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Early Buddhism and the Brahmanas

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THE *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* states that Māthava, the Videgha, crossed the Saraswati with Agni in his movement toward the east. "Now that (river) which is called 'Sadānīrā' (either modern Gandaki or Karatoya), flows from the northern (Himālaya) mountains. That one he did not burn over. That one the Brāhmaṇas did not cross in former times, thinking, "it has not been burnt over by Agni Vaiśvānara".

"Now-a-days, however, it is very cultivated, for the Brāhmaṇas have caused (agni) to taste it through sacrifices".[1] Hermann Oldenberg, writing in 1882, stated that the land of the Māgadhas (the "original" homeland of Early Buddhism) was "still farther off from the old centres of Vedic culture", and that some parts of the *Atharva Veda* and a host of other passages in the Vedic literature combine to show that the Māgadhas were looked upon as strangers and were regarded by no means with favour".[2] Two assumptions are made regarding this special relationship between Buddhism and its Māgadhan background, *viz.*, that sacerdotal Brahmanism was a relatively recent phenomenon in Māgadha and that Buddhism represented a revolt against an attempted Brāhmaṇa domination in the land.[3] These assumptions are then made the basis for the assertion that Buddhism began as an anti-Brahmanical movement, and was a "Kṣatriya" protest against Brahmanical domination. Evidence for this may obviously be found in the Early Buddhist texts, in statements articulating an antipathy against the Brāhmaṇas. Derogatory remarks about the pretensions of Brāhmaṇas are scattered through many parts of the Pāli canonical literature. The *Anguttara Nikāya*, for instance, has the Buddha compare the high ethical standards of the Brāhmaṇas of yore with their current depravity, in which they are compared to dogs. Brāhmaṇa secrecy concerning their ritual lore

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is denounced, and they are described as greedy for women and wealth. Likewise, Brahmanical literature also betrays a rather low opinion of the Buddhists. It is decreed, for instance, that a fine of 100 *paṇas* be imposed on anyone inviting a Buddhist (*Śākya*) to ritual dinners honoring the gods or Manes.[4]

Interesting as this mutual exchange of compliments is, it conceals a situation much more complex than simple antipathy or continuing hostility. The time between the composition of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and the rise of Early Buddhism saw extensive demographic and cultural changes in Māgadha and the adjacent territories. Brahmanical penetration and dispersal in these areas had proceeded apace, and within the Brahmanical group great diversities in occupations and philosophical pursuits had taken place. Early Buddhism itself had seen a gradual but continuing change in the social composition of its votaries, monastic and lay, and during this time of change, gradual accomodation—if not a partial synthesis on certain levels—between Buddhism and the Brāhmaṇas had been accomplished. The purpose of the present paper is to analyze the social background of Early Buddhism to ascertain signs of such accomodation, the nature and content of the Brāhmaṇa-Buddhist encounter and its effect on the history of Early Buddhism.

It is necessary to define at the outset the two terms that will be used in this discussion. These are Early Buddhism and Brāhmaṇas. By Early Buddhism is meant the movement called Theravāda, whose texts are in Pāli and are included in the collection called the Pāli Canon, whose chronological limits may be set between *circa* 485 B.C. and the end of the First Century B.C. The earlier date is postulated on the assumption that the Buddha's *Parinibbāṇa* occured in 486 B.C., and that the First or Rājagaha Council was held immediately following. The historicity of the Rājagaha Council has been generally accepted, and the purpose of the Council was to prepare an authoritative corpus of "texts" embodying the Buddha's enunciations on the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya*. We also will have occasion to use some post-canonical texts and the commentaries of Buddhaghoṣa (first half of the Fifth century A.D.), but only to obtain clarity or greater explication of some of the terms used in the canonical texts.[5] The term Brāhmaṇa is commonly understood as a designation of a "caste", with prescribed occupations considered ritually permissible, ritual obligations, and ascription of the highest status in the Hindu social hierarchy. This view is reflected in the Brahmanical *smṛitis* and usages of later centuries.[6] What we have in the Pāli texts, however, is something very different from what is implied in these definitions. As will be shown below, our texts include four distinct religious and occupational categories under the rubric "Brāhmaṇa".

II

Of these four categories, the first, called *pubbakā isayo* (sages of yore) may need only be briefly mentioned here. These were Vasiṭṭha, Vāmadeva, Kassapa, Bhagu, Yamataggi, and others whose names figure among the composers of some of the Vedic hymns. They are called "hymn-makers" (*māntānam kattāro*), whose compositions the Brāhmaṇas of later ages simply learned by rote and recited at length. The Buddha praised the simplicity of their life-styles and the high-mindedness of their spiritual quest, lamenting the fact that their descendants had fallen so low from the standards set by their forebears. There is no criticism of these sages, much less any hostility or antipathy toward them.[7] A few others are simply called *isi*, explained as "a holy man, one gifted

with special powers of insight and inspiration, an anchoret, a Seer, Sage, Saint 'Master' ". The term "anchoret", or anchorite, has the meaning of "one who renounces the world to live in seclusion, usually for religious reasons; hermit, recluse".[8] Among such *isis* are Asita and Devala who are so called as a matter of honor and respect rather than for any hymn-making activity on their part.[9]

The second and third groups comprised professional priests such as *purohitas*, who performed ritual services for the kings and also a variety of other services, and those who are called *mahāsālas*, or wealthy Brāhmaṇas. Many of the second group were also *mahāsālas*, and the main distinction between *purohitas* and *mahāsālas*, is that while all *purohitas* could be called *mahāsālas*, all *mahāsālas* were not necessarily royal *purohitas*. The stock description of such a Brāhmaṇa is given as "a repeater (of the sacred words), knowing the mystic verses by heart; one who had mastered the Three Vedas, with the indices, the ritual, the phonology, and the exegesis (as a fourth), and the legends as a fifth; learned in the idioms and the grammar; versed in Lokāyata sophistry, and in the theory of the signs on the body of a great man".[10] The Post-canonical *Milinda Pañha* repeates this description with slight variations, saying that the duty of these Brāhmaṇas was "concerned with the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sama Veda, the Atharva Veda; with the knowledge of the lucky marks (on the body), of legends, Purāṇas, lexicography, prosody, phonology; verses, grammar, etymology, astrology, interpretations of omens and of dreams, and of signs; study of the six Vedāñgas, of eclipses of the sun and moon, of the prognostications to be drawn from the flights of comets, the thunderings of the gods, the junctions of the planets, the fall of meteors, earthquakes, conflagrations, and signs in the heaven and on the earth; the study of arithmetic, of casuistry, of the interpretations to be drawn from dogs, deer and rats; and the mixtures of liquids and the sounds and cries of birds". Some of these "arts," such as prognostications from comets and birds and animals, are described as "low arts" (*hīnavijjā*) by the *Brahmajāla sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*.[11] It is with these Brāhmaṇas that the Buddha had most of his argumentative encounters concerning the Brahmanical claims to the purity and greatness of their "caste" or to the efficacy of their sacrificial ritual. The *Ambaṭṭha sutta* is a fairly representative a piece of such polemics. Ambaṭṭha, a disciple of the Brāhmaṇa Pokkharasāti of Ukkaṭṭhā, in the Kosala region, behaves in a discourteous manner with the Buddha, and when queried as to whether that is his normal practice in relation to Brāhmaṇas, Ambaṭṭha says that he behaved as he did only with "Shavlings, ascetics, menials, blacks, and those born of the feet of Bandhu or Brahma or Sudras". This leads to a rather acrimonious exchange, in which the Buddha suggests that Kaṇhāyana, the *gotra* to which Ambaṭṭha belonged, was the progeny of a slave-girl of king Okkāka (Ikśvāku), the putative ancestor of the Śākya clan.[12] In the *Brāhmaṇdhammika sutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta* the Buddha denounces his Brāhmaṇa contemporaries as creatures who have fallen from the high standards of their ancestors because of greed for material wealth. At another place, it is asserted that Khattiyas are superior to Brāhmaṇas in the matter of *gotra (khattiyo settho jané tasmim; ye gotta patisāriṇo)*, and Khattiyas are placed before Brāhmaṇas as a matter of course when the four standard social groupings (*vaṇṇā*) are enumerated in the Pāli texts.[13]

Many of these learned Brāhmaṇas enjoyed royal patronage. A standard list of the leading Brāhmaṇas of the time of the Buddha contains five names : Canki, Tārukkha, Pokkharasāti, Janussoṇi and Todeyya. They are described as *Brāhmaṇamahāsālas*

explained by Buddhaghoṣa as those who have amassed great wealth.[14] That such an assemblage of wealthy Brāhmaṇas should live in one place such as Icchānangala may seem surprising, but the explanation may be found in the institution of the *Brāhmaṇagāma*. The exact meaning of the term is not quite clear, for it may mean a village (settlement) either exclusively inhabited by Brāhmaṇas (which is not very likely), a village predominantly inhabited by Brāhmaṇas, or a village designated in a proprietary way for the residence and maintenance of learned Brāhmaṇas. A number of such Brāhmaṇa settlements are mentioned by name, such as Icchānangala, Ekasālā. Opasāda and Veṇagapura in Kosala, Ambasanda, Upatissagāma, Ekanāḷā, Pañcasāla and Khāṇumata in Māgadha, Khomadussa in the Śākya country, Dunnivittha in the Kalinga country and Kalandagāma in far away Ceylon. That the institution was claimed to be of ancient origin is indicated by the mention of an Anupama *Brāhmaṇagāma* in the days of the former Buddha Anomadassi.[15] Besides these *Brāhmaṇagāmas*, which were compact settlements close to important towns, even Rājagaha, the capital of Māgadha, and other cities, such as Āpaṇa, also are described as residences of *Brāhmaṇamahāsālas*. Brāhmaṇas also owned specific tracts, like mango groves.[16]

The Pāli texts leave no doubt about the extent of the wealth possessed by these *Brāhmaṇamahāsālas*, but perhaps the most prosperous among them were those who enjoyed what are called *brahmadeyya* lands. The term *brahmadeyya* is explained by the dictionary as "a most excellent gift, a royal gift, given with full powers (said of land granted by the King), a full gift". These *brahmadeyya* gifts are further qualified as *rājabhogga* and *rājadāya*, the former obviously meaning a "royal gift" while *bhogga* is explained as "royal, in the service of king.....with power over it as if he were king". These lands are also described as places "teeming with life, with much grassland and woodland and corn". Such gifts were given to Brāhmaṇas like Pokkharasāti, Kūṭadanta, Lohicca, Soṇadanda and Cānki, who are described as learned in the Vedic texts and ritual traditions, and who had numerous disciples of their own living with them. Buddhaghoṣa adds the gloss that these gifts could not be retracted or repossessed by the king (*yathā dinnam na puna gahetabbam hoti)*, given up *(nissatthaṃ)*, or abandoned (*pariccattam*). Nor was "raising the flag, with abridgement of royal authority to be enjoyed" (*chattamm ussāpetva rajasamkhepe bhuñjitabbam)*. While these *brahmadeyya* lands were given by kings such as Pasenadi Kosala and Bimbisāra to Brāhmaṇas, there is one instance where a similar gift is given to a *rajañña*, namely, Pāyāsi. This exception may be taken to mean that such land gifts were not given exclusively to the Brāhmaṇas, but were also made to others, such as the *rājañña* ("royalty" . . . . . a high courtier, khattiya).[17]

Some of the questions raised by this institution of the *brahmadeyya* lands are of great social and economic significance to the background of Early Buddhism. The explicit meaning attached to the gift of these lands shows that they were given in proprietary possession, whereby they became an absolute property of the donee. Secondly, it is fairly reasonable to assume that there was a transference of some administrative functions from the royal authority to the donees. In the case of Pāyāsi, it is clearly suggested that he discharged administrative functions over his domain, including rights of apprehension and punishment of criminals. If Pasendi Kosala, who made the land grant to Pāyāsi, could allow the latter the exercise of administrative functions, could the same be said of such grants to Brāhmaṇas? The lands included areas used for farming and

pasturage, as well as for the growing and use of fruit trees (mango-groves.) The Pāli texts refer to the *dūtas, parisās* and *amaccas* associated with the *Brāhmaṇamahāsālas*. If the Brāhmaṇa *brahmadeyya* donees had no administrative functions in their domains, what were these *dūtas* and *amaccas* supposed to do? Buddhaghoṣa makes it clear that the donee exercised quasi-royal authority and acted almost as a ruler (*chattam ussāpetva*) and that his lands were tax-free. The Brāhmaṇas had their own *parisās* and *sabhās*. The Brāhmaṇa *parisās* are traditionally included among the components of the state, listed as four (*khattiya, Brāhmaṇa, gahapati* and *Samaṇa*) and Brāhmaṇa *gahapatikas* (householders) are also included in the traditional lists of a *rājaparivāra* (retinue of a king).[18]

A good many Brāhmaṇas are mentioned as royal functionaries. Most of them were *purohitas* to the kings of Kosala, Uttarapañcāla, Avanti, and the Śākyas, such as Gagga, Aggidatta (father of the monk Jenta), Kevaṭṭa. Tiriṭavaccha and Asita. Others like Vassakāra were *mahāmattas* (ministers). treasurers, accountants, or superintendents of waterworks.[19] The *Mahāgovinda sutta* tells the story of the mythical king Disampati and his Brāhmaṇa Govinda, whose son Jotipāla was appointed to succeed him after his death. The term for the office used here is *Govindiya*, and Rhys Davids translates the term Govinda as "Lord of the Herds", which he construes as a title meaning "treasurer or steward", though Mahāgovinda in the story is called a *purohita*.[20] It is also specifically said that Mahāgovinda used to tender advice to the king on matters of *attha*, later specified as *diṭṭhadhammika attha*, and under him had seven *Brāhmaṇa mahāsāla* and 700 *snātakas* (obviously a round number). Though the story is fictional the points concerning the hereditary succession to *purohitaship* and its duties of advice to the king on matters pertaining to this world (*diṭṭhadhammika-attha* is invariably contrasted with *samparāyikaattha*), raise some interesting questions.[21] It seems certain that at this time the office of the *purohita* involved functions well beyond the performance of Brahmanical rituals for the king. Vassakāra and Sunidha, the former specifically mentioned as Ajātasattu's *purohita*, were involved in erecting fortifications for the city of Pāṭaliputta in anticipation of an attack by the Vajjians. In the *Culladhanuggaha jātaka* (No. 374), the Brāhmaṇa is described as well-trained and skilled in archery, while at another place a Brāhmaṇa is described as a *navakammika* Bhāradwāja, who obviously had to do with construction work.[22] Elsewhere, we are told of Brāhmaṇas going to the Yona and Kamboja regions (probably the Northwest Frontier Province and the Kabul region) for trade. The story of Kasibhāradwāja Brāhmaṇa indicates that Brāhmaṇas engaged in farming.[23] Kasibhāradwāja obviously was a rich farmer, for he used 500 ploughs (obviously a round number again).[24] The point to be made is that the Brāhmaṇas of the period discussed here formed a functionally varied group, performing not only the prescribed Brahmanical ritual but also, and often in addition, following a variety of callings. These Brāhmaṇas, from the royal *purohitas* to rich farmers, were an influential group, and their acceptance or rejection of the Buddha and Early Buddhism was of vital significance to the history of the new movement. Many of these Brāhmaṇa *gahapatikas* lived in widely scattered areas in Māgadha, Kosala, the Śākya region, Avanti, and Dakkhiṇāpatha and they especially congregated in the great cities of Rājagaha, Pāṭaliputta and Sāvatthi.[25]

Many of these Brāhmaṇas claimed to belong to and were proud of their *gotta* purity. The most common *gotta* mentioned is that of Bhāradwāja; also mentioned in our texts are Brāhmaṇas belonging to Kassapa Assalāyana, Ākāsa, Kondañña Kosiya,

Kāccāyana, Gotama, Pārāsariya, Kaṇhāyana, and different kinds of priests, such as *addhariyu (adhvaryu)* and *udicca* Brāhmaṇas.[26] Many of these *gotta* names, such as Gautama, Bhāradwāja and Kāśyapa, are Vedic, and the term *gotra*, as Brough points out, had become so elastic in its usage that it sometimes denoted an exogamous unit, a family, or even social status generally.[27]

From the above, it is possible to arrive at some broad generalizations. One is that by 500 B.C. Brāhmaṇa penetration had proceeded into areas that once had been declared unfit for Brāhmaṇa residence and functions. This was especially so in Māgadha, Kosala, Avanti and parts of Dakkhiṇāpatha, where the existence of *Brāhmaṇagāmas and brahmadeyya* lands indicates widespread Brāhmaṇa colonization and acquisition of large landed properties, with quasi-fedual rights. Secondly, the Brāhmaṇas, either as *purohitas* or ministerial functionaries, had come to occupy strategic positions in the political, social and cultural life of the regions described as the homeland of Early Buddhism and of the areas into which it expanded by the last quarter of the first century B.C. Thirdly, the Brāhmaṇa group was socially and occupationally diverse, and there was a degree of upward and downward social mobility, permitting changes in social status and intermarriages.

Many of these influential Brāhmaṇas, either following the example of the kings they served, or on their own, became supporters of the Buddha and his movement. I have been able to trace the "conversion" of Brāhmaṇas who declared themselves *upāsakas* in the *Nikāyas*, and they number 49. Of these, five were *mahāsālas* enjoying *brahmadeyya* lands. They were Cāṅkī, Kūṭadanta, Pokkharaśati, Soṇadanda and Lohicca. One, Kasibhāradwāja, was a very rich farmer. Others seem to be ordinary Brāhmaṇas in terms of wealth, and quite a few are mentioned simply as "one Brāhmaṇa" (*aññataro Brāhmaṇo*). In other cases, "many Brāhmaṇa householders" (*sambahulā Brāhmaṇagahapatikā*) are mentioned as having become *upāsakas*. In a few cases, there is no mention of the Brāhmaṇa becoming an *upāsaka*, while there is one known instance in which Brāhmaṇas are reported to have attempted to harass the Buddha and his followers by throwing garbage into a well.[28]

The standard formula for the person seeking "shelter" (*saraṇam*) in the Buddha, Dhamma and Samgha, and requesting that he be accepted as a lay devotee (*upāsaka*), occurs at the end of the *suttas* in which these encounters between the Buddha and his Brāhmaṇa interlocutors are narrated. There is no reason to reject these "conversions" out of hand, for in many cases they are preceeded by an invitation to a meal.

What was the meaning of a Brāhmaṇa's becoming a lay devotee of the Buddha? In the case of those enjoying *brahmadeyya* lands and the *mahāsālas* it simply indicated that those concerned expressed their respect to the Buddha as a "holy" man. It is nowhere said that these Brāhmaṇas ceased to hold the *brahmadeyya* lands, a condition of whose control was to devote themselves to Vedic learning and train their disciples in it. Nor is it necessary to assume that the *purohitas* who declared their devoteeship ceased to be *purohitas*. In the case of Sunīdha and Vassakāra, the two ministers of Ajātasattu, there is no specific mention that they ever formally declared themselves to be *upāsakas*. Nor is it necessary to assume that their "conversion" signified any dramatic change in their traditional beliefs and social status. Probably, some of them who were officiating at the animal sacrifices on behalf of their royal patrons desisted from offering such sacrifices in deference to the Buddha and his preaching. That they continued to function as Brāhmaṇas seems a reasonable assumption. Their becoming *upāsakas* did not signify their giving up the old "caste" status. We have inscriptional evidence of such Brāhmaṇa *upāsakas* continuing to regard themselves as Brāhmaṇas. An inscription from Kuda (in Maharashtra) specifically mentions a gift to the monastic settlement there by a Brāhmaṇa who calls himself an *upāsaka*. On palaeographic grounds, the inscription may be dated to a period between the first and second centuries A.D. If Brāhmaṇas who were *upāsakas* continued to call themselves Brāhmaṇas in distant Maharashrta in the second century A.D., we may reasonably assume that such a practice prevailed during the life-time of the Buddha and afterward.[29] All that such a "conversion" involved was a kind of special relationship between the Brāhmaṇa and the Buddha and his movement. It indicated the absence of resistance to the new Buddhist movement by these Brāhmaṇas, their giving up practices especially objectionable, such as animal sacrifices, and their making donations to Buddhist establishments in the area. The situation may have been analogous to relationships between *Gurus* and their disciples among Hindus today, whereby the disciples regard themselves as members of the Guru's following without ceasing to be Hindus in any way. The point is that such "conversions" did not imply a distinct and separate "religious" or social identity, as later happened when a Hindu became a Moslem or Christian. Buddhism generally failed in establishing an organized group of lay devotees who, on their "conversion", regarded themselves, other than in their frequent or periodical visits and donations to Buddhist shrines as socially different from the rest of the community. But their support was valuable to Early Buddhism, for many of them were influential either at the court or in society in general, and their acceptance of the new Buddhist movement could have meant a new prestige and respectability for the Buddha and his monastic followers.

III

The last group of the Brāhmaṇas to be considered is one that is invariably coupled with the *samaṇas* as in the stock phrase *samaṇa-Brāhmaṇa*. The justification for separating it from the *Purohita-Mahāsāla-Gahapati* groups is that this last group is always distinguished from the rest of the Brāhmaṇas in the texts of the Early Buddhists. Our texts also speak of Brāhmaṇas living in *assamas* (hermitages), as in the case of the Brāhmaṇa Rammaka, which was in the vicinity of Sāvatthi, or the case of Brāhmaṇas who lived in forest huts constructed out of twigs, branches, and leaves. These conform to the picture of the Upaniṣadic philosophers who retired to sylvan areas for meditation and philosophical discussions.[30] The *samaṇas*, on the other hand, formed a class of their own, and had "one essential characteristic in common, *viz.*, that they are all professed religieux, homeless wanderers without kinship or social bonds". The group was "varied and miscellaneous in character" and its members lived by begging, having no fixed abodes (except in the rainy season), moving about from one place to another, singly or in groups of teachers and their disciples. The Buddha himself was called a *samaṇa* in this sense by his contemporaries.[31] One text gives an interesting list of *jaṭilas* (those of matted hair), Niganṭhas (followers of Mahāvīra, the Jina), *acelakas* (the naked ones), *ekasāṭakas* (wearing only one garment), and *paribbājakas* (wandering religious mendicants), "all with hairy bodies and long nails, carrying friars' kit". The precise distinction between a *samaṇa* and a *paribbājaka* is not always clear, though Dutt observes that the

samaṇas held "a distinguished place in the Parivrājaka community".[32] Some of our texts make a distinct mention of Brāhmaṇa *paribbājakas*, indicating that whereas the *paribbājakas* lived and wandered alone, the *samaṇas* formed their own groups or communities, guided by a well-understood code of discipline (*vinaya*).[33] The theories of the *samaṇa-Brāhmaṇas* are detailed in the *Brahmajāla* and *Sāmaññaphala suttas* of the *Digha Nikāya*. They discuss the theories of the six famous sectarians, Pūraṇa, Kassapa, Makkhalī Gosāla, Ajita Kesakambali, Pakudha Kaccāyana, Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta and Niganṭha Nāṭaputta who were contemporaries of the Buddha. Each one is described as "head of an order, of a following, the teacher of a school, well-known and of repute as a sophist, revered by the people, a man of experience who has long been a recluse, old and well stricken in year's".[34] In the formative period of Gotama s career, he was one of these *samaṇas* and/or *paribbājakas*, and it was, only after his Enlightenment and formal conversions, along with the formation of a distinctive *Vinaya*, that his followers were called *samaṇā sakyaputtiyā* (*Śākyan samaṇas*).

This body of homeless religious wanderers provided a significant number of converts to the monastic fraternity of Early Buddhism. Many of the celebrated disciples of the Buddha came from among such groups of *samaṇas* and *paribbājakas*, and the names of Sāriputta, Moggallāna, Mahākassapa, the three Kassapa brothers (Uruvela, Nadi and Gayā), Vangīsa and Mogharāja immediately come to mind. The *Nikāyas* give us a list of ten *paribbājakas* who became *upāsakas*, the majority of whom were converted in large urban centers, such as Sāvatthi, Rājagaha and Vesāli. Names of some nine *paribbājakas* who joined the Buddhist monastic fraternity also are listed. Some of them, such as Sandaka, also asked their own followers to join the order, and one, Acela Kassapa, joined the order after being a *paribbājaka* for 30 years. Similarly, the same sources provided the names of some 27 Brāhmaṇas—outside of the list of famous monks who were Buddha's followers (Sāriputta *et al*)—and of these seven claimed Bhāradwāja as their *gotta*. Like the *paribbājakas*, these Brāhmaṇas also joined the order after their encounters with the Buddha in large cities.[35]

On the role of ex-Brāhmaṇa monks and nuns in the Buddhist movement from the time of the Buddha to about the first century B.C., further interesting evidence is given in the verses of the *Thera-Theri Gāthas* and in the biographical information given in the commentary on these collections of verses. The list contains 332 names, and its social composition gives us some idea on the nature of what, for want of a better term, may be called the Early Buddhist Elite, Of these 332 individuals, 261 are monks and 71 are nuns. Of these 332, the social origins of four (three monks and one nun) are unknown. Of the rest, 134 or 40.8% (117 monks and 17 nuns) are described as being former Brāhmaṇas; 98 or over 29% (74 monks and 24 nuns) belonged to the *Gahapati* or *Vessa* group; 75 or over 22% (53 monks and 22 nuns) may be said to belong to the Khattiya order; 10 (seven monks and three nuns) may be called members of the so-called degraded classes of society. Of the 134 Brāhmaṇas in this group, 27 were scions of *Mahāsāla* families, but 107 belonged to commoner Brāhmaṇa families.[36]

A more significant piece of evidence on the relationships between the Brāhmaṇas and Early Buddhism and the Brāhmaṇa contribution to Early Buddhism come from the *Etadagga vagga* of the *Anguttara Nikāya*. In this text, the Buddha himself is attributed with statements indicating leadership in various aspects of the Early Buddhist movement and the persons he considered foremost among them (*etadaggam bhikkhave mama*

sāvakanam bhikkhūnam.....). This list contains the names of 41 monks and 13 nuns. Of the 41 monks, 18 belonged to the Brāhmaṇa group (43.9%), nine were Khattiyas (most of them being Śākyas), 11 belonged to the *gahapati* or Vessa class, one may be called a Sudda (Upali, the master of the Vinaya was an ex-barber), and there are two whose affiliations are unknown. The *Thera-Therigātha* group gives us 40.8% Brāhmaṇas among those whose verses were considered significant enough to be included in the collections that form a part of the Theravāda Canon, while the *etadagga* list has even a larger (43.9) percentage of monastic leaders. Among the 13 nuns cited for their leadership, and their qualities of intelligence, learning, and rigorous training and practice, only two were Brāhmanas, while four were Khattiyas and seven belonged to the *gahapati* class.[37]

Further evidence of the importance attached to the Brāhmaṇa class comes from the list in the *Jataka* stories of the "former" Buddhas and the Bodhisattas. The theory of the "former" Buddhas occurs prominently for the first time in the *Mahapadāna sutta* of the *Digha Nikāya*, which may be considered a late interpolation, though certainly prior to the time of Aśoka (*circa* 272-232 B.C.), who mentions the enlargement of the stupa of a "former" Buddha Koṇāgamana in one of his inscriptions. The *Dīgha* source has a list of six Buddhas who preceded Gotama. Of these six, the last three (50%) Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana and Kassyapa, were born as Brāhmaṇas. A random check of castes ascribed to Bodhisattas in the *Jātakas* reveals that the Future Buddha in these stories (a very small part of the collection was examined) was born as a Brāhmaṇa 31 times.[38] By themselves, these figures may not mean too much, but they do add to the cumulative impression that the relationship between Early Buddhism and the Brāmaṇas was characterized by an acceptance of the prestige of the latter by the former.

In view of the foregoing, what conclusions may reasonably and legitimately be drawn, concerning the encounter between Early Buddhism and the Brāhmaṇas? That the Buddha often ridiculed the pretensions of some Brāhmaṇas to purity and social snobbery is amply borne out by many a *sutta* in the Pāli Canon. It is also clear that the Buddha completely ignored caste distinctions in admission to his order. In the famous *Cullavagga* passage, the Buddha declared : "Just as Gangā, Yamunā, Aciravati, Sarabhū, Mahi (rivers), on reaching the great ocean abandon their former names and designations (*nama-gottāni*), and are known only as the great ocean, likewise, these four orders (*vaṇṇa*) Khattiya, Brāmaṇa, Vessa, Sudda, when they renounce the state of householders for homelessness under the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* preached by the *Tathāgata*, abandon their former names and designations, and are called only as ascetics (*samaṇā*) of the Sakyas (*Sakyaputtiyā*)".[39] This injunction was strictly followed in the matter of admissions to the order (subject to other conditions) and recognition of merit, as the case of Upāli, an ex-barber, being recognized as the master of *Vinaya* shows. Outside the order, however, conditions differed a great deal. Among the *upāsakas* (lay-devotees), a certain disregard for considerations of caste distinctions, may have prevailed, but the evidence is far from eonclusive on this point. We have noticed above that many a royal chaplain declared himself to be an *upāsaka* of the Buddha at the end of his encounter with the Enlightened One, though it is not indicated that after that event he ceased to exercise the duties ordained by the Vedic or Brahmanical ritual. We have also cited the inscription from Kuda in which an *upāsaka* declares himself to be a Brāhmaṇa *upāsaka*, and the date of that inscription may fall between the first and the second century A.D. Similarly, the

votive inscriptions from Bharhut and Samchi contain evidence of gifts to those Buddhist establishments by persons who do not seem to have been even *upāsakas*.[40] In the case of royal donations to Buddhist establishments in Western India, the Brahmanical affiliations of rulers, such as those belonging to the Sātavahana or Kśatrapa dynasties, are clearly on record.[41] The point here is that we must consider the history of Early Buddhism in two parts, one relating to the monastic fraternity, the other to the *upāsaka* and general lay supporters of the movement. Of the specifically Buddhist (doctrinal and organizational) character of the former, there is not the slightest doubt it formed a distinct "religious" community. We cannot be as sure of the specifically Buddhist character (as a separate and distinct "religious" community) of the second category. There is reason to believe that in the history of Buddhism in India, the lay community never quite acquired the status of a separate and distinct "Buddhist" community. The distinction always existed in the monastic organization, but the unity of that organization splintered as soon as sects began to appear among the Buddhists, and sectarian donations then began to become evident. While a resurgence of Brahmanism from the time of the Śungas (*circa* 186 B.C.) cannot be ruled out as a factor in the decline of Buddhism in India, we also must consider other factors that worked against the crystalization of lay Buddhists as a separate and religiously distinctive community. Among the lay population, it seems, Buddhism remained a *sampradāya* (a part of the general social community), calling for special support from *upāsakas* and others favorably inclined toward the movement. Once the monastic communities disappeared from the surface of life, the lay supporters gradually became assimilated into the general "Hindu" community.

As mentioned before, royal support (Aśoka, Kaniṣka and Harṣa) undoubtedly was a factor in the popularity and spread of Buddhism in India. Alongside of this support, we also must consider the support given by Brāhmaṇas, either as *upāsakas* or as members of the monastic fraternities, as an important contributing factor. These Brāhmaṇas brought to the Early Buddhist movement a prestige and intellectual acumen that considerably augmented the effect of royal patronage. That the Early Buddhists clearly recognized this contribution as indicated by the (above-noted) percentage of ex-Brāhmaṇa leadership in the Buddhist "Elite" groups, and especially by the proportion of Brāhmaṇas recognised by the Buddha as foremost in scholarship and piety in the Buddhist creed, as indicated in the *etadagga* list. In view of this, to what extent are we justified in adhering to the prevalent general assumption that the Early Buddhist movement was anti-Brahmanical? Our discussion so far suggests that the accommodation between the Brāhmaṇas and the Early Buddhists far outweighed rivalry, antipathy, or hostility between the two. The anti-Buddhist bias appears in Brahmanical literature from time to time, but it is bias of more against the monastic movement in general, though in later periods (post-second century B.C.) the Buddhist monastic fraternity proved to be a highly visible target, because of its large numbers and the relative affluence of its monasteries. The withdrawal of relatively large groups of men and women, or the fear of such continuing and increasing withdrawal, from economically productive work seems to have been a potent factor in the later disapproval of monasticism in general. The economic consequences of large-scale monastic movements led to the rise of anti-monastic sentiments, reflected in the *Arthaśastra*, where Kauṭilya advised the king not to allow ascetics freely to frequent villages, for fear of interruption in their work.[42] Later, Manu too shows his disapproval of the *Sannyāsa* mode, and advised that normally

sannyāsa must follow the first three (*Brahmacarya, Grhastha* and *Vānaprastha*) modes or stages (*āśramas*) of life.[43] Increasingly, therefore, social and political thinking, influenced by Brahmanism, began to disapprove of monasticism. But that may have been due more to the social and economic consequences of monasticism in general than to a particular dislike of the Buddhist variety. Another factor may have been the emergence of the Brāhmaṇa as a closed group (caste) almost exclusively associated with priestly functions. The curious fact is that, as "Vedism" based on the *Ṛg Veda, Yajur Veda, Sāma Veda* and the *Brāhmaṇas* declined, Vedic ritual, in the form of the great sacrifices, became a court cult. The horse-sacrifice was performed by Puśyamitra Śunga (*circa* 186-152 B.C.), Samudra Gupta (*circa* A.D. 350-376?) and several other later kings. The masses followed one of the more popular cults centering on worship of Śiva, Viṣṇu and other deities of the emerging Hindu pantheons. The Brāhmaṇas had then emerged as an exclusive group—"a genteel literati whose magical charisma" rested on their possession of the Vedic lore and its ritual, preserved in a "holy literature, written in a holy language remote from that of everyday speech". They and their rituals, based on the *Vedas*, became the major, if not the only source, of satisfying the desire of rulers, sprung from non-descript dynastic origins, to acquire legitimacy through ritual consecration and affiliation and a share in the charisma of which the *Vedas* and the Vedic rituals were the repository. Anyone rejecting the *Vedas* and its ritual, which by this time was more or less restricted to court circles, threatened directly the sacerdotal authority of the new Brāhmaṇa caste. The Buddhist rejection of Vedic authority, which in the earlier period (500-200 B.C.) did not trouble greatly even *purohitas* who declared themselves as *upāsakas* of the Buddha, now challenged the very basis of the priestly power entrenched in the court circles. Accommodation, therefore, was practically impossible, and therewith emerged the Brahmanical ire against Buddhism. By that time, however, Buddhism itself was split into rival sects, and Theravāda had practically disappeared from large parts of India, only to find asylum in Ceylon, Burma and other countries of Southeast Asia.[44]

FOOTNOTES

1. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, I, 1, 14-16; J. Eggling (Trans.), *The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (Oxford, 1882), I, pp. 105-106.
2. H. Oldenberg, *Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order* (London, 1882), pp. 399-400.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
4. See for instance J. Kashyap (Ed.), *The Anguttara Nikāya* (Nalanda, 1960), I, p. 263; II, pp. 466-467; all Pāli texts cited here, unless otherwise indicated, belong to the series edited by J. Kashyap and published from Nalanda between 1956 and 1960. They will be cited in abbreviation as *Mahāvagga-MV*; *Cullavagga-CV*; *Dīgha Nikāya-Dn; Majjhima Nikāya-MN*; *Samyutta Nikāya-ŚamN*; *Anguttara Nikāya-AngN*; *Khuddaka Nikāya-KhN*; *Kautilya Arthaśāstra*, III, 20, 16; P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra* (poona, 1968), I, 1, p. 219.
5. For the date of Buddha's passing away see M.M. Singh, *Journal of Indian History*, XXXIX/iii (Dec. 1961), pp. 359-363; for the chronology of the Pāli Canon see M. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature* (New York, 1971), II, pp. 17 ff.
6. For a definition of caste see J. H. Hutton, *Caste in India* (Cambridge, 1946), pp. 42 ff; G. S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India* (Bombay, 1969), pp. 173, 177.
7. For the Pāli list see *DN*, I, p. 91; *MN*, II, pp. 433, 472, AngN, II, p. 472; for their Vedic identities, see A. A. Macdonell and A. B. Keith, *Vedic Index* (Delhi, 1958), I, pp. 11, 45, 145, 276; II, pp. 97-98, 109-110, 274-277, 286-287, 311-312.
8. T. W. Rhys Davids and W. Stede (Eds.), *Pāli-English Dictionary*, (London, 1959), p. 123; hereafter abbreviated as *PED*; *Webster's New International Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass.), p. 98.
9. *MN*, II, pp. 411-413; the *Nalaka sutta* of the *Sutta Nipata* calls Asita *Kanha* (Black) who forecasts the future Buddhahood of Gotama; *KHN*, I, pp. 374-379.
10. *DN*, I, p. 76; T. W. Rhys Davids (Trans.), *Dialogues of the Buddha* (London, 1956), I, pp. 109-110.
11. V. Trenckner (Ed.), *The Milindapañho* (London, 1880), p. 178; T.W. Rhys Davids (Trans.), *The Questions of King Milinda* (New York, 1963), I, p. 247; Rhys Davids regards the Milinda book as post-*Kathāvatthu* (II, pp. xxv-xxvii) while M. Winternitz ascribes the *Milinda* to the First Century A.D., *op. cit.*, II, p. 175; *DN*, I, pp. 10 ff.
12. *DN*, I, pp. 80-81.
13. *KhN*, I, pp. 311-314; *SamN*, I, p. 8; *MN*, II, p. 26.
14. *MN*, II, pp. 462, 474: *KhN*, I, p. 362; W. Stede (Ed.), *The Sumangala-Vilasini* (London, 1971), II, p. 586; hereafter abbreviated as *SV*.
15. *DN*, I, pp. 76, 109 ff; II, p. 198; *MN*, II, pp. 427 ff; *Ang N.* I, pp. 167 ff; II, p. 297; *SamN*, I, pp. 111, 113; *KhN*, I, pp. 12-13; G.P. Malalsekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names* (London, 1960), I, pp, 80, 161, 203, 304-305, 393, 446, 452, 465, 534, 563, 716, 730, 1096; hereafter abbreviated as *DPPN*; see also B.G. Gokhale, "The Brahmanas in Early Buddhist Literature" in *Journal of Indian History*, XLVIII/I (April, 1970), pp. 51-61.
16. *KhN*, I, pp. 354-359; *MN*, II, p. 483; *DPPN*, I, pp. 277, 663-664.
17. *DN*, I, pp. 76 ff, 97, 109, 191, 236; *MN*, II, p. 427; *DPPN*, I, pp. 329, 658; *SV*, I, p. 246; *PED*, pp. 347, 424, 493, 568, 571, 665; T. W. Rhys Davids (Trans.), *Dialogues of the Buddha*, I, p. 108.
18. *DN*, I, pp. 109, 128, 129, 199; III, p. 114; *AngN*, III, p. 214; *SamN*, I, p. 183.
19. *DN*, II, pp. 70-71, Vassakāra is here mentioned along with Sunidha both of whom are called *Magadhamahamatta*; *MN*, III, p. 74 calls Vassakāra a Brāhmaṇa while *AngN*, III, p. 165 identifies him as minister of Ajātsattu; it seems reasonable to assume that Sunidha may also have been a Brāhmaṇa; also see *MN*, II, pp. 354-355; III, pp. 61, 68 ff, 74, 76; *DPPN*, I, pp, 12, 208, 569, 666, 730, 884, 908, 968, 1016.
20. *DN*, II, pp. 172-173; *Dialogues of the Buddha*, II, pp. 266-267.
21. For the two terms see *PED*, p. 320.
22. *SamN*, I, p. 179; Mrs. Rhys Davids (Trans.), *The Book of the Kindred Sayings* (London, 1950), I, p, 227 and note 2.
23. *DPPN*, I, pp. 526, 542.
24. *KhN*, I, pp. 280-283.
25. *MV*, p. 35; DN, I, pp. 97, 111; *MN*, I, pp. 349, 356; II, pp. 281, 389, 403, 428, 449; for the various occupations followed by the Brahmanas see *AngN*, II, p. 470, trade, pastoralism, archery, royal service and arts are mentioned.
26. *MN*, II, pp. 198 ff, 375, 402, 432; *SamN*, III, pp. 111-113; *KhN*, I, pp. 287, 329, 339; *DPPN*, I, pp. 4, 11, 15, 18, 59, 151 ff, 228, 230, 351, 476, 489, 499, 528, 547, 552, 562, 628, 683, 699-700, 786, 787, 930.
27. For the Bramanical institution of *gotras* and *pravaras* see J. Brough, *The Early Brahmanical System of Gotra* and *Pravara* (Cambridge, 1953), pp. xii, 6 ff; G. S. Ghurye, *Two Brahmanical Institutions — Gotra and Charana* (Bombay, 1972), pp. 17 ff.
28. *DN*, I, pp. 95, 107, 126-127, 133, 135, 182, 198, 212; III, p. 76; *MN*, I, pp. 32, 234, 255, 349-355, 356, 359; II, pp. 91, 389, 394, 413, 425, 440, 448, 461, 468, 480, 497; III, pp. 67, 68, 76, 286, 397, 404-405; *SamN*, I, pp. 171-179, 181-184; II, pp. 65, 66, 156; III, pp. 111-114; *AngN*, I, pp. 54-57, 64-65, 145, 147-148, 454-455; II, pp. 40-46, 184, 185, 191-193, 249, 473, 477, 479; III, pp. 53-56, 72, 78, 166, 188, 292, 381; IV, pp. 69, 280, 292, 306-307, 350; *KhN*, I, pp. 66, 159, 283, 290, 314, 344, 368.
29. For details of the Kuda inscription see B. G. Gokhale, *Buddhism in Maharashtra—A History* (Bombay, 1976), pp. 56-59.
30. For the stock phrase *samaṇa-Brāhmaṇa* see *DN*, I, pp. 7 ff; for Brāhmaṇa *assamas* see *MN*, I, p. 209; *DN*, III, p. 73.
31. See S. Dutt, *Early Buddhist Monachism* (New York, 1960), pp. 31-32.
32. *Ibid*, p. 32.
33. *AngN*, I, pp. 145, 148.
34. *DN*, I, pp. 8 ff; 41-42; Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, I, p. 66, for the various views propounded by these groups also see *DN*, I, pp. 141, 147-148; *MN*, I, pp. 112-115, 203-207, 291 ff; II, pp. 193, ff; 225; III, pp. 3 ff, 21 ff; *SamN*, I, p. 182; *AngN*, I, pp. 160 ff; SV, I, p. 319.
35. *DN*, I, pp. 149, 168; II, p. 117; *MN*, I, p. 53; II, pp. 65-66, 175, 183, 197, 210, 223, 246, 266, 270; II, pp. 344-350; III, p. 193; *SamN*, I, pp. 141, 161-166; II. p. 110; III, pp. 267-268; *AngN*, I, pp. 146, 203; II, pp. 22, 105-106; III, pp. 70-71; *KhN*, I, pp. 339, 352, 354, 359, 438.
36. For details see B. G. Gokhale, "The Early Buddhist Elite", *Journal of Indian History*, XLIII/II (August, 1965), pp. 391-402.
37. *AngN*, I, pp. 23-27
38. *DN*, II, pp. 4 ff; *DPPN*, I, pp. 2, 49, 52, 63, 65, 167, 168, 201, 207, 429, 446, 499, 513, 522, 548, 568, 570, 669, 730, 886, 949, 971, 984, 1009, 1016, 1037, 1041, 1064, 1096, 1101, 1243.
39. *CV*, p. 356.
40. H. Luders (Ed.), *Appendix to Epigraphia Indica and Record of the Archaeological Survey of India* (Calcutta, 1912,)

X, pp. 38, 88 (List numbers 302, 869.),
41. B.G. Gokhale, *Buddhism in Maharashtra*, pp. 41 ff.
42. R. Shamasastry (Trans.), *Kauṭilīya Arthaśāstra* (Mysore, 1924), p. 47.
43. See G. Buhler (Trans.), *The Laws of Manu* (Oxford, 1886, *Sacred Books of the East Series*, XXV), pp. 204-205, 214.
44. For the charismatic functions of Brahmanical ritual see Max Weber, *The Religion of India* (Glencoe, Illinois, 1958), pp. 139-145.

6

The Disappearance of Buddhism and The Survival of Jainism : A Study in Contrast

PADMANABH S. JAINI

ONE of the most puzzling of the many enigmas that characterize Indian history is the decline and disappearance, between the seventh and thirteenth centuries A.D., of the religion of the Buddha from its native land. Numerous theories have been put forth in the attempt to explain this phenomenon; these are summarized as follows by R.C. Mitra in his excellent work, *The Decline of Buddhism in India* :[1]

1) "Exhaustion"
2) Withdrawal of royal patronage
3) Brahmanical persecution
4) Muslim invasion
5) Internal corruption and decay
6) Divisive effect of sectarianism
7) Insufficient cultivation of the laity.

The first of these suggestions, namely, that Buddhism was simply "exhausted" or "ready to die" in India by 1200 A.D., must be dismissed as adding little or nothing to our understanding; no light is cast by such a statement upon the actual *cause* of the death in question.[2] The remaining six theories, on the other hand, deserve more serious consideration, for each takes note of a situation or set of events that certainly exerted some influence upon Buddhist fortunes. It is hard to accept, however, that any one of these factors (or even, for that matter, all of them taken together) could have been decisive in precipitating the demise of institutional Buddhism on the sub-continent, for as we shall see, similar and often identical forces were at work on another non-Vedic community and yet failed to bring about its extinction. The community referred to is that of the Jainas, whose own circumstances during the Buddhist "period of decline" have been virtually ignored by scholars. This is most unfortunate, for it is perhaps only by asking the question, "How is it that one Gangetic, non-theistic *Śramaṇa*