

"EVAM ME SUTAM". A CRITICAL EVALUATION AND INTERPRETATION OF ORAL  
FEATURES OF THE BRAHMAJALA SUTTA.

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that the whole of this dissertation, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own original work and that it has not been submitted for any degree at any other university.



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S. GOVENDER

DECEMBER 1992

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our journey through life is unpredictable. Within its course, we shall never know whom we may meet. However, it seems that, sometimes, some well-orchestrated Divine plan casts special people into our lives to influence us in a positive way.

To two such special people, Professor E.R. Sienaert and Ms I. Le Roux, I express my sincere thanks.

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ABSTRACT

Why the Buddhist Pali Canon? Why the Brahmajala Sutta? Will this dissertation contribute anything new and valuable towards Orality-Literacy Studies?

It was with much anxiety and apprehension as well as intimidation in remembering the words of Jousse (1990):

"A man who writes a book deriving solely from other books contributes nothing new."

..... that the choice of this topic became finalised.

The Brahmajala Sutta commences with the words: "Evam me sutam" (Thus I have heard). [ It is the written representation of an oral form that came into existence as the culmination of an established authentic oral tradition that had its origins in the 5th Century B.C. It became preserved in written form in the 1st Century B.C. with the purpose of canonizing the Discourses of Gotama Buddha. These were and still are transmitted orally and the written text abounds with oral elements such as mnemotechniques, repetitions, refrains, sound and rhythmic patterns, silences and pauses that are germane to the content and comprehension of the sutta (discourse). ]

This text which has survived many centuries holds much fascination as it attaches a meditative dimension to the Orality-Literacy continuum since the [ meditative repetition of its verses aims at the spiritual transformation and enhancement of the individual. ]

Le Roux (1991 : 48) asks,

"Is it possible to rekindle a live relationship with this ancient text, which is now only available in printed form?"

In answering her question she states,

"It is possible when the present day reader realises that this sutta has a dynamic vitality of its own, that it is able to challenge, communicate and demand a response from the interpreter. Inevitably, the reader is drawn into an involvement with the message of the sutta which Ricoeur (1967 : 354) calls, 'a passionate, though critical relation with the truth value of each symbol.' When the two horizons meet, that of the present day reader and the ancient text itself, understanding becomes a reality. That is possible notwithstanding immense differences in time, language and religio-philosophical beliefs."

This dissertation is not intended to be an exegetical analysis of the Brahmajala Sutta, for which, in any case, it affords neither scope nor range. What it seeks to do is to explore how the text came to be fixed in its present form, as well as to appreciate the processes that lie behind its formulation, and most important of all, to attempt to understand what intrinsic qualities it possesses that give it its "dynamic vitality."

In the first three chapters, the text is placed against the historical, sociological and cultural contexts of the Buddhist Pali Canon. This information is essential as it provides the background necessary for the comprehension of important aspects of the sutta. Chapter Four locates the position of the Brahmajala Sutta within the giant corpus of material embraced by the Buddhist Pali Canon and Chapter Five presents the structural formulation of the text. In Chapters Six and Seven, the oral compositional process with its use of formulaic devices comes into focus within a semantic, morphological and phonological analysis. I emphasise that since I consider my knowledge of the Pali Canon to be relatively limited, I have had to rely on the works of the many eminent researchers whose names appear in the Bibliography, for the information contained in the first three chapters.

CHAPTER ONE

A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO BUDDHISM

PRE-BUDDHIST INDIAN RELIGIOUS THINKING

In the centuries prior to the advent of the Buddha, Indian religious thinking focussed primarily upon the attainment of salvation for the soul of the individual. Indians interpreted the holy Vedic scriptures such that the path to such salvation could be realised in three different ways. Some maintained that strict ritual observance guaranteed salvation whilst others believed that self mortification and the subjection of the body to deprivation and austerities also attained the same end. A third group believed in the attainment of salvation by intellectual means involving the quest for the unity of the impersonal Brahma (the cosmic principle pervading the entire universe) with the Atman (the psychic principle or inner essence of man).

THE BUDDHA AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MIDDLE PATH TO SALVATION

Gautama Siddharta, The Buddha (literally, "the enlightened one") also known as Shakamuni (Sakyamuni), lived in India in the 6th Century B.C.

Chen (1972 : 4) wrote that Sakyamuni established a system that repudiated the Brahmanical claim of the Vedas to be the divine and

infallible source of spiritual truth, rejected the rituals as the sole means to salvation, and disapproved of the intellectual approach of the Upanishads (Vedic scriptures). His way to salvation was based on a rigorous code of personal spiritual behaviour with the emphasis on conduct as the chief means to salvation. Because he steered the middle course between austerities on the one hand, and gratification of the senses on the other, he called his teachings, "the middle path".

#### THE SPREAD AND DIVISION OF BUDDHISM

About a century after the death of Sakyamuni, (Murata : 1971), his following split over different interpretations of his teachings. By the beginning of the Christian era, two major sects had emerged. One called itself Mahayana (Greater Vehicle) and referred belittlingly to its chief rival as Hinayana (Lesser Vehicle), better known by its own designation, Theravada, meaning "the School of Elders".

Theravada Buddhism spread to Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia, while Mahayana found its way to China, Tibet, Korea, and then to Japan.

Briefly, Theravada reveres the teachings of the historical Buddha. This religion is primarily a way of life which offers release to the individual from the sufferings of human life by helping him attain tranquillity of mind. A Theravadist seeks the goal of enlightenment by faithful adherence to the rule of conduct, The Eightfold Path, as

set down by the Buddha (an explanation of which is given on page 14 of this dissertation.

Mahayana, on the other hand, deified the historical Buddha, regarding him as one particular incarnation of the eternal, transcendent Buddha nature. Against the quietism of Hinayana, with its emphasis on personal abnegation, is set the activism of Mahayana, concerned with the salvation of all mankind.

Hence the term, "Greater Vehicle" - a means of transporting a larger number of individuals to the realm of supreme enlightenment. To the Mahayanists, Theravada Buddhism was like a vehicle that accommodated only one person.

Theravada and Mahayana also differ in their respective use of the word "bodhisattva" (a person who seeks enlightenment). In Theravada, bodhisattva meant Gotama the Buddha in his previous incarnation, during which he performed many acts of merit. It was because of these acts of merit, according to Theravada, that Gotama was able to become a Buddha, an "enlightened one", in his actual life. The Mahayanists believed, however, that they themselves could become Buddhas through their own endeavour and that therefore they should be called bodhisattvas. They expected a bodhisattva both to live righteously and to save others spiritually. He was to become a Buddha by working for the good of others through perfecting himself in the virtues of generosity, mortality, patience, vigour, meditative concentration and wisdom.

In such an endeavour, however, the Mahayanists also depended on the aid of transcendent Buddhas and bodhisattvas who delayed their own attainment of Buddhahood to assist others.

There are several doctrinal differences between the Mahayana and the Hinayana (Theravada) and it is not possible to delve into them at this stage. However, since our text, The Brahmajala Sutta, is of Theravadin origin, and was transmitted as the "doctrine of the Elders", it is necessary to trace the origins of the language in which it is written and to understand the essential concepts of Theravada Buddhism upon which it is formulated.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORIES ABOUT THE EVOLUTION OF THE BUDDHIST PALI CANON

Although the term "Pali" is the name, accepted by the scholars, of the Middle Indo-Aryan dialect that is found in the Theravadin texts, there is no mention of the name "Pali" in the Theravadin canon. Scholars have advanced a number of conflicting identifications and even though the controversy has undergone several reviews, few definitive results have been achieved.

Norman (1982 : 1) suggests that the name "Pali" is based upon a misunderstanding of the compound "pali-bhasa" (language of the canon), where the word "pali" was taken to stand for the name of a particular canon, as a result of which the word was applied to both the language and the canon by later commentators.

In his extensive research, Norman used the contributions of other notable writers such as Childers, Burnouf and Lassen who had already made inroads into the origins of the Pali Buddhist Canon.

Childers (1875 : 7) stated that the English usage was taken from the Sinhalese who used the word in the same way. Burnouf and Lassen (1826) also used the name "Pali" in their essay on Pali grammar and pointed out that Simon de Loubère, who published a description of the King of Siam, had mentioned the name "Pali" in 1691. This evidenced the theory that the name "Pali" was already being used of the language of the Theravadin texts in Thailand in the late 17th Century.

The Sasanavamsa, written in Burma in 1861, uses the word "Pali" in a context where it seems to be the name of a language. Since this work is based upon an earlier Burmese text, the usage of the name is probably earlier than would appear. Norman concluded that it does not seem possible to determine where the misunderstanding first occurred as it seems unlikely that the usage arose independently in all three countries.

#### ORIGINS OF THE PALI CANON

In addition to the uncertainty surrounding the name of the language, the nature of the original language was also shrouded in uncertainty as was also the source of its origin.

Rhys-Davids (1978 : 7) writes about the enigma of the explanation of the scriptures of Ceylon being written in an admittedly Indian tongue (Pali) which was not the language of Ceylon, and yet was not found in India. She questions whether Pali had ever been actually spoken or whether some central ecclesia had systematised the doctrines to retain the scriptures in the language in which they had been written, purely for religious and ecclesiastical usage. However, even in the present state of our knowledge, both questions will still remain as disembodied speculations although the literary structure of the Pali Suttas does suggest a strong indication that they were spoken in both metric and prosaic forms before they were set down in writing.

This leads us to believe that they were first uttered, and repeated as uttered, then redacted in a fixed form, verse or prose, all of it

oral, before there was any writing of the discourses. When these came to be written down, the forms found in the past most effective for memorising had become fixed, too sacred to be altered to suit the style found most effective in writing. So the fixed forms were written down relatively unaltered.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF THE PALI CANON

In a chapter dealing with the history and development of the Pali language, Norman (1982 : 2) identifies Magadhi, the language of Magadha, as the language spoken by the Buddha and which is the language of the canon. He states that an examination of the Pali canon shows clearly that portions of it were either composed or transmitted through one or more dialects of Middle Indo-Aryan before being turned into the version which exists at present.

It is clear therefore, that the statement that the canon is in one dialect, whether Magadhi or anything else, cannot be true of all of it. It would seem likely that, because the texts speak of the Buddha at times preaching in Magadha, although none of the scenes of the great events in his life was situated within the boundaries of Magadha as we know it in historical times, the tradition arose that all his sermons were preached in the dialect of that region of North India. It is also possible that the prestige attached to Magadhi during the time of the Mauryan kings, and also the way in which the Magadhi of the original Asokan edicts was, everywhere in India, translated into the local dialect or language, led to the acceptance by the Buddhists, at about the time of the council, which, the Theravadin tradition reports, was held during the reign of Asoka

(274 - 236 B.C.), of the idea that their ruler too employed such a language.

It is generally agreed that the Buddha did not preach in Sanskrit, but employed the dialect or language of the area where he was preaching. It must therefore be assumed that his sermons and utterances were remembered by his followers and his audiences as they heard them. In the course of his lifetime and after his death, collections must have been made of his words, and translations or redactions of these must have been made as the need arose.

The Theravadin tradition speaks of sangitis' (councils) being held to recite the canon, of which the third was held in the time of Asoka. Such councils would inevitably have led to a normalisation of the language of the canon. This language was an ecclesiastical one being recited by monks who probably spoke a variety of languages or dialects. Although it has been described as ecclesiastical, Pali, the medium through the Buddha's discourses were transmitted both in oral and literate forms, seems to have been a language chosen for its adaptability and, most important of all, for its accessibility to the common people.

Southwold (1983 : 115) disagrees, and states that the Buddhist Pali canon was esoteric to the extent that it was written and reserved for the elite:

"The Buddhist scriptures were not composed by a representative sample of Buddhists. They were composed by clerics, a religious elite.... The scriptures were first produced as oral compositions, and then handed down for many generations, indeed centuries, through very formal oral transmission from teacher to pupils. This could only have occurred in the larger monasteries, and the work would have been entrusted to the clerics of the most eminent, and the best endowed, of the monasteries. Thus the scriptures were the product of an elite among the clerical elite. It does not follow that such clerics were themselves involved in monasticism of the secluded meditative kind, but we can be rather sure that they were little involved with ministry to the common people. It is not in the least surprising that the view of religion propagated by such authors should have had a distinctly elitist tendency."

It is difficult to accept Southwold's assertion as there is much historical evidence to substantiate the fact that the choice of this language was the initial point of the Buddha's departure from the Brahmanistic influence which itself was esoteric and reserved for the elite. It is common knowledge that the Buddha's teaching differed from that of the Brahmins in that it was directed at anyone who was a listener at any sangha (religious gathering) in any area that the Buddha visited in his travels.

Since the Pali canon was the end result of the interplay between and the diffusion of many languages and dialects, it must have been

subjected to metamorphosis in its journey of oral transmission. Norman makes the point that although the chances of major changes being made to the language of the canon must have diminished once the texts had been written down, nevertheless, there was room for a certain amount of minor emendation to take place in the course of the centuries-long scribal tradition. Once the Pali grammarians had begun to classify and categorise the features of Pali, it was inevitable that their writings would have had some effect upon scribes. It is clear from some of the later commentaries that the commentators had a knowledge of Sanskrit. This is most probably the reason for the Sankritisation of the canon a few centuries later.

It is likely that the opinions of the commentators would sometimes have had a bearing upon the readings which the scribes handed down and it also seems likely that their knowledge would have affected the phonology and morphology they transmitted.

As Buddhism spread from India to its diasporic centres in South-East Asia, Pali became the religious language and was often used as a second language.

This led to the introduction into Pali of the features of their first language, more particularly of vocabulary, but also of syntax. Pali texts written in Ceylon show the influence of languages such as Prakrit, Sinhalese and Dravidian. In the same way texts written in Burma or Thailand showed features of Burmese or Thai.

In the course of tracing the Pali language from its uncertain origins to its present form, two features become apparent: firstly, it was an earlier form of language that came into existence as an instrument for the preservation of orally transmitted doctrines and sayings of the Buddha through documentation, and secondly, its ecclesiastical nature had its derivation from the vernacular of the casual conversation of several Middle Indo-Aryan dialects.

It is unfortunate that the spirit of this language cannot really be captured, for its true oral performance will always remain buried within the irrevocable glory of an ancient time.

Jousse (1990 : 91) stated:

"One may know the grammar of a language and be able to make a correct word-for-word translation from it, but this will not enable one to grasp the spirit of that language (to get from it the actual mental dispositions expressed through its propositional gestures), or to assimilate the thought of those who speak and write it. One could even go further and say that the more scrupulously literal a translation, the more it actually runs the risk of being inexact and untrue to the intention of the original. For there is no real equivalence between the terms of two different languages, especially when those languages are far removed from each other, far removed, not so much philologically as in respect of the difference in the ideas of the people who use them; and it is this last element that no amount of erudition will ever enable us to grasp."

Our interpretation and evaluation of the Pali in the Brahmajala Sutta may only be conducted through our attempts at translation, revivification and oral performance as we perceive them to have been.

CHAPTER THREE

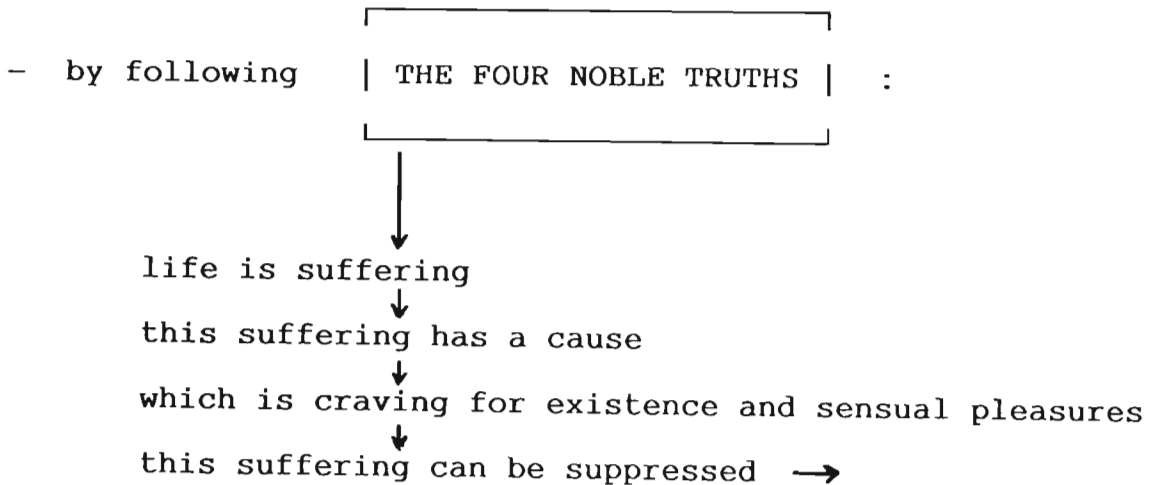
THE MAIN CONCEPTS OF THERAVADA BUDDHISM

KAMMA

The Buddhist definition of Karma is intention plus the bodily action that follows the intention. To the Buddhist, the life of an individual exists within the continuum from a beginningless past to an endless future, following a cycle of births, deaths and rebirths which is known as the round or cycle of existence. The nature of each period of life within a birth and a death is dependent upon past Karma.

One of the fundamental beliefs of Buddhism is that as long as we are revolving in this endless cycle of rebirths, we are continually subject to suffering and misery. In order to terminate all suffering, we must get outside the round of existence i.e. to stop transmigrating and to attain salvation.

Salvation can only be made possible in the following way:



→ by practice of 

THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH
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which is divided into three categories:

- a) INTUITIVE INSIGHT OR WISDOM
  - right views
  - right intentions
  - right speech
  
- b) MORALITY OR MORAL CONDUCT
  - right action
  - right livelihood
  - right effort
  
- c) MENTAL DISCIPLINE
  - right mindfulness
  - right concentration

The kernel of the Buddhist moral discipline is to abstain from evil practice, to do good and to purify ones own mind.

When the mind is not disturbed by external elements, it can attain stages of bliss and ecstasy not otherwise obtainable. It will then promote spiritual development, diminish the impact of suffering, and deepen the virtues of compassion and gentleness.

He who practises intuitive insight, wisdom and mental discipline, perceives things as they really are. There is a surface and a depth of things and it is necessary to penetrate beyond external appearances to get at true reality.

Intuitive wisdom consists of taking the right view of things, viz: maintaining that all existence is suffering, that all existence is impermanent and that there is no permanent self or soul in man.

THE TRUTH OF IMPERMANENCE - there is no static moment in life, only an eternal flux without beginning or end.

THE DOCTRINE OF NO PERMANENT SELF OR SOUL - there is no permanent self or soul

what can be found is a conglomeration of five aggregates:

material body

sensation

perception

predisposition

consciousness

At any moment, we are but a momentary collection of these five aggregates, a combination of physical matter and mental energies or forces.

We are but a continuous living entity which does not remain the same for two consecutive moments, which comes into being and disappears as soon as it arises. Only once we deny the existence of a permanent self do we give up our egoistic pleasures.

If there is a no soul, what is it that is reborn?

THE DOCTRINE OF NON-SELF

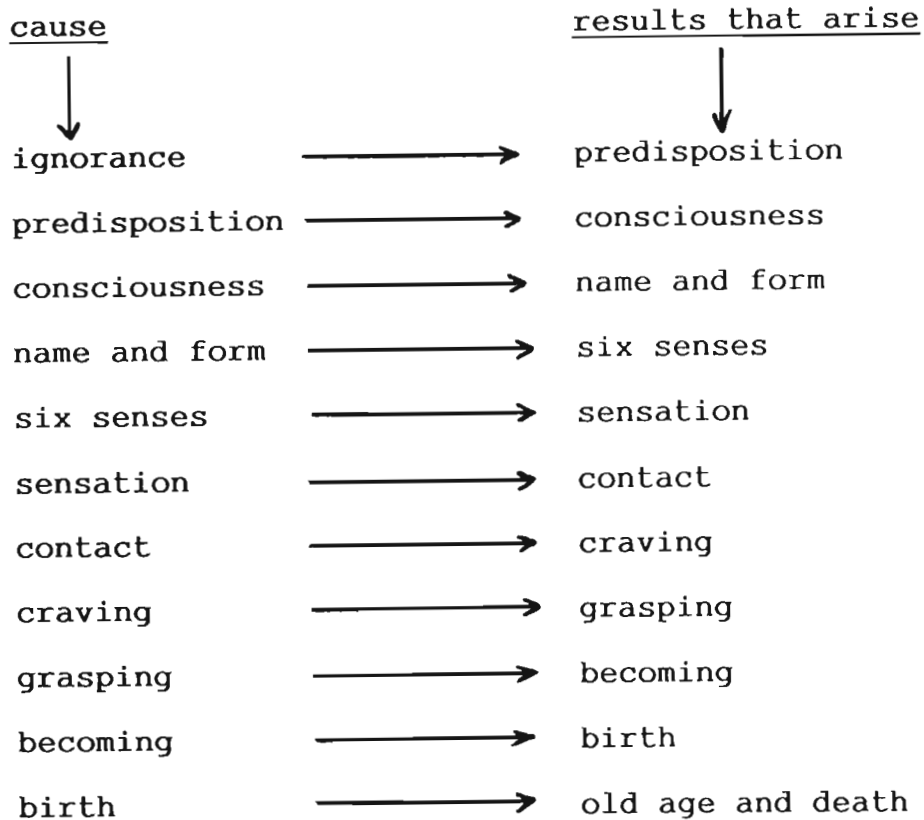
When a living being dies, the five aggregates disintegrate, but because of the karma of the past, there must be fruition. A new being inherits the karma of the past and comes into existence. There is a life stream that connects the different rebirths. This may be explained by the use of the following analogies:

- the river maintains one constant form though not a single drop of water remains which composed the river yesterday.
- if we light one candle with another, the transmitted flame is the same, but the candle is not.

When a living being dies, it is not the end of the life stream, it is merely the dissolution of one composition of the five aggregates, to be followed immediately by the appearance of another combination.

The Buddhist doctrine of non-self means that there is no permanent self or soul in the individual, that there is only a living complex of physical and mental elements living on the fruits of the individual's acts. It can exert efforts to acquire meritorious kamma and eventually attain salvation.

RIGHT VIEW - includes a correct understanding of the formula of dependent origination or the chain of causation. This may be illustrated as follows:



This formula was meant to demonstrate that events are not caused by the arbitrary will of some outside power but that each event arises out of some previous cause.

### NIBBANA

This profound concept is inexplicable through the use of words, as words are finite and can only describe finite things. Nirvana is infinite and transcendental and cannot be described with finite words. What we know is that it is the final release from phenomenal existence, on the assumption of Arahantship, which is the state of

the perfect being. Buddhist philosophy speaks of the stream-flow to Nibbana and describes the four stages through which mortal man must pass to the attainment of Nibbana.

In the first stage, that of entering the stream (sotapanna) that flows to Nibbana, the meditator becomes sure of attaining enlightenment. He will never be reborn in any of the sorrowful states (animal, demon) because he has assimilated the ethical precepts of the Dhamma. At most he will be reborn seven times a man before he wins Nibbana, which can be achieved by none other than a human being.

The next stage, that of sakadagamin, means that because the man who is intent on self-deliverance has completely destroyed the three fetters (wrong view, doubt, and false trust in the efficacy of rites and ceremonies) and has reduced attachment, aversion and confusion to a minimum, he will return but once more to a birth as a human being, then to make an end of anguish.

At the third stage, that where he is an anagamin or never-returner to birth on earth, he has destroyed the five fetters (the three mentioned plus malevolence and sense-desire) and after his death here will become a denizen of one of the highest deva-worlds (worlds of the Gods) and attain Nibbana there when the residual kamma that has led to this deva-birth has expended itself.

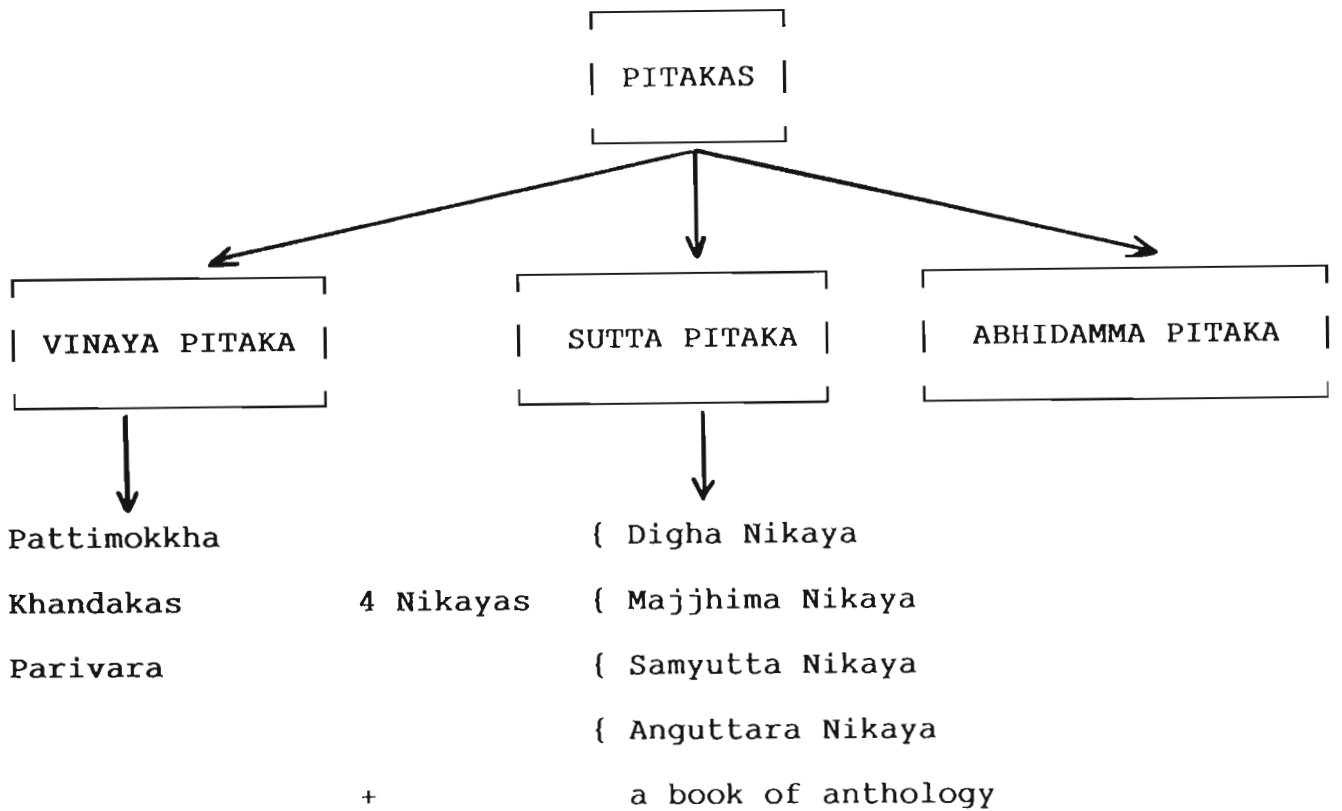
The fourth stage is that of Arahantship. The man who has realised, by his own efforts here and now, the freedom of mind and freedom through intuitive wisdom, who has done all there was to be shed the

burden of self and cut off the binding fetters, comes not to birth again. Samsara (the round of existence) is at an end for him.

These, the main concepts of Theravada Buddhism, form the backbone of the Brahmajala Sutta.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PLACE OF THE BRAHMAJALA SUTTA WITHIN THE DIVISIONS  
OF THE BUDDHIST PALI CANON



Three main divisions form the structure of the Buddhist Pali Canon. These are known as Pitakas. The word "pitaka" is a Pali word that means a basket, a treasure-house or a casket of valued contents. The three Pitakas are the Vinaya Pitaka, the Sutta Pitaka and the Abhidamma Pitaka.

Le Roux (1991) precisely categorises the contents of the three Pitakas as:

"The Vinaya Pitaka in which the monastic rules for monks and nuns are outlined, the Sutta Pitaka ('thread' of the discourse) containing the discursive and narrative renditions of the Buddhist tradition and the Abhidhamma Pitaka ('the basket of superior truth') - a comprehensive collection of systematic interpretations elucidating Buddhist teaching."

Our concern is with the Sutta Pitaka for it is within this work that the Brahmajala Sutta lies. It is divided into four Nikayas and one book of anthology. The Digha Nikaya, the first of the four Nikayas, is further subdivided into three volumes and the Brahmajala Sutta is therefore the first Sutta of the first volume of the first Nikaya of the Sutta Pitaka.

Bhikku Bodhi (1978 : 1) places much emphasis upon the significance of the position of the Brahmajala Sutta within the Buddhist Pali Canon:

"That the Brahmajala was assigned to this strategic position - that of the first discourse of the first collection - is not a matter of chance or haphazard arrangement, but of deliberate design on the part of the Elders who compiled the canon and set it in its present form. Its placement reflects a choice, a far-sighted and carefully considered choice, stemming from a keen awareness of the significance of the discourse both

intrinsically and in relation to the Buddha's teaching as a whole. For just as our sutta, in terms of its position, stands at the entrance to the total collection of discourses spoken by the Buddha, so does its principal message provide a prolegomenon to the entire Dispensation itself. It is, so to speak, the sentry at the gateway to the Doctrine, whose seal of approval must be obtained in order to cross the border that separates the Buddha's understanding of reality from all other attempts at a reflective interpretation of man's existential situation.

The paramount importance of the Brahmajala in the context of Buddhist thought springs from the very nature of the Buddha's teaching - from its aim and from the methodology it employs to actualize that aim."

The aim of the Buddha's teaching, adds Bhikku Bodhi, is absolute liberation from samsara and the realisation of Nibanna, the state of pure bliss when the cycle of successive births and deaths is finally terminated. However, there are many impediments on the path to Nibanna. Defilements (kilesa) such as avarice, passion and misconceptions are the major obstacles that have to be overcome.

Defilements originate in ignorance (avijja) which, in turn, binds man helplessly to the round of existence. Wisdom (panna) conquers ignorance and leads man back to the pursuit of Nibanna. Wisdom is essentially man's ability to perceive reality in an enlightened state, free of all defilements.

It is at such a level of understanding that the individual is finally able to adopt the right view (sammaditthi) which in turn, leads to right knowledge and emancipation.

Right view is also the ability to discriminate between right and wrong views. Right view is understanding the nature of actuality whilst wrong view constitutes doctrines about the nature of reality. In order to develop right view, wrong views must be eliminated and in order to eliminate them it is necessary to know what they are.

Wrong views may be classified into three categories, viz:

- 1) wrong views with fixed consequences (niyatamicchaditthi) - these are views that tend to undermine the basic principles of morality e.g.: the acceptance of sensory pleasures and indulgence in materialistic pursuits as being good;
- 2) speculative views (ditthigata) - these include all metaphysical theories, religious creeds and philosophical tenets concerning issues that lie beyond the reach of possible experiential verification; and
- 3) personality view (sakkayaditthi) - these are views that arise out of the fundamental belief in a self or ego-entity.

The Buddha regarded man's inclination to speculation as one of the major factors that impeded the adoption of right view, and, Bhikku Bodhi (1978 : 6) lists several reasons why the Buddha was so concerned to discourage man from speculation:

1. Views proceed from ignorance and blindness rather than from knowledge.
2. They involve misinterpretations of experience.
3. They involve subjective distortions of actual experiential data.
4. They proclaim a part of the truth to be the whole.
5. Views lead to conceit, to extolling oneself and disparaging others who hold different views.
6. Views result in dogmatic thinking and clinging.
7. Differences in views lead to quarrels and disputes.
8. The adherence to views maintains the forward movement of the round of becoming, by obstructing the acceptance of the right views which lead to the cessation of the round, and by conditioning kammic accumulations that precipitate renewed existence.

The Brahmajala Sutta stands as the Buddha's testimony that warns mankind against the adoption of speculative and personality views. Brahmajala means "supreme net". Bhikku Bodhi describes it as an all-embracing net, having no loopholes and no portals of escape, which is cast out by the Buddha upon the ocean of man's thought, designed to catch and to contain all possible theories about the

self and the universe. It classifies into sixty-two cases the entire range of man's views concerning the perennial topics of speculative thought, the ultimate nature of the self and the world.

The Brahmajala Sutta occurs within a physical journey undertaken by the Buddha but it is, in essence, the first steps of a journey of enlightenment with the attainment of Nibbana as its ultimate destination.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BRAHMAJALA SUTTA

<u>FIRST UNIT OF RECITATION</u> <u>Speculative Views of the Common Man (Putthujano)</u>	<u>SECOND UNIT OF RECITATION</u> <u>Speculative Views and Personality Views of the Higher, Spiritually Conscious Man (Bhikku)</u>	<u>THIRD UNIT OF RECITATION</u>
<p>Introduction: The journey to Nalanda</p> <p>The themes: Praise and Dispraise</p> <p>Introduction to Janata, Passata, Suppatividata</p> <p>Introduction to the 18 Views on Eternalism</p>	<p><u>Speculations about the past</u></p> <p>4 Views on Eternalism</p> <p>4 Views on Partial-Eternalism</p> <p>4 Views on Extensionism</p> <p>4 Views of the Eel-Wrigglers</p> <p>2 Views of the Fortuitous-Originists</p> <p><u>Speculations about the future</u></p> <p>16 Views on the conscious existence of the soul after death</p>	<p>8 Views on the unconscious existence of the soul after death</p> <p>8 Views that the soul is neither conscious nor unconscious</p> <p>7 Views on the annihilation of the soul</p> <p>5 Views on the doctrine of happiness in this life</p> <p>(The Tathagata)</p> <p>Summary of the 62 Speculative Views</p> <p>The Exposition of Truth</p>

CHAPTER FIVE

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BRAHMAJALA SUTTA

The text of the Brahmajala Sutta displays a clearly and elaborately structured unity that enables it to fulfil its function as the gateway to the Buddhist doctrine by encompassing the fundamental teachings of the Buddha within a skilfully constructed formulaic framework.

It is distinctly divided into three chapters each of which is, in itself, a complete unit of recitation. The first unit of recitation includes an Introduction together with the discourses on the moralities (sila) pertaining to the life of the common or terrestrial man. The second and third units of recitation consist of the sixty-two speculative views propounded by man about the nature of the universe and of the soul. The Sutta culminates, at the end of the third unit of recitation, with the Buddha's summary of the entire range of man's speculative views and adds his final exposition of Truth.

Each of the units of recitation may also be regarded as an exposition of a state of spiritual consciousness. The first unit embodies the knowledge of the Putthujano, the common worldling or terrestrial man; the second unit presents the knowledge of the Bhikku, the monk, ascetic or recluse who has attained a higher level of spiritual consciousness. The third and final unit projects the supramundane knowledge of the Tathagatha, the Supreme, Enlightened Being who has attained the pure state of Nibbana.

This ancient text displays its uniqueness by remaining of fixed form, whatever the circumstances under which it is recited. It excludes variation and oral improvisation, deliberate visible physical gesticulation, musical accompaniment and all forms of sensory distractions.

Its teleological function is to present a transcendental sound vibration with the potency to liberate the human mind from its worldly, materialistic conditioning and to serve as a ritual that is performed to initiate and deliver the aspirant to the state of Nibbana.

It is an incantatory medium that catalyses spiritual awareness through meditation as an individual, group or communal experience. It aims at the revivification of the inner spiritual consciousness of all human beings through the chanting of its words.

Its vibrancy comes from its many oral features which are found within its semantic, morphological and phonological structure. It is necessary to probe deeply into the compositional process that lay behind its formulation in order that its orality may be experienced.

CHAPTER SIX

THE ORAL COMPOSITIONAL PROCESS AND THE USE OF FORMULAIC DEVICES - A SEMANTIC AND MORPHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

A characteristic and essential feature of any orally composed and orally transmitted work is the dominant part played in the composition by the various sequences, repetitions, standard phrases and verbal or thematic templates conventionally known as formulas. These devices, that are utilised in the compositional process, serve as effective mnemotechnical devices that facilitate memorization and oral performance. They are also ingenious devices that ensure the continuity of the sequences within the text as well as the spontaneity of the language. Even a superfluous examination of the Brahmajala Sutta would reveal obvious examples such as the opening and closing sequences, recurrent combinations of formulated narrative units, repetitions of dialectical questions, lines introducing speech or answer, descriptions of views, and linkages by single words or phrases. It is necessary to carefully analyse some of these elements of the Sutta's compositional structure to illustrate how effectively they promote its orality. "Evam me sutam" (Thus I have heard), are the words with which the discourse begins and at this, the very outset, the fact that it has been orally transmitted is lucidly, though indirectly, conveyed to the listeners or reciters, who by their reception and recitation would continue its long oral tradition. The discourse begins in narrative style in the manner of simple story-telling by the immediate introduction of both the

protagonists of the action and the spatio-temporal context in which it occurs:

(Di, 1.1)

"Ekam samayam Bhagava antaraca Rajagaham antaraca Nalandam addhana magga patti panno hoti mahata bhikku-samghena saddhim panca mattehi satehi Suppiyo pikho parribajako antaraca Rajagaham antara ca Nalandam addhana magga patti panno hoti saddhim antevasina Brahmaddattena manavena."

(The Blessed One was once going along the high road between Rajagaha and Nalanda with about five hundred brethren. Suppiya, the mendicant, too was going along the high road between Rajagaha and Nalanda with his disciple, the youth Brahmaddatta.)

Such an introduction would naturally stimulate a curious response from the listener who would wonder: What then? What happened next?

It is then that the themes of praise (vannam) and dispraise (avannam) are immediately introduced, indicating that there is a situation of discord, thereby creating a feeling of anticipation in the mind of the listener or reciter. Having set the scene and having explained the nature of the discord, this particular action-sequence is subtly mobilised by:

(Di, 1.1)

" Iti ha te ubho acariyantevasi annamannassa uju-vipaccanika-vada  
Bhagavantam pitthitto pitthito anubaddha honti bhikku-samghan ca."

(Thus they two, teacher and pupil holding opinions in direct  
contradiction, one to the other, were following step by step, after  
the Blessed One and the company of the brethren)

- which maintains the story-like narrative form.

Continuation is ensured by the use of mobilising, introductory  
phrases such as:

" Atha ko Bhagava ..... " (Di, 1.2/4)

(Now the Blessed One .....)

and:

" Atha kho rattiya paccusasamayam " (Di, 1.3)

(And in the early dawn ....)

which lead the narration on. This sequence is terminated with the  
repetition of (Di, 1.1) which, together with the anticipation that  
had been created, promotes the progression of the story.

Mediation occurs in (Di, 1.5/6) when the Buddha intervenes and extols  
the virtues of being completely dispassionate and to exercise wise

judgement in the confrontation of both favourable and adverse criticism. The discord is settled and a significant new theme, the use of wise judgement, is subtly woven into the discourse.

The entire introduction up to this point may be seen to fit almost perfectly into the Levi Straussian determination of theme as outlined by Canonici (1990 : 62). The thesis is posited and portrayed by the protagonist (The Buddha). The antithesis consisting of opposite values is represented by the antagonist (Suppiya). The Synthesis, represented by the mediation and wise judgement of the Buddha, leads to the denouement. A cyclic movement completes itself within the narration and the tension caused by the binary oppositions is relieved.

However, the subtlety of the narrativization lies in the fact that with the ending of one sequence, which was the occurrence on the journey to Nalanda, the introduction to a new sequence, which, in this case, is the introduction to the discourses on moralities, is allowed to come to the forefront:

(Di, 1.7)

"Appamattakam kho pan'etam bhikkave oramattakam silamattakam yena putthujano Tathagatassa vannaṃ vadamaṇo vadeyya."

(It is in respect only of trifling things, of matters of little value, of mere morality, that an unconverted man, when praising the Tathagatha, would speak.)

The final question at the end of (Di, 1.7):

"Kataman ca tam bhikkave appamattakam oramattakam silamattakam yena putthujano Tathagatassa vannaṃ vadamano vadeyya? "

(And what ~~are~~ such trifling, minor details of mere mortality, would the common man, praise when speaking of the Tathagatha?)

- provides the opportunity and the link for the commencement of the discourses on the trivial matters concerning moralities.

It is also significant that the representatives of the two opposite stages of the spiritual journey, the worldling (Putthujano) and the Supreme Enlightened Being (Tathagatha), are introduced together with the vital underlying theme of Knowing, Seeing and Clearly Perceiving (Janatta, Passatta, Suppativada - (Di, 1.3).

Such an example demonstrates how a particular sequence is initiated, allowed to unfold itself to the listener or the reciter and is then terminated with a resolution. Out of the successful completion of a sequence comes the finely woven introductions to related themes which are presented for correlation at later stages in the Sutta.

Active, and in conjunction with such a technique, is the technique of repetition.

There is little doubt that of all the formulaic mnemotechnical devices used by those anonymous Pali composers, repetition seems to have been the most favoured.

In the Kula, Magghima and Maha Silas (the Discourses on Moralities - Di, 1.8 to Di, 1.28 ) themes, stanzas and refrains are repeated with little or no structural variation.

It is also interesting to note that the moralities applicable to the common man are not presented as rules, having an element of compulsion about them, but are rather skilfully presented as those positive actions that the Buddha would practise in contrast with those that are negative. This simple formula is constructed within the sutta in the following manner:

Putting away/casting aside/avoiding X (which represents a negative action)

The Buddha (Gotama) holds aloof and engages in Y (a positive action).

Eg: (Di, 1.9)"Musa vadam pahaya musa vada pativirato Samano Gotama saccavadi sacco-sandho theto paccayiko avisam vadako lokassati."

(Putting away lying words Gotama holds himself aloof from falsehood. He speaks the truth, from the truth he never swerves .... he breaks not his word to the world).

Similarly in (Di, 1.9):

"Pisuna vacam pahaya pisunaya vacaya pativirato Samano Gotamo ito sutva na amutra akkhata imesam bhedaya, amutra va sutva na imesam akkhata amusam bhedaya. Iti bhinnanam va sandhata sahitanam va annupadata samaggarama samaggarato samagga-nandi samagga karanim vacam bhasita ti."

(Putting away slander, Gotama holds himself aloof from calumny. What he hears here he repeats not elsewhere to raise a quarrel against people here: what he hears elsewhere he repeats not here to raise a quarrel against people there. Thus does he live as a binder together of those who are divided, a peace-maker ..... a speaker of words that make for peace.)

Repeated in (Di, 1.9)

"Samphappalapam pahaya samphappala pativirato Samano Gotamo kala-vadi bhuta-vadi atnavadi dhamma-vadi vinaya-vadi niddhanavatim vacam bhasita kalena sapadesam pariyantavatim attha sam hitanti."

(Putting away frivolous talk, Gotama holds himself aloof from vain conversation. In season he speaks, in accordance with the facts, words full of meaning, on religion, on the discipline of the Order. He speaks, and at the right time, words worthy to be laid up in one's heart, fitly illustrated, clearly divided, to the point.)

From the above examples the attentive listener or reciter would be able to determine the distinctive structural similarities and the repeated use of the words that are semantically equivalent:

musa-vadam pahaya	putting away lies/deceitful speech.
pisuna-vacam pahaya	putting away slander.
pharusa-vacam pahaya	putting away rudeness of speech.
samhappalapam pahaya	putting away frivolous talk.

Not only is the recognisable formula repeated within the stanzas to facilitate recitation, this ingeniously patterned placement of words is also repeated, to facilitate recitation or chanting. Furthermore, it serves as a good mnemotechnical device as the reciter would simply utter the word for the negative quality that is mentioned and follow his utterance by using its antonym to convey the reciprocal positive quality. Syntactically and semantically, coupling occurs between the respective first sentences of each stanza while parallelism is found between their remaining sections.

The predominant Buddhist principles of right intention and right action and disassociation from evil intent are also continually repeated as in (Di, 1.10) which sets out twenty actions from which the Buddha would abstain.

"Bijagama-bhutagama samarambha pativirato Samano Gotama"  
(Gotama refrains from causing injury/damage to plants and seed).

"Eka-bhattiko, rattuparato vikata bhojana pativirato Samano Gotama"  
(Gotama refrains from eating at night, or at odd hours and takes one meal a day).

"Nacca-gita vadita-visuka dassana pativirato Somano Gotamo."

(Gotama refrains from being a spectator at fairs, dances, musical events.)

"Malagandha-vilepana-darana mandana vibhusana-tthana pativirato Samano Gotamo."

(Gotama refrains from self adornment, the wearing of scents, unguents and garlands.)

"Uccasayana-mahasayana pativirato Somano Gotamo."

(Gotama refrains from using a large, luxurious bed.)

"Jatarupa rajata pattigahana pativirato Somano Gotamo  
amaka dhana pattigahana pativirato Somano Gotamo  
amaka mansa pattigahana pativirato Somano Gotamo  
itthi kumarika pattigahana pativirato Somano Gotamo "

(Gotama refrains from accepting silver or gold  
Gotama refrains from accepting uncooked grain  
Gotama refrains from accepting raw meat  
Gotama refrains from accepting young girls (virgins))

The predominant word pativirato meaning detachment from or abstention from, emphasises the perfect state of detachment of the Supreme Enlightened Being who touches not Evil and is himself untouched by Evil.

The repetition of the refrain:

"Iti va hi bhikkave putthujano Tathagatassa vannaṃ vadamano vadeyya"

(Such are the things, brethren, which an unconverted man (worldling), when in speaking in praise of the Tathagata, might say)

occurs after every utterance of a positive action not only to assist in the incantation but also to indicate that the discourse is still at the stage in which the codes of conduct (moralities) for the terrestrial man are being presented.

The formulaic pattern of repetition and the use of semantic clusters of words continues in the Magghima Sila, which is an extension and an elaboration upon the codes of conduct that had been mentioned in the Kula Sila, with the syntactic structure also following the same formula as in the Kula Sila, with minor variation e.g.:

Whereas some recluses and Brahmins, while living on the food provided by the faithful, engage in X (negative actions), Gotama, the recluse, holds aloof from such practices.

The addition of the phrase: "saddha-deyani bhojanani bhunjitva te evarupam"

(while living on the food provided by the faithful)

into the formula, is really the introduction of a repeated indictment against the fraudulent Brahmins who indulge in luxuries at the expense of their trusting followers. This phrase is repeated eight times in the Magghima Sila and six times in the Maha Sila which follows.

An interesting parallel may be drawn between the Kula and Magghima Silas to illustrate how the negative actions previously mentioned in the Kula Sila are repeated and extended in the Magghima Sila for intensity and for the purpose of bringing unrighteous actions into the minds of the listeners or reciters. These are represented in the following comparison:

negative actions mentioned in  
the Kula Sila



(Di, 1.10)

indulgence in shows, dancing,  
music

(Di, 1.10)

indulgence in games and  
recreation

similar and elaborated upon in  
the Magghima Sila



(Di, 1.13)

- the addiction to 16 similar  
forms of entertainment is  
mentioned

(Di, 1.14)

- the addiction to 18 similar  
forms of games and frivolities  
is mentioned

negative actions mentioned in  
the Kula Sila

similar and elaborated upon in  
the Magghima Sila

(Di, 1.10)

indulgence in the use of large  
and lofty beds

(Di, 1.15)

- the addiction to 20 similar forms  
of luxuries for physical comfort  
are mentioned

(Di, 1.9)

indulgence in verbal wrangling  
and frivolous talk

(Di, 1.18)

- the addiction to 10 examples  
of the use of wrangling phrases  
is mentioned

(Di, 1.10)

indulgence in self-adornment

(Di, 1.16)

- 20 examples of the practices of  
self-adornment are mentioned

The end of each verse in which the various addictions are mentioned is concluded with the repetition of: "iti evarupa ..... pativirato Samano Gotama ti" (Gotama the recluse holds aloof from such practices) thus continuing the same theme of the Buddha's abstention and detachment from evil and negative actions which constitute unrighteous behaviour.

The end of the Magghima Sila with the line (Di, 1.20) -

"Yatha ve pan eke bhonto samana Brahmana saddha-deyani bhojanani bhunjitva te kuhaka ca honti lapakka ca nemittika ca nippesika ca labhena ca labham nijinsitaro - iti evarupa kuhana lapana pativirato Samano Gotamo ti. Iti va hi bhikkave putthujano Tathagatassa vanna vadamano vadeyya."

(Or he might say: Whereas some recluses and Brahmins while living on food provided by the faithful, are tricksters, droners out (of holy words for pay), diviners and exorcists ever hungering to add gain to gain - Gotama, the recluse, holds aloof from such deception and patter. Thus the worldling would praise the Tathagatha.)

- demonstrates once more the subtlety of the pattern of the narrativization in which the conclusion of one sequence within itself heralds a new theme which becomes predominant in the following sequence. In this instance, the immediate sequel (Di, 1.21 to Di, 1.27) forms the dominant theme of the succeeding sila (the Maha sila). Mention has already been made of the Brahmins and recluses who seek material gain by engaging in activities such as divining, prophesying and exorcism. This, in fact, forms the central theme in the Maha Sila where the Buddha discourses at great length on the interpretation and foretelling of psychic phenomena which he describes as the low arts (tiracchana-vijjaya micchajiva). Such linkage is of vital importance as the reciter/listener is able to anticipate what is to follow.

The Maha Sila provides several examples of the use of other mnemotechnical devices such as the juxtapositioning of opposites (i.e. the use of antithetical parallelism) and the use of the stylistic figure of anaphora.

The anaphoric style is clearly evident in (Di, 1.24):

<u>there will be</u> an eclipse of the moon	-canda-ggaho <u>bhavissatti</u>
<u>there will be</u> an eclipse of the sun	-suriya ggaho <u>bhavissatti</u>
<u>there will be</u> an eclipse of the star	-nankhata ggaho <u>bhavissatti</u>
<u>there will be</u> an aberration of the sun or the moon	-candima-suriyanam patha - <u>bhavissatti</u>
<u>there will be</u> a fall of meteors	- ukka-pato <u>bhavissatti</u>
<u>there will be</u> an earthquake	- bhumi-calo <u>bhavissatti</u>
<u>there will be</u> thunder	- deva-dundhubi <u>bhavissatti</u>

In (Di, 1.25) both the juxtapositioning of opposites and the anaphora are used together:-

{ <u>there will be</u> abundant rainfall	- subbutthika bhavisatti }
{ <u>there will be</u> drought	- dubutthika bhavissatti }
{ <u>there will be</u> good harvest	- subbhikkham bhavissatti }
{ <u>there will be</u> famine	- dubbhikkham bhavissatti }
{ <u>there will be</u> tranquility	- khemam bhavissatti }
{ <u>there will be</u> disturbance	- bhayam bhavissatti }
{ <u>there will be</u> pestilence	- rogo bhavissatti }
{ <u>there will be</u> a healthy season	- arogyam bhavissatti }

A retrospective investigation will reveal that the anaphora was used earlier in a similar manner, but with the juxtapositioning of synonyms and analogous concepts: (i.e. the use of synonymous parallelism).

e.g.: (Di, 1.9)

musa vadam pahaya	-	putting away	lies/deceitful speech
pisuna vadam pahaya	-	putting away	slander
pharusa vadam pahaya	-	putting away	rudeness of speech
samhappalapam pahaya-		putting away	frivolous talk

The use of this device is repeated in (Di, 1.27) as the Maha Sila nears its completion, with the first word of successive clauses being repeated to facilitate memorisation and recitation. The Maha Sila is finally concluded with a repetition of the refrain:

"Iti va hi vhiikkave putthujano Tathagatassa vannaṃ vadamano vadayya".

(Such are the things, brethren, which an unconverted man, when, in speaking in praise of the Tathagata, might say ....)

followed immediately by the same refrain with a slight, but significant variation:

"Idam kho taṃ bhikkave appamattakam oramattakam silamattakam yena putthujano Tathagatassa vannaṃ vadamano vadeyya."

These, brethren, are the trifling matters, the minor details of mere morality, of which, the unconverted man, when praising the Tathagata, might speak.

The second refrain consolidates the finality of the discourses on moralities by replacing the previous renderings of "such are the things (trivialities) ...." with the substitution of "these, then, monks, are the trivialities ...." of which the unconverted man might speak.

Such a conclusion serves the twofold purpose of dispensing with the putthujano and concern with the trivial matters of the secular world; and, at the same time, indicating to the reciter/listener that, at its continuation, the discourse would aspire to a higher level concerning the stream-flow towards the realisation of Nibbana.

As a natural corollary to this, the course of the Sutta is immediately directed by the first utterance of what may perhaps be considered as two of the most significant and most pervasive refrains of the Brahmajala Sutta, which, in correlation with each other, are repeated no less than twelve times before the conclusion of the entire discourse. For the purpose of analysis, they will be labelled as Refrains A and B.

(Di, 1.28) Refrain A

"Atthi bhikkave ann eva dhamma ghambira duddasa duranubodha santa panita atakkavacara nipuna pandita-vedaniya ye Tathagato sayam abhinna sacchikatva pavedeti, yehi Tathagatassa yatha-bhuccam vannam samma vadamana vadeyum. Katama ca pana te bhikkave dhamma gambhira duddasa duranubodha santa panita atakkavacara nipuna pandita-vedaniya, ye Tathagato sayam abhinna sacchikatva pavedeti, yehi Tathagatassa yatha-bhuccam vannam samma vadamana vadeyyum?"

(There are, brethren, other things, profound, difficult to realise, hard to understand, tranquillising, sweet, not to be grasped by mere logic, subtle, comprehensive only to the wise. These things the Tathagata, having himself realised them and seen them face to face, hath set forth; and it is of them that they, who would rightly praise the Tathagata in accordance with the truth, should speak, and what are they?)

(Di, 1.36 Refrain B

"Tayidam bhikkave Tathagato pajanati : "Ime ditthitthana evam-gahita evam-paramattha evam-gatika bhavissanti evam abhisamparaya ti." Tan ca Tathagato pajanati, tato uttaritam pajanati, tan ca pajananam na paramasati, aparamasato c'assa pacattam yeva nibbuti vidita vedanam samyudayam ca atthagaman ca assadan ca adinavan ca nissavanan ca yatha bhutam veditva anupada vimutto, bhikkave, Tathagato."

Now of these, brethren, the Tathagato knows that these speculations thus arrived at, thus insisted on, will have such and such a result, such and such an effect on the future condition of those who trust in them. That does he know, and he knows also other things far beyond (far better than those speculations) and having that knowledge, he is not puffed up, and thus untarnished he has, in his own heart, realised the way of escape from them, has understood, as they really are, the rising up and passing away of sensations, their sweet tastes, their danger, how they cannot be relied on, and not grasping after any (of those things men are eager for), he the Tathagata, is quite set free.

The distinctive feature of both refrains is that they advance the discourse from concern with what had been described as the trivialities, to a higher dimension in which the discourse transcends into the realm of the metaphysical.

In order to validate this perspective, it is necessary to analyse the semantic content of both refrains.

#### Refrain A

This refrain not only introduces the metaphysical realm, but also establishes the fact that the Buddha possesses knowledge that is suprarational and which, may only be attained by man on reaching Nibbana. Its numerous repetitions serve as a constant reiteration of the theme of "Janata, Passata, Suppatividata" (Knowing, Seeing and Clearly Perceiving).

Refrain B, by its numerous repetitions, is a reminder of man's proclivity for theorising and formulating speculative opinions that originate from his ignorance of the truth. In addition, it serves to continually emphasise the fact that man's speculative views arise because of the clinging or grasping of the sentient being to the wheel of existence (samsara). Against all of this, Refrain B is also a constant reminder that the Buddha remains detached, unaffected and liberated as he has surpassed the conditioning imposed by earthly desires and cravings for material things.

Refrain A ends with the question : "And what are they?" - in reference to the profound matters, for which mankind would praise the Tathagata. This important question is asked with every repetition of Refrain A and with every occurrence it introduces particular aspects of speculative views until every one of the sixty-two views has been completed.

The Brahmajala sutta divides the sixty-two speculative views into eighteen views about the past and forty-four views about the future. An interesting aspect of the compositional process is the manner in which linkages are effectively utilised to ensure the logical progression of the discourse. In fact, the structural components of the Sutta may be compared to the cog-wheels of a finely engineered piece of machinery. Each cog-wheel is separate and distinctive and yet its own revolution is dependent upon its articulation with another cog-wheel, and, by its own revolution, it ensures the revolution of another in a series of cog-wheels which ultimately ensure the functionality of the machine as a whole. Each view, like the cog-wheel, in unravelling itself, sets into motion another in a

series until the exposition of the entire configuration of views is seen in totality.

A recurrent formulaic pattern, devised in eight progressive steps, can be seen in the exposition of all the views:

Step 1:           The Standpoint

There are, brethren, recluses and Brahmins, who, on x number of grounds postulate z (representing a certain belief/view).

Step 2:           The Link Question

And about what, with reference to what, do these venerable ones do so?

Step 3:           The first case is put forward, elaborated upon, and concluded with the statement:

This, brethren, is the first state of things, on account of which some recluses and Brahmins postulate z.

Step 4:           The 2nd case is put forward in a similar manner.  
The 3rd case is put forward etc. etc. etc.

Step 5: The final case is presented with a significantly different introductory format:

In this case, brethren, some recluse or Brahmin is addicted to logic and reasoning. He gives utterance to the following conclusion of his own, beaten out by his argumentations and based on his sophistry.

Step 6: The conclusion

These, brethren, are those recluses and Brahmins who in x number of ways maintain z. For whosoever of the recluses and Brahmins are such and maintain this, they do so in these ways, or in one or other of the same, and outside these there is no other way.

Step 7: Repetition of Refrain B.

Step 8: Repetition of Refrain A.

The consistency of this formulaic pattern is maintained with little structural variation as far as the end of the third unit of recitation, at the end of the Sutta. The following example may be taken to illustrate the operational mode:



(In the first case, brethren, some recluse or Brahmin, by means of ardour, of exertion of application, of earnestness, of careful thought, reaches up to such rapture of heart that he, rapt in heart, dwells in the world, imagining it finite. And he says thus to himself: 'Finite is the world, so that a path could be traced around it. And why is this so? Since I, by means of ardour, of exertion and application, of earnestness, of careful thought, can reach up to such rapture of heart that, rapt in heart, I dwell in the world perceiving it to be finite - by that I know this. This, brethren, is the first case').

Step 4

The second case

"Idha, bhikkave, ekacco samano va brahmano va atappam anvaya padhanam anvaya anuyogam anvaya appamadam anvaya samma-manasi-karam anvaya tatha-rupam ceto-samadhim phusati yatha samahite citte ananta-sanni lokasmin viharati. So evam aha: 'Ananto ayam loko अपरियान्तो. ये ते समाना-ब्रह्मणा एवम अहंस्तु. अन्तवा एवम लोको परिवतुमो ति तेषाम्मुसा. Tamkissu hetu? Aham hi stappam anvaya .... pe .... tatha rupam ceto samadhim phusami yatha samahite citte ananta-sanni lokasmin viharami. Iminapaham etam janami: yatha ananto ayam loko अपरियान्तो ति."

(In the second case, brethren, some recluse or Brahmin, by means of ardour, of exertion, of application, of earnestness, of careful thought, reaches up to such rapture of heart, that he, rapt in heart, dwells in the world imagining it to be infinite. And he thus says to himself: 'Infinite is the world without a limit. Those recluses and Brahmins who say it is finite, so that a path could be traced around it, are wrong. And why is this so? since I, by means of ardour, of exertion, of application, of earnestness, of careful thought, can reach up to such rapture of heart, that, rapt in heart, I dwell in this world perceiving it to be infinite; by that I know this.)

The underlined portions demonstrate the only difference between the morphological structures of the first and second views; with the rest being structurally equivalent. The third view is similar, with the only differences being that he perceives the world to be finite on the vertical plane and infinite on the horizontal plane. He declares both conclusions to be wrong.

Step 5

The final case

" Idha, bhikkave, eccaco samano va brahmano va takki hoti vimansi. So takka pariyahatam vimansanucaritam sayam-patibhanum evam aha: 'N evayam loko avtavana panantanto. Ye te samana-brahmana evam ahamsa. Antava ayam loko parivatumo ti tesam musa. Ye pi te samana brahmana evam ahamsu : Ananto ayam loko apariyanto ti tesam pi musa. Ye pi te samana brahmana evam ahamsu : Antava ca ayam loko ananto cati tesam pi musa. N evayam loko antava na pananto ti."

(In the fourth case, brethren, some recluse or Brahmin is addicted to logic and reasoning. He gives utterance to the following conclusion of his own, beaten out by his argumentations and based on his sophistry : 'This world is neither finite nor yet infinite. Those recluses and Brahmins who maintain either the first, or the second, or the third conclusion, are wrong. Neither is the world finite nor is it infinite.')

In accordance with the established pattern, the final case is always presented as that in which the conclusion is arrived at by the use of meditation and rationality. In all previous cases, the conclusion is merely an assertion made because that particular Brahmin perceives it to be so. The structure of the rest of the final case is the same as that of the other cases.

Step 6

Conclusion

"Ime kho te, bhikkave, samana brahmana antanantika antanantam lokassa pannapenti catuhi vathuhi. Ye hi keci, bhikkave, samana va brahmana va antanantika antanantam lokassa pannapenti, sabbe ta imeheva catuhi vatthuhi ete sam va annatarena, 'natthi ito bahidda."

(These, brethren, are those recluses and Brahmans who are Extensionists and in four ways maintain that the world is finite or infinite. For whosoever of the recluses and Brahmins are such, and maintain this, they do so in these four ways, or in one or other of the same; and outside of these there is no way in which this opinion is arrived at.)

Step 7

Repetition of Refrain B

Step 8

Repetition of Refrain A

A structural analysis of, for example, Di, 2.23 to Di, 2.29 (the view of the Eel-Wrigglers), Di, 2.30 to Di, 2.36 (the views of the Fortuitous Originists), Di, 2.37 to Di, 2.40 (the doctrine of a conscious existence after death), will reveal the consistency of the formulaic pattern that has been shown.

The ubiquity of similar formulaic patterns within the Brahmajala Sutta is of such great frequency that it would be an arduous task to attempt an analysis of every example within the scope of this dissertation. However, what is important is the recognition of the distinctive characteristic of the use of the repeated formulaic pattern as a device that facilitates and maintains within a performative text, the orality of a language even though such a language may not essentially be the medium of daily and habitual communication; as Lord (1965 : 35) points out:

"In studying the patterns and systems of oral narrative verse we are in reality observing the grammar of the poetry, a grammar superimposed, as it were, on the grammar of the language concerned. Or, to alter the image, we find a special grammar within the grammar of the language, necessitated by the versification. The formulas are the phrases and clauses and sentences of this specialized poetic grammar. The speaker of this language, once he has mastered it, does not move any more mechanically within it than we do in ordinary speech."

The use of the formula in The Brahmajala Sutta effectively regulates its flux, flow and rhythm, linking sequences and themes in such a way that its transmission from a literate, documented text into a performative one is smoothly effected.

Another example of an interesting formulaic pattern that promotes the progression of the discourse and its memorization and recitation, by the use of devices such as repetitions, is the presentation of the speculative views in the form of arguments.

Le Roux (1991 : 48) has described the Brahmajala Sutta as a philosophic and argumentative treatise. This is indeed appropriate, as a remarkable feature is the presentation of arguments in syllogistic form. With the presence of dialectical questions leading to the development of arguments, each argument is extended and formulated upon the substratum of the previous argument and a new conclusion (or opinion or standpoint) is put forth.

Verses Di, 3.10 to Di, 3.25 (the seven views on the annihilation of the soul) provide a good example for the demonstration of this feature:

"Idha, bhikkave, akacco samano va brahmano va evam-vadi hoti evam ditthi, "Yato kho bho uyam atta rupi catum-maha-bhutiko mata-pettika-sambhavo, kayassa bheda ucchijjati vinassati na hoti param marana, ettavata kho bho ayam atta samma samucchinnno hotiti."

(In the first place, brethren, some recluse or Brahmin puts forth the following opinion, the following view: "Since, Sir, this soul has form, is built up of the four elements, and is the offspring of father and mother, it is cut off, destroyed, on the dissolution of the body; and does not continue after death, and then, Sir, the soul is completely annihilated.")

This is the first Annihilist view stated together with the premise upon which it is founded.

"Tam anno evam aha : "Atthi kho bho eso atta yam tvam vadesi. N' eso n'atthiti vadami. No ca kho bho ayam atta ettavata samma samucchino hoti. Atthi kho bho anno atta dibbo rupi kamavacaro kaba linkarahana bhakho. Tam tvam najanassi na passasi. Tam aham janami passami. So kho bho atta yato kayassa bheda ucchijjati vinassati na hoti param marana, ettavata kho bho ayam atta samma samucchino hoti ti."

(To him another says: There is, Sir, such a soul as you describe. That I do not deny. But the whole soul, Sir, is not then completely annihilated. For there is a further soul, divine, having form, belonging to the sensuous plane, feeding on solid food. That you neither know of nor perceive. But I know and have experienced it. And since this soul, on the dissolution of the body, is cut off and destroyed, does not continue after death, then is it, Sir, that the soul is completely annihilated.)

This is the second view. The proponent of this view accepts the premise advocated by the proponent of the first view but makes mention of a significant difference and then proceeds to argue his own case by asserting that he has made such a conclusion as a result of his perception and personal experience. He also maintains that the other Brahmin is seriously limited by the fact that he has been unable to perceive or experience at a higher level and will therefore be ignorant of the truth.

The following five views are presented in a similar manner, with each Brahmin making his own distinction and concluding that the ignorance of the other will prevent him from realising the truth.

The words that have been underlined are those that remain structurally intact in all the views and are repeated as part of the formula. Of greater significance are the words:

"Tam tvam na janasi na passasi "

(That (of which) you neither know nor perceive)

"Tam aham janami passami "

(But (of which) I know and have experienced)

which, by their recurrence, constantly focus upon man's tendency to cling and grasp to his own points of view and, by so doing, to tighten the fetters that bind his mind and spirit.

Elaboration of each view is necessitated by the repeated question: And on account of what, starting out from what, do they do so? which creates the basis for the explanation of the rationale (or lack of it) behind the formulation of each view.

The advocacy of views in opposition to each other is recurrent in the third unit of recitation and it is probable that this was done, not only to maintain the fields of tension, but also to remind the Sangha of a basic principle of the Buddhist doctrine which maintains that mere verbal argument without meditation, contemplation and complete detachment from materialistic conditioning, is futile and will lead one away from the accumulation of wisdom and right view.

Refrains A and B are repeated at the conclusion of this sequence of arguments, thus reinforcing the supramundane knowledge of the Enlightened Being who has attained Nibbana, and whose example has been set for the seeker of wisdom to follow.

It is evident from the morphological analysis that the use of formulaic devices with their repetition of themes, words and phrases as well as their use of dialectical questions, arguments in syllogistic form, and leading sequences, play a pivotal role in the oral compositional process which aims at the transmission and perpetuation of the discourses through effective memorisation and recitation.

However, since the text of the Sutta is set in an audile dimension, it is imperative also that it be analysed through a phonological perspective, so that the effects of sound, the vitalising element of the oral compositional process, may be established.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ORAL COMPOSITIONAL PROCESS AND THE USE OF FORMULAIC DEVICES

A PHONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

The larger paradigm of the Buddhist Canon is centred upon what is commonly known as the trinity, viz: the Buddha (The Enlightened One/The Teacher), the Dhamma (Laws/Precepts of the Doctrine) and the Sangha (the Community of Followers). Although the followers of the Buddha in the Abhidarmic phase (the period from the Buddha's death to Circa 1st Century AD) belonged, in the main, to scribal societies, the Dhamma was always pronounced and proclaimed in oral exchange as it had not, at that stage, been fixed in literate form. The Theravadin discourses, amongst which stands the Brahmajala Sutta, even when they became fixed in written form, retained the orality because the Dhamma was meant to be heard. Therefore, their phonological structure was of vital importance for two reasons viz: to facilitate memorization and recitation as well as to promote the meditative experiences conducive for the individual and communal absorption of the Dhamma.

Since the Dhamma states that birth, in human form, is a precondition for Nibbana, it is the belief of Buddhists that man is inherently enlightened and therefore requires to practise meditation to actualize this enlightenment in his life i.e. a manifestation of his already enlightened state.

It is for this reason that the physical or mental chanting of the Sutta is a sustained diligent practice that affords the stilling of the mind and a gradual diminution of the distorting waves of everyday consciousness.

The chant of the Sutta allows the transition into a state of physical being that has a concomitant mental state with the potential for further insight. Therefore sound, within the Sutta, is a natural and spontaneous characteristic that creates a spiritual ambience in which the Dhamma and the Sangha are transformed by their strong interaction with each other. This facilitates the awakening of the inner spiritual consciousness of the listener-reciter.

Jousse (1990 : 19) states that it is the reception of sound in particular that dynamogenises the organism and, in so doing, enhances all its activities and increases its vital and intellectual capacity.

One of the key mechanisms that causes this dynamogenesis is the use of strongly rhythmic phrases.

The Brahmajala Sutta has a rich variety of such phrases that not only facilitate memorisation but have a pervasive effect upon the physical and spiritual being of the reciter-listener.

One of the finest examples is the recurrent refrain which describes the speculative view of the doctrine of happiness in this life ("dittha-dhamma-nibbana-vada") and the five ways of attaining salvation in the visible world. This refrain which begins in (Di, 3.19) contains, within itself, the same strongly rhythmic verses repeated several times with slight variation in its syntactic structure:

(There are, brethren, recluses and Brahmins who hold the doctrine of happiness in this life, who, in five ways, maintain the complete salvation, in this world, of a living being. And relying on what, starting out from what, do they do so?)

"Santi, bhikkave, eke samana brahmana dittha-dhamma-nibbana-vada, sato satassa, parama-dittha-dhamma-nibbanam pannapenti pancahi vatthuhi. Te ca bhonto samana-brahmana kim agamma kim arabbha dittha-dhamma-nibbana-vada sattassa dittha-dhamma-nibbanam pannapenti pancahi vathuhi?"

The words - "dittha-dhamma-nibbana-pannapenti" - found within five identically constructed phrases, are repeated twenty-two times from Di, 3.19 to Di, 3.26.

An analysis of the phonic-compounds of these words will reveal forceful double consonants with the dominant labials: -m-, -b- and -p- subtly harmonising with the softer dentals, -t- and -n-. Whether this was intentional on the part of those anonymous Pali composers, is difficult to assess; but the repetition of these words in such a syntactic combination creates a flowing rhythm and reverberation which, when uttered, is ideally suited to chanting.

The same characteristic can be observed in another example of a refrain:

(Di, 1.28)

" Atthi bhikave ann eva dhamma gambhira dudasa duranubodha santa panita atakkavacara nipuna pandita vedanya, ye Tathagato sayum abhinna sacchikatva pavedeti, yehi Tathagatassa yatha-bhuccam vannam summa vadamana vadeyam."

Here, the voiced dental consonantal sound, -d-, creates a reverberating sound pattern together with the nasal-dental consonant, -n-. If consideration is given to the fact that this combination is repeated as part of a refrain which is repeated twelve times in the discourse, one may fully realise the dynamogenetic effect.

Examples such as these, taken from refrains which are themselves part of the formulaic patterns discussed earlier demonstrate that the phonological structure correlates with the semantic and morphological constituents to create the total dynamogenic characteristic of the Sutta. Structural elements cannot be detached and viewed in isolation as they work in concert with each other.

The acoustic patterns are closely linked to the ideas that are expressed by the formulas. Di, 1.10 is an example of a series of consecutive utterances incorporating the theme of the Buddha's abstinence from materialistic pleasures. Words that describe such materialistic pleasures are linked together, when recited, to form polysyllabic structures ending in vowels, where the jingle of vowels without perfect rhyme becomes a natural and spontaneous characteristic:

" Bijagama-bhutagama samarambha pativirato Samano Gotamo  
Ekka-bhatikko Samano Gotamo rattu parato  
vikala-bhojana pativirato Samano Gotamo  
Nacca-gita vadita-visuka-dassana pativirato Samano Gotamo  
Mala-gandha-vilepana-dharana-mandana-vibhusana-tthana  
pativirato Samano Gotamo

Uccasayana mahasayana pativirato pativirato Samano Gotamo  
jatarupa rajata pattigahana pativirato pativirato Samano Gotamo  
amakka-dhanna pattigahana pativirato pativirato Samano Gotamo  
amakka-mansa pattigahana pativirato pativirato Samano Gotamo "

These are only ten of the twenty examples that are chanted in sequence without interruption. The sound pattern is monotonous without noticeable changes in stress or pitch and in accordance with the idea of the slow unravelling of a unitary theme, in this particular instance, in the Sutta.

A similar pattern is discernible in Di, 1.17 in which a series of words describing the examples of vain conversation are uttered one after the other. The rhythm and structure are the same as in the previous example, except for the fact that the words are paired such that a word, ending in an open vowel, is linked to a word ending in a consonant, to form a single word. These words, when uttered together in sequence, form a cluster of similar sounds.

Eg: " rajakatham            cora-katham            mahamatta-katham  
      senā-katham            bhaya-katham            yudā-katham  
      anna-katham            pana-katham            vattha-katham  
      sayana-katham        mala-katham            ..... " etc.

Di, 1.22 is another example in which this pattern is identifiable:

" .... mani-lakkhanam danda lakkhanam  
vattha lakkhanam asi lakkhanam usu lakkhanam  
dhana lakkhanam ayudha lakkhanam itthi lakkhanam  
purisa lakkhanam kumara lakkhanam kumari lakkhanam  
dasa lakkhanam dasi lakkhanam "

Here, the low arts of soothsaying and prophesying are mindfully repeated one after the other in a monotonous drone.

An interesting acoustic phenomenon, prevalent in these examples and which proliferates in the Brahmajala Sutta, as well as in many other volumes of the Pali Canon, is the sound of the labial-nasal-consonant, -m-.

Indians have always placed much store in the ability of this sound to create the transcendental vibrations for meditative practice. This sound is infinite and it creates the continuous low pitch, to which, Hindus attribute the revivification of man's inner spiritual consciousness. This quality is defined by Sivananda (1971 : 30) who wrote that with the continuous repetition of the word -om-:

"All superimposed ideas will dissolve  
The heart knots of ignorance will be cut asunder  
The thin veil will be pierced  
You will attain the highest knowledge,  
bliss, realisation and goal of life."

Since Pali is an Indian language and Buddhism originated in India, this influence may perhaps have been retained in the Pali Canon. However, such an assertion can only be conjectural. What is important to this study is the fact that the proliferation of this sound is germane to the accoustic and rhythmic patterns created by the recitation of this Sutta.

We can consider also, the accoustic quality of the link question which introduces each speculative view: (Di, 2.1)

"Te ca bhonto samana brahmana kim agamma kim arabbha  
ekacca-sassatika ekacca-assassatika ekaccam sassatam ekaccam  
assassatam attanan ca lokan ca pannapenti catuhi vathuhi?"

The words: "ekacca-sassatika akacca assassatika ekaccam sassatam ekaccam assassatam" - are heavily assonanced with the sibilant, -ss-, which alternates with the unvoiced guttural consonant, -cc- (pronounced in Pali as -ch-).

The strategic placement of such a pattern, within lines that are repeated several times within the Sutta, may be considered to be an effective mnemotechnical device because it produces an automatism of response in which the listener-reciter would be able to predict the words as soon as he encounters the initial part of the pattern.

Intricately woven into the pattern is the more complex phenomenon of rhyme. In the Brahmajala Sutta, it has its euphonious function as a repetition of sounds, eg:

ekkaccam sassatam  
ekkaccam assassatam

- but more important is its function as an organiser of a stanzaic pattern in which words are brought together, linked up or contrasted with the theme or sequence:

eg: (Di, 3.13)

This is an example of another stanza that is repeated several times in the third unit of recitation in which Brahmin after Brahmin propounds his view as the only rational one:

" Tam tvam na janasi na passasi  
Tam aham janami passami "

(That you neither know of or perceive  
But I know and have experienced it.)

"Tam-tvam-aham," and, "janasi-passasi-janami-passami," recited as coupled words fulfil the euphonious function of rhyme. However, placed together, as they are within this stanza, they affirm the essential semantic component around which the theme has been centred viz; Knowing, Seeing and Clearly Perceiving.

Several features of the phonological structure of the Brahmajala Sutta have all been discussed together, supported by examples from the text. That such features have not been singled out and discussed, each under its own heading, is deliberate and intentional as they must be seen as analogous phenomena that work together within the formulaic patterns of the Sutta. In unison, they enable the Sutta to perform its teleological function of conveying the Dhamma to the Sangha in such a manner that the meditative repetition of the words ignites the higher intellectual capacity of the listener-reciter so that its message would infiltrate into his consciousness and his entire being.

CONCLUSION

Alan Dundes, in his foreword to John Miles Foley's publication, "The Theory of Oral Composition" (1988), makes three interesting observations.

He states, initially, that both Parry and Lord constructed their Oral Formulaic Theory from the study of texts, without much consideration for contexts. He amplifies this when, in his second point, he asserts that the studying of a text, divorced from its interactional context is considered methodologically inappropriate.

In his third observation, he expresses doubt as to whether the Oral Formulaic Theory is applicable without the possibility of improvisation.

Regarding these observations, one could hardly disagree that there can be no substitute for the vitality generated by an oral-performance that is enacted within the sociological, cultural and anthropological contexts in which it was conceived.

It may also be agreed that Lord and Parry did, to a large extent, depend upon textual analysis for the construction of their theory and, it may be accepted that the theory is limited in this respect.

However, what kind of methodology is one expected to employ when one encounters works, such as the Homeric Epics, or, for that matter, the Brahmajala Sutta, that originated within spatio-temporal dimensions of the past? These are but two examples, characterised by the fact that their true interactional context will never be realised.

Will it be inappropriate, then, to attempt to conjure up their magic from textual analysis followed by performances derived from textual referencing?

When all that exists is the text, there is little else that one may do but attempt to actualize its aura of brilliance by delving deeply into the very heart of its format.

The Brahmajala Sutta presents such a case.

It is of fixed form and defies improvisation in its performance. It is different because it belongs to a genre, as yet unexplored. It belongs to the genre of the meditative oral tradition. The application of the Oral Formulaic Theory to its analysis is an appropriate beginning from which some of the dynamism of this text may be realised.

The magnitude of this ancient text reaches such great heights that any attempt to determine all of its oral features would constitute a long and arduous task. In a strange way, its vibrancy lies in the tranquility that it fosters. Its composers, in accordance with the Dhamma expounded by the Buddha, have prescribed no rules for the manner of its recitation or comprehension. The reciter-listener is given unconditional liberty to interpret, incant and intonate it as he will.

To the seeker of Nibbana, it offers the exposition of Truth and Freedom, taken from the utterances of the Buddha. The Sutta is a personal experience and within its stratum of sound lies the means to Knowing, Seeing and Clearly Perceiving. If this dissertation has, even in the most rudimentary way, awakened the consciousness of the reader to this text and, more especially, to the fascinating culture in which its oral tradition is rooted, then it has served at least one facet of Orality-Literacy Studies.

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