Kathāvatthu: A Unique Pali Text

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The Pali text *Kathāvatthupakaranam*, popularly known as *Kathāvatthu*, forming a part of the *Tipitaka*, is a Buddhist compendium of debates on matters of theology, philosophy and other issues with various opponents, presented from the Theravāda (Sthaviravāda)-Vibhajjavāda point of view. The *Kathāvatthu* is a leading document of an age of Buddhism when repeated schisms had rent its unity and produced an atmosphere seething with doctrinal debates and controversies. It presents a broad cross-section of Buddhist thought in an age of critical transition, when some of the conflicts and obscurities, latent in the earlier doctrines, emerged openly, and when, in the course of their discussion, ground was prepared for future development. The work, unmistakably, belongs to an age of many-sided reflections, when the meaning, significance, implications and pre-suppositions of the traditional Buddhist ideas were closely examined and diverse hypotheses advanced to elucidate and harmonise them internally within the context of Buddhist thought as also with the ideas and tendencies which were then current in the general intellectual milieu of the times. Before the emergence of the controversies, recorded in this text, Buddhism still presented, more or less, an ecumenical aspect, but not long afterwards, beginnings of the Mahāyāna are clearly traceable. The *Kathāvatthu* is, thus, a *magnum opus* for any reconstruction of the history of early Buddhism, especially for the understanding of the process of metamorphosis from the earlier historical forms to the later developed systems. Winternitz, in his *History of Indian Literature*, has described it as the crowning piece of the Buddhist Canon. The text does not mention the names of the Buddhist sects, whose tenets and doctrines are disputed. It is the commentary, *Kathāvatthu-Atthakathā*, written by Buddhaghoṣa, which supplies the names of the respective sects.

Despite its importance, it has remained a less cultivated canonical text and little work has been done to understand and elucidate its admittedly difficult and often obscure, even enigmatic contents.

Taylor brought out the first Roman edition of the text, as published by the Pali Text Society, London in two volumes, respectively in the years, 1894 and 1897. The learned Society, again, did great service to the Buddhist studies by publishing its English translation in 1915, completed by Aung and Rhys Davids. In 1961, Kashyap edited the text in Nagari characters, published in the Nalanda Devanagari Pali Series. Buddhaghoṣa's commentary (*atthakathā*) on the *Kathāvatthu* was edited by Minayeff and was published in the *Journal of the Pali Text Society* in 1889. Law translated this commentary into English in the year 1940. Owing to the endeavor of the translators, some welcome light has been thrown on the difficult text. Still its obscurities continue to require explanation. In fact, the translators have often rendered the original quite literally and have glossed over the obscurities many a times. There is hardly any unanimity among scholars even on the English rendering of the term *Kathāvatthu*. While Aung and Rhys Davids have titled their translation of the *Kathāvatthu* as 'Points of Controversy', 'Debates Commentary'. The 'Book of Controversial Points,' 'Book of Discussion,' 'Subjects of Discourse,' 'Account of Opinions,' 'Disputed Matters', 'Logical Deadlock' etc.

Traditionally, the *Kathāvatthu* is said to be the fifth of the seven books that go to make up the third collection, viz., the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* of the Buddhist Canon.[1] Sometimes, it is also said to be the third of the seven books.[2] This discrepancy, in the early traditions, becomes enigmatic when we notice that, on the one hand, the *Kathāvatthu* quotes form the *Dhammasangani, Vibhanga* and *Patthana*, i.e., the first two and the last books of the *Abhidhamma* and, on the other, it is given to understand that *Yamaka* the 'Book of double questions', which is the sixth book of the *Abhidhamma*, was compiled to clear up the difficulties left by the first five books, including the *Kathāvatthu*. It is difficult to ascertain the reliability of these traditions. However, on the basis of its own textual analysis, it may be taken to have been compiled when some parts, at least, of the *Dhammasangani, Vibhanga* and *Patthana* were already accepted as authoritative doctrines within the *sasana*.[3] This is the only book in the entire Pali Canon of individual compilation of which the date and authorship are recorded. According to the Sri Lankan traditional accounts, the discussions and debates embodied in the *Kathāvatthu* took place in the Third Buddhist Council which was held at Pataliputra in the seventeenth regnal year of the Mauryan Emperor Asoka and that the compilation of this text was also completed in the Council

by Moggaliputta Tissa and was included in the Canon among the *Abhidhamma* treatises. The traditions further maintain that the outlines or heads of these discussions were laid down by the Buddha in anticipation of disputes that would arise eventually within the *Saṁgha* and threaten it with disruption. Buddhaghoṣa, commenting on the authority of the text points out that the Buddha himself laid down the table of its contents (*matika*)[4] and while doing it he foresaw that more than 218 years after his demise (*mama parinibbanato attharasavassadhikanam dvinnam vassasatanam matthake*), Tissa, son of Moggali, being seated in midst of one thousand *bhikṣus*, would elaborate it to the extent of the *Digha Nikāya* bringing together 500 orthodox and 500 heterodox *Suttas*.[5]

So far as the laying down of its outlines by the Buddha is concerned it seems that by its very nature the authority of this text was unacceptable to non-Theravada-Vibhajjavada sects and they rejected it on the ground that it was set forth two hundred and eighteen years after the demise of the Buddha and was only the utterance of a disciple. It was, perhaps, with a view to authenticating the text that the commentator Buddhaghoṣa laid down that the *matika* or the lists of subjects taught in the *Kathāvatthu* were drawn by the Buddha himself. It may be regarded as the utterance of the Buddha in the same sense as the *Madhu-Pindika-Sutta* which was preached actually by Mahakaccana but was considered as the teachings of Buddha.[6] Thus, even the Buddhist tradition may be said to admit, in effect, that it is only in its essential and seminal principles that the *Kathavatthu* may be said to hark back to the personal teachings of the Buddha.

As regards the actual time of its compilation, the tradition, as noted above, has it that Moggaliputta Tissa elaboated in the Third Council the full details of the outline heads devised by the Buddha himself. It is a moot point, however, as to how far the traditional date of the compilation of *Kathāvatthu* can be taken as authentic.[7] C.A.F. Rhys Davids does not accept this as a fact of sober history for she thinks that 'no work put together for a special occasion, or to meet an entirely new need, could conceivably have assumed the "patch-work-quilt" appearance of the *Kathāvatthu*'. In her opinion the text grew slowly by accretions. The strongest argument against the traditional date, she maintains, lies in the asymmetry of the text and 'if we imagine that (1) each *kathā* (or, at times, each two or more *kathās*) was framed by, or by order of, the heads of the *Saṁgha* at the time when each seceding school newly systematised and taught this and

that heresy, or gave it occasional and special prominence, and that (2) such a new *kathā*, or sub-group of them was added, by memorial or scriptural registration to the existing stock of the *kathās*, then the puzzle of *Kathāvatthu's* asymmetry resolves itself into a simple matter.'[8] Looking to its form Mrs Rhys Davids' surmise appears to be plausible, especially the alleged asymmetry of the text. But the suggestion that the wealth of ideas contained in it does not belong to any recognisable historical age, such as, the age of Aśoka seems to proceed too far in a sceptical direction. The sequence of evidence at our disposal, in fact, tends to suggest that bulk of the so-called heretical assertions, discussed in this text, had emerged as thorns *(kantakas)* to the *Saṁgha* by the time of Aśoka.

The circumstances, obtaining then, appear to justify its compilation. The Sri Lankan chronicles, as also the *Atthakathās*,[9] inform us that about 200 years after the demise of the Buddha, a large number of pseudo-Buddhists entered the *Saṁgha*. They held unorthodox views in matters of both the doctrine, as well as, the discipline. The Buddhist community was torn by bitter dissensions and heresies. The result was that the most important *uposatha* ceremony of the Buddhist Order was held in abeyance for seven years in a row, as the orthodox monks refused to perform it in the company of those whom they considered as heretics. Aśoka took great pains to restore the unity of the order and purify the original faith. He is said to have deputed one of his ministers to persuade the monks of the monastery of Aśokarama to resume the ceremony. The minister, however, miscarried the orders and beheaded several monks. Aśoka was shocked to learn about it and remorcefully approached Moggaliputta Tissa, the oldest and one of the most learned monks of the time, for solace. The latter consoled him on the ground that he had harboured no deliberate intention to have the monks beheaded. Ultimately the Order was purged of all those monks who were heretics and did not subscribe to the Therāvāda-Vibhajjavāda view-point. The non-conformists were deprived of the yellow robe and were asked to quit the Order wearing white clothes. After the removal of the non-conformists a Council was held at Pataliputra under the presidentship of Moggaliputta Tissa. The *Pitakas* were recited, as was done in the earlier Councils. However, the most outstanding product of the deliberations of this synod was the compilation of *Kathavatthu* with a view to refuting the various doctrinal views held by the non-Therāvāda-Vibhajjavāda sections. Thus, Moggaliputta Tissa is said to have compiled the text in order to specify the orthodox doctrinal

positions after he had defrocked heretics and purified the *Saṁgha* so that those remaining adhered to the Therāvāda-Vibhajjavāda doctrine. So far as the historicity of this Council is concerned, the more plausible opinion seems to be that the Third Council did take place, although it was a sectarian affair.[10] From the details of the Council it appears that, during Aśoka's time, conditions were such that the compilation of a work like the *Kathāvatthu* had become a desideratum for the survival of true doctrine, as the orthodox viewed it.

It is pertinent to note that the historical perspective in which this work is said to have been compiled seems also to be preserved in some of the Aśokan edicts. It has now been definitely settled that Asoka was a Buddhist. In the Bhabru or second Bairat edict he has paid homage to the *Saṁgha* and declared that he respected and put his faith in the Three Jewels. He recommended to the sisters and brothers of the Order, and to the lay disciples of either sex frequently to hear, and to meditate upon, certain selected texts or passages, viz. (i) *Vianyasamukase* (ii) *Aliyavasani* (iii) *Anagata-bhayani*, (iv) *Munigatha* (v) *Moneyasute* (vi) *Upatisapasine* and (vii) *Laghulovada*. He thought that all of the Buddha's teachings were good, but certain doctrines (*dharmaparyāya*) were particularly useful in ensuring that correct teachings of Buddhism might endure for long. Aśoka also issued some orders (*śāsana*) which were engraved on pillars at three different places, Sarnath, Sanchi and Kausambi. Through this edict he sought to preserve the unity of the Buddhist *Saṁgha* by putting down all attempts tending to create schism. Warnings against schism were included in the Minor Rock Edicts as well. The *māhāmāttas* were directed to see that the *Saṁgha* remained united,[11] and in case any monk or nun was found tending to break up that unity, he or she was to be given white robes and removed. The earnest, almost severe tone of the edict and the fact that its copies are found at places of important Buddhist monastic establishments presuppose that in Aśoka's time the Buddhist Order was at least threatened with disruption, to prevent which he was straining every nerve.

A scrutiny of the evidence, gleaned from the schism edicts, underlines certain facts which appear to be helpful in the dating of *Kathāvatthu*. Firstly, it cannot be a mere coincidence that the punishment prescribed for schismatics in the Aśokan edicts is the same that was given in the Third Buddhist Council, i.e., depriving them of the yellow robe and expulsion from the Order. Such an extreme step, on the part of Aśoka, would presuppose an already set

practice in the Order. Secondly, the above edict of Aśoka was issued only after the convention of the Council which was held in the seventeenth regnal year of his rule.[12] The edict has been ascribed to the period between the twenty-nine and thirty-eight regnal years.[13] Now, the keenness of Aśoka to check the schismatic tendencies during this period becomes understandable if we suppose that although schismatic sects had been expelled in the Third Council, there was still an apprehension that they might threaten the unity of the *Saṁgha*.[14] Moreover, there lay the authority to guide the *māhāmāttas* in deciding whether a certain monk or nun was guilty of creating schism in the Order. It may be suggested that such an authority was vested in the *Kathāvatthu*. It was only on the supposition that such an authorised text of the Canon was there before the *māhāmāttas* which made it possible for them to detect, prove and punish acts of apostasy. The Sri Lankan tradition mentions categorically that the canonical literature was definitely and finally settled in the Third Council so as to eliminate all disruptive tendencies. Attention may also be drawn to the concluding line of the Sanchi Pillar which reads: *Icha hime kimti samghe samage cilathitike siyati*, i.e. : 'This is my desire - what is that? That the *Saṁgha* may last long by remaining intact or in its entirety.' This shows the deep concern of Asoka regarding the unity and logevity of the Buddhist Order. It may be added here, that the hypothesis of the *Kathāvatthu* having been composed during the time of Aśoka is also supported by the fact that this text seems to have influenced his Rock Edict IX.[15] In this edict Aśoka decries the people who perform various auspicious ceremonies on occasions of sickness, the weddings of sons and daughters, the birth of children and departure on journeys. Women especially perform manifold and various kinds of petty and meaningless auspicious ceremonies. They are all of doubtful effect. They may achieve their purpose or may not. Moreover, they are only for this world. But this ceremonial of *Dhamma (dhamma-mangala)* is not of time. Even if it does not attain the desired result in this world, it certainly begets endless merit in the other world. But if one achieves that purpose in this world, the gain of both results from it, that object in this world, and endless merit is produced in the other world by this *dhamma-mangala*. Aśoka held that such ceremonies were salutary and should be performed until the desired object was achieved. The style of composition and the subject of discussion which are noticed in this inscription resemble those of the *Kathāvatthu* and the *Samannaphala Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* respectively.

The Sri Lankan chronicle *Mahavamsa* informs us that Aśoka sent Buddhist missionaries to various countries at the end of the Third Council to propagate the religion. The *Māhābodhīvamsa* corroborates this tradition by adding that soon after the close of the Council, Moggaliputta Tissa persuaded Emperor Aśoka to despatch Buddhist missions to certain places in the border countries (*paccantimesu janapadesu*) where the teachings of the Master, if promulgated, were expected to endure. Tissa, accordingly, selected nine centres to each of which he despatched a leading member of the Order. This information pertains to a time when the Buddhist missions had not yet been despatched by any royal patron for its propagation beyond the Middle Country (*Majjhima-janapada*). The traditional account seems to be corroborated by the internal evidence. According to one of the points debated in the *Kathāvatthu*, there was no holy life among the gods (*n'atthi devesu brahmachariyavaso'ti*).[16] The proponents of the thesis maintain that among the gods there is no Buddhist mode of holy life, because it is not till then introduced among the inhabitants, godly or otherwise, in the regions outside the limit of the Middle Country, i.e., in the '*Paccantima-janapadas*'. They argue with the orthodox opponents that as yet there can be no initiation or *pabajja*, in places lying beyond the geographical boundaries of the Middle Country, referring thereby to the godly inhabitants of Uttarakuru and the *mlecchas* of other places. It may be concluded, thus, that Buddhist missionary work was confined up till the age of the *Kathāvatthu* within the limits of the Middle Country as defined in the Buddhist literature. Moreover, since a concerted effort had been started for the propagation of the religion, the exponents of the doctrine must have tried to finalise the canonical literature sooner than later.

Buddhaghoṣa's commentary, the *Kathāvatthupakarana-atthakathā* is important, because it helps us in identifying the sects whose tenets are supposed to be contained in this text. Buddhaghoṣa, informs us that the Buddhist Order in India, within two centuries of the Buddha's demise, had been divided into eighteen schools.[17] This is a confirmation of the account of Sri Lankan chronicles *Dipavamsa* and *Māhāvamsa*. In conformity with the above, the northern or Sanskrit traditions of Vasumitra, Bhavya and Vinitadeva go to confirm that a good number of these sects had originated in the second century of the Nirvāṇa era.[18] It may be observed, however, that some of them may not have really crystallised as well-knit schools at the time of the Third Council, but there is nothing to warrant against the

hypothesis that they were in the formative stages of their evolution and such a hypothesis will easily square into the traditional assumption. Thus, it would be reasonable to suppose that sections of monks in the Buddhist *Saṁgha* were nursing specific views and tenets in the light of their own understanding and interpretation of the teachings of the Buddha and were gradually evolving into separate bodies of sects. Once these tendencies became powerful enough to threaten to disrupt the *Saṁgha* completely, the orthodox sections, apparently, helped by a favourable ruler, held the Third Council and compiled the *Kathāvatthu*, refuting all those tenets and doctrines which they considered as heretical.

Attention may also be drawn to another Pali text *Milinda Panha*, the north Indian original of which, if any, is supposed to have been written in the beginning of the first century A.D. It comprises the discussion of a number of points of Buddhist doctrine treated in the form of conversations between king Milinda and a Buddhist monk Nagasena. The questions raised, or dilemmas stated, which are put into the mouth of the king, find their explanations through the answers which are put into the mouth of Nagasena. It is interesting to note that some of the questions, which have been discussed in the *Milinda Panha*, were the same which had been agitating the Buddhist community since the time of the Third Council. Thus, there are issues raised in the *Kathāvatthu* which are also discussed by the author of the *Milinda Panha*. Further, in every instance the two authors agree in their views, Nagasena always advocating the opinion which Moggaliputta Tissa had already upheld as the Theravada-Vibhajjavada point of view. This is especially the case with those points which Tissa thinks of so much importance that he discusses them at much greater length than the others. *Kathāvatthu's* first chapter, for instance, the longest in the book, relates to the issue, whether, in addition to the impersonal *dhammas*, there is still a 'person' (*pudgala*) or 'soul' to be reckoned with and that this person can be got at (*upalabbhati*) as a reality in the ultimate sense (*paramatthena*) and it can become the object of true experience (*saccikattha*).[19] It is exactly this question which constitutes the theme of the very first dialogue between Milinda and Nagasena. The conversation leads to the celebrated similie of the chariot by which Nagasena apparently convinces Milinda of the truth of the orthodox Buddhist view that there is really no such thing as a 'person' or 'soul' in the ordinary sense.[20] It cannot be doubted that the authors of the *Kathāvatthu* and the *Milinda Panha* were perfectly justified

in putting this crucial question in the very forefront of their discussion, just as the Buddha himself made it the subject of the very first discourse he addressed to his earliest converts in the *Anatta-lakkhana Sutta*, included both in the *Vinaya Pitaka* and in the *Anguttara Nikāya*.

There are some other points on which the account of the *Milinda Panha* may be compared with that of the *Kathāvatthu*. For example, the discussion in the former as to the manner in which the Divine Eye (*dibba cakkhu*) can arise in a man,[21] is reminiscent of the question raised in the *Kathāvatthu*, as to whether the eye of flesh can, through the strength of *dhamma*, grow into the Divine Eye.[22] Similarly, the discussion in the *Milinda Panha* as to how a layman, who is a layman after becoming an Arhat, can enter the Order, is entirely in accord with the opinion maintained, as against the Uttarapathakas in the *Kathavatthu*.[23] The central argument that the Theravadins offer against the Uttarapathakas is that a layman, bound with layman's fetters cannot be an Arhat. In the *Kathāvatthu*, the very first issue of debate about the Buddha rests over the thesis that the ordinary affairs of his life, such as his speech (*vohar*), were supramundane.[24] Buddhaghoṣa has attributed this view to the Andhakas. The arguments offered by the Therāvādins to counter this view in the *Kathāvatthu*is almost fully repeated in Nagasena's argument on the subject. Another discussion in the *Milinda Panha* as to whether an Arhat can be thoughtless or guilty of an offence is foreshadowed by the similar points raised in the *Kathāvatthu*.[25] The two dilemmas in the *Milinda Panha*, especially as to the cause of space, may be compared with the discussion in the *Kathāvatthu*, as to whether space is self-existent. A comparison between the two interesting books of controversial apologetics, viz., *Kathāvatthu* and *Milinda Panha*, would, thus, show that the older text *Kathāvatthu* takes almost the whole of the conclusions, reached in the *Milinda Panha*, for ganted, and goes on to discuss further questions on points of detail. It does not give a description of Arhatship in glowing terms, but discusses minor points.[26]

The internal evidence of the text, when scrutinised closely, seems to sustain the traditional date. For example, its linguistic peculiarities are noteworthy. It uses '*ke*' for '*ko*', '*vatabbe*' for *vatabbo* or *vatabbam* and '*se*' for '*so*' etc., which is reflective of the Magadhan language of Aśoka's times. Similarly, the archaic character of its prose is quite evident from the abstruse dialogical arguments. From certain discussions relating to the *Saṁgha*, one feels inclined to think

that the *Kathāvatthu* should be forming part of the *Vinaya Pitaka*, rather than the *Abhidhamma*, because while dealing with the *Vinaya* issues, it appears closely allied with the topics discussed in the *Cullavagga*. It has also been argued that the *Kathāvatthu* contains the views of some late schools, such as, the Vetulyakas and Hetūvādins. For the Vetulyakas it is observed that they cannot be taken to be pre-Christian.[27] Some of the tenets attributed to the Vetulyakas undoubtedly foreshadow the Māhāyāna doctrines, nevertheless, it is in the very nature of these tenets which suggests that the Vetulyakas and similar other Mahasaṁghika group of schools were like precursors of the Māhāyāna. And if the evolution of Māhāyāna is to be placed in the 2nd cent. B.C.,[28] it is no wonder if its dawn should be blinking some half a century earlier. The northern or Sanskrit tradition informs us that one of the sub-sects that emerged in the second century of the Nirvāṇa era within the Mahasaṁghika group was the Lokottaravāda.[29] The proto-Māhāyānic tenets of the Vetulyakas are nothing but their postulations about the supernatural (*lokottara*) aspect of the Buddha. In fact, a good number of early Buddhist doctrinal controversies, discussed in the *Kathāvatthu*, are in the nature of a conflict between the two tendencies of evolution which crystallised finally as Hinayāna and Māhāyāna, the two basic schools of Buddhism. It follows that some prominent, so-called, unorthodox doctrines should reflect a 'half-way-house' and a transitional stage from Hinayāna to Māhāyāna. As regards the Hetuvadins, Mrs. Rhys Davids does not specify as to why they should be regarded as late. In fact, the origin of this sect is extremely obscure. Bhavya has identified the Hetuvadins with the Sarvastivādins,[30] which is rendered doubtful in the light of the fact that, out of the ten theses attributed to them in the *Kathāvatthu*, two at least certainly run contrary to the views of the Sarvastivādins, viz., (a) insight is not far those in the world[31] and (b) that five spiritual faculties do not function in worldly matters.[32] However, an analysis of the different theses attributed to the Hetuvādins would show that the problems raised by them do not show any break from the general range of controverted theses in the text. To cite an example, their assertion that all save the Path is pain and sorrow seems[33] to form a connected group with such theses as the fruit of recluseship is unconditioned[34] or attainment (*patti*) is unconditioned.[35] Attention may also be drawn to a particular controversy where a Mahasaṁghika thesis, viz., the Ariyan Path is five-fold,[36] is disputed by the Therāvādins. It may be observed that the Mahasaṁghika assertion reflects an early state of the Buddhist

history when its doctrines had not yet been systematised under detailed formulae. It was a stage when the idea of eight-fold Path had not perhaps become institutionalised and a certain section still entertained the doubt that the path could be five-fold only. A number of debates show that both sides referred to the Buddha as the final court of appeal, underscoring thereby their proximity to the teachings, as contained in the early Pali texts, especially the *Nikāyas*.

While ascribing the tenets to different sects, Buddhaghoṣa, often uses in his commentary, a significant term '*etarahi*', i.e., 'at present'. The theses attributed in this manner belong to such sects as the Sammatiyas, Sarvastivadins, Andhakas, Gokulikas, Bhadrayanikas, Uttarapathakas, and Vetulyakas.[37] Similarly, there are two other terms *icchanti*, i.e., 'accept' or 'incline to' this or that belief used in the case of such sects as the Vatsiputriyas and Mahasaṁghikas[38] and *mannanti,* i.e., 'imagine' or 'deem' applied in the case of the Kasyapiyas.[39] All these terms are in the present tense, by using which Buddhaghoṣa seems to be suggesting that, the theses in question, were living doctrines during his time. He does not use these terms uniformly for each and every thesis discussed in the *Kathāvatthu*, which may mean that some of them were no more current doctrines. It is not unlikely that insignificant or weaker sects were either amalgamated with more powerful units or had disappeared completely by the time of Buddhaghosa. The most significant phrase, however, out of the above, is '*etarahi*' by affixing which in certain cases, the commentator wants to affirm that this or that opinion is now held by such and such sect.

As regards the problem of asymmetry in the *Kathāvatthu*, one may point out that this feature of the text would, in fact, sustain its traditional antiquity. Supposing that different *kathās* were inserted into the existing stock in course of time in different stages, one might expect that, at the time of the final compilation, the person or persons doing it would adopt some system in presenting the controversies, i.e., the subjects discussed could have been classified either according to their themes or the sects to which they belonged. The idea of sanctity of a text, obstructing its proper systematisation would arise only if the text were taken to have been recited at some sacred congregation as was the case with the *Sutta* and the *Vinaya Pitakas*. The Mahasaṁghika alteration in the canonical texts was regarded by orthodox sections as an heretical act. The controversies are haphazardly strung together in the *Kathāvatthu* for the simple reason that some sections of the Buddhist monks had not perhaps, as yet

formulated all their views in a clear cut sequence and their views had not so far crystallised into well-knit exclusive doctrines, otherwise they might have, like the Mahasaṁghikas, parted company earlier, instead of continuing in the *Saṁgha* to be expelled only in the Third Council.[40] It seems that once the doctrinal disputes began openly, these sections came out with their assertions one after another, even as the orthodox Therāvādins claimed to have refuted the earlier ones already. That the antiquity of *Kathāvatthu* ought to be really high is also sustained by a certain reference where Theri Khema, chief of the Buddha's women disciples, is described as being *Kathāvatthuvisārada*.[41] Although this reference occurs in the *Atthakatha*, it probably embodies an ancient tradition.

Taking a panoramic view of the contents of *Kathāvatthu* with reference to its subject-matter, the text comprises twenty-three chapters delineating discussions and refutations of two hundred and eighteen different doctrinal theses of various schools. Besides hundreds of minor points of discipline, debated therein, there are some leading questions of crucial philosophical and religions significance which exercised the sectarian thought, such as: Is the 'person' (*puggala*) an expression, used by the Buddha in the *Suttas*, a real entity, which, moreover, transmigrates from one living body to a new one, or is this just a conventional expression to be replaced by strict analysis? And if not the 'person', then do the groups (*skandhas*) of elements transmigrate? From the details, it is evident that the orthodox Therāvadins held fast to the ultimate non-existence of any metaphysical entity, such as, 'self' (*ātmā*) or semi-metaphysical 'person' (*puggala*), but the innovative Pudgalavadins espoused the existence of a semi-trans-empirical agent (*puggala*) with the existence of trans-empirical entities, such as, psycho-physical elements, i.e. *rupadhammas* etc. Prolonged doctrinal debate between the two schools was inevitable. The *Kathāvatthu* took up this debate and made it the heart of all other controversies. Other important issues raised included: Do all natural elements (*dhammas*), whether past, present or future, exist? (ii) Are all forces (*saṁsakāras*) momentary? Just as the dogmatic assertion of the non-existence of a 'self' had to be supplemented by some 'pseudo-selves', so the dogmatic assertion of 'impermanence' could be made credible by introducing certain 'pseudo-permanancies'.[42] The early Buddhist ideal of Arhatship was delimited gradually and variety of such views came to be held by a section of the monks which postulated possibilities of imperfection and retrogression in the personality of

an Arhat. Thus, it was debated as to whether or not an Arhat can relapse again into worldly entanglements?[43] It is plausible that basic disparity between the conceptions of a mere Arhat and a Samma Sambuddha, inherent in the *Nikayās*[44] was brought to the fore in course of time, and led to two parallel developments in a new direction in the history of Buddhism. One led to the gradual decline in the Arhat ideal and the other towards the eventual deification of the Buddha. Generally, the same group of sects, which carried on an anti-Arhat campaign, led the parallel movement stipulating the transcendentality of the Buddha and the Bodhisattva. Thus, equally intense debate ensued on Buddhahood, e.g. (i) Are Buddhas transcendental (*lokottara*)? (ii) Whether every word of the Buddha could free the hearer from *saṁsara* (iii) Are all the dialogues direct (definitive) statements, or are some indirect statements requiring special interpretation? (iv) Is progress in understanding the truth gradual or does insight come all at once? (v) Can good conduct grow unconsciously? With the question about the transcendentality (*lokottarata*) of the Buddha arose problems of the manner of his birth and relation with the *Saṁgha*. Similarly, when the contradictions in the Canon were noted, the question of distinguishing the *nitartha* (profound) from the *neyartha* (superficial) *Sutras* was raised. Still later it led to the theory of two truths in the Satyasiddhi school which is supposed to be transitional between the Hinayāna and the Māhāyāna. Other issues, such as, the problem of *antarabhāva*, the nature of *anusāya* or dormant passions, the functioning of *vijnana*, the number of *asamskrtas*, the order of *bhavana* and *abhisamaya* were also raised. Controversies among the sects over ritual practices were also not insignificant. The Mahisāsakas, for example, claimed that there is more merit in worshipping and making offerings to the *Saṁgha* than in worshipping a *stūpa* as the latter merely contains the remains of a member of the *Saṁgha* who is no more. On the contrary, the Dharmaguptas thought that there is more merit in worshipping a *stūpa*, because the Buddha's past and his present state (in Nirvana) are far superior to that of any living monk.[45] Even if one were to ignore various other controversies debated in the *Kathāvatthu*, the refutation of the three major doctrinal heresies alone—those of the Personalists (Pudgālāvādins), the Realists (Sarvastivādins) and the Transcendentalists (Lokottāravādins)—could make its author Moggaliputta Tissa one of the greatest exponents of Buddhist philosophy since its first enunciation by the Buddha.[46] These all-important issues could not have sprung suddenly in the 3rd

century B.C. It is likely, as has been shown elsewhere,[47] that these were problems that persisted even during the Buddha's days and that they continued until Moggaliputta Tissa, urged by the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka, devised means of refuting them.

A considerable difference of atmosphere is visible in this respect in the age of Buddha.[48] We meet here with wandering teachers and ascetics, comparable to the Greek Sophists in their debating skill and sophistries. They have neither humility nor simple earnestness. They hold specific opinions on diverse questions and defend them by argumentation. The oppositions of faith and reason, the positive and the transcendent, the decidable and the un-decidable have clearly emerged in the course of this debating. We have, thus, materialists, atheists, sceptics and agnostics. The commonest kind of reason given is an appeal to observation, while counter-examples are used for verification. An attempt is also made to tie the opponent in a knot of contradictions. The most important development in logical argumentation occurs through the formulation of the four-valued logic of the sceptics. This was adopted with more elaboration by the Niganthas and with a difference by the Buddha himself.[49]

Buddha's own dialogues and expositions, while reminiscent of the *Upaniṣads* are, somewhat, more developed in their logical aspect. They evince an attempt not merely to express and illustrate a deep truth but also to persuade and disarm a neutral or even hostile audience. The Buddha had the capacity to preach his doctrines persuasively. Still, on the whole, the Buddha gives the impression not of a logician but of a seer who is seeking to communicate beyond the opposites and dilemmas generated by mere logical argumentation. The Buddha, thus, condemns contentious opinion (*ditthi*) and indicates that truth lies beyond perennial antinomies, such as, of existence and non-existence.[50] This is the true *madhyamapratipad* or *pratityasamutpada*, the original dialectical method of the Buddha, which was grasped and developed by the Mādhyāmikas. Buddha, thus, (1) appeals to experience in contradistinction to any appeal to mere tradition or faith in the transcendent, (2) subjects experience to analysis, seeking to show that experiences stand for contingent phenomena, subject to a Law, (3) declares spiritual truth to be beyond logical antinomies, and (4) on certain metaphysical issues declares speculative reasoning futile. In the Buddhist *Sutras* the general method of discussion is that of an empirical and rational enquiry and although there are many arguments and debates with opponents, but not, apparently, an overt awareness of what constitutes a valid

proof. It is clear, however, that speculative reasoning and logical debating grew apace among the followers of the Buddha after his passing away. The very effort to interpret the words of the Master was a fertile source of debate and controversy. The effort to carry further the analysis of phenomena, initiated by the Buddha, was another source of the growth of divergent opinions. Some of the controversies suggest that the effort to include or exclude non-Buddhist doctrines was still another source of controversy.

First of all, the thesis is presented for discussion by the disputants, i.e., Therāvādins in the direct order (*anuloma*)—'Is "*puggala*" known in the sense of a real and ultimate thing?' This is called *thapana* or formulation of the issue. Pudgalavādins affirm the '*puggala*,' thus questioned. Therāvādins ask further, 'Is "*puggala*" known in the same way as a real and ultimate thing?' This is called *papana* which raises a crucial implication that would really take the form of a hypothetical syllogism. The denial of Pudgalavādins as regards this identity leads Therāvādins to affirm that the former's thesis is refuted, for, if they maintain the first premise they must also accept the implication as put forth in the second question. This is called *ropana*. Now, the advocates of the thesis come forward with a rejoinder (*patikamma*), 'Is "*puggala*" not known in the sense of a real and ultimate thing? Therāvādins affirm that it is not so known. Pudgalavadins argue further, 'Is it unknown in the same way as a real and ultimate thing is known?' The Therāvāda refusal to accept this argument leads Pudgalavādins to affirm that if the disputants admit the first premise, they must also accept the second.

Next follows the third phase of the debate called *niggaha* in which Pudgalāvādins claim the defeat of the disputants on the basis of their rejoinder. Then follows an application of the reasoning of the disputant to his own case (*upanaya*), wherein Pudgalavādins observe that, (a) '*puggala*' is known in the sense of a real and ultimate thing, but (b) unknown in the same way as a real and ultimate thing is known. At this, Therāvādins raise an objection that if the statement (b) is not admitted then statement (a) cannot be admitted either. And now they maintain that (a) '*puggala*' is not known in the sense of a real and ultimate thing, (b) but not unknown in the same way as a real and ultimate thing is known. Following the same logic, as applied by the Therāvādins, the Pudgalavādins also point out that if they do not admit the statement (a), they cannot admit (b) either.

Thus, Padgalavādins draw the conclusion (*niggamana*) that refutation of their thesis as proposed by the Therāvādins is not sound,

whereas their own rejoinder is sound. This is the first defeat on refutation (*niggaha*) followed by four more. In the second defeat which is in the adverse manner (*paccanika-niggaho*), the respondents being Therāvādins, the argument of the preceding one is accordingly repeated. In the third, fourth and fifth defeats we have the modification of the first *niggaha* by insertion of the words, 'everywhere', 'always', and 'in all cases'. In the sixth, seventh and eighth defeats, 'not known' replaces 'known' in the question. Thus, these eight *niggahas* seem to comprise a dialectical whole, wherein we 'find a five-fold argument pro, a five-fold argument contra, three modes of the pro argument, and three modes of the contra argument'. It has been pointed out that the use of the word *niggaha* only up to the number eight is arbitrary, since the subsequent discussion also constitutes refutations. This is, in short, the style of debate in the *Kathāvatthu*, which evinces that long before the times of Nagarjuna, and before the early Nyāya logical system theorised in the *Carakasāmhita*, the principle of dual instantiation (i.e., *anvaya* and *vyatireka*) had become an essential part of Indian logic. Further, the mention of such technical terms as *anuyoga* (enquiry), *aharana* (illustration) *patinna* (proposition), *upanaya* (application of reason), *niggaha* (defeat or refutation), presupposes a fairly developed science of logic in the middle of the third century B.C.[52]

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See *Atthasalini*, p. 15 *Kathavatthu- Atthakatha*, pp.1 ff. *Mahavamsa*, V.279; *Dipavamsa*, VII 41, 56-58.
2. *"Dhammasangani - Vibhangan ca Kathavatthun ca Puggalam.... Dhatu-yamaka Patthanam Abhidhammo ti vuccati," Mahabodhivamsa*, p. 94.
3. Aung, and Rhys Davids (1960), p.XXIX f; See Malalasekera, (1960) Vol.1.p. 505.
4. *Matikas* are list of *dhammas* which we find sometimes enumerated in the *Vinaya Pitaka* (cf. *Mahavagga*, pp. 120, 324, 368, *Cullavagga*, pp. 421-23). It may be noted that three *Abhidhamma* texts, viz., *Dhammasamgani*, *Puggalapannati* and *Dhatukatha* start with a *matika*.
5. *Mahavamsa*, chap. V; *Mahabodhivamsa*, p. 94; *Kathavatthu-Atthakatha*, p. 1.f. *Atthasalini*, p. 20.
6. It may be noted that the Chinese *Mahavibhasa-sastra* begins with a similar questioning about the relationship of Mahakatyayaniputra to the Buddha over the authorship of the *Śāstra*.
7. Dube, (1972), pp.80 ff. Keith (1923), p. 18 f., Winternitz (1933) Vol. II. pp. 169 ff.; Upadhyaya (1983), pp. 52-53; Akira (1998), pp. 89-91, 110.

8. Aung, and Rhys Davids (1960) pp. xxxi-xxxii.
9. *Dipavamsa*, chap. VII; *Mahavamsa*, chap. V; *Katthavatthu-Atthakatha*, pp. 5 f.
10. Pande, (1983), pp. 14 f.; Bhandarkar, (1955), pp. 69 ff.; Dube, (1965-66), p. 15.
11. See Hultzsch, 159-163; Barua (1968) p. 333; Basak (1959) pp. 146-49.
12. See *Dipavamsa*, chap. VII.
13. Dube (1972), p. 82.
14. Aśoka is the zealous guardian of the unity of the Buddhist *Saṃgha* and yet the tolerant helper of all the sects. He discouraged the criticism of other sects as also the attempts to disrupt ones own. Cf. Rock Edict VII, XII and Schism Edict, i.e., Sanchi, Sarnath and Kausambi Minor Pillar Edict; See Hazra (2002, 99 ff.)
15. Law (1933) Vol. I, p. 325; See Malalasekera (1960: I, 505) Barua (1968, 337).
16. *Katthāvatthu*, I. 3; In *Samyutta Nikaya* (verse 466), a similar statement asserts, 'Few are the beings who are reborn in the Middle Lands, more numerous are they that are reborn in the outlying districts (*paccamtimeya janapadesu*), among the unintelligent barbarians', see Law, B.C. (1933), Vol. I, p. 325.
17. *Kathāvatthu-Atthakatha*, p. 3.
18. See Masuda (1925, 14-17). Bareau, A. (1956, 167-172), 192; Poussin, L. de la Vallee (1910, 414 ff.), Lamotte, E. (1956, 148-62), Cousins (1991, 27 ff.)
19. *Puggalo upalabhati saccikatthapaṟamatthenati, Kathāvatthu*, p. 3; See Dube (1980, 229 ff), Duerlinger (2003), pp. 11 ff.
20. *Milindapanhapali*, pp. 31.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
22. *Katthāvatthu*, III. 7.
23. *Gihissa araha ti? Kathāvatthu*, IV.1; see also *Kathāvatthu-Atthakatha*, p. 73.
24. *Buddhassa Bhagavato voharo lokuttaro ti, Kathāvatthu*, II. 10.
25. *Parihayati araha arahatta ti, Kathāvatthu*, I.2; *Atthi arahato asucisukkavissatthiti; Kathāvatthu*, II.1; *Atthi arahato annanamti? Kathāvatthu*, II.2; *Atthi arahato kankhati? Kathāvatthu*, II. 3.
26. See for details Dube (2003, 33 ff.)
27. Dube (1972, 83).
28. Pande (1993, 1 ff.) Dutt (1930, 34 f.), Joshi (1967, 3-4), Harvey, Peter (2001), p. 9.
29. Masuda (1925, 15), Bareau, (1956, 168, 192).
30. Bareau (1954, 21), (1956, 245).
31. *Kathāvatthu*, XIX. 8.
32. *Ibid.*, XX. 2.
33. *Ibid.*, XIX. 5.

34. *Ibid.*, XIX. 3.
35. *Ibid.*, XIX. 4.
36. *Kathāvatthu*, XX. 5.
37. *Kathāvatthu-Atthakatha*, pp. 42, ff.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
40. We have later picture preserved in the Chinese traditions wherein it is given to understand that Buddhist monks of different denominations lived together in one and the same monastery.
41. See. *Therigāthā Commentary*, 135.
42. *Sabbam atthiti, Kathāvatthu*, I.6; See Conze (1962, 134 ff).
43. *Parihayati araha arahatta ti? Kathavatth*, I.6 See also *Kathāvatthu*, II. 1, II.2, II.3, II.4. Dube (2003, 36).
44. *Digha Nikāya*, II, p. 95 *Anguttāra Nikāya*, II, p. 1
45. Pande (1990, 186 f. cf.), Dutt (1970, 184-185).
46. See Kalupahana (1992, 132), (1987, 4-5).
47. Dube (1980, 40 ff.)
48. See *Digha Nikaya, Brahmajala and Samannaphala Suttas.*
49. Jayatilleke (1963, 304, 344 ff.)
50. *Sutta Nipata*, pp. 200 ff.
51. See *Kathāvatthu*, pp. 3 ff; see also Randle (1976, 13 ff.), Warder (1997, 299 ff.), Ichimura (2001, 189 ff.) Jayatilleke (1963, 412 ff.) Vidyabhusan (1978, 243 ff.)
52. See Vidyabhusan, (1978, 234).