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# Buddhism and the Caste System

by Y. Krishan

It has been long recognised that Buddhism and Jainism were not movements for social reform directed against the caste system,<sup>1</sup> and that the Buddha's doctrine did not aim at transformation or improvement of the social conditions.<sup>2</sup> Still, the Buddha's criticism of the caste system in general and of the social superiority claimed by the brāhmaṇas is still interpreted by some to mean that the Buddha held that "all men are born equal" or that his ideal was to establish a classless society.<sup>3</sup> We are of the view that the Buddha by his teaching unwittingly strengthened the caste system by explaining it in terms of the doctrine of karma.

The salient features of the caste system in its classical form are:

- (i) A hierarchical organisation of laymen into four groups, the brāhmaṇas at the top, followed by kṣatriyas, vaiśyas and the śūdras. Those outside the caste system were called *pañcamas*.
- ii) Practice of endogamy and exogamy; endogamy permitted marriages within a caste, excluding *sagotra* and *sapinda* marriages; exogamy prohibited inter-caste marriages to ensure the purity of blood of the endogamous caste group.
- (iii) Prohibition of commensality, that is, inter-dining among the castes.
- (iv) Discriminatory treatment of the śūdras and the outcastes. These castes and classes were debarred from studying the Vedic scriptures, performing Vedic *yajñas*, or sacrifices. The penal system, as laid down in the *Dharmaśāstras*, was discriminatory: for the same offence, a brāhmaṇa offender had to bear a lighter punishment, whereas it became heavier as we descend the caste hierarchy, the heaviest punishment being reserved for the śūdra.

The *pañcama* or *antyaja*, excluded from the pale of the āryan society, were treated as untouchable; their touch or sight was believed to cause pollution of the members of the upper castes, necessitating performance of purificatory rites.

There was another class that was outside the social system into which the laymen were organised, viz., the bhikṣus of the Buddhists, the *parivrājakas* or *sādhus* of the Brāhmanical faith, and the *yatis* and *sādhus* of the Jains. They had renounced the lay life for good. They were a class *sui generis*, not bound by the caste restrictions, and they commanded respect from all lay social groups.

### *I. Features of the Caste System in Buddhist Scriptures*

It seems clear that by the time the Buddhist texts were composed, the caste system had already acquired most of its essential features. In the *Madhura Sutta* (84) of the *Majjhimanikāya* (II 4.4) and in the *Assalāyana Sutta* (93) of *Majjhima* (II 5.3), the brāhmanaṣ claim to be of superior caste (*brāhmaṇo seṭṭho veṇṇo*) and the rest are of inferior caste (*hīno aṇṇo vaṇṇo*); the brāhmanaṣ claim to have fair complexion (*sukko vaṇṇo*), while others are dark (*kaṇho*); the brāhmanaṣ are pure (*sujjhanti*), while non-brāhmanaṣ are not.

The purity of caste blood was highly prized and was a bar to inter-caste marriages. In the *Caṅkī Sutta* (95) of the *Majjhima* (II 5.5), one of the grounds on which Caṅkī is dissuaded from going to the Buddha is that Caṅkī, both on his father's and mother's side, is of pure descent back through seven successive generations, without break or blemish in his caste lineage (*jāti vādena*). Caṅkī replies that Gotama is also of pure descent for seven generations both on the mother's and father's sides.<sup>4</sup>

The *Ambaṭṭha Sutta* (iii) of the *Dīghanikāya* (I 92–93) records the fear, entertained by the exiled children of Okkāka, a King of the Sākyas, of caste impurity (*jāti sambheda bhayā*) that may lead to marriage between brothers and sisters (*sakāhi bhaginīhi saddhim samvāsam kappenti*). There is also a reference to denial of seat (*āsana*) or water (*uddakam*) (*ibid.* III 98) to a person excommunicated from the caste group. In modern Indian parlance, it means that there can be no sharing of *hookāh* (smoking hubble-

bubble) and water with the person who is expelled from the caste.

In the story of Viḍūḍabha contained in the *Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā* (4.3),<sup>5</sup> King Pasenadi of Kosala is incensed at being tricked by Mahānāma, King of the Sākya, who has given him in marriage a daughter, advertised as a pure kṣatriya blood, but actually Vāsabhakhattiya, born from a slave girl. When Pasenadi discovers this deception, he degrades his queen and her son, Viḍūḍabha, to the status of slaves. The Buddha, the kinsman of the Sākya, pacifies Pasenadi by emphasising to him that the family of the mother does not matter; "it is the family (*gotra*) of the father that affords the only true measure of social position." Thus, the Buddha seems to have accepted the principle of blood purity as the determinant of social superiority.

The *Esukāri Sutta* (96) of the *Majjhima* (II 5.6) indicates that occupations were linked to castes, and that occupational mobility across caste divisions was frowned upon. The *sutta* states that a member of the higher caste could not serve a member of the lower caste: a brāhmaṇa may be served by members of all the castes; a kṣatriya (*khattiyyā*) by a kṣatriya, vaiśya (*vessā*) or śūdra (*suddā*), a vaiśya by a vaiśya or śūdra; and a śūdra by a śūdra only. At *Majjhima* II 180, a brāhmaṇa maintains that it is blameable conduct for anyone to desert his vocation for something else: *bhikkhācariyam ca pana brāhmaṇo sandhanam atimaññamāno akiccakāri hoti, gopo va adinnam ādivamāno ti*: by discarding alms begging, a brāhmaṇa fails to fulfil his duty or obligations, and is like a guardian who takes what is not given to him. The same is true of a kṣatriya, vaiśya or śūdra, who abandons the duties prescribed for his caste.

This is in consonance with the teaching of the *Bhagavadgītā* which enjoins (4.13, 18.41–47) performance of *varṇa-karma* as the most important means for attainment of *siddhi*, liberation.

T.W. Rhys Davids, in *Buddhist India*,<sup>6</sup> adduces considerable evidence from the *Jātakas* to establish that caste-based occupational rigidity had ceased to exist and that there were marriages between members of higher and lower castes (including śūdras) that did not lead to loss of caste. So far as the question of occupational flexibility is concerned, the successful assault on *yajña-karma*, religious sacrifices, by Buddhism and Jainism, and consequent occupational loss to the brāhmaṇas would have driven them to take up professions that in theory were the

monopoly of other castes. *Bhūridatta Jātaka* (no. 543, 214) describes the situation very graphically:

As householders to gain a livelihood  
Count all pursuits legitimate and good,  
So Brāhmaṇas now in our degenerate day  
Will gain a livelihood in any way.<sup>7</sup>

Obviously, this freedom to take up any profession was confined to the professions open to *dvijas*, the twice born, and could not include professions believed to cause pollution. Perhaps as a compensatory measure, the taboos on inter-caste marriages and inter-caste dining came to be practised *more* intensively and vigorously.

In the *Jātakas*, there is evidence that the touch or sight of the *pañcamas* was believed to cause pollution. In the *Setāketu Jātaka* (no. 377),<sup>8</sup> brāhmaṇa Setāketu, on seeing a *caṇḍāla* fears that “the wind, after striking the *caṇḍāla*’s body, might touch his own body” and thereby pollute him. He calls the *caṇḍāla* ill-omened. In the *Mātaṅga Jātaka* (no. 497),<sup>9</sup> Diṭṭha-maṅgalikā, on seeing a *caṇḍāla*, says “Bah, I have seen something that brings bad luck” and washes her eyes with scented water. This is repeated in the *Citta Sambhūta Jātaka* (no. 498).<sup>10</sup> In the same *Jātaka* a man describes a *caṇḍāla* as “the blot in the blood” (*jātiya doso*). The dwellings of the *caṇḍālas* were outside the towns.<sup>11</sup>

## II. The Buddha’s Attitude Toward Caste

The Buddha’s reactions to these features of the caste system do not indicate that he repudiated or condemned the caste system. In the *Madhura Sutta* of the *Majjhima* (II 85), he maintains that all four castes are equal: *ime cattāro vaṇṇā samasamā honti*; and describes the brāhmaṇas’ claim to superiority as an empty boast (*ghoso*). In the *Assalāyana Sutta* of the *Majjhima* (II 149) and the *Madhura Sutta, Majjhima* II 87, the Buddha refutes the claim of higher castes to superiority—but on metaphysical grounds: after death, they shall be reborn in accordance with their karmas and not in accordance with their caste (*jāti*): “a man who is a murderer or a thief or a fornicator, or a liar, or

a slanderer, or of violent speech or rattles or covets or is malevolent or holds wrong views, he will, after death at body's dissolution pass to the state of misery and woe, whether he be a brāhmaṇa, a kṣatriya, a vaiśya or a śūdra."

In *Jātaka* no. 498, the origin of *caṇḍālas*, described as the lowest race and the meanest of men, is traced to karma: "When all our deeds were ripe as guerdon meet, we both as young *caṇḍālas* had our birth" (*sakehi kammehi supapekhi caṇḍāla gabbhe avasimha pubbe*).<sup>12</sup>

Regarding the concept of the purity of caste blood, in the *Assalāyana Sutta* of the *Majjhima* (II 154), the Buddha maintains that all castes are of equal purity: *cātu vaṇṇim suddhim paccāgato*. But he attacks the claims of the caste conscious brāhmaṇa to social superiority on the ground that his purity of blood might be suspect: *jānanti pana . . . yā janīmātū mātā yāva sattamā mātā mahayugā brāhmaṇam yeva agamāsi no abrahmaṇa*: "Do you know for certain that your mother's mother and your grandmother for seven generations had intercourse with brāhmaṇas only and never with non-brāhmaṇas?" The Buddha goes on to repeat the same for the father's side (*sattamā pitā mahayugā*). (*ibid* II 156)

In the *Ambaṭṭha Sutta* of *Dīghanikāya* III, the Buddha recognises the caste-superiority of kṣatriyas over brāhmaṇas by pointing out that the kṣatriyas do not admit a child born of an *anuloma*<sup>13</sup> or *pratiloma*<sup>14</sup> marriage into their caste, even though the mother or father might be a kṣatriya and the other a brāhmaṇa. Such a child was admitted to the brāhmaṇa caste. The Buddha therefore concludes that when one compares women with women (*itthiya va itthim*) or men with men (*purisena va purisam*), the kṣatriyas are superior (*setṭho*) to the brāhmaṇas, who are lower (*hīna*). The Buddha avers: *khattiyo parama nihīnatam patto hoti*, even when a kṣatriya is fallen in the deepest degradation, *khattiyo va setṭha hino brāhmaṇo*, the kṣatriya is superior, brāhmaṇa inferior. The Buddha quotes Sanam Kumāra, a Brahmā god, to the effect that the kṣatriya is the best among those who believe in caste lineage (*gotra*): *khattiyo setṭho jani tasmin ye gottā paṭisārino*.

Again, in the *Esukāri Sutta*, the Buddha's reaction to occupational restrictions and rigidity in relation to various castes is equivocal; all that he emphasises is that "if the service makes a man bad and not good, it should not be rendered but if it makes

him better and not bad, then it should be rendered." He emphasises: "I assert that *uccakulīna*, high class family, does not enter into a man's being either good or bad, nor do good looks or wealth, for you will find a man of noble birth who is a murderer, a thief, a fornicator; therefore I assert that noble birth does not make a good man . . ." <sup>15</sup> In other words, the Buddha recognises the existence of the caste system and only emphasises that it is the moral conduct of a person and not his caste that determines whether he is good or bad. This is saying the obvious; it is no challenge to the caste system.

There is direct evidence in the *suttas* that the Buddha recognised caste distinctions. In the *Kaṇṇakatthala Sutta* (90) of *Majjhima* 4.10 (II 128–129), the Buddha, addressing Pasenadi, observes that there are four castes, *khattiyās*, *brāhmaṇas*, *veśās* and *suddās*. "Among these four castes . . . two are pointed to as chief, the nobles (*khattiyā*) and the *brāhmaṇas*, that is to say, in the way of addressing them, rising up from one's seat for them, saluting them with joined palms and rendering them service." <sup>16</sup> Again, Buddhas take birth only in two castes, *kṣatriya* and *brāhmaṇa*. <sup>17</sup> The Buddha clarifies that from the point of view of causality (*heturūpam*) there is no distinction or difference in a future state between the castes provided they strive equally for freedom or the end of sorrow. Again in the *Esukāri Sutta* (*Majjhima* II 181), a person's birth in a particular family of known parentage on the father's and mother's side is what determines his caste designation: *porāṇam—paṇ'assa mātā pettikam kulavaṃsam [khattiyā, brāhmaṇa, etc.] anussarato yatha yatth'eva attabhāvassa abhinibbati hoti, ten ten'eva saṅkham gacchati*.

From the *Assalāyana Sutta* (*Majjhima* II 149) it is evident that the Buddha was also aware that among the Yonas and Kambojas, those outside the āryan fold, there were only two classes, nobles and slaves, but that their classes and occupations were interchangeable: *yona kambojeṣu dveva vaṇṇā ayyo c'eva dāso ca; ayyo hutvā dāso hoti dāso hutvā ayyo hoti*. The Buddha never advocated this class structure as a first step to a casteless society.

Regarding the participation of *śūdras* and outcastes in religious life, it is significant that the Buddha's sermons are addressed to *kṣatriyas*, *brāhmaṇas*, *gṛhapatis* (respectable householders) and *sramaṇas* or their *parisās* (assemblies). In the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* (*Dīghanikāya* V 136) only the *kṣatriyas*,

brāhmaṇas and householders are invited to attend the great *yajña* (*homam*) organised by the king—a *yajña* approved by the Buddha. At *Aṅguttaranikāya* III 363, the Buddha describes the goals in life of the three upper castes and makes no mention of the goals of the śūdras and *pañcamas*. In other words, the Buddha ignored the śūdras and outcastes while encouraging religious life among the people. There is also no evidence that the Buddha ever denounced the discriminatory caste system-based penal laws of the *Dharmaśāstras*. In fact, the Buddhist texts do not even show any awareness of such a discrimination.

The later Mahāyāna doctrine of the bodhisattva expressed no special concern for the under-privileged and the depressed—the śūdras and the *pañcamas*, *caṇḍālas*, and the *nesāda*, *vena*, *rathakāra* and *pukkusa kulas*. In the *Aṣṭadaśa-sāhasrikā pra-jñāpāramitā* (f. 225a, chap. 57)<sup>18</sup> the Buddha tells Subhūti that the bodhisattva who trains beings to extricate themselves from *saṃsāra* is not reborn in hell, or as an animal, is free from physical deformities, and also is not reborn “among refuse workers or outcastes” (*na pukkasa caṇḍāla kulesu upapadyate*). In other words, the bodhisattvas also shun outcastes. Again, the bodhisattva was concerned with the alleviation of individual suffering and *not* with the oppression suffered by the mass of śūdras and outcastes or the disabilities of the serfs.

The Buddha only puts forward ideal, philosophical, definitions of brāhmaṇa and *caṇḍāla*. In the *Vāsettha Sutta* (*Majjhima* II 98) and *Suttanipāta* (3.9 27–28), the Buddha says:

*na cāham brāhaṇo brūmi, yonijam matti sambhavam*

-----  
*akincanam, anādānam, tamaham brūmi brāhmaṇam*  
*sabbasamyojanam chetvā yo ve na paritassati,*  
*saṃgātigam visamyuttam, tamaham brūmi brāhmaṇam:*

I call no one a brāhmaṇa from parentage; the man who has nothing, no possessions, who is free from grasping or covetousness, I call him a brāhmaṇa. He who cuts fetters, is free from thirst and fear, is a brāhmaṇa.<sup>19</sup>

Likewise, he defines a *caṇḍāla* in the *Aṅguttaranikāya* (III 203): a layman pursuing five things is an outcaste; he is without faith; without morals; is a diviner; believes in luck, not deed; and



seeks outside (the order) for a giftworthy person, and therefore first offers services.

### III. Buddhist Monks and the Caste System

Both Buddhism and Jainism led to the creation of another class outside the lay social system: the *bhikṣus* of the Buddhists, the *sādhus* and *yatis* of the Jainas, and the *parivrājakas* and *sādhus* of the Brāhmaṇical faith. They were a class *sui generis*, not bound by the caste restrictions, who had renounced lay life for good, irrevocably. Unlike outcastes, they commanded the respect of all the lay castes. This group and this group alone the Buddha had proclaimed free from caste distinctions: it was casteless. In the *Cullavagga* of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* (IX I. 4) the Buddha says, "just as . . . all the great rivers namely Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Aicravatī, Sarabhū, Mahī, when they reach the great ocean, lose their former names and differences and are denominated as the great ocean, even so . . . these four castes (*vaṇṇā*) kṣatriyas, brāhmaṇas, vaiśyas, śūdras, when they go forth from the household to houseless life under the doctrine and discipline (*dhamma vinaye*), lose their former family names (*nāmagottāni*) and are denominated as *samaṇa* . . ." In the *Aṅguttaranikāya* (III 240), this is graphically represented by a dream of Gotama in which four birds of four different colours (*nānā vaṇṇā*) fall at his feet and become entirely white (*sabbasetā*), symbolising abandonment of castes by those laymen who give up the household life and join the saṅgha. Thus, in the *Ambaṭṭha Sutta* (*Dīgha* III 2.1), the Buddha emphasises that "there is not . . . in the highest perfection of knowledge and virtue, any talk of caste (*jātivādo*) or of family (*gotta-vādo*) . . ."

In the *Madhura Sutta* (*Majjhima* 84), it is emphasised that whosoever renounces household life and joins the order of monks—be he a brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya or śūdra—and abstains from stealing, falsehood, etc., and observes the good law, would be entitled to respect and honour irrespective of his caste prior to renunciation. The *Uddālaka Jātaka*, no. 487 (307), and *Nimi Jātaka*, no. 541 (101), make it clear that caste ceases to have relevance when a person attains sainthood.

On the other hand, slaves and debtors were not admitted

to the saṅgha unless the slaves had been freed by their masters and the debtors had discharged their debts. This could only restrict severely any scope for breakdown of the caste system via the saṅgha.

#### IV. The Doctrine of Karma and the Caste System

In the *Vasala Sutta* (*Suttanipāta* I 7.21 of the *Khuddakanikāya*) the Buddha says:

*na jaccā vasalohoti, na jaccā hoti brāhmaṇa/  
kammuno [also kammaṇa] vasalohoti kammuno hoti brāhmaṇa*

Not by birth does one become an outcaste, not by birth does one become a brāhmaṇa; by deeds or karma one becomes an outcaste, by karma alone one becomes a brāhmaṇa.

In the *Vāseṭṭhasutta* (*ibid.* I 9.57), the Buddha repeats:

*na jaccā brāhmaṇo hoti; na jaccā hoti abrāhmaṇa/  
kammana brāhmaṇo hoti, kammana hoti abrāhmaṇa*

Not by birth does one become a brāhmaṇa; not by birth is he a non-brāhmaṇa. It is karmas that make a person brāhmaṇa and non-brāhmaṇa.

These verses have been interpreted to mean that the Buddha had repudiated the Indian caste system. This, I believe, is erroneous. The karmas referred to in these *suttas* are not current karmas (*sañciyamāna karma*), but past deeds, karmas done in previous lives. The *Vasala Sutta* (I 7.22–24) shows that Mātāṅga, who was a *caṇḍāla*, was honoured by brāhmaṇas and kṣatriyas because of his high conduct, but he could be reborn in the Brahmā-world, that is, attain this status of a brāhmaṇa, only after his death. Similarly (*ibid.* I 7.25–26), the sinful Vedic brāhmaṇas are blamed or criticised in this existence, but in the coming world, that is, after rebirth, “birth (as a brāhmaṇa in this world) does not save them from hell nor from blame.” A person born as a brāhmaṇa continues to belong to that caste even though he may be vile in his conduct; it is only in the next

birth that he is born according to his deeds—his earlier birth as a brāhmaṇa does not protect him against a fall in his caste status.

The *Vāseṭṭha Sutta* (*Suttanipāta* 3.9.8–26) explains the diversity in the world—why there are diverse breeds of grass, trees, insects, birds, animals. In the case of men, diversity is to be seen in their trade or callings: some are farmers, (*kassako*), tradesmen (*sippiko*), merchants (*vanijo*), servants (*peṣṣiko*), thieves (*coro*), soldiers (*yodhajīvo*), chaplains (*yājako*), or monarchs (*rājā*). Diversity of breeds in the case of plants, animals and birds is explained by the accumulated karmas (*sañcit karmas*) of previous births. Thus, diversity and the difference among men with reference to trade and profession can best be explained as due to their karma.

This is conclusively established by the verses in I 9.60 & 61 *ibid*. In Verse I 9.60, it is said that diversity is the result of *kammavipāka*. Again, *kammavipāka* is the cause of things, *yathā bhūtam*. The term *karma vipāka*, as a rule, means that the karmas of previous lives mature or ripen and bear fruit in subsequent life or lives. Verse I 9.61 *ibid*. proclaims:

*kammanā vattati loko, kammanā vattati pajā*

karmas rotate the world, karmas rotate the people (in the cycle of existence).

Such karmas are and can only be karmas of previous lives, *sañcita-karmas*, not *kriyamāna-karmas*.

This finds support in the *Cūlakammavibhaṅga Sutta* and *Assalāyana Sutta*. In the *Cūlakammavibhaṅga Sutta* (*Majjhima* III 204) the Buddha emphasises that it is their deeds that divide people into high and low and explain the disparities in life, length of life, health, wealth and looks. “Such deeds, if persisted in of deliberate choice, either bring that person at the body’s dissolution after death, to misery or woe or to purgatory.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, the consequences of these acts are manifest in another life. The *Assalāyana Sutta* of the *Majjhima* (II 149–50) is more explicit: the Buddha says that a person belonging to any caste, including the superior castes of the brāhmaṇa and kṣatriya, who commits murder, theft, sexual misconduct, is covetous, is malevolent, etc., will “after death, at the body’s dissolution pass to a state of misery and woe . . . .” Likewise,

one who observes the *pañcaśīla* would “after death, at the body’s dissolution” “attain heaven irrespective of whether he be a brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya, or śūdra.” In the *Milindapañha* (127, 128) it is stated that those who do good karmas are reborn, according to their wish, in a family of rich warrior, noble, rich brāhmaṇa or rich householder. In the *Divyāvadāna* (616), Prakṛti, a *caṇḍāla* girl, is freed from her previously accumulated sins, which had brought about her low birth (*pūrva sañcita pāpam durgati*). In the *Sārdula Karmāvadāna* of the *Divyā* it is said that men are architects of their own fortunes, that they are of the same class, with differences arising out of their karmas. The *Sīlavīmamsa Jātaka* (no. 362) is conclusive: *khattiyā brāhmaṇā vessā suddā, caṇḍāla pukkusā idha dhamamam caritvāna bhavanti tidive samā*: The kṣatriyas, brāhmaṇas, vaiśyas, śūdras, caṇḍālas and *pukkusas*, by practising the dharma in this world, will become equal in heaven.

In short, Buddhists recognised caste distinctions in the present life as the product of a man’s past karmas and not an accident of birth, as in the *gotra-karma* of the Jaina classification of karmas.

What the Buddha taught was that *jāti* caste does not enter into the moral quality of a person, either good or bad, nor his physical features (good looks) nor his wealth: “For you will find a man of noble birth who is a murderer, a thief, a fornicator, a liar, a slanderer, a man of bitter tongue, a tattler, a covetous person, a man of rancour or of wrong views, and therefore I assert that noble birth does not make a good man.” While the caste of an individual is determined by his birth, his caste in the next birth will be determined by his karmas in the present birth. The Buddha stresses that, “whatever caste in which a person might be born in this world, in the next birth, after the dissolution of his body after death his caste status will be determined by the quality of his accumulated karmas in previous births.” The destiny of man, the external organisation of his family life, is, for the Buddhists a necessary consequence of his karma, his former deeds: “wealth or poverty, high or low caste, the individual has deserved through his deeds in a former existence.”<sup>21</sup> The Buddha emphasises that past karmas (*sañcita karma*) determine the present caste of a human being and the current karmas (*kriyamāna karma*)<sup>22</sup> determine the caste status in future births. In this manner, the Buddha found an apparently rational and

firm foundation for the caste system in the doctrine of karma.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the Buddha (and Mahāvīra) promoted the formation of a casteless saṃgha recruited from amongst laymen belonging to various castes, who lost their caste on renouncing lay life. He did not condemn or repudiate lay observance of the caste system, even the practice of untouchability. He accepted the caste system among laymen as a fact of life; he only emphasised that the law of karma operated impartially, irrespective of the caste of a doer, and that kārmic law was not discriminatory like man-made law codes. More importantly, the Buddha taught that, irrespective of the caste of a person in this world, his caste status in his birth in the next life (and his happiness and suffering in that birth) is determined by the quality of his previous karmas, and thus established a link between caste and karma. The Vedic explanation of caste rooted in the primordial division of *Puruṣa* (*Rg Veda* X 90) is replaced by a genesis-explanation based on *karma*: now the origin of the caste is to be found, not in mythology, but in the causal cosmic law.

#### NOTES

1. E. Senart, *Caste in India* (Delhi, 1975), p. 206.
2. Richard Fick, *The Social Organisation in North East India in Buddha's Time*, English tr. (Calcutta: S. Maitra, 1920), p. 335.
3. A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism* (Delhi, 1980), p. 164, 169.
4. Likewise in the *Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta* of the *Dighanikāya* 4.120.21, in *Vāseṭṭha Sutta* (98) of the *Majjhima* (II 5.8) and in the *Samyuttanikāya* (115), the brāhmaṇas claim that what made a brāhmaṇa was pure descent on both the parental sides right back through seven successive generations of ancestors with no break or blemish in the lineage. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (1, 8.3.6) prohibits marriage among blood relations up to the 3rd or 4th degree. According to *Kalpasūtra* 17, Jaina arhats, etc., are born in families of pure descent on both sides (*visuddhajāti kulavansesu*).
5. E.W. Burligame, *Buddhist Legends* (London, 1969), Pt. 2, pp. 38–39.
6. *Buddhist India*: (Calcutta, 1950), pp. 40–42.
7. E.B. Cowell (ed.) *The Jātakas*, translated by Cowell, Francis, Rouse & Neil (Delhi, 1978) vol.IV, p. 112.
8. *The Jātakas*, *ibid.*, vol.III, p. 154. In the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* (VI 4.13) it is laid down that a śūdra should not touch a married woman undergoing periodic impurity (menstruation).
9. *The Jātakas*, *ibid.*, vol.II, p. 236.
10. *The Jātakas*, *ibid.*, vol.IV, p. 248.

11. *The Jātakas, ibid.*, vol.IV, no. 497, p. 236, vol.IV, no. 498, p. 248, vol.VI, no. 542, p. 79 and no. 546, p. 217.

12. *The Jātakas, ibid.*, vol.IV, p. 248.

13. A higher caste male marrying a lower caste female.

14. A higher caste female marrying a lower caste male. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (XIV 4.2.23) and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up.* (I 4.11) maintain that "nothing is superior to kṣatriya." Again, in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (5.3.7) it is a kṣatriya who instructs a brāhmaṇa about the other world, rebirth, etc. This shows the superiority of the kṣatriyas *vis-a-vis* the brāhmaṇas.

15. Lord Chalmers (tr.), *Further Dialogues of the Buddha (Majjhima-nikāya)* (London: PTS, 1899–1921).

16. I.B. Horner (tr.), *Majjhima-nikāya: The Middle Length Sayings* (London: PTS, 1957), vol.II, p. 310.

17. According to the *Kalpasūtra* (17–18), *inter-alia*, a *tīrthāṅkara* is born only in a high family, a royal and noble family belonging to the race of Ikṣvāku or Hari.

18. E. Conze (ed. and tr.), *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Aṣṭadasa-sāhasrikā-prajñā pāramitā* (Rome, 1962). See also Conze (tr.) *The Large Sūtra on Perfect Wisdom* (Berkeley, 1975) AA V2 P 26.

19. In the *Mahābhārata* (cr. ed) (III 177.15–16) Yudhiṣṭhira defines brāhmaṇa in a similar manner: a brāhmaṇa is one who practices truth, liberality, forbearance, self-control, benevolence, austerity and compassion.

20. *kāyassa bhedo param maraṇā apāyam duggatin viniṣṭātam nirayam uppajati.*

21. Fick, *ibid.* p. 335.

22. To this should be added the unexhausted previous karmas.

23. The attitude of the Buddha towards the *dāsas* (slaves, servants) provides a corroborative parallel to his attitude towards *sūdras* and outcastes. The *Śīgalovāda Sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya* (31.27) enumerates *dāsa kammakāra* (slaves and workers) as a distinct class, other than friends and kinsmen and *śramaṇa* and brāhmaṇa. It is significant that they are identified as belonging to the nether region. The discrimination in the treatment of friends on the one hand and slaves and servants on the other is patent. Friends are to be treated like oneself but slaves and servants must get up before the master rises, go to bed after he has retired and take only what is given to them.

Again, a slave or *dāsa* could not be admitted into the *saṅgha* unless he had secured the permission of his master.