On the Buddha’s Use of Some Brahmanical Motifs in Pali Texts

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Many Pali texts portray the Buddha in the act of expressing his teachings through Brahmanical motifs. They are “Brahmanical” motifs because for readers today they are visible in Brahmanical texts, even if we cannot be sure how composers of Pali texts came to use such motifs. The aim of this paper is to consider and hopefully to advance our understanding of how some of the same motifs are used in Brahmanical and Pali texts.

Introduction

Since the days when T. W. Rhys Davids and other pioneering scholars labored to understand Pali texts in light of evidence external to them, many terms, phrases, ideas, myths, and structural or stylistic devices common to Brahmanical and Pali texts have been identified. Sometimes these motifs have been taken as evidence that the Buddha or early Buddhists had some knowledge of Brahmanical lore, such as verses of the Rgveda (e.g. Lindtner, 1998) or teachings found in the Upaniṣads (e.g. Nakamura, 1955; Ghosh, 1969; Dutt, 1970). But it also has been argued that motifs common to Brahmanical and Pali texts only show that some Brahmins and Buddhists drew from a common fund of ideas and figures of speech (Chandra, 1971; Bronkhorst, 2007), that is to say from what Patton (2008) has called “an early Indian imaginaire” (p. 54). Richard Gombrich (2009), on the other hand, has argued that the best available explanation for certain passages in Pali texts is that they are meant to refer to Brahmanical teachings, visible to us in Brahmanical texts. Indeed, in several publications Gombrich has found the recognition of Brahmanical motifs in Pali texts to be the key to contextualizing...
and therefore understanding early Buddhist teachings. In this Gombrich has built on the work of his teacher K. R. Norman, who among other scholarly feats has developed a scheme for categorizing “the Buddha’s use of Brahmanical terms” (Norman, 1991, p. 193). Norman’s scheme is primarily concerned with how the Buddha or his followers responded to various expressions used in the Brahmanical tradition, but the scheme also includes “ideas” (p. 199), and a few examples of “structures” such as “myths and fables” (p. 194). Thus, Norman’s scheme is actually an underutilized framework for classifying a range of motifs common to Brahmanical and Pali texts. Classification is not the aim of this article, but exploring the possibility that early Buddhists employed a variety of Brahmanical motifs is very much the concern of what follows. I shall endeavor to contribute to this line of thought by first briefly surveying a number of motifs common to Brahmanical and Pali texts, and then by focusing on a few motifs common to Brahmanical and Pali texts in more detail. My concern in this article is not necessarily with the historical individual known as the Buddha, but with words attributed to him: herein “the Buddha” means the Buddha portrayed in Pali texts.

In some of the Sanskrit passages below sandhi effects have been removed fully or partially so that individual words may be better identified, and compared where appropriate with Pali words. Unless otherwise stated, Pali quotations are from the Burmese Chaṭṭha Saṅgīyana Tipiṭaka edition, but in lower case, with punctuation marks removed, and in a few cases with sandhi effects removed.

A Spectrum of Motifs Common to Brahmanical and Pali Texts

Motifs common to Brahmanical and Pali texts can be imagined as lying along a spectrum of increasing evidence that Brahmins or Buddhists knew something of the others’ teachings. At one end of the spectrum and outside the scope of this paper are words or phrases in identical or analogous forms common to Brahmanical and Pali texts, but devoid for our purposes of comparative interest: water is wet and fire burns in Brahmanical and Pali texts alike. More interesting are expressions which suggest a borrowing has occurred, perhaps from an organized composition, from the vocabulary of a sect, or from an imaginaire of common cultural tropes and figures of speech whose further study might help us better appreciate a bygone world. Pali texts often mention “divine sight” (dībba cakkhu), for example, a kind of special ability also mentioned at CU 8.12.5 (daiva cakṣus). Pali texts frequently employ the term nāmarūpa (“name and appearance”), a term used in several Brahmanical texts. Other well known motifs common to Brah-
Buddha’s Use of Brahmanical Motifs

Manical and Pali texts include the way bodies of water symbolize life’s difficulties, watercraft symbolize teachings and practices, and “crossing over” and the “other side” symbolize deliverance, variously conceived (Shaw, 2012). Also well known is the way Pali texts employ the Brahmanical motif of the triple refuge, found e.g. at RV 9.97.47 (śarman trivarūṭha) and RV 6.46.9 (tridhātu śaraṇa), and the going to three entities for refuge (śaraṇa), found e.g. at CU 2.22.3-4 (Weiler, 1962, p. 241). Probably less well known is that both PU 1.6-8 and Vv #647 (Be) call the sun “thousand-rayed” (S. sahasraśmi / P. sahassaraṃsi), and speak of it shining in the ten directions or what amounts to them. Wynne (2007) has pointed out that the description at Ud 80 of a state “where there is no earth, water, fire... no sun or moon” (p. 115) is very like a description at KaU 5.15: “There the sun does not shine, nor do the stars; lightning does not shine...” (pp. 115, 155, n. 22). The similarity of a description at Ud 9 equally suggests a borrowing: “There the stars do not shine, nor does the sun give light, There the moon does not glow...” (Ānandajoti, 2008, p. 38).

The common use of the expression “above, below, and across” (P. uddhaṃ adho ca tiriyaṇā / S. ārdhvam adhaḥ ca tiryak) also suggests a borrowing. It is used as a rhetorical flourish which signifies completeness in a given context, at e.g. SN i 122 and SU 5.4. The Buddha uses variations of the motif, such as uddham... adho... tiriyaṇā at AN i 141; variants are likewise found in the epics and other Sanskrit works. The Buddha’s variation at Sn 202 (uddhaṃ adho tiriyaṇcāpi mahijhe) involves the word “middle” (P. majjha / S. madhya) and is close to a negative formulation in the Sa.mhitā of the White Yajurveda at VS 35.5 (na... ārdhvam na tiryāṇca na madhye), also found at SU 7.43. These examples appear to be related to expressions such as that found at RV 1.24.15, TS 1.5.11.3, and elsewhere, including AV 7.83.3 (Whitney, 1905, p. 450):

ūd uttamāṃ varaṇa pāśam asmād āvādhamāṃ vi madhyamāṃ śrathāya
Loosen up the uppermost fetter from us, O Varuṇa, [loosen] down the lowest, off the midmost

Metaphorical talk of fetters, snares, etc. – sometimes using the term pāsa (Rhys Davids, 1907, p. 111) – is itself a significant motif in Pali texts. One wonders if Buddhists who used the motif were aware of what we call the Rgveda. We can liken the situation to the use of certain English expressions in our own day: some people deliberately echo and thereby evoke the King James Bible, others speak its idioms unawares, and still others may use an idiom and know an its bibli-cal providence, but attach no situational significance to that providence. Thus,
when the Buddha at SN i 229 refers to Sakka (Indra) as one who (Bodhi, 2000, p. 330) “thinks of a thousand matters in a moment” and as “Thousand-eyed” (sahasakkha), one wonders if the Buddha means to evoke the verse at RV 1.23.3 in which Indra is called a “lord of thought” and “thousand-eyed” (sahasrākṣa). One wonders why at Sn 76 the Buddha’s foe Māra is called “Namuci”, the name of Indra’s foe at e.g. RV 8.14.13 (Thomas, 1997, p. 146). At Sn 82 the Buddha uses the phrase cando va rāhuggahāṇā pamuttā. Applied to a plural subject, this means: “freed, like the moon from Rāhu’s grasp”. CU 8.13.1 contains nearly the same phrase: candāḥ iva rāhoh mukhāt pramucya, i.e. “freeing myself, like the moon from Rāhu’s jaws” (Olivelle, 1998, p. 287). We may never know if the Buddhist composer of Sn 82 was trying to endow his composition with explicitly Brahmanical overtones, or if he simply used a phrase like one which happened to be used in a Brahmanical composition.

In some Pali texts the Buddha speaks explicitly of what he calls brāhmaṇa-dhamma, a word suggestive of what Brahmins believe and do in accordance with their beliefs. And there are indeed many motifs in Pali texts related to the doctrines and practices of Brahmins. For example, in the Ambattha Sutta (DN 3) the Buddha asks at DN i 97 if a certain kind of person would obtain a seat among the Brahmins, or water, if he would be fed, and if he would be taught holy utterances (manta = S. mantra). This is virtually identical to the sequence of events starting at BU 6.2.4 when a Brahmin arrives at the court of Pravāhaṇa Jaivali. The Brahmin is offered a seat, given water, provided with “refreshments” (Olivelle, 1998, p. 147; Black, 2007, p. 116), and finally instructed. Black (2007) has shown how this BU passage is related to ideas advanced in other Brahmanical texts, his point being that the passage depicts the sequence of events in accordance with Brahmanical ideas about proper relationships and behaviors involving Brahmins (pp. 114-119). The Ambattha Sutta at DN i 91 depicts a Brahmin who is rather touchy about just what those behaviors should be, upset that the Buddha’s countrymen did not receive him properly. When the Buddha continues to ask that same Brahmin how certain kinds of people would be received, he varies his questions in a manner which implies that the ways to treat a Brahmin and a member of the war-

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1 The phrase also occurs at Sn 89. Kochhar (2010) describes Rāhu’s career in ancient Indian texts; the Pali texts Kochhar cites are the Candima Sutta (SN i 50) and the Suriya Sutta (SN i 51).

2 The PED defines brāhmaṇa-dhamma as the “duty” of a Brahmin. Freiberger (2009, p. 63) translates brāhmaṇadhammā at AN iii 221 as “principles of Brahmins”; Bodhi (2012, p. 800) as “brahmin practices”. Norman (2001, p. 35) translates brāhmaṇadhamma at Sn 50 as “brahmanical lore”. The number of possible translations for dhamma is notorious.
rior class are epitomized differently, though these stereotypes are not the target of his teaching.

Wijesekera (1945) has elucidated a motif common to Brahmanical and Pali texts which shows that early Buddhist involvement with the Brahmanical thought-world might well have been quite complex, in so far as Brahmanical teachings on certain matters were not monolithic and were themselves complex. Many have written about Sāti’s misguided views on consciousness (viññāṇa) and the Buddha’s scathing response as set forth in MN 38. Norman (1990) and Gombrich (2009, pp. 119-120) helpfully have placed the episode in an Upaniṣadic context, but it was Wijesekera who revealingly juxtaposed Sāti’s views and certain Upaniṣadic passages with MN i 8, CU 3.14.2-4, and ŚB 10.6.3.2. To put it simply: Sāti and certain Upaniṣadic passages appear to express a view which is opposed by the Buddha (MN i 8, MN i 258), CU 3.14.2-4, and ŚB 10.6.3.2. When Sāti explains his view of consciousness at MN i 258 he says it is vado vedeyyo, this “speaking, feeling one”. This same phrase is uttered by the Buddha at MN i 8 as he gives an example of a misguided view. Wijesekera has shown that the phrase vado vedeyyo is a way of referring to something essential about a person which is allied with a number of statements in the Upaniṣads, and that these represent a teaching opposed at least in form by a teaching which calls the self (S. ātman) “speechless and indifferent” at CU 3.14.2-4 (avāki anādaraḥ) and ŚB 10.6.3.2 (avākkam anādaram). I say “at least in form” out of respect for Wijesekera’s wish to argue about the subtle differences in Brahmanical doctrines and what exactly is affirmed and denied in the relevant Brahmanical passages. Wijesekera’s arguments need not detain us here, for what is important for our purposes is that MN i 8, CU 3.14.2-4, and ŚB 10.6.3.2 in their own ways deny a self which “speaks” and in some sense experiences or reacts to the world.

Part of what makes the study of Brahmanical motifs in Pali texts rewarding is the potential it holds for shedding light not only on what early Buddhists knew of Brahmanical beliefs and practices, but on what they knew of how Brahmins actually spoke of their beliefs and practices. Scholars including Jayatilleke (1963), Bhattacharya (1980), and Gombrich (1990) have discussed how BU 4.5.6 and MN i 135 refer to the identification of the self with a string of past participles meaning “seen, heard, considered, recognized” (S. drṣṭa śruta mata vijñāta / P. diṭṭha

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1 Wijesekera refers to passages including BU 4.3.26 “where the Ātman is held to be the ‘speaker’ (i.e., agent) par excellence” (p. 92). The “speaker” in BU 4.3.23-25, 27-30 retains the capacity to think and to experience through the senses (see Olivelle, 1998, p. 517, n. 3.23-31).
More recently, use of the rare term *añjasāyana* (“straight” or “straight way”) in the *Tevijja Sutta* (DN 13) and in three Brahmanical texts has prompted our own claim that the composer of the *sutta* portrayed Brahmins using the technical ritual vocabulary of Brāhmaṇa-style texts (Shults, 2013). These seem to be instances where Buddhists have successfully referred to actual Brahmanical [oral] teachings; I mention them here because as such they might be thought of as occupying the strong end of our evidential spectrum. But there are many other motifs in Pali texts which may reflect some knowledge of what Brahmins believed and said. We now turn to the examination of some of these motifs.

### Refining Gold

The Brahmanical composer of PB 17.6.4 refers to a process of refining gold – Dube (2001, p. 173) regards the reference as credible – and likens it to a purifying ritual act. So too does the composer of PB 2.17.2, and the composer of JB 2.136 (Caland, 1931, p. 462). The Buddhist composer of AN i 257, on the other hand, likens the refining of gold to what happens to the Buddhist follower applying himself to higher thought (*adhicitta*). The composer of MN i 38 uses a gold-refining simile to illustrate his conception of ethical and mental achievement: “just as gold becomes pure and bright with the help of a furnace...” (Bodhi & Ñānamoli, 2005, p. 120). The composer of AN i 253-254, which Dube (2001, pp. 171-172) also regards as metallurgically credible, uses the motif of refining gold to make a point about purifying one’s defilements. The composer of AN iii 16-17 employs a gold-refining motif to make a point about purifying mental defilements. In his account the “defilements” (*upakkilesa*) which defile gold are iron, copper, tin, lead, and silver. The composer thus identifies six of the so-called “seven metals of antiquity”, a list reminiscent of lists of metals in Brahmanical texts. But unlike the authors of e.g. VS 18.13 and TS 4.7.5.1, the Buddhist author sees iron, copper, etc. as impurities in gold, and in this he appears to display some fairly accurate metallurgical knowledge. According to Dube (2001, p. 174): “Native gold is invariably

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4 Buddhist tradition has long felt the need to explain *muta* as “sensed” other than by sight and hearing (Bhattacharya, 1980, p. 11). While aware of this, the PED primarily defines *muta*: “thought, supposed, imagined”. Geiger (2000, p. 13) explains that *muta* as a “dialectal side-form” of *mata* simply means “thought”. Norman (2001, p. 107) translates *diṭṭhāṃ va sutāṃ mutāṃ* at Sn 157 as “seen, heard, or thought”.

5 The other is mercury. See Cramb (n.d.) *A Short History of Metals*. The Buddhist author needs, structurally, to name five defilements of gold.
by no means a pure metal. It contains up to 20% silver, copper, iron, lead, bismuth, platinum group metals, and other metals; as impurities. How much the composers of Brahmanical and Pali texts actually knew about metals, however, is less important for our purposes than what they did with such knowledge as they possessed. A preliminary consideration of gold-refining motifs common to Brahmanical and Pali texts yields the following observation: Brahmins enriched their discussions of what was important to them by relating the refining of gold to ritual, and Buddhists did the same except that they related the refining of gold to forms of mental training.

The motif of refining gold shows that some Brahmins and Buddhists drew upon similar ideas to construct and wield similes. It cannot be proved, but it is possible that the Buddhist versions of the motif are reworkings of Brahmanical usages into similes for mental purification. If so, we might say that here the Buddhists have borrowed not a word or a phrase, but ready-made templates for teaching by analogy.

**Treating Gold with Salt**

If the idea of working with gold to improve its quality captured the imagination of some Brahmins and Buddhists, one of the more intriguing manifestations of their shared interest in the topic is the idea of treating gold with salt. A metallurgical simile at JUB 3.17.3 begins:

*tad yathā lavaṇena suvarṇaṃ samadhyāt...*

Just as one would fix gold with salt...

According to Monier-Williams (2005, p. 1144) the verb *saṃvādhā* (above as *saṃdadhyāt*) carries a range of meanings including “hold” and “mend”, such that it is difficult on purely linguistic grounds to say what exactly the metallurgical operation is supposed to accomplish. The Greco-Roman world of antiquity knew techniques for refining gold with salt (Healy, 1999, pp. 283ff.; Dube, 2001, p. 178), as did the Indian world of antiquity (Dube, 2001, pp. 173ff. cites the *Kautilīya Arthaśāstra*). The JUB passage above continues: “silver with gold, tin with silver, copper with tin, iron with copper... ”. Here again is the rhetorical collocation of several “metals of antiquity”, and one suspects that the refining or purification of metals somehow informs the passage. But whatever the composer of the passage

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6Cf. Healy (1999, pp. 283ff.)
meant by the verb *samvādhā*, it is clear from the larger context that the composer above all had in mind the rectifying of mistakes made in the performance of ritual. One might initially think that a sense of purifying the ritual is meant, but the composer takes the simile in another direction, more of repair or healing than purification. This is brought out by Oertel’s translations in the longer JUB passage (Oertel, 1896): just as one “would mend” (*samdadhyāt*) gold with salt, etc., so one “cures” (*bhīṣajyati*), in effect, the ritual (p. 177). In a similar passage at CU 4.17.7 which speaks of gold, salt,7 and other “metals of antiquity”, Olivelle (1998) translates *samvādhā* as “binds”, the same verb being used later in the text to suggest the treatment of “an injury done to a sacrifice”, as in the binding of a wound (p. 229). One difficulty in fully appreciating the poetic vision of these passages is that additional materials have been listed, incongruously, with the salt and metals. The CU list continues with leather and wood; the JUB list with wood, leather, and śleśman, i.e. “cord” or perhaps “glue”. With these additions the passages seem to be hybrids between the purely metallurgical version of the motif at GB 1.1.14 (gold, salt, metals) and the “organic” forms of the motif found elsewhere. For example, AB 5.32.6 likens the way one would unite (*samdadhyāt*) “an object of leather” (*carmanya*) with “a cord” (śleśman) to the way one “unites” (*samdadhāti*) “whatever in the sacrifice has come apart” (Keith, 1920, p. 257). In its discussion of rectifying errors in the sacrifice, KB 6.7.4 (= KB 6.12 in Keith, 1920, p. 381) speaks of cord (śleśman) or a strip of leather (paricarmanya) fastening together wood. We get the point: the ritual is “fixed” as certain materials are “fixed”.8 But does one really do to gold with salt what one does to wood with cord or a strip of leather? Is it possible that a reference to refining metals, to refining gold with salt, has become mixed up with the motif of repair? Is it possible that the Brahmanical authors of JUB 3.17.3 and CU 4.17.7 mixed their metaphors, so to speak? If they did, perhaps due to a lack of metallurgical expertise, we should not be much surprised. For the great geographer Strabo was apparently confused about certain gold processing techniques, as was Pliny the Elder (Healy, 1999, pp. 286-287). But again our concern is less with the metallurgical techniques known to the composers of these Brahmanical passages, and more with how they deployed a motif. For it seems the composers of these passages thought of what was most prized in their

7Roebuck (2000, p. 183, n. 129): “Said to mean borax”; cf. Radhakrishnan (2012, p. 420). Olivelle (1998, p. 552, n. 17.7) thinks the meaning of *lavaṇa* in this context is “uncertain”, and that “it must refer to some chemical used to mend gold”.

8See also ŚB 11.5.8.6 and JB 1.358.
system – ritual – and they thought of how in spite of procedural imperfections the ritual could be treated and made to yield true results. Among the things that powered their articulation of this vision was the idea of treating gold with salt. Treating gold with salt also powered the Buddha’s articulation of his vision. But of course in the Buddha’s system it is not ritual which needs to be treated, but the human mind. Like the composers of GB 1.1.14, JUB 3.17.3, and CU 4.17.7, the composer of AN i 210 refers to treating gold with salt. In this passage the Buddha asks rhetorically about the purification of impure gold by a treatment (upakkiliṭṭhassa jātarūpassa upakkamena pariyodapanā), and his subsequent explanation begins with the words:

\[ \text{ukkañca paṭicca loṇañca paṭicca…} \]

Based on a furnace and based on salt…

The larger passage mentions tongs (saṇḍāsa) and other items, thereby providing details about a physical gold refining process. But like the Brahmanical passages, the Buddhist passage employs the motif of treating gold with salt as a way of talking about something less tangible. It is noteworthy that the composers of these passages should have thought alike of treating gold with salt to articulate their vision of improving what was most important in their respective systems.

Three Lines, Twenty-four Syllables

The Sundarikabhāradvāja Sutta (Sn 79-86) begins with a Brahmin named Sundarikabhāradvāja performing the agnihotra, a kind of fire sacrifice. He exchanges words with the Buddha, who then says in verse (Norman, 2001, p. 55):

\[ \text{brāhmaṇo hi ce tvam brūsi maṇca brūsi abrāhmaṇam} \]
\[ \text{tam tam săvittim pucchāmi tipadaṃ catuvīsatakkharan} \]

If you call yourself a brahman, but call me a non-brahman, then I ask you about the Sāvittī, with three lines and twenty-four syllables.

The Sāvittī is a famous verse about which more will be said below. Oddly, nothing further is said about it in the sutta. Despite what the Buddha says, he does not seem actually to ask a question.⁹ Nor does the Brahmin give any sort of answer;

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⁹According to Lang (1994), in this passage “The Buddha rejects the notion that birth and knowledge of the Sāvitrī mantra makes one a brahmin” (p. 150).
Instead he asks a question. Given that the opening and some other parts of sutta occur in other Pali texts (Tam, 2006), and that the meter of the above lines is “strange” (Norman, 2001, p. 255), it is possible that the passage is out of place. But as it stands the passage holds considerable interest. It undoubtedly refers to what in Sanskrit is called the sāvitrī. The Sāvitrī is a celebrated verse from RV 3.62.10 (Roebuck, 2000, p. 1):

We meditate on the lovely
Glory of the god Savitṛ
That he may stimulate our minds.10

This famous verse is known as the Sāvitrī because it is a prayer addressed to Savitṛ, a name for the sun. Everyone initiated into Vedic learning – theoretically this means in particular every male Brahmin – is supposed to recite this verse at sunrise every day. In order to fully grasp the significance of what the Buddha says about this verse we must briefly review a few basic points on Indian meters. The commonest Sanskrit meter is called the anuśṭubh, each verse of which is usually formed of four pada or “quarters”, each of eight syllables. A standard anuśṭubh verse has all four pada and 32 syllables. There is also an old meter called the gāyatrī, which consists of only three quarters of the standard anuśṭubh. The gāyatrī thus has three pada (sometimes translated as “line”) and 24 syllables.

We can now recognize that when the Buddha refers to the Sāvitrī with the adjectives tipada (“having three lines”) and catuvīsatakkhara (“having 24 syllables”), this is a specification of the gāyatrī meter. In the Sāvitrī itself the word which Roebuck translates as “lovely” is vāreṇyam, and taking into account the Vedic pronunciation vāreṇiyam, the classic Sāvitrī indeed has three pada of eight syllables each for a total of 24 syllables,11 just as the Buddha says.

The question is why he says it. Which is another way of asking not only why the Buddha mentions the Sāvitrī, but why he refers to itsmetrical structure, i.e. why sāvittim is qualified the way it is. As we shall discover, the Buddha’s words in the Sundarikabhāradvāja Sutta above are more typical of what is found in Brahmanical texts than Pali texts, and so is the interest the Buddha’s words are a sign of. For unlike Pali texts, Brahmanical texts show a prodigious interest in meter and things to do with meter, and in making summary statements about meter. A typical passage at KB 12.4.13 states:

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10Cited in Roebuck (2000, p. 1) as Rgveda III.57.10
11See e.g. The Rigveda: Metrically Restored Text by Thomson & Slocum, at: http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/lrc/RV/RV03.html#H062
"caturviṃśatyaṅkṣara gāyatrī"
the gāyatrī has twenty-four syllables

The same phrase (sometimes with the emphasizing particle vai inserted) occurs in many passages in the Brāhmaṇa-style texts of the three main Vedas. Because the word gāyatrī is sometimes used to refer to the classic Śāvitrī, the preeminent verse set in that meter, it is possible that in some Brahmanical contexts the word caturviṃśatyaṅkṣara in the phrase caturviṃśatyaṅkṣara gāyatrī actually refers to the Śāvitrī, just as the Buddha’s equivalent Pali term catuvisatakkhara (i.e. catuvisati + akkharā) does in the Sundarikabhāradvāja Sutta. But by using the word “three” (P. ti) the Buddha (with the word ti-pada) is actually closest to certain passages in Jaiminiya texts of the Śāmaveda in particular. For example, JUB 1.17.2 features “three” (S. tri) and a convoluted use of “syllable” (S. aṅkṣara = P. akkharā) to accomplish what is accomplished in the Sundarikabhāradvāja Sutta, i.e. the specification of the gāyatrī meter (Oertel, 1896, p. 96):

aṅkṣara gāyatrī aṅkṣaram-aṅkṣaram tryaṅkṣaram tat caturviṃśatiḥ sam-padyante caturviṃśatyaṅkṣara gāyatrī
Of eight syllables is the gāyatrī; each syllable is a triple syllable. Thus they amount to twenty-four. The gāyatrī has twenty-four syllables.

We also find an expression very like the words of the Sundarikabhāradvāja Sutta at JB 3.6.11-12:

tryaṅkṣarā gāyatrī... caturviṃśatyaṅkṣarā gāyatrī
the gāyatrī has three lines... the gāyatrī has twenty-four syllables

As far as I am aware, catuvisatakkhara in the Sundarikabhāradvāja Sutta occurs in no other Pali text, excepting commentary. The term tipada quite possibly occurs in no other sutta. Some of what the Buddha says in the Sundarikabhāradvāja Sutta is therefore not typically “Buddhist”, at least by Pali standards. It is much closer to the utterances of the priests in the Jaiminiya lineage of the Śāmaveda, who as udgātṛ priests had the responsibility for singing ritual chants during sacrificial rituals.

A Question of Meter

There may be another level of narrative significance to the Buddha’s reference to gāyatrī meter in the Sundarikabhāradvāja Sutta. The passage above appears to be
a sort of gambit. It seems to be or to presage a challenge, a way of questioning or ascertaining the knowledge of a Brahmin to whom one speaks. Such challenges are seen in Brahmanical texts, as at ŚB 11.4.1a-4b when a Brahmin is told that only those who know certain things – the gāyatrī is one – can go around seeking to engage in debate. Knowledge of the Sāvitrī and its gāyatrī meter is also important in the BU. For at BU 5.14.5 there is a reported controversy to do with recitation of the Sāvitrī. It is a question of meter. Some people recite the Sāvitrī as an anuṣṭubh. But this is wrong, we are told. One should recite the Sāvitrī as a gāyatrī. We have seen above what these terms mean, thus we perceive that the controversy is about how many lines and syllables a performance of the Sāvitrī should have. It is important to note, as Roebuck (2000) points out, that besides the classic Sāvitrī there are “several alternative Sāvitrī verses, including some in other metres” (p. 102, n. 208). Roebuck’s note implies that CU 5.2.7 might contain the kind of alternative Sāvitrī in the anuṣṭubh meter that the author of BU 5.14.5 rejects; Olivelle (1998) calls the verse at CU 5.2.7 a “variation of the Sāvitrī verse” (p. 554, n. 2.7). Based on Olivelle’s translation (p. 233) this alternative Sāvitrī at CU 5.2.7 is as follows:

We choose that [food] of Savitṛ,
[that] food of the god [Savitṛ],
the greatest, the best creator of all.
Bhaga’s rich bounty would we create for ourselves.

We also find at BU 6.3.6 an expansion of the classic Sāvitrī in which each of its three lines is followed by other lines from the Rgveda, and this too is a kind of variation or alternative form of the Sāvitrī. Alternatives there may have been, but when it comes to the Sāvitrī, the Buddha of the Sundarikabhāradvāja Sutta is evidently a gāyatrī man, like the author of BU 5.14.5.

The author of BU 5.14.5 does not tell us who the erring ones are that recite the Sāvitrī as an anuṣṭubh. We are told, however, that they argue for doing so by saying: “the anuṣṭubh is speech” (vāg anuṣṭup). There are indeed a number of statements saying exactly that the anuṣṭubh is speech in Brahmanical texts (e.g. AB 3.15.1, JB 1.272.13, ŚB 3.1.4.16). There are also passages which glorify or promote the anuṣṭubh. TS 5.4.12.1, for example, refers to “this” [anuṣṭubh] as the

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12 The message is delivered by a Brahmin chosen by other Brahmins to go on their behalf. The motif of choosing and sending forth a Brahmin “champion” is also seen in Pali texts, e.g. at MN ii 147-148.
“best of meters” \( (\text{paramā vā eśā chandasāṃ}) \).\(^{13}\) BU 5.14, on the other hand, is a long promotion of the \( \text{gāyatrī} \) meter, and against the background of rival claims for the \( \text{anuśṭubh} \) to which the text alludes we can see that the way to recite the \( \text{Sāvitrī} – \text{anuśṭubh or gāyatrī} \) – is apparently for those involved a matter of some import.

Black (2007) insightfully shows how the teachings of the Upaniṣads are often situated in important but overlooked situations of dialogue and challenge. Thus, after BU 5.14.1-7 expounds at length on the \( \text{gāyatrī} \) meter, including the matter of how to recite the \( \text{Sāvitrī} \), we gather that at BU 5.14.8 it is a kind of challenge when King Janaka says to a Brahmin: “Hey! Did you not claim to know the Gāyatrī? So how is it that you…” (Olivelle, 1998, p. 141). Coming where they do, the words of the king serve to highlight the text’s teachings on the \( \text{gāyatrī} \), including the proper way to recite the \( \text{Sāvitrī} \).

BU 5.14 links its teachings to King Janaka, presumably the same Janaka who in ŚB 11.3.1.4 presents cows to Yājñavalkya “as a reward for his deep knowledge of the Agnihotra ritual” (Cohen, 2008, p. 68). These associations bring us back to the \( \text{Sundarikabhāradvāja Sutta} \), replete with the same Brahmanical associations. As we have it the text presents the Buddha (from the warrior or ruler class) seeming to challenge or about to challenge a Brahmin (who has just performed the \( \text{agnihotra} \)) on his knowledge of the \( \text{Sāvitrī} \) or its \( \text{gāyatrī} \) meter,\(^{14}\) just as King Janaka at BU 5.14.8 challenges a Brahmin on his knowledge of the \( \text{gāyatrī} \) meter.

BU 5.14 indicates that Brahmins differ on the right way to do things connected with their religion, and it ends with the implication that one who really knows the \( \text{gāyatrī} \) becomes clean (\( \text{suddha} \)), pure (\( \text{pūta} \)), not subject to old age (\( \text{ajara} \)), and immortal (\( \text{amṛta} \)). In the \( \text{Sundarikabhāradvāja Sutta} \) the Brahmin will ask about the right way to do something connected with his religion (i.e. sacrifice), and the Buddha’s reply will include talk of being clean (\( \text{suddha} = \text{S. } \text{suddha} \)) and the end of birth and death (\( \text{jātīmaraṇassa anta} \)). Like BU 5.14, the \( \text{Sundarikabhāradvāja} \)

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\(^{13}\)Some editions follow \( \text{paramā vā eśā chandasāṃ} \) with \( \text{yadanuśṭuk} \) (i.e. \( \text{yat anuśṭuk} \), the latter being a variant spelling used in the TS). A passable translation might be: “as for the \( \text{anuśṭubh} \), this is certainly the highest of meters”. Keith (1914, Part 2, p. 439) translates the passage as: “The Anustubh is the highest of metres”.

\(^{14}\)Smith (1986) explains how according to some texts the \( \text{Sāvitrī} \) “was to be recited in different metres by the different classes. Brahmins were to learn the verse in the \( \text{gāyatrī} \) metre, Kṣatriyas in the \( \text{triśṭubh} \), and Vaiśyas in the \( \text{jagatī} \)” (p. 72). Can it be that the passage has the Buddha signaling his own knowledge of how Brahmins are supposed to recite the \( \text{Sāvitrī} \), and therefore his own credentials as a kind of expert?
Sutta relates the Sāvitrī and its gāyatrī meter to a context in which experts confront each other on matters of Brahmanical religion. Both texts then move on to speak of higher spiritual goals, expressed partly in terms of being clean and being immortal or beyond death.

The Foremost Sacrifice, The Foremost Meter

Gombrich (1990, p. 16) points out that in the Ādittapariyāya Sutta some Brahmans who are convinced by the Buddha give up the agnihotra ritual of fire sacrifice (Vinaya i 33). But this does not prevent the Blessed One from elsewhere praising the agnihotra – and the Sāvitrī. At Sn 111 and Vinaya i 246 the Buddha says in verse:

\[
\text{aggihuttamukhā yaññā sāvittī chandaso mukham}
\]

Sacrifices have the agnihotra as foremost; of meter the foremost is the Sāvitrī.\(^{15}\)

The Buddha continues in verse, and his poem is similar to a poem which appears in some versions of the Mahābhārata.\(^{16}\) There the poem begins with the words agnihotramukhā vedā gāyatrī chandasām mukham. After noticing this similarity I learned that Bodewitz made the same point in 1976; he furthermore suggested that the latter might be a “wrong version” of the Pali verse (Bodewitz, 2003, p. 5).

More interesting for our purposes is how the Pali verse in particular resembles portions of the TS which claim that a certain meter (TS 5.2.1.5) or sacrifice (TS 7.1.1.3) is highest or best. Indeed the Pali verse seems to provide an alternative to the view expressed in TS 5.4.12.1, which holds the “three-nighter” (trirātra) to be the best of sacrifices (paramas trirātro yajñānām) and, as noted above, the anuśṭubh to be the best of meters (paramā... chandasām). The Buddha’s poem ends as a sort of paean to the Buddhist religious order, “foremost for those who sacrifice looking for merit” (Norman, 2001, p. 76). The poem as a whole is said as a sort of blessing after the Buddha and his monks have been fed. The Mahābhārata version, on the other hand, ends as a paean to Keśava (a name of Viṣṇu

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\(^{15}\)See also in MN 92 in Bodhi & Nāṇamoli (2005, p. 761).

\(^{16}\)See e.g. the translation by Ganguli, Book 2, Section 37. Smith (2001) explains the lines of the poem to be “short fragments of text attested in one or more manuscripts but not accepted into the constituted text of the Critical Edition’. The Mahābhārata version of the poem will also employ the phrase ārdhvaṁ tiryag adhaś caiva, a variation of the “above, below, and across” motif mentioned above.
or Kṛṣṇa). Both versions, I speculate, are derived from forms of praise occurring in earlier Brahmanical [oral] texts.

Some Brahmanical motifs in Pali texts merely establish a link with the deeds and beliefs of Brahmans, or at least to ideas shared by Brahmans. But as we will see in what follows, other Brahmanical motifs in Pali texts serve to evoke and in various ways oppose, unfavorably compare, supplement, or supplant Brahmanical beliefs and behaviors.

Women and Vehicles

Black (2007) cites ŚB 11.6.2.5, JUB 3.2.4.8, ŚB 2.4.1.6, and DN 3 as instances where Brahmans are depicted in chariots or carriages, and he reminds readers of Bodewitz’s suggestion that the chariot represents the “luxury car” of the Vedic elite (pp. 109, 188-9, n. 7). More examples and variations are not lacking. BU 4.3.10 features the dream of vehicles and roads on which to drive, followed by elaborating verses which refer to “dallying with women” (Olivelle, 1998, p. 113). KaU 1.25 speaks of “lovely maidens with chariots” (rāmāḥ sarathāḥ). Variations of a prayer repeated at e.g. TS 4.2.5.6, ŚB 7.2.2.11, VS 12.71 and AV 3.17.3 ask for a kind of vehicle or related equipment (rathavāhana) and a “plump wench” (Whitney, 1905, p. 115). In CU 4.2.4 the sage Raikva is presented with gifts including a carriage and a man’s daughter. At CU 5.13.2 the “dazzling” things listed include a “carriage drawn by a she-mule” (aśvatarīratha) and a “slave-girl” (Olivelle, 1998, p. 241). CU 8.12.3 imagines the pleasures to be had with women and vehicles (p. 285):

\[
\text{sa tatra paryeti jakṣat kriḍan ramamāṇah stribhir vā yānair vā}
\]
\[
\text{jnātibhir vā}
\]
He roams about there, laughing, playing, and enjoying himself with women, carriages, or relatives

In a passage at DN i 7 which is repeated in other Pali texts, talk of relatives, carriages, and women (and other topics) is seen as low. More interesting for our purposes is the Buddha at Sn 52 telling how Brahmans were affected by gazing upon “women adorned, and chariots yoked to thoroughbreds, well-made, with variegated coverings” (Norman, 2001, p. 37). The Buddha then tells how the Brahmans obtained said women and chariots. In these Sn passages other sources of pleasure are mentioned, but as in several Brahmanical passages, the women and vehicles are mentioned together. In DN 3 the Buddha refers (DN i 105) to
Buddha’s use of Brahmanical Motifs

Brahmins amusing themselves with “women dressed up in flounces and furbeis” and riding around “in chariots drawn by mares with braided tails” (Walshe, 1995, p. 121). Again the women and vehicles are collocated. In some Pali texts the collocation of females and vehicles is presented on a truly glorious scale, as at SN i 211 with its “hundred [thousand] mule-drawn chariots” (assatarīratha) and “hundred thousand maidens bedecked”. But the human spectacle of Brahmins with fancy women and vehicles envisioned at Sn i 52-53 and DN i 105 is above all blameworthy, whereas in Brahmanical texts such pleasures are wholly positive. Brahmanical conduct might have been the basis for the motif in Pali texts, but one wonders if Buddhists did not also know of, and to some degree fashion their discourses in response to, Brahmanical religious sanctions of the pleasures Brahmins enjoyed.

Thinking About “I”

Another motif common to Brahmanical and Pali texts is the activity signified by the word ahaṅkāra, i.e. conceiving one’s individuality. CU 7.25.1 presents a sort of example or instruction (ādeśa) for how to think about “I”, which it calls an ahaṅkārādeśa and which goes like this: “It is I who am below; I am above; I am to the west; I am to the east; I am to the south; I am to the north. It is I who am this whole [world]” (aham eva idam sarvam). The text will go on to say the same of the self (ātman). The Buddha at AN iii 444 seems to refer to this sort of teaching when he says that acts (note the plural) of conceiving of one’s individuality (ahaṅkārā) shall be stopped (uparujjhissanti), as will conceivings of “mine” (mamaṅkārā). This is just after he speaks of being sabbaloke atammayo, “without identification [with anything] in the entire world”.

The Inner Fire Sacrifice

Like the Sundarikabhāradvāja Sutta, the Sundarika Sutta (SN i 167-170) portrays a Brahmin named Sundarikabhāradvāja “offering to the fire, carrying out the fire oblation” (aggīṃ juhati aggihuttaṃ paricarati). The word aggihutta is the Pali version of S. agnihotra, sometimes simply translated as “fire sacrifice”. Over time agnihotra seems to have become synonymous with “fire-ritual in general” (Bode-witz, 2003, p. 5), but the agnihotra proper was a twice-daily ritual featuring an

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17Bodhi explains that in the context the word “thousand” is to be imputed (Bodhi, 2000, p. 482, n. 586).
oblation or offering (S. hotra) of milk or other substances placed in a fire (S. agni). The precise actions involved in performing the agnihotra, as well as the purpose of the sacrifice, are the subject of much discussion in Brahmanical texts. In the Sundarika Sutta the motive of the Brahmin for performing the agnihotra is not given, but it is worth noting that the Brahmin seems to be alone. That is, there is no mention of a patron on whose behalf the Brahmin carries out the agnihotra. Is this omission a mistake? Bodewitz's research on the agnihotra as depicted in Brahmanical texts may show that in fact the Pali text portrays the lone Brahmin accurately (Bodewitz, 2003, p. 116):

Several formulas to be recited by the priest and several comments in the brāhmaṇa actions of the priest make sense only in connection with a sacrificer who performs the rite himself... The performance on behalf of someone else... points to a later development.

Some Brahmanical texts purport to explain the origins of the agnihotra or tell related myths. KS 6.2 tells how Prajāpati “poured that oblation into the water” and “placed the oblation in the plants” (Bodewitz, 2003, p. 30). These are the two ways the oblation is disposed of in KS 6.2, and these are the two places – water and plants – the Buddha mentions in the Sundarika Sutta when he tells the Brahmin to dispose of the remains of the sacrifice. The Brahmin does so, in water, whereupon the remains “sizzled and hissed and gave off steam and smoke” (Bodhi, 2000, p. 263). In KS 6.2, after Prajāpati puts the oblation in water, “that oblation started to burn the water” (Bodewitz, 2003, p. 30).

The agnihotra has been described as “one of the most important” Vedic sacrifices (Dumont, 1964, p. 337), but it also has been noted for its role in the interiorization of ritual in the Brahmanical tradition. Bentor (2000) has noted how “brāhmaṇa texts” taught that “the agnihotra is, in fact, breathing or life” (p. 596). Deussen (1906, pp. 124-125) noted how the ideas of fire sacrifice were extended to interiorized practices which “replaced” the agnihotra, as evidenced by KU 2.5 with its reference to the āntara (“inner”) agnihotra, a kind of practice nominally associated with the wise man Pratardana, and one whose mastery the text says prompted the ancients to forgo [external] fire sacrifice. The expert Yājñavalkya

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18The word used in the Pali text to refer to vegetation or “greens” is harita, in the compound (in the locative case) appaharite. Bodhi (2000, p. 263) translates this as: “in a place where there is sparse vegetation”.

19Appeal to religious practices of the past is itself a significant motif in Brahmanical and Pali texts, but there is no room here for further comment.
teaches in ŚB 11.3.1.4 that even with no materials for the agnihotra (Eggeling, 1900, p. 46): “yet there would be offered – the truth in faith”. ŚB 11.3.1.5-6 explains the importance of the mind for the offerer of the agnihotra. Brahmanical texts such as BSS 29.5 speak of other ways to interiorize the agnihotra (Bentor, 1997, 2000). We can scarcely doubt that the agnihotra featured in the development of interiorized fire sacrifice in the Brahmanical tradition. What we want to know is how much the early Buddhists knew of this development, and if they participated in it.

We return now to the Sundarika Sutta, in which the Buddha says (SN i 169) to the Brahmin who has just performed the agnihotra (Bodhi, 2000, p. 264):

Having given up the fire made from wood,
I kindle, O brahmin, the inner light alone.
Always ablaze, my mind always concentrated,
I am an arahant living the holy life.

I suggest that these and following verses represent a Buddhist version of an attempt to interiorize the fire sacrifice. What Bodhi translates as “inner light” (ajjhatta joti) might be better translated here as “inner fire” (Cone, 2010, p. 246, citing this passage), but in any case the positive sense of the passage is somewhat unusual because the imagery of burning in Pali texts often symbolizes what should be brought to an end.20 If this signals a willingness to adopt a rhetorical stance toward fire in keeping with Brahmanical sensibilities, the following verses leave no doubt that the Buddha or composer of the text is willing to engage the Brahmanical thought world on its own terms. But to see why we must first briefly examine another aspect of interiorization.

Bentor (2000) and others have pointed out that the interiorization of fire sacrifice in the Brahmanical tradition took different forms, some traceable to ideas in texts which homologize body parts or faculties with the components of fire sacrifice.21 For example, in TS 2.5.11.7 the large ladle used in the sacrifice is said to be the body (ātmā dhruvā). In CU 5.18.2 the vedi (i.e. sacrificial area) is identified with the chest (ura eva vediḥ). In BU 6.2.12 and CU 5.7.1 man is likened to the sacrificial fire, his breath the smoke, his speech (CU: tongue) the flame. According to AB 5.25 (Keith, 1920, pp. 249-250):

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21 See e.g. Bodewitz (2003, especially p. 143).
Their offering spoon was thought.
(Their) butter was intelligence.
(Their) altar was speech...
(Their) oblation was breath...

In the *Sundarika Sutta* the Buddha continues with what can only be seen as a simulacrum of Brahmanical speech (Bodhi, 2000, p. 264):

> Conceit, O brahmin, is your shoulder-load,
> Anger the smoke, false speech the ashes;
> The tongue is the ladle, the heart the altar,
> A well-tamed self is the light of a man.

Whatever the meaning of the final line – and it is possible that the author of the *sutta* uses *joti* as “fire” or “light” depending on the context – what is expressed in the Pali text itself (*attā sudanto purisassa joti*) is remarkably like what Yājñavalkya in BU 4.3.6 says about a man (*puruṣa*), and what in the context must be light:

> ātmā eva asya jyotiḥ bhavati
> The self indeed is his light

Parts of the *Sundarika Sutta* clearly seem to be working with forms of expression and homology attested in Brahmanical texts. But the sacrifice is interiorized further into purely ethical dimensions. Brahmanical experts taught that in some sense the sacrifice lies within, but the Buddha in effect says that Brahmins with their conceit, anger, and lying are getting the sacrifice wrong.

In some Brahmanical texts certain actions of the *agnihotra* ritual are said to be done for śuddhi, i.e. “purity”, as at TB 2.1.4.8 (Bodewitz, 2003, p. 101; cf. p. 62). The Buddha seems to be aware of this concern, for the above verses from the *Sundarika Sutta* come after the Buddha says (Bodhi, 2000, pp. 263-264):

> When kindling wood, brahmin, do not imagine
> This external deed brings purity;
> For experts say no purity is gained
> By one who seeks it outwardly.

The implication is that the purity (*P. suddhi*) desired by Brahmins is really an internal matter, to be addressed by a properly internal sacrifice. The Buddha is no doubt an expert on the topic, but by “experts” (*kusalā*) could these lines also refer
to Brahmanical sages? Yājñavalkya at BU 4.4.23 teaches the importance of inner knowledge rather than outer action: through knowledge one becomes “free from impurity” (viraja). An accompanying verse says that one “is not stained by evil deeds” (na lipyate karmaṇā pāpakaṇa). We have seen above how Yājñavalkya in the ŚB preaches the importance of the inner dimensions of the agniḥotra, and that KU 2.5 teaches the “inner agniḥotra” as superior to the external rite. We can see that the Brahmanical promoters of interiorization worked by reinterpreting forms of Brahmanical sacrifice, and this is just what the Buddha does in the Sundarika Sutta. I am not suggesting that the Buddha knew of Yājñavalkya or Pratardana, but it is at least possible that the composer of the Sundarika Sutta was aware of interiorization within the Brahmanical community. For the Sundarika Sutta appears to build on what Brahmanical experts had started, moving the interiorization of fire sacrifice beyond interiorization as such and towards typically Buddhist ethical concerns.

**Reinterpreting Vedic Ritual Fires**

Gombrich has repeatedly considered the Buddha’s reinterpretation of the three Vedic sacrificial fires as portrayed in Pali texts (Gombrich, 1985; 1990, pp. 16-19; 1996, p. 66; 2006, pp. 81-82; 2009, pp. 112-113), and here it is necessary to begin by virtually reprising parts of Gombrich’s work. We commence with the observation that in Pali texts the Buddha sometimes refers to a well-known triad of Vedic ritual fires – but in a “Buddhist” way. These fires are in Sanskrit the āhavanīya, i.e. the offertorial or eastern fire; the gārhapatya, i.e. the householder’s or western fire; and the daksināgni, i.e. the southern fire, also known as the anvāhāryapacana. For reference, the diagram below shows a stylized Vedic sacrificial arena and the placement of the three fires:
In AN iv 45 the Buddha will refer to these fires when he tells a Brahmin that the three fires to be maintained are (Bodhi, 2012, p. 1030):

\[ \text{"āhuneyyaggi gahapataggi dakkhineyyaggi"} \]

The fire of those worthy of gifts, the householder’s fire, and the fire of those worthy of offerings

Here \text{"āhuneyya"} (in the compound \text{"āhuneyya + aggi"}, the latter meaning “fire”) is the grammatical equivalent of S. \text{"āhavaniya"}, both being gerundive forms of \text{"ā√hu"}. The Pali words for the two other fires are also relatable to their Sanskrit counterparts (Gombrich, 1990, p. 19). This same phrase also occurs at DN iii 217 and AN iv 41, but only at AN iv 45 does it come with an explanation. As Gombrich (2009) points out, the explanation “metaphorically reinterprets” (p. 112) the fires: the eastern fire is one’s parents; the western fire is one’s wife, children, and other dependents; the southern fire is worthy renunciates and Brahmins. One should maintain the fires, but it turns out this means: supporting people. The fires are thus ultimately explained in terms of how one should behave towards others, as Gombrich emphasizes. This is similar to how the Buddha in DN iii 188-192 allegorizes a ritual of honoring the directions in terms of classes of people and how one should support them.

Gombrich (1990) identifies other facets of Brahmanical religious culture to which composers of Pali texts may have responded. But I suggest that reinterpreting the three sacrificial fires was itself a Brahmanical practice to which the composer of AN iv 45 is responding. A classic Brahmanical reinterpretation of the fires at TS 1.6.7.1 identifies the \text{"āhavaniya"} as the abode of the gods (\text{"devānām āyatana"}), the \text{"gārhapatya"} as that of men, and the \text{"anvāhāryapacana"} as that of the fathers, i.e. ancestors. In so far as it is possible to discern from the text, these “fires” have significance only in relation to the sacrifice and its objectives. Moody (1980) notes a similar example at ŚB 12.4.1.3 in which the fires are identified as the “yonder world”, “this world”, and the “world of the middle region” (p. 85). We will soon have more to learn from Moody’s 1980 study of the agnyādheya ritual in which the three (or sometimes five) sacred fires are established; for now we note that the above examples are typical of the way Brāhmaṇa-style texts explain components of Vedic sacrifice. The early Upaniṣads also often present their teachings by variously explaining elements of Vedic religion, as at CU 4.11-14, in which “the three sacrificial fires are explained as forms of the ātman’s manifestation” (Deussen, 1906, p. 63). In AN iv 45 the Buddha will try his hand at explaining the fires in order to aid the reception of his teachings.
The Brahmanical passages noted above, and others not shown here, indicate that reinterpreting the fires was an established Brahmanical practice. Individual interpretations varied, however. At JUB 4.26.15 the three sacrificial fires are reinterpreted in terms of human conduct:

\[ \text{karma iti gārhapatyah \textit{\_} samaḥ iti āhavaniyah damah iti anvāhāryapacanah} \]

“rite” is the gārhapatyah, “tranquillity” is the āhavaniyah, “restraint” is the anvāhāryapacanah

The key to understanding the passage is to be found in what is said earlier in the text, and indeed in other Brahmanical texts. At JUB 4.21.8 it is said about a particular “hidden connection” (upaniṣad):

\[ \text{tasyai tapaḥ damah karma iti pratiśṭhā ēvedāḥ sarvāṅgīni satyam āyatana} \]

austerity, restraint, and rites are for it the foundation, the Vedas are all the limbs, truth is the abode

JUB 4.25.3 proclaims (Oertel, 1896, p. 222):

\[ \text{vedēḥ brahma tasya satyam āyatanam samaḥ pratiśṭhā damah ca} \]

The Veda is the brahman, truth is its abode, tranquillity and restraint its foundation

These passages are similar to many other passages in Brāhmaṇa and Upaniṣad texts in that they refer to and uphold a polythetic class of Brahmanical ideals – or better, ideal behaviors. But in identifying the three fires with ideal behaviors, JUB 4.26.15 departs from the more typical Brahmanical reinterpretations of the fires noted above. Much the same can be said for AN iv 45. That is, JUB 4.26.15 identifies the fires with idealized behavior, and in AN iv 45 the fires are linked with – become the objects of – idealized behavior. A closer look at how the two texts identify the fires reveals further points of interest:

\[ ^{22} \text{In similar contexts Olivelle (1998) translates upanisad as “hidden connection”, and the singular karman as “rites”. I adopt these usages from Olivelle’s translation of the duplicate passage at KeU 4.8, itself part of the JUB (see Olivelle, 1998, pp. 21, 24, 25, 171, 363, 371).} \]
In both texts there is intuitive sense in the identification of the gārhapatya, for the householder has a duty to look after the members of his household and to perform actions including religious rites. Gombrich (1990, p. 19) and Bodhi (2012, p. 1778, n. 1511) have remarked on the wordplay which evidently accompanies the Buddhist identification of the fires, but there seems to be no obvious reason why in the JUB the eastern fire should be “tranquillity” (śama), or why the southern fire should be “restraint” (dama) – understood here and elsewhere to mean “self-restraint” or “self-control”. Apart from any wordplay, it is interesting that the Buddha identifies the southern fire with renunciates and Brahmins, for in many Pali texts self-control is said to be one of the hallmarks of the true renunciate or Brahmin. Indeed the Buddha explains the meaning of the southern fire by referring to renunciates and Brahmins who “tame” (damenti) themselves, using a verb related to the JUB’s dama. But he also says that such renunciates and Brahmins “calm” (samenti) themselves, using a verb related to the JUB’s śama.

In any case, JUB 4.26.15 and AN iv 45 have to be seen in light of what Moody (1980) has revealed to be the layers of meaning attached to the ritual fires – and the directional axes along which they are constructed. One of Moody’s key findings is just how selfish the establishment of the three sacrificial fires was for the sacrificer. Moody summarizes (p. iii):

Within the spatial organization of the firehall is found an emphasis on the individual and independent life of the sacrificer as against social ties, the former represented along an axis extending toward the gods in the east and the latter along an axis extending toward one’s ancestors in the south.

Moody elaborates (p. 87):

...we have seen that in setting up his fires the sacrificer attains a greater degree of autonomy. Even the shy sacrificer is thrust forth to carve out for himself a secure niche. There he creates his own world in
Moody has examined many Brahmanical texts in order to reach this conclusion. If Moody is correct about what I am calling the selfishness which pervades the symbolism of the three sacrificial fires, this should register as the opposite of what the Buddha teaches in AN iv 45. Indeed it appears to be exactly what the Buddha is teaching against, for according to the Buddha’s teaching we might say it is exactly social dependencies which are increased and the welfare of others which is furthered by him who, lessening his autonomy, properly maintains the [redefined] fires. Moody helps us recognize just what levels of meaning AN iv 45 may be exploiting as it presents the Buddha following the attested Brahmanical practice of reinterpreting the fires. Moreover, the evidence allows us to contemplate how the Buddha or the *sutta* might be advancing efforts to allegorize the fires in terms of conduct already recommended by Brahmans, like that visible to us in JUB 4.26.15. That is, the Buddha or the composer of AN iv 45 not only reinterprets the fires, it may be that he reinterprets Brahmanical reinterpretations of the fires, agreeing that the fires are to be understood ultimately in terms of conduct, but going the Brahmans one further and linking the fires to specifically altruistic conduct because, as Moody has shown, they are emblems of consummate selfishness.

**Meaningful Directions**

In the *Siṅgāla Sutta* (DN 31), briefly alluded to above, the Buddha teaches a man how to properly honor the directions. But here again this really means taking care of people: at DN iii 188-189 the Buddha says one’s parents are the east, teachers are the south, etc. In his account of the *Siṅgāla Sutta*, Gombrich (2006) remarks: “the Buddha constantly slips new ethical wine into old brahminical bottles: pretending to interpret traditional ritual, he in fact abolishes it” (p. 81). To this deft observation I would like to add the suggestion that with respect to Brahmanical references and the traditional beliefs they represent, there is more to the *sutta* than at first meets the eye, and that in the *sutta* the Buddha or the composer skillfully makes use of some traditional Brahmanical ideas even as he abolishes others.

First we note that the Buddha’s directional scheme in the *Siṅgāla Sutta* is unlike the directional scheme we have found to be implicit in AN iv 45 above, in that the former has six actual directions (*disā*) to account for: the four cardinal directions plus a zenith and a nadir. To cover all six the Buddha adds categories
of people to the three we have seen above, and he divides one’s household and dependents into two categories. The placement of categories of people in the *Siṅgāla Sutta* again shows a prior understanding that directions have meaning apart from what the Buddha says they mean: he exploits directional meaning rather than creates it where none existed. For in the three dimensional scheme of the *Siṅgāla Sutta*, Brahmins and mendicants are shifted not to a random direction, but to the zenith. Menials get what is low, where they belong: the nadir. And the Buddha maintains key elements of a similar east-west axis as in AN iv 45: parents to the east, wife and offspring to the west. I doubt this is a meaningless coincidence. The Buddha’s directional schemes are like directional schemes in the Upaniṣads in that they carry on with an apparently older Brahmanical practice of equating or relating directions to something else. But compared to most Upaniṣadic directional schemes, the Buddha’s scheme in the *Siṅgāla Sutta* is in certain respects closer to the directional schemes of the Samhitā and Brāhmaṇa texts studied by Moody (1980), which identify the directions with types of beings (or their worlds). Another similarity is that the Samhitā and Brāhmaṇa directional schemes also tend to consistently identify the eastern direction; a large difference is that they identify it with the gods (e.g. TS 6.1.1.1). The Buddha does not allow supernatural beings to have a direction in his directional schemes, and I suggest that the Buddha’s consistent identification of the east with parents has another reason alongside the wordplay suggested by Gombrich and Bodhi (noted above). The Buddha elsewhere identifies parents with no less a god than Brahmā (e.g. AN i 132, AN ii 70). Who better than parents, then, to assign to the direction of the gods, in directional schemes which have no place for gods?

There is more evidence that the Buddha or the composers of Pali texts knew how to make use of Brahmanical directional schemes. The Buddha’s directional scheme in the *Kūtadanta Sutta* at DN i 142 is somewhat different from those mentioned above in that it cannot for structural reasons of the story accommodate e.g. parents or wife. But it does associate directions with classes of people. The scene is one in which different classes of people attend a king’s great sacrifice and place their gifts to the east, south, west, and north of the “sacrificial pit” (yaññavāṭa).

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23 One could of course put it from the other perspective: that in AN iv 45 he subtracts and combines.

24 Cf. BU 1.2.3; BU 3.9.19-24; BU 4.2.4; CU 3.1.2-5.1; CU 3.13.1-6; CU 3.15.1-2; CU 4.5.2; CU 7.25.1

25 They are also consistent on the southern direction (the “fathers”), but not west and north (Moody, 1980, p. 73).
This is of course the traditional order of directions as given in e.g. TS 6.1.1.1. At DN i 142 a class of people analogous to teachers – here the king’s advisors – again gets the south. But is it also significant that members of the warrior class, Gotama’s class, get the east at DN i 142, while Brahmins get the west? The latter is the direction not only of women and children (and menials at AN iv 45) in Buddhist directional schemes, but of demons and snakes in some Brahmanical schemes, and of humans at TS 6.1.1.1 in which humans are the least respectable of the beings mentioned (Moody, 1980, p. 73). Trained Brahmins whose traditional texts show a fascination with directional schemes would not have failed to observe and draw conclusions from the directions allotted in the Kūtadanta Sutta.

Conquering Both Worlds

In the Singāla Sutta one who is correctly “covering” the six directions (chaddīsā-paticchādin) is said at DN iii 181 to be ubholokavijayaya patipanno, i.e. “on the way to conquering both worlds”. Talk of two worlds such as this world and the next is common enough in Pali texts, but talk of “conquering” two worlds is not. The idea of “conquering both worlds” is thoroughly Brahmanical, seen e.g. at TB 1.3.4.3.8; at JB 1.21.4 in which it is said that one who sacrifices “knowing thus” conquers both worlds (ubhau eva lokau abhijayati); at ŚB 13.2.4.1 in which Prajāpati says: ubhau lokau abhijayeyam (“may I conquer both worlds”); at TS 6.1.1.2 with its dative construction ubhayo.h lokayo.h abhijityai (“for the conquering of both worlds”). The Singāla Sutta’s dative construction is particularly reminiscent of the latter. But what is more, talk of conquering both worlds in the Singāla Sutta is thematically joined with identifying the directions with other beings, and this is exactly what happens in TS 6.1.1.1-2.

Conclusion

If the study of Brahmanical motifs in Pali texts does nothing else, it reminds us that there is a large population of terms, phrases, ideas, myths, and other devices which are common to Brahmanical and Pali texts – far more, I would venture, than is generally recognized. But of course it does more than this. It provides a window into the world that preceded classical Theravāda Buddhism. And it invites us to confront anew the questions of how and why certain motifs visible to us in Brahmanical texts came to be present in Pali texts. At issue is the flow

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26See however AN iv 269-270.
of words and ideas between religious communities in ancient India, a topic still contested and poorly understood.

“Who can tell what routes ideas travel by...” (Clark, 2013, p. 45). The question must haunt the student of early Buddhism. The motifs mentioned in this paper are but a fraction of the motifs common to Brahmanical and Pali texts which have been documented. It is my hope that in the continued discovery, study, and debate of motifs in Brahmanical, Buddhist, Jain, and other texts, a way forward will be found between the complacent acceptance of generalities which “explain” early Buddhism on the one hand, and overreaching revisionist claims about what we know of early Buddhism, or skeptical claims about what we can know about it, on the other.

Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
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<td>Atharvaveda</td>
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I have in some cases transcribed Oertel’s Roman script into letter forms more widely accepted in our day. Words in parentheses or brackets in the indented quotations above are the translator’s.

Bibliography


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