i> I by Dhammapāla)   |
| <b>VRI</b>        | Vipassana Research Institute (Digital texts of CST 4.1)   |
| <b>Vin</b>        | <i>Vinaya Piṭaka</i>  |
| <b>Vism</b>       | <i>Visuddhimagga</i>  |
| <b>Vv</b>         | <i>Vimānavatthu</i>   |
| <b>Vv-a</b>       | <i>Vimānavatthu-aṭṭhakathā</i> ( <i>Paramattha-Dīpanī</i> III by Dhammapāla)  |



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**Keywords:** *Tisaraṇa, Tiratana/Ratanattaya, Tathāgata, Taking Refuge, Precepts, Faith, Recollection, Protection, Awakening, Liberation.*

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## 要 旨

### *Tisarāṇa*（三帰依）の文脈における「如来」 の意味の考察

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*Tisarāṇa*/*Trīśarāṇa*「三帰依」は、初期パーリ經典において仏教の基本的な教えの一つとして示されており、仏教儀式の重要な一部を成している。仏教の伝統において、「三宝」（*Tiratana* または *Ratanattaya*）は、仏（*Buddha*）、法（*Dhamma*）、僧（*Saṃgha*）の三つの信仰対象を示している。

この三宝への「帰依」（*sarāṇa/sarāṇa*）は、多くの在家や出家の儀式で唱えられ、修行者が三宝のそれぞれに帰依して保護されることを正式に宣言したり、悟りと解脱への道に沿った理想的な帰依を認めたりする。ブッダの教えの実践は、帰依することから始まるというと、「なぜ帰依が必要なのか？」という重要な問いが生じる。本稿はこの文脈から、「如来」という称号が仏教信仰と実践の基本的な表現としてどのように用いられているかを考察する。

三宝と三帰依の枠組みの中で、「ブッダ」と「如来」という言葉はしばしば相互に交替して使われるが、それぞれ異なる意味を持っている。このことから、さまざまな文脈で「如来」という称号が三帰依の定形句の中にどのように組み込まれているのかを検討する必要がある。

本論文では、以下の三つの側面に焦点を当てる：

1. 三宝と三帰依における「如来」の意義の歴史的な変遷。
2. 「如来」と法（*Dhamma*）・僧（*Saṃgha*）の関連と解釈。
3. 上記二つの側面に基づいて、「如来」という称号がブッダだけでなく、法や僧にもどのように適用されるのか。

初期の経典 (Sn 236-238; Khp 5-6: 15-17; DN II 155,<sup>19</sup>156<sup>33</sup>; AN III 35,<sup>8</sup>36,<sup>14</sup>; SN I 220, <sup>17-32</sup>Vv 837-841) には、「如来」がブッダ、法、僧のすべてを指す称号として使われていることが示されている。また、後代の経典 (Netti 176,<sup>12-15</sup>) では、「如来」の出現が *Tisarāṇa* 「三帰依」の始まりであることが示唆されている。

これらの重要な用語がどのように関連しているのか、またそれぞれがどのように信仰されるべきかについては、伝統的な注釈書に詳しく説明されている。ブッダゴーサは『パラマッタジョーティカー』(Khp-a 195,<sup>29</sup>196,<sup>1-19</sup>; 170,<sup>19</sup>179; and Sn-a I, 278,<sup>10</sup>) で、法や僧における「如来」の意味を説き、さらに三宝の一部としての「如来」の優れた意味を説明している。また、ダンマパーラの『パラマッタディーパニー』(It-a I 117, <sup>8-18</sup>; Ud-a 153, <sup>16-32</sup>) に見られる別の説明についても検討する。

本研究は、これらの注釈を検討し、*Tisarāṇa* 「三帰依」における「如来」の役割をより深く理解することを目指している。その後、経典と注釈の分析を通じて、「如来」という言葉の具体的な使い方と、法や僧との緻密な関係を探る。さらに、理想的な避難所としての「如来」が、古代から現代に至るまで、悟り、平和、解脱の追求においてどのように重要な役割を果たしているかを考察する。