

Synopsis of Ph. D. Dissertation

Submitted by

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*The Making of New Communicative Space in Early Buddhist Canon:
Modes of Address and Social Dialogues in the Pāli Nikāyas and the
Theravāda Vinaya Piṭaka.*

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Introductory Chapter

Introducing the Topic and the Sources

Conversations, speeches and narrative devices as tools of preaching and intellectual communication were prevalent in the religious domain in India from a very early period. The preaching and addresses carried out in oral forms were frozen into written texts centuries later to build up a layered and accretive textual tradition. In the Theravāda Nikāyas and the Vinaya Piṭaka there are concrete indications that a wider intellectual forum based on complex communicative modes was being fashioned in a systematic way. The present study intends to identify and examine certain distinctive modes of address in the Nikāya collections and the Vinaya Piṭaka. The distinctiveness and complexity of these communicative modes would be assessed against the backdrop of earlier discursive practices and narrative traditions. With the emergence of a self-conscious and organised order of monks with a hierarchically structured scholastic community, these addresses acquired a new dimension. This is an attempt to delineate the wider communicative space which assembled the speech-acts as authoritative utterances and tried to give it a societal shape. New patterns of cultural behaviour were transmitted and endorsed within an extended community. The site on which these addresses are to be investigated are primarily the Nikāya texts and the Vinaya Piṭaka of the Theravāda collection.

The Pāli Buddhist suttas known as the Nikāyas, the four principal texts within the Sutta Piṭaka, the Dīgha, the Majjhima, the Saṃyutta and the Aṅguttara and the Vinaya Piṭaka also from the Theravāda collection were originally oral texts, dating roughly from the fourth century BCE, when they were taking shape as recognizable ‘texts’ and were set down in

writing shortly before the beginning of the common Era. Most scholars had assumed that these parts of the Theravāda canon contain the oldest sources for the study of Indian Buddhism. Their assumptions have been derived from the evidence of the Sinhalese chronicles, which state that the Pāli canon was written down in the reign of Vaṭṭagāmiṇī (29-17 BCE) and it was brought to Sri Lanka during the reign of Aśoka.¹ According to the tradition of the chronicles, a complete canon of sacred texts was compiled on the occasion of the third council, at the time of Aśoka.² It is certain that, at that time the saṃgha was divided into several schools. This was a period of ideological contestations and therefore it is possible that the need for holding on to a notion of a fixed body of texts became more important. Claims to uphold the original utterances of the Buddha had become more palpable in the situation.

This assumption also stems from internal evidence from the Pāli Canon itself which seems to indicate that the major chunks of the Sutta and the Vinaya Piṭakas were compiled in a pre-Aśokan North India/Madhyasdesa. The internal evidence also proves its antiquity and authenticity. This is the framework suggested by T.W. Rhys-Davids³, K.R. Norman⁴ and Richard Gombrich.⁵

Thus, the accepted framework places the earlier portions of the Pāli Canon around the middle of the 3rd century BCE. But this time-range has been challenged time and again. In more recent times Gregory Schopen took a sceptical view of this time-range and asserted that the Pāli texts have been preserved in very late manuscripts and can hardly contain evidence of a time before 5th century CE, when the major commentaries were being written.⁶ Most recently, Alexander Wayne, taking a cue from K.R. Norman and Richard Gombrich has argued on the basis of certain internal evidence that the Pāli Canon had an early pre-Aśokan closure.⁷

If we accept the framework proposed by Wynne we can trace the trajectory of these oral texts. In the first phase we have the creation of the discourses which were then disseminated verbatim, recited, taught and learnt by heart. In the next phase this memory had to be contextualized, each memory thread had to be reiterated with reference to specific settings. As we shall see, this process started with the coming of organised monastic Buddhism and the attempts of the saṃgha to link itself to temporal events. This would initiate the process of narrativisation of memory and appropriate doses of stylization. The narrative context, framing of the content and mode of delivery had to be kept flexible and variable to highlight interchange of views in different situations, reaching out to an expanding and ranked community. Thus even before the compilation of the suttas and the making of separate collections, the process of narrativisation had begun. These early attempts of narrativisation would leave its imprint on finished ‘texts’, where successive phases of narrative structures are found in fossilized forms. This trajectory enables us to understand the fluidity of the oral texts in the early phase of creation which would allow these speech acts to spill out into a more open social space. In a later phase of crystallization the utterances would be fitted into more organised formats. Thus, within the discursive universe of the texts very clear shifts can be detected as far as the nature of address is concerned and these shifts in their turn were connected to the world outside the texts on multiple levels.

Prior Researches

All prior researches on the Pāli collections while very exhaustive and analytically sound have been concerned with the stratification or the

authenticity of the utterances or have focused on facets of Buddhist thought. Thus G.C. Pandey's voluminous work *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism* adroitly handles the problem of stratification of the four major Nikāya texts, while K.R. Norman in *Pali Literature* does a meticulous textual study and explores the problem of authenticity of the utterances and the dynamics of their transmission. Richard Gombrich has foregrounded the practices and precepts of Theravāda Buddhism and stressed the importance of relating Buddhist texts and practices to other Indian religions. This delineates an intellectual context but does not people this intellectual landscape going beyond the bounds of the texts. Naomi Appleton in her book *Jataka Stories in Theravāda Buddhism: Narrating the Bodhisatta Path* has brought in the issue of the audience in texts, as well as the theoretical framework of narrativisation, but she has focused exclusively on the Pāli Jātaka collection. Recently Bruno Galasek in his unpublished dissertation has done a very interesting study 'On Presenting Characters and the representation of Persons: A Narratological Study of the Characters in Narrative Suttas of the Majjhima Nikāya'. But he has deliberately chosen a narrower scope and basing exclusively on the Majjhima Nikāyas and does not look at the Nikāyik programme as a whole. A more consolidated scope of perspective, taking the Nikayas as a whole and juxtaposing these to the Vinaya allows us to review the early frames and transitions in the frames of communications in a more historically meaningful way.

Kumkum Roy, in various articles has sought to develop a new methodology for retrieving lost voices of history. This has prompted her to look at unconventional sources from unconventional perspectives and also to read conventional texts from a new and unconventional perspective. She has not gone into piecemeal reconstruction of events or

sought to draw out nuggets of historical information from a given text. Instead, she has worked on a methodology of understanding particular literary genres and their multiple contexts. She has focused on the familiar collection of Pāli Jātakas and the not so familiar collection of Therīgāthā to understand broader social structures and institutional edifices like the issues of political authority or gender relations. The issues of visibility and silence in the sources that she has brought in, as far as the marginal sections of the society are concerned, especially women and the labouring people, have been adopted as working models by researchers who work with early Indian texts.

Outside the boundaries of Pāli literary tradition, Laurie Patton, Brian Black, Alf Hiltebeitel and Michael Nichols have done sterling work to project face -to -face conversation and dialogue as defining features of South Asian traditional texts, rituals and practices. All of them have foregrounded the phenomenon of multi-vocality in the domain of religion and emphasized on the role of performed and written dialogues. These works provide certain thematic and discursive frames which we have referred to in relevant parts of our discussions.

Research Questions

The primary research questions have been incorporated and fleshed out in the Introductory Chapter.

A careful examination of the selected texts of the Theravādin collection and an assessment of the cultural information contained in the texts can help us to delve into the problems of understanding at least tentatively, the composition of certain modes of address in the early Buddhist texts

and on a macro level will also help us to define more accurately the development of a broader communicative space involving the ranked community of monks and the outer world during the period between fourth century BCE to first century BCE. This engagement with a broader space takes place on multiple planes, physical, social and intellectual. In fact, tracking the nature and processes of such engagements could enable us to read aspects of the intellectual history of the times.

On a middle level, the development of the Nikāyik programme as a whole has been explored tracing separate function for each text and shifts in modes of communication. G.C. Pande's exhaustive work on the Nikāyas has illustrated that the suttas were made up of heterogenous material and the texts thus were stratified. He has also shown how a meticulous examination of the material concerned can help us to identify the order and various strata of the text.⁸ The Nikāyik programme, being a conduit of moral ideology, articulated varying notions of hegemony as a reservoir of authoritative utterances. On the other hand, these utterances were blended into a format of polite discourse which sought to engage with the wider society on different levels through different forms of speech act.

The Vinayas (as a compilation), on the other hand, was rooted in institutional morality. Outward morality cultivated by training had been laid down for the monks in a network of relationships with other monks, the laity and the wider society as a whole. While the Sutta Piṭaka was preoccupied with the subjective states to be experienced by the monks, the Vinaya reflected an objective attitude. It has to be asserted that the Vinaya articulated a propensity for positive conduct and thus sought to delineate a wider fabric of appropriate behavior.

Thus, we note how the phenomenon of inter-generational intellectual networks were forged under conditions of creative rivalry, which created and sustained the social and institutional edifice of the intellectual systems themselves. This creative rivalry was articulated internally within the Buddhist order and also spilled out of the order to engage with a wide range of intellectual systems prevalent at the time.

The Precursors

While the process of narrativisation and budding narrative forms would seek to forge a specific mode of communication in the Nikāyik texts and broaden the communicative space, incipient narrative forms had a very important role to play in creating and sustaining intellectual linkages in earlier phases and in specific historical contexts. Some budding narrative forms have been chosen from Early and Later Vedic texts. We have tried to analyse the complexity and distinctiveness of the Nikāyik forms by situating these forms within the earlier tradition.

There are certain incipient narrative forms in the ṚgVeda that presuppose the germination of the *Itihāsa-Purāṇa* tradition. The *Dāna stuti* hymns of the earliest sections of the Ṛg Veda and the *gāthās* , *nārāśaṃsīs* and the *Ākhyānas* are narratives that were constructed to sing praises of the king. Though they occur mainly within a ritual context, they encapsulate forms of social assumptions as they unfurl genealogies of particular descent groups or eulogize a king. As a whole they signify recollection of the past within a specific context.

The early Upaniṣads were composed within an enormous land mass stretching from the Kuru-Pāñcāla region to the Kośala-Videha region.

The oldest Upaniṣads are tentatively the Bṛhadāraṇyaka and the Chandogya. Both were largely pre-Buddhist because they contain earlier source materials. The two texts have been tentatively placed in a time-bracket of 7th-6th century BCE. Localization of these early texts is problematic because they are based on earlier compilations. However, the focus of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad seems to be the Videha region, where the king Janaka plays an important role. The region becomes an important site of contestation in the text, for various schools of Vedic pedagogy. The triumph of the seer Yajñnavalkya over all the seers of Kuru-Pāñcāla region underlines this phenomenon. What is novel in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad is the presentation of the discourses as instructions of specific individuals. This can be explained in the movement of the Vedic people to the east as the priestly groups were trying to make Vedic material relevant to a new kind of audience through dialogues and narratives. The other most interesting aspect of the narratives and the dialogues is that they still carried an imprint of the sacrificial context, but focused on a completely different set of practices in contradistinction to the sacrifice. The practices fully developed by the narratives are teaching, debating or advising the king. It is not plausible that the sacrifices died out but yet its central importance in the texts is lost, replaced by ideological mechanisms of transmission of the Vedic faith.

The narratives in the texts are not just a way filling up the gaps between various cycles of rituals but they foreground direct transmission of knowledge, its context and the persons involved. All these methods reinforce the importance of a proper teacher and a proper pedagogical lineage. The pedagogical dialogues reiterate particular modes of address

and behavior that regulates the flow of knowledge. The interesting thing is that learning from unlikely sources is not always ruled out.

Addresses and Speech Acts in the Early Pāli Texts

We have to recognize the essential difference of the Buddhist discursive practices interspersed with illustrative narratives from the Brahmanical traditions and also from the epics. The records of the Buddhists had a more concrete engagement with the sequences of history. This stemmed from the belief of the order in the Buddha as a historical person. His life and actions were not only seen as an example to follow but also as a life that had a deep impact on the broader canvas of history. Thus it became imperative for the Saṅgha as an institution to weave together the dispersed content of the Teacher's discourses and to collate and preserve it as historical memory.

Chapter One: The Historical Context

In the First Chapter entitled '**The Historical Context of the Early Buddhist Theravāda Texts**' has two components. In the first part, the geographical/cultural context within which the rubrics of the discursive exercises were taking shape during the course of several centuries have been explored.

The texts describe a vast land mass—the Majjhimadesa. The Buddhist delineation of Majjhimadesa differed from the Brahmanical perception of the *Āryāvarta* or the *Madhyadeśa* in the sense, that in the Buddhist texts the Eastern boundary of Majjhimadesa stretched up to lands situated

further East of Campā and included the craggy terrains of the Himalayan foothills, while the contemporary Brahmanical texts stopped near Prayāga. The region east of the confluence of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā was not considered Brahmanical territory even when complex political systems like empires were taking shape within that very region. It implies that the Brāhmaṇas inhabiting these lands were not considered to be of a superior variety or the Brāhmaṇas were not regarded as the predominant social group in this region. In this part I have tried to investigate how the Buddhist texts sought to engage with this landscape in a very distinctive way and tried to look at it through the records of journeys undertaken by the first generation of Buddhist monks as contained in the texts.

According to the texts the Buddha and his first followers moved within a circumscribed area and took the same orbits again and again, the texts show a familiarity with the natural landscapes as well as the social landscapes. Apart from the fine cities, the texts repeatedly mention hillocks, lakes, fresh water tanks, rivers and local shrines by name. We have to remember that, the knowledge about the wider landscape was acquired through direct experience and was not ‘received knowledge’, handed down by tradition. Though in course of time, it became a part of tradition. Thus, the created landmarks are not to be understood in the ideational sense only but also as something embedded in the material context. Reading between the lines, the texts give ample indications that there was a drive on the part of the travellers to forge some links with the local land or community and to find a foothold within the local landscape.

The interesting thing is that rather than turning non-space into space the texts sought out spaces which were already occupied, spaces which can be perceived as affirmative categories and had significant affective values. Thus, while recording a journey, the texts also recognize and

memorialize familiar landmarks and imbue them with new meanings. The integrated multi-temporal landscape is not simply an inert backdrop to human activities but involves a symbolic re-arrangement of space.

The other interesting thing is that the Buddhist religion is seen as to have arisen partially as a response to the incipient state and the urban forms. Yet the Buddhist texts while they record stories of movement and travel relate more emotively to places and spaces tucked into the grey areas and the narrative of the state takes a back seat. In the texts there are the notions of infiltration and appropriation but also a sense of rapport with the community, which does not surface in the narratives of the state.

In the second part, the ideological backdrop has been explored. I have tried to analyse it by examining it through the prism of the peculiar position of Videha and Kosala in the intellectual landscape prior to the Buddha. This area hosted a common culture of critical questioning and was a hotbed of debates and discussions. The act of public speaking, as a specialized skill was being honed as well as a communicative arena for public speaking was also being prised open in the chieftain's court at Mithilā. The Paribbājaka tradition, which was steeped in this culture of conversations emerged in these very regions roughly a century later. Against this very complex backdrop the various dialogic devices and communicative modes delineated in the early Buddhist texts emerged not merely as the idiot's guide to the world at large but as a distinctive way of making sense and explaining the world and fleshing out their own parts in it.

Chapter Two: The Dīgha and Majjhima Nikāyas

In the second chapter entitled **Communicative Modes in the Early Theravāda Buddhist Canon: The Dīgha and Majjhima Nikāyas**, the principal modes of address have been discussed at the outset. The Suttas of the Dīgha and the Majjhima are all narrative suttas in the sense that they contain sermons, discourses, dialogues and so on but all of them have an overarching narrative structure. All of them consist of rhetorical acts of somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose that something happened. To be very precise, all the Suttas in the two collections share a structural feature which is a doubled communication situation, where the narrative work does not merely narrate but also represents an act of narration. But of the two or more frames and narrative surfaces they project, none are supposed to be fictional.

Initially, I have tried to argue that an evolved mode of communication surfaced in the Sūta Nipāta and can be identified in specific layers of the text. The initial attempts to take conversations into the public domain can be also traced. These budding forms of communication with a narrative framework could be taken as precursors to the more developed dialogic modes in the Dīgha and the Majjhima Nikāyas.

I have separately identified and analysed the various narrative forms within the two collections. The forms that are predominant in the two collections are-

- i. The Dialogic Narrative
- ii. Manufacture of legends
- iii. Mythic narratives with parabolic telling
- iv. Biographical units

The Importance of the Nidāna or the Context

This device of delineating a context to conversations was important in the Dīgha and also to a lesser extent in the Majjhima Nikāya. The texts mention the conversations of the Buddha with various people in various cities where he preached, such as Rajagṛha, Śrāvastī, Campā, Vaiśali, Vārānaśī or Kapilāvastu. The conversations are with a wide range of people – monks, householders, heads of clans and kings. The context has a three-fold significance- it posits the speech-act in a specific spatial-temporal context and also clarifies the reason behind the particular utterance. The factor of causality that is the premise of Buddhist perception of reality, permeates the fundamental texture of the Suttas.

Purposive Nature of the Addresses in the Dīgha and the Majjhima Nikāyas

In the next part, the distinctive functions of the two texts within the Nikāyik collection has been analysed, which helps us to ascertain the nature of the audience to which the texts were geared to. While both the Dīgha and the Majjhima are replete with narratives, dramatic turns and imaginative flights, the two texts served different purposes within the ranked community of monks and the laity. It has been argued that, the Dīgha embodies the imaginative and narrative aspects of the Nikāyik texts and was probably geared to reach out to a larger audience, the Majjhima looked inwards and was current within the inner ring of the monkish community. I have tried to propose a more nuanced reading of the narratives as purposive addresses and tried to delineate wider functions for both the collections. As far as the narrative elements are concerned the Majjhima collection, is strikingly similar to the Dīgha but

on the whole the suttas are shorter. The themes of the suttas are also more varied. I have tried to argue that, Majjhima Nikāya foregrounds the narrative strategies and communicative devices of the early Buddhist texts more clearly as it has a wider variety of suttas addressed to various groups and individuals

Chapter Three: Saṃyutta and Aṅguttara Nikāyas

The third chapter, attempts to unravel the development of a authoritative discourse in the Saṃyutta and Aṅguttara Nikāyas.

While the Dīgha and the Majjhima are replete with narratives, dramatic turns and imaginative flights, the suttas of the Saṃyutta and the Aṅguttara Nikāyas, with some exceptions, appear with no frills and are dry and scholastic. The narrative trapping is mostly done away with here and only minimal circumstantial background to the discourses is given. A background story or nidāna is almost completely absent as the introduction is a perfunctory one which states the discourse was delivered by the Blessed One or one of his prominent disciples in such and such location. The shifting of the narrative perspective and creation of two or more narrative axes are devices that have been rejected. Sometimes the Buddha lets out a direct proclamation to a single monk or a group of monks regarding some finer points of the doctrine. These suttas were intended for those who were already steeped in the ways of the saṃgha and immersed in its study and practice. Despite these similarities, I have tried to argue, that the two collections had different roles to perform within the Nikāyik collection and also within the community who were the direct and indirect recipients of the utterances.

In the first part, the various forms of address have been identified and analysed separately.

In the next section the separate functions of the two collections have been fleshed out. In the Saṃyutta Nikāya, the terse pronouncements on the doctrine, gathered and laid out with a thematic arrangement however superficial, point to a repository of suttas which catered to the doctrinal specialists and the disciples with an intellectual bent of mind who sought to explore the weighty topics like dependent origination, the five aggregates, the six basic senses or the Four Noble Truths. In this collection specific suttas dealing with specific aspects of the doctrine is a ready reckoner for the specialist.

The Aṅguttara Nikāya on the other hand contain large numbers of numerical lists or flow chart like suttas. These suttas underline a phase in Early Indian textual history when writing was not used to articulate religious utterances. Memorization and preservation of the discourses were aided by the numerical method.

As we have seen the notion of Buddhavacana and the anxiety for its preservation surface from an early phase of Buddhist history and all the four Nikayas with their variegated content each had a specific role to play in conveying the words of the Buddha. If we look at the individual suttas this inner purpose is not at all apparent or crystal clear. To understand the role of the specific Nikāyas it is necessary to look at the collection as a whole. The Saṃyutta and the Aṅguttara collections have quite a few overlaps and mostly contain terse suttas laid out in a numerical format and foreground quick and radical insights on some of the points of the doctrine. The Saṃyutta would serve as a ready reckoner for the doctrinal specialist or for the monk/nun who were preoccupied with the notion of

attaining absolute truth. The Aṅguttara on the other hand, has the kind of structure which would facilitate pedagogic exercises. Thus, it has a more practical orientation conducive to teaching and edification. In this collection more than the others suttas are compiled which valorize the practice of learning. According to the suttas the learned are esteemed by all their fellow men. It is not only glorifying learning but actually foregrounding the proper ways to learn and to teach. Emphasis is on how to listen attentively and to retain correctly. Thus, the authenticity and authoritative quality of an utterance is underscored and the notion of a authoritative discourse comes into play.

The scope of the suttas however, have to be examined against the backdrop of the imageries of multifarious congregations and assemblies that come up in the texts again and again. This has been done in the last section. The idea of the congregation broadens the scope of the discourses and reveals a communicative space that is complex and heterogenous.

Chapter Four: The Vinaya Piṭaka

The Fourth Chapter explores the development of various narrative forms in the Vinaya Piṭaka. The Vinaya Piṭaka also symbolize a phase when narrativisation of discourses is a dominant feature. In the first part, an analysis of the structural features and thematic content of the suttavibhaṅga and the Khndhaka portions of the Theravāda Vinaya Piṭaka.

Just as Dhamma sought to arrange the inner life of the monks, Vinaya sought to order their outer life. Outward morality cultivated by training

had been laid down for the monks in a network of relationships with other monks, the laity and the wider society as a whole.

Basic Narrative format in the Suttavibhaṅga

The Suttavibhaṅga is arranged according to a set pattern.

- a) A story leading up to a rule
- b) A Pātimokkha rule stating the penalty for breaking it
- c) The Padabhājanīya- defining each rule word for word
- d) More stories dealing with deviations from the rule

The Khandhakas

Just as the first part of the Vinaya Piṭaka is concerned with the individual as a member of the saṅgha, the second part of the Vinaya Piṭaka, the Khandhakas, touch upon the saṅgha as a whole.

The structure and arrangement of the narratives in the Khandhakas are different. Here the stories are embedded in the history of the order. The Mahāvagga opens with the days preceding the foundation of the order. For the most part the stories are told in the context of the biography of the Buddha.

In the next section, I have tried to flesh out how the notion of an integrated community, including the lay followers, had taken shape in the Vinaya and individual lay followers have been projected as moral agents on display in the public sphere. The location of various categories of women within this integrated community has also been discussed. The figure of the Buddha had emerged as presiding over this integrated community as the supreme moral arbiter. Thus, in the Vinaya, the rules do not simply have the force of law but usher in the notion of an

overarching dispensation or *sāsana* and projects a way of life that is more powerful and potent than the rules and sanctions. The Buddha thus, is not a mere codifier of laws but a moral leader and the promulgator of a distinct moral culture.

In the last section, the nature of the Buddhist organization and its engagements with historical processes have been foregrounded. Especially the *saṅgha*'s engagement with the political edifices had churned out new forms of discursive practices preserved in the *Vinaya Piṭaka*.

At the very outset, it has been said, that the discourses in the *Vinaya Piṭaka* reflect more tangible imprints of narrativization. None of the stories told in the *Vinayas* are unresolved, but they are more open-ended and conjure up multiple closures. The stories are apparently not closed but are conclusive and omnipotent. I have also tried to argue throughout the chapter, that underneath the moral packaging of the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, a subterranean current of critical commentary on the idea of morality represented in the *Vinaya* flows constantly and the notion that the moral scheme of the *Vinaya* is somehow incomplete and inadequate is a sub-text that surfaces again and again.

Conclusion

In the concluding chapter, the problem of dissemination of the speech acts has been discussed again and the ranked community of the monks as well as other in-text audience outside the community of monks have been brought into the picture again. Who were the disseminators? Who were

the recipients? Did the mode of address change with the changing category of recipient?

In the Nikāyik programme the Buddha dominates as the authoritative figure, yet it also has the underpinning that the disciples are to realize and experience the truth by themselves. In the Vinaya Piṭaka it has been underlined again and again that the Dhamma had to be taught energetically and in full detail. The teaching had to be carried out in the form of suttas, both in the prose and verse forms. The epithet of *sāttthā* applied almost exclusively to the Buddha. The *sāttthā* is more than a teacher or a master. He is the one who sends a message or śāsana, which is authoritative in the sense that it produces an effect.

The Disseminators: The Community of monks

It is also important to note that the message was to be disseminated within an integrated but ranked community and the custodians and disseminators were various categories of monks who made up the scholastic community. Though in the Nikāyik world the notion of the samagra saṃgha comes up again and again it necessarily connotes the notion of a harmonious order with fixed hierarchical alignments. The saṃgha as the universal order or the order of the four quarters incorporated all disciples and transcended time and space. But the saṃgha which is located in history and in a specific temporal and spatial context included five groups of mendicants. Here I have tried to understand the scholastic community of the saṃgha from the texts and have also tried to bolster my findings by drawing corroborative evidence from the early corpus of inscriptions of Sanchi and Bharhut. Here it has been argued that even if we leave the Buddha aside, we come across a

large group of speakers and disseminators, who operated inside and outside the order and tried to fashion distinctive modes of public speaking.

The Recipients

If we look at the in-text audience the number of sermons directed towards the laity was not insignificant. In many suttas lay followers came to the Buddha of their own accord and asked for advice. A common refrain can be found in the four major Nikāyas, where the laity approaches the Buddha and declare their this-worldly and other-worldly desires.

As we analyse the presence of the various social groups as in-text audience we are aware that each Nikāya text had a different role to play and were geared towards different social groups as audience. Thus, in the Dīgha Nikāya majority of the suttas directed towards the laity had upper caste individuals or groups as audience. In the Dīgha, a major part of the suttas are addressed to the Brāhmaṇa audience and deal with the phenomenon of conversion. Thus, the in-text audience would be essentially Brāhmaṇa ideologues who would be won over from a prior world view. In the Aṅguttara on the other hand, most of the lay suttas are directed towards the vessas and householders, who are already adhering to the teachings of the Master and most the suttas are oriented towards leading people to a good rebirth.

As far as the lay suttas are concerned, a meagre number of sermons are directed towards women. Roughly 26 suttas can be winnowed out as having lay women as audience. In the Dīgha again, we do not have a single sutta addressed to a lay woman. In the Aṅguttara on the other hand,

we have the highest number of suttas being addressed to women. It can be argued that women could be present as in-text audience even when they were invisible. As the householders came for consultation, they could bring their wives along though their presence has not been noted in the texts. In the king's retinue also, women were present, though the texts merely mention them and present them as silent listeners.

We can identify three main types of addresses- sermons, debates and consultations. Most of the sermons are unsolicited sermons where sequential instruction is given by the Buddha. This type of address does not arise from a challenge or a question. Sometimes a sermon is given in response to request by an individual or by a group. Sometimes the mode of address is made further complex when the Buddha leads the listener through a series of questions. Sometimes the teaching is prefaced by or is included in a story.

Unsolicited sermons of this kind were more common in the *Aṅguttara* and the *Saṃyutta*. Storytelling and dialogic devices were more common in the other two major *Nikāyas*. The element of consultation when a question is asked or the element of debate, when a challenge is posed is more frequent in these two collections, as the suttas were longer and more elaborate. At the same time, it can be said that the interlocutor as a high caste male is perceived as most appropriate in the texts. The *Dīgha* and the *Majjhima* having the bulk of the higher caste male as the addressee thus would spin out more stories and dialogic devices as well as addresses in the format of a debate or a consultation.

On the other hand, generally the low caste and the women were recipients of sequential plain sermons. Women were instructed on issues of generosity, marriage and domesticity while the vessa householders would

be lectured on how to fulfill the goals in this life and to achieve a good rebirth in a heavenly realm. Thus, changes in modes of address and content while reaching out to various social groups can be discerned as we make an analysis of the four major Nikāyas.

The interesting thing is, that within these literary dialogues there are extra-textual referents that indicate broader frameworks of historical interactions and social dialogues that may have existed outside the universe of the texts. The texts present the act of public speaking as a distinct moral practice that exudes calmness even in polemical situations. The emphasis is on speaking in a pleasant manner to various social groups. I would like to argue that, the early Buddhist texts were pleading for a polite discourse and trying to underscore specific patterns of cultural behavior, which could be emulated and consumed in a broader urban ambience. Here the notion of an interpretive community has been foregrounded, involving the composers, reciters and audience of the addresses, who not only read, interpreted and acted out the norms underlined in the texts, but also directly and indirectly shaped them. This presupposes the presence and operations of intellectual and moral facilitators both inside and outside the Saṅgha.

This authoritative voice cast into a polite mode of discourse, evolves further in later texts like the Jātaka collection and the Theragāthā which have also been discussed in the last portion. As a distinctive and purposive narrative genre, the Jātaka collection took shape over a longer period of time than the Nikāyas. Some of the narratives at the core, may have been extant since Buddha's times, as many of them are found in the Nikāyas, often in a proto-Jātaka format. The Gāthas, original and oral, are generally held to have been completed by 2nd century BCE, most probably with an earlier commentary attached to them. The Jātaka

Atthakathā, the final form in which we find it today crystallized much later, around the middle of the first millennium A.D. and were frozen into the written form. The Jātaka collection constitutes a distinctive narrative genre, which reasserts the hegemonic role of the Buddha as a speaker and underlines that different components of the narratives had a distinct role to play and were geared to different addressees.

The Gāthās of the Theras and the Therīs as finished texts, also had a long drawn-out biography. Some of them were composed long after the Great Demise of the Buddha according to conventional in-text evidence and were not even composed before the time of Aśoka, let alone become the part of a collection. The Gāthās were embedded in a 6th century C.E. commentary without which some of the shorter utterances would become quite cryptic. A very refreshing investigation into the two texts by Kumkum Roy has brought out the different flavours of the texts with ample clarity. According to her, the Theragāthā has a more systematized content and might have catered to a monkish audience. The Therīgāthā being more subjective and context-specific had a different role to play.⁹ If we look at some of the addresses in the Theragāthā, they verge on to being authoritative, almost normative utterances, ascribed to individual Buddhist monks. These utterances resonate the hegemonic discourse of the Nikāyas and the Vinaya Piṭaka and reflect conventions of public speaking that could permeate broadening orbits of social conversation.

Thus, changes in modes of address and content while reaching out to various social groups can be discerned as we make an analysis of the four major Nikāyas.

The interesting thing is, that within these literary dialogues there are extra-textual referents that indicate broader frameworks of historical

interactions and social dialogues that may have existed outside the universe of the texts. The texts present the act of public speaking as a distinct moral practice that exudes calmness even in polemical situations. The emphasis is on speaking in a pleasant manner to various social groups. I would like to argue that, the early Buddhist texts were pleading for a polite discourse and trying to underscore specific patterns of cultural behavior, which could be emulated and consumed in a broader urban ambience. Going a step further we can say, that the literary dialogues and discourses are actually artefacts that indicate the possibility of an array of social conversations that could take place outside the sangha.

Notes

¹ Dip XX.20-21.

² DipavaṃsaV,27ff.

³ Rhys-Davids,1903, pp.165-167.

⁴ Norman 1983, p,36.

⁵ Gombrich,2006, p.12.

⁶ Schopen 1997, p.23.

⁷ Wynne 2005, pp.38-42.

⁸ Pande(1957)pp.27-50.

⁸ Roy, Kumkum, ‘Of *Theras* and *Therīs*: Visions of Liberation in the Early Buddhist Tradition’ in *The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power: Explorations in Early Indian History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 21–22.

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