

Revisiting the Term “*bhaddekaratta*” in the Pāli Canon and Its Variants, Translations, and Interpretations*

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The term *bhaddekaratta* occurs in the title of four consecutive discourses (nos. 131–134) in the *Majjhimanikāya* in the Pāli canon. The first one is directly associated with the Buddha himself while the remaining three discourses are associated with—and respectively named after—three prominent disciples of the Buddha, namely Ānanda, Mahākaccāna, and Lomasakaṅgiya.¹

In the first discourse (no. 131) the Buddha is portrayed as addressing monks in general and proclaims: “O monks, I shall teach you the summary and the exposition of *bhaddekaratta*” (*bhaddekarattassa vo, bhikkhave, uddesaṅ ca vibhaṅgaṅ ca desessāmi*). One of the verses appearing in the main part of the Buddha’s instruction uses the term *bhaddekaratta* which gives the discourse its title. There the Buddha establishes the following:

*evaṃvihāriṃ ātāpiṃ, ahorattam atanditaṃ;
taṃ ve bhaddekarattoti, santo ācikkhate muni.*

“The Peaceful Sage calls indeed [only] one who abides zealously and relentlessly in this [aforesaid] manner night and day the ‘*bhaddekaratta*.’”²

This verse is followed by these three verses:

*atītaṃ nānvāgameyya, nappaṭikaṅkhe anāgataṃ;
yad atītaṃ pahīnaṃ taṃ, appattaṅ ca anāgataṃ.*

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¹ The disciple Lomasakaṅgiya is not as prominent as the other two, but his name still occurs in *Theragāthā* (Th 5), and *Apadāna* (Ap II 504), which includes the verses discussed here.

² My translation.

*paccuppannañ ca yo dhammaṃ, tattha tattha vipassati;
asaṃhīraṃ asaṃkappaṃ, taṃ vidvā -m-anubrūhaye.*

*ajjeva kiccaṃ ātappaṃ, ko jaññā maraṇaṃ suve;
na hi no saṅgarama tena, mahāsenena maccunā.*

One should neither wish back the past nor yearn for the future because the past has [already] passed [while] the future has not [yet] arrived.

When he observes the present state of things here and there, the wise one should devote himself to it so as [to make the observation/contemplation] imperturbable and unshakeable.³

On this very day, one should exert oneself [to achieve the goal]; who knows if death will come [as soon as] tomorrow? There can never be a bargain for us with death who has his mighty forces.

The problem lies in the particular terminology of *bhaddekaratta*. To mention some recent translations: Bhikkhu Bodhi (1995: 1039) translates the verse containing this term as “But one who dwells thus ardently, Relentlessly, by day, by night – It is he, The Peaceful Sage has said, *Who has had a single excellent night*”. Ṭhānissaro (2002: 343), on the other hand, offers the translation as “Whoever lives thus ardently, relentlessly both day & night, has *truly had an auspicious day*: So says the Peaceful Sage”. However, in Anālayo (2011: 758, n. 15), the translation is “Dwelling diligently like this, day and night without laziness, *to him indeed, the night is auspicious*, so the peaceful sage has explained.” Sujāto (2018)⁴ understands this verse as “The peaceful sage explained it’s those who keenly meditate like this, tireless all night and day, *who truly have that one fine night*.”

This term as the title of the *sutta* was translated as “Discourse on an Excellent Single Night” by Baums (2015: BEB I 411b) and in the same volume as “discourse on a person, for whom (day and) night are auspicious” by von Hinüber (2015: BEB I 419b) with the additional remark “(comp. Skt. *ekarātra*, ‘[duration of] one day and night’)”. The term *bhadda* is the least problematic part of this compound. It means “good, auspicious, fortunate, excellent”, etc. in the Pāli canon. The Skt. form of this term

³ For these two important terms (*asaṃhīraṃ, asaṃkappaṃ*) see Bodhi 1995: 1343, endnote 1213. This pair is used as description of *nirvāṇa* in the *Suttanipāta* (v. 1149) or the liberated mind in the *Theragāthā* (v. 649), but as Bhikkhu Bodhi notes following the commentary: “here it seems to refer to a stage in the development of insight”. This is noteworthy, as the commentary explains: “insight is ‘invincible unshakeable’ because it is not vanquished or shaken by lust and other defilements”.

⁴ <https://suttacentral.net/mn131/en/sujato>: last accessed 06.07.2021.

bhadda, i.e. *bhadra* also appears, though less often, in the same meaning. (See PTSD s.v. *bhadda & bhadra*. For this phenomenon see also von Hinüber 1986:124 § 258.)⁵

The commentaries offer little help in analyzing the compound here or in understanding the meaning of this keyword properly. Semantically, it could be a *tatpuruṣa* with the meaning: “attached exclusively to what is good [i.e., dwelling absolutely in the present, mindfully, without worrying about the past or the future]” (*ratta* as Skt. *rakta*) or a *bahuvrīhi* with the meaning “one who has a single auspicious night” (*ratta* as Skt. *rātra* or *rātri*).

For instance, the *Majjhimanikāya* commentary simply says laconically:

Here, “**of the *bhaddekaratta***” means “because his one night is auspicious as he applies himself [to insight meditation] in this manner” (*tattha bhaddekarattassāti vipassanānuyogasamannāgatattā bhaddakassa ekarattassa*: MN-a V 1).⁶

A little later the commentary explains:

“***bhaddekaratto***” [is a *bahuvrīhi* in the sense of] “for whom one night is auspicious”, [viz.] because he applies himself [to insight meditation] in this manner; therefore, the Sage, [i.e.,] the Buddha, who is peaceful because he has destroyed passion etc., speaks of that person who applies himself in this way [to insight meditation] [with the words] “this [person] is one for whom one night is auspicious”. (*evaṃ paṭipannattā bhaddo ekaratto assāti bhaddekaratto. iti taṃ evaṃ paṭipannapuggalaṃ bhaddekaratto ayaṃ ti rāgādīnaṃ santatāya santo buddhamuni ācikkhati*: MN-a V 3).

Similarly, the sub-commentary (*ṭīkā*) to MN interprets it thus:

⁵ These verses where the Buddha summarizes this particular piece of teaching are also called *bhaddekarattiyo gāthā* in the *sutta* no. 134 and its commentary.

⁶ The CPD quotes this passage in its explanation of the term *ekaratta* (s.v. *ekarātra*). It says: *ekaratta*, mfn. [sa. -*rakta*], having a single attachment, being attached to one thing; *Bhaddekarattassā ti vipassanānuyogasamannāgatattā bhaddakassa — assa*. This seems to be the only place where the possibility of *ekaratta* as *ekarakta* is taken into account. Hence this makes the compound a *tatpuruṣa* and not a *bahuvrīhi*, as in later commentaries. A similar kind of phenomenon can be observed in the early commentaries, where the interpretation of “not-self” (*anattā*) is generally understood as “not being under one’s control”/“not being subjected to mastery” (*anattāti avasavattanaṭṭhena anattā*: AN-a II 380; III 125; IV 195, etc.). It was then later additionally interpreted as “no-self” (*attasuñña*: “devoid of self”) (*avasavattanaṭṭhena anattā attasuñña assāmikā anissarāti attho*: Dh-p-a III 406) or as ‘rejection of self’ (*attapaṭikkhepaṭṭhena*) in the sub-commentaries (*anattāti avasavattanaṭṭhena asāmikāṭṭhena suññataṭṭhena attapaṭikkhepaṭṭhenāti evaṃ catūhi kāraṇehi anattā*: Sp-ṭīkā: CSCD III 168). For the ‘no-self theory’ and the ‘not-self contemplation’ see Schmithausen 2014: 633ff.

ekaratta [means] one night; [*bhaddekaratta* is a *bahuvrīhi* compound in the sense of] “he who (/that which) has one auspicious night”: a person who cultivates insight which has (i.e., lasts, continues for) one auspicious night (*bhaddekarattam vipassanam*, both acc. sg. fem.); therefore it is said: **because he is devoted to insight** [meditation]. And since he exerts himself concerning this [insight], he (= the person) [himself, too,] is called “having one auspicious night” in so far as he goes together with (i.e., is accompanied or qualified by) [the insight] that lasts for one auspicious night. (*ekā ratti ekaratto, bhaddo ekaratto etassāti bhaddekarattam, vipassanam paribrūhento puggalo. tenāha – “vipassanānuyogasamannāgatattā” ti. tam uddissa pavattiyā pana bhaddekarattasahacaraṇato bhaddekaratto: MN-ṭīkā CSCD*).

Two problems arise with this interpretation. What does the word “single” (*eka*) mean precisely here? Why should the insight-practitioner have only one auspicious night? Apart from that, why should his night (*ratta*) be auspicious? Is there any internal evidence to justify the explanation given in the sub-commentary? In none of the four discourses is there any special reference to night-time, other than the simple common adverb *ahorattam* (day and night) in the same verse where we find our problematic expression *bhaddekaratta* (I will return to this point later). The only other references to night-time are the conversation between a certain deity and the monk Samiddhi (*sutta* no. 133) and the conversation between the deity Candana and the monk Lomasakaṅgiya, which takes place at night (which is not very extraordinary, as discussions with the deities often happen at night in canonical narratives).

All of these difficulties are discussed in detail by Bhikkhu Bodhi in his translation of the *Majjhimanikāya* in an endnote (Bodhi 1995: 1342, n. 1210). There, Bhikkhu Bodhi hints at the Central Asian Sanskrit and the Tibetan versions. The Tibetan translation has a slightly changed version of our term, i.e., *bhadrakarātri*, which eliminates the uncomfortable word *eka* (or changing *-e-* to *-a-* to “convert a difficult reading into a more familiar one”) and conforms to the term *rātra*, i.e., night. Bhikkhu Bodhi notes, “The Chinese *Madhyamāgama* has merely transliterated the title of the Skt. version and thus offers no help.”

Further, Bhikkhu Bodhi quotes Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli in the original translation who suggests that *bhaddekaratta* could be a “popular phrase taken over by the Buddha and given a special sense by him, as was not infrequently done, but there seems to be no reason to do so and there is no evidence for it in this case. It is more likely to be a term coined by the Buddha himself to describe a certain aspect of development.”

At the beginning of the same footnote, Bhikkhu Bodhi already remarks:

In the first edition I followed Ñm [sc. Ñāṇamoli] in rendering *bhaddekaratta* as “one fortunate attachment.” At the suggestion of Ven. Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu,

however, I have changed it to “a single night,” which seems more likely to be correct.

This topic is later taken up by Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda (1973), Anālayo (2008, 2011), Hsu-Feng Lee (2017: 219, 227) and recently by Kathrin Holz (2021).

Bhikkhu Bodhi mentions the study of Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda but does not comment on Ñāṇananda’s interpretation of *bhaddekaratta* as “the ideal lover of solitude” (1995: 1342, n. 1209).

Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda understands *bhadda* as ideal, *eka* as solitude, and *ratta* as “lover” (PPP of *rañj*). By doing so, Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda follows Neumann (1956: 977), who has translated this term as *glückseligeinsam* (“blissful-lonely”) (“Wer also ausharrt unverzagt und unermüdlich Tag und Nacht, / Glückseligeinsam ist er da, Der stille Denker, wie man sagt”). However, Neumann does not take *eka* as an abstract noun, but rather as an adverb. To interpret *eka* as solitude there must be something like *ekatta*, unless this is rather meant as a gloss or paraphrase. I. B. Horner (1959, xxvi–xxvii) already criticized this rendering by saying: “But *ekatta* is loneliness; *ekaratta* usually means ‘for one night’” (quoted by Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda 1973: 2).

I. B. Horner also pointed out the difficulty of understanding *ekaratta* as “one night.” She emphasized: “But the *Bhaddekaratta Suttas* do not appear to envisage withdrawal from thoughts of the past, future, and present for so little as one night. On the contrary, the verses that form the *mātikā* say that the person to be called *bhaddekaratta* is he who abides ardently and unweariedly day and night, that is, surely, for some consecutive time lasting longer than ‘one night’” (quoted by Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda 1973: 2).

For his part, Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli similarly interpreted *ratta* as Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda did sometime later, using the milder expression “attached” (though still very strong and somewhat negative to Buddhist sensitivity!) instead of (the spiritually repulsive) “lover.” Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda quotes Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli as saying:

The Pāli word *ratta* (adj.) or *ratti* (n.) in this instance is from the root *raj* (*rañjati*, *rajjati*: “to take pleasure in”; e.g., *ettha me rañjati mano*: “here my mind delights” [Sn verse 424]). So the *bhaddekaratta* appears as one who is applying himself invincibly, unshakably to know and to study the present state as it occurs (see verse). This application or attachment is auspicious or fortunate because it leads to liberation (Venerable Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, Translation of the *Majjhimanikāya* (unpublished) quoted by Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda 1973: 2–3).

Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli pinpoints the real difficulty in taking the meaning of *ratta* as night by saying: “The much more common meaning of the Pāli word *ratti* is ‘night’ (Skt. *rātra*). But (neither the commentary nor sub-commentary decides the point) if we attempt to interpret the term *bhaddekaratta* as ‘one who has a single auspicious night’

and the commentarial passages accordingly (... [the word is unintelligible in the ms.] ... grammatically possible), it is hard to make satisfactory sense of the context.” (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, Translation of the *Majjhimanikāya* (unpublished) quoted by Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda 1973: 2–3)

In an unpublished manuscript,⁷ Hellmuth Hecker (1972: 272b) suggests:

If one distances oneself from the familiar KEN translation “the blissful lonesome song”, one can also understand *bhaddekaratto* in the following way: One who “*eka*” = solely (= and only) delights in and is uplifted by and enthusiastic about (*ratto* of *rajjati*) *bhaddo*, namely in the inner happiness (the state of being “elevated”, i.e. not on/with regard to outer things) that arises as inner brightness in the one who “day and night” fervently seriously perseveres as described in the stanzas before. Instead of “enthusiastic about the contemplation happiness”, one could then approximately translate as something like “delighted only by inner well-being”.⁸

Anālayo surveys the textual parallels of Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese traditions and provides us with an overview of them, so that the parallelism can be seen immediately.

The parallel versions in various Buddhist traditions which he gives in three of his footnotes are very useful.⁹ They are therefore reproduced here. The first footnote supplies information about the Chinese translations:

MĀ 165 at T I 696c7: 跋地羅帝, yielding the early middle Chinese pronunciation *bat di^h la tej^h* (following Pulleyblank 1991: 27, 76 and 203). Sanskrit fragment versions of this expression can be found in SHT III Nr. 816 V3

⁷ This manuscript has in the meantime been published under the title *Wegweiser zu den Lehrreden des Buddha: Ein Kommentar zu den 152 Reden des Buddha aus der Mittleren Sammlung* by Verlag Beyerlein & Steinschulte with the cooperation of Lothar Nestler in 2014. The above remark is abridged to a short note on page 193: “Titel: *Bhadda* (glücklich) *eka* (allein, einsam) *ratta* (PP zu *rañjati* = färben. Daher herzgefärbt, selig).”

⁸ My translation. The original German text: ‘Wenn man sich von der Gewöhnung an die KEN-Übersetzung “der Glückseligeinsamen Sang” frei macht, kann man *bhaddekaratto* auch so verstehen: Einer, der sich “*eka*” = einzig und allein (= nur noch) am *bhaddo* (dem -inneren- Glück, dem Zustand des “high” seins, also nicht an äußeren Dingen) erfreut und erhebt und begeistert (*ratto* von *rajjati*), nämlich an dem inneren Glück, das als innere Helligkeit bei dem aufkommt, der “Tag und Nacht” glühend ernst so ausharrt, wie in den Strophen vorher beschrieben. Statt “begeistert in der Einkehr Glück” könnte man dann übersetzen (etwa): “einzig von innerem Wohl beglückt” o.ä.’ (reproduced by the present writer without changes to the ms.)

⁹ Anālayo 2011 examines in detail the extant parallels in his comparative study on the *Majjhimanikāya*. I prefer to use his 2008 article for quoting the parallels because of its brevity and clear structure. See also Kashiwahara 1990 for Chinese parallels (I owe this information to Prof. Shobha Rani Dash, Otani University in Kyoto, Japan).

in Waldschmidt 1971: 32, which reads: *bhadragarātrīya* (cf. also R2), and in fragment 3b3 in Minayeff 1983: 243, which reads: *bhadrakarātrīyaḥ*. The Tibetan version Q *mdo shu* 171a7 (used throughout this study as a representative of the altogether five extant versions) speaks of an “auspicious night”, *mtshan mo bzang po*, corresponding to *bhadrakarātrī*. MN 133 at MN III 192,11 reads *bhaddekaratta*. Bodhi in Ñāṇamoli 2005: 1342 note 1210 explains that “*ratta* and *ratti* could be taken to represent respectively either Skt. *rātra* and *rātri* (= night) or Skt. *rakta* and *rakti* (= attachment)”. The Sanskrit and Tibetan versions support the first alternative (Anālayo 2008: 24–5, n. 31).

According to the second footnote, parallels to this verse can also be found in the *Yogācārabhūmi*, T 1579 at T XXX 387c28. See also Enomoto 1989: 35 and Wayman 1989: 209; further parallels are listed in Skilling 1997: 82 (Anālayo 2008: 25, n. 40).

The third footnote mentions that the second part of this verse in MN 133 at MN III 193,19 instead reads: “to him, indeed, the night is auspicious, so the peaceful sage has explained”, *taṃ ve bhaddekaratto ’ti, santo ācikkhate muni*. The corresponding part in T 1362 at T XXI 882a8 reads: “for this reason I, the sage, have now expounded the discourse on an auspicious night”, 是故我牟尼, 善夜經今說. The relevant part of this verse in Q *mdo shu* 172b2 reads: “for this reason the discourse on an auspicious night has always been taught by the sage”, *de phyir mtshan mo bzang po yi, mdo sde thub pas rtag tu gsungs* (Anālayo 2008: 26, n. 43).

It is worthy noting that the Chinese parallel quoted in this third footnote (43), namely T 21.1362: 882a8 does not provide an equivalent for *eka* (善夜經, **Bhadra-rātri/rātra-sūtra*).

At this juncture, I would like to draw readers’ attention to a passage from the *Yogācārabhūmi*,¹⁰ *Cintāmayībhūmi* (YBh CintBh) ms fol 138a4ff in which the relevant passage on the *bhadraikarātrīya-gāthās* is mentioned, quoted (one verse of them), and commented on. This version regarding the term *bhaddekaratta* has not been mentioned or listed in the scholarly publications until now, and has consequently been neglected. This particular passage in the *Cintāmayībhūmi* of the *Yogācārabhūmi* has been transcribed and edited by Lambert Schmithausen (comparing the manuscript YBh ms¹¹

¹⁰ This work of ca. 4th centuries CE is assigned to Maitreya and/or Asaṅga by tradition but was most probably the product of a fairly complex process of compilation. For discussions on its authorship and date, see Deleanu 2006 (vol. I, 154ff) and Delhey 2017.

¹¹ See Delhey 2013: 504ff and 520 for the history and details of this manuscript. See also Bandurski 1994: 9–126. Recent and more readable photography of this manuscript was kindly made available for Prof. Schmithausen just before finalizing this article by Prof. Ahn Sung-Doo of Seoul National University in South Korea.

with the Chinese and Tibetan versions). He has kindly made it available for me to use in the present paper. The edited script is attached to this paper as an appendix at the end. The relevant passage reads (my translation):

The wise one should neither wish back¹² the past nor yearn for the future; [instead] he should observe the present states of things through insight in each case and devote himself to the Immovable and the Unshakable.

Likewise the verses of “*bhadraikarā[tri]*”:¹³

Here, a certain person, having obtained faith in the teaching and discipline¹⁴ expounded by the Tathāgata, has gone forth¹⁵ from his house to a homeless state [so as to become a recluse] through the very right faith.¹⁶ [Then] he leads an extremely pure religious life, according to five aspects.

He becomes indifferent to matters¹⁷ of lay life which he has already given up. He does not intend to cling to them and he does not cling to them again. This is the first aspect.

Again, he does not desire future matters connected with advantages and favours (or gain and respect) in this very life, nor does he follow the religious life hoping for things of the heavenly and human [realms] in [his] next life. This is the second aspect.

Moreover, as regards the **present phenomena**, i.e., those comprised in the aggregates subjected to clinging, viz. the material body etc., fixed on them (*teṣv*) he **is** correctly **aware** that “the evil person who behaves badly gets evil results in this very life and in the yonder world. If I behaved badly ...”, so [to be extended] in detail according to the *sūtra*¹⁸ until: “having given up the bad behaviour through the body he cultivates the good behaviour of the body.” In the same way, good behaviour through words and mind are to be understood. Moreover, he

¹² Cf. CPD I 258b; perhaps “nachtrauern” in German. Ch. [T 30.1579: 387c28] reads 戀 = to hanker after.

¹³ See the commentary *ekarātri* and Tib., but Ch. is like the ms. (see n. 42).

¹⁴ See Abhayawansa (2021) for a detailed and convincing discussion on *dhammavinaya*.

¹⁵ *pravrajito* is to be understood verbally (= gone forth) and in connection with *bhavati* in the sense of an act of the past that continues in the present (see Hendriksen 1944: 75f § 25).

¹⁶ *samyag eva śraddhayā*. Waldschmidt (1989) translates (p. 349 § 4) “instigated by the right faith”, and a little bit later (§ 14) “through the very right faith”; so apparently also the Chin. transl. of the YBh passage [30.1579: 388a3: 以正信心]; but possibly *samyag eva* is to be connected with *pravrajito bhavati*, at least according to the Tib. translation of the CintBh passage: P Dzi 303b5: *dad pas khyim nas khyim med par legs pa kho nar rab tu byung la*, i.e., approximately: “through [his] faith has gone forth ... in precisely the right way”. The formula is also found in SWTF s.v. *samyak* [+ *eva*] and s.v. *pravrajita*.

¹⁷ What the term *saṃskārāḥ* really means here is not clear; perhaps “things” or even “circumstances” or the like?

¹⁸ See AN I 48f.

observes the aggregates, i.e., material bodies etc., that belong to the past, present, and future as transitory, [and he realizes that] “that which is transitory is unsatisfactory, that which is unsatisfactory is not-self, that which is not-self does not belong to me ...” [so] up to “this is not my self.” In this way he perceives [things] as they really are by means of right insight. This is the third aspect.

Moreover, having achieved the first insight into the phenomena, his mental faculties (sc. *saddhindriya* etc.) being mature, he **devotes himself to** [acquiring] the pieces of equipment of [religious] meritorious acts and knowledge for the sake of detachment¹⁹ in the future, [i.e.,] **the Immovable**,²⁰ that which cannot be taken away by the kings, etc. This is the fourth aspect.

Moreover, having achieved the second insight into the phenomena, in this very life he **devotes himself to** *nirvāṇa*,²¹ that which is **Unshakable** by all the [major] defilements/afflictions and secondary defilements/afflictions. This is the fifth aspect.

[Consequently,] his religious life that is absolutely pure through the five aspects becomes **excellent**, most excellent and surpasses all [other forms of] religious life, *even if he abides in it [only for] one night (ekarātrisanniśrito 'pi)*.

This is the concise explanation of what was said: in short, the Blessed One has explained, in his well proclaimed teaching and discipline, the living of religious life that is pure in every way and extraordinary. This should in this [case] be understood as an explanation in summary.

In this passage, the expression *bhadraikarātra* (note that the text explicitly says *ekarātrisanniśrito*, taking the *eka* seriously) is interpreted in quite a different way by taking *bhadra* as an adjective applied to one’s religious life rather than to the night and understanding *ekarātri* as an adverb, thus supplying a better meaning “even if he abides in it (i.e., religious life [practising insight in the above-mentioned way]) [exclusively for] one night, it [i.e., the life of religious life] becomes excellent.”

It also makes more sense to praise and recommend a religious aspect or a practice as “excellent” rather than a natural phenomenon like night. If it is the night which is praised here (as in translations like “excellent night”), this might be the only occurrence to my knowledge where the Buddha praises a natural phenomenon, even if merely in a metaphorical sense.

¹⁹ *āyatyām abhinirvide*. See Delhey I 2009: 225: *yo bhavyaḥ parinirvāṇāyābhinirvide*. The term *abhinirvid* can mean: inner detachment (innere Loslösung, innere Abkehr); turning away towards (sich wenden ab/hin zum) *nirvāṇa*. Or: *abhinirbhid*; successful breaking through/away (Durchbruch).

²⁰ So CPD. The following explanation of the text here, however, seems to rather assume the meaning “what cannot be confiscated/taken away”; See PTSD s.v. *saṃhīrati* “to be drawn away or caught in.” Here in the text: *asaṃhāryam*, sc. °*sambhāram*.

²¹ Or: he **devotes himself to** *nirvāṇa* in this very life.

Some reflections

The interpretation of Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda (1973) in *Ideal Solitude: An Exposition of the Bhaddekaratta Sutta*

Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda translates *bhaddekaratto* as a “lover of solitude” or “the one attached to solitude,” interpreting *eka* (“one, alone, single”) as solitude. As I have already mentioned above, this meaning was first suggested by Neumann (glückseligeinsam) and rejected by I. B. Horner, who simply says: “But *ekatta* is loneliness; *ekaratta* usually means ‘for one night.’” Certainly, *ekaratta(m)* (“one night” or as adv. “for one night”) is attested many times in PTC (p. 433), along with *ekaratti(m)*, but neither means solitude. To mean “the one attached to solitude,” the compound should be *bhaddekattaratto*, not *bhaddekaratto*.

Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda points out the semantical relationship between the content of the *Bhaddekarattasutta* in the MN and the *Theranāmasutta* of the *Samyuttanikāya* (SN II 282f). The *Theranāmasutta* explains the expression *ekavihāra* in the same way as the *Bhaddekarattasutta* describes the *vipassanā*. That is to say, the person who is called *bhaddekaratto* by the Peaceful Sage does not wish back the past nor yearn for the future, but only cultivates the right attitude for the present, i.e., seeing things as they really are. In the *Theranāmasutta* of the SN, it is said that the Buddha explains the *ekavihāra* to a monk named Thera. While accepting that *ekavihāra* can simply mean “exclusively living all alone,” he gives a special meaning to this expression by emphasizing the following: “And how, Elder, is dwelling alone fulfilled in detail? Here, Elder, what lies in the past has been abandoned, what lies in the future has been relinquished, and desire and lust (*chandarāga*) for present forms of individual existence have been thoroughly removed. It is in such a way, Elder, that dwelling alone is fulfilled in detail” (Bodhi 2000, 721; SN II 283: *kathaṅ ca, thera, ekavihāro vitthārena paripuṇṇo hoti. idha, thera, yaṃ atītaṃ taṃ pahīnaṃ, yaṃ anāgataṃ taṃ paṭinissaṭṭhaṃ, paccuppannesu ca atabhāvapaṭilābhesu chandarāgo suppaṭiviniṭo. evaṃ kho, thera, ekavihāro vitthārena paripuṇṇo hotī’ti*). This is exactly what the *bhaddekarattiya-gāthas* also intend to convey.

Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda has already pointed out that a second sutta in SN, namely the *Migajālasutta* (SN IV 35f), also defines the *ekavihāra* in the same way. In this *sutta*, the Buddha emphasizes once again that the person who truly lives in solitude is one who has got rid of lust (*taṇhā hi ’ssa dutiyā, sā’ssa pahīnā. tasmā ekavihārī ti vuccatī ti*), whereas somebody who lives alone in apparent seclusion but is not free from the fetters of delight (*nandisaṃyojanasaṃyutto*) cannot be considered as truly living in solitude. Instead, he should be considered as “one dwelling with a companion” (*sadutiyaivihārī*). Here, the companion is not a real person but a psychological factor. This *sutta* only differs from the four *Bhaddekarattasuttas* in that it does not espouse being mindful of the present moment by totally ignoring the past and the future, as the

Bhaddekarattasutta and the *Theranāmasutta* do. In the canon, the term *ekavihāra/ekavihārī* is defined only in these two *suttas*, as far as I can see.

To my mind, Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda demonstrates convincingly that the *Theranāmasutta* has the same content for *ekavihāra* as the *bhaddekarattiya gāthās* have in our *suttas* for *vipassanā*. Along with some other examples, it presents a strong case for understanding *eka* as “alone, in solitude” in *ekavihāra*.²² Here, one could also assume a *madhyamapadalopa samāsa* (a compound in which the middle member is omitted)²³ and posit a construction like *bhaddeka[vihāra]ratto*.

There is another term that parallels *ekavihāra* in the canonical and paracanonical Buddhist literature and which should be considered in this discussion. This interestingly similar concept is *ekārāmatā* (DP vol. I, p. 530 s.v. *eka*: “f., abstr., delight in solitude”) which occurs only in the *Mahāgovindasutta* in the *Dīghanikāya* as a special character trait of the Buddha. Parallel to *ekavihāra*,²⁴ *ekārāmatā* seems to share the common word *eka*, with its meaning of “solitude.” Although *eka* is commonly translated as “solitude,” strictly speaking it is only used as an easy paraphrase of “solitary [living etc.]” (adj.) rather than as the abstract noun “solitude.” This usage applies to both *ekavihāra* and *ekārāma*.

The *Mahāgovindasutta* states as follows:

laddhasahāyo kho pana so bhagavā sekhānañ ceva paṭipannānaṃ khīṇāsavānañ ca vusitavataṃ. te bhagavā apanujja²⁵ ekārāmatam anuyutto viharati. evaṃ

²² Here, *eka*° means “as [merely] one” or “alone” (in essivic function in the sense of *ekatvena*, but not in the function of a locative in the sense of *ekatve* that would probably not work); similarly *ekacara*, *ekacārika*, *ekavāsa*, etc.; with *ekārāma* it probably does not work.

²³ Other classical examples for this kind of compound are: *śākha[priya]pārthiva* (vegetable-king = a king fond of vegetables), *chāyā[yukta]druma* (shade-tree = a tree giving a shade), *guḍa[misṛita]dhānā* (sugar-grains = [fried] grains [mixed with] sugar), *śiñja[yukta]valaya* (jingle-bracelet = bracelet having jingle bells).

²⁴ It is interesting to note that both words *ārāma* and *vihāra* are also used for a monastery in the course of the development of the monastical order of Buddhism.

²⁵ *apanujja*, the absolutive of the verb *apanudati* (to drive away, to remove), can also be divided in two ways, namely, *apa+nujja* and *a+pa+nujja* (not having driven away or not having removed). The commentary (DN-a II 652) understands it here without negation (*apanujjāti tesam majjhepi phalasaṃpattiyā viharanto cittaṃ apanujja, apanujjeva ekārāmatam anuyutto viharatīti attho*: “*apanujja* means that even among them, [i.e., both *sekha* and *arahanta* bhikkhus, the Buddha] withdraws himself by heart while dwelling in the attainment of fruition; having withdrawn himself he dwells in seclusion”). The absolutive *panujja* occurs a few times in the canon (SN IV 71: *manomayaṃ gehasitañ ca sabbaṃ panujja*: Bodhi 2000: 1174: “having dispelled every mind-state bound to the home life”; Sn 361/359: *panujja kāme*: Bodhi 2017: 215: “having discarded sensual pleasures”; Sn 540/535: *saññaṃ tividham panujja pañkam*: Bodhi 2017: 246: “having dispelled the threefold perception [and] the mire”; Sn 1061/1055: *nandiñ ca nivesanañ ca panujja*: Bodhi 2017: 332: “having dispelled delight and attachment”), so to combine it with a negation is not impossible. Neither CPD nor DP mention the possibility with negation in the entry *apanujja*; MVu III 200,16

ekārāmatam anuyuttam iminā p'aṅgena samannāgataṃ satthāraṃ neva atītaṃse samanupassāma, na pan' etarahi, aññatra tena bhagavatā (DN II 223).

The Buddha has gained companions, both learners who are in training and ones who have eliminated all the defilements and accomplished [the goal of] the religious life. The Buddha devotes himself to delight in solitude and sends them away.²⁶ I do not see any teacher, past or present, who is endowed with this quality, other than the Buddha.

DN-a does not comment especially on this term, but the MN-a utilizes this term while commenting on the *Mahāsuññatasutta* and describing any monk “who stands out in the order of the Buddha by applying himself fully to solitude after taking up the root meditational object to which he attends after [his] midday-meal, and having cleaned that [eating] place and purified/washed himself” (*pacchābhatte pana divāṭṭhānaṃ sammajjitvā sudhotahatthapādo mūlakammaṭṭhānaṃ gahetvā ekārāmatam anuyutto bhikkhu buddhasāsane sobhati*). Nevertheless, the commentary is not very clear about the term *ekārāmatā*, because this could also mean “having only one object of delight.” Based on the syntax, it could also refer to the meditational object he has just taken up. The context nonetheless seems to favor the interpretation of “solitude,” as the previous sentence speaks of a monk who does not stand out in the order because he is attached to the company of others and neglects his meditation.

has *pranudya*, and also the *Mahāgovindasūtra* in Sanskrit (Hahlweg 1954: 38). Modern translations of the Pāli canon seem to assume a negation in this case and translate accordingly.

There are some occasions the Buddha preferred to be alone and did not want to be approached by his disciples or anybody other than one attendant who brought him alms-food (SN III 94 and Ud 41: *yasmim, āvuso, samaye bhagavā sāmaṃ senāsanam saṃsāmetvā pattacīvaram ādāya anāmantetvā upaṭṭhāke anapaloketvā bhikkhusaṅgham eko adutiyo cārikaṃ pakkamati, ekova bhagavā tasmim samaye viharitukāmo hoti; na bhagavā tasmim samaye kenaci anubandhitabbo hotī ti*: “Friend, whenever the Blessed One has set his lodging in order himself, taken his bowl and robe, and without informing his personal attendants, without taking leave of the Bhikkhu Saṅgha, he has set out on tour alone, without a companion, he wishes to dwell alone. On such occasion, the Blessed One should not be followed by anyone.” Bodhi 2000: 921; SN V 12, 13, 319, 325, etc.: *icchāmaṃ, bhikkhave, aḍḍhamāsam (temāsam) paṭisalliyitum. namhi kenaci upasaṅkamitabbo, aññatra ekena piṇḍapātanihārakenā ti*: “Bhikkhus, I wish to go into seclusion for a half a month (/three months). I should not be approached by anyone except the one who brings me alms-food.” Bodhi 2000:1531)

²⁶ Rhys Davids 1899–1921: II 262: “Them does he **not** send away, but dwells in fellowship with them whose hearts are set on one object.” Walshe (1995: 302): “... and the Lord dwells **together with them**, all rejoicing in one thing.” Sujāto (<https://suttacentral.net/dn19/en/sujato>, last accessed 31.07.2021): “The Buddha is committed to the joy of solitude, but **doesn't** send them away.” Neumann 1957: 335: “Freunde gefunden hat aber auch Er, der Erhabene, so bei den Kämpfern, die weiter schreiten, als bei den Wahnversiegten, die angelangt sind: **ohne sie abzuweisen** bleibt der Erhabene alleinsam zufrieden.”

The Sanskrit parallel to this *sutta* in the *Mahāvastu* (composed between ca 2nd century BCE–4th century CE) speaks of: “one who is alone being separated from the group, alone, delights in solitude, and applies himself to the state of delighting in solitude” (*eko gaṇād vyapakṛṣṭo, eko ekārāmo ekārāmatam anuyukto*, Marciniak 2019: vol. III. 251).

The *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, a later Buddhist text ascribed to Śāntideva (7th–8th century CE), quotes the *Akṣayamatisūtra* (an early Mahāyāna text, ca. first or second century CE according to Braarvig 1993) that uses this terminology of *ekārāmatā* twice in explaining tranquility (*śamatha*) and the practice of the equipment of dharma (*dharma-saṃbhārayoga*).²⁷

This echoes the concept and the wording of an old verse in the *Dhammapada* (305): “Sitting alone, lying down alone, walking alone, diligent [in meditation], the one who restrains himself alone will find delight in [the solitude in] the forest.”²⁸

The term *ekārāmatā* seems to be very archaic, and seems to appear first (?) in the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (XI.5.7.1), which Eggeling 1900 (Part V) translates as “delighted in the one thing,” (p. 99) leaving room for speculation as to what this “one thing” in the relevant passage might be.²⁹ Eggeling quotes Sāyaṇa here in a footnote and makes the comment: “Sāyaṇa seems to take ‘*ekārāmatā*’ in the sense of ‘remaining always the same,’ –*eka eva sann ā samantād bhavātīti {ramātīti?} ekārāmas tasya bhāvaḥ*” (p. 99, n. 6).³⁰

If one examines the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* more closely, it is clear that this term should mean “delight in solitude” because it suits the other attributes of a Brahmin who is devoted to the study of the scriptures (*svādhyāya*). The text says: “... [H]e becomes ready minded and independent of others, and day by day he acquires wealth. He sleeps peacefully, he is the best physician for himself; and (peculiar) to him are restraint of the senses, delight in the one thing, growth of intelligence, fame and the (task of) perfecting the people” (Eggeling 1900, V. 99–100: *yuktamanā bhavaty aparādhīno 'harahar*

²⁷ ... *ekāgratā ekārāmatā saṃgaṇikāvarjanatā vivekaratiḥ kāyavivekaś cittāvibhramo 'raṇy[ābhi]-mukhamanasikāratālpecchatā...*: (*Śikṣāsamuccaya*, Vaidya 1961: 67, 20–21; Akṣ Braarvig 1993: 167); ... *saṃgaṇikāvivarjanam ekārāmatā arāṇyābhimukhamanaskāratā āryavaṃśasantuṣṭiḥ* ... (*Śikṣā* Vaidya 1961: 106,15; Akṣ Braarvig 1993: 170).

²⁸ *ekāsanam ekaseyyam, eko caram atandito| eko damayam attānam, vanante ramito siyā||*. Dhṛp 305 has parallels which are in similar verbatim in the Patna and Gandhārī *Dhammapadas*, and the *Udānavarga*.

²⁹ MW gives the interpretation: “having but one object of pleasure” for the term *ekārāma*, and PW translates it as “sich an der Einsamkeit ergötzend, allein,” (“feasting on solitude, alone” or “enjoying solitude, alone”) respectively.

³⁰ Perhaps Sāyaṇa intended to mean: “being absolutely alone, *ā* [means] completely, *ramati* (not {*bhavati*}!), [means] [delight in/rejoice at], is the one who is [called] *ekārāma* and his state of being [is meant here]”. The verb *ramati* is also attested in *parasmaipada* according to MW!

*arthānt*³¹ *sādhayate sukhaṃ svapiti paramacikitsaka ātmano bhavatīndriyasamnyamaś caikārāmatā ca prajñāvṛddhir yaśo lokapaktiḥ*).

It is interesting that the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* (YJ, around 4th or 5th century CE) also documents this term when it describes the *yatidharma* (codex of norms for the ascetics): “The ascetic, kind to all beings, tranquil, carrying the three staves and water vessel, taking delight in solitude, should enter the village asking for alms after wandering [in the wild?].”³²

All these considerations of the terms *ekavīhārin* and *ekārāmatā* in the meanings of living or taking delight in solitude lead to the conclusion that Buddhist literature could accept two meanings of solitude. The first is seclusion in the ordinary sense of the word. The second is seclusion as a psychological state of mind in which one is detached from all the defilements/afflictions, especially lust and craving, and fully mindfully engaged in the present moment, ignoring all kinds of worries of the past and future.

The first meaning is used when the general physical seclusion of being solitary, especially in staying in lonely places such as forests, etc., is praised and recommended. Ñāṇananda (1973: 5f) gives some examples of this meaning, including the passage where the Buddha praises seclusion in the forest in various ways and simply states that he would be quite at ease even in answering the calls of nature while travelling alone when he sees nobody else in front of him or behind him on the road (*yasmāhaṃ Nāgita samaye addhānamaggapaṭipanno na kañci* (PTS: *kiñci*) *passāmi purato vā pacchato vā, phūsu me nāgita tasmim samaye hoti, antamaso uccārapassāvakkammāyā’ti* (AN III, IV 344)).

The author/s of the *suttas* employed the second meaning, i.e., seclusion as a psychological state of mind when they meant the Buddhist interpretation of seclusion as being free from all the defilements/afflictions.

Taking all of this evidence into account, one can assume that Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda’s interpretation³³ makes a strong case for interpreting *eka* as solitude from a semantical point of view, even though he does not explain how it is grammatically possible. There is no problem with the term *ratta/rakta* in his interpretation, but it would have been better if he had chosen a more neutral term like “devoted to”, “committed to”, “delighting in,” etc., instead of “lover” or “attached to.”

³¹ AiGr (Wackernagel) Band I Lautlehre, § 282.

³² *sarvabhūtahitaḥ śāntas tridaṇḍī sakamaṇḍaluḥ ekārāmaḥ parivrajya bhikṣārthī grāmam āsrayeti* (Yj 3.58). In the *Bhāṣya* (*Mitākṣarā* by Vijñāneśvara of ca. 12th century CE) it is explained: “He who is delighted in solitude, not accompanied by other mendicants, female ascetics and women” (*ekārāmaḥ pravrajitāntarenāsahāyaḥ samnyāsinībhiḥ strībhiś ca*). In the Pali canon an *ekavīhārin* is described in a similar way: *so eko gāmaṃ piṇḍāya pavisati eko paṭikkamati eko raho nisīdati eko caṅkamaṃ adhiṭṭhāti* (SN II 282).

³³ “All this evidence suggests that ‘ekaratto’ in ‘bhaddekaratto’ means ‘the one attached to solitude,’ in other words, the ‘lover of solitude’” (Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda 1973: 9).

Pāli, Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan exegetical traditions on the term *bhaddekaratta*

The term *bhaddekaratta* was transmitted in two variant forms in various traditions of the Buddhist canon. *Bhaddekaratta* is attested throughout the Pāli tradition, while the Sanskrit tradition has the corresponding term *bhadraikarātra* or *bhadragarātra*.³⁴ Surprisingly (or not surprisingly as there was a reason for it) not a single tradition of transmission has ever attempted to Sanskritize the term as *bhadraikarakta*, which would have been perfectly viable.

In a discussion of the Tibetan translation of the *Bhaddekarattasutta*, Kathrin Holz (2021: 63f) writes: “Both Sanskrit manuscripts, as well as the Indic title at the beginning of the Tibetan translation, read *bhadrakarātrī* and therefore confirm the fact that the Pāli word *ratta* represents Sanskrit *rātra* or *rātri*. Only the change of the ‘e’ in *bhaddeka* to ‘a’ in *bhadraka* remained a puzzle.” She offers a possible explanation of *bhaddeka* becoming *bhadraka* by suggesting: “Another, highly plausible, explanation of the change from ‘e’ to ‘a’ is a Sanskritization of the Pāli word *bhaddeka* or *bhadda-eka* “one auspicious night”, and Pāli *bhadda-eka-ratta* thereby becomes Sanskrit *bhadraka-rātrī*. Regarding all points, we can translate the title *Bhaddekaratta-sutta* or *Bhadraka-rātrī-sūtra* as the *Discourse on an auspicious night*.”

However, as the *bhaddeka* in this compound occurs in the Pali canonical text and its commentaries as well as in some Sanskrit recensions, one must take this particular form of the term seriously. In fact, it looks more like a *lectio difficilior* (*probabilior*). At Peter Skilling’s suggestion, Bhikkhu Bodhi (Bodhi 1995: 1342, n. 1210) also suggests the same: “The change from -e- to -a- can be understood as an attempt to convert a difficult reading into a more familiar one.” Even though Bhikkhu Bodhi asserts: “The Chinese Madhyama Āgama has merely transliterated the title of the Skt. version and thus offers no help,” this is not quite correct because in MĀ (T 1.26) no. 165 the verses are called 跋地羅帝偈 (somewhat like: *bat ti la* (for *ra*) *tej*). The light vowel at the end of the Chinese equivalent for *bhadra/ai*^o (and before ^o*rātri*) speaks for *ai*, confirming the reading/presence of *eka*. This confirmation of the word *eka* is important for the reconstruction of the original wording. In the title of this *sūtra*, the expression does not occur; instead, it reads “the Discourse on a Deva at the Hot Spring Grove” (see also Anālayo 2008). So by reading the term as *bhadraka* instead of

³⁴ More precisely, the secondary adjectival noun *bhadragarātrīya* or *bhadragarā(t)r(ī)*. Waldschmidt (1971: 32) reads *bhadraga*^o (*ga* instead of *ka*) in the ms. and further remarks: “The *bhaddekaratta*, which Buddhaghosa explains with *vipassanānuyogasamannāgatattā bhaddakassa ekaratta*, corresponds in the fragment to *bhadragarātrīya*, which occurs in two places in it (V3 and R2) and probably contains an incorrect Sanskritisation of *rattīya* = *raktika*”. (My translation. The original German text: “Dem *bhaddekaratta*, das Buddhaghosa mit *vipassanānuyogasamannāgatattā bhaddakassa ekaratta* erklärt, entspricht im Fragment *bhadragarātrīya*, was darin in zwei Stellen vorkommt (V3 und R2) und wahrscheinlich eine falsche Sanskritisierung von *rattīya* = *raktika* enthält”.

bhadraika, all the Tibetan translations only seem to bypass the difficult reading *bhadraika*. An overview of the Tibetan translations which have exclusively the reading *bhadrakarātrī* or similar can be found in Skilling (1997: 79, 82, 140f, 585, etc.) and recently in Holz (2021: 58, 63, 101, 122, etc.) and Tauscher (2021: 131,179, etc.).

The expression *ekaratta* was traditionally interpreted to mean “one night” due to a rather superficial connection with the compound *ahorattam*, as has been pointed out by the Venerable Ñāṇamoli. As already mentioned at the beginning of this article, enough has been said by him and I.B. Horner (1959: xxvi–xxvii) to show that there is little justification for interpreting *ekaratta* as “one night” (Ñāṇananda 1973: 9).

The standard Sanskrit-English Dictionary of Monier-Williams explains (s.v. *ekaratra*) “duration of one night, one night, one day and night”. PW says simply “die Dauer einer Nacht (eines Tages)”. Later commentators of *Manusmṛti* (III.102: *ekarātram tu nivasann atithir brāhmaṇaḥ smṛtaḥ*) like Medhātithi (ca. between 820 and 1050 CE) use the term *ekarātram* in combination with *dvitīye 'hni*, which perhaps confirms the meaning “one day and one night”.

The attempt to explain *ekaratta* as **one** night as a conventional shorthand for a whole day in our context is certainly possible, but leads to a real problem. Why practise this meditation only for “one night” or “one day”? Ṭhānissaro (2002: 346, n. 1) suggests: “The Pali literally says, ‘an auspicious night,’ but this should be interpreted in light of the custom—common in cultures that follow the lunar calendar—of calling a 24-hour period of day-and-night a ‘night.’” However, reading “one night” as “one day” still does not solve the *real problem* of the **short timespan**, as Horner (1959: xxvi–xxvii) pointed out: “But the Bhaddekaratta Suttas do not appear to envisage withdrawal from thoughts of the past, future and present for so little as one night. On the contrary, the verses that form the *mātikā* say that the person to be called *bhaddekaratta* is he who abides ardently and unweariedly day and night, that is surely, for some consecutive time—lasting longer than ‘one night’” (or even one day!).

What is striking about the Sanskrit version of the *Cintāmayībhūmi* in the *Yogācārabhūmi* is that the author/s, though interpreting the Pāli term *ratta* as *rātri/rātra* (and not as *rakta*!), link it not with the term *bhadra* (to make it an auspicious night) but emphatically with *brahmacaryavāsa* (which does not appear in the Pāli version). When one takes a close look, the word *bhadda* could easily be connected with *vipassanā/vipaśyanā* (or in other cases *ekavihāra*, *ekārāma*) which means absolute mindfulness at the very present moment. This interpretation does not have the problem of short timespan because the text uses that expression in a rhetorical way. It effectively reads: “even if he abides in it [only for] one night”, stressing the importance of committing oneself ardently, unwaveringly, and with complete devotion to religious life (*brahmacaryavāsa*). The use of the particle *api* (even) in this construction, giving the meaning “even if he abides ...” should also be noted. It shows an attempt to impose an interpretation which does not fit well in the context.

A working hypothesis

If we have to accept **bhadraikarakta* as the original reading, *eka* must be understood as “exclusively”: “devoted exclusively to what is good/excellent”, or something similar.

The term *eka* here has a meaning and grammatical place in the whole compound, compared to other self-contained compound like *ekaratta* (in Sanskrit either *ekarātra* or *ekarakta*), where the emphasis created by this term is different. The compound *ekaratta/ekarātra*, as such, has been used in Vedic Sanskrit, Sanskrit, and Pāli literatures whereas *ekaratta/ekarakta* (*eka* + PPP, substantive, etc.) seems to be rare in all three languages. The word *eka* appears to function here in the sense of “exclusivity/solitude” and not in the sense of the numeral “one”. Thus it seems more pertinent to separate the members of the compound as *bhaddeka* + *ratta*³⁵ (rather than *bhadda* + *ekaratta*), thus obtaining the meaning “devoted exclusively to what is good/excellent”.

This is the most direct and simple solution that requires no further explanation. Is this then a case of an “Occam’s razor”, in the sense that “the simplest explanation is most likely the right one”? PW (s.v. *eka*) gives various examples from later Sanskrit literature, such as *punyaikakarman* (“whose actions are only/exclusively meritorious”), *dharmaikarakṣa* (“whose only protection is dharma”), *svargaikasammukhī* (“who is only looking at the sky”) and *madirārasaikasaktā* (“addicted exclusively to the taste of alcohol”), which means this construction was not at all unknown to the Sanskrit authors.³⁶

In this sense, we can also interpret the term **bhadraikarātra* as a *bahuvrīhi* compound, understanding: “one for whom the nights are exclusively wholesome/salutary/beneficial.” Interpreting *eka* as “exclusively” thus makes much more sense than interpreting it as “one.” Following this interpretation, we see that understanding the word *ratta* as “night” (Skt. *rātra/rātri*; Pāli. *ratta/ratti*) is no longer problematic.

³⁵ Cf. MW s.v. *eka*: MW proposes a similar separation by stating: “frequently ifc.; cf. *dharmaikarakṣa*, &c.” with the meanings “(with and without *eva*) alone, solitary, single, happening only once, that one only”.

³⁶ A cursory survey of the *Mahābhārata* (according to GRETIL) provides us with some examples of this construction: *svārthanīṣṭhaikabuddhi* (“whose sole intention is one’s own goal”: 1.138.28), *dharmaikatatpara* (“who is exclusively devoted to *dharma*” 12.50.21), *kāryaikaniścaya* (“who is determined exclusively to do his [duty]” 12.113.2), *sukṛtaikaniścaya* (“who is determined to do only good” 12.344.10), *satyaikalakṣaṇa* (“whose characteristic is solely truth” 12,156.022), *sarvajñānaikabhājana* (“the only vessel for all knowledge” 12.212.52). Another later example is: *vyomaikakāya* (“space alone is his body”: *Āgamaḍambara*, IV.37).

The negative and positive usages of √*rañj* or *raj*

The problem with reading *ratta* as *rakta* (PPP from √*rañj* or *raj*) has to do with its negative connotations. Originally this verbal root meant “to redden” or “to take colour”; later it acquired the abstract meaning of “to be attracted or enamored.” The root of all evils in Buddhist thought is called *rāga*, a noun formed from the verbal root *rañj* or *raj*, a very strong and passionate desire, including sexual desires. This vehement desire is also called thirst (*taṇhā/trṣṇā*), which constitutes the strong foundation for “becoming” (*bhava*) or the cycles of rebirth (*samsāra*).

A brief survey through the Pāli canonical passages shows that *ratta* is rarely used in a positive sense in the texts. For instance, on its own, it denotes “one excited by lust, overcome by lust, with mind obsessed by it” (Bodhi 2012: 253: *ratto ... rāgena abhibhūto pariyādinnaṅgato*: AN I 159), and in compounds, it means “people [...] excited by illicit lust, overcome by unrighteous greed, afflicted by wrong Dhamma” (Bodhi 2012: 254: *manussā adhammarāgarattā visamalobhābhibhūtā micchādhammaparetā*: AN I 160). Sexual lust is especially highlighted in this context: “a man/woman [...] excited by them, taking delight in them, he/she attends externally to a [man’s/woman’s] feminine/masculine faculty” (Bodhi 2012: 1039: *ratto/ā tatrābhirato/ā bahiddhā itthi/purisindriyaṃ manasikaroti*: AN IV 57). The *Suttanipāta* mentions individuals who are “passionately attached to existence” (*bhavarāgarattā*), “attached passionately to sensual pleasures” (*kāmarāgaratta*), “the ones who are passionately attached will not see the [highest truth]” (*rāgarattā na dakkhanti* DN II 36 et al.), “the one not excited by lust or attached to dispassion” (*na rāgarāgī na virāgarattoti*, Sn 795/801 PTS 155), and finally “those who do not lust after” (Bodhi 1995: 772: *asārattaratta*: MN II 160; *Aṭṭhakathā: sārattarattāti suṭṭhu rattarattā; Ṭīkā: suṭṭhu rattarattā’ti ativiya rattā eva hutvā rattā*), and similar expressions (*rūparata, viññānarata, upādānarata, taṇhārata*: SN IV 389f).

As far as I know, *jhānaratta* is the only instance where *ratta* is used in a positive sense: “Then after seeing [the bhikkhu Kaṅkhārevatattara] who was devoted [fully] to meditative absorption, the Buddha, the sage who has overcome the world, declared him to be the foremost among the bhikkhus who meditate”: *tato jhānarattaṃ disvā, buddho lokantagū muni; “jhāyīnaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ aggo” [ti] paññāpesi mahāmati*: Th-a 1 35.³⁷ When used in a positive sense, the term *rakta/ratta* could well be translated as “devoted to,” “committed to,” “fond of (MW),” or “fully engaged in,” etc.

³⁷ Th-a 1 35 quotes here (*vuttam pi c’ etaṃ apadāne*) the *Apadāna* II 492, but the version in the *Apadāna* has notably *tato jhānanirattaṃ disvā* (according to PTS edition and *tato jhānarattaṃ disvā* according to CSCD) instead of *tato jhānarattaṃ disvā*. Th-a 1 35 CSCD gives the full quotation while PTS edition abbreviates it.

Combining normally negative words with positive words yields positive (and intense) meanings and should be translated accordingly, such as *dhammarāga*,³⁸ *dhammarati*,³⁹ *dhammārāma*,⁴⁰ and *jhānarata*.⁴¹ Admittedly, such compounds are rare, but they do exist. Another striking example in the *Therīgāthā* is: “After having gone forth into the homeless state, o Bhadrā! (the Good-One) be someone who delights in good/auspicious things.” (*saddhāya pabbajitvāna, bhadre bhadraratā bhava*: Thī verse 9: PTS 124). The commentary explains: “*bhadrarata* means: the one who delights and rejoices in good/wholesome factors like virtue etc.” (*bhadraratāti bhadresu sīlādidhammesu ratā abhiratā*: Thī-a PTS 13).⁴²

In later Sanskrit literature one also finds examples that use *rakta* in a positive context. PW gives for *rakta* (e): *devās tapasi raktā hi (Harivaṃśa)* and *jīvaloko yadā sarvo rakto rāmaguṇair ayam (Rāmāyaṇa)*; and for the root *raj* (PW 1871: 230b): *ārya-karmaṇi rajyate (Spr. 3723⁴³)* and *rāme rajyatu me manaḥ*.

It is possible that the strong negative connotation of the term *rakta/ratta* might have scared the commentators and translators, leading them to substitute another less offensive or inoffensive word like *ratta/rātra/rattī*.

Schmithausen (2020 II 386, n. 2642), in a long endnote where he discusses the term *bodhisattva*, refers to the similar case *sakta/satta* ($\sqrt{\text{sañj}}$). He demonstrates how the original meaning of the important term of an adept in Mahāyāna, *bodhisatta*, possibly changed from *bodhisakta* “devoted to the search for or striving for the awakening” to *bodhisattva*, somewhat like “Awakening-Being,” as the term became re-Sanskritized. Schmithausen sees this alteration from *sakta* to *sattva* in Sanskrit (ambivalently both words take the form *satta* in Pāli) as a result of conscious reinterpretation:

In the course of the increasingly spiritually negative connotation of *sakta* (→“clinging to”, “attached to”), however, it is hardly surprising that the

³⁸ MN I 350, 352, 436; AN IV 423, V 343: *ten’ eva dhammarāgena tāya dhammanandīyā*. Bhikkhu Bodhi (1995: 455) translates: “because of that desire for the Dhamma, that delight in the Dhamma.” Even here, the meaning could be understood as negative. Bhikkhu Bodhi explains in a footnote (1995: 1254, n. 553): “These two terms signify desire and attachment (*chandarāga*) with respect to serenity and insight. If one is able to discard all desire and attachment concerning serenity and insight, one becomes an arahant; if one cannot discard them, one becomes a non-returner and is reborn in the Pure Abodes.” MN-a confirms this understanding.

³⁹ DhP 354: *sabbaratiṃ dhammarati jināti*; Thī 156: *ramanti dhammaratiyā*.

⁴⁰ DhP 364, Sn 329 et al.: *dhammārāmo dhammarato*. Bodhi (2017: 209, verse 327): “delighting in the Dhamma, delighted with the Dhamma.”

⁴¹ Sn 212, 503, 1009: tr. Bodhi 2017, “delighting in jhāna/delighted in the jhānas”; DN II 264; SN I 53, 122; It 40; It 31 *pavivekarata*.

⁴² See n. 37.

⁴³ = MBh 5.33.25. Other examples from MBh: *tasmād guṇeṣu rajyethā mā doṣeṣu kadācana*! (12, 282, 6.1); *sarvamitraḥ sarvasahaḥ samarakto jīvendriyaḥ*! (14, 19, 2.1), etc.

expression seemed inappropriate in connection with a person striving for Buddhahood.⁴⁴

In this context, he also gives an example from *Mahābhārata* (MBh 14.94.01: *yajñe saktā nṛpatayaḥ tapaḥsaktā maharṣayaḥ*), where *sakta* is used in a very positive sense. The question that arises here is whether all Buddhist commentarial traditions felt the same aversion towards the term *rakta* as they did towards the term *sakta*.

Therefore, if we accept the translation of “devoted exclusively to what is excellent,” then “what is excellent” could be understood as the “insight” which is described in the *bhaddekagāthās*. Indirectly, it is also connected somehow with *ekavihāra* (or *ekārāmatā*), as Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda already pointed out. It is thus also associated with the whole “religious life” (*brahmacaryavāsa*), which was mentioned in the *Cintāmayībhūmi* in the *Yogācārabhūmi* as demonstrated above.

We have now surveyed all of the possible interpretations: “one auspicious night”; “even if he abides in it (i.e., religious life [practising insight in the above-mentioned way]) [only for] one night, it [i.e., the life of religious life] becomes excellent”; “one for whom the nights are exclusively salutary”; “devoted to solitude”; and “devoted exclusively to what is good.” The interpretations with the meaning “night” appear to be the least convincing, although this is the meaning given by almost all the commentators and translators (with the few recent exceptions mentioned above). The interpretations that read *eka* as “solitude” should be taken more seriously. The most uncomplicated and sound interpretation would be “one who is devoted exclusively to what is excellent.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have to accept that this rather enigmatic term, *bhaddekaratta*, might remain a puzzle as regards its originally intended meaning, despite all these attempts at interpretation,⁴⁵ as I. B. Horner stated in her introduction to the Middle Length Sayings III (pp. xxvi–xxvii). Almost all the commentaries, sub-commentaries, and earlier translations into Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan tend to interpret *ratta* as “night.” The majority of modern interpreters also prefer to understand this term as “night”. Nevertheless, there is also the possibility of understanding it as “devoted,” as some scholars have pointed out with good reason. As there is no way to decide how it was originally meant by the author/authors, this “puzzle” will probably remain unsolved.

⁴⁴ “Im Zuge der zunehmend spiritueller negativen Besetzung von *sakta* (→‘sich klammernd an’, ‘verhaftet’) ist es aber kaum verwunderlich, dass der Ausdruck in Zusammenhang mit einer nach der Buddhaschaft strebenden Person unangemessen erschien.” (Translation is verified by the author himself.)

⁴⁵ This reminds me of something our respected teacher, Prof. Srinivasa Ayya Srinivasan, often emphasized in class, i.e., it is more important to see the problems than to find solutions to them.

Revisiting the Term “*bhaddekaratta*” in the Pāli Canon

Philology too seems to have its boundaries, perhaps just like any other academic discipline. The well-known device of using “probability” (what is most probable according to common sense) as the measurement for finding the correct interpretation (though being the last and perhaps then the best option) still depends on the scholars’ knowledge of the subject matter, their subjective perception, and their capacity to make the right choice.

Appendix

*Yogācārabhūmi Cintāmayībhūmi Ms fol 138a4ff.*⁴⁶

atītaṃ nānvāgamayen na pratikāṃkṣed anāgataṃ |
 praty^[138a5]ṭpannās ca ye dharmās tatra tatra vipāśyakaḥ |
 asaṃhārya[ḥ]m asaṃkṣobhyaṃ tad⁴⁷ vidvān anubr̥mhayet ||⁴⁸

iti Bhadrakarāgāthā⁴⁹ ||

ihaikatyas tathāgatapravedite dharmavinaye śraddhāṃ pratilabhya samyag eva
 śraddhayā⁵⁰ agārād anāgārikāṃ pravrajito bhavati | sa pañcabhir ākārāiḥ supariśuddhaṃ
 brahmacaryaṃ carati (<|)

ye anena saṃskā^[138b1]rā āgā[ḥ]rikāḥ parityaktāḥ teṣu nirapekṣo bhavati | na
 teṣāṃ upādānāya⁵¹ cetayate⁵² (<,) na punar upādatte (<| a)yaṃ prathama ākārāḥ |⁵³

sa punar dr̥ṣṭe dharme lābhasatkārasahagatānāgatān⁵⁴ [ḥ] saṃskārān na
 prārthaya[ḥ]te nāpi ca divyamānuṣyakāṇāṃ sām̐parāyikāṇāṃ saṃskārāṇāṃ arthe
 prañidhāya brahmacaryaṃ bhavati⁵⁵ (<|) ayaṃ dvitīya ākārāḥ (<|)

^[138b2] punar ye (<')syopādānaskandha[ḥ]saṃgrhītā rūpādayo **dharmāḥ**
pratyutpannā yeṣv⁵⁶ ayaṃ vyavasthita evaṃ samyag **vipāśyako** bhavati –
 “kāyaduścaritasya pāpako vipāko dr̥ṣṭe dharme saṃparāye ca(>) ahaṃ cet kāyena
 duścaritaṃ careyam (<...)” iti vistareṇa yathāsūtram, yāvat: kāyaduścaritaṃ prahāya [ḥ]
 kāyasucaritaṃ bhāvayati | evaṃ vānmanahsucaritaṃ vedi^[138b3]tavyaṃ | rūpādīṃś ca
 skandhān atītānāgatapratyutpannān anityataḥ samanupaśya[ḥ]ti | yad anityaṃ ta^d
 duḥkhaṃ (<,) ya^d duḥkhaṃ tad anātmā[ḥ] (<,) yad anātmā[ḥ] tat sarvaṃ nai[ḥ]ta[ḥ]n
 mama yāvan naiṣa me ātmeti evaṃ etad yathābhūtaṃ samyakpraññayā paśyati⁵⁷ (<|)
 ayaṃ tṛtīya ākārāḥ |

⁴⁶ [-] = so in ms., but to delete; [xy] = in ms. self-deleted; (<) = added by Lambert Schmithausen; additions in the ms. are in superscript characters.

⁴⁷ Ms. *tata* (statt *ta*?).

⁴⁸ SHT III Nr. 816 reads: +++ *taḥ pratyutpannā ca ddharme tatra tatra vipāś(y)akahaḥ asaṃhāry(ā)vikalpast[h]aḥ vidvas=taṃ !!!*; SWTF I 198: *vidvas* → *vidvāms*.

⁴⁹ Tib. *mtshan mo bzang po 'i tshigs su bcaḍ pa* = **Bhadrakarātrigāthā* or the like, Ch. 造賢善頌 = **Bhadrakarā-gāthā* or the like.

⁵⁰ Ms. *sra*^o

⁵¹ Tib. *skyed par* = **utpādanāya*?

⁵² Ms. *tecyete*

⁵³ Ms. *°ras* (sa ...)

⁵⁴ Sic ms. (comp.: *°sahagata-anāgatān*); or to be emended to *°sahagatān (an)āgatān*? Tib. *rnyed pa dang bkur sti dang ldan pa 'i ma 'ongs pa 'i 'du byed rnams*, Ch. 利養恭敬未來種類所有諸行

⁵⁵ Sic ms.; *carati*??

⁵⁶ Sic ms.; read *°ṭpannās teṣv* with Tib. *de dag la*? Or *yeṣv ayaṃ vyavasthita (s teṣv) evaṃ ...* (cf. Ch. 又於現在...色等諸法 及彼安立 能正觀察)?

⁵⁷ Ms. *°ty* (*ayaṃ*)

punaḥ prathamām[ḥ] dharmavipaśyanām āgamyā paripa^[138b4]kvendriyaḥ puṇya-
saṃbhāraṃ [ḥ] jñānasambhāraṃ āyatyām abhinirvide **asaṃhāryaṃ** rājādibhir
anu⁵⁸**br̥ṃhayati** | ayaṃ caturtha ākāraḥ |

sa punar dvitīyām dharmavipaśyanām āgamyā dṛṣṭe dharme nirvāṇam
asaṃkṣobhyaṃ sarvakleśopakleśair **anubr̥ṃhayati** | ayaṃ pañcama ākāraḥ |
tasyāyaṃ pañcākārasuvisuddho⁵⁹ brahmacaryavāsaḥ [ḥ] **ekarātrisa**^[138b5]nniśrito⁶⁰ (')pi
bhadro bhavati [ḥ] paramabhadraḥ(,) sarvabrahmacaryavāsasamatikrānto veditavyaḥ |
asya *khalu* bhāṣitasya saṃkṣiptena vyākaraṇaṃ bhavati | samāsato bhagavatā svākhyāte
dharmavinaye asādhāraṇasarvākārapariśuddho brahmacaryavāsaḥ paridīpitaḥ (|) idam
atra saṃkṣiptena vyākaraṇaṃ veditavyaṃ[ḥ] || ||

Abbreviations

- AiGr *Altindische Grammatik*, vols. I–III, J. Wackernagel and A. Debrunner, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1929.
- Akṣ *Akṣayamatīnirdeśasūtra*, ed. Jens Braarvig, Oslo: Solum Forlag 1993. Vol. I: Edition of extant manuscripts with an index. Vol. II: The tradition of imperishability in Buddhist thought.
- AN *Aṅguttaranikāya*, ed. R. Morris and E. Hardy, 5 vols. Oxford: PTS 1885–1900.
- AN-a *Aṅguttaranikāya-aṭṭhakathā*, ed. M. Walleiser and H. Kopp, 5 vols. London: PTS 1924–1956.
- Ap *Apadāna*, ed. M.E. Lilley, 2 vols. London: PTS 1925–1927 (reprinted Oxford: PTS 2000).
- BEB *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Jonathan Silk, vol. I. Leiden: Brill 2015.
- CintBh *Cintāmayībhūmi* of the *Yogācārabhūmi*.
- CPD *A Critical Pāli Dictionary*, started by V. Trenckner, ed. D. Andersen et al. Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters 1924ff.
- CSCD Chatṭhasangāyana CD-ROM edition (used throughout in this paper as source, but also PTS reading is added), Version 4.0 (Igatpuri: Vipassana Research Institute 1995). (Available on CD-Rom or online, see www.vridhamma.org/Chattha-Sangayana-CD-Rom-Update).
- Dhp *Dhammapada*, ed. Sūriyagoḍa Sumaṅgala Thera. London: PTS 1914.
- Dhp-a *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā*, ed. Helmer Smith and H.C. Norman, 5 vols. London: PTS 1906–1914.
- DN *Dīgha Nikāya*, ed. T.W. Rhys Davids and J.E. Carpenter, 3 vols. Oxford: PTS 1890–1911.

⁵⁸ Ms. °bhi[ḥ an]r anu°

⁵⁹ Ms. °suddho

⁶⁰ Ms. °śrto

- DN-a *Dīgha Nikāya-aṭṭhakathā*, ed. T.W. Rhys Davids, J.E. Carpenter, and W. Stede. Oxford: PTS 1929–1932.
- DP *A Dictionary of Pāli*, Margaret Cone. Oxford: PTS 2001 (Part I: a–kh), Bristol: PTS 2013 (Part II: g–n), Bristol: PTS 2020 (Part III: p–bh).
- IRIAB The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University, Tokyo.
- It *Itivuttaka*, ed. E. Windisch. London: PTS 1889.
- KEN *Die Reden Gotamo Buddhos aus der mittleren Sammlung des Majjhimanikayo des Pali-Kanons*, Karl Eugen Neumann. München: R. Piper Verlag 1922.
- MĀ *Madhyamāgama* (Chin.): T 1.26.
- MBh *Mahābhārata*, critically ed. by V.S. Sukthankar et al. Poona 1933–1941.
- MIO *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung. Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin: Institut für Orientforschung*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag.
- MN *Majjhimanikāya*, ed. V. Trenckner and R. Chalmers, 3 vols. Oxford: PTS 1888–1902.
- MN-a *Majjhimanikāya-aṭṭhakathā*, ed. J.H. Woods, D. Kosambi, and I.B. Horner, 5 vols. Oxford: PTS 1922–1938.
- MN-ṭīkā *Majjhimanikāya-ṭīkā* (CSCD).
- Mv *The Mahāvastu: A New Edition*, ed. Marciniak, Katarzyna, vol. III. Tokyo: IRIAB 2019.
- MW *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Monier Monier-Williams. Oxford 1979.
- Ñm Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* (unpublished).
- PTC *Pāli Tipiṭakaṃ Concordance*. London: Luzac.
- PTS Pali Text Society.
- PTSD *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and W. Stede. Nachdruck: London: PTS 1966.
- PW *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch*, ed. O. Böhtlingk and R. Roth. St. Petersburg 1855–1875.
- SHT *Sanskrihandschriften aus den Turfanfunden*, ed. E. Waldschmidt et al. Göttingen, 1965ff (vols. and pages).
- Śikṣ *Śikṣāsamuccaya* of Śāntideva, ed. P.L. Vaidya. Darbhanga: Mithila Institute 1961 [tr. C. Bendall and W.H.D. Rouse, London 1922].
- SN *Samyuttanikāya*, ed. Feer, L., 5 vols. Oxford: PTS 1884–1898.
- Sn *Suttanipāta*, ed. D. Andersen and H. Smith. London: PTS 1913 (CSCD).
- Sp-ṭīkā *Sārattadīpanīvinaya-ṭīkā* (CSCD).
- SWTF *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfan-Funden*, started by Ernst Waldschmidt, ed. Heinz Bechert et al. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1973–2018.
- T *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*, 100 vols. Tokyo 1924 ff.
- Th *Theragāthā*. In: *The Thera- and Therī-gāthā*, ed. H. Oldenberg and R. Pischel. 2nd ed. by K.R. Norman and L. Alsdorf. London: PTS 1966.

- Th-a *Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā*, ed. F.L. Woodward, 3 vols. London: PTS 1971–84 (first published 1940–1959).
- Thī *Therīgāthā*. In: *The Thera- and Therī-gāthā*, ed. H. Oldenberg and R. Pischel. 2nd ed. by K.R. Norman and L. Alsdorf. London: PTS 1966.
- Thī-a *Therīgāthā-aṭṭhakathā*, ed. W. Pruitt. Oxford: PTS 1998.
- YBh *Yogācārabhūmi*.
- YJ *Yājñavalkya-smṛti*, ed. Umesh Chandra Pandeya. Kāśī Samskrta granthamālā 178. Vārāṇasī 1967.

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