

**THE DĪGHA NIKĀYA DEBATES:  
DEBATING PRACTICES AT THE TIME OF THE  
BUDDHA<sup>1</sup>**

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Eighteen out of thirty-four suttas in the Dīgha Nikāya (D 1-13, 23-25, 28, 31) are debate suttas, that is to say that each of these has all or most of the following features: a central character, most usually the Buddha, and a statement of his credentials; an adversary, and a statement of his credentials; a description of a location that functions to set the scene and the atmosphere; an audience; a greeting ceremony; a challenge; a refutation of the adversary's position; the establishment of the Buddhist position; a hypothetical case history<sup>2</sup>; a surrender, in the form of an acceptance formula, by the adversary; a reward<sup>3</sup>. Witzel has already drawn attention to similarities between the debates in the Vedic texts and those in the Pāli texts, notably on the

issue of the severed head<sup>4</sup>, on the relationship between the *sahadhammika* type of questioning 'which takes place in a kind of open challenge or tournament, (which is) similar to the Vedic *brahmodya*<sup>5</sup>, and on the similarity of both the *anati-praśnya* and the *sahadhammika* questions and the general rules of discussion found in the Vedic and Pāli texts<sup>6</sup>. He particularly observes, 'As often, it is the early Buddhist texts which provide more detailed and useful information. The Pāli texts . . . frequently describe in lively and graphic detail what is only alluded to in the Vedic texts which were, after all, composed by Brahmins for Brahmins: one did not have to explain ritual matters of everyday occurrence or of common knowledge to one's fellow Brahmins or to *brahmacārin* students . . .<sup>7</sup>. Witzel comments further, 'Interestingly, the challengers seem to be the best among the various groups of Brahmins (and both Yājñavalkya's and their personalities require further study)<sup>8</sup>.

The Buddhist debates of the Dīgha contain information regarding contemporary debating practices, including customs or conventions related to the debate situation, information regarding the types of utterance that were usual in religious

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2 Most usually a repetition of §§ 40-98 of the Sāmaññaphala Sutta, D 2.

3 See J. Manné, 'Categories of Sutta in the Pāli Nikāyas and their implications for our appreciation of the Buddhist Teaching and Literature' JPTS XV, 1990, pp.29-87 (abbrev. Manné, 1990), cf. pp.44-68.

4 M. Witzel, 'The case of the shattered head', *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 13/14, 1987, pp.363-415 (abbrev. Witzel, 1987), but see S. Insler, 'The shattered head split and the Epic tale of Śakuntalā', *Bulletin d'études indiennes* 7-8, Paris 1989-90, who takes a different view of the history of the theme of the shattered head.

5 Witzel, 1987, p.408.

6 'Both the *saccakiriya* and the *anati-praśna* / *sahadhammika* statements deal with truth, but both do so in a formalised context: either a discussion with a challenger and one or more opponents.' *Ibid.*, p.110.

7 *Ibid.*, p.381.

8 *Ibid.*, p.365.



debate, and criteria for judging success in debate, beyond those that Witzel discusses in his article (by no means all of which have been referred to above). It is the very large number of features in common between Vedic and Buddhist debates that Witzel has drawn attention to in his article, and others that I have pointed out<sup>9</sup> that permits me to say this. The purpose of this article is to present this material. It is beyond its scope to make extensive comparisons with the Vedic tradition. This article then analyses the Buddha's debating style and techniques in terms of these conventions and compares them with those of one of his disciples, Kumāra Kassapa.

In three of the debate suttas, the Brahmajāla (D 1), the Kassapa-Sīhanāda (D 8) and the Udumbarikā-Sīhanāda (D 25), contemporary debating practices, including customs or conventions related to the debate situation, are specifically mentioned. In the Brahmajāla there is information regarding the types of utterance that were usual in religious debate (and the Buddha's attitude towards them). In the Kassapa-Sīhanāda are the criteria for judging success in debate, and in the Udumbarikā-Sīhanāda the value placed upon discussion between religious practitioners of different persuasions is demonstrated. In these suttas the Buddha is the debater on behalf of the Buddhists. This is the normal state of affairs in the Pāli texts, which lends support to Witzel's observation cited above that 'interestingly, the challengers seem to be the best among the

9 Manné, 1990.

various groups of Brahmins, . . .'<sup>10</sup> In a fourth sutta, the Pāyāsi (D 23), the wordy Kumāra Kassapa takes this role. It is because he is so explicit about his tactics in the discussion that this sutta also provides useful information on debating techniques.

In the Brahmajāla Sutta the Buddha criticises the disputatious habits of brahmins and sāmāṇas, particularly the use of expressions like:

- (1) 'You don't understand this doctrine and discipline, I do.'  
'How should you know about this doctrine and discipline?'  
'You have fallen into wrong views. It is I who am right.'  
'I am speaking to the point, you are not.'  
'You are putting last what ought to come first, and first what ought to come last.'  
'What you have excogitated so long, that's all quite upset.'  
'Your challenge has been taken up.'  
'You are proved to be wrong.'  
'Set to work to clear your views.'  
'Disentangle yourself if you can'<sup>11</sup>.

Because of the many features in common between the Vedic

10 Witzel, 1987, p.365.

11 'Na tvaṃ imaṃ dhamma-vinayam ājānāsi, ahaṃ imaṃ dhamma-vinayam ājānāmi, kiṃ tvaṃ imaṃ dhamma-vinayam ājānissasi? - Micchā-paṭipanno tvam asi, aham asmi sammā-paṭipanno - Sahitam me, asahitan te - Pure vacanīyaṃ pacchā avaca, pacchā vacanīyaṃ pure avaca - Avicinṇan te viparāvattam - Aropito te vādo, niggahīto 'si - Cara vādappamokkhāya, nibbettehi vā sace pahosīti, D 8, § 18. Tr. T.W. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha* I, p.14f. See also his extensive notes.



and the Buddhist debates, the reference to these types of utterance may be taken to indicate that they were in general use in contemporary debating practice.

The expression of criteria for success in debate in the Kassapa-Sihanāda Sutta takes the form of a categorical denial, uttered by the Buddha, of a set of criticisms that he suggests might be made against him by religious wanderers of other sects<sup>12</sup>. The structure of the sutta shows that these criticisms are important: it is the Buddha himself who, unprovoked, first introduces them and then denies that they can be applied to him. Once again, because of the many other features in common between the Vedic and the Buddhist debates, this suggests that these were genuine contemporary criticisms which accurately reflected contemporary conventions of the debate situation. In this case, however, because Kassapa was a naked ascetic (*acelo*), they may not apply strictly to the Vedic debates<sup>13</sup>. The points that the Buddha disputes provide us, nevertheless, with the criteria of the time for judging and evaluating the competence of the debater.

The following are the potential criticisms that the Buddha suggests might be made against him: that although he issues his challenge<sup>14</sup>,

12 *ṭhānaṃ kho paṇ' etaṃ Kassapa vijjati yaṃ aññatitthiyā paribbājakā evaṃ vadeyyūṃ*. D I 175, § 22.

13 'JUB [Jaiminiya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa] 3.7.2 sqq. expressively states that such discussions were held only among the Brahmins and Kṣatriyas (and Vaiśyas?) but not among the Śūdras.' Witzel, 1987, p.410.

14 *sīha-nādaṃ nadati* - 'utters his lion's roar', 'makes his assertion', 'issues his challenge'.

- (2) 1. he does this in empty places, and not in assemblies<sup>15</sup>,
2. he issues his challenge in assemblies, but he does it without confidence<sup>16</sup>,
3. he challenges with confidence, . . . but people do not ask him questions<sup>17</sup>,
4. people ask him questions, but he does not answer<sup>18</sup>,
5. he answers their question, . . . but he does not win over their minds with his exposition<sup>19</sup>,
6. he wins over their minds with his expositions . . . but they do not find him worth hearing<sup>20</sup>,
7. they find him worth hearing but after they have heard him they are not convinced<sup>21</sup>,
8. having heard him, they are convinced, . . . but the faithful make no sign of their belief<sup>22</sup>,
9. the faithful give the sign of their belief, . . . but

15 *tañ ca kho suññāgāre nadati no parisāsuti*. D II 175. *parisā* - 'group', 'assembly'.

16 *parisāsu ca nadati, na ca kho visārado nadati*. Ibid.

17 *visārado ca nadati . . na ca kho naṃ pañhaṃ pucchanti*. Ibid.

18 *pañhaṃ ca naṃ pucchanti . . na ca kho paṇ' etaṃ* [Nālanda ed. *nesaṃ*] *pañhaṃ puṭṭho vyākaraṇoti*. Ibid.

19 *pañhaṃ ca nesaṃ puṭṭho vyākaraṇoti . . na ca kho pañhassa veyyākaraṇena cittaṃ ārādheti*. Ibid.

20 *pañhassa ca veyyākaraṇena cittaṃ ārādheti . . na ca kho sotabbaṃ assa maññanti*. Ibid.

21 *sotabbaṃ c'assa maññanti . . na ca kho sutvā pasīdanti*. Ibid. *pasīdati* - 'a mental attitude which unites deep feeling, intellectual appreciation and satisfied clarification of thought and attraction towards the teacher'. K.N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, London 1963, § 655.

22 *sutvā c'assa pasīdanti . . na ca kho pasannā pasannākāraṃ karonti*. Ibid. Presumably this means that they utter no acceptance formula, provide no meals for the bhikkhus, etc.



they do not follow the path to the Truth (Nibbāna)<sup>23</sup>,  
10. they follow the path . . . but they do not succeed<sup>24</sup>.

The Udumbarikā-Sihanāda Sutta contains a list of criticisms which provide further evidence that a religious leader was required to discuss his views and indeed to put himself before his critics in the public debating arena rather than to remain in solitude. These criticisms are made by Nigrodha, a wanderer (*paribbājaka*) and not a brahman, against the Buddha. Nigrodha challenges Sandhāna, a householder (*gahapati*) and lay disciple, on the subject of the Buddha's habits:

(3) 'With whom does he talk?

With whom does he engage in conversation?

With whom does he attain wisdom and distinction?

His wisdom is damaged by solitude.

The samaṇa Gotama is outside the assembly.

He does not converse enough.

He busies himself with peripheral matters<sup>25</sup>.

He ends his criticisms with the boast: 'If the Samaṇa Gotama were to come to this assembly, with a single question only could we settle him; yea, methinks we could roll him over like an empty pot'<sup>26</sup>.

23 *pasannā pasannākārān ca karonti . . na ca kho tathattāya paṭipajjanti.* Ibid.

24 *tathattāya ca paṭipajjanti . . na ca kho paṭipannā ārādhenti.* Ibid.

25 . . . *kena Samaṇo Gotamo saddhiṃ sallapati? kena sākacchaṃ samāpajjati? kena paññā-veyyattiyam āpajjati? Suññāgara-hatā Samaṇassa Gotamassa paññā, aparisaṅvacaro Samaṇo Gotamo, nālaṃ sallāpāya, so antamantā' eva sevati.* D III 38, § 5.

26 *Ingha gahapati, Samaṇo Gotamo imaṃ parisaṃ āgaccheyya, ekā-pañhen' eva naṃ saṃsādeyyāma, tuccha-kumbhi va naṃ maññe orodheyyāmāti.* D III

As this criticism comes from Nigrodha, whose followers have been criticised for their talkativeness by Sandhāna (§ 4), and who will be criticised for the same fault by the Buddha later in the sutta (§ 21), its content is evidently defensive in character. For this reason it might be expected that the Buddha, as he is represented by the composers of the texts, would not take it entirely seriously. As in the Kassapa-Sihanāda Sutta, however, these criticisms are given importance in the sutta: the Buddha hears Nigrodha's accusations by means of his clair-audience, and takes them seriously enough to come out of his solitude on the Vulture Peak into the area where the discussion was taking place in order to refute them.

Finally, Kumāra Kassapa, who is so explicit about what he is doing in the debate situation, by suggesting an earnest desire to conform to standards, provides samples that support the rules in the previously cited suttas. He provides further examples of the techniques a debater was expected to use, and indeed was admired for using. These are supported by examples of similar strategies in debates where the Buddha is the protagonist.

Kumāra Kassapa attempts the Buddha's technique of gradually leading the adversary on 'by the usual Socratic method adopted in so many of the Dialogues, to accept one self-evident truth after another'<sup>27</sup>, explaining to his adversary:

(4) 'Therefore, Prince, I will question you in this matter

38, § 5. Tr. T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha* II, p.35.

27 T.W. Rhys Davids' introduction to the Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta (D 4). *Dialogues* I, p.138.



and you answer if you please"<sup>28</sup>.

In the same explicit way he offers a simile:

- (5) 'Well then, Prince, I will make you a simile, for by a simile some intelligent persons will recognise the meaning of what is said'<sup>29</sup>.

The text tells us that Kumāra Kassapa was considered a skilled debater. At the end of the debate his opponent says to him, 'I was delighted, satisfied, by Master Kassapa's first simile, but I wanted to hear the variety of (his) answers to the question'<sup>30</sup>.

The suttas above provide information concerning the conventions, rules and customs connected with the debates that took place between religious leaders of one sect, or their senior followers, and those of another. They refer explicitly to a number of debating techniques or strategies. How far does the Buddha's performance in the debate suttas conform to these conventions?

In the Brahmajāla Sutta the Buddha's choice not to express himself in certain ways (see (1) above) is reported, and indeed the Buddha adheres to his standards throughout the Dīgha debates.

28 *Tena hi Rājañña taṃ yev'ettha paṭipucchissāmi, yathā te khameyya tathā nam vyākareyyāsi.* D II 319, § 5.

29 *Tena hi Rājañña upaman te karissāmi. upamāya pi ida' ekacce viññū purisā bhāsitaṃ atthaṃ ājānanti.* Ibid., § 9. Tr. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues* II p.354.

30 *Purīmen' evāhaṃ opammaṃ bhoto Kassapassa attamaṇo abhiraddho, api cāhaṃ imāni vicitrāni pañha-paṭibhānāni sotu-kāmo . . .* D II 352.

The criticisms in the Udumbarikā-Sīhanāda Sutta emphasise certain features of the customs that formed part of the debate situation, notably the expectations placed upon a religious leader, that he should be willing to enter into public debate and discussion. The large number of debate suttas in D alone attest to the Buddha's conformity to these expectations.

The criteria of the Kassapa-Sīhanāda Sutta (see (2) above) relate to the conventions of the debate situation. The debater was expected confidently to issue a challenge or make an assertion to an assembly (see (2), points 1 and 2). The challenge or assertion should be so important (or interesting?) that people wish for further information or elucidation, i.e. they ask questions (see (2), points 3 and 4). Questions should be so competently answered that the attention of the questioner is captured, he appreciates the value of the message, and he becomes so convinced that he makes his convictions publicly manifest (see (2), points 5 - 9). Furthermore, he should undertake to follow the path being taught and he should succeed in his efforts, thus proving that the assertions were well-founded (see (2), point 10).

The defeat of and surrender by the adversary is a significant feature of the Buddhist debate suttas as well as of the Vedic debate tradition<sup>31</sup>. It regularly attests to the Buddha's success as a debater. There is, however, only one occasion where the eventual attainment (see point 10 in (2) above) of the

31 'In the course of the discussion, participants who do not know the whole truth have to state this clearly, they must cease questioning, . . . and thus declare defeat, or they must even become the pupil of the winner.' Witzel, 1987, p.372.



erstwhile adversary is attested (Kassapa-Sīhanāda Sutta). The Pāyāsi Sutta adds to the above requirements a point of style: the technique, richly adhered to by the Buddha in the debate suttas, of furthering one's argument through the use of similes and analogy.

The seemingly simple conventions of the debate situation are used in a variety of powerful ways.

The first requirement in a debate is that a challenge should be issued. When the Buddha receives a challenge he may accept it and respond directly, answering point by point, as in the Sāmaññaphala Sutta (D 2) when he shows his thirty-two marks, the Kūṭadanta Sutta (D 5) where he describes the higher sacrifice, the Mahāli Sutta (D 6) where he explains the relationship between achieving the hearing of heavenly sounds and the seeing of heavenly sights, the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta<sup>32</sup> where he answers Poṭṭhapāda's questions on the summits of consciousness<sup>33</sup>, and many further occasions.

The Buddha may, however, reject a challenge. The grounds for this are that it is misplaced, i.e. he will reject a challenge on subjects with regard to which he has made no claims. This demonstrates a convention, not directly named in the suttas, that a challenge on a position that was never asserted could rightfully be dismissed. Into this category comes the Buddha's refusal to answer certain questions, for example the *avyā-*

32 D 9 [I 185, §§ 19,20]

33 *saññāga*.

*kata* questions (Poṭṭhapāda Sutta<sup>34</sup>) because they do not conform to the purpose of his teaching<sup>35</sup>. Also in this category is his refusal in the Pāṭika Sutta<sup>36</sup> to reveal the Knowledge of the Beginning<sup>37</sup>, and his refusal in the Kevaddha Sutta (D 11) and the Pāṭika Sutta (D 24, § 4) to produce miracles<sup>38</sup>. The Buddha may simply reject a challenge on this ground, or he may first reject it and then redefine it and answer it (Kevaddha Sutta: the mystic wonder)<sup>39</sup>. The Buddha may use the technique of both issuing and answering his own challenge. He does this in the form of a rhetorical question<sup>40</sup>, or by referring to a challenge made by a hypothetical opponent<sup>41</sup>.

The technique of the question-challenge is fundamental to a further strategy that the Buddha uses. He will accept his adversary's position and then, by posing subtle questions, lead him to refute his own position through his own answers<sup>42</sup>. In this way he gets him to cede point after point, and then uses what is left of the adversary's position to his own advantage<sup>43</sup>. In a similar way, the Buddha will prove his case by asking a

34 D 9 [I 187f, §§ 25-27]

35 Defined in this sutta, § 28.

36 D 24 [III 4, § 5]

37 *aggaññaṃ paññāpeti*.

38 *iddhi-pāṭihāriya*.

39 The Pāṭika Sutta, D 24, however, demonstrates that although the Buddha may refuse to perform miracles and to reveal the Knowledge of the Beginning, he both performs the former and knows the latter.

40 Brahmaṅgala Sutta, D 1; Kevaddha Sutta, D 11; Lohicca Sutta, D 12.

41 Poṭṭhapāda Sutta, D 9 [I 197, § 43]. *Pare ce . . . amhe evaṃ puccheyyū . . .*

42 Poṭṭhapāda's position on the soul/self, Poṭṭhapāda Sutta, D 9, §§ 21-23; the limitations of ascetic practices, Udumbarikā-Sīhanāda Sutta, D 25.

43 Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta, D 4.



sequence of rhetorical questions to which he will provide answers. These answers add increasing weight to his argument, and point by point he gets his adversary to agree with him<sup>42</sup>. He will also use simile and analogy strategically in his argument to attain this goal. He will provide an analogy with the case presented, and get the adversary to agree to his own (i.e. the Buddha's) position in terms of the analogy. The Buddha will then relate the analogy to the opponent's position, and in this way show that the latter has condemned himself<sup>43</sup>.

The Buddha is also successful at eliciting questions from his opponent, the requirement of the third point in the Kassapa-Sīhanāda Sutta. This occurs so generally in the debate suttas that it is not worth citing examples. What is noteworthy in the Buddha's use of this strategy is his ability to force from his adversary a question which demonstrates the latter's ignorance, and hence the Buddha's superior knowledge<sup>44</sup>. So *Soṇadaṇḍa*, having been led to reduce the number of qualities that permit a person to be defined as a brahman to two, is forced to ask the Buddha to explain these qualities<sup>45</sup>.

There are a variety of further strategies or conventions which occur regularly in the debates but which have not been specifically mentioned in any of the suttas cited above. Two strategies especially favoured by the Buddha are those of

42 *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, D 2.

43 *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, §§ 35, 37; *Paṭṭhapaḍa Sutta*, §§ 34–38; *Lohicca Sutta* D 12; *Tevijja Sutta*, D 13.

44 See Witzel, 1987, for the importance of this strategy and its occurrence in the brahman texts.

45 *Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta*, D I 124, § 22.

appealing to authority, both his own and that of another person, and of undermining the opponent's authority and status.

The Buddha will appeal to his own authority as *Tathāgata*. He will enhance his authority by telling the story of a previous lifetime in which his competence to answer the present challenge is established, and he is proved to be an expert on the subject (*Kūṭadaṇṭa Sutta*: when he was the brahman chaplain in charge of the sacrifice). He will present the adversary's position exhaustively and systematically, and then put himself above it because of his knowledge and achievements<sup>46</sup>. He will resort to his transcendental vision<sup>47</sup>. He will put himself forward as the example that is also the ultimate proof of his own position: 'Could such a bhikkhu (i.e. one who has achieved the described advanced state) say that?' . . . 'But I am such a bhikkhu and I do not speak thus'<sup>48</sup>. Similarly he puts his discipline above and out of reach of that of certain adversaries<sup>49</sup>. In this context too

46 *Brahmajāla Sutta*. *Atthi bhikkave aññ' eva dhammā gambhirā duddasā duranubodhā santā pañitā atakkāvacarā nipuṇā pañḍita-vedaniyā, ye Tathāgato sayam abhiññā sacchikavtā pavedeti . . .* D 1 [I 12, § 28], and *Ime diṭṭhānā evaṃ-gahitā evaṃ parāmaṭṭhā evaṃ-gatikā bhavissanti evaṃabhisamparāyā tī. Tañ ca Tathāgato pajānāti, tato ca uttaritaraṃ pajānāti, tañ ca pajānanam na parāmasati, aparāmasato c'assa pacettaṃ yeva nibbuti viditā, vedanānam samudayañ ca atthagamañ ca assādañ ca ādīnavañ ca nissaranañ ca yathā-bhūtaṃ viditvā anupādā vimutto, bhikkhave Tathāgato.* D I 16f.

47 *Kassapa-Sīhanāda Sutta*, D 8 [I 161f, § 3]: . . . *dibbena cakkhunā visuddhena atikkanta-mānusakena . . .*

48 *Mahāli Sutta*, D 6 [I 157, § 16] and variously; *Jāliya Sutta*, D 7: *Yo nu kho āvusa bhikkhu evaṃ jānāti evaṃ passati kallaṃ nu kho tass' etaṃ vacanāya . . . Aham kho pan' etaṃ . . . evaṃ jānāmi evaṃ passāmi. Atha ca pañāhaṃ na vadāmi . . .*

49 *Udumbarikā-Sīhanāda Sutta*, D 25 [III 39f, § 7]: *Dujjānaṃ kho etaṃ Nigrodha tayā añña-diṭṭhikena añña-khantikena añña-ruccikena aññatr' āyogena*



come the Buddha's assertions that he is 'the greatest!'<sup>50</sup>

The Buddha quotes or resorts to external or non-present authorities to enhance his authority. He cites the gods in the Ambaṭṭha Sutta<sup>51</sup>, where he quotes a verse by Brahmā Saṃkumāra and agrees with it, and in the Pāṭika Sutta<sup>52</sup> where he supports his assertion that he knows by adding that he has also been told this by a deva. He tells a story which shows that the highest god recognises that only the Buddha can answer a certain question<sup>53</sup>. In the Kassapa-Sihanāda Sutta<sup>54</sup>, he imputes a decision in his favour to 'the wise'. Also in this sutta<sup>55</sup>, he invokes Nigrodha's support, although the latter is absent, when he refers to an occasion when Nigrodha found an answer that he (the Buddha) gave very satisfying.

The strategy of undermining or reducing the adversary's status and authority is also frequently used. In the Ambaṭṭha Sutta<sup>56</sup>, the Buddha humiliates Ambaṭṭha by revealing the latter's humble origins; in the same sutta<sup>57</sup> he reveals that

*āñnat' ācariyakena yenāham sāvake vinemi . . .*

50 Cf. Kassapa-Sihanāda Sutta, D 8 [I 174, § 21], and variously. *Yāvata Kassapa ariyā paramā vimutti, nāham tattha attano samasamaṃ samanupassāmi kuto bhīyyo*. Cf. On the claim to be the best, Witzel, 1987, p.365, quoting the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa 3.10.5. Also, 'One cannot just claim to be better than the rest . . . Mere brazen assertion does not suffice; one must be able to prove one's knowledge.' p.372f.

51 D 3 [I 99, § 28].

52 D 24 [III 14, § 18].

53 Kevaddha Sutta, D 11 [I 215, § 67-end].

54 D 8 [I 163, § 8].

55 § 23.

56 D 3 [I 92f, § 16].

57 D 1 103, § 6.

Pokkharasādi, Ambaṭṭha's teacher, is not sufficiently respected to be permitted into the direct presence of the king. Also in this sutta he tells Ambaṭṭha that the ability to recite mantras of the ancient rishis does not make him a rishi<sup>58</sup>. He resorts to ridicule of brahman knowledge and habits in the Tevijja Sutta (D 13). Similarly, Kassapa ridicules his adversary when he tells him, 'I have never seen or heard anyone professing such a position, such a view'<sup>59</sup>.

There are further general strategies in use. The Buddha will establish the criteria for winning the debate and then maintain that he conforms to them, as in the Kassapa-Sihanāda Sutta<sup>60</sup>, where he defines the criteria for the appellation 'samaṇa' or 'brāhmaṇa', and in the Udumbarikā-Sihanāda Sutta, where he defines true asceticism<sup>61</sup>. The Buddha will show both the pros and cons in the adversary's position, and then demonstrate that his own position is still stronger<sup>62</sup>. Like Kumāra Kassapa, but not so explicitly, the Buddha will use similes and analogy. He may use these poetically, to reinforce the ideas he is presenting, as the many similes in the Sāmaññaphala Sutta. He may also use these strategically in his argument, especially with the goal of getting the opponent to refute his own position. The Buddha can also be reasonable. In the Kassapa-Sihanāda Sutta, when Kassapa challenges him whether he condemns all asceticism, he

58 . . . *tyāhaṃ mante adhiyāmi sācariyako' ti tāvatā tvaṃ bhavissasi isi vā isittāya vā paṭipanno ti n' etaṃ ṭhanaṃ vijjati*. D 3 [I 104, §§ 8, 10].

59 *Nāham Rājāṇa evaṃ-vādiṃ evaṃ-ditṭhiṃ addasaṃ vā assosiṃ vā*. (Pāyāsi Sutta, D 23 [II 319, § 5].

60 D 8 [I 167, § 15].

61 *tapo-jigghucchā parisuddhā*.

62 Kassapa-Sihanāda Sutta, D 8; Udumbarikā-Sihanāda Sutta, D 25.



replies, 'How then could I, O Kassapa, who am thus aware, as they really are, of the states whence men have come, and whither they will go, as they pass away from one form of existence, and take shape in another, — how could I disparage all penance; or bluntly revile and find fault with every ascetic, with every one who lives a life that is hard?'<sup>63</sup> The Buddha can open himself up to the judgment of others. Also in the Kassapa-Sīhanāda Sutta, he tells Kassapa of an occasion when in discussion with certain *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas*<sup>64</sup> he offered them to put aside all the subjects on which they held mutually incompatible views, and to judge solely with regard to those qualities that they mutually agreed were unskilful (*akusala*), blameworthy (*sāvajja*), ignoble (*nālam-ariya*) and wicked (*kiṇha*), whether the Buddha was not the one among them who had most completely abandoned them (*anavasesam pahāya vattati*)<sup>65</sup>.

An interesting feature that occurs in two of the debates is the sub-challenge.

Sub-challenges have a particular character. They occur when the followers of an adversary interfere in a debate. The Buddha responds to these sub-challenges in a standard way. He counters by challenging his adversary's supporters to debate with him themselves, if they think that their leader is not performing

63 Kassapa-Sīhanāda Sutta, D I 161f, § 3: *Yo 'haṃ Kassapa imesaṃ tapassīnaṃ evaṃ āgatiṃ ca gatiṃ ca cutiṃ ca uppattiṃ ca yathābhutaṃ pajānāmi, so 'haṃ kiṃ sabbāṃ tapaṃ garahissāmi sammaṃ tappasim lūkhājivaṃ ekasena upakkosissāmi upavadissāmi?* Tr. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues* I, p.224.

64 I.e. in a debate with potential opponents. See Manné, 1990, p.58f.

65 Kassapa-Sīhanāda Sutta, D I 163, § 5.

adequately.

The sub-challenges occur only in debates with brahmins<sup>66</sup>. In the Ambaṭṭha Sutta, once the Buddha has accused Ambaṭṭha of being descended from the slave of a Sākya<sup>67</sup>, Ambaṭṭha's followers defend him. The Buddha then challenges them: 'If you, young brahmins, think that the young brahmin Ambaṭṭha is ill-born, not of good family, not learned, not a fine reciter, without wisdom, and not able to debate with me, then let him be silent, and you debate with me. If you think the opposite, then you be silent and let Ambaṭṭha debate with me'<sup>68</sup>. Ambaṭṭha's companions are silent. In the Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta (D 4) the Buddha extracts from Soṇadaṇḍa the concession that only two attributes are essential for a man to claim truthfully to be a brahmin. Soṇadaṇḍa's companions accuse him of betraying them: 'Do not, Venerable Soṇadaṇḍa, speak in this way. The Venerable Soṇadaṇḍa rejects our caste; he rejects our sacred verses, he rejects our birth'<sup>69</sup>. The Buddha's reply is the same as

66 *Mānavas*, Ambaṭṭha Sutta, D 3; *brāhmaṇas*, Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta, D 4.

67 D I 92f, § 16.

68 *Sace kho tumhākaṃ mānavakā evaṃ hoti, "Dujāto ca Ambaṭṭho mānavo, akula-putta ca Ambaṭṭho mānavo, appassuto ca Ambaṭṭho mānavo, akalyāṇa-vākkaraṇo ca Ambaṭṭho mānavo, duppāṇṇo ca Ambaṭṭho mānavo, na ca pahoti Ambaṭṭho mānavo samaṇena Gotamena saddhiṃ asmim vacane patimantetun ti", tiṭṭhatu Ambaṭṭho mānavo, tunhe mayā suddhiṃ asmim vacane mantavho. Sace kho tumhākaṃ mānavakā evaṃ hoti, "Sujāto ca Ambaṭṭho mānavo, kula-putta ca Ambaṭṭho mānavo, bahussuto ca Ambaṭṭho mānavo, kalyāṇa-vākkaraṇo ca Ambaṭṭho mānavo, paṇḍito ca Ambaṭṭho mānavo, ca pahoti Ambaṭṭho mānavo samaṇena Gotamena saddhiṃ asmim vacane patimantetun ti", tiṭṭhatha tunhe, Ambaṭṭho mānavo mayā suddhiṃ mantetūti.* D I 93f, § 18.

69 *Mā bhavaṃ Soṇadaṇḍo evaṃ avaca! Apavada! eva bhavaṃ Soṇadaṇḍo vannaṃ apavadata manta apavadata jātim . . .* D I 122, § 17.



in the Ambaṭṭha Sutta, but without the opening remarks about birth and family<sup>70</sup>.

The style of debate is remarkably consistent in all the debate suttas, with the single exception of the Pāyāsi Sutta (D 23), where Kumāra Kassapa, and not the Buddha, is the protagonist. This enables us to compare the Buddha's debating style and techniques with those of one of his disciples. The style of the Pāyāsi Sutta is qualitatively different from that of the suttas in which the Buddha is the protagonist. Where Kumāra Kassapa says, 'I, Prince, have neither seen or heard of any one holding such a view, such an opinion'<sup>71</sup>, the Buddha is never surprised by a view expressed by his adversary. Where Kumāra Kassapa asks the adversary his reasons<sup>72</sup> the Buddha never invites extensive representations of the opponent's views. It is his style rather to ask brief pointed questions to which only one answer is possible and which leads to the rebuttal by the adversary himself of his own position. Kumāra Kassapa thus pays more attention to the details of his adversary's case, while the Buddha goes straight to the weak point of his adversary's argument.

Kumāra Kassapa's is a poor imitation of the Buddha's method of asking a series of questions whose answers manoeuvre the adversary into denying his own position: he takes much longer to convince his adversary than the Buddha ever does. Kumāra Kassapa's arguments contain notably less Buddhist teaching than those of the Buddha. Where the Buddha

70 *Ibid.*, § 171.

71 See n.61. Tr. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues* II, p.351.

72 *pariyāya*, §§ 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16.

produces similes, without explicitly saying that he is doing so, Kumāra Kassapa is explicit (§ 9). In every way the Buddha is both more subtle and more skilful than Kumāra Kassapa in his use of debating techniques and strategies.

Fully half of the debates in the Dīgha are with brahmins (D 1, 3-5, 10, 12, 13, 23). Debates exist also in the Brāhmaṇas and the Upaniṣads. They appear too in the earliest Vedic literature, the R̥gveda, as Speech Contests<sup>73</sup>. So far the rules for these have not yet been fully described by scholars. Insofar as they have been<sup>74</sup>, they show that this is another case<sup>75</sup> where we need Buddhist texts to help us understand brahmanical literature.

73 F.B.J. Kuiper, 'The Ancient Aryan Verbal Contest', *Indo-Iranian Journal* IV, 1960, pp.217-81.

74 Witzel, 1987.

75 See J. Bronkhorst, 'The Mahābhāṣya and the Development of Indian Philosophy' in *Three Problems pertaining to the Mahābhāṣya*, Poona 1987, third lecture.