

Comparison of Venues of the Buddha's Discourses in the Three Nikāyas

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to share my findings of distinctive patterns in the three Pali Nikayas (Dīgha, Majjhima and Saṃyutta Nikāya). In order to grasp the Buddha's teachings correctly in Pāli Nikāyas, there will be various approaches. My approach is the research of the Locations of the venues of the Buddha's discourses with a comparison of statistical data.

In many cases the Buddha's teachings took place in Anāthapindika's Park; but Dīgha Nikāya is very different. We will see the variety of settings of three Nikāyas. Many different locations mean the Buddha was not a hermit who isolated himself from the society but one who shared life with people. Through the Locations in Pāli Nikāyas, we find some clear characteristics of Buddha's teachings.

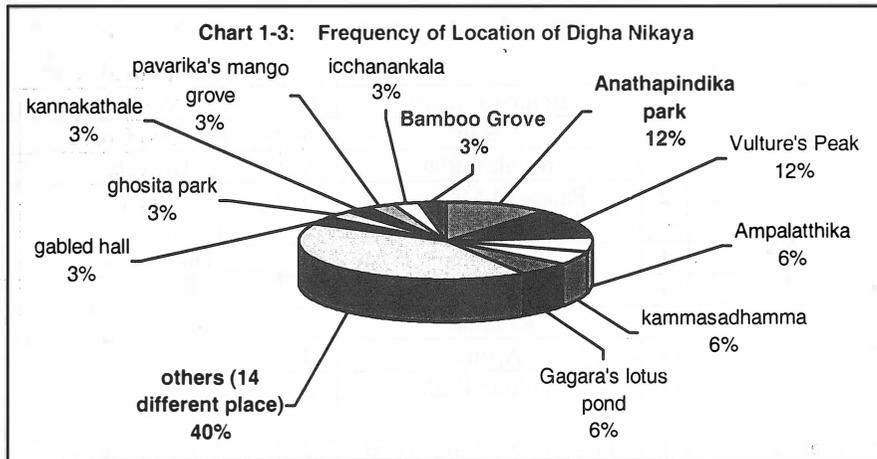
Table 1: Locations of Three Nikayas ¹

When we compare the Locations of the three Nikayas, we find that there are very distinctive patterns among them. The following table and chart present a comparison of the locations of three Nikayas.

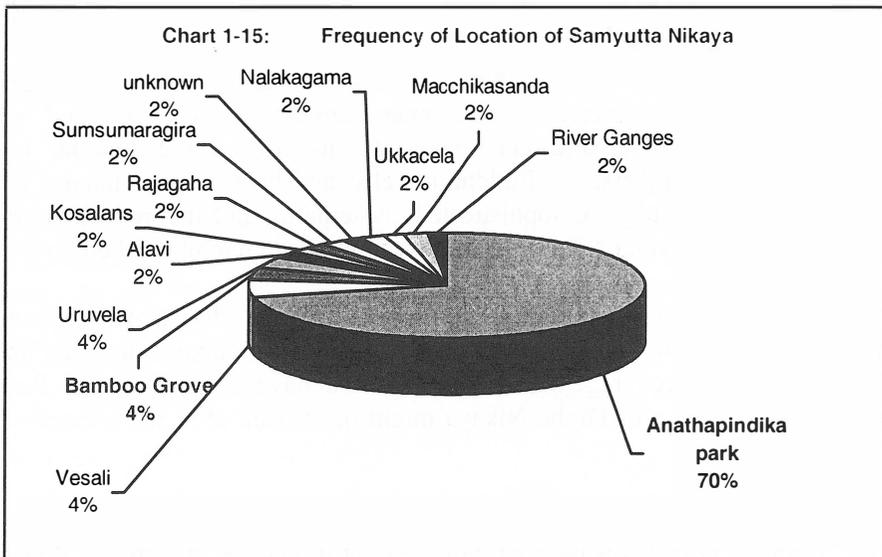
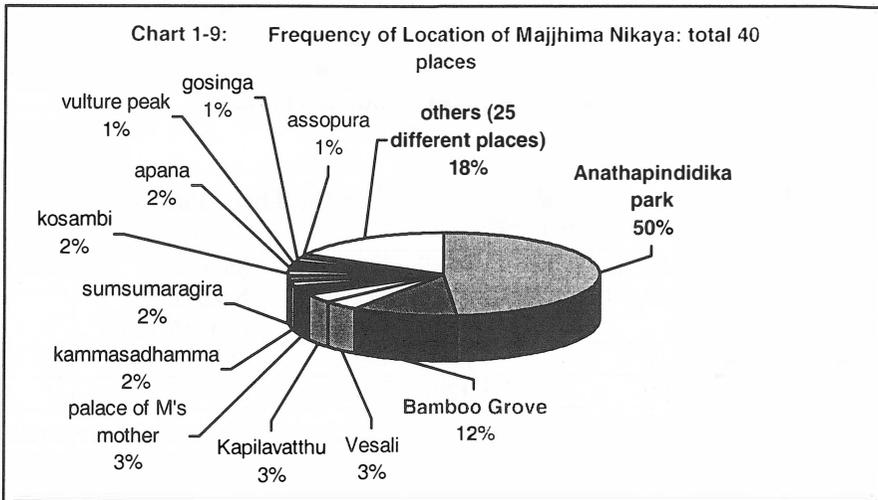
Digha Nikaya: 34 sutta (25 places: 74%)		Majjhima Nikaya:152 sutta (41 places: 27%)		Samyutta Nikaya:56 Sutta (13 places: 23%)	
Anatthapindika's Park	4	Anathapindika	70	Anathapindika's Park	40
Vulture's Peak	4	Bamboo Grove	16	Vesali	3
Ampalattika	2	Vesali	5	Bamboo Grove	2
Kammasadhamma	2	Kapilavattu	5	Uruvela	2
Gaggara's lotus-pond	2	Palace of Migara's mother	5	Alavi	1
Icchanankala	1	Kammasadhamma	3	The Kisalans	1
Gabled Hall	1	Sumsumaragira	3	Rajagaha	1
Ghosita Park	1	Kosambi	3	Sumsumaragira	1
Kannakattale	1	Apana	3	Unknown	1
Pavarika's Mango Grove	1	Vulture Peak	2	Nalakagama	1
Salavatika	1	Gosinga Sala-tree wood	2	Ukkacela	1
Manasakata	1	Assopura	2	Macchikasanda	1
Mala's Sal grove	1	Sala	2	River Ganges	1
Nadika	1	Rajagaha	2		
Kapilavattu	1	Kosalans	2		
Ambasanda	1	Campa	1		
Setavya	1	Beluvagamaka	1		
Anupiya	1	Nalanda	1		
Matula	1	Haliddhavasana	1		

Mansion of Migara's mother	1	Catuma	1		
Nalanda	1	Nalakapana	1		
School Building	1	Kasi Country	1		
Bamboo Grove	1	Ukkacela	1		
Cunda's mango grove	1	Kuru Country	1		
Jivaka's mango grove	1	Mithila	1		
		Mathura	1		
		Medalumpa	1		
		Ujunna	1		
		Videhan Country	1		
		Benares	1		
		Opasada	1		
		Icchanangala	1		
		Devadana	1		
		Kusinara	1		
		Samagama	1		
		Isigili	1		
		Magadhan Country	1		
		Deer Park Issipatana	1		
		Nagaravinda	1		
		Kajangala	1		
		Ukkatta	1		

Chart 1: Frequency of Locations of the three Nikayas: comparison



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The above table 1 and chart 1 show that among 34 suttas of the Digha Nikaya, 25 suttas have different locations (74%). Various locations of the teachings indicate that the Buddha never stayed in one particular place or comfortable monastery for a long time. Sometimes the Buddha visited his disciples who dwelt in a wide range of areas and taught them. Also, the high frequency of Anathapindika's Park indicates that the Buddha stayed in this park most often and that he always returned to this park after traveling. Samyutta Nikaya shows only 23 % in different places. It implies that mostly the discourses took place in the Anathapindika's Park.

Table 2: Frequency of Main Locations in the Three Pali Nikayas:

Location	Digha Nikaya: total 34 suttas	Majjhima Nikaya: total 152 suttas	Samyutta Nikaya: total 56 Suttas	Average
Anathapindika Park	12 %	50 %	70 %	44 %
Bamboo Grove	3%	12 %	4 %	
Vulture's peak	12%	1 %		
Vesali		3 %	4 %	

The above table 2 shows that Digha Nikaya is very low (12 %) in frequency of Anathapindika's Park, on the contrary, Samyutta Nikaya is very high (70 %). It indicates that Samyutta Nikaya is more involved in the practice of Bhikkhu Sangha because Anathapindika's park was well furnished and is the second largest monastery at Savatthi² in Buddhist history. Majjhima Nikaya is neither extremely high nor low but it is average of the other two Nikayas. This chart indicates that the teachings of the Digha Nikaya took place in many different locations. In many places, the Buddha met numerous Brahmins, wanderers, ascetics, other thinkers, and lay men and women. Usually they brought problematic social issues and questions to the Buddha. In order to debate with these thinkers, the Buddha traveled and hence it was natural that the Digha Nikaya contains logical, sophisticated, systematic, and theoretical discourses. On the other hand, Samyutta Nikaya is in a very simple and unembellished style.

Digha Nikaya shows that Vulture's Peak³ is of the same frequency as Anathapindika's Park. It indicates that Vulture's Peak is a mountain, so many hundred thousand people gathered together and they would have listened to the Buddha's teachings. The situation of Digha Nikaya might have been after the membership of Sangha increased. . .

Digha Nikaya shows Bamboo Grove as of the lowest frequency among three Nikayas. Bamboo Grove was the first monastery at Rajagaha,⁴ which was donated by King Bimbisara. It was a small and humble monastery, so for the large Sangha it would not had have suitable. Majjhima Nikaya is high in frequency of Bamboo Grove (12 %). It means this Nikaya is not excessively (like Digha Nikaya) dealing with problematic issues but with both practice and social issues. It is also possible that when a location of a discourse is not known the venue automatically given is Anathapindika's Park. (like in Samyutta Nikaya).

Table 3: Who was in Anathapindika's Park?

<i>Digha Nikaya:</i> Anathapindika's Park: 5 times out of 34 Suttas		<i>Majjhima Nikaya:</i> Anathapindika's Park: 70 times out of 152 Suttas		<i>Samyutta Nikaya:</i> Anathapindika's Park: 40 times out of 52 Suttas	
Buddha	4	Buddha	65	Buddha	34
Bhikkhus	3	Bhikkhus	47	Bhikkhus	29
Individual Bhikkhu	1	Individual Bhikkhu	17	Individual Bhikkhu	5
Brahmins	1	Brahmins	12	Householders	1
Householder	1	Householder	6	Wanderer	1
Wanderers	1	Bhikkhunis	3	Man	1
Wanderer	1	Wanderer	4	Ananda	1
Young man	1	Sariputta	3	Bhikkhunis	2
Ananda	1	Ananda	6	Sariputta	1
		Carpenter	3	Moggallana	3
		others	11	king	2
				others	4

Three Nikayas commonly show groups of Bhikkhus and individual Bhikkhus mostly were at Anathapindika's Park because it was a large monastery. This included kings and various people who visited the Buddha and listened to the Dhamma.

In conclusion, we should not ignore that the Buddha's compassionate teachings took place in a variety of settings such as parks, mango groves, roads, Sala groves, riversides, mountains, halls, woods, mansions, villages, towns, monasteries, fields and so on. The Buddha stayed among the masses, talked, and listened to them and taught them. The Buddha was not a hermit who isolated himself from society but rather he shared life with people because his final goal was to serve the good and the happiness of many thereby benefiting them.

Notes

¹ The suttas of Digha Nikaya are long discourses. For example, the Mahaparinibbana sutta (sutta 16) is 46 pages long, so it has many different locations, different stories, and different persons. Therefore, I selected the first location on page 1. The lengths of the Samyutta Nikaya vary: 22 Khandhasamyutta is 130 pages long and 26 Uppadasamyutta is just 4 pages long. However, I only counted chapters and the first location as on page 1.

² Book of Discipline Vol. 5: Cullavagga, p. 221-223. Publisher: Pali Text Society.

³ I have climbed this mountain. Now, the place of the sermon was well preserved and cemented to sit.

⁴ The Book of Discipline explains in detail the giving of the first monastery: Book of Discipline: vol IV: Mahavagga: the great division I, p. 51, Publisher: Pali Text Society.