Sutta Nipāta: The Uraga Sutta

I.

It is now possible to proceed to the analysis of a few individual suttas of the Sutta Nipāta with the aid of the criteria detailed earlier. The following analysis is restricted to a proportionately small number of suttas and further inferences regarding those that are left out may be drawn on similar lines. Every opportunity will be taken to discuss problems of general application to the whole work under the discussion of these suttas, so that most of the problems connected with the majority of the suttas will be eventually touched upon. An attempt has been made to make the selection as representative as possible. A few suttas from each vagga and from each type in the classification on pp. 83ff. in U.C.R. VI, 2 are taken up for analysis. Wherever possible the suttas will be discussed in the order in which they occur in Sn., and at the same time those that bear some similarity to one another will be arranged in some order so as to bring out the properties they share in common.

II.

The title Uraga Sutta is undoubtedly derived from the simile, urago jin-ṇam iva tacam purāṇam (as a serpent—discards—its old and worn-out slough) in the refrain that runs through the whole length of the poem. Its ability to cast off its slough, an important characteristic of the uraga, has been introduced here to describe the action of the bhikkhu who renounces both "Here and the Beyond." There seems to be some mysterious significance attached to this creature which is described as ura-ga (lit. belly-crawler). Some uragas are considered to belong to a class of semi-divine beings: they are kāma-rūpī (SnA. 13, capable of changing their form at will). The semi-divine characteristics are usually attributed to nāgas rather than to uragas. There are numerous instances in the Pāli Canon of nāgas changing their form or appearing in disguise. The Commentary (SnA.) refers to Saṅkhapālanāgarājā in Saṅkhapālajātaka (JA. V. 161-177). At Vinaya I. 86 a nāga is said to have received ordination disguised as a young man. An equally mystic significance is associated with the uraga's casting off of the slough. The Commentary (SnA. 13-14) describes in detail the four ways in which it does so. PvA. 61-62 commenting on Pv. I. 12, 1, urago va tacam jinṇam hitvā gacchati saṃ tanūṃ

(he goes abandoning his body—corporeal form—as a serpent discards its worn-out slough) says that a serpent casts it off whenever it wishes to do so, as easily as removing a garment, with no attachment to it whatsoever. Here the simile of the serpent’s slough is employed to describe the body at death. The mysterious significance of the uraga is more pronounced in a passage occurring at S.I. 69. It describes four young creatures (daharā) which should not be despised nor abused viz. a khattiya, an uraga, aggi and a bhikkhu. A khattiya when he becomes king can inflict heavy punishment on man, woman or child that despises him; an uraga can sting them; therefore he who holds his life dear should not despise it. Fire with necessary fuel (upādāna) can blaze forth into a huge flame and burn them who despise it. The virtuous bhikkhu can burn with his flame-like majesty. The uraga is also described as, uccāvacehi vanñehi urago carati tejasī (v. 1. tejasā) in the Saṁyutta: (In diverse appearances the uraga roams in its own splendour). It is described here as a mysterious and wonderful creature demanding respect and adoration. The Commentator is silent about the pāda, urago carati tejasī, and does not confine the quality of tejas to uraga alone. Fire too possesses the same quality. The tejas (splendour or better, power) of the uraga is perhaps due to one or more of the following reasons:—

1. Its extraordinary force or strength.
2. Its ability to change at will (kāmarūpa).
3. The ease with which it casts off its slough.
4. The fact that it possesses two tongues (dujivho cp. J.V. 425 cp. II. 458, and III. 458).
5. Perhaps its ability to live even in fire, like the mythical salamander.4

Uraga is almost synonymous with nāga, a creature equally gifted with miraculous powers and great strength. Some of them are semi-divine. Nāga is often used as an epithet for arahants and sometimes of the Buddha. Popular etymology explains nāga as “āgam na karoti” (cp. Sn. 522a); and the origin of the epithet is perhaps based on the great power of the nāga. The phrase

4. Here fire and the uraga both possess tejas. A. K. Coomaraswamy in his “Hinduism and Buddhism” makes out that the Dragon is the sacrificer and the sacrifice, i.e., connected with the smoke coming from the sacrificial altar. Referring to ŚB. I. 6.3.14 ff. he attempts to identify the Dragon with the Progenitor. Some such mystical significance may be among the reasons for ascribing tejas to the uraga.

At Vin. IV. 108 a nāga (Vin. I. 24, nāgarājā) is described as iddhiṃā; but in each case he was overcome by the (greater) tejas of his opponent (Sāgata and the Buddha) cp. J. I. 360. It is also told at AA. I. 324 ff. how Sāgata tamed the fierce nāgarājā. (Note by Miss I. B. Horner).
hatthi-nāga suggests an equally mystic significance. Yet, it is noteworthy that the word nāga is hardly or never used in the Pāli Canon in the same simile of its shedding the slough. Though sappā, ahi, āśīvīsa and bhujāṅgama are synonyms for uraga, they fall short of the connotation of the latter term. There is no real magical power attributed to them, unlike the uraga or the nāga. The last of the four synonyms bhujāṅgama, though not in frequent use in Canonical Pāli seems to be nearer uraga than ahi. Sappā is treated as a mere poisonous snake in similes. It should be avoided; e.g. Sn. 1b, 768b, Th 1. 457, and J.V. 18. Āśīvīsa is employed in similes to describe kāma and similar evil tendencies; e.g. Th 2. 451, J. III. 525, cp. 267 and S. IV. 172-174. It is called uggalejas at S. IV. 172 ff. and is a synonym for the mahādhātus.

III.

It has already been remarked that the emphasis on uraga in the refrain has been the basis of the title Uraga Sutta. There are three other suttas in Sn. named after a simile or metaphor occurring in them; viz. I. 3 (Khaggi-visāṇa), II. 8 (Nāvā) and III. 8 (Salla). Over half the number of suttas in Sn. are named after the interlocutors mentioned in them. There are 36 such suttas; viz. Sn. I. 2, 4, 5, 9, 10; II. 5, 11, 12, 14; III. 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11; IV. 7, 8(?), 9, 16; and V. 2-17. To this may be added I. 7 which is called Aggikabhāravāja Sutta in the Commentary. Of the above list Pasūra Sutta is rather doubtful, for Pasūra may not be a proper name as Neumann (Reden p. 528) suggests. He favours the commentarial gloss paṭī-sūro and says that it is pa-sūra (pra-sūra) like pācariya at M.I. 509. There are 15 suttas named after the topics or themes discussed in them; viz. Sn. I. 6, 7, 8, 12; II. 1, 2, 4, 7, 13; III. 1, 2, 12; and IV. 1, 6, 11. To this may be added the alternative names given in the Comy. for I. 11 (Kāyavācchandanika), II. 8 (Dhamma), II. 12 (Nigrodhakappa), II. 13 (Muni or Mahāsamaya), III. 4 (Puraḷāśa) and III. 11 (Moneyya). In addition to the six suttas mentioned in the note at p. 45 U.C.R. VI. 1, as being named after their opening words, Sn. IV. 10 (Purābheda) is named after the opening word of the second stanza (i.e. Buddha’s reply). The four Āṭṭhakas have already been mentioned (U.C.R. VI. 4, p. 226) to contain in their opening lines the words after which they are named. This makes a total of 11 suttas that are named after an opening line. The titles of 9 of these suttas (i.e. except Purābheda and Attadanda) have direct bearing on the topics discussed in them. The other four suttas in Sn. viz. Sn. I. 11, IV. 12, 13 and 14 are given descriptive titles. It is significant that all the four suttas named after a simile occurring in them are pure didactic ballads and all the suttas named after persons are dialogue ballads. Those that are

named after topics discussed in them belong to various types. There are
dialogue ballads like Vasala and Brāhmaṇadhammika Suttas, didactic poems
such as Muni and Kāma Suttas, narratives like Pabbajjā and Padhāna Suttas
and doctrinal dissertations such as Dvayatāṇupassanā Sutta belonging to
this group. All the suttas named after their opening words are didactic
poems.

Coming back to the Uraga Sutta, the effectiveness of the simile of the
serpent's skin may have been one of the reasons for placing this sutta at the
head of the vagga, which in turn derives its name from the former. This is the
only vagga in Sn. which is named after a sutta. However, the practice of
naming vaggas after suttas is not rare in other parts of the Canon. There are
two Yodhājīva Suttas occurring in the Pañcaka Nipāta of the Aṅguttara, viz.
A. III 89 ff. and 93 ff., and the vagga in which they occur is called Yodhājīva
(A. III. 84-110). Similarly, the second vagga in the Majjhima, Sīhanāda, M.I.
63-122) is named after the two opening suttas Cūlasihanāda and Mahāsihanāda
(M. Nos. 11 and 12) and the eleventh vagga (Devadaha, M. II. 214-226, III.
1-24) derives its name from the opening Devadaha Sutta (M. No. 101). In
such instances as these it need not be the opening sutta that is always re-
sponsible for the name of the vagga. In the Udāna, the third vagga, (Nanda,
Ud. 21-33) derives its name from the second udāna in it, its fifth vagga Sopat-
thera, Ud. 47-61) from its sixth member, its sixth vagga (Jaccandha, Ud.
62-73) from the simile in the fourth piece in it, and the last vagga (Pātalīgāma,
Ud. 80-93) from the sixth udāna in it. The first two vaggas of Pv. are named
after their concluding members, Uragapetavatthu and Ubbaripetavatthu
respectively. Of them the Uraga Vagga is of special interest here. The
first verse of the vatthu at Pv. II (I. 12') contains the simile of the serpent's
worn-out slough, and this is the only reason for naming the vatthu and the
vagga, Uraga. The Comy. associates this vatthu with an uraga (serpent)
which was responsible for the death of the individual referred to in the story.
The illustrative story in the Comy. is the same as that at J. III. 162-168, which
also contains the text at Pv. I. 12 in full.

The simile of the snake casting off its slough seems to be rather popular
in Pāli verse. The line at Pv. I. 12' is also found at Ap. 394, 13. In Mora
Jātaka (J. IV. 341) the hunter renounces his career as a hunter even as a
serpent discards its old worn-out skin (tacam va ḭiṇṇam urago ḍurāṇām).
Bv. IX. 28 contains the same line. This simile is also employed to describe
how Fortune keeps the fool at bay at J. V. 100, and VI. 361.

_Sirī jahati dummedhāma ḍiṇṇam va urago tacam._

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The 17 stanzas of the text describe the bhikkhu who overcomes anger, lust, craving, arrogance, hatred, doubts and perplexities and other impediments, has found no essence (sāra) in all forms of being, sees everything as void being free from covetousness, passion, malevolence and delusion, has eradicated all evil tendencies with no leanings whatsoever towards them, is free from all such qualities which form the basis for earthly existence, and has destroyed all obstacles. He verily is "the bhikkhu who shuns both Here and the Beyond as a serpent its old and worn-out skin."

The tone of the sutta is generally archaic and the language preserves an early stratum of Pāli. The words and forms of interest are:—Orapāram (Sn. 1c-17c), a simple dvandva cpd. meaning "here below -cp. Sk. avara- and the beyond," cp. parovaram (Sn. 353, etc.). The ora and the pāra are the limitations (sima) to a true bhikkhu. If he wishes to go beyond them (simātigo, cp. Sn. 795a) he should rid himself of all obstacles and leanings which act as causes (lit. causal antecedents) for his downfall (cp. Sn. 15b). The concept ora has already been noted (U.C.R. VI. 4, p. 228 ff.) as being the opposite of pāra; but pāra in this context is quite different from that of the Pārāyana and other places in Sn. Here it merely denotes birth in other existences whereas elsewhere (loc. cit.) it is almost a synonym for nibbāna. Udacchidā (Sn. 2a, 3a) cp. Sk. ud-a-chid-at; augmented radical Aor. 3 sg. cp. Vedic. The change -a + ch- > -acch- is due to metrical reasons and for preservation of quantity. This is a pure Gāthā-form not met with in Canonical prose. There are four other such augmented radical Aor. forms in this sutta: viz. udabaddhi (Sn. 4a), ajjhagama (Sn. 5a), accagama (Sn. 8b) and accasāri (Sn. 8a-13a). This type of Aor. is very frequent in Sn. and other old Gāthā-Pāli. Udabaddhi is usually explained as being formed from ud + vadh cp. udavadhiti. It is probable that this verb is associated with ud + vṛh, brvhati, to tear, cp. A.V. abarahit and Bṛh. Ār. avṛkṣat, P. udabbha (Sn. 583b, opt. 3. sg.) and abba (Aor. 3 sg.) in the phrase abba vata sallam used frequently in Th 1 and Th 2. The probable development of udabaddhi from ud + vṛh is as follows:—Vedic udabarh tit ud-a + v/b (v. in vṛh.) > P. udabb-: Vedic -h> P. -dh- cp. Vc. iha> P. idha. It may be possible that this form is the result of a contamination of the two roots vadh and vṛh, but either of the two can give this form directly and makes the explanation of a contamination superfluous. Ajjhagama (adhi-a-gam-at) and Accagama (ati-a-gam-at) cp. abbhidā (J. 1. 247), āṣadā (Th 1. 774), acchidā (Sn. 357c) and udacchidā (supra). Accasāri (occurring in both nāccasāri and paaccasāri) ati-a-sār-īt, from v ṣr, sarati. Neumann (Reden, p. 406) suggests atyasmārī and pratyas-
māri, but the explanation in the Comy., na atidhāvi and na ohiyī is preferable. Samūhatāse (Sn. 14b) cp. paccayāse (Sn. 15b), double Vc. nom. pl. from -āsas > -āso > -āse; -a - e is a dialectical variation influenced by E. Pkr. (Māgadhi). This double nom. with Māgadhī -e is rather frequent in early Pāli poetry. In Sn. alone it is seen to occur 20 times, 10 of which are in the Āṭṭhaka Vagga. Neumann (Reden, p. 407) says that such forms as samūhata e are not “Māgadhisms” but periphrastic perfects; samūhata + āe. It would be rather straining to construe a perfect in such contexts as these, and his suggestion, however useful, is not tenable. Hetukappā—“ which act as a cause” (Sn. 16b). The cpd. appears to be dialectical and nearer the older language, cp. khaggavisāna-kaṭṭpo “resembling a rhinoceros” (Sn. 35d-75d).

V.

The Uraga Sutta is written in a metre described as “ Aupachandasaka ” by Helmer Smith (SnA. 463). The regular Aupacchandasika metre differs from the Vaitāliya which consists of two half verses with 30 morae each, in that it has an extra long syllable added to each line of 14 and 16 morae respectively in the Vaitāliya. The metre of these stanzas is rather irregular. The number of morae in the first half-verse varies from 32 to 36, but the average seems to be 33, as in the case of the common second half of all these stanzas. The extra syllables in the longer lines may be explained as anacrusis. Helmer Smith (ibid.) further notes pādas Sn. 6b, 7a, 8a-13a and 14b as irregular. Though this metre is similar to Aupacchandasika which became fixed in the Classical period of Sanskrit literature this particular rhythm cannot be considered so late as that, for it may have been in use long before a metre as such came to be fixed.

Another noticeable feature here, as well as in all Pāli poetry is the apparent disregard of metrical rules. This probably may be the result of the composers being guided more by the ear (rhythm) than by such artificial means as fixed metres. Moreover, in all popular poetry metrical rules are not strictly observed. However, the beat and rhythm of these lines resemble those of dance metres which are usually free and easy metres not subject to artificial regulations.

The style of this sutta has already been commented upon. It is a ballad in every respect, though it is used for a didactic purpose. The purpose of the refrain in lines cd in each stanza is to lay emphasis on the central theme. There is a refrain in the initial line and the greater part of the second line of stanzas 8-13.

Yo nāccasāri na paccasāri sabbam vitatham idaṃ ti vīla—

33

1537—B
There is perfect antithesis in the two halves of all these stanzas. Invari-
ably the stanza begins with yo and the second half with so bhikkhu. In spite
of this and the lucidity of diction there is no poetic extravagance which charac-
terises later compositions. Popular similes are freely used to describe the
bhikkhu who leads a life in accordance with Buddhist ethics. Neumann
(Reden, p. 408) points out a few parallels in Mbh. and other early literature,
viz. jīrṇaṁ tvacām sarpa īvāvamucya (Mbh. V. 39, 2 ; cp. XII. 250, 11) and
yathā padodaras tvacā vinirmucyale (Prāśnapaniśad, 5, 5; also vide Brh. Ār. IV.
4.10). Other similes are at Sn. 1b, 2b, 4b, (compared by Neumann with
Ṛgveda I. 32, 8) and 5b.

There is nothing extraordinary in thought and ideology in the sutta. The
emphasis is on the conduct of the bhikkhu. It is noteworthy that there are
80 references to bhikkhu in the gāthās of Sn. (in addition to over 15 in the
prose), 77 to muni (24 of which refer to the Buddha) and over 40 to samaṇa, at
least 17 of which are used without any specific reference to a Buddhist
samaṇa. The Saṅgha is mentioned 8 times in the Ratana Sutta and 4 times
elsewhere in both prose and verse. All the references to bhikkhu, muni and
samaṇa amply justify Fausboll’s statement “we see here a picture not of life
in monasteries but the life of hermits in its first stage.”7 The Uraga Sutta
like Tuvaṭaka and Sammāparībājaniya Suttas is a splendid example of a
poem that describes the true bhikkhu just as Muni Sutta describes the muni.

The few technical expressions used indicate a phase of development in the
doctrine. The terms ora and orapāram have already been discussed. The
terms kōḍha, rāga, taṇhā, māna bhaveṣu sāra (cp. bhavaṭaṇhā), kopa and vitakka
(Sn. r-7) have not undergone the later systematization and arrangement in
groups. Usually the three rāga, dosa and moha occur in one group in the more
systematised texts and are called the three akusalamūlāni (fundamental
blemishes of character). At some places kōḍha and upaṇāha are added to
these three, while at others kīlesa and kōḍha and still others māna together
with or without diṭṭhi. Similarly the occurrence of paṭaṇca, vitathā, lobha,
rāga, dosa and moha in Sn. 8-13 seems to presuppose a time prior to the scholastic
classification of the three akusalamūlāni as rāga/lobha, dosa and moha. Besides
Sn. 14 seems to associate mūlā akusalā with anusaya.

On the other hand the technical significance of daratha and vanatha (Sn. 15
and 16 respectively), the mention of paṇca nīvāraṇa (Sn. 17), and the emphasis
on imaṇ paṇcaṇaṇ (Sn. 8) seem to suggest a development in terminology.
These are the only references to them, in the form as they are, in this work,
though Sn. 514d mentions the nīvāraṇāni and Sn. 66a the paṇcāvāraṇāni.

SUTTA NIPĀTA THE URAGA SUTTA

This seemingly developed terminology may probably point out that this sutta presupposes a time when some form of systematization and arrangement has just set in. Another interesting word is itibhavābhavalatā (Sn. 6) which is translated by Fausboll as ‘reiterated existence’ and by Neumann as ‘being and non-being.’ The explanation in the Comy. (SnA. 20), sampattivipatti-vuddhihāni-sassatusccheda-puññapāpāpvasena iti anekapakkāra bhavābhavatā does not make it clear at all. It seems to be somewhat different from bhavabhava which occurs in 8 other places in Sn. in the sense of ‘reiterated existence’ or re-birth. Its meaning in this context is apparently nearer the idea of the fluctuating changes of fortune in the course of re-birth. The term is not strictly technical.

An examination of Uraga Sutta in the various aspects of language, metre, style, doctrine and ideology shows that it is a comparatively old sutta. The lack of linguistic forms that may be classed as late and the presence of old Vedic and dialectical forms suggest that the sutta preserves an old stratum of Pāli. The syntax of the stanzas is also simple. The flexibility of metre also suggests an early date for the sutta. The lucid and simple style which is by no means heavy or laboured is characteristic of old poetry. The doctrinal emphasis too speaks of an early date for the sutta; and the few technical expressions reflect the “germs of a philosophical system which came to be more logically and consistently systematised” later on. Nothing could be gleaned regarding the social conditions of the time from this sutta; all other available evidence points to an early date.

N. A. JAYAWICKRAMA

8. Sn. 496b, 776d, 786d, 810b, 877d, 901d, 1,060b and 1,068d.