

**Dialogues in South Asian Traditions**  
Religion, Philosophy, Literature and History

Face-to-face conversation and dialogue are defining features of South Asian traditional texts, rituals and practices. Not only has the region of South Asia always consisted of a multiplicity of peoples and cultures in communication with each other, but also performed and written dialogues have been indelible features within the religions of South Asia; Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and Islam are all multi-vocal religions. Their doctrines, practices and institutions have never had only one voice of authority, and dialogue has been a shared tactic for negotiating contesting interpretations within each tradition.

This series examines the use of the dialogical genre in South Asian religious and cultural traditions. Historical inquiries into the plurality of religious identity in South Asia, particularly when constructed by the dialogical genre, are crucial in an age when, as Amartya Sen has recently observed, singular identities seem to hold more destructive sway than multiple ones. This series approaches dialogue in its widest sense, including discussion, debate, argument, conversation, communication, confrontation and negotiation. Opening up a dynamic historical and literary mode of analysis, which assumes the plural dimensions of religious identities and communities from the start, this series challenges many outdated assumptions and representations of South Asian religions.

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## 10 Careful attention and the voice of another

*Maria Heim*

In this Chapter I consider reflections on dialogue in the Pali commentarial tradition as it is represented by the fifth century Pali commentator Buddhaghosa. I take two approaches. First, I consider Buddhaghosa's theory of scripture and its implications for interpretative practice. Embedded within Buddhaghosa's thinking on *buddhavacana* and exegesis is a substantial body of programmatic reflection on many of the very questions about dialogue prompting our workshop. I argue that Buddhaghosa's commentarial practice emphasises *suttas* not only as discursive renderings of doctrinal meaning, but as events to be lived.

Once I have sketched out Buddhaghosa's ideas about scripture, it will be useful to consider them in light of an actual case, and so in the second half we consider Buddhaghosa's application of some of his interpretative principles in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* to show how he develops the philosophical and literary potency of dialogue. This is a *sutta* about the rewards of renunciation addressed to the patricidal king Ajātasattu in the throes of his disordered and anxious life. In Buddhaghosa's reading the *sutta* is not only about the doctrinal teachings on benefits of renunciation; it is also about how this encounter radically transforms Ajātasattu. It is, I will show, the enactment of the very doctrinal teachings it espouses.

In the space that we have I cannot go through all of the features of *buddhavacana* that Buddhaghosa deems important for the task of interpretation (elsewhere I have sought to outline with systematic detail Buddhaghosa's theory of scripture and hermeneutics).<sup>1</sup> Here I wish only to point out several features of his understanding of the Buddha's word that are particularly relevant to his interpretation of the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*. Most salient is his treatment of scripture as the immeasurable words of an omniscient teacher – texts with limitless meanings – that has significant implications for exegesis. Buddhaghosa is also very systematically occupied with the dialogical features of the *sutta* – where, when and to whom it was spoken, what prompted it, what was asked, how it is to be heard, what its impact on the hearer should be. I aim to show how reading *suttas* with Buddhaghosa heightens their power: we come to see how a *sutta* can be an intervention not only for the people involved in the narrative in which the *sutta* is embedded, but also for the ideal reader as trained by Buddhaghosa.

*The limitlessness of text*

It is striking that two doctrines only incipiently present in the canonical texts develop simultaneously at the commentarial level, namely, a full-fledged theory of the Buddha's omniscience and the idea of scripture's immeasurability. The commentarial theory of the Buddha's omniscience was quite specific: for Buddhaghosa and know it unconstrained by any obstacle in understanding it. The omniscience of the Buddha was for him not a claim to be argued epistemologically (as it was in certain Mahāyāna philosophical formulations), but rather an assertion demonstrated by reading the texts. For example, when one encounters the Buddha teaching one comes to glimpse the way the Buddha's omniscient mind penetrates, without any limitation, his interlocutors and the needs of the moment: he knows, without limit, 'beings' various inclinations, biases, practices, and dispositions'.<sup>2</sup> And the Buddha is said, frequently, to be 'Knower of Worlds':

because for all beings he knows their inclinations, he knows their latent tendencies, he knows their doings, he knows their intentions, he knows beings who have little dust in their eyes and much dust in their eyes, who have keen faculties and dull faculties, with good attributes and with bad attributes, teachable and difficult to teach, capable and incapable, and so this very world of beings is known to him in all ways.<sup>3</sup>

This knowledge of particular beings is said to be illustrated specifically by the genre of canonical teachings captured in the *suttas*. The *suttas* are said to be 'well-spoken in that the meanings are spoken in accordance with the inclinations of those being taught right here'.<sup>4</sup>

Even as the doctrine of omniscience was being developed, the commentators were also expanding claims made in the canonical sources about the 'immeasurability' of the Buddha's teachings (e.g., 'the Tathāgata has immeasurable teachings of the Dhamma about this, with immeasurable words and immeasurable phrasings').<sup>5</sup> Buddhaghosa strongly emphasises that *buddhavacana* is measureless in meaning. He makes frequent use of oceanic imagery: we are told that both scripture and the Buddha's knowledge from which it issues are oceans.<sup>6</sup> The oceanic enormity is to be felt by one beholding these two oceans who will find them even more 'incalculable and immeasurable'<sup>7</sup> than the great briny sea itself. Part of this sense of immeasurability must surely refer to the sheer enormity of the corpus of texts we now refer to as the Pāli Canon. But Buddhaghosa also sees *buddhavacana* as highly generative because the Buddha's pedagogical practices can produce, in a limitless way, new meaning and application. The *piṭakas* themselves are conceived as 'methods' (*nyaya*) that produce further understanding: scripture is 'an ocean of methods',<sup>8</sup> a bottomless sea of methods that find ever deeper application.

I find it productive to consider the possibility that these ideas developed in tandem, specifically that the commentarial project itself facilitated the idea that the Buddha was omniscient. Perhaps Buddhaghosa came to emphasise omniscience because it gave a name to features of the textual corpus that he found immeasurably and infinitely generative. In his reading of scripture, he also came increasingly to wonder at how the Buddha's words were evocative across time: they spoke to their own context and continue to speak to readers in the present and future. The Dhamma is said to be 'visible here and now' and 'timeless', that is, immediately fruitful.<sup>9</sup> It can become immanent as it speaks to the 'here and now', but it is of course always transcendent (*lokuttara*), speaking well beyond it; in both cases it becomes evident and immediate. The practices prompted by *buddhavacana* live on in that they find application today; present and future readers find meaning and resonance with the stories of the past whose dialogues are rendered immediate by both canon and commentary.

In these ways, the infinity of scripture comes to the fore as a central hermeneutic challenge. This challenge can be put in a series of questions all of which, in various ways, Buddhaghosa articulates in his commentaries: how can texts convey the Buddha's omniscient and immeasurable knowledge? How can words – finite utterances, recitations, *suttas*, books – deliver this unlimited, immeasurable and omniscient knowledge? How might we, with our limited understandings, receive and grasp it?

Such observations about scripture's infinity are hardly unique to Buddhaghosa. Other interpreters have also seen how the written text may be read and reread in an infinite number of ways as it encounters ever new readers and opens up new lines of thought for them. The ever-changing contexts in which a text is received expand its meaning; an infinity of the written text that Paul Ricoeur calls its 'surplus of meaning', and Jacques Derrida calls its 'plenitude'.<sup>10</sup> But for Buddhaghosa it is not just because a text has an infinite number of potential readers that its meaning may develop infinitely, but also, at least in the case of scripture, because of the omniscience of its author. The idea of an infinitely potent text spoken by an omniscient author is a connection of ideas shared by medieval interpreters in other scriptural and exegetical traditions, including commentarial masters in the Abrahamic traditions. For example, Ibn 'Arabi and Meister Eckhart share with Buddhaghosa the idea of divinely-inspired scripture as the 'shoreless sea'; as Eckhart puts it, 'there is none so wise that when he tries to fathom it, he will not find it deeper yet and discover more in it'.<sup>11</sup> Kabbalah exegetes also found an infinity in scripture authored and anticipated by the omniscient deity, where the number of readings of the Torah is equal to the number of Israelites who come in front of it.<sup>12</sup>

We cannot pursue any of these comparative possibilities here, but I raise them to suggest that Buddhaghosa was wise to hermeneutical questions about written texts that many others have also wondered about: once a text is written down it will have future readers, presumably unknown to the original 'author', to whom it may speak and evoke new meaning. Even a single reader can find new meaning in a text each time she encounters it. For medieval commentators the

infinite readings made possible by the written text are in some important way known or anticipated by their omniscient authors. As the text gets universalised, so too does its author's knowledge (although in the medieval conceptions it is the reverse of this, that is, it is the omniscience of its author that makes a text immeasurable).

*Pushing discourse back into speech: the message is the event*

As others have helpfully suggested, and following Ricoeur's formulations of these ideas, texts have both *sense* and *reference*, with the *sense* as the meaning immanent in the text, and the *reference* as the transcendent or externalised meaning 'where thought is directed through the sense towards different kinds of extralinguistic entities such as objects, states of affairs, things, facts, etc.'<sup>13</sup> In a spoken text, there is a grounding of reference in the shared dialogical situation of speaker and listener (the speaker can point to the harvest moon in the night sky above them and it will be the *same* harvest moon experienced by both parties). But this 'grounding of reference in the dialogical situation' gets 'shattered by writing', because of the spatial and temporal distance between writer and reader in written texts (the reader must make an association with a harvest moon that she has known).<sup>14</sup> References 'opened up' by the written text are un tethered from the original dialogical situation and can create 'worlds' for us far and removed from that situation.<sup>15</sup> For example, the *sutta* we consider below describes a moment in which King Ajātasattu is suddenly hit with a powerful love for his newborn son. We can speak of how the *sutta* is about these specific experiences of Ajātasattu, where both sense and reference are grounded in Ajātasattu's dialogical situation with the Buddha. But reading the dialogue now we may find that Ajātasattu's experiences can *refer* to something we also might know – the sudden joyful and vulnerable love one can have for one's own children. But even as the gap opened up by the written text (where the reader no longer shares the same references) renders possible new and rich possibilities for meaning (the text becomes 'immeasurable' in its references), it also introduces an 'estrangement', as Ricoeur puts it, from the original dialogical situation. Interpreters reflective about the hermeneutic situation have to make sense of that estrangement or distance even as they also strive to discover and explain the modes of appropriation of the text whereby one can make it 'one's own'.<sup>16</sup>

These considerations may be useful for appreciating some of the things Buddhaghosa emphasises in reading *suttas*. He is fascinated with dialogue and draws the notice of his readers to features of the living speech of a *sutta*. Like us, he finds himself distanced from the original dialogue and event of the Buddha teaching even while he is at pains to articulate scripture's claim on its distant readers. I think that one of the ways he does this is to identify the *meaning* within the *event* of the *sutta* (the dialectic of meaning and event is noted by Ricoeur). To understand the meaning of the *sutta* is to know and experience, often with the aid of considerable exegetical and literary

supplement, the event of the *sutta*. We might say that Buddhaghosa attempts to push discourse back into speech, as it were. In a paradoxical way, texts can speak richly and powerfully to us in our distant locations precisely by bringing us back to the moment of the original dialogical situation. Buddhaghosa is explicit about how *suttas* do this and his commentarial practices attempt to make it so.

Buddhaghosa has much to say about the dialogical situation of a *sutta*, and I will briefly discuss some of this here. First of all, he is very interested in the narrative particulars of *suttas*. Readers familiar with Buddhist *suttas* will recognise the opening line of every *sutta*: 'thus have I heard'. These are Ānanda's words as he recited the *suttas* at the First Council where he was required to report (and thereby construct) the *nidāna*, the origin or narrative context of the sermon that follows. In an important sense the First Council is an account of the *reception* of the Buddha's teachings; and from the first moment of redaction what must be remembered is not just the doctrinal content but the *event* of the teaching as it was experienced and recalled by Ānanda. The *nidāna* reports the time (*kāla*), place (*desa*), teacher (*desaka*), story (*vathu*), assembly (*parisā*) and region (*padesa*) in which the sermon was given.<sup>17</sup> While some readers might wish to zip through these contextual details to get to the doctrinal gist of the teachings, for Buddhaghosa such haste would be ill-conceived. For it is in the *nidāna* that one comes to see the dialogical encounter that comprises the *sutta* as a whole.<sup>18</sup> The *nidāna* captures the living speech of Buddha's encounter with the many different types of interlocutors he met, ranging from devoted disciples, hostile rivals, sceptical merchants, arrogant Brahmins and, as we will see shortly, anguished kings. This contextual narrative provides not only the setting of the doctrinal teaching, but situates the reader in the moment of the *sutta* wherein the *nidāna* enacts, demonstrates and performs the very philosophical or psychological core of its teachings.

Buddhaghosa writes of the *nidāna* in lavishly poetic terms, likening it to a *trīṭha* by which one enters a holy bathing place, or a radiant stairway to a great palace, or a gorgeous threshold to a great mansion; the '*nidāna* is spoken for the sake of pleasure of entering the *sutta*, which is perfect in meaning and phrasing and indicates the power of the Buddha's qualities'.<sup>19</sup> It is through the *nidāna* that one, quite literally, *enters* the *sutta*. The idea that the *nidāna* 'indicates the power of the Buddha's qualities' is his way of saying that the *nidāna* allows the ideal reader to encounter the Buddha. The *nidāna* of a *sutta* indicates the nine qualities (*guṇas*) in the *tipiṭiso gāhā*, a formula present in many *nidānas* (including in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*); the nine qualities are 'the Bhagavan is an Arahāt, Perfectly Awakened, Accomplished in Knowledge and Conduct, Well-gone, Knower of Worlds, Highest Coachman of Men to be Tamed, Teacher of Deities and Humans, the Buddha, the Bhagavan'.<sup>20</sup> Buddhaghosa mentions an expansive commentarial treatment of these qualities also present in the 'Recollection of the Buddha' contemplation given in the *Vissuddhimagga*.<sup>21</sup> The encounter with the Buddha's *guṇas* is said to be radically transformative (as we shall see in its impact on King Ajātasattu).

A *sutta* is in this way an encounter with the Buddha in which he becomes narratively present. Before we can meet the message of the Dhamma, we must meet the Buddha. Buddhaghosa often reads a *nidāna* as demonstrating how the Buddha is speaking to the inclinations and dispositions of his audience, giving an impromptu sermon that addresses their particular needs. This style of reading attends to what we might call the emotional preconditions for dialogue preparing the ground for the immediacy of its impact, as will be amply demonstrated in Buddhaghosa's reading of the *sutta* discussed below.

The importance of the event of a *sutta* is also evident in Buddhaghosa's reflections on genre (taking 'genre' to refer to the three *pitakas*), where Suttanta discourse is said to be largely 'transactional' (*voḥāra*) and 'conventional' (*sammūhi*) based on the ordinary conventions of give-and-take of conversation (in contrast to *paramattha* discourse which delivers meaning acquired from further analysis). The didactic content of a *sutta* is to be understood precisely in terms of its dialogical context, and the richness of its meaning is to be understood, at least in part, by how it was prompted by and speaks to its context. Of course the tradition also provides abstract or decontextualised formulations of the teachings – these are called the Abhidhamma. When the teachings are presented in the Abhidhamma they are stripped of such contexts and can speak in a manner unrestricted to any single instance, unlike Suttanta teachings which are embedded within and speak to a specific context or instance. Buddhaghosa is explicit on this: teachings in the Suttanta are generally described as *pariyāya* (contextual, figurative or in a qualified sense) in contrast to the teachings delivered in the Abhidhamma register which are said to be *nippariyāya* (categorical, not by reference to a single instance).<sup>22</sup> It may in fact be the very presence of the abstract and decontextualised presentation of the teachings in Abhidhamma discourse that leads the Pāli commentarial tradition to be particularly attentive to the contextual nature of the adjacent Suttanta discourse. While our interest here is in the 'contextuality' of the Suttanta, both forms of *buddhavacana* are equally valued, the first getting at the contextual and dialogic teachings of the *suttas* embedded in an encounter through which the teachings are to be interpreted, and the second giving a more abstract formulation of these same teachings.

Buddhaghosa is highly attentive to and explicit about the dialogic qualities of Suttanta discourse: what prompts the Buddha's teaching, how questions work, what it means to listen, the impact on the audience, etc. For example, it seems that the Buddha did not just wander around giving teachings unprompted. Rather, according to Buddhaghosa, he taught only when prompted by an occasion, and then he taught extemporaneously. His teachings are the unfolding of his omniscient understanding, which is understood not so much as an encyclopaedic grasp on all things simultaneously but an unhindered expansion of his understanding upon turning his attention to something or someone. Buddhaghosa describes four 'promptings of a *sutta*': from one's own inclination, from the inclination of another, because a question is asked, or because of a special incident.<sup>23</sup> Buddhaghosa's commentarial services often require specifying the reason prompting

the particular *sutta* in question; the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, for example, is said to be a *sutta* prompted by a question.<sup>24</sup> As an interpretative matter, identifying and elaborating the prompting of a sermon becomes a way that the reader can see the workings of the Buddha's omniscience in real time, as it unfolds.

We have been told that the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* was prompted by a question, and as we turn to Buddhaghosa's exegesis of it, we will see that he is intrigued with the artfulness and power of putting questions, both by the Buddha and by King Ajātasattu. Elsewhere, Buddhaghosa draws notice to (and attempts to systematise) this feature of living dialogue by offering a list (lists are, of course, a chief tool for attending to and managing text in this kind of scholarship). He says that there are five types of questions: (1) questions that illuminate something unseen; (2) questions that discuss views; (3) questions that cut through doubts; (4) questions (to discover) opinion; (5) questions based on a desire to explain.<sup>25</sup> The Buddha, because he is omniscient, does not use the first three, but uses only the latter two to draw out the opinions of others when teaching, or to explain something.<sup>26</sup>

Buddhaghosa is also attentive to the nature of listening and hearing. My title comes from the Pāli canonical sources which specify two conditions for right view: 'careful attention' and listening to the 'voice of another'.<sup>27</sup> Buddhaghosa insists that without the voice of another – ideally that of the Buddha, but that of any teacher well trained by the Buddha or his scripture – one is unable to make spiritual progress. Only Perfectly Awakened Buddhas and *paccakabuddhas* can achieve awakening solely with careful attention (for dialogues with *paccakabuddhas* see Chapter 2 in this book); all others will require the voice of another.<sup>28</sup> The voice of another is to be *heard*: it involves 'listening to the beneficial Dhamma'.<sup>29</sup>

The *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* makes explicit reference to listening and attending to the Buddha's words, and Buddhaghosa expands on what this means by invoking a two-fold distinction very dear to his heart and ever at hand in his commentarial practice, which is to consider the way the Buddha's words come 'with meaning (*attha*) and phrasing (*byañjana*)'.<sup>30</sup> (we also saw meaning and phrasing above, for example, in his praise of the *nidāna*). Both meaning and phrasing – what a text means and the linguistic forms in which meaning is put – are conceived as highly generative. This distinction is discussed and deployed extensively in other commentaries by Buddhaghosa, and we cannot do much more here than invoke it and mention one way that he discusses it. 'With meaning is putting together word and sense via showing, making evident, opening up, distinguishing, making clear, and denoting'.<sup>31</sup> It is connected to practices of analysis (*paṭisaṃhita*) that involve taking meaning further in comprehension and application. 'With phrasing is excellence in syllables, words, phrasing, mode, language, and description',<sup>32</sup> and refers to 'analytic practices associated with language and the [spoken] Dhamma'.<sup>33</sup> The analyses of the spoken teaching and language often involve a highly generative commentarial service that uses the phonosesthetics of spoken language to generate meaning through *nirutti* analysis (a practice widespread in Sanskrit commentaries too and often baffling to modern readers encountering



*niruttis* in translation – hence the unfortunate misunderstanding that would call these ‘false etymologies’).<sup>34</sup> Buddhaghosa manages to generate a great deal of meaning from analysing alliteration and other formal properties of *buddhava-cana*. Thus we see that the repeated emphasis of meaning and phrasing indicate qualities of *buddhava-cana* that generate analytic and narrative practices for the interpreter expanding meaning through ideas and the aural forms of the text.

But it is time to turn to an example of the way Buddhaghosa reads a *sutta* and how he notes and expands features of it that work discourse back into a speech and collapse meaning and event.

### The *Samaññaphala* and Buddhaghosa's commentary<sup>35</sup>

#### *The canonical Samaññaphala, 'the fruits of renunciation'*

This long *sutta*, the second *sutta* in the *Dīgha Nikāya*, describes the ‘fruits’ (*phala*) of monastic renunciation (*samañña*). We cannot hope to cover all of its nuances in this brief foray into it, and I focus here on its *nidāna* – the story or context in which it occurs and to which it speaks. This may be summarised briefly.

The story begins on a gorgeous full moon night when King Ajātasattu is in his palace, and the Buddha is staying nearby with 1,250 of his followers in a mango grove given to him by Jīvaka, Ajātasattu's physician. From the upper terrace of his palace Ajātasattu exclaims on the loveliness of the moonlit night and asks his ministers if they might recommend any recluse or Brahmin whom he might visit who could bring him peace of mind. His various ministers mention five famed recluses (Makkhali Gosāla, Ajita Kesakambala, etc.), but the king is not inspired. He finally turns to his physician Jīvaka and asks him who he might recommend, and Jīvaka suggests they go to the Buddha.

Ajātasattu is animated by the idea and orders Jīvaka to ready 500 female elephants and the king's own bull elephant; he orders 500 court women to ride the elephants, and with attendants carrying torches they process in royal splendour to the mango grove. At one point, spooked by the quiet stillness of the monastic inhabitants of the mango grove, Ajātasattu becomes gripped by fear, trepidation and terror, suspecting ambush. But Jīvaka reassures him and they proceed. They arrive and the King asks to see the Buddha, who is sitting before him; again, noting the calm silence and peaceful composure of the Buddha's assembly, the King blurts out ‘May my son, the prince Udāyibhadda, enjoy such peace as the company of *bhikkhus* now enjoys’.<sup>36</sup> Ajātasattu pays homage to the Buddha and asks if he may ask a question. The Buddha says yes, and the King asks if there are any fruits of the renunciatory life that are visible in the ‘here and now’ (as opposed to waiting for the afterlife). The Buddha asks in turn whether this is a question he has asked other teachers and how they responded, and Ajātasattu describes other teachers' answers (which he has found unsatisfying). He then puts the question to the Buddha again. The bulk of the sermon is the Buddha's response given at certain junctures in a Socratic style of questioning to

the King and leading to a discovery of how moral discipline yields peace and security; how restraint of the sense faculties, mindfulness and clear comprehension bring freedom, happiness and contentment; how one rid of the hindrances can experience gladness, rapture, a calm body and happiness; the pleasure and equanimity of the *jānana*; and insight and the various super knowledges all the way up the sublime and excellent freedom and awakening promised as the highest aim of the Buddhist path.

Upon hearing this sermon, Ajātasattu takes refuge and asks the Buddha to accept him as a lay follower. He also confesses his patricide (here mentioned for the first time in the *sutta*), and the Buddha encourages him since Ajātasattu ‘sees his transgression as a transgression’ and has attempted to ‘counteract it according to the Dhamma’.<sup>37</sup> Once Ajātasattu, ‘rejoicing and delighting at the Buddha's words’, has taken leave, however, the Buddha points out to his disciples that Ajātasattu is ‘ruined’, had he not killed his father, he would have achieved the ‘dust-free, stainless eye of the Dhamma’. The monks rejoice at having heard the word of the Buddha which is the typical ending of a *sutta*.

#### *Buddhaghosa's commentary*

Buddhaghosa's commentary substantially embellishes this story, making it richly complex and pregnant with literary impact (and forcing us to be selective here on what we can describe). No detail is too small to escape considerable dramatic enhancement. Buddhaghosa first gives substantial background on Jīvaka, the King's physician and the Buddha's devout follower, who cleverly understood from the start that Ajātasattu was hinting around to be taken to the Buddha even when he asked his ministers about other teachers.<sup>38</sup> And Jīvaka also knew the value of holding back until the King specifically addressed him whereupon he could lead the willing king to the Buddha. As for the King himself, Buddhaghosa supplies a story which builds up considerable dramatic tension.

It seems that Ajātasattu was from the womb forecasted to someday kill his father (and so he is called ‘unborn [*ajāta*] enemy [*sattva*]).<sup>39</sup> As a prince he befriended the schismatic monk Devadatta and conspired with him to make several botched attempts on the Buddha's life. Devadatta convinces Ajātasattu to assassinate his own father, the good King Bimbāsāra, a follower of the Buddha. The story of the assassination is grim, involving imprisonment, torture and starvation before Bimbāsāra finally succumbs. On the same day that Bimbāsāra dies, a son is born to Ajātasattu, and his ministers approach Ajātasattu with both pieces of news (which Buddhaghosa anachronistically puts in two letters, *lekha*): first they give him the letter with news of his son's birth:

At that very instant affectionate love for his son arose in the King and shook his entire body and cut to the very marrow of his bones. At that moment he grasped the qualities of a father: ‘when I was born, such affectionate love arose in my father too’. And so he said: ‘Go, men, and release my father’.<sup>40</sup>  
‘How can we release him, Sire?’ – they handed him the other letter.

The drama continues. Learning that his father is now dead, Ajātasattu goes weeping to his mother to verify that in fact his father had felt the same affectionate love toward him. She replies:

Foolish son, what are saying? Once when you were a child, there was a boil on your finger. Not able to calm the crying we took you to your father sitting in the judgment hall. Your father took your finger in his mouth, and the boil popped right in his mouth. Not able to spit out the pus mixed with blood your father swallowed it because of his affectionate love. Such was the affectionate love of your father.

Weeping and lamenting, he performed the duties for his father's body.<sup>41</sup>

These events give proper context for the evening of the *sutta*, when Ajātasattu is sleepless on the moonlit night. 'From the day he killed his father, whenever he said he would fall asleep he had only to close his eyes and it was as though he was assailed with a hundred spears, and he would wake up, weeping.'<sup>42</sup> Yet even as he sat sleepless and anguished, he is so moved by the beauty of the night that he cannot help making a joyous exclamation:

just like how a flood is described as water that cannot be contained in a lake that rushes out, spilling over it, so too an exclamation is described as the heart unable to contain a joyful word, and it becomes too much, it cannot be held back, and it bursts out.<sup>43</sup>

Such is Ajātasattu's condition: he is struck simultaneously with immense pain and immense joy. The juxtaposition parallels – and is made possible by – the day he received the two letters: first he is suffused with the overwhelming joy of discovering parental love, and then dashed to the depth of grief and horror at having killed his own father. Now he is tormented with remorse even as the beauty of the moon-filled night overwhelms him, itself perhaps a newfound feeling of love for the world made poignant by the experience of having a child. In each juxtaposition the acuteness of the pain magnifies the exquisite joy, and *vice versa*. It is *this* man, in *this* state, who seeks the wisdom of the Buddha and the peaceful and blissful life he is said to make possible. The toggling between anguish and joy only heightens as the *sutta* develops.

Buddhaghosa also identifies and amplifies the juxtapositions of silence and speaking throughout the text. For example, at the start of the narrative, Jīvaka stays silent while the other ministers praise their teachers, a discussion that the King himself dislikes and through which stays silent. But then noticing that Jīvaka is silent he says (to himself)

I don't want to hear the words of these who have spoken. Rather I want to hear the words of the one who stays silent like the Supanna bird stays having sipped from the Lake of the Serpent Dwellers, for this [other talk] is useless to me.<sup>44</sup>

(In Indian mythology the serpent and the raptor are arch enemies as in Western mythology, so Jīvaka has vanquished his rivals and remains quietly above the fray.) So the King asks Jīvaka about his teacher and Jīvaka realises that now is the time to not stay silent, and he rises to praise the nine *tipiso* qualities of the Buddha and invite the King to visit him. The impact of hearing the qualities (*gūṇas*) of the Buddha is striking: 'the entire body of the King hearing the report of the Bhagavan's qualities was pervaded continuously with the five kinds of happiness.'<sup>45</sup>

The theme of questioning also develops. Jīvaka promises that the Buddha can answer every question:

Maṅgāṅga, even when questioned by a hundred, or a thousand, or a hundred thousand like yourself, my Teacher grasps the minds of all of them and has the strength and power to answer. Maṅgāṅga, trusting [him], approach and ask your question.<sup>46</sup>

The Buddha answers questions by grasping the minds of his interlocutors, no matter who they may be or how many. Buddhaghosa explains that they take 500 elephants because elephants are the most excellent of vehicles, and their feet move softly, whereas horses and chariots are noisy. Jīvaka has the female elephants mounted with 500 women, disguised as men with swords and spears. Why is this? Intriguingly, 'when supported by women, men do not become afraid.'<sup>47</sup> Jīvaka further thinks that having such a large audience present will allow the Buddha to teach fully:

This king does not have the supporting conditions for the Path and its fruit in this life, and *buddhas* will only explain the Dhamma when they have seen the supporting conditions. So let me assemble a crowd, for then the Teacher, seeing the supporting conditions in someone there will teach the Dhamma and that will be helpful for the crowd.<sup>48</sup>

All of these details are dialogical: the Teacher speaks when asked, and then with the knowledge of the mind of his interlocutor; further he speaks in a way that is appropriate to his audience and what will emerge from him is conditioned by what people present can hear and understand.

To continue the story. The King's pain manifests as fear as they approach the mango grove, the very silence of which unnerves him. Again, a list is provided to achieve precision: of the four kinds of fear (mental anxiety, the fear that is knowledge, fear from a particular object and moral apprehension),<sup>49</sup> he has mental anxiety, an objectless fear and unease. He has this fear, we are told, because of the extreme stillness of the ashram. But he is reassured by Jīvaka and eventually they arrive. The King is unable to face the Buddha at first, and so gets a tour of the grounds by Jīvaka. But finally he gains confidence in the presence of such peace, and when finally placed in front of the Buddha, with silence all around, his thoughts race to his son and he blurts out a joyful utterance wishing

his son to enjoy such peace. Buddhaghosa clarifies: it is not that he wants his son to renounce the world like these monks, but rather that 'it is natural for people who see something rare and wonderful to call to mind their beloved relatives and friends'.<sup>50</sup> Sadly, this only occasions anxiety and torment with a further thought: will his son someday kill him as he has his own father? (Buddhaghosa of course knows the hideous answer: Ajātasattu is the first of a series of five royal patricides lasting until the people finally overthrow the last of that lineage.)

While the King had been speechless, the Buddha read his mind<sup>51</sup> even before his exclamation, and so asks him about his thoughts going to his son. Ajātasattu, feeling the weight of his crimes (listed as killing Bimbisāra and his assassination attempts on the Buddha himself), is astonished at the Buddha's kind response. We get at last to the questions; the Buddha invites him to ask whatever he wishes (and we are told that only a *buddha*, not a *paccekabuddha*, advanced disciple, or anyone else can make such an offer). The King asks about the present-life rewards of renunciation. The Buddha turns it right around to ask Ajātasattu what he has heard, inviting the King to describe the doctrines of other teachers, and, Buddhaghosa adds, thereby gracefully allowing the King to describe rival views and their shortcomings rather than have such words in the mouth of the Buddha.

When the King has finished describing the shortcomings of the other teachers, he asks the Buddha again to teach him the fruits of renunciation and how they might benefit him in this very life. The Buddha urges him to listen and attend, explaining what is meant in the *sutta* when the Buddha says 'Mahārāja, please listen and pay careful attention, and I will speak' (emphases added).<sup>52</sup> Buddhaghosa seizes the opportunity to map the distinction between phrasing and meaning on to *listening* (to the voice of another) and paying *careful attention*: by listening one does not muddle phrasing, by attending carefully one does not muddle meaning; by listening there is the hearing of the Dhamma, by attending carefully there is investigating and retaining the Dhamma; and by listening one finds that the Dhamma has phrasing that should be heard, and by paying careful attention one finds that the Dhamma should be thoroughly worked over with the mind.<sup>53</sup> Again, we are drawn to the power of the spoken Dhamma and the meaning the careful listener can make of it in one's mind.

What follows is the bulk of the *sutta* about how the monastic life entails benefits in this life, with Buddhaghosa supplying details about the emotional shifts and transformations to be gained from a life of monastic moral discipline and contemplation. Read with an eye on psychological preconditions – 'beings' various inclinations, biases, practices, and dispositions' – we see the doctrinal message enacted in Ajātasattu's particular circumstances and transformation. By getting a highly textured and immediate sense of Ajātasattu's experience through the literary detail in which it is conveyed, we (the distant readers trained by Buddhaghosa) come very close to sharing the same references as those present in the original *sutta*.

The *sutta* ends of course with Ajātasattu's conversion, citing again the impact of the Buddha's qualities: 'His body, pervaded with the five types of happiness

arisen from recollecting the qualities of the Buddha, made evident his own calmness, and he declared himself a lay person'.<sup>54</sup> He makes another exclamation out of confidence and praise, confesses his patricide, pays homage and departs. The Buddha notes his destruction of his previous wholesome roots, which Buddhaghosa elaborates to specify that the murder of a parent has earned him the copper cauldron hell for 60,000 years. Still, Ajātasattu benefits enormously from the teachings: he comes to be able to sleep, he attains faith and curiously enough, he will in the distant future become a *paccekabuddha*. So while his afterlife is highly unfortunate, he has achieved sleep – no small benefit in the here and now.<sup>55</sup>

### Conclusion

As far as I know, Buddhaghosa never thematises writing or the written text and how it changes the experience of the Buddha's words. But his focus on the spoken and immediate quality of the dialogue suggests a nostalgic longing to hear, see and converse with the Buddha. For him the existential and devotional impact of the Buddha's teachings is found in the encounter as much as the message. And so he trains his ideal reader in styles of interpretation that make the event the message. His reading of *suttas* continues the tradition begun at the First Council's redaction that casts a *sutta* as a dialogical event – a performance and demonstration of the doctrinal teachings it espouses. Redaction and commentary add layers and supplements that push discourse back into spoken dialogue to interweave content and context, doctrine and its environment, ideas and the people between whom they are exchanged. The process continues into our present; as James Madiaio also suggests in his Chapter in this volume, the reader, no matter how distant in time, is invited into the story world and the dialogical inquiry prompted by scripture.

It is worth noting how Buddhaghosa's supplements and commentarial interventions reveal a literary sensibility perhaps unexpected in this particular scholastic pedant, who is more often noted for his management of doctrine. Buddhaghosa is aware of how (what we would call) literature can collapse time and make us feel like we are there, and he draws skilfully on the large corpus of traditional lore that had grown up around the canonical sources to embellish the story with dramatic tension and poignant literary detail. He is also highly sensitive to and explicit about the generative qualities of texts and how they might continue to work in human experience. As we allow ourselves to be guided by Buddhaghosa's commentarial theory and practice, we gain new ways of reading both *suttas* and commentary as literature.

Of course, Buddhaghosa's reading of Ajātasattu's story is not the only way to read it. We find another reading of it in Brian Black's contribution in this volume for example, where the story is contextualised entirely differently and in terms of contemporary political concerns. As Buddhaghosa predicts, we can enjoy a plurality of interpretations as the text speaks in new ways to present and future audiences. In this, we may find that Buddhaghosa's explicit choices about



reading practice can help us be more attentive to our own as we bring contexts and questions to the texts we read, and discover the new ways the texts manage to speak to them.

To sum up, reading with Buddhaghosa has allowed us to see that a *sutta* does not just deliver conceptual meaning but is an event to be lived, and for Buddhaghosa the event is an encounter with infinity (in the form of the Buddha's ken and his words). We learn from Buddhaghosa a hermeneutics of embeddedness or contextuality that requires us to look to context and how the sermon speaks to its interlocutors in their singular circumstances. It is through the particularities of the moment on the moonlit night in the mango grove that we, even as distant readers, are drawn into the power of the *sutta* and can glimpse the immeasurable.

## Notes

- 1 Heim (2018).
- 2 *Athasālinī* (hereafter: As) 21; *Samantapāsādikā* (Sp) i:21; *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* (Sv) i:19; *aneḷajjhāyānūsaya-carīyādharmitikkā suttā*. On commentarial theories of the Buddha's omniscience see also Endo (1997); ch 2. All translations are my own, using the Chattha Saṅgāyana editions (Igatpuri: Vipassana Research Institute, 1995).
- 3 *Vsuddhimagga* (Vism) VII.39 (cf. Sp i.117): *Yasmā paṇesa sabbevaṃpi sattānaṃ āsavaṃ jānāti, aṇṣoyam jānāti, caritaṃ jānāti, abhinuṃtiṃ jānāti, appariyākkhe mahārajjakkhe tikkhīndriye muddhāriye svākāre dvākāre suvīññāpāye duivīññāpāye bhābbe abhābbe satte jānāti, lasnassa sattdokkopi sabbahā vāḍo*. This passage is a commentary on the frequently mentioned ninefold list of the Buddha's qualities, one of which is that he is 'Knower of Worlds', listed in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (*Dṛṣṭya Nīkāya* [D] i:49) and referenced in its commentary (Sv i.146).
- 4 As 19; Sp i.19; Sv i.17: *Suvuttā cetha athā veyyājjhāsayānūlomena vituttā*. This passage is glossing 'sutta'.
- 5 *Abguttara Nīkāya* (A) ii.181: *Tathā aparimāṇā padā aparimāṇā byājanā aparimāṇā taṭhāgatassa dhāmmadevanā*.
- 6 There are four oceans: 'the ocean of *samsāra*, the ocean of water, the ocean of methods, and the ocean of knowledge' (*samsārasāgāro, jalasāgāro, nayasāgāro, nāpasāgāro*; As 10).
- 7 As 11: *asānīhveyyo appameyyo*. This metaphor gets extensive development in the *Athasālinī*.
- 8 'What is the ocean of methods? The *tipiṭaka* that is the Buddha's words' (*Kaṃamo nayasāgāro? Teṭṭhikāṃ buddhavaṇṇaṃ*, As 11).
- 9 *Majjhima Nīkāya* (M) i:37; A iii.285: 'The Dhamma is well-spoken by the Bhagavan, visible here and now, timeless, inviting one to come and see, leading forward, and to be experienced by the wise for themselves' (*svākāto bhagavaṇā dhāmmo sandhīthiko akālīko ehipassiko opameyyiko paccattāṃ vedhītho vīññāṭīti*). Buddhaghosa says that 'timeless' means that 'there is no time between the [spoken Dhamma] and the bearing of fruit' (Vism VII.80; *Sāvatthappakāsinī* [Spk] i:43).
- 10 On Derrida, see Almond (2004: 104). Ricoeur (1976: 92).
- 11 Almond (2004: 106) (citing Walsh 250). As Almond suggests, for Ibn 'Arabi, the Quran, as the "inexhaustible words" of God, 'has no single message but, rather, a variety of messages, each one gauged to the competence and situation of its reader'. To interpret the Quran is 'to participate in its expansion', as understanding the text draws out the meaning anticipated by God. In Ibn 'Arabi's own words: 'on God's part there are perpetual turnings of attentiveness and inexhaustible words'; thus 'the situation is new forever' (Almond 2004: 103, 108).

- 12 Gershom Scholem notes the widespread belief 'that the number of possible readings of the Torah was equal to the number of the 600,000 children of Israel who were present at Mount Sinai – in other words, that each single Jew approached the Torah by a path that he alone could follow' (Scholem 1974: 172).
- 13 Ricoeur (1976: 34).
- 14 Ricoeur (1976: 35).
- 15 Ricoeur (1976: 37).
- 16 Ricoeur (1976: 43).
- 17 Sv i.50.
- 18 Jonathan Walters (1999: 266–268) notes the 'fractured text' that is the product of scholars focusing on the doctrinal core, ignoring the literary qualities of 'the textual whole that has its own integrity, its own beauty, and its own meanings'.
- 19 Sv i.50: *athāvyāṅyamasampannassa buddhagayānābhivāsasīṭakassa imassa suttassa sukānāvagaharantānaṃ ... nidānaṃ bhāsītaṃ*. The smiles of the bathing place, palace and mansion are elaborated in poetic terms at Sv i.50, his commentary on the purpose and function of *nīdāna* as it is given in the first *sutta* of the first book of the Suttanta.
- 20 D i:49: *tipi so bhagavā arahaṃ samnāsanabuddho vijācarāsaṃpanno sugato lokavidā anuttaro purisadammasārathi sattha devamanassānaṃ buddho bhagavā ti*.
- 21 He gives the abbreviated commentary on this at Sv i.146, and refers to the detailed treatment at Vism VIII.2–67.
- 22 *Manorathapīṭavāṇī* (Mp) iv.205–206.
- 23 Sv i:50: *Caritāro hi suttanikkhepā – atūjjjhāsayo, parajjhāsayo, pucchāvāsiko, aṭṭhapparikko*.
- 24 Sv i.50–51.
- 25 As 55: *Pañcaviḍḍhī pucchā – adhiṭṭhāyānāpucchā, dīṭṭhasaṃsandanāpucchā, vīna-ticchadanāpucchā, ammittāpucchā, kathetukamyatāpucchāti*.
- 26 As 56.
- 27 A i:87; M i:294: *yoniṣo manasikāra and parato glosa*.
- 28 *Papañcasūdanā* (Ps) ii.346.
- 29 Ps ii.346 has *sappāyadhāmmassavaṇaṃ* (listening to the good Dhamma). A i:87; Mp i:157. It is noteworthy that the voice of another can also be a condition for wrong view: lack of careful attention and listening to those who do not teach the Good Dhamma results in wrong view (A i:87).
- 30 Sv i.176.
- 31 Vism 214 (VII.72): *sankhāsanā-pākāsanā-vivaraṇa-vibhājanā-mittāññāraṇa-paññāti-atthapadaśamāyogato sātthānaṃ*. Note that this follows very closely *Nettipakarāna* 8.
- 32 Vism 214 (VII.72): *akkhāra-padda-byūṭṭhānākāra-nirvūti-nīdāsa-sampattiyā sabyaññānaṃ*.
- 33 Vism 214 (VII.72): *dhāmmāniruttipajjissambhīdāvisayato sabyaññānaṃ*.
- 34 Consider, for example, part of his long gloss on 'Bhagavan': 'he is auspicious, fortunate, connected with blessings, full of analytic detail, adored, and his going to further births has been expelled, thus he is "Blessed" (Bhagavan)' (*Bhāgyavā bhagavāṇvā yūto, bhagehi ca vibhūtiyā; Bhattavā vanagānaṃ, bhāvesu bhagavā taṭo* [Sv i:34; Vism VII.57]). This must be read or spoken in Pali to see how the alliteration with the sounds *bha*, *ga* and *va* is generating these meanings which in turn will be further elaborated; the sounds produce further meaning. For more on *nirvūti* analysis in Sanskrit, see Kahrs (1998); ch. 3, where he offers a structurally quite similar example of a gloss on 'Bhairava' by Abhinavagupta. D i:46–86; for a wonderful translation of the *sutta* and several of its commentarial layers, see Bhikkhu Bodhi (2008). Note that all translations in the paper are my own.
- 36 D i:50; Bodhi (2008: 18).

- 37 D. i.85: *accayaṃ accayaṃ dīsvā yathādhamaṃ paṭikarosi*. Atwood (2008), is likely correct that the best way to translate *paṭikarosi* is ‘counteract’. For Buddhaghosa there is a sense that there is ‘begging pardon’ (*khamaṇesi*) in this (Sv i.236).
- 38 Sv i.140.
- 39 Sv i.133.
- 40 Sv i.138: *Raṇṇo taṅkhaṇeyeva puttassineho uppaḍḍhivā sakalasarāṇaṃ klobhervā aṭṭhi-mūḍḍhaṃ āhacca aṭṭhāsi*. *Tasmiṃ khane piṅguyamaṇṇāsi* – ‘nasyi jālepi mayhaṃ piṅguyamaṇṇāsi. *Kim viṣṣajjāpeṭha, devāṇi itaraṃ lekhaṃ hatthe ṭhapyeyṃsu*.  
Sv i.138: *bhāḍaputta, kṃp vadesi, tava daharāḍḍe anṅutiyā pīṭakā uṭṭhahi*. *Attha taṃ rodamaṇaṃ saṃhāpetuṃ asaḅbonā taṃ gāhevā vīṇchayathāne nisimassa tava piṅguyamaṇṇaṃ agamaṇṇsu*. *Piṭā te anṅuliyā mukhe ṭhapesi*. *Piṭakā mukheyyeva bhujji*. *Attha khaṃ piṭā tava sinehena taṃ lohitamissakaṃ pubbaṃ anuṭṭhobhivāva ajjhohari*. *Evaṃ-ṭpo te piṅguyamaṇṇo hi*. *So roḍhivā paridevīvā piṅguyamaṇṇaṃ akāsi*.
- 42 Sv i.140: *āyvaṇhi vēja piṭari upakkamaḍḍavasato paṭṭhāya* – ‘*niddaṃ okkamaṇṇāmi hi nimṭṭhamaṇṇeyeva akkhaṃ sutisataraḍḍabhāto vya kandaṇṇāyeva pabujji*.  
Sv i.140–141: *Jaṇca jaṇaṃ taḷākaṃ gāhetuṃ na sakkoti*, *ajjhoharivā gacchati*, *taṃ oghoti vuccati*, *evameva yaṃ pīṭavacanaṃ hadayaṃ gāhetuṃ na sakkoti*, *adhikaṃ hinvā anto asaṃhāhivā bahinikkhamaṇi*, *taṃ udāṇami vuccati*.
- 44 Sv i.145: *atthaṃ yassa vacanaṃ na soṭṭhāmo*, *so so eva kathesi*. *Yassa paṇaṇhi vacanaṃ soṭṭhāmo*, *esa nāgavasanaṃ pivivā jhito supannaṃ vya tuṇṇhūto*, *anatho vada me hi*.
- 45 Sv i.146: *Raṇṇiṇopi bhagavato gundaḍḍhaṃ sunantaṃ sakalasarāṇaṃ pañcavaṇṇāya piṅguyamaṇṇaṃ niraṇṇaṃ piṅguyamaṇṇo*. The five types of happiness are described in *Viṃs IV.94–99*.
- 46 Sv i.146: *‘mahārājā, tumhādsānaṇhi satenopi sahassenapi satasahassenopi piṅguyamaṇṇāya mayhaṃ satthano sabbesaṃ cittaṃ gāhevā’ katheṇuṃ thāmo ca balaṇca alhi*, *viṣṣattho upasankamaṇṇivā puccheyvāsi mahārājā’*.
- 47 Sv i.148: *Tato itthiyo nissāya purisānaṃ bhayaṃ nāma natthi*.
- 48 Sv i.148: *‘imassa raṇṇo imasmiṃ atthaḍḍāve maggaḥpalānaṃ upanissayo natthi*, *buddhā ca nāma upanissayaṃ dīsvāva dhammaṃ kathaṇi*. *Handāhaṃ, mahāgānaṃ samuḍḍātāpema*, *evaṇṇhi sati sattha kassacādeva upanissayena dhammaṃ desessāti*, *sā mahāgānaṃsa upakāṭṭhāya bhavissatthi*.
- 49 Sv i.149: *cittuṭṭāsabhayaṃ, nāyabhayaṃ, āramanabhayaṃ, otappabhayaṃ catubhiḅhaṃ bhayaṃ*. Buddhaghosa goes on to say that the ‘fear that is knowledge’ is the fear one has when one realises that the Buddha’s teachings about *sansāra* are correct.
- 50 Sv i.153: *Dullabhaṇṇi laddhā acchariyāṃ vā dīsvā piyāṇaṃ hānimitāḍḍhaṇaṃ anussaraṇaṃ nāma lokassa pakāṭṭhēva*.
- 51 Sv i.154: *assa cittaṃ hātāvā*.
- 52 Sv i.171: *Tena hi, mahārājā, suṇohi, sādhuḅkaṃ manasi karohi*, *bhāṣissāmi hi*.
- 53 Sv i.171–172.
- 54 Sv i.227: *buddhagayāṃ assaraṇasambhūtāya pañcavāḍḍhāya piṅguyamaṇṇo attano pasādaṃ āvkaronto upāsakattaṃ paṭivēdesi*.
- 55 Sv i.237–238.

## 11 *Mahābhārata* dialogues on *dharma* and devotion with Kṛṣṇa and Hanumān

*Bruce M Sullivan*

The most well-known, frequently memorised, and arguably most important dialogue in the Hindu religious tradition is to be found in the *Bhagavad Gītā* (*Mahābhārata* 6.23–40).<sup>1</sup> In this Chapter, I compare this dialogue with another with which it has many parallels and thematic resonances, the dialogue between Hanūmat (Hanūmān) and Bhīma from the *Aranyakaparvan* (*Mahābhārata* 3.146–53).<sup>2</sup> The critical edition of the *Mahābhārata* shows both passages to be represented throughout the manuscript tradition, and to have relatively few variant readings. Themes shared by these two dialogues include their presentations of Time as determining the quality of human life, Time’s manifestation in the four eons (*yugas*), the importance of following one’s *dharma* and devotional worship (*bhakti*) of the divine.

These two dialogues are parallel not only with regard to their themes but also their structure: each is an encounter of a Pāṇḍava warrior with a divine elder relative who instructs his junior as a *guru* instructs a disciple. That the disciple in both cases is a *ksatriya* means that the admonition to follow his *dharma* refers specifically to the warrior’s *dharma*. But the passages also repeatedly use the expression *svadharmā* (one’s own *dharma*), which will be significant as we shall see; *ksatriyadharmā* and *svadharmā* (even for a warrior) are not necessarily synonymous. Kṛṣṇa and Hanūmat both deliver their discourses in dazzling divine forms that overwhelm their Pāṇḍava disciples, who soon request in each case that the deity resume his prior form. The revelation of divinity is also a secret: Kṛṣṇa displays his divine form only to Arjuna despite the presence of many other warriors on the battlefield, while Hanūmat’s revelation occurs privately and he tells Bhīma to keep it a secret. Indeed, the parallels between these two dialogues are sufficiently numerous and close as to suggest to me that the Hanūmat-Bhīma dialogue is likely to have been patterned on the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

### Time and *yuga*

In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Arjuna is stunned by the vision of Kṛṣṇa’s Viśvartūpa form, which he associates with the eon-ending cataclysm: Arjuna tells Kṛṣṇa that he is ‘Seeing your mouths that bristle with fangs and resemble the fire at the end of the *yuga* ...’ (*Bhagavad Gītā* 11.25). Kṛṣṇa’s immediate response to Arjuna