

Creative Dictums for Better community in the *Sujana Kaṇṭa*

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Abstract

The *Sujana Kaṇṭa* is the second chapter in the *Lokaṇīti* which contains seven chapters and leads people in reasonable ways for social and other worldly affairs. This section not only indicates characteristics of good people, bad people and advantage of partnership with good ones and disadvantage of partnership with bad ones but also teaches everyone for better living in community. The purpose of this paper is to let people know important social matters in the world, ethics and worldly teachings in harmony with the real life.

Key words: worldly affairs, social matters, ethics

Introduction

The *Sujana Kaṇṭa* is the second chapter in the sacred work of *Lokaṇīti*. In *pāḷi*, ‘Loka’ means ‘world’ and ‘Nīti’ means ‘giving direction’ or ‘carrying out’. Therefore *Lokaṇīti* means giving directions in varieties of worldly affairs or social guidance. It was the work of *Lokaṇīti* that could be affirmed as the earliest work by the title of ‘Nīti’ among those by the same title observed in the *pāḷi* literature of Myanmar.

Composition of the *Lokaṇīti*

Since the beginning of Myanmar culture a history, there had been four different collections of *Nīti*: *Lokaṇīti*, *Dhammanīti*, *Rājanīti* and *Mahārahanīti* for sharing knowledge about ethical teaching in three fields of study, namely, worldly affairs, theory of *Dhamma* and the King’s courtesy of those four collections the *Rājanīti* is intended for the administrative class—from the king, his noble men and his general to even his servants. Other three collections of *Nīti* seal with preferable guidance for respective social classes in learning and social communication. Therefore they are interrelated with each other by subject matter.

The work of *Lokaṇīti* is the most significant and well-known. It was originally written in Sanskrit and *pāḷi* but later it becomes rooted in Myanmar society as a hand book of social relationship. It was Myanmar scholars who brought up teachings of *Lokaṇīti* into Myanmar society from time to time being skillful in both Myanmar and *pāḷi* languages.

There are altogether 167 *gāthās* in the work of *Lokaṇīti*. The first and second ones introduce the sense of ethical teaching. Therefore only 165 *gāthās* deal with genuine nature of

nīti. Seven sections are organized in the same subject matter from the third to the 137 *gāthās*.

Those can be indicated as follows:-

1. *Panṭita kaṇṭa*: the section which describes about welfare concerned with professionals.
2. *Sujana kaṇṭa*: the section which investigates quality and character belonging to the ones who can be worthy to be called good persons
3. *Bāladdujjana kaṇṭa*: the section which reveals manners and characters of bad persons.
4. *Mitta kaṇṭa*: the section which indicates different character between a real friend and a counterfeit friend.
5. *Itthiya kaṇṭa*: the section which describes general characteristic of women.
6. *Rāja kaṇṭa*: the section which teaches about principles for the administrative class.
7. *Pakinnaka kaṇṭa*: the section which indicates every favorable knowledge about worldly social affairs.

Biography of the Compiler, *Caturangabala* and Period

Lokanīti is the work of the Myanmar philosopher *Caturangabala* who lived during the fourteenth century; A.D. born in Śrī -K^aetra the ancient city of Prome during the Pinya Dynasty, *Caturangabala* entered the service of King Ngazishin Kyawswa (A.D. 1342-1350). In the succeeding reign of King Thihathu (A.D. 1350-1359) he was elevated to the rank of Atwinwun Minister. *Caturangabala* wrote his treatise in *pāḷi*.

Famed for his excellence in many fields of learning, he was a master of prosody, poesy, grammar and lexicon. In recognition of his virtuosity in these four fields the king conferred upon him the title of *Caturangabala* or 'He who is endowed with the four qualities of strength.'

One of *Caturangabala*'s most important works is his classic commentary on the *pāḷi* Dictionary. This erudite and monumental work constitutes a landmark in the history of *pāḷi* scholarship in Myanmar, and is still used in the present day. He is most widely known, however, for his treatise, the *Lokanīti* or the "Guide to Life." Drawing upon a variety of sources including Hindu and Buddhist sacred writings for his material, *Caturangabala* worked them into a unique amalgam with his own thinking, to present them in the form of a guide for young men and women on the proper conduct of life.

Varieties of Essence in Dictums of the *Sujana Kaṇṭa*

Sujana means a good person and *Kaṇṭa* means a chapter or a section. Therefore different kinds of information about good persons can be learnt in this section which describes about them.

There are 27 *gāthās* in this section. Factual contents described in this part are studied by using descriptive approach in order to discuss in details.

1. Associate with the good, from companionship with the righteous; it is good, not bad, knowing the goodly ways of righteous men.

As good persons think, say and do in any preferable ways, making friends with them is not disadvantageous. Similarly such a habit lets one know that the whole lifetime will be free from all kinds of bad conduct.

2. Spurn companionship with the wicked, cultivate the society of the virtuous; night and day do what is good; remember always the impermanence of worldly things.

Bad persons think, say and do in any unfavorable ways. Therefore it should be reminded not to make friends with those persons. However there are some examples of making friends with them for some reasons to get a particular opportunity based on greed. This part of teaching gives a lesson to get rid of friendship with a bad person who makes undesirable conduct out of such greed if one comes to realize that neither poverty nor wealth is permanent.

3. Just as ripe figs, although red outside, are full of worms inside, even so are hearts of wicked men.

As if a fig plucked near water resource contains full bacteria inside although it looks nice outside bad persons are crooked and bad-natured to be cruel even to kill any other living beings for their own welfare despite they wear sweet face over-reading polite words. Eventhough they appear supportive for other people's welfare by communicating in clever use of language; they usually go wild in the end. Nature of bad persons can be traced by learning this *gāthā*.

4. But as ripe jacks, although thorny outside, are full of juice inside, even so are the hearts of righteous men.

As if jackfruits have sweet taste inside even though they have pointed covering outside, good persons have positive nature although they seem to be blunt and impolite. This *gāthā* lets everyone realize good persons' instinct.

5. The sandal-wood, being dry, does not part with its odour; an elephant, on the march, ceases not to display its grace in the eyes of men; the sugar-cane, being brought under a pressing-machine, does not dissipate its sweet juice; a wise man even under affection does not abandon his virtuous conduct.

Despite other trees no longer keep fragrance when their flowers or branches have entirely dried up, the scent of sandal wood still belongs to the original fragrance until the host tree dried. Similarly the big elephant continues to stand elegantly without any fear although he

is in a terrible battlefield. As if a sugar cane stalk does not lose its sweet taste until it is finally crushed inside rollers, a good person never abandons a good habit although poverty takes its turn. People usually keep hold of bad habits when they face with any kinds of worldly troubles without tolerance. It is learnt about the nature of good persons who always practice as thus.

6. The lion, being hungry, does not eat leaves and the like; even emaciated, he does not eat the flesh of the snake.

A lion never eats leaves however hungry it is. It never eats snake however thin it becomes. This *gāthā* indicates a nature of ethical value unworthy to be broken and also suggests avoiding greed and defective profession in comparison with food which should not be eaten.

7. A descendant, belonging to a good family, maintains well the family lineage; having of himself fallen into trouble, he should not commit a mean action.

This *gāthā* describes that a person of good lineage or the one who survives family traditions very carefully, never behaves badly although troublesome situation comes. In the scope of being wise and good one is not possibly good inspite of wisdom. Thus it is also important for wise people to be good.

8. Sandal-wood, in the world, is pleasant; pleasanter is the light of the moon; far pleasanter than sandal-wood and the moon is the well-uttered discourse of the righteous.

A way of relaxing by hearing words of comfort uttered by good persons in a situation people are enforced by extreme worry. When worry takes place in mind, one has to approach good persons to hear their comforting words which are more peaceful than sandal wood fragrance or the moon. In another situation other people get annoyed one should be able to comfort them in turn. A good person is worthy to be called as thus only if such a person comforts others in a mentally troubled situation by avoiding words for more worry.

9. Should the sun rise in the west, and *Meru*, king of mountains, bend should the fire of hell grow cold and the lily grow on the mountain-top, yet unchangeable will be a good man's words.

Nature will change unnaturally by having water lilies on a hillock or having the sun rise in the west or having the mythical mountain summit of *Myintmo* cracked or having fire without heat. On the contrary the very words of good persons and the Buddha's teachings on ultimate truth never change in any situation but always continue to support every living king. Therefore it is learnt that their true words and the Buddha's sermons should be developed for those are true for ever everywhere, everytime and for everybody.

10. Pleasant is the shadow of a tree; pleasanter that of a relative, a father, or a mother; more pleasant that of a teacher; pleasanter still that of a king; and still more pleasant, in many ways, the shadow of Buddha.

May be shelter underneath a tree protects the one who travels in the sun during the summer from heat. But that creates pleasure only for a moment while travelling. Shelters belonging to parents and relatives (finance, wealth, reputation and influence) are more pleasant than that of a tree. More is that of a teacher who teaches what the right or wrong thing is. Emperors' shelters are more powerful because they can appoint preferable ranks and protect people from local or foreign enemies. The shelter of the Buddha's teaching is more pleasant than any other kinds of pleasure for that shelter provides genuine pleasure of spirituality in addition to those which can be experienced in plenty of lives as a human or a celestial being. Other shelters can create pleasure only for one life circle but it is learnt that the Buddha's teaching get anybody get shelter for ever.

This *gāthā* describes that any kinds of worldly pleasure can affect on only one life but it is shelter of the Buddha's teaching can provide a lot of lives as human or celestial beings and even the genuine pleasure of spirituality.

11. Bees wish for flowers, good men for what is virtuous; flies for what are putrid; bad men for blemishes (in other).

As if bees and beetle like flowers, good persons want to do anything good for others or let them feel pleasure. As if flies like rotten things, ones who are not good-natured easily go angry or commit sinful conducts. This *gāthā* indicates that characters belonging to good persons and bad persons can be distinguished from each other and thus one should try to be good if the character has not been positive yet.

12. Bad is the speech of one who has a vile mother, bad the conduct of one who has a vile-father, but he who has a father and mother both vile, his speech as well as his conduct is bad.

If the mother has a habit of using impolite language when she communicates with house maids and neighbors, such a habit will be imitated by her children because she is close to them at home living together. Thus if the mother is not polite in talking so are her children.

Similarly the father has a habit of fighting with others, doing illegal business, bullying his juniors in working situations, drinking, gambling and having fun with prostitutes, such bad habits can be imitated by his children. It means that children will be not only impolite in using language but also boozed in character if both mother and father have bad habits. Therefore parents should practice very well to be role models for their own children.

13. Good is the speech of an excellent mother, good is the conduct of one who has an excellent father, but he who has a mother and father both excellent, his speech as well as has conduct is good.

Children brought up by good parents will prove themselves that they are polite and have good characters. It is learnt that such children are called good children of good parents. Therefore the earliest teachers are parents.

14. In battle we need a warrior, in a commotion a counselor, during meals a loved one, a wise man in an emergency.

If war breaks out, adventurous persons are needed. Ones who can negotiate and discuss are preferable. Ones who can control their mouth to keep a secret are needed if there is something to be discussed secretly for letting no one else guess. When one has a chance to eat good food, the beloved one is needed. It means that the one who he loves is remembered. If there is something difficult to understand the meaning and if one likes to ask a question, a wise person who knows a lot is needed. This *gāthā* is mainly composed about gratitude of wise persons with a purpose to inform about different attitudes of depending, winning, sympathizing and adoring.

15. A dog, seeing a dog, shows its teeth to harm; a bad man, irritable, on seeing a good man, wishes to oppress him.

A dog gnarled at the other dog for robbing food from one to another. Similarly a bad person tries to beat his partner who is good by threatening. In this section nature of a bad person is compared with character and manner of a dog.

16. Do not perform nor cause actions to be performed hastily, a deed being done hastily, a foolishman suffers at length.

This *gāthā* reminds everyone to think before deciding if one has something to do. Thinking carefully comes first and no rush is necessary. If anyone else does something in a hurry, one must tell him or her to do only after thinking very carefully. This *gāthā* teaches about after effect of rushing by defining that such a manner belongs to the one with less wisdom. Actually doing something without preparing in advance can make worry later, There are two situations in doing anything to do by taking time and to do right now. If one is to finish something for the time being, taking time will not be good by any means. In such a situation one must be quick not only in thinking but also in doing. Therefore if some matter has to be carried out, one should do only after thinking carefully by expecting the good result.

17. A person grieves not at all, having put aside anger; the sages praise the abandonment of hypocrisy; bear with the harsh language of all: the righteous say that this forbearance is excellent.

This *gāthā* indicates that a good person is free from anger, grateful to others and tolerant to impolite language. Such a person is praised by holy persons even the Buddha.

An angry person can no longer distinguish between good and bad or right and wrong. Everything done, told or thought during a particular state of anger is followed by undesirable affects for something usually goes wrong. Therefore immediate management is necessary for treating anger. If angry mind can be relaxed, one feels free from any woes and worries (even within a moment of removing anger). Thus everyone should practice to remove anger, to do grateful to other and tolerant to bad words expecting to become a holy person.

18. Living in a place dirty, circumscribed, and crowded is a hard-ship; a greater hardship living with an unloving foe; living with one ungrateful is a greater hardship still.

The *Lokanīti* teacher indicates that living with ungrateful persons can make insure all through the vicious circle of life by this *gāthā*.

Living among containers full of excrement can make one hate each other as enemies but the other one is under influence of the former one, being more miserable both in body and in mind will be experienced. Moreover the one who is ungrateful would not recognize the gratitude of the three holy Gems. One would neither that of parents and teachers nor that of friends and companions. Therefore one would never feel secured to live all through a circle of live. Instead such misery will be more miserable than any other miseries. Therefore it is learnt that one should try not only to be the one who recognizes other's gratitude but also to be the one who is grateful.

19. A man should admonish in what requires admonition; he should prevent the commission of an evil deed. Such a one is beloved by the good, but disliked by the wicked.

Parents and teachers must reprove must reprove their children and pupils when the latter ones are guilty. Reproving should be made before guilt has not been committed. One must reprove from time to time and bad habits must be prevented as thus. Ones who reprove are usually admired by good persons. But bad persons dislike those people. Good persons like receiving reprove. Bad persons, however, hate the one who reprove if they get any reprove. In *Dhammapada* the Buddha teaches that even though they are not good and holy they can be assumed to be good if they humbly accept reprove. Therefore it is learnt that one should admire the only who are really supportive and reprove other persons for being able to choose the right way in a manner as similar as pointing at some gold pot with treasure.

20. One exalted should be overcome by humility, a warrior by dissension, one lower in position by the bestowal of a small gift, one's equal by industry.

This *gāthā* mainly indicates that young people should be humble and diligent. If one behaves humbly with one's senior persons, any matters can be successful. In competing with braver and more adventurous persons, one must beat such a person by creating dissension. One can beat junior persons by providing something. One can beat his or her peers by diligence. In this way the *Lokanīti* scholar shares four causes of success in life.

21. A poison, they say, is not a poison; the wealth of the priesthood is said to be a poison; poison kills but once; the wealth of the priesthood kills entirely.

In this *gāthā* reminds people not to misuse any property belonging to monks. Manner of misusing that property is compared with poison which destroys life for once. But it is pointed out that one would be guilty from one life to another for such a bad manner.

If one misuses and destroys anything of all four kinds of provision for Saṃgha: rice, robe, shelter and medicine, such person whether a layman or a monk would be harmed as if poison has been eaten. Poisoning is for only one life but misusing Saṃgha's property would make anyone get harmed not only in present life but also in future life. Thus the *Lokanīti* scholar teaches not to behave like that.

22. They know a horse's worth by its speed, the value of oxen by their carrying power, the worth of a cow by its milk-giving capacity, that of a wise man by his speech.

If information is needed to recognize a horse's quality, one can ride it. In the same way if information is needed to recognize a bull's quality one can let it draw a loaded cart. Cows can be tested in practice if one likes to know how they would produce milk. Similarly one can be tested by hard questions and problems to know who is wise or who is not.

23. The wealth of the virtuous, although scant, is serviceable like the water in a well; that of the bad, though considerable is like the water in the ocean.

As if good water in a well can be drunk by men and animals, a good person's property is so advantageous for other people. However as if much water in the sea cannot be drunk because that water is salty, a bad person's property would not be advantageous despite number of such properties can be counted as hundreds of thousands or millions. This *gāthā* teaches to share one's own property with other people by participating in social care activities based on nature which belongs to good persons.

24. Rivers do not drink up their water, nor trees eat up their fruit; rain does not fall in some places only: the wealth of the virtuous is for others.

Habits of good persons and bad persons are described in this part. Rivers never drink up their own water. Trees never eat up their own fruits. Similarly rain falls for advantage of other beings. Good person's property can be shared without using only for oneself. It means that good people work not only for their own welfare but also for others. On the contrary bad people work only for themselves. Thus it is taught that a good person's nature should be followed and a bad person's nature should be avoided.

25. One should not long for what should not be desired, nor think of what should not be thought; he should think only of what his duty is; he should not wish for unprofitable time.

In this world there is something which should be wished and which not. In the same way there is something which should be thought or which not. Once a person thinks of something decision can be made on basis of given situations. If one thinks of something irrelevantly, time and advantage will be entirely wasted. Thus it is suggested that everyone should think in good manner removing unnecessary thoughts out of mind.

26. What is not thought of happens; what is thought of comes to naught; riches therefore, for man or woman are not made by thinking.

Despite one expects nothing, success would come true unexpectedly. On the contrary despite one expect everything; failure would take place in some way or other. Thus this *gāthā* teaches to be contented in business activities.

27. He who has an endearment for a bad man does not love a virtuous one; he delights in the ways of wicked men: that delight to him is the occasion of ruin.

In this *gāthā*, it is described about the bad result of making friends with bad persons. A bad person usually likes bad nature and bad people. Such a person would not like a good holy person. The point is that one who has such nature would fail in everything all through the life.

Some people do not know how to admire and pay respect to good and wise persons but instead they imitate bad person's manners. In that way they would fail to get advantage in their present lives. Thus bad persons without wisdom are external enemies. Conducts of bad manner are internal enemies. Any enemy would never develop welfare but they would destroy. Therefore it should be noticed that treating all enemies is not preferable.

Conclusion

Lokanīti is admonishment for human ethics or guidance for everyone. Most *gāthā* in the holy work of *Lokanīti* guide everybody towards the goal of dignified living in life. It is usually published in Myanmar together with other nine works of *pāli* literature and such publication is called ten works collection. *Lokanīti* provides teachers, parents and Buddhist monks with teachings for young generation as a handbook.

The work of *Lokanīti* is well-known not only in Myanmar but also in Śrīlanka and England. Every Myanmar Buddhist who had experienced former monastic education could not hide himself from learning *Lokanīti* which actually inspired a lot of scholars and sacred persons.

Lokanīti urges people not to stay without leaning. The work is owed much gratitude to them. Thus it is also a gem for everyone throughout lifetime. *Lokanīti* can be compared to parents who reprove and guide their children or a teacher who teaches his or her pupils or a good friend for life.

In the section of *Sujana*, Qualities of good persons are described in comparison with lions, dogs, sugar cane and sandal wood. It is found that suggestions and recommendations in this section remind people to make friends with good persons and not to ignore nature of impermanency

Good persons seem to be impolite by outward appearance but they are white and gentle inside. Even in misery they hardly change their manner to go bad and rarely talk about misconception. Moreover they can tolerate other people's impolite words without being angry and they always praise others for some gratitude. Bad persons appear to be gentle and polite but their inner mind is not reflexive to such appearance. They want to control and torture other people. It is also learnt that truth behind good persons and bad persons reflect their habits and manners.

This section mostly teaches for making friends with good persons pointing out that if one has no good character, his friend would be in trouble sooner or later. There was an example of *Ciñcamāna* who accused the Buddha for having affair and died and went to hell after being beaten in audience. It happened as thus because she made friends with *Bālatitthi*.

Sujana kaṇṭa belongs to varieties of features such as love of knowledge, doing business rightfully, mannerism, honesty, social relationship, diligence, altruism, unified cooperation and cherishing traditional and national culture. Young people are the ones who would be able to create better society and if they follow dictums in the *Lokanīti* that would be

better. Such a tradition should be handed from one generation to another in order to maintain a good society.

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