

# AN EXPLORATION OF VENERABLE U SILANANDA'S BOOK "PALI ROOTS IN SADDANĪTI"

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## Abstract

The book *Pali Roots in Saddanīti—Pali Roots in Saddanīti Dhātumālā Compared with Pāṇinīya Dhātupāṭha* by Venerable U Silananda is a useful work of reference for Pali students, Pali scholars, and to those interested in translating from the Pali into English or other European languages. Although this book was published<sup>1</sup> in 2005 and it is also available online<sup>2</sup> free of charge, it has gone mostly unnoticed. Therefore the 2<sup>nd</sup> conference of the Association of Theravada Buddhist Universities (ATBU)<sup>3</sup> is a good venue to share what this book is about and how it can be used to enhance our knowledge of the Pali language in which the Theravada scriptures are recorded.

## Introduction

In 1977, the late Venerable U Silananda published a book in Myanmar language, a comparative study of Aggavaṃsa's *Saddanīti Dhātumālā* with the *Pāṇinīya Dhātupāṭha*. I understand that his book is still available in Myanmar. The *Saddanīti Dhātumālā* is the ultimate reference for those who wish to learn the Pali roots as the *Pāṇinīya Dhātupāṭha* is for those who wish to learn the Sanskrit roots. In his original book published in Myanmar language Venerable U Silananda not only shows all the approximate 1800 Pali roots with their meaning, and the corresponding Sanskrit roots, but he also points out to errors he found in Aggavaṃsa's work.

In 1995, when I was studying Pali with Venerable U Silananda at his old monastery in Daly City, California, United States of America, I discovered his comparative study of *Saddanīti Dhātumālā* with the

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<sup>1</sup> By Centro Mexicano del Buddhismo Theravada A.C.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.btmar.org/files/pdf/dhatu.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> To be held in Sagaing, Myanmar, March 6-9, 2009.

*Pāṇiniya Dhātupāṭha* in Myanmar language. Since the main part of the book, the comparison between Pali and Sanskrit roots, was in Pali-Myanmar script, I decided to transliterate it into Pali-Roman script.

When the transliteration was finished, we thought it would be a good idea to revise it, root by root, add the meanings of the roots in English and Spanish, and write an Introduction and a guide so others, in particular scholars and students of Pali and Sanskrit, could benefit from his work. After many hours of sitting together working with this material, now at his new Dhammananda Vihara in Half Moon Bay, the book was completed in August 1999.<sup>4</sup>

After the book was completed, we looked for and found a publisher in Mexico, and submitted the book material for publication. But, as it may be the case with other books, the material languished in the publisher's hands, and year after year passed by. At the beginning of 2005, Venerable U Silananda got sick, the book still unpublished, and he passed away in August. Before he died a long-time disciple<sup>5</sup> of Venerable U Silananda approached me and offered help to print the book as a way of honoring him. And in this way the book was printed by the end of 2005 as Dhamma Dāna.

After the book was published and we had the boxes delivered to Dhammananda Vihara in Half Moon Bay, we gave a few here and there, sent boxes to Taiwan and México, but soon it was forgotten. Some people told me that the book was too technical; that Dhamma Dāna books should be easy to read and understand. So, since 2005, many boxes of books are languishing in the garage of Dhammananda Vihara.

I am now glad to have the opportunity to bring it back to life at the panel of Pali Literature of the 2<sup>nd</sup> conference of ATBU. The late Venerable U Silananda was a great Pali scholar and having the chance to present a paper about his book at this distinguished venue is to me both a way to honor him and an opportunity to briefly explore its contents hoping to be able to elicit its merits so it becomes for many an indispensable work of reference for the study of Pali.

### Exploring the book “*Pali Roots in Saddanīti*”

The following are the contents of the book: Preface, Introduction, Guide to Pali Roots, Abbreviations, Bibliography, Pali Roots in Comparison, Meaning of Pali Roots and About the Author. The main part of the

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<sup>4</sup> This paragraph and the next have been taken and adapted from my preface to the book.

<sup>5</sup> Sukhavati Tran.

book consists of two sections: (1) Pali Roots in Comparison and (2) Meaning of Pali Roots. These two sections are presented in tabular form. The first one contains the comparison between Pali and Sanskrit roots. The following is an image of part of the first page.

Pali Root <i>raíz pali</i>	Root Meaning <i>significado de la raíz</i>	Ref. <i>ref.</i>	Sanskrit Root <i>raíz sánscrita</i>	Root Meaning <i>significado de la raíz</i>	Ref. <i>ref.</i>
aṃsa	saṅghāte = accumulating; collecting    acumular; juntar; agregar.	VIII 348	aṃsa	samāghāte	X 371
aka	kuṭilagatiyaṃ = moving crookedly    ir torcidamente.	I 12, 210	ak a	kuṭilāyāṃ gatau	I 829
aki	lakṣhaṇe = marking; mark    marca, señal.	I 16	ak /	lakṣaṇe	I 87
aki	lakṣhaṇe = marking (saññāṇa)    marca, señal.	VIII 281	aṅka	pade lakṣaṇe ca	X 382

The first column lists all the Pali roots in alphabetical order following the Pali alphabet. The second column has the meaning of the roots, first in Pali following Aggavaṃsa's explanations in the *Dhātumālā*, and then the English and Spanish translation of its meaning separated by the "||" sign. The third column shows the group to which the Pali root belongs and the page number in which it is found in the *Dhātumālā*. The fourth column shows the corresponding Sanskrit root followed by its meaning and group and number from the *Dhātupāṭha* in the fifth and sixth column respectively.

For example, the first root “aṁsa” has the meaning of “saṅghāte” which means “accumulating” or “collecting”; and in Spanish, “acumular”, “juntar”, “agregar”. It belongs to the 8<sup>th</sup> conjugational group and can be found in page 348 of the *Dhātumālā*.<sup>6</sup> In this case the Pali root “aṁsa” has a similar corresponding Sanskrit root which belongs to the 10<sup>th</sup> conjugational group of the *Dhātupāṭha*.

The first main section of the book, Pali Roots in Comparison, has more than 300 pages, and it is followed by a second section, Meaning of Pali Roots, which shows all the meanings and corresponding roots. The following image of part of the first page will illustrate what this section is about.

Root Meaning <i>significado de la raíz</i>	Pali Root <i>raíz pali</i>
akkosane=abusing; insulting    insultar; agraviar.	khusi viii 347
akkose=insulting; abusing    insultar; agraviar.	biḷa i 200, sapa i 121
akkhepe=throwing    arrojar, tirar; lanzar.	sara viii 335
aggagamane=going first; leading (padhānagamana, paṭhamam eva gamaṇam vā)    ir primero; liderar.	pura i 156
aggisadda-pakkhepa-maddanesu=sound of fire; putting in, throwing in and crushing    sonido del fuego; poner en/dentro de, arrojar en/dentro de y aplastar, triturar.	muṭa i 54
acchane=sitting (nisīdana)    sentar(se), estar sentado.	saṁ-kase i 190

This section has only two columns. The first one lists all the Pali meanings of roots ordered according to the Pali alphabet, while the second column shows the Pali roots that correspond to that meaning. For example, to the Pali meaning of “akkosane”, insulting, corresponds the root “khusi” of the 8<sup>th</sup> conjugational group. The second meaning “akkose” which also is translated as “insulting” corresponds to two roots,

<sup>6</sup> All references are to the Sixth Buddhist Council edition in Myanmar script.

“biḷa” and “sapa”, both belonging to the 1<sup>st</sup> conjugational group. This section is relatively shorter, if compared with the previous one, with approximately 70 pages.

After preparing the two main sections of the book, it was decided to add an introduction and guide where other relevant information would be included. Venerable U Silananda wrote the introduction where he first gives some background information such as why he decided to write this book and the relation between Pali and Sanskrit. Also in the introduction he explains the meaning of the word “dhātu”, root, according to the ancient Pali grammars and provides useful insights on the *Saddanīti* and its author and the way old Pali grammars are structured.

To complement the introduction we prepared a guide where the eight conjugational groups together with their conjugational sign are shown in tabular form. The following is an image of this table.

GROUP	GROUP NAME (gaṇa)	TOTAL ROOTS*	CONJUGATIONAL SIGN (vikaraṇa)	REMARKS
I	bhūvādigāṇa	1110	a	.....
II	rudhādigāṇa	18	m̐-a	'm̐' to be inserted after first syllable
III	divādigāṇa	104	ya	.....
IV	svādigāṇa	30	ṇu, ṇā, uṇā	'ṇ' is not an indicatory letter
V	kiyādigāṇa	32	nā	.....
VI	gahādigāṇa	10	ppa, ṇhā	.....
VII	tanādigāṇa	14	o, yira	.....
VIII	curādigāṇa	399	ṇe, ṇaya	'ṇ' indicates strengthening of vowel of 1 <sup>st</sup> syllable if not already long or followed by double consonant

These are the eight groups in which Pali roots are distributed. The first column lists the eight groups in roman numbers while the second shows their names in Pali. The third column tells us the approximate number of roots belonging to each group. The fourth column provides the conjugational sign of the corresponding group while the last column contains remarks needed to be taken into account when forming the base. For example, the 8<sup>th</sup> group is called “curādigaṇa”, the group beginning with the root “cura”, stealing. This group has 399 roots and its conjugational signs are “ṇe” and “ṇaya”. The letter “ṇ” is called an indicatory letter used to signify strengthening of the vowel of the first syllable of the root if it is not long or followed by a double consonant.

The guide also contains two tables: (1) Forming Verbs from Root and (2) Forming Nouns from Root. These tables illustrate the process of forming verbs and nouns from roots. The book also includes a bibliography, abbreviations and Pali Alphabet pages.

### Conclusion

In this paper I have explored the contents of the book *Pali Roots in Saddanīti* by the late Venerable U Silananda. Every student of Pali, either when studying the formation of words or conjugation of verbs or when reading the explanations of the Commentaries (Aṭṭhakathā) and Sub-commentaries (Ṭīkā), will eventually have to deal with roots or face a dead-end in his or her study. Why is that? Because, as Venerable U Silananda says, “most words in Pali as well as in Sanskrit are made up of a root and a suffix”.

Since the root is the essential and basic element of almost every word we encounter in Pali, knowing about the root will definitely enhance our knowledge and understanding of the language. And that is what this book provides based in one of the most authoritative Pali grammars ever written: Aggavaṃsa’s *Saddanīti*. And not only that, using *Pali Roots in Saddanīti* is a timesaver because our respected author was able to compile in a handy and well-organized format what would take uncountable hours if one were to chose to browse the complete *Saddanīti* for the same kind of information.

Personally, I have benefited from helping Venerable U Silananda to prepare and edit his book, and also, after it was finished, it has become an indispensable reference to my work of translating from Pali into Spanish. I believe others will find it useful too, so download it online or let me know if you want a free printed copy.

### Venerable U Silananda (1927-2005)

He was the founding Rector of the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU), Yangon, Myanmar, from 1999 until his death, abbot of Dhammananda Vihara, Half Moon Bay, California, spiritual director of the Dhammachakka Meditation Center, and Centro Mexicano del Buddhismo Theravada A. C. In 1993, he was awarded the title of *Agga-Maha-Pandita* in recognition for his learning achievements and wisdom. In 1999, he received the title of *Agga-maha-saddhammajotika-dhaja* and in 2005, he was granted the highest recognition of *Abhidhaja-aggamaha-saddhammajotika-dhaja* for his tireless and selfless service to the Buddha Sasana.

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