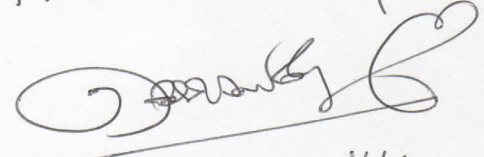


POST GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF PALI AND
BUDDHIST STUDIES

AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF
DEBATES AND DIALOGUES: A
CULTURAL APPROACH

To the Library

6.2.2014

BY: MS BHAGYA KANKANAMGE

THE THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE POSTGRADUATE
INSTITUTE OF PALI AND BUDDHIST STUDIES UNIVERSITY
OF KELANIYA, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN BUDDHIST STUDIES.

2013

ABSTRACT

Faced with the challenge of introducing a new and rather controversial Dhamma into a multi-religious, philosophically confused and communicational difficult context, the Buddha initiated his mission with sermon method and then adopted more successful technique of dialogue. He seemed to have found dialogue more effective than sermon.

Resorting to common man's language and applying a listener-friendly technique the Buddha refined a technique that may be called 'engaged communication', as participatory involvement of the audience was a major characteristic of it. The Buddha himself called his technique '*anupubbī kathā*' (graduated discourses). However, when a listener was found not capable to follow the deep teachings and realize the goal of Buddhism owing to his intellectual poverty or incurable dogmatic obsession, the Buddha would not waste his time on him. (

The religious environment of the day was such that it was inevitable, for the Buddha to enter into debate as well, in spite of his claim that he did not argue with the world. Anticipating challenging situations, however, as a preparatory measure, the Buddha had encouraged his four-fold followers to be capable of confident communication, which included refuting distortions.

The earliest recorded beginning of debate was ritualistic engagement in *Vākovākya* (*Brahmodya* or *Brahmavādyā*) of Vedic times which later gave rise to *Anvikṣikīvidyā*. They were not real argument platforms but dramatized educational techniques. Yet when these formal question and answer practices were extended to royal courts they assumed debate characteristics. Still later in the hands of *Samaṇas* debate had degenerated into verbal war fares. The Buddha and even Jain Mahāvīra were reported to have found places of debate like *samayappavedana sālā* and *kotuhalasālā* not acceptable to them and refrained from visiting such places.

Mahāvīra developed a technique of asserting that reality was a multifaceted thing and therefore any philosophical statement could be accepted as partial truth. It was a good excuse for him not to engage in debate. The Buddha however, had a different approach. He changed his policy of avoiding debate halls and engaged in debate when

the opponents agreed to a disciplined programme of exchanging ideas. He perhaps delayed his entry to debate culture until he was known better among the religious circles for his cultured, peace loving and open minded behavior.

This stand necessitated creating a new debate culture, where systematically dealing with wrong views, imperfect views and distortions of own views were necessary characteristics. It essentially involved, then, developing a corrective to the miserably abused debate practice by his contemporaries.

Thus, we find that the Buddha's debate technique involved

1. Filtering out unsuitable discussions and rejecting unsuitable topics.
2. Getting agreed on ethics of debate,
3. Getting terms defined, not to allow changing the stand or side-tracking.
4. Showing epistemological poverty
5. Pointing out internal inconsistencies of the views.
6. Revealing factual inaccuracies.
7. Demonstrating ethical risks of the stand.
8. If myths are presented reinterpretation or presenting an alternative myth.

This civilized activity was the beginning of the *Kathāvatthu* tradition initiated in *kathāvatthu sutta*, developed through *Abhidhamma kathā* and *Abhivinaya kathā*, and extended to the *Abhidhamma* text *Kathāvatthupparakaraṇa*.