Maha Kaccana

Master of Doctrinal Exposition

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Abbreviations
AN .... Anguttara Nikaya (by nipata and sutta)
Ap. .... Apadana (i = Therapadana)
Comy. .... Commentary
Dhp. .... Dhammapada
DN .... Digha Nikaya (by sutta)
MN .... Majjhima Nikaya (by sutta)
SN .... Samyutta Nikaya (by samyutta and sutta)
Thag. .... Theragatha
Ud. .... Udana (by chapter and sutta)
Vin. .... Vinayapitaka (by volume and page, PTS ed.)

1. Introduction

As a skilled and versatile teacher with mastery over pedagogic technique, the Buddha adopted different styles of presentation to communicate the Dhamma to his disciples. Often he would explain a teaching in detail (vittharena). Having introduced his topic with a short statement, technically called the uddesa or synopsis, he would then embark on the detailed exposition, the niddesa, also called the analysis, the vibhanga. In this stage of the discourse he would break the subject introduced by the synopsis down into its component strands, define each strand in turn, and draw out its implications, sometimes attaching a simile to illustrate the message of the discourse. Finally, he would restate the introductory declaration as a conclusion (niggamana), now supported by the entire weight of the foregoing analysis.

On other occasions, however, the Buddha would not teach in detail. Instead, he would present the Dhamma briefly (sankhittena), offering only a short, sometimes even cryptic, statement charged with a profound but highly concentrated meaning. The Buddha did not teach the Doctrine in this way in order to conceal an esoteric message or because he delighted in obscurantism. He used this technique because it sometimes proved a more effective means of shaking and transforming the minds of his auditors than would have been possible by a full elaboration. Although direct explanation of the meaning might have transmitted information more quickly, such a method might not have produced the lasting and edifying effect the Dhamma is intended to instil. But by requiring the disciples to reflect upon the meaning and to tease it out by sustained inquiry, as well as by mutual discussion, the Buddha ensured that when the disciples did come to understand his utterance, its message would penetrate deep into the silent recesses of the mind.

While such brief teachings would escape the understanding of the great majority of the monks, the mature disciples with sharp faculties of wisdom could readily fathom their meaning. Under such circumstances the ordinary monks, reluctant to trouble their Master with requests for explanation, would turn for clarification to the senior disciples whose comprehension of the Dhamma had already been confirmed by the Blessed One. So important did this function become in the early Buddhist Sangha that the Buddha himself established, in the ranks of his most eminent disciples, a separate category called "the foremost of those who analyze in detail the meaning of what was stated (by me) in brief" (aggam sankhittena bhasitassa vittharena attham vibhajantanam). The bhikkhu who was assigned to this position by the Master was the Venerable Maha Kaccana — Kaccana the Great, so called to distinguish him from others who bore the common brahmanical clan name of Kaccayana (shortened to Kaccana).[1]

After his ordination as a bhikkhu, the Venerable Maha Kaccana usually resided in his homeland of Avanti, a remote region to the southwest of the Middle Country where the Buddha dwelt, and thus he did not spend as much time in the Blessed One's presence as some of the other great disciples did, such as Sariputta, Maha

Moggallana, and Ananda. For this reason we do not find, in the records of the Sutta Pitaka, that the Venerable Maha Kaccana figured as prominently in Sangha affairs and in the Buddha's ministry as the aforementioned elders. Nevertheless, on account of the astuteness of his intellect, the profundity of his insight into the Dhamma, and his skill as a speaker, whenever Maha Kaccana did join the Buddha for extended periods, the other monks frequently turned to him for help in illuminating the meaning of brief statements of the Buddha that had been causing them bafflement. As a result, we find in the Pali canon a sheaf of discourses spoken by the Venerable Maha Kaccana that occupy a place of primary importance. These texts, always methodically refined and analytically precise, demonstrate with astounding lucidity the far-ranging implications and practical bearings of several brief statements of the Buddha that would otherwise, without his explication of them, escape our understanding.

2. The Samsaric Background

As in the case of all the Buddha's chief disciples, the Venerable Maha Kaccana's elevation to a position of pre-eminence in the Sangha was the flowering of a seed that had been planted long ago in the rolling cycles of samsara, the round of rebirths, and had been brought to gradual maturity over countless lives. The biographical sketch of Maha Kaccana[2] relates the story of the future disciple's original aspiration to a leading role in the Sangha. According to this account, the aspiration was formed 100,000 aeons in the past, during the Dispensation of the Buddha Padumuttara. At that time Kaccana had been reborn into a wealthy householder family. One day he went to hear the Buddha preach, and on that occasion, during his sermon, the Buddha appointed a certain bhikkhu as the foremost of those who can analyze in detail what had been stated by him in brief. The young householder was deeply impressed by the monk on whom this honor was bestowed, and the thought occurred to him: "Great indeed is that bhikkhu, in that the Teacher praises him so. I ought to attain such a position in the Dispensation of some future Buddha."

But to attain such a lofty status in the Dispensation, the generation of a wish is by no means sufficient. The aspiration must be supported by a base of meritorious deeds. Thus the young householder invited the Teacher to receive alms at his home, and for a full week he bestowed lavish offerings on the Buddha and his company of monks. At the week's end he prostrated himself at the Blessed One's feet and voiced his heart's desire: "Venerable sir, as the fruit of this offering I do not wish for any other achievement but this: that in the future, in the Dispensation of a Buddha, I might obtain the same position as the bhikkhu you appointed to that position last week." Then Lord Padumuttara, looking into the future with his unimpeded knowledge of a Fully Enlightened One, saw that the youth's aspiration would be fulfilled. He told him: "Young man, in the future, after 100,000 aeons have elapsed, a Buddha named Gotama will arise. In his Dispensation you will be the foremost of those who can analyze in detail the meaning of what the Buddha has stated in brief."

The Apadana relates that in this same past life, Kaccana had built for the Buddha Padumuttara a stupa with a stone seat, which he had covered with gold; he had the stupa embellished with a jewelled parasol and an ornamental fan.[3] According to the above text, it was after he made this offering that the Lord Padumuttara predicted his future attainment to the position of a great disciple in the Dispensation of the Buddha Gotama. In this prediction the Blessed One also makes other prophecies concerning Kaccana's future sojourn in samsara, which from our temporal perspective would now constitute his past history. The Buddha foretold that as the fruit of his meritorious gifts, the householder would become a lord of the gods (devinda) for thirty aeons, exercising rulership over the gods. Having returned to the human world, he would become a world monarch (cakkavatti-raja) named Pabhassara, whose body would emit rays of light all around. He would spend his next to last existence in the Tusita heaven, and passing away from there, he would be reborn in a brahman family with the clan name Kaccana. In that life he would attain arahantship and be appointed a great disciple by the Buddha.

A later section of the Apadana gives a somewhat different account of Maha Kaccana's original aspiration to great discipleship.[4] In this version, at the time of the Buddha Padumuttara, the future disciple was an ascetic living in seclusion in the Himalayas. One day, while traveling through the sky by supernormal power, he passed over a populated area and saw the Victorious One down below. He descended, approached the Master to listen to the Dhamma, and heard him praise a certain bhikkhu (whose name was also Kaccana) as the chief among those who can elaborate on brief statements. Thereupon the ascetic, amazed by this unexpected encounter, went to the Himalayas, collected a bouquet of flowers, and, quickly returning to the assembly, presented them to the Buddha. At that point he formed the aspiration to become the chief expositor of the Dhamma in the Dispensation of some future Buddha. The Lord Padumuttara then prophesied that his aspiration would be fulfilled 100,000 aeons later when the Buddha Gotama arises in the world.

In this same series of verses Maha Kaccana states that as a result of his offering to the Buddha he never took rebirth thereafter in the nether world — in the hells, the animal realm, or the sphere of ghosts — but was always reborn either in the world of gods or in the human realm. Also, when he took rebirth as a human being, he was always reborn into the upper two social classes — among nobles or brahmans — and never into low-class families.

One important incident, which determined a particular feature of the great disciple's physical appearance during his final existence, took place during the Dispensation of the Buddha Kassapa, the immediate predecessor of Gotama in the lineage of Enlightened Ones. At the time of the Buddha Kassapa, Kaccana had taken rebirth in a family of Benares. After the Lord Kassapa's Parinibbana he offered a precious golden brick for the construction of a golden stupa for the Buddha. On presenting it he made the wish: "Whenever I am reborn, may my body always have a golden hue." As a result of this, when he was reborn during the time of our Buddha, his body was

endowed with a beautiful golden hue, which deeply impressed those who beheld it. [5] In one case, which we will discuss below (see pp.13-15), this physical attribute of the elder led to a bizarre series of events.

3. Kaccana's Conversion to the Dhamma

In his last existence, when the Buddha Gotama appeared in the world, Kaccana was born as the son of the chaplain (purohita) in the city of Ujjeni, the capital of Avanti, to the southwest of the Middle Country.[6] His father's personal name was Tiritivaccha, his mother's Candima,[7] and they were of the Kaccayana clan, one of the oldest and most highly respected lines of brahmans. Since he was born with a golden colored body, his parents exclaimed that he had brought his name along with him at birth, and they named him "Kañcana," which means "golden." As a brahman and the son of the court chaplain, when Kañcana grew up he studied the Three Vedas, the traditional sacred scriptures of the brahmans, and after his father's death he succeeded him in the position of court chaplain.

The king of Avanti at the time that Kaccana became chaplain was Candappajjota, Pajjota the Violent. He was known by this epithet because of his explosive and unpredictable temper. When King Candappajjota heard that the Buddha had arisen in the world, he assembled his ministers and asked those who were so capable to go and invite the Blessed One to visit Ujjeni. The ministers all agreed that the only one who was truly capable of bringing the Buddha to Avanti was the chaplain Kaccana. The king therefore assigned him to go on this mission, but Kaccana laid down a condition before he would accede to the king's request: he would go only if he would be permitted to become a monk after meeting the Enlightened One. The king, ready to accept any condition in exchange for a meeting with the Tathagata, gave his consent. Kaccana set out accompanied by seven other courtiers. When they met the Master, he taught them the Dhamma, and at the end of the discourse Kaccana and his seven companions all attained arahantship together with the four analytical knowledges (patisambhida-ñana). The Buddha granted them ordination simply by welcoming them into the Sangha with the words, "Come, bhikkhus."[8]

The new bhikkhu, now the Venerable Maha Kaccana, then began to praise the splendors of Ujjeni to the Buddha. The Master realized that his new disciple wanted him to travel to his native land, but he replied that it would be sufficient for Kaccana to go himself, as he was already capable of teaching the Dhamma and of inspiring confidence in King Candappajjota.

In the course of their return journey the party of monks arrived at a town named Telapanali, where they stopped to gather alms. In that town lived two maidens, merchants' daughters of different families. One girl was beautiful, with lovely long hair, but both her parents had expired and she lived in poverty, looked after by her governess. The other girl was wealthy, but was afflicted with an illness that had

caused her to lose her hair. Repeatedly she had tried to persuade the poor girl to sell her hair so she could make a wig but the poor girl had consistently refused.
Now, when the poor girl saw the Venerable Maha Kaccana and his fellow monks walking for alms, their bowls as empty as if they had just been washed, she felt a sudden surge of faith and devotion arise in her towards the elder, and she decided to offer alms to the party of bhikkhus. However, as she had no wealth, the only way she could obtain money to buy provisions was to sell her hair to the rich girl. This time, as the hair came to the rich girl already cut, she paid only eight coins for it. With these eight coins the poor girl had almsfood prepared for the eight bhikkhus, using one coin for each portion. After she had presented the alms, as an immediate fruit of the meritorious deed, her full head of hair instantly grew back to its original length.
When the Venerable Maha Kaccana arrived back in Ujjeni, he reported this incident to King Candappajjota. The king had the girl conveyed to his palace and at once appointed her his chief queen. From that time onwards the king greatly honored Maha Kaccana. Many people of Ujjeni who heard the elder preach gained faith in the Dhamma and went forth under him as monks. Thus the entire city became (in the words of the commentary) "a single blaze of saffron robes, a blowing back and forth of the banner of sages." The queen, who was exceedingly devoted to the elder, built for him a dwelling in the Golden Grove Park.

So says the Anguttara Commentary, but the Pali canon itself suggests that the Sangha was not as well established in Avanti as the commentator would lead us to believe. This fact can be discerned from a story involving the Venerable Maha Kaccana that is reported in the Mahavagga of the Vinaya Pitaka.[9]

When this story unfolds, the elder was dwelling in Avanti at his favorite residence, the Osprey's Haunt on Precipice Mountain. A lay disciple of his named Sona Kutikanna came to him and expressed the wish to go forth under him as a monk. But Kaccana, seeing perhaps that the householder was not yet ready to take such a big step, discouraged him with the words: "Difficult, Sona, is it to sleep alone, to eat one meal a day, and to observe celibacy for as long as life lasts. While remaining a householder, you should apply yourself to the Buddha's teaching, and at the proper times you may sleep alone, eat one meal a day, and observe celibacy."

With these words Sona's enthusiasm for ordination subsided. Some time later, however, the urge was rekindled, and he approached the Venerable Maha Kaccana with the same request. A second time the elder discouraged him, and a second time Sona's desire for ordination abated. When Sona approached him for the third time and asked for ordination, Maha Kaccana gave him the "going forth" (pabbajja), that is, the initial ordination as a novice (samanera).

During the Buddha's time it seems to have been customary to grant mature men, already endowed with faith in the Dhamma and well acquainted with its tenets, both ordinations in immediate succession. The novice ordination would be given first, and then right afterwards the ceremony of higher ordination (upasampada) would be

performed, making the postulant a bhikkhu, a full member of the Sangha. But at the time that the above incident took place Avanti was short of monks, being a region quite far from the Buddha's own missionary rounds and from the other centers of Buddhist activity. According to the disciplinary regulations that were still in effect, the higher ordination had to be performed by a chapter of at least ten bhikkhus (dasavagga-bhikkhusangha). But such was the situation in Avanti that the Venerable Maha Kaccana could not easily find even nine other bhikkhus to confer the higher ordination on Sona. It was only three years later that the elder could, with trouble and difficulty, convene an assembly of ten bhikkhus from different places in the region to give Sona the higher ordination.

When the Venerable Sona had completed his first rains retreat as a bhikkhu, the wish arose in him to pay a visit to the Buddha. He had heard many times the highest praise of the Blessed One, his lord and refuge, yet he had never seen the Master face to face, and now the desire to do so had become irresistible. He went to his preceptor to ask for his permission to make the long journey to Savatthi, where the Buddha was residing. Not only did the Venerable Maha Kaccana applaud his disciple's desire to see the Buddha, but he asked Sona to convey to the Lord an appeal that certain monastic regulations be relaxed to suit the different social and geographical conditions that prevailed in Avanti and in other border regions.

When the Venerable Sona came to the Buddha and explained his preceptor's request, the Master readily agreed. First, to determine what districts should count as border regions, the Buddha defined the boundaries of the Middle Country, wherein the original regulations were to remain binding. Then he announced the revised versions of the rules that would apply in the border regions, though not in the Middle Country. These revised rules are the following: (1) The higher ordination would not require ten bhikkhus but could now be given by a chapter of five, one of whom must be a master of the Vinaya, the monastic discipline. (2) Monks are allowed to use sandals with thick linings, as the ground in those regions is rough and hard on the feet. (3) Monks are permitted to bathe frequently, as the people of Avanti attach great importance to bathing. (4) Sheepskins and goatskins, etc., could be used as coverlets. (5) Robes could be accepted on behalf of a monk who has left the district, and the ten days' period during which (under the rule) an extra robe could be kept would begin only when the robe actually reaches his hands.

4. Various Incidents

Neither the suttas nor the commentaries offer us abundant biographical information about the Venerable Maha Kaccana's life in the Sangha. They focus, rather, on his role as teacher, especially on his detailed expositions of the Buddha's brief statements. From the settings (nidana) to the suttas in which Maha Kaccana appears, we can infer that after his ordination he spent most of his time in Avanti. Usually, it seems, he dwelt quietly in seclusion, though when occasion arose he gave instruction to others. Periodically he would go to visit the Buddha at his main places of

residence, and it seems likely that he also sometimes accompanied him on his preaching tours. The three suttas of the Majjhima Nikaya in which Maha Kaccana appears in the role of expositor open at three different locales — in Kapilavatthu, Rajagaha, and Savatthi. As these cities were, relative to the geographical extent of the Ganges Valley, widely separated from each other, and as all were far from Avanti, this suggests either that the Venerable Maha Kaccana spent long periods accompanying the Buddha on his journeys or that he would travel to the different monastic centers where the Buddha resided when he heard that the Master intended to stay there for some time.

We do not find in the texts indications that Maha Kaccana entered into close friendships with the other leading monks, as for instance Sariputta, Maha Moggallana, and Ananda did with one another. He seems to be one who generally lived aloof, though he did not place a strict emphasis on seclusion in the manner of one like the Venerable Maha Kassapa, nor did he seem especially stern in his asceticism.[10] He was ready to assume teaching duties on request, as we shall see, but we find that he always appears in the suttas in the role of expositor and elucidator of the Dhamma to others. We do not see the Venerable Maha Kaccana engage in person-to-person dialogues with other monks, as we see in the case of all the above-mentioned elders; neither do we see him address inquiries to the Buddha, as even the wisest of the bhikkhus, the Venerable Sariputta, often did. His absence is conspicuous in the Mahagosinga Sutta (MN 32), wherein the other outstanding disciples gather on a full-moon night to discuss the ideal bhikkhu who could illuminate the forest. On that occasion six great elders — Sariputta, Moggallana, Ananda, Maha Kassapa, Anuruddha, and Revata — each describe the ideal bhikkhu according to their particular dispositions, and at the end the Buddha offers his own picture of the most worthy monk. Surely if Maha Kaccana was present on that occasion he would have described such a monk as one skilled in the detailed exposition of brief sayings. Maha Kaccana did grant ordination, as we saw above in the case of Sona, though his pupils were probably not very numerous, despite the words of the Anguttara Commentary. One of his pupils was the bhikkhu Isidatta, who even while very young had impressed many of the older monks with his incisive replies to difficult questions on the Dhamma.[11] There can be little doubt that Isidatta's adroitness in tackling subtle points of doctrine reflects the rigorous training he must have received from the Venerable Maha Kaccana.

On one occasion when the Venerable Maha Kaccana visited the Buddha he received special homage from Sakka, the king of the gods.[12] This occurred when the Buddha was dwelling at the Eastern Park at Savatthi, in the Mansion of Migara's Mother. The Lord was sitting surrounded by a company of great disciples on the occasion of the pavarana, the ceremony of mutual criticism among the monks which ends the annual rains retreat. Because Maha Kaccana regularly used to visit the Buddha in order to hear the Dhamma, coming even from a long distance, the other chief elders would always reserve a seat for him in case he should unexpectedly turn up.

On this occasion Sakka, along with his celestial retinue, drew near to the holy assembly and prostrated himself before the Blessed One. Since he did not see the Venerable Maha Kaccana, he thought to himself: "It would be good indeed if the noble elder would arrive." Just at that moment Maha Kaccana approached and took his seat. When Sakka beheld him, he grasped him firmly by the ankles, expressed his joy over the elder's arrival, and honored him with gifts of scents and flowers. Some of the younger monks were upset and complained that Sakka was being partial in his display of reverence, but the Buddha reproved them with the words: "Monks, those monks who, like my son Maha Kaccana, guard the doors of the senses, are beloved both among gods and humans." He then pronounced the following stanza of the Dhammapada (v.94):

"Even the gods hold him dear,
Whose senses are subdued
Like horses trained well by a charioteer,
Whose pride is destroyed,
And who is free from corruptions."

That the Venerable Maha Kaccana was actually one who devoted much attention to the mastery of the sense faculties is borne out by his discourses, which (as we shall see below) often emphasize the need for guarding "the doors of the senses."
The commentaries record two curious series of events, both of which stemmed from the impression that the elder's physical form made on the minds of others. One of these, reported in the Dhammapada Commentary,[13] involved a young man named Soreyya, who was the son of the treasurer in the city of the same name. One day the youth Soreyya was driving out of the city in a carriage, en route to a bathing spot together with an intimate friend and a merry band of companions. Just as they were leaving the city the Venerable Maha Kaccana was standing at the city gate, putting on his outer robe before entering to walk on alms round. When the youth Soreyya beheld the golden-hued body of the elder, he thought to himself: "Oh, that this elder might become my wife! Or may the hue of my wife's body become like the hue of his body!"

At the very moment this thought passed through his mind, Soreyya was instantly transformed from a man into a woman. Startled by this inexplicable change of sex, he jumped out of the carriage and fled before the others could notice what had occurred. Gradually he made his way to the city of Takkasila. His companions searched for him in vain and reported his strange disappearance to his parents. When all attempts to trace him proved futile, his parents concluded that he had died and they had the funeral rites performed.

Meanwhile the woman Soreyya, on reaching Takkasila, met the son of the city's treasurer, who fell in love with her and took her as his wife. In the first years of their marriage she gave birth to two sons. Previously, while a man, Soreyya had fathered

two sons through his wife in his native city. Thus he was the parent of four children, two as a father and two as a mother.

One day the former intimate friend of Soreyya came to Takkasila on some personal business. Lady Soreyya saw him in the street and recognized him. She called him into her house and revealed to him the secret of her mysterious metamorphosis from a man into a woman. The friend proposed that Soreyya should offer alms to the Venerable Maha Kaccana, who was living close by, and then beg pardon from him for having given rise to such a lewd thought.

The friend then went to the elder and invited him to come to the lady's house for alms on the following day. When the Venerable Maha Kaccana arrived, the friend brought Lady Soreyya into his presence, informed him of what had happened long ago, and asked him to pardon her for that transgression. As soon as the elder uttered the words "I pardon you," Lady Soreyya was transformed back into a man. Shaken out of all worldly complacency by this double metamorphosis, Soreyya determined that he could never again lead the household life. He took ordination as a bhikkhu under Maha Kaccana, and after a short time attained arahantship together with the supernormal powers.

Vassakara, the chief minister of Magadha under the parricide King Ajatasattu, was less fortunate, though his misfortune sprang entirely from his own pride and obstinacy and not from some force outside his control. The commentary to the Majjhima Nikaya reports that one day, when Vassakara saw the Venerable Maha Kaccana coming down from the mountain Vulture Peak, he exclaimed: "He looks just like a monkey!"[14] Such an exclamation seems strange, particularly as Maha Kaccana is described in the texts as being especially handsome and graceful in his physical presence. Whatever the reason for the remark, news of the incident spread and eventually reached the Buddha. The Blessed One said that if Vassakara should go to the elder and beg his pardon, all would be well; but if he does not ask pardon he would be reborn as a monkey in the Bamboo Grove in Rajagaha. This was reported back to Vassakara. As the chief minister of the kingdom, he must have been too proud to beg forgiveness from a mendicant monk. Thus, reflecting that whatever the Buddha says must turn out to be true, he resigned himself to his future fate and made preparations for his next existence by planting trees in the Bamboo Grove and setting up a guard to protect the wild life there. It is said that some time after his death a monkey was born in the Bamboo Grove who would draw near when one called out "Vassakara."

The circumstances of the Venerable Maha Kaccana's death are not recorded in the texts, but at the end of the Madhura Sutta (discussed below) Maha Kaccana declares that the Buddha has attained Parinibbana, so it is evident from this that he himself outlived his Master.

5. The Elaborator of Brief Statements

The Buddha honored the Venerable Maha Kaccana by naming him his foremost disciple in the ability to provide detailed expositions of his own brief statements. Maha Kaccana earned this distinguished title principally because of eight suttas found in the Nikayas: three in the Majjhima, three in the Samyutta, and two in the Anguttara. Besides these, we find in the Nikayas several other discourses that the Venerable Maha Kaccana spoke without basing himself upon a brief utterance of the Buddha as his text. All these discourses, taken together, have a uniform and distinctive flavor, revealing the qualities of the mind from which they sprang. They are thorough, balanced, careful and cautious, substantial in content, meticulous in expression, incisive, well conceived, and well rounded. They are also, admittedly, a little dry — unemotional and unsentimental — but with no wastage of words they never fail to lead us straight to the heart of the Dhamma.

The discourses of Maha Kaccana are bare of the rhetorical devices utilized by other renowned exponents of the Dhamma: we find in them no similes, parables, or stories; their language is plain but impeccably precise. In this respect his sermons contrast with those of the Buddha, the Venerable Sariputta, and the Venerable Ananda, all of whom were skilled in devising striking similes that impress the formal message of the discourse indelibly on the auditor's mind. The Venerable Maha Kaccana's discourses, it seems, owe their effectiveness entirely to their content and analytical exactitude rather than to literary embellishment.

As an analyst of the Dhamma, the Venerable Maha Kaccana most closely approximates to the Venerable Sariputta, and indeed the discourses of both exhibit similar traits. The difference between them is principally a matter of emphasis rather than of substance. Sariputta's analytic disquisitions, as seen for example in the Sammaditthi Sutta and the Mahahatthipadopama Sutta,[15] begin with a specified topic and then develop by dissecting that topic into its component strands and exploring each component in turn (often with still finer subdivisions). Within his own specialized sphere Maha Kaccana starts, not with a general topic, but with a short utterance of the Buddha, often one that is intuitive, poetic, or exhortatory in character. His exposition then unfolds by reformulating the gnomic or inspirational phrasing of the Buddha's statement in ways that link it up with established, more familiar frameworks of doctrine, usually with the six spheres of sense and the practice of sense restraint. Yet, despite their differences in emphasis, both these great disciples share a predilection for systematic analysis and both display the same concern for razor-sharp precision in their thinking.

For this reason, no doubt, within the Theravada tradition each has come to be regarded as the father of a particular methodology for interpreting the Dhamma, exegetical systems that rose to prominence in the early centuries of Buddhist intellectual history. Sariputta is, of course, viewed as the original systematizer of the Abhidhamma, which (according to tradition) he elaborated in detail based on the

outlines that the Buddha taught him during his periodic visits to the human realm while expounding the Abhidhamma to the devas in the Tavatimsa heaven.[16] Maha Kaccana is regarded as the author of a method of exposition embedded in two post-canonical works that exerted an important influence on the early Buddhist commentators. About these two works — the Petakopadesa and the Nettippakarana — we shall have more to say below.

(1) The Majjhima Nikaya

The first sutta in the Majjhima Nikaya in which the Venerable Maha Kaccana plays a prominent role is the Madhupindika Sutta (MN 18), the Honeyball Discourse, a title assigned to it by the Buddha himself — perhaps a unique instance of the Buddha's conferring a title upon a sutta spoken by a disciple.

The sutta opens on an occasion when the Buddha is dwelling at the city of Kapilavatthu in his native land, the Sakyan republic. One day, while the Buddha is sitting in meditation in Nigrodha's Park, an arrogant Sakyan named Dandapani approaches him and asks him, in a deliberately discourteous tone: "What does the recluse assert, what does he proclaim?" The Buddha replies with an answer intended to underscore his own refusal to be dragged into the type of contention that his questioner wants to provoke:

"Friend, I assert and proclaim such (a teaching) that one does not quarrel with anyone in the world with its gods, its Maras and its Brahmas, in this generation with its recluses and brahmans, its princes and its people; such (a teaching) that perceptions no more underlie that brahman who abides detached from sensual pleasures, without perplexity, shorn of worry, free from craving for any kind of being."

The reply is utterly incomprehensible to Dandapani, who raises his eyebrows in bewilderment and departs. Later, in the evening, the Buddha informs the bhikkhus what had transpired. One monk inquires: "What exactly is the teaching that the Blessed One proclaims whereby one can avoid all quarrels and, at the same time, be free from the pernicious influence of craving?" The Buddha answers with the following pithy statement:

"Bhikkhus, as to the source through which perceptions and notions tinged by mental proliferation beset a person: if nothing is found there to delight in, welcome, and hold to, this is the end of the underlying tendencies to lust, aversion, views, doubt, conceit, the desire for being, and ignorance; this is the end of reliance on rods and weapons, of quarrels, brawls, disputes, recrimination, malice, and false speech; here these evil unwholesome states cease without remainder."

Having said this, before the monks even have time to ask for an explanation, the Lord rises from his seat and enters his dwelling.

After the Buddha has retired, the bhikkhus ponder his statement, and realizing that they cannot understand it on their own, they consider: "The Venerable Maha Kaccana is praised by the Teacher and esteemed by his wise companions in the holy life. He is capable of expounding the detailed meaning. Suppose we went to him and asked him the meaning of this."

When they approach Maha Kaccana and make their request, he first chides them for coming to him rather than asking the Buddha to clarify it. To come to him when the Blessed One is present, he says, is like seeking heartwood among the branches and leaves of a great tree after passing over the trunk. The Blessed One is the one who knows and sees; he is vision, he is knowledge, he has become the Dhamma, become the holy one; he is the sayer, the proclaimer, the elucidator of meaning, the giver of the Deathless, the Lord of the Dhamma, the Tathagata.

The bhikkhus, however, while admitting that the elder's reproach is warranted, still insist that he himself is able to explain the meaning. Finally the elder consents and then gives the following explanation of the Buddha's brief statement:

"Dependent on the eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as condition there is feeling. What one feels, that one perceives. What one perceives, that one thinks about. What one thinks about, that one mentally proliferates. With what one has mentally proliferated as the source, perceptions and notions tinged by mental proliferation beset a person with respect to past, future, and present forms cognizable through the eye."

The same pattern is repeated for each of the other sense bases. The elder then connects the entire exposition with the principle of conditionality, showing how each term in the series arises in dependence on the preceding term and ceases with the cessation of its predecessor.

This passage, rich in implications, offers a penetrative account of the process by which the deluded mind becomes overwhelmed by its own imaginary creations — its distorted perceptions and mental constructs. The sequence begins as a straightforward description of the conditioned genesis of cognition: each type of consciousness arises in dependence on its respective sense faculty and object. The process unfolds in the natural order through contact, feeling, and perception as far as the stage of thinking. But in the unenlightened worldling, who lacks correct insight into the true nature of things, at the stage of thought cognition is vitiated by the influence of papañca, a difficult Pali word best rendered as "conceptual proliferation."[17] Instead of correctly comprehending the objects of perception, the deluded mind, infiltrated by papañca, spins out a complex mental commentary which embellishes things with

the erroneous notions of "mine," "I," and "my self." Thereby the person is overrun by "perceptions and notions tinged by mental proliferation" (papañcasaññasankha). The underlying springs of this conceptual proliferation are three defilements: craving (tanha), conceit (mana), and wrong view (ditthi). When these three gain control of the thought process, cognition runs wild, churning up a host of delusive ideas, obsessions, and passions which overpower the subject and reduce him to their hapless victim. This process of sense perception, as Maha Kaccana shows, is "the source through which perceptions and notions tinged by mental proliferation beset a person," referred to by the Buddha in his brief statement. When there is no delighting in the process of perception by way of craving, which elaborates upon experience in terms of the notion "mine"; when there is no welcoming it by way of conceit, which introduces the notion "I am"; when there is no holding to it by way of wrong view, which proliferates in notions of a self, then all the underlying tendencies to the defilements will be uprooted, and one can dwell in the world as a liberated sage, holy and wise, without quarrels, conflicts, and disputes.

Such was the explanation of the Buddha's words that the Venerable Maha Kaccana offered to the monks. Afterwards the monks approached the Blessed One and told him what Maha Kaccana had said. The Buddha replied with words of the highest praise for his disciple: "Maha Kaccana is wise, bhikkhus, Maha Kaccana has great wisdom. If you had asked me the meaning of this, I would have explained it to you in the same way that Maha Kaccana has explained it. Such is the meaning of this, and so you should remember it."

Just then the Venerable Ananda, standing nearby, added a memorable simile to highlight the beauty of Maha Kaccana's exposition: "Just as if a man exhausted by hunger and weakness came upon a honeyball, in the course of eating it he would find a sweet delectable flavor; so too, venerable sir, any able bhikkhu, in the course of scrutinizing with wisdom the meaning of this discourse on the Dhamma, would find satisfaction and confidence of mind." On the basis of this simile the Buddha named the discourse the Madhupindika Sutta, "The Honeyball Discourse."

The other two Majjhima Nikaya suttas featuring Maha Kaccana, and one in the Anguttara Nikaya, conform to this same stereotyped pattern: the Buddha makes a brief statement, gets up, and enters his dwelling; the monks approach the Venerable Maha Kaccana to ask for an explanation of the meaning; he reprimands them for coming to him rather than asking the Lord himself, but finally he complies with their request and elucidates the Buddha's utterance; the monks return to the Buddha and repeat his analysis, which the Master applauds with words of praise for the elder. The Maha Kaccana Bhaddekaratta Sutta (MN 133) centers around the famous Bhaddekaratta poem, a set of verses spoken by the Buddha that had been circulating within the Sangha. The poem stresses the need to abandon longing for the past and anticipation of the future; it calls instead for urgent effort to marshal one's energies for penetrating with insight the present reality itself. Many of the monks had learned

the poem by heart, along with the Buddha's own exegesis of it, and had been using it as an inspiration for their meditation practice and as a theme for sermons.[18]
One bhikkhu named Samiddhi, however, did not know even the poem, let alone its exegesis. One day a benevolent deity, taking compassion on him, came to him in the early morning and urged him to learn the Bhaddekaratta poem and exposition. The Venerable Samiddhi went to the Buddha and asked him to teach him the Bhaddekaratta summary and its analysis. The Buddha recited the poem:

"Let not a person revive the past
Or on the future build his hopes,
For the past has been left behind
And the future has not been reached.
Instead with insight let him see
Each presently arisen state;
Let him know that and be sure of it,
Invincibly, unshakeably.
Today the effort must be made;
Tomorrow Death may come, who knows?
No bargain with Mortality
Can keep him and his hoards away.
But one who dwells thus ardently,
Relentlessly, by day, by night —
It is he, the Peaceful Sage has said,
Who has one fortunate attachment."

Then the Blessed One rose from his seat and entered his dwelling.

Samiddhi, and the other monks present at the time, went to the Venerable Maha Kaccana in search of an explanation. As in the prelude to the Madhupindika Sutta, Maha Kaccana at first remonstrates with them, but then agrees to share his understanding of the poem. Taking up the first two lines as the theme of his exposition, he explicates each by way of the six sense bases.

One "revives the past" when one recollects the eye and forms seen in the past, dwelling upon them with desire and lust; so too with the other five sense faculties and their objects. One "builds up hope upon the future" when one sets one's heart on experiencing in the future sense objects one has not yet encountered. One who does not bind himself by desire and lust to memories of past sensory experience and yearnings for future sensory experience is one who "does not revive the past or build up hope upon the future." Similarly, one whose mind is shackled by lust to the present sense faculties and their objects is called "one vanquished in regard to presently arisen states," while one whose mind is not bound to them by lust is called "one invincible in regard to presently arisen states."

Again, the monks return to the Buddha, who says "if you had asked me the meaning of this, I would have explained it to you in the same way that Maha Kaccana has explained it."

The third Majjhima sutta, the Uddesavibhanga Sutta (MN 138), opens with the Buddha announcing to the monks that he will teach them a summary (uddesa) and an exposition (vibhanga). He recites the summary thus:

"Bhikkhus, a bhikkhu should examine things in such a way that while he is examining them, his consciousness is not distracted and scattered externally nor stuck internally, and by not clinging he does not become agitated. If his consciousness is not distracted and scattered externally nor stuck internally, and if by not clinging he does not become agitated, then for him there is no origination of suffering — of birth, aging, and death in the future."

Then, as on prior occasions, he rises from his seat and retires, without giving the exposition — a strange omission, as he had announced that he would teach the exposition! But the monks do not feel lost, for the Venerable Maha Kaccana is in their midst, and after his usual protest, he begins his analysis.

He proceeds by taking up each phrase in the Buddha's summary and dissecting it in minute detail. How is consciousness "distracted and scattered externally"? When a monk has seen a form with the eye (or has experienced some other sense object with its corresponding faculty), "if his consciousness follows after the sign of form, is tied and shackled by gratification in the sign of form, is fettered by the fetter of gratification in the sign of form, then his consciousness is called 'distracted and scattered externally.' " But if, on seeing a form with the eye, etc., the monk does not follow after the sign of form, does not become tied and shackled to the sign of form, then his consciousness is called 'not distracted and scattered externally.' "
His mind is "stuck internally" if he attains any of the four jhanas, the meditative absorptions, and his mind becomes "tied and shackled" by gratification in the superior rapture, bliss, peace, and equanimity of the jhana. If he can attain the jhanas without becoming attached to them, his mind is "not stuck internally."

There is "agitation due to clinging" (upadaya paritassana) in the "uninstructed worldling" (assutava puthujjana), who regards his five aggregates as self. When his form, or feeling, or perception, or volitional formations, or consciousness undergoes change and deterioration, his mind becomes preoccupied with the change, and he becomes anxious, distressed, and concerned. Thus there is agitation due to clinging. But the instructed noble disciple does not regard the five aggregates as his self. Therefore, when the aggregates undergo change and transformation, his mind is not preoccupied with the change and he dwells free from anxiety, agitation, and concern. This, the elder states, is how he understands in detail the summary stated in brief by the Blessed One, and when the monks report to the Master, he endorses his disciple's explanation.

(2) The Samyutta Nikaya

The Samyutta Nikaya contains three suttas in which the Venerable Maha Kaccana displays his ingenuity in elaborating upon brief utterances of the Buddha: SN 22:3, SN 22:4, and SN 35:130. These suttas are different both in setting and character from the three analytical discourses of the Majjhima Nikaya. In all three Maha Kaccana is not dwelling in the midst of the Sangha in close proximity to the Buddha, but in Avanti, at the Osprey's Haunt on Precipice Mountain, presumably a remote place difficult of access. Then a lay devotee named Haliddikani, evidently quite learned in the Dhamma, comes to him and asks him to explain in detail a short discourse of the Buddha. Maha Kaccana's reply is addressed to the householder Haliddikani alone, not to a group of monks, and there is no subsequent confirmation of his exposition by the Buddha at the end of the discourse. It seems impossible to determine whether these exchanges took place during the Buddha's life or after his demise, but obviously, to have been incorporated into the Canon, reports of the discussions must have reached the main centers of the Buddhist community.

In SN 22:3, Haliddikani asks the elder to explain in detail the meaning of a verse from "The Questions of Magandiya," included in the Atthakavagga of the Sutta Nipata (v.844):

"Having left home to roam without abode,
In the village the sage is intimate with none;
Rid of sensual pleasures, without preference,
He would not engage people in dispute."

In responding to the lay devotee's request, the Venerable Maha Kaccana introduces a methodology that is strikingly different from his approach to interpretation in the three suttas of the Majjhima Nikaya. Here he does not simply elaborate upon the literal meaning of the Buddha's statement, drawing out its philosophical and practical implications as he did in those suttas. Instead he transposes the key expressions of the verse to a different level of discourse, treating these expressions, not merely as obscure terms in need of clarification and exemplification, but as metaphors or figures of speech that to be properly understood must be redefined in terms of their non-figurative meanings. He does this, as we shall see just below, by first eliciting from the selected figurative terms their implicit literal meanings and then mapping those meanings on to other, more systematic frames of doctrine. This technique was to become characteristic of the Pali commentaries in later centuries, and we might even regard Maha Kaccana's style of exegesis here as being, in certain respects at least, the original prototype of the commentarial method.

Taking up first the expression "having left home" (okam pahaya), Maha Kaccana treats the word "home," not as bearing the literal meaning of a place where people live, but as an elliptical reference to the "home of consciousness" (viññanassa oko). He explains that the "home of consciousness" is the other four aggregates —

material form, feeling, perception, and volitional formations — which are here referred to as elements (dhatu); elsewhere these are described as the four "stations of consciousness" (viññana-thiti).[19] If consciousness is bound by lust to these four elements, one is said to move about in a home. If one has abandoned all desire, lust, delight, and craving for these four homes of consciousness, one is said to "roam about homeless" (anokasari). It should be noted that this last term does not itself occur in the verse, but Maha Kaccana has introduced it into his exegesis as a description of one who has abandoned home.

Next the elder explicates the phrase "to roam without abode" (aniketasari). He first defines the counterpart, "roaming about in an abode" (niketasari), which also does not appear in the verse. As before, Maha Kaccana treats this expression as a metaphor to be reformulated in terms of systematic doctrine. In this instance, rather than using the five aggregates as his scaffold, he draws in the six external sense bases. By being shackled to the sign of forms (sounds, odors, etc.), by moving about in the abode of forms, etc., one is called "one who roams about in an abode." When one has abandoned all bondage to the sign of forms, etc., cut them off at the root, then one is said to "roam without abode."

The remaining sections of the exposition proceed more literally, and simply explicate, with straightforward definition, the meaning of the phrases used in the verse, always in terms of contrasting pairs. One who is "intimate with none in the village" is defined as a bhikkhu who keeps aloof from lay people and their worldly concerns. One "rid of sensual pleasures" is one devoid of lust and craving for sensual pleasures. One "without preferences" (apurakkharano) is one who does not yearn for the future. And one who "would not engage people in dispute" is one who does not become embroiled in quarrels and disputes over the interpretation of the Dhamma.
In the next sutta (SN 22:4) Haliddikani asks how one should understand in detail the following brief statement of the Buddha, found in "The Questions of Sakka":
[20] "Those recluses and brahmans who are liberated by the full destruction of craving are those who have reached the ultimate end, the ultimate security from bondage, the ultimate holy life, the ultimate goal, and are best among devas and humans." Maha Kaccana explains:

"Householder, the desire for the material-form element, (for the feeling element, the perception element, the volitional-formations element, the consciousness element), the lust, the delight, the craving, the engagement and clinging, the mental standpoints, adherences, and underlying tendencies regarding it: through their destruction, fading away, cessation, giving up, and relinquishment, the mind is called well liberated.
"Thus, householder, it is in such a way that the meaning of what was stated in brief by the Blessed One should be understood in detail."

In a third sutta (SN 35:130) Haliddikani begins a query with a quotation from the Buddha, but this time he does not ask: "how should the meaning of this brief

statement be understood in detail?" Rather, he simply requests the Venerable Maha Kaccana to explain the following excerpt from the Dhatusamyutta (SN 14:4): "Bhikkhus, it is in dependence on the diversity of elements that there arises the diversity of contacts; in dependence on the diversity of contacts that there arises the diversity of feelings."

The Buddha himself had explained this assertion by showing how the different kinds of elements condition their corresponding kinds of contact and feeling: "In dependence on the eye element there arises eye-contact; in dependence on eye-contact there arises feeling born of eye-contact." And so for the other sense faculties. The Venerable Maha Kaccana, however, does not merely parrot the Buddha's analysis, but carries the divisions down to a finer level:

"Here, householder, having seen a form with the eye, a bhikkhu understands one that is agreeable thus: 'Such it is.' In dependence on eye-consciousness and a contact to be experienced as pleasant, there arises a pleasant feeling. Then, having seen a form with the eye, a bhikkhu understands one that is disagreeable thus: 'Such it is.' In dependence on eye-consciousness and a contact to be experienced as painful, there arises a painful feeling. Then, having seen a form with the eye, a bhikkhu understands one that is a basis for equanimity thus: 'Such it is.' In dependence on eye-consciousness and a contact to be experienced as neither-painful-nor-pleasant, there arises a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling."

The same analysis is applied to each of the other sense faculties. Thus, while the Buddha merely differentiates the contact and feeling by way of the sense faculty, the Venerable Maha Kaccana distinguishes within each sense sphere three qualities of the object — agreeable, disagreeable, and indifferent; three qualities of the contact — to be felt as pleasant, to be felt as painful, and to be felt as neither; and three qualities of the feeling — pleasant, painful, and neither-painful-nor-pleasant. These triads are then collated and shown to originate in a conditional relationship: the quality of the object conditions the quality of the contact; the quality of the contact conditions the quality of the feeling. As the entire process is said to be contemplated by a bhikkhu endowed with understanding, this also implies that he has the capacity for overcoming the bondage to feelings by means of insight into their conditioned origination.

(3) The Anguttara Nikaya

The Anguttara Nikaya offers two further examples of Maha Kaccana's exegetical skills. In one short sutta (AN 10:26) in this collection we see how the elder interprets a verse, the meaning of which seems completely explicit as it stands, by transposing it into a figurative mode and then extracting the implicit meaning by mapping it on to a framework of systematic doctrine. Here a woman lay disciple named Kali comes to the elder and asks him to explain in detail a verse from "The Girl's Questions." The reference is to the account of the Buddha's encounter with Mara's daughters when

they tried to seduce him in the first year after his Enlightenment (SN 4:25). The daughter Tanha (Craving) had asked him why, instead of forming intimate relationships in the village, he squanders his time meditating alone in the woods. To this the Buddha replied:

"Having conquered the army of the pleasant and agreeable,
Meditating alone I discovered bliss —
The attainment of the goal, the peace of the heart.
Therefore I do not make friends with people,
Nor does intimacy with anyone flourish for me."

It is this verse that Kali asks the Venerable Maha Kaccana to elucidate. The elder explicates the verse in a way that does not appear to be derivable from the words themselves. His interpretation contrasts the Buddha's attitude to the kasinas — the meditations on special devices for inducing concentration[21] — with that of other recluses and brahmans. He explains that some contemplatives, regarding the attainment of the earth kasina as the supreme goal, thereby generate this attainment. Others may take one of the other kasinas as supreme — the water kasina, the fire kasina, etc. — and reach the corresponding meditative state. But for each kasina, the Blessed One has directly understood to what extent it is supreme, and having understood this, he saw its origin, he saw the danger, he saw the escape, and he saw the knowledge and vision of the true path and the wrong path. Having seen all this, he understood the attainment of the goal and the peace of the heart. It is in this way, the elder concludes, that the meaning of the above verse should be understood in detail.

Interpreted by way of its apparent meaning, the verse seems to be extolling the bliss of secluded meditation above the pleasures of sensual and social contact — the very enjoyments with which Mara's daughters have been trying to tempt the Enlightened One. But the Venerable Maha Kaccana gives a different twist to the meaning. For him, the contrast is not merely between sensual pleasure and meditative bliss but between two different attitudes to advanced stages of meditative absorption. The ordinary recluses and brahmans understand the jhanas and other extraordinary states of consciousness attainable through the kasina meditations to be the final goal of spiritual endeavor. By doing so, they remain caught in the trap of craving for becoming and thus fail to find the way to final deliverance. Because they become attached to the exalted bliss and quiet serenity of the jhanas, they cannot see that these states too are conditioned and transient, and thus they cannot relinquish their attachment to them. They therefore remain within Mara's domain, vanquished by his army of "agreeable and pleasant forms," however sublime such may be. But the Buddha has seen the origin (adi)[22] of these attainments, i.e., craving as the origin of suffering; he has seen the danger (adinava), i.e., that they are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and subject to change; he has seen the escape (nissarana) from them, i.e., Nibbana; and he has obtained the knowledge and vision by which he can distinguish the true path from the false, i.e., the Noble Eightfold Path from the wrong

eightfold path. By means of this fourfold knowledge, which in effect is knowledge of the Four Noble Truths, he has attained the goal, Nibbana, experienced as the peace of heart that can arise only when all defilements have been extinguished without residue.

Finally, towards the end of the massive Anguttara Nikaya, we find one more sutta constructed on the same pattern as the three Majjhima Nikaya suttas. This sutta (AN 10:172) opens with a short statement of the Buddha:

"Bhikkhus, non-dhamma should be understood, and so too dhamma should be understood. Harm should be understood, and benefit should be understood. Having understood all this, one should practice in accordance with dhamma, in accordance with benefit."

Having said this, the Blessed One rose from his seat and entered his dwelling.
The monks then approach the Venerable Maha Kaccana to request an explanation. Following the stock formulas of protest and insistence, Maha Kaccana interprets the Buddha's injunction by way of the ten unwholesome and ten wholesome courses of kamma: taking life is non-dhamma, abstaining from taking life is dhamma; the numerous evil unwholesome states that arise on account of taking life — this is harm; the numerous wholesome states that arise conditioned by abstinence from taking life and that go to fulfillment by development — this is benefit. The same pattern is applied to stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, slander, harsh speech, and gossip. Finally, covetousness, ill will, and wrong view are non-dhamma, and the evil states that arise from them are harm; non-covetousness, goodwill, and right view are dhamma, and the wholesome states conditioned by them that go to fulfillment by development are benefit.

6. Other Teachings of Maha Kaccana

Not all the discourses spoken by the Venerable Maha Kaccana take the form of commentaries on brief statements by the Buddha. He also delivered Dhamma talks that unfold along independent lines, and he was skilled too in resolving the doubts of inquirers and fellow monks with his own original insights into the Teaching.
The Majjhima Nikaya contains a full-length dialogue between the great elder and King Avantiputta of Madhura, who was (according to the commentary) the grandson of King Candappajjota of Avanti. Once, when the Venerable Maha Kaccana was dwelling at Madhura, the king heard the favorable report that was circulating about him: "He is wise, discerning, sagacious, learned, articulate, and perspicacious; he is aged and he is an arahant." Desiring to converse with such a worthy monk, the king drove out to his hermitage to meet him, and the conversation that resulted has been recorded as the Madhura Sutta (MN 84).

The question with which the king opened this dialogue did not concern a profound problem about the nature of reality or the deeper realizations of insight meditation. It revolved around a practical issue that must have been weighing heavily on the minds of many of the noble-caste rulers of the time: the attempts of the brahmans to establish their own hegemony over the entire Indian social system. The brahmans tried to justify this drive for power by appeal to their divinely ordained status. King Avantiputta relates to Maha Kaccana the claim that they had been putting forth: "The brahmans are the highest caste, those of any other caste are inferior; brahmans are the fairest caste, those of any other caste are dark; only brahmans are purified, not non-brahmans; brahmans alone are the sons of Brahma, the offspring of Brahma, born of his mouth, born of Brahma, created by Brahma, heirs of Brahma."
The Venerable Maha Kaccana, though of pedigree brahman stock himself, is well aware of the presumption and arrogance that lay behind this proclamation. He replies that the claim of the brahmans is "just a saying in the world," one with no divine sanction at all to support it. To prove his point Maha Kaccana brings forth a powerful array of arguments in its favor: one of any social class who gains wealth can command the labor of those in the other castes; even a menial could enrol a brahman in his service. One of any caste who violates the principles of morality would be reborn in hell, while one of any caste who observes the moral precepts would be reborn in a happy realm. One of any caste who breaks the law would be punished. One of any caste who renounces the world and becomes an ascetic would receive homage and respect. As each argument draws to a close, the king proclaims: "These four castes are all the same; there is no difference between them at all."
At the end of the discussion, after expressing his appreciation of Master Kaccana's replies, King Avantiputta declares: "I go to Master Kaccana for refuge and to the Dhamma and to the Sangha of bhikkhus." But Maha Kaccana corrects him: "Do not go to me for refuge, great king. Go for refuge to that same Blessed One to whom I have gone for refuge" — the Fully Enlightened Buddha. When the king asks where the Blessed One is now living, the elder explains that he has attained Parinibbana. This reply indicates that Maha Kaccana's own demise must have taken place at some date after that of the Buddha.

The Samyutta Nikaya includes a sutta (SN 35:132) that shows how the Venerable Maha Kaccana's skill in handling a group of rowdy young brahman boys helped to transform the attitude of a learned old brahman and his entourage of pupils. On one occasion the elder was living in Avanti in a forest hut. Then a number of young brahmans boys, pupils of the renowned brahman teacher Lohicca, drew near to the hut while collecting firewood. As the brahmans of that period often harbored hostile feelings towards the renunciant Buddhist monks, these boys, behaving as boys typically do when on a group outing, trampled around the hut, deliberately making a racket to disturb the meditating monk. They also shouted the words which the brahmans used to taunt the non-brahman ascetics: "These bald-pated ascetic rascals, menials, swarthy offspring of the Lord's feet, are honored, respected, esteemed, worshipped, and venerated by their servile devotees."

The Venerable Maha Kaccana came out from the hut and addressed the boys with verses in which he reminded them of the ancient brahmanical ideals, so badly neglected by the brahmans of that day:

"Those men of old who excelled in virtue,
Those brahmans who recalled the ancient rules,
Their sense doors guarded, well protected,
Dwelt having vanquished wrath within.
They took delight in Dhamma and meditation,
Those brahmans who recalled the ancient rules.
But these have fallen, claiming 'We recite'
While puffed up on account of their descent.
They conduct themselves in unrighteous ways;
Overcome by anger, armed with various weapons,
They transgress against both weak and strong.
For one who does not guard the sense doors
(All the vows he undertakes) are vain
Just like the wealth a man gains in a dream:
Fasting and sleeping on the ground,
Bathing at dawn, (study of) the Triple Veda,
Rough hides, matted locks, and dirt;
Hymns, rules and vows, austerities,
Hypocrisy, crookedness, rinsing the mouth:
These are the emblems of the brahmans
Performed to increase their worldly gains.
A mind that is well concentrated,
Purified and free from blemish,
Tender towards all sentient beings —
That is the path for reaching Brahma."

On hearing this, the brahman boys were angry and displeased. On returning to their teacher, the brahman Lohicca, they reported that the recluse Maha Kaccana was denigrating and scorning the sacred brahman hymns. After his first flush of anger had subsided, Lohicca, being a man of sense, realized that he should not rush to conclusions merely on the basis of hearsay reported by youngsters, but should first inquire from Maha Kaccana himself whether there was any truth in their accusation. When Lohicca went to the Venerable Maha Kaccana and asked him about the conversation he had with the boys, Maha Kaccana reported everything as it occurred. Lohicca was deeply impressed by Maha Kaccana's poem on the proper brahman way of life, and even more so by the elder's following discourse on how to guard the doors of the senses. At the end of the discussion not only did he go for refuge to the Triple Gem, but he invited the elder to visit his household, assuring him that "the brahman boys and maidens there will pay homage to Master Kaccana; they will stand up for him out of respect; they will offer him a seat and water; and that will lead to their welfare and happiness for a long time."

The Venerable Maha Kaccana seems to have had a particularly deep insight into the causal basis of human quarrels and disputes. We have already seen how he traces out the causal roots of conflict in his exposition in the Madhupindika Sutta and his skill in transforming Lohicca's retinue of disciples. On another occasion (AN 2:4:6) a brahman named Aramadanda came to him and asked: "Why is society rent by such bitter conflicts — conflicts that pit nobles against nobles, brahmans against brahmans, householders against householders?" To this the elder replies: "It is because of sensual lust, attachment, greed, and obsession with sensual pleasures, that nobles fight with nobles, brahmans with brahmans, householders with householders." Next Aramadanda asked: "Why is it that recluses fight with recluses?" And Maha Kaccana replies: "It is because of lust for views, attachment, greed, and obsession with views, that recluses fight with recluses." Finally the brahman asked whether there was anyone in the world who had transcended both sensual lust and lust for views. Although Maha Kaccana, as an arahant, could have put himself forth as an example of such a one, with characteristic modesty and self-effacement he named instead the Blessed One, who was dwelling at Savatthi at the time. When this was said, the brahman Aramadanda knelt down on the ground, held out his hands in reverential salutation, and exclaimed three times: *"Homage to the Blessed One, the Arahant, the Fully Enlightened One."*

In the next sutta (AN 2:4:7) a brahman named Kandarayana reproaches Maha Kaccana for not showing proper respect towards aged brahmans. The elder defends himself by distinguishing the conventional usage of the words "aged" and "young" from their proper meaning within the Discipline of the Noble One. On this latter criterion, even if a person is eighty, ninety, or a hundred years from birth, if he is still addicted to sensual pleasures he is reckoned as a fool, not an elder. But even if a person is young, with jet black hair, endowed with the blessing of youth, if he has broken free from sensual desires, he is then reckoned as an elder.

Once the Venerable Maha Kaccana gave the monks a discourse on the six recollections (cha anussati) — the contemplations of the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha, virtue, generosity, and the devas (AN 6:26). He declared that it is wonderful and marvellous how the Blessed One has discovered these six recollections as the way to freedom for those still trapped in the confines of the world. He describes the six recollections in exactly the same terms that the Buddha himself has used to describe the four foundations of mindfulness. They are the means "for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the passing away of pain and grief, for the arrival at the right method, and for the realization of Nibbana." On another occasion (AN 6:28) some elder bhikkhus were holding a discussion about the right time to approach "a monk worthy of esteem" (manobhavaniyo bhikkhu). One said he should be approached after he has finished his meal, another said he should he approached in the evening, while still another contended that the early morning was the most fitting time to speak with him. Unable to reach accord, they came to Maha Kaccana with their problem. The elder replied that there were six proper times for approaching a worthy monk. The first five are when the mind is

overcome and obsessed by the five mental hindrances — sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and doubt — and one cannot find an outlet from them on one's own. The sixth occasion to approach is when one does not know a suitable object to attend to in order to reach the destruction of the cankers (asavakkhaya).

It was not always with words that the Venerable Maha Kaccana taught, but also by silent example. On one such occasion the Buddha was moved to extol Maha Kaccana in an udana — an inspired utterance — preserved for us in the canonical collection of that name (Ud. 7:8). One evening the Buddha was seated in his cottage at Jeta's Grove in Savatthi when he saw the Venerable Maha Kaccana nearby "sitting cross-legged, holding his body erect, having mindfulness with regard to the body set up and well established within him." On realizing the significance of this, the Blessed One uttered this inspired utterance:

"He who always has mindfulness
Continually established on the body thus:
'If there had not been, there would not be for me;
There will not be, so there will not be for me,'
If he dwell therein in graded steps
In time he will pass beyond attachment."

In its explanation of this sutta, the Udana Commentary helps shed light on the approach that the Venerable Maha Kaccana adopted to reach arahantship. While this explanation conflicts with the account of the elder's "instantaneous enlightenment" found in the biographical sketch of the Anguttara Commentary (see above, p. 7), it appears more realistic. The Udana Commentary explains that in his endeavor to attain arahantship, Maha Kaccana first developed jhana using mindfulness of the body (kayagata sati) as his subject of meditation. Utilizing that jhana as his foundation of calm concentration, he then redirected mindfulness of the body on to the track of insight meditation (vipassana). With the wisdom of insight that arose from the contemplation of the body, he reached the supramundane paths and fruits, culminating in the final fruit of arahantship. Thereafter he would regularly resort to this same approach in order to enter upon the fruition attainment of arahantship (arahattaphala-samapatti), the special meditative absorption, unique to the arahant, in which the bliss of Nibbana is experienced even in this very life. It was just on such an occasion, when the elder was sitting absorbed in fruition attainment, that the Buddha caught sight of him and extolled him in this inspirational verse. The couplet by which the Buddha expresses the theme of contemplation is taken, by the commentary, to signify "four-cornered emptiness" (catukoti-suññata): the absence of "I" and "mine" in the past and present ("If there had not been, there would not be for me"), and the absence of "I" and "mine" in the future ("There will not be, so there will not be for me"). By applauding the Venerable Maha Kaccana with this inspired utterance, the Buddha has held him up as a model for others to emulate in their own quest to overcome attachment to the world.

7. The Theragatha Verses

The Theragatha, the verses of the ancient elders, includes eight verses ascribed to the Venerable Maha Kaccana (vv.494-501). These verses are in no way exceptional and merely express, in verse form, injunctions to proper discipline for monks and practical advice for householders. Although Maha Kaccana's verses addressed to the brahman Lohicca did serve effectively as a didactic tool, he does not seem to have been as amply endowed with the gift of poetic expression as several of the other great disciples, such as Maha Kassapa, Sariputta, and Vangisa. His sphere of excellence was analysis and exegesis, not inspirational eloquence or artistic creativity.
The first two verses (vv.494-95), according to the commentary, were spoken as an exhortation to the bhikkhus. One day the elder had noticed that a number of monks had laid aside their meditation practice in order to delight in work and in company. They were also growing too fond of the delicious food provided by their devoted lay supporters. He therefore admonished them thus:[23]

"One should not do much work
One should avoid people,
One should not bustle (to obtain gifts).
One who is eager and greedy for flavors
Misses the goal that entails happiness.
They knew as a bog this homage and veneration
Obtained among devoted families.
A subtle dart, difficult to extract,
Honor is hard for a vile man to discard."

The other six verses, again according to the commentary, were spoken as exhortations to King Candappajjota. The king, it is said, placed faith in the brahmans and at their behest performed animal sacrifices; he also would impose penalties and confer favors arbitrarily, presumably on account of that impulsive temperament of his that earned him the title "the Violent." Therefore, to dissuade the king from such reckless behavior, the elder recited the next four verses (496-99):

"It is not on account of another
That a mortal's kamma is evil.
On one's own accord one should not resort to evil,
For mortals have kamma as their kinsmen.
One is not a thief by another's word,
One is not a sage by another's word;
It is as one knows oneself
That the devas also know one.
Others do not understand
That we all come to an end here.
But those wise ones who understand this
Thereby settle their quarrels.[24]

The wise man lives indeed
Even despite the loss of his wealth.
But if one does not obtain wisdom,
Then even though rich one is not alive."

The last two stanzas (500-501) were spoken by the elder when the king came to him one day and informed him of a disturbing dream he had seen the previous night:

"One hears all with the ear,
One sees all with the eye,
The wise man should not reject
Everything that is seen and heard.
One with eyes should be as if blind,
One with ears as if deaf,
One with wisdom as if mute,
One with strength as if feeble.
Then, when the goal has been attained,
One may lie upon one's death bed."

The commentary explains the purport of the verses thus: A wise person should not reject everything, but should first investigate virtues and faults and then should reject whatever should be rejected and accept whatever is acceptable. Therefore, in regard to what should be rejected, though one possesses vision one should be as if blind, and though able to hear, one should be as if deaf. One who is intelligent, able to speak well, should be as if dumb when tempted to speak what is unfit to be uttered; and one who is strong should be as if feeble in regard to what should not be done.

The last line is ambiguous, in the Pali as well, and is interpreted in two different ways by the commentary: (1) When a task that should be done has arisen, one should investigate it and not neglect it even if one is lying on one's death bed. (2) Or alternatively, if a task that one should not do has arisen, one should prefer to die — to lie down on one's death bed — rather than do it. Neither explanation sounds convincing, and the sense consonant with the spirit of the Theragatha as a whole would seem to be: One should die as one who has attained the goal, i.e., as an arahant.

8. The Exegetical Treatises

Before concluding this survey of the Venerable Maha Kaccana's contribution to the Buddha's Dispensation, we should briefly take note that the Theravada tradition ascribes to him two exegetical treatises — the Petakopadesa and the Nettippakarana — and an influential grammar of the Pali language called the Kaccayana-Vyakarana. The two treatises are not included in the Pali canon (except in Burma, where they were lately incorporated into the Sutta Pitaka), but have exerted a major influence on the evolution of exegetical method.

Bhikkhu Ñanamoli, who translated both treatises into English, holds that the Netti is a later, more refined version of the Petakopadesa.[25] Both deal with essentially the same method of exegesis, which in the Netti is clearer and more concise. The method described there is designed to elicit from the Buddha's discourses the unifying principles that underlie the variegated expressions of the Dhamma. It is founded on the assumption that beneath the many diverse utterances of the Master, adapted according to the temperament and situation of the auditors, there runs a single consistent system, which with the right exegetical techniques can be extracted from the particular statement under investigation and displayed in its unadorned essence. The Netti, as Ven. Ñanamoli has explained, is not itself a commentary but a guide for commentators. It explicates, not so much the teachings themselves (except by way of exemplification), but the tools that are to be used to elicit the structural elements that underlie and shape the expression of the teachings.

The Netti sets up its methodology under two main headings, the phrasing (byanjana) and the meaning (attha). The phrasing is handled by sixteen "modes of conveyance" (hara), techniques of verbal and logical analysis that can be applied to any specified passage in order to extract the principles that lie behind the verbal formulation and logical organization of its content. The meaning is handled by three methods or "guidelines" (naya). These take the meaning to be the aim or goal of the doctrine (attha signifies both "meaning" and "goal"), which is the attainment of Nibbana, and they then disclose how the teaching in question points to the attainment of that goal as its underlying purport. Two additional methods are then proposed for correlating the sutta's terminology with the methods for explicating the meaning.[26] The method is applied by the subcommentaries to the first sutta of each of the four Nikayas in special supplements to the main portion of the subcommentary.[27] A commentary on the Netti, attributed to Acariya Dhammapala, also exists.
The colophons of both exegetical treatises — the Petakopadesa and the Nettippakarana — attribute them to the Buddha's disciple Maha Kaccana. The Netti colophon states further that it was approved by the Blessed One and chanted at the original Buddhist Council. Western scholars have been inclined to dismiss the ascription of authorship to Maha Kaccana as fanciful. Ven. Ñanamoli, however, in the Introduction to his translation of the Nettippakarana, offers an explanation that preserves at least a grain of credibility in the traditional Buddhist view without falling into the opposite extreme of credulity.[28]

Ven. Ñanamoli proposes that we distinguish between the authorship of the exegetical method on the one hand, and the authorship of the treatises on the other. He suggests as a hypothesis — possible though neither provable nor refutable — that the Elder Maha Kaccana and his lineage of pupils in Avanti may have formulated a compendious method for interpreting the Buddha's discourses, and that this method — or at least its elements — may have been discussed at the early Councils and transmitted orally in skeletal form. At a later date, the method could have given birth to a treatise, which attempts to coordinate its elements and to illustrate their application to specific texts. This treatise eventually became the Petakopadesa. Some

time later, perhaps even centuries later, a more polished and perspicuous version of the same work was made, this being the Nettippakarana. As the original methodology embedded in these treatises was derived from the Venerable Maha Kaccana, or at any rate was believed to have been derived from him, out of reverence for its architect — and also to boost the prestige of the treatises — their compilers ascribed authorship to the elder. G.P. Malalasekera offers a parallel hypothesis to explain the imputed authorship of the Pali grammar, the Kaccayana-Vyakarana, to the Buddha's great disciple.[29]

While such propositions must remain conjectural, as both Ven. Ñanamoli and Malalasekera themselves acknowledge, the type of detailed analysis of textual statements found in the Nettippakarana is consonant with the approach that the historical Maha Kaccana brought to bear on the interpretation of the Buddha's brief utterances. Thus it would seem that even if no direct connection actually exists between the great elder and the ancient Pali treatises ascribed to him, the fact remains that they embody the spirit that he represented. This spirit, so evident in the suttas that record his elucidations of the Buddha Word, couples acuity of insight with terseness of expression, precision of formulation with profundity of meaning. It was on the basis of such skills that the Enlightened One named him the foremost master of doctrinal exposition, and it is this that constitutes his outstanding contribution to the Buddha's Dispensation.

Notes

1. The Buddha assigns Maha Kaccana to this position at AN 1: Chap. 14, Etadagga Vagga.
2. The biographical sketch of Maha Kaccana is taken from the commentary to AN 1: Chap.14, Etadagga Vagga; this is partly paralleled by commentary to Thag., Atthakanipata.
3. Ap. i,4:3.
4. Ap. i,54:1.
5. The offering of the golden brick is mentioned in commentary to AN, Etadagga Vagga.
6. The account here resumes as in commentary to AN.
7. His parents' names are mentioned at Ap. i,54:1, v.21.
8. According to commentary, at the moment the Buddha invited them to join the Order, their hair and beards disappeared and they were spontaneously provided with bowls and robes, created by the Buddha's psychic power.
9. Vin.i,194-98.The story of Sona is also related at Ud. 5:6, but without the passage on the modification of the monastic rules.
10. At Vin.ii,299, in describing the preparations for the Second Council, it is said that eighty-eight arahants from Avanti gathered on the Ahoganga mountain slope. They are described as "mostly forest-dwellers, mostly almsmen, mostly rag-robe wearers, mostly wearers of the three robes," and are contrasted with sixty arahant bhikkhus from Pava, all of whom observe these ascetic practices. Though any conclusions drawn from this passage are speculative, these monks may have belonged to the pupillary lineage of Ven. Maha Kaccana, and the reason they were "mostly" observers of the ascetic practices (rather than entirely such) is that he inspired his disciples to undertake such practices by personal example without making them mandatory.

11. Isidatta is mentioned at SN 41:1, 2. In the first sutta he answers a question on the diversity of elements, a topic that Maha Kaccana also discusses (see below, pp. 29-30); in the second, on speculative views. To escape the fame and admiration which came to him on account of these replies, he disappeared into obscurity.
12. Dhp. Comy. (to v.94). See E.W. Burlingame, Buddhist Legends (PTS 1969), 2:202-3.
13. Dhp. Comy. (to v.43). See Buddhist Legends, 2:23-28.
14. MN Comy. (to MN 108).
15. Sammaditthi Sutta (MN 9); see The Discourse on Right View (BPS Wheel No. 377/379). Mahahatthipadopama Sutta (MN 28); see The Greater Discourse on the Elephant's Footprint Simile (BPS Wheel No. 101). For a discussion, see Nyanaponika Thera, The Life of Sariputta (BPS Wheel No. 90/92), pp.40-42.
16. Atthasalini, 16-17. See Life of Sariputta, pp.49-50.
17. For a detailed study of the term papañca, see Bhikkhu Ñanananda, Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought (Kandy: BPS, 1971). This book contains an insightful discussion of the Madhupindika Sutta, pp.2-9.
18. MN contains four suttas dealing with the Bhaddekaratta verses, Nos. 131-134. The title phrase is itself a riddle: Ven. Ñanamoli has rendered it "one fortunate attachment," Ven. Ñanananda as "the ideal lover of solitude." But as the word ratta can be taken to mean "night" as well as "attached," the expression may have meant "a single blessed night," referring to the night when insight issues in the attainment of arahantship."
19. The four viññanatthiti are mentioned at DN 33 (iii,228). See too SN 22:53, 54.
20. DN 21/ii,283. See Sakka's Quest (BPS Wheel No. 10). The DN text does not include the words settha devamanussanam, "best of gods and humans," appearing in the SN quotation.
21. See Visuddhimagga, Chaps. IV and V.
22. Sinhala script and PTS eds. read here adi, though the Burmese script ed. reads assada. The latter reading may be the result of the assimilation of an uncommon reading to the standard formula, in which assada appears in the first place.
23. This translation is based on K.R. Norman's prose translation of Thag., Elders' Verses, I (PTS 1969).
24. This verse occurs also as Dhp. 6.
25. Bhikkhu Ñanamoli's translation of the Petakopadesa is published as The Pitaka Disclosure (PTS 1964); of the Nettippakarana, as The Guide (PTS 1962).
26. For a discussion of the Netti's methodology, see Ven. Ñanamoli's introduction to The Guide.
27. For a translation of the Netti analysis of the first sutta of the Digha Nikaya, see Bhikkhu Bodhi, The Discourse on the All-Embracing Net of View: The Brahmajala Sutta and Its Commentaries (Kandy: BPS, 1978), Part 3.
28. The Guide, pp.xxvi-xxviii.
29. G.P. Malalasekera, The Pali Literature of Ceylon (1928; reprint Kandy: BPS, 1995), pp.180-82.

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