

## **THE SOCIAL ORGANISATION**

**THE  
SOCIAL ORGANISATION  
IN NORTH-EAST INDIA  
IN BUDDHA'S TIME**

**BY  
RICHARD FICK**

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## **TRANSLATOR'S DEDICATION.**

**To the Memory of**  
**My dear departed brother**  
**Prof. NIKHILNATH MAITRA,**  
**to whose encouragement I owe the impulse**  
**to translate German works into English,**  
**This translation is**  
**humbly dedicated by his unworthy brother**



## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The title requires some explanation and justification. The sources upon which the inquiry that follows is based are the so-called Jâtakas or legends of previous births contained in the Pâli Canon of Southern Buddhism, that is, they are the stories which relate to the five hundred and fifty existences which Buddha in his various forms, ranging from that of an animal to that of a god, must have gone through before his final existence. The true and most ancient germ of the Jâtaka collection is contained in the verses (gâthâs) which exhibit *in nuce* the essential events of the legends and whose number determines the arrangement of the Jâtakas. These verses constitute, with the prose-commentary which gives the legend a more explicit form, the so-called *atîtavatthu*, the "story of the past" which has for its subject-matter the experiences of Buddha in one of his former existences. Each of these stories is preceded as an introduction by a *paccuppannavatthu* or "history of the present times," which tells us of the event in Buddha's life which impelled him to narrate the history of the past for illustrating the events of the

present day. Then follows the *samodhāna*, or "connexion" by which Buddha, who remembers not only his own previous existence but that of people around him, identifies the persons of the *atītavatthu* with those of the *paccuppannavatthu*.

^ §The Jātakas are most varied in their subject-matter: they consist, in part, of stories, parables or fables of animals, partly, of scenes from Indian folk-life of a cheering or edifying character. Consequently, our source is not only competent to arouse interest in the domain of the history of literature; the collection of legends is of more importance as a reservoir for materials for culture-history. Every account of the life in ancient India which will ever be written in future must take account of the Jātaka which has justly been called a thesaurus of Indian antiquities, State and private. §

That I have placed the culture which the Jātakas exhibit in North-Eastern India, will, I hope, not provoke any opposition. For although most of the stories contained in our sources are, so far as their contents are concerned, the common property of the Indian people and were known all over India, yet in the form in which they appear in the Jātakas, they belong to a particular part of India, namely, the north-east, the home of Buddhism.

Here, in the kingdom of the Kâsi-Kosala and Magadha, in the States where Buddha, according to tradition, lived and taught, the somewhat ancient stories took the garb of Buddhistic birth-legends; here the acts of by far the largest majority of the Jâtakas were performed, and if some particular incidents among them occurred elsewhere, even in the most distant west, still the whole mass of detail, in which all the Jâtakas agree, points to the fact that what we find here is only an external transference of the scene.

It may seem to be a very bold thing to take an entirely determinate period, namely, the age of Buddha, for the age of the legends and the state of civilization depicted in them. Taken as a whole, the collection of Jâtakas in their present form surely does not represent any single culture period. Many of the Jâtakas are undoubtedly very old and belong, so far as their origin is concerned, to the pre-Buddhistic period. That they were known in the third century B. C. and that too in the form of legends of previous births of Buddha designed for the education of laymen—for this we have irrefutable evidence in the sculptures in the third century B. C. which are found in the tombstones of Sanchi, Amaravati and Bharhut; these reliefs represent scenes from the Jâtakas and the superscriptions which

are added to the individual representations agree with the titles contained in our texts. If these sculptures give us, as the lower limit of the age of the Jâtakas, the third century B.C., there are reasons—as has been shown clearly by Bühler (*Indian Studies*, No. 3, p. 17 sq. in the “*Sitzungsberichten der Wiener Akademie, Philo-hist. Classe*” Vol. 132)—for placing it in a still earlier age.

On the original bed much clay was deposited in the course of centuries, till the Jâtakas came to acquire the form which they at present have. The introductory narratives are, although they relate to the time of Buddha and go back to the older portions of the Pali canon, manifestly composed after the beginning of the Christian era; the conditions described in the *paccup panna-valthu*, the life of the cloister which is portrayed with the minutest detail and regulated by precise rules, the relation between the laymen and the confederation and many other matters show a departure from the culture-period of the *alîta-valthu* and point to a time when Buddhism had already become a power and ruled over everything. If the view of culture to be sketched by me appears somewhat uniform, it is because the later components of the Jâtaka collection are left out of account; where they have been considered, I have brought out always very prominently

their character as *paccuppannavatthu*. Now, even in the oldest form, there was some portion which was specifically Buddhistic and there was a good deal of subsidiary matter that was introduced later to continue the thread of the narrative. In general, we can suppose that our legends have changed very little from their original form, as the oral transmission of such stories is generally true to the letter of the original and has preserved the form in which they obtained currency among the disciples of Buddha and spread from mouth to mouth.

Out of the rich historical material which the Jâtakas contain, I have put together in the present work first that which refers to the social organisation and specially to the caste-relationship; from this, the inquiry has no doubt at times drifted to other matters. A thorough-going account of the political and economical relations, as they ruled in Buddha's time in North-East India, I hope to be able to give at a later time on a broader basis by drawing upon the whole Pali canon, but I do not think of dealing with this problem before I have made myself clear on a question without a solution of which a complete understanding of the life of ancient India is unthinkable.

The responsibility for this work is entirely mine but I feel it my duty to thank Prof.

Oldenberg for various suggestions and kind help. I have also to give my thanks to Prof. Jacobi, who was kind enough to go through the proofs, as well as to my friend and former colleague, Dr. Wischmann, who has also helped me in reading the proofs.

The quotations from the Jâtakas refer to Fausböll's editions, of which up to now five volumes have appeared. The sixth volume which is being published I have not been able to make use of.

Regarding the transliteration of Pali and Sanskrit words it is to be remarked that *e* (ॡ) sounds like the German "tsch" and *j* has the same sound as in the English word 'journey'; *ś* and *sh* are pronounced like the German\* 'sch,' *s* is as sharp as "ss" and *e* and *o* are always long.

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\*That is, like *sh* in the English word *shame*—Translator.

## PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION.

Thanks to the original conception and adroit execution of Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, Sarasvati, President of the Post-Graduate Department, a special Degree in M.A. in Ancient Indian History and Culture was instituted by the Calcutta University in 1918. And as the course in its entirety was too vast for the comprehension of any student within the time at his disposal, the subject was divided into four Groups. One of these Groups is Social and Constitutional History dealing with social life, manners, customs and ceremonies, as well as economic life, principles and methods of administration and ethnology. It is impossible to exaggerate the special difficulty with which the University lecturers had to struggle, because there were very few manuals or text-books which could be prescribed for the use of the student. Of the few books again that were available, most were either in German or in French. Such, *e.g.*, was Dr. Richard Fick's *Die Sociale Gliederung im Nordöstlichen Indien zu Buddhas Zeit*. The importance of this book for the social and administrative history of

ancient India cannot possibly be denied, based as it is on the Jātakas of the Pāli Buddhist canon. One has only to look to the contents of this book to be convinced of it. The different subjects handled in the different chapters throw a flood of light on the social life of northern India in and before Buddha's time which is believed to have been portrayed by the Jātakas. Unfortunately for the students of India, Dr. Fick's work is in German and could in no way be useful to them, most of them not being acquainted with German. In these circumstances the Board of History recommended that it should be translated into English and that this translation should be published by the University. It was no easy matter, however, to find out a scholar capable of undertaking this translation. Just at that time Dr. S. K. Maitra, Director, Indian Institute of Philosophy, Amalner, came to Calcutta from the Bombay Presidency on some business. He had already undertaken the translation of Dr. Ludwig Stein's *Die Philosophischen Strömungen der Gegenwart* for the Calcutta University and done it satisfactorily. The History Board was thus in a way induced to approach him with their request, and he with his inherited zeal for the cause of education allowed this new task to be imposed on him, in spite of the multifarious duties that pressed on him heavily at that time. For the present publication, therefore, the



University is highly indebted to him. How beautifully Dr. Maitra has performed his task will be seen from the fact that none who goes through the book ever feels or even suspects that it is a translation.

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*The 8th August, 1920.* }

## CONTENTS

### *Chapter I*

INTRODUCTION	...	...	...	1
--------------	-----	-----	-----	---

One-sidedness of Brahmanical literature—  
The Brahmanical caste-theory—Superiority of  
Brâhmaṇa caste in Western India—Contrast  
between the Western and Eastern culture—  
Tendency of the Pali texts.

### *Chapter II*

GENERAL VIEW OF THE CASTES	...	17
----------------------------	-----	----

The Brahmanical caste-theory in the Pali  
canon—Theoretical discussions about the worth-  
lessness of the caste—Existence of castes in  
Buddha's time—Definition of the modern caste—  
The castes of the Brahmanical theory—The essen-  
tial characteristics of castes—The castes in the  
Jātakas—Impurity carried by air—Impurity  
through the sight of a low-born person—Im-  
pure food—Marriage within the caste.

### *Chapter III*

THE HOMELESS ASCETICS	...	...	60
-----------------------	-----	-----	----

Transition to the homeless condition a  
universal characteristic of Eastern culture—  
The *samanas* are recruited from all classes—

Examples of the adoption of the homeless condition among the Khattiyas, Brâhmanas and members of the middle and low classes—Causes of asceticism.

### *Chapter IV*

THE RULING CLASS ... 79

Who were the Khattiyas?—Not the warrior caste but the ruling class—Well-marked consciousness of rank and respect for purity of blood—Superiority of the Khattiyas over the Brâhmanas—Religious study for the Khattiyas.

### *Chapter V*

THE HEAD OF THE STATE ... 97

The chief representative of the Khattiyas is the king—General view—The duties of the king (in war: to lead the army; in peace, administration of justice, exercise of the power of inflicting punishment)—His revenues—Succession and consecration—The Viceroy—Limits of royal power—Oligarchical constitutions.

### *Chapter VI*

THE KING'S OFFICERS ... 139

General view of ministers—Their caste—The adviser of the king in worldly and spiritual things—The leader of the army—The minister of

justice—The surveyor—The corn measurer—  
The chariot-driver—The superintendent of the  
king's treasury and the supervisor of wares—  
The gate-keeper—The town sentinel—The exe-  
cutioner—The superintendents of villages.

### Chapter VII

THE HOUSE PRIEST OF THE KING ... 164

Historical evolution of the post of *purohita*  
—His personal relationship with the king—The  
king's teacher—His share in administration—  
His political power—The *purohita* as sacrificer  
and magician—The country *purohita*.

### Chapter VIII

THE BRĀHMANAS ... 180

The Brāhmaṇas are a caste in the sense of  
their own theory—General view of the Brāhma-  
ṇas according to the Jātakas—The proper Brāh-  
maṇas—The four āsramas—Duties and privileges  
of the Brāhmaṇas—The worldly Brāhmaṇas  
—Brāhmaṇas in king's service—Their functions,  
sacrifice, prophecy, magic—Brāhmaṇas practis-  
ing civil professions; Brāhmaṇa agriculturists,  
tradesmen, hunters and carpenters.

## Chapter IX

## THE LEADING MIDDLE CLASS FAMILIES ... 251

The caste Vessa is without a real meaning—  
 The position of the *gahapati*—The *kuṭumbikas*  
 —The *gahapati's* consciousness of rank—The  
*Setṭhi*—The *Setṭhi* as the representative of the  
 trading classes in the Royal Court—The *Setṭhi*  
 as a wholesale trader.

## Chapter X

## THE GUILDS OF TRADESMEN AND ARTISANS... 267

Stage of economical evolution in the Jātakas  
 —The combination of tradesmen into profes-  
 sional unions—The elder at the head of trade  
 guilds—Hereditary character of individual  
 branches of trade—Organisation of the artisan  
 class—Local isolation of the different guilds—  
 The elders of the trade unions—Hereditary  
 character of the professions.

## Chapter XI

## CASTELESS PROFESSIONS ... 286

Artisans in the king's service—The Court  
 barber—The king's cook—The royal valuer—The  
 Court artist—Itinerant jugglers—The tramp—  
 The country professions of herdsmen, fisher-  
 men and hunters—The hired labourer—The  
 slaves.

*Chapter XII*

THE DESPISED CASTES	...	314
---------------------	-----	-----

A Sudda caste has never existed—Despised ethnical castes—The Caṇḍāla—The Pukkusa—The Nesāda—Despised professional castes—The Veṇa—The Rathakâra—The basket-maker, flute-maker, cobbler, potter, weaver. Conclusion. Index of names and topics. Pāli and Sanskrit Index.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

.....ce n'est pas la théorie qui peut rendre compte des faits ; ce sont les faits qui aident à voir la théorie sous son vrai jour, à la ramener dans ses justes limites.

*Senart, Les Castes dans l'Inde.*

The time is past when people used to think that so far as ancient India was concerned, it was enough to consider only Brahmanical literature. The view that for ancient Indian culture and ancient Indian life, we require only to consider Brahmanical sources, is necessarily one-sided, because these sources were written from a one-sided point of view. For their authors immersed in the priestly views, the world which surrounded them, material as well as spiritual, existed only so far as it related to the sacrifices with their litany and their ritual which filled all their thoughts and aspirations, and where, as in the text-books of law, there was a departure from this special view-point and the entire domain of law and morals for private as well as public life was taken into account, this was still done from the standpoint of theorising.

Brahmanism<sup>1</sup>; nay, even in epic literature, where one could expect most a view of the real state of things, this was prevented or, at any rate, rendered

[p. 2.]\* difficult by the all-eclipsing under-  
wood of theories and systems.

No wonder that this world which the Brâhmanas interpreted in their own way appears so foreign and so strange to us; no wonder that in many points it agrees so little with what we know of ancient India from other sides. Now-a-days, however, we no more consider a non-Brahmanical source, such as the accounts of the Greek messenger Megasthenes, unreliable simply because it cannot be brought into harmony with the Brahmanical theory<sup>2</sup>; we try, on the other hand, to collect all available material, whether it is of Buddhistic, Jaina or Greek origin, which exhibits the priestly theories in their true light—nay, we do not even hesitate to make use of the conditions of modern India which on account of the

\* The figures on the margin [2], [3], etc., relate to the page numbers of the original German.—*Translator*.

<sup>1</sup> Oldenberg, *Religion des Veda*, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> So writes Max Duncker, *Geschichte des Alterthums*, 4th Edition, Vol. III, p. 319. "When the Greeks give seven instead of four castes, when the officials, the spies and the artisans, and lastly, the hunters and the shepherds are designated as separate classes by them, this error arises from the reason that they look upon these as caste-divisions." Cf. further Lassen, *Indische Alterthumskunde*, 2nd edition, Vol. II, p. 715, "Why he (Megasthenes) took seven instead of four is not clear."



stability of most Oriental cultures have preserved so much of the past, for comparison with, and for the explanation of earlier periods.

Nowhere does the one-sidedness of Brahmanical explanation seem so manifest as in the manner in which the Indian society is shaped in priestly literature. Heedless of all reference to facts, the Brâhmaṇas built up a theory which appeared to them to establish for ever, through eternal and Divine reasons, their rule. As the foundation for their caste-theory, they made use of certain class-distinctions which, as everywhere, existed in a wholly analogous manner among the Iranians and which existed in India even in the oldest Vedic age and were trans-

[p. 3.]                      mitted to the Vedas. Here they found as a line of demarcation

which was authoritative for them and which was not too circumscribed, that suggested by the opposition between the ruling classes, the priestly classes and the common people and the still sharper separation of the entire Aryan population from the peoples who were inimical to them, namely, the *dasyus*, who by their dark skins were distinguished from the fair conquerors, and, so far as they were subjugated, were employed in the capacity of slaves. With these distinctions of profession and race, the authors of the lawbooks made certain rules

concerning religious rites and regulating marriage and food which probably had been current from ancient times in many tribes of the people and specially, in their class, and thus developed the concept 'caste,' whose chief characteristic they took to be that which was the most obvious mark of the four castes, namely colour (varna).<sup>1</sup>

The Brahmanical theory divides Indian society into four castes and prescribes for each of these wholly fixed professions and activities. At the head stand the Brâhmanas; they represent the priest and teacher class. They have for their work the teaching and study of the Veda, the offering of sacrifices for themselves and for others and the receiving and giving of alms. The

[p. 4.]

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<sup>1</sup> It is beyond the scope of my problem which is only concerned with the condition of a particular period, to examine in detail the question of the origin of the castes and especially, of the influence which the institution of family has upon the building up of caste. I refer the reader to the article of Senart, *Les Castes dans l'Inde* in the "Revue des deux mondes" (Vols. 121, 122, 125), which I consider the most sensible and acute thing that has ever been written about the Indian castes. In particular points the statements no doubt stand in need of proof before they can be regarded as scientific facts. Especially, the proposition which is to be looked upon as the cardinal point of his theory, namely, that "caste is the normal development of the ancient Aryan family conception" seems hardly to meet adequately the objection that no traces of this development of the family into the caste are to be found in the Vedas, with the help of the following statement: "The development might have taken place too slowly, it rests upon too instinctive, too primitive elements to give us much evidence of this element in a literature such as that of the hymns."

Kshatriyas or "warriors" have for their duty the protection of the people, the giving of alms, the offering of sacrifices and the study of the Vedas; to the Vaiśyas, breeding of cattle, trade and agriculture were assigned as their work, but along with these, giving alms, offering sacrifices and study are made their duties; the Śûdras, finally, have only one work and that is to serve the other three castes (Mānavadharmasāstra I. 87-91). The authors of the lawbooks could not possibly conceal the inconsistency of this their theory with the surrounding facts. Most early probably, the two highest castes, the priests and the warriors, were brought into relation with the real facts, but the great mass of the people who in the course of a progressive civilization were assigned the various professions could only be held fast by doing violence to facts. But how to explain the existence of innumerable facts contradicting the theory? It would not do to introduce new castes without destroying the sacred old tradition. "The Brāhmaṇa, the Kshatriya, the Vaiśya, these three castes have two births, the fourth has only one birth; and there is no fifth (caste)"—so it is said in Manu (X. 4).

People joined with the already current theory another, and that was the theory of mixed castes.

Acting upon this, people began to look upon only the children by properly wedded women of the same caste as belonging to the caste of their father and the children resulting from the union of different castes as mixed castes, and this in the following way: the higher the caste of the mother and the lower the caste of the father, the lower became the caste of the issue. Thus, the child born of the union of a Brâhmana with a Vaiśya girl was called an Ambashtha, so it was called a Nishâda when the union was with a Śûdra's daughter; the issue of the marriage of a Kshatriya with

[p. 5.]      the daughter of a Śûdra was called Ugra; the children resulting from

the opposite kind of union, namely, when the mother belonged to a higher and the father to a lower caste, were called in the descending order of their social rank, Sûta, Mâgadha, Vaideha, Âyogava, Kshattri and Candâla. All these mixed castes were characterised as of low birth (apasada), the lowest and most contemptible was, according to the theory, the Candâla, because resulting from the union of a Brâhmana's daughter with a Śûdra. Through further combinations, through further alliances between the four recognised castes and the mixed castes and through marriages among the latter, there arose a further number

of mixed castes. Among others—I only mention the names which occur to me in this connexion—the issue of the union of a Nishāda with a Śūdra wife was called Pukkasa and the Vena was the issue of the alliance between a Vaidhaka and an Ambashtha woman. This, however, in no way exhausts the number of mixed castes; here come first the so-called Vrātyas, who are the issue of legitimate unions of the three higher castes but who through neglect of religious obligation, that is, neglect of taking admission into their caste (upanayana) at the right time, lost the right to belong to that caste. Their descendants fall again into different groups of ~~castes~~ castes, according as they were originally of Brāhmaṇa, Kshatriya or Vaiśya origin. We shall in course of our enquiry come across them (as Mallas, Licchavis and Natas who were all descended from the Vrātyas of the Kshatriya caste. Innumerable despised mixed castes, again, are the offspring of those who through some fault—adultery, consanguineous marriage, abandonment of the prescribed profession—are excommunicated from the Aryan Society; thus we have the origin of the Kaivarta out of the union of a Nishāda with an Ayogava woman. To these mixed castes professions were assigned with as much strictness as in the case of the four official castes; for instance, to the Sūta

was assigned the work of a cart-driver, to the Ambashtha, the medical profession, to the Mâga-dha, trade, to the Nishâda, the killing of fish, to the Pukkasa, the capturing and killing of

[p. 6.] the cave-dwelling animals, to the Caṇḍâlas, the carrying of corpses

and the execution of criminals.

So much for the theory of the Brâhmanas (according to Manu, X. 5 sq). It is *prima facie* evident that we cannot possibly have in it true picture of the real state of things; and it is not difficult to see how there has been developed such a system. The names of the particular mixed castes show very plainly the material out of which the system is built; throughout it is either geographical or ethnical relations, names of lands or peoples, which give them their distinctive names, as, for example, Mâgadha, Nishâda, Vaideha, Ambashtha, Malla, Licchavi and Caṇḍâla. Along with these and to a much smaller extent, professional categories determine the names, as, Sûta, cart-driver, Veṇa, maker of reeds, Nâṭa, dancer, Kaivarta, fisherman. The self-contained existence of these and similar groups separated from the Aryan Society, through contempt shown towards their race or their callings, was too evident to make it possible to ignore them quietly or to bring them under one or other of the four castes. The theory was

widenēd and the mixed castes were annexed to the four original and recognised castes by giving their families or professional groups a wholly arbitrary genesis.

That the inadequacy of the orthodox theory and the necessity for making certain concessions to truth was felt is shown by numerous exceptions to the general rule recognised for particular cases. The law, according to which every caste was assigned a wholly fixed calling, could not be maintained in this its exclusive form; people permitted at first the higher castes to follow the mode of life of the caste next in order in the system, but people could not stop there and allowed, evidently, under pressure of circumstances, the higher castes to adopt the professions which were originally considered proper for the lower ones. Thus, a Brāhmaṇa may, if he cannot earn his living by the work proper to his own caste or by that of the warrior caste, adopt the life of a Vaiśya and earn his livelihood by agriculture and rearing cattle. (Manu X. 82). In practice people went further and we may suppose that even among the Brāhmaṇas of ancient times the ways of earning a livelihood were no less manifold than they are to-day.<sup>1</sup>

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From the list of Brāhmaṇas who according to law cannot be invited to take part in the offering to one's departed ancestors (Manu

If we thus have in the Brahmanical theory anything but a picture of the real social conditions, we should not also lose sight of the fact that this theory after it was promulgated without much reference to facts, reacted powerfully upon the facts (actual conditions). The more Brahmanical culture spread in the course of centuries, the more did the priestly classes succeed in stamping their desired physiognomy upon the Indian society through their religious and social influence. The superiority of the Brâhmaṇa caste which came gradually into recognition and at first, surely, not without opposition, influenced to a great extent the further

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III. 151 sq), we can get an idea of the multifariousness of the professions followed by them in spite of the prohibition. We thus meet with players (kitava), medical men (cikitsaka), butchers (māṃsavi-krayin), shopkeepers (vipaṇena jīvan) paid professions (preshyo grāmasya rājūśca), usurers (vârdhluhi), herdsmen (paśūpāla), actors (kuślāva) singers (bandin), oilmillers (tailika), dealers in spices (rasavikrayin), makers of bows and arrows (dhanuśārāṇām kartā) restrainers of elephant, cattle, horses and camels (hastigośvoshūtrada-maka), astrologers, tamers of birds, instructors in the use of the weapons (yuddhâcārya), architects, tamers of dogs (śvagrâḍin), falconers (śyenajīvin), agriculturists (krishijīvin) and even carriers of corpses (pretaniryâtaka)—Now-a-days one can find, as stated in Nesfield's *Brief View of the caste system of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh*, Allahabad, 1885, Brâhmaṇas following any paid profession, with the exception of such as bring on religious disrepute and eventually, loss of caste, such as, for example, that of a sweeper or a washerman. We find them following the occupation of a water-carrier, cook, cart-driver, watchman, field-watch, postman, pallooman, professional singer, dancer, etc., etc.



development of the social condition; it was essentially the prime cause of the various groups of the Indian society which had been formed on the lines of professions or of races, modelling themselves upon the Brahmanical castes and so becoming what the theory had already made them.

[p. 8]

This superiority of the Brāhmaṇa caste, however, extended in no way over the whole province of ancient India conquered by Aryan culture. The proper centres of Brahmanism, the provinces which in Manu were styled the land of Brahmarshi, comprise the countries of the Kurus, Matsyas, Pañcālas and Śūrasenas. The land bordering this, the portion of Northern India which was called Madhyadeśa or middle land, forms, starting eastward, a region indicated by a line drawn from the Himālaya through Prayāga, called Allahabad to-day, towards the high land of Amarakantaka'. The provinces to the east of this line, the countries known to-day as Oudh and Behar, where in Buddha's time we find the people of Kāśi, Kośala, Videha and Magadha, are excluded from Brahmarshideśa. According to the evidence of the Brāhmaṇa texts and the lawbooks, there can be no doubt that these people, especially, those of Magadha

and Videha came late in contact with Vedic culture and were never influenced so much by it as the western people. We should not forget that the Aryan immigration in India took place by stages and was not uniform throughout; the Aryan races, who proceeding farthest east, subjugated first the Gangetic people, may have separated themselves from the great body of the Aryans for a time, when there was still no culture which we are accustomed to designate by the term "Vedic." Also it is doubtful whether these advanced guards of Aryan civilization ever succeeded in fully absorbing the aboriginal races who, however inferior they might have been to the Aryans in point of culture, were numerically much stronger than their invaders. So also the circumstance that in Manu the names of some of these eastern races, namely, those of

[p. 9]           Magadha and Videha, are applied to the mixed castes not belonging to the Aryan family, points to the conclusion that they were not regarded as of the same rank by people who considered themselves true representatives of Aryan culture. The possibility, therefore, is in no way excluded

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*Cf.* The excursus "Über das geographische Verhältniss der vedischen und der buddhistischen Kultur" in Oldenberg's *Buddha* Berlin, 1881, p. 399 sq.

that we have to see in the individual races of princes repeatedly mentioned in the Pali texts, such as, the Licchavis of Vesālī and the Mallas, the lords of Kusinārā and Pāvā, who were both looked upon by Manu as the descendants of a *Vrātya* of the Kshatriya caste, the non-Aryan aboriginal rulers.

If this supposition of an ethnical and cultural opposition between the specifically Brahmanic west and the less Brahmanised east, the home of Buddhism, is correct, then we can presume that even the social conditions, as we find them here, are different from those of the west; for the social organisation of a people is essentially dependent upon the above-named factors and is probably more so in India than elsewhere; ethnical differences and religious views have principally determined the social physiognomy of the Indian people. To this we have to add a circumstance which even for India cannot be left out of consideration and has to be brought in here for the explanation of the opposition mentioned above, namely, the influence of climate and the soil; climatical and geographical differences have even in India, which is so often called "a world in itself," sometimes even a world which unites the greatest contradictories, played a part in the shaping of the social conditions,

Now let us leave the province of *a priori* suppositions and take our stand upon firm ground which will form the basis of the inquiry that follows. From the Pali texts and especially, the Jātakas, we will take the material for the reconstruction of such a picture as the Indian society in Buddha's age and the field of his work may have presented. Here, however, we must consider that when this picture differs from that which is presented by the Brāhmanical sources, this difference arises not necessarily from local variations but in part from the nature of the texts. Just as the Brāhmaṇa texts, the lawbooks and even the Brahmanical epics reflect very little the real state of Indian culture and just as in reality they represent the state of culture as it occurs in the imagination of their Brāhmaṇa authors, so also in the case of the Buddhist texts, one should not lose sight of the subjective element. The authors of the Pali canon were Buddhist monks, and as such, kept aloof from, if they were not hostile to, Brahmanical culture. The sacrificial ceremony, the study of the Vedas, the Brahmanical caste, in short, everything which gave the Brāhmaṇas their special position, was looked upon as worthless by these and challenged. Many of the disciples of Buddha belonged, before their acceptance

of the homeless life (*pabbajjā*), like Buddha himself, to the Kshatriya caste and showed a preference for their former caste even when they entered the monk's state; many were rich, influential citizens, before they renounced the world, and in consequence of this, looked at their own former condition with more favourable eyes than the Brāhmaṇas; and whoever, among these classes even accepted Buddhism was very likely to view Brahmanism with great and even unjust severity. But the Buddhist monks among whom the tradition spread and to whom we owe its fixation, showed a more objective attitude towards the worldly life which they had renounced and in exchange for which they had adopted the homeless life, than the Brāhmaṇas who were always conscious of their Brahmanism which they spread over the society in which they lived.

Besides, Buddhistic narratives which are in other respects altogether different, exhibit the same tendency in the region of morals; the great mass of concrete data regarding the life of the people which are found in the realistic pictures of the Jātakas is for them a matter of indifference; it is purely casual, and this casual manner, this parenthetic way in which these things are described, has preserved it from distortions.

For these reasons—so it seems to me at  
 [p. 11] least—the picture of Indian society,  
 as we obtain it from the Pali  
 texts and principally, from the Jâtakas, is  
 more life-like and true than that which the  
 Brâhmaṇas through their one-sided exaltation  
 of their own caste have given us and so we  
 may hope to get some material from our sources  
 which can throw light upon the caste-relations  
 in eastern India.

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## CHAPTER II

### GENERAL VIEW OF THE CASTES

If we first seek, on the basis of quotations which relate to castes in general, a conception of their meaning, and of their relation to one another, we are confronted at first sight with a circumstance which seems to give the lie direct to the introductory words—the circumstance, namely, that even in the Pali canon we find the Brāhmanical caste-theory. The division of Indian society into four castes is in no way unknown to Buddhist literature.

“Just so, you monks”—with these words Buddha teaches his disciples in the Cullavagga of the Vinaya-Piṭaka (IX, 1, 4) about the relation of the castes to the Order—“just as the great rivers, such as, the Gaṅgā, the Yamunā, the Aciravati, the Sarabhū and the Mahī, when they pour their waters into the great ocean, lose their names and origins and become the great ocean, precisely so, you monks, do these four castes, the Khattiya (=Skr. Kshatriya), the Brāhmana, the Vessa (=Skr. Vaiśya) and Sudda (=Skr. Śūdra) when they pass, according to the doctrines and prescriptions of those who have attained perfection, from home to homelessness,

lose their names and origins and take from here onward the name *samāṇa* attaching to the son of Sakya."

In *Kaṇṇakathāla Sutta* (No. 90 of the *Majjhima Nikāya*) the following words were put into the mouth of Buddha: "These are the four

[p. 12] castes, O great king: *Khattiya*, *Brāhmaṇa*, *Vessa* and *Sudda*. Of these four castes, O great king, two stand in the front rank, namely, the *Khattiya* and the *Brāhmaṇa*, so far as relates to the salute, the seat to be offered, the extension of the folded hands and the service to be rendered."

The *Assalāyana Sutta*,<sup>1</sup> which tries to prove the worthlessness of the castes, likewise speaks of four castes: "Once stopped"—so it begins—"the Holy at *Sāvatthi*, in *Jetavana*, the park of *Anāthapiṇḍika*. At that time there lived in *Sāvatthi* five hundred *Brāhmaṇas* hailing from different places for some religious purpose; among them there was a rumour that this hermit (*samāṇa*) *Gotama* proclaimed the purity of the four castes. Who is in a position to challenge the *samāṇa* *Gotama* with regard to this question?" As the *Sutta* proceeds, this division is surely not always observed: the author is occasionally—as if unconsciously and perhaps against his will



—forced by reality to mention, by the side of the Khattiyas and the Brâhmaṇas, the Rājannas<sup>1</sup> and as lower castes, the Caṇḍāla, Nesāda, Veṇa, Rathakāra and Pukkusa; but the existence of the four castes is still the tacit assumption which is in no way given up even in the admission which Gotama at the end of his dispute forces the Brâhmaṇa Assalāyana to make, namely, that caste is worthless and that the claim of the Brâhmaṇas to be the best caste is untenable.

The same subject is also handled in the Madhura Sutta<sup>2</sup> (No. 84 of the Majjhima Nikāya) and to some extent the same words are used. The king Madhura Avantiputta betakes himself to Samaṇa Kaccāna and puts to him the question: "The Brâhmaṇas, Kaccāna, maintain that the Brâhmaṇa is the best caste and every other caste is low, that the Brâhmaṇa is the white caste and every other caste is black, that the Brâhmaṇas are pure and not the non-Brâhmaṇas, that the Brâhmaṇas are the favourite sons of Brahma, that  
 [p. 13.] they are born out of his mouth,  
 born of Brahma, successors of  
 Brahma. What do you say to this, Kaccāna?"  
 And Kaccāna replies that caste neither assures material success in life nor makes any difference,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. with this the remark in the sixth chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. and transl. by Robert Chalmers in the "Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society" 1894, p. 394 sq.

with regard to the punishment or happiness that awaits after death, that it does not protect wrong-doers from the punishment prescribed by law and that above all, for the homeless ascetics it is a matter of indifference. But here, too, the argument rests upon the four castes and the result is, not that these four castes do not exist but only that they are all the same.)

The thought that a Brâhmaṇa does not occupy a special place by reason of his birth but that virtue alone constitutes a true Brâhmaṇa, recurs also in the Jâtakas; in many ways the theme of the worthlessness of the castes is varied and an opportunity given to the narrator for lengthy discussions on the caste. Especially, the Uddâlaṅka Jâtaka deals in a most penetrating way with the caste question. "A long time ago, when Brahmadatta ruled in Benares, the Bodhisatta<sup>1</sup> was appointed his house priest, on account of his scholarship and intelligence. The latter saw one day in a pleasant spot in the park an extremely beautiful courtesan and fell in love with her. She became pregnant (with his child) and when she recognised her condition, she said to him, "O Lord, I have received a live fruit; when it is born I will give the child the name of its grandfather." He reflected,

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SKT. BODHISATTA, i.e., Buddha in one of his former existences.

"A child which is born of a low woman cannot possibly be given the family name" and said to her, "My love, this tree here is called Uddâla; because you have got your child here, you may call it Uddâlaka". Then he gave her a signet ring and continued, "If you get a daughter, bring her up with this, if you get a son, you can show him to me after he is grown up". She gave birth some time

[p. 14.]

later to a son and named him Uddâlaka. When this son grew up, he asked his mother, "Dear mother, who is my father?" "The *purohita*, my son." "If that is the case, I will study the Vedas". With this resolution, he took the ring and the honorarium for his teacher from his mother and went to Takkasilâ and read there with a world-renowned teacher. At the sight of a crowd of ascetics, the thought occurred to him, "These must be in possession of the highest knowledge, I must learn it from them"; full of desire for knowledge, he adopted the homeless state, rendered all manner of service to the ascetics and prayed that they might teach him their wisdom. They taught him according to the measure of their wisdom, but among the five hundred ascetics there was not a single one who excelled him in intelligence; he was the wisest among them all. Therefore they agreed and made him their chief

He said, however, to them, "Brothers, you live permanently in the woods and eat the roots and fruits of the forest; why don't you tread the soil of men?" "Brother, men want, as soon as they have given us alms, to hear in return the doctrine (*dhamma*) from us; they put questions to us and for fear of this we don't go there". "Brothers, even if a world-conqueror should come, as you have me, let the answer be my care and do not fear". With these words, he betook himself with them to the route followed by them in begging and gradually reached Benares; here he stopped in the park of the king and went next day a-begging in the company of all to a village provided with a door. The people gave them copious alms; next day, the ascetics came to the city where, too, abundant alms fell to their lot. The ascetic Uddālaka gave the thanks, pronounced the benedictions and answered the questions. The people were greatly edified, gave the ascetics liberally, as much as they wanted. Throughout the town the rumour spread that a wise teacher and pious ascetic had come; people narrated this even to the king. The latter asked where he was staying and when he heard that he was staying with the rest of the ascetics in the park, he said, "Good, I will go and see him to-day". Somebody announced to Uddālaka that the

king was coming to see him. He called together the host of wise men and said  
 [p. 15.] to them, "Dear brothers, if one wins a prince even for a single day, this is enough for his whole life". "What, however, shall we do, O teacher?" He gave them the following advice: Some of you should behave like a bat<sup>1</sup>; some of you should sit with folded legs and practise penance, some should lie on a bed of thorns, some should practise the penance relating to the five fires<sup>2</sup>, others should plunge into the water, still others should recite verses in different places". They did accordingly. He himself, however, sat with eight or ten learned men, surrounded by disciples upon a space specially prepared for this and placed a book upon a beautiful desk. In a moment the king came to the park with the *purohita*, surrounded by a large number of men, and as he saw the false ascetics practising penance, he reflected, "They are all free from all fear of misery," went to Uddālaka, seated himself by his side after accosting him with reverence, and

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*vaggulivatam carantu.* What is to be understood by this expression, I cannot state exactly; it seems to indicate a special kind of posture, by which the holy man in question performs a vow, just as is the case with the 'cock-holies' mentioned by Oldenberg (*Buddha* p. 69) who pick out their food like cocks and behave always like cocks.

<sup>2</sup> *pañcatāpam*, "the five <sup>tapas</sup> tapas". These are the four fires directed towards the four directions and the sun which shines above.

began the following conversation with the *purohita* in a happy spirit :

"These here, who wear coarse skins, have long tufts of hair and recite verses with unclean teeth and dirty face, are they really, as they recognise this (that is, penances) as the duty of men, free from misery ?"

When the *purohita* heard this, he said to himself, "This king is favourably disposed towards wrong persons; I must not remain silent" and so he recited the second verse :

"When, O king, a learned man does an evil act, does not live virtuously, he cannot, even if he knows a thousand Vedas, be free from misery without finding the right path."

[p. 16.] When Uddâlaka heard these words, he reflected : "The king is in every way pleased with this host of holy persons; this Brâhmaṇa, however, strikes the running ox in the mouth; filth is thrown upon the prepared meal. I will speak to him". He recited the third verse directed towards the *purohita* :

"If when a man knew a thousand Vedas and yet could not be free from misery, so long as he did not know the right path, my opinion is, that the Vedas are useless, the path of self-restraint is the truth"

To this the *purohita* replied :

"The Vedas are not in any way useless, nor is the path of self-restraint undoubtedly the truth : for he who studies the Vedas attains fame, whereas he attains only peace who restrains himself in his life".

When Uddālaka heard this, he meditated, "Towards this man here I cannot in any way adopt an attitude of hostility ; if I tell him that I am his son, he cannot but show love to me ; I will make myself known to him". He recited the fifth verse :

"Parents and other kinsmen one should support ; he to whom one owes one's origin is identical with oneself ; I am Uddālaka, sprung from thy Brāhmaṇa family".

The former asked, "Are you really Uddālaka", and as the latter answered in the affirmative, he said "I have given thy mother a mark of identity, where is it ?" With the words, "Here is it, O Brāhmaṇa," Uddālaka reached him the ring. The Brāhmaṇa recognised the ring and said "Surely, you are a Brāhmaṇa<sup>1</sup>, do you know however, the duty of a Brāhmaṇa ?" In asking

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. what is said below at p. 35. Another reading omits *brāhmaṇa* ; probably, to the writer the express recognition of a bastard as a Brāhmaṇa was repugnant ; this omission makes no difference with regard to the fact that the *purohita* looks upon his illegitimate son as belonging to his caste.

him about the duty of a Brâhmaṇa, he uttered the sixth verse :

“Tell me who a Brâhmaṇa is, how he becomes perfect, how extinction<sup>1</sup> takes place and what is to be understood by the righteous.”

[p. 17] Upon this, Uddâlaka explained in the seventh verse :

“Rejecting (all worldly thoughts), taking the fire with him, sprinkling water, offering sacrifices, the Brâhmaṇa sets up the sacrificial post. Acting in this way he attains peace of mind, and for this reason he is called virtuous.”

The *purohita* replied to him, finding fault with his conception of the duties of a Brâhmaṇa :

“The Brâhmaṇa is not pure through the sprinkling of water, nor is he perfect through it, nor does there arise peace or virtuousness, nor does he thereby attain Nirvâṇa”

Wishing to know how anybody could be a Brâhmaṇa if not in the way shown by him, Uddâlaka asked, reciting the ninth verse :

“How is he a Brâhmaṇa, how does he become perfect, how does he attain Nirvâṇa, what is understood by the righteous ?”

The *purohita* taught him in these words :—

“Without land, without kinsmen, indifferent to the sensuous world, free from desire, immune

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<sup>1</sup> *parinibbâna*, Skr. *parinirvâṇa*, the attainment of Nirvâṇa, the extinction, abnegation of self.



from lust, careless of existence, acting in this way, the Brâhmaṇa attains peace of the soul, and so is called virtuous."

On this, Uddâlaka recited the verse :

"Khattiya, Brâhmaṇa, Vessa, Sudda, Caṇḍâla and Pukkusa can all be virtuous, self-restrained and can attain nirvâṇa ; is there any among them, when they have all attained peace of the soul, who is better or who is worse ?"

To him replied the *purohita*, in order to show him that the moment Arhatship<sup>1</sup> is attained, inferiority and superiority cease to exist :

"Khattiya, Brâhmaṇa, Vessa, Sudda, Caṇḍâla and Pukkusa can all be virtuous and self-restrained and attain nirvâṇa ; among them, when they have attained peace of the soul, there is no one who is better and no one who is worse"

[p. 18]

Uddâlaka, however, found fault with him and said :

"Khattiya, Brâhmaṇā, Vessa, Sudda, Caṇḍâla and Pukkusa can all be virtuous and self-restrained and attain nirvâṇa ; among them, there is no one who is better or worse, when they have attained peace of the soul. If this

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<sup>1</sup> *arahatta*, position of an arhat, a holy man, the highest of the four stages in the path of emancipation, complete holiness. Cf. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 326 Note,

is so, then Brahmanism which you hold and your belonging to a family noted for its knowledge of the Vedas, are of no value."

The *purohita*, however, taught him through a parable and recited two verses :

"A tent is covered with fabrics of various colours, but the colour does not follow the shades of the fabrics. So it is also with men ; always men attain purity ; the virtuous don't ask a person about his birth, when they have recognised his piety."

As Uddālaka could not regain his ground, he sat down, without answering. The Brāhmaṇa however, said to the king : All these, O great king, are cheats, they will ruin the whole of India with their hypocrisy. Make Uddālaka give up his asceticism and make him my disciple ; make the rest return to their former condition, give them arms and make them your servants." The king was pleased with this advice of his teacher and so they were all enlisted in the service of the king.

The fundamental thought appears in a somewhat different way in *Silavimamsa Jātaka* (III. 194 sq). The *purohita* of the king of Benares wants to examine him with a view to knowing whether he esteems him on account of his virtuousness or on account of his learning. He commits theft, is shown to the king and

learns that the latter only esteems him for his virtue. With this knowledge he resolves to renounce the worldly life and with these words takes leave of the king :

“Whether virtue is better than learning—about this I had doubts ; that virtue is better than learning, of this I doubt no more.

Birth and caste cause conceit ; verily, is virtue the highest ; he who does not possess virtue, for him learning also has no value.

A Khattiya who has aimed at vice and a  
[p. 19.] Vessa who acts viciously, both come to grief after they have passed away from the world.

Khattiya, Brâhmaṇa, Vessa, Sudda, Caṇḍāla and Pukkusa will be all equal in the world of the gods, if they have acted virtuously here.

Of no value are the Vedas, of no value is birth or kinsmen for the future world, only one's own pure virtue brings him happiness in the next world.”

The same account of castes and the same conception of their equality, as viewed from the ethical standpoint, meets us in Amba Jātaka (IV. 205). where it is said :

“As a man who seeks juice in the forest considers that tree the best in which he finds

it, whether it is the *eranda*<sup>1</sup> tree, the *pucimanda*<sup>2</sup> tree or the *pālibhadda*<sup>3</sup> tree,

So also among the Khattiya, Brāhmaṇas, Vessas, Suddas, Caṇḍālas and Pukkusas, he is the best from whom one can learn what is right."

Thus we meet everywhere in the Pali canon and even in the Jātakas<sup>4</sup>, although the worthlessness of the castes is emphasised, with the Brahmanical caste theory and the division of society into four castes, the Khattiya, Brāhmaṇa, Vessa and Sudda, as something self-evident, and nowhere is any doubt expressed. Still let us look a little more minutely at these passages. These are, so to speak, academical discussions regarding the value of castes which all only serve—not to give us a picture of Indian society—but to oppose the claim of the Brāhmaṇas to be through their caste in sole possession of truth, of the knowledge of the path of emancipation. In my opinion,

[p. 20.]

<sup>1</sup> Ricinus shrub.

<sup>2</sup> Skr. picumanda, Azadirachta Indica.

<sup>3</sup> Skr. pālibhadra, Butea Frondosa.

<sup>4</sup> That in the passages quoted from the Jātakas, not four but six castes, that is, in addition to the official castes of the Brahmanical theory, the two castes, Caṇḍāla and Pukkusa, reckoned among the mixed castes, are enumerated, has for its reason this, that people felt in the circles from which the verses came, the non-reality of the Vessa and Sudda castes and thereby the two hated classes, whose real existence people could perceive everyday, were denied. Our position that the Brahmanical caste theory is present even in the Jātakas is thereby not modified.

there is no more reality in these theoretical speculations than in the theory of the Brâhmanas ; they are nothing else than a reflex of the priestly literature and show us that the Brahmanical theory was not only well known to the Buddhist monks but was so strongly inbedded in their consciousness, that they could not free themselves from it, although in all probability, they were quite convinced of its incongruence with the real world as well as of the worthlessness of the caste. Moreover, the Buddhist writers never cared in the least to contradict the caste-theory as such and thereby introduce a better organisation of society ; what they tried to do was simply to show that caste is of no value for the striving for emancipation.

Only this much appears to me to emerge clearly out of these theoretical discussions, that the castes in Buddha's time and in the eastern lands were an important factor in the social life. The question, in my opinion, can never be of any influence which Buddha's doctrine of the worthlessness of the castes may have had upon the existing condition of society, of any weakening of the class-oppositions through Buddhism. The conception of the non-existence of caste-distinctions which we notice everywhere in Buddhistic writings, may (at first sight) seem

to suggest the thought that we are to see in this peculiarity of the Buddhistic doctrine, a reformatory act of Buddha and have to look upon Buddha as the destroyer of rigid limits fixed by orthodox practice. This view, however, is not at all correct.<sup>1</sup> The castes continued after the spread

[p. 21] of the Buddhistic doctrine quite as well as before; the social organisation

in India was not in the least altered by Buddha's appearance.) We see that there is constant reference to the institution of castes and that not simply in the older portions of the Pali canon. Even the later portions, the commentaries on the Jâtikas bear witness to this, that in the caste-distinctions one has to see a real force, even long after Buddhism had acquired a firm footing and Buddha's doctrine of the worthlessness of castes had found universal acceptance as a means of acquiring emancipation.

Even among Buddhist monks we find this conception of the distinction of castes, of the value of high birth, in no way extinguished. As

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cf. Koeppen (*Die Religion des Buddha*, Berlin Vol. I. p. 127 sq) against whom the unjustified polemic has been thrust by Hopkins (*The Religions of India*, Boston and London, 1895 p. 586 note) that he saw in Buddha an emancipator, a political reformer. Cf. further Oldenberg's *Buddha* p. 155 sq.—When even in the second edition of Ratzel's *Völkerkunde* (Leipzig and Vienna 1895 p. 599), it is said of Buddhism that it "abolished the castes" and not "that it was in a position to check its further growth," it is hoped that it will not be considered beating the air if I polemize against this conception.

evidence of this, we have the introduction to the *Tittira Jātaka* (I. 217 sq.), where it is said that the disciples of the six<sup>1</sup> (*chabbaggikā*) requisitioned all places for themselves and their teachers, so that the wisest men who came later got no quarters. When Buddha became aware of this, he called an assembly of monks and put the question, Who deserves to have the best quarters, the best water, the best food? He received from some the reply, "He who was a *Khattiya* before he became initiated" (*khattiya kulā pabbajito*); from others, "He who was a *Brāhmaṇa* or a *gahapati* (*brāhmaṇakulā gahapatikulā pabbajito*)." Here the three classes looked upon by the Indians are narrated in their order of succession and even though Buddha himself in summing up the debate recognises no privilege grounded on birth, the narrative still shows that in the consciousness of the great majority of the monks the caste distinctions had value. The action of *Devadatta*<sup>2</sup> and *Kekila* mentioned in the introduction to *Jambukhadaka Jātaka* (II. 438) is also evidence of the respect which people had for the higher castes—the action, namely, of their trying to revive their lost reputation.

[p. 22]

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<sup>1</sup> The six monks who in the *Vinaya Piṭaka* play the rôle of the scoundrels and who try to go against Buddha's prescriptions in every possible way. Cf. Oldenberg, *Buddha* p. 342 sq.

<sup>2</sup> Buddha's cousin and rival. See Oldenberg, *Buddha* p. 162 sq.

The two, that is to say, visit the householders, moving from house to house, sing praises of each other and speak with pride of each other, one stating that Devadatta is descended from Mahā-sammata<sup>1</sup> and can point to an unbroken succession of princes in the royal house of Okkāka,<sup>2</sup> the other that Kokila had belonged to a north-western Brāhmaṇa family before he was initiated (*udiccabrāhmaṇakula nikkhamitvā pabbajito*).

But the question whether or not Buddhism has changed the caste-relationships is not of great value for us, as we, starting from the assumption<sup>3</sup> that the Jātakas in their older forms exhibit the social condition of India, as it existed in Buddha's time, have only made this the subject of our study. In any case, one thing appears very clearly from the passages of a theoretical character quoted above, and that is, that the concept of caste, of *jāti*,<sup>4</sup> was widely prevalent in Buddha's

<sup>1</sup> The traditional name of the first king.

<sup>2</sup> Skr. Ikshvaku, name of a mythical king.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the Preface.

<sup>4</sup> The word *jāti*, i.e., "birth" is also in Sanskr. the term for the concept "Caste." By the side of *jāti*, there occurs in the Pali texts in the sense of "caste," though much more rarely, the word *vaṇṇa* (=Skr. *varṇa*) and *kula*. Cf. Vinaya Piṭaka, ed. by Oldenberg Vol. 2 p. 239, *cattāro' me vaṇṇā khattiyā brāhmaṇā vessā suddā* Vol. 3. p. 184 *sq.* *cattāri kulāni, khattiyakulam brāhmaṇakulam, vessakulam suddakulam*. The use of *kula* which as a rule denotes family in the sense of "caste" shows how much the two concepts overlap each other in the consciousness of the Indians and how closely allied they



time.) Consequently, our purpose is not much achieved if we consider how far the views relating to the essence of the caste are divergent, how much the views of the different authors vary here and there, when the question is to determine the concept of caste for a special period of Indian culture-history. (Our problem will be to determine what is to be understood by caste in this period and

[p. 23.] to answer the question: "How far is the concept of caste, as it has

come to us from the Brahmanical theory, or as we are accustomed to use it, when we speak of the modern conditions of India, applicable to the *jāti* of the Pali texts?"

We must distinguish between the two concepts, between the modern caste and that which the Brahmanical law-books understand by caste;) they do not coincide with each other in any way and it would be a great mistake to make them identical. We cannot also hope to arrive at a universally valid definition by a combination of the two; a definition like this which is true of all stages of evolution of Indian culture, cannot at all be given; we can only try, through a comparison of the different stages which the caste has gone through in the course of centuries, to find persisting, and consequently, probably

essential <sup>ele</sup> moments, in order, with the help of these, to get an approximate idea of the general meaning of caste in the earlier Buddhistic age. On the other hand, we must not ignore the development of the modern castes and confine ourselves wholly to literary tradition, for it is precisely the modern castes which give us many valuable parallels where the Brahmanical theory leaves us in the lurch, and many conditions of the social life of ancient times are only intelligible to us in the light of the present day.

By a caste of modern India, we understand, if I am to adhere in all essentials to the definition given by Senart,<sup>1</sup> a self-contained body which with a certain traditional and independent organisation, has a chief as well as a council, the membership of which is hereditary and which is thus determined not by chance or free selection but by birth, which gathers more or less fully on certain occasions, for instance, in certain festivals, and which is generally held together by a common hereditary calling, which observes the same customs, especially, with regard to marriage, eating and various acts of purification, which, finally, is provided with a judiciary that makes the authority of the corporate body felt

[p. 24.]

<sup>1</sup> Revue des deux mondes, Tome 121, p. 605.

principally through the punishment of excommunication. The essential element by which the castes are even now characterised as an order *sui generis* and are distinguished from other similar social groups, is to be sought in the customs relating to the *connubium*, interdining and contact of impure persons; it is precisely these rules which set up absolute barriers between the innumerable modern castes and thereby give the Indian society its own proper physiognomy. }

We must at once eliminate, if we wish to determine the concept of caste as it agitated the minds of the authors of the lawbooks, some of the attributes which have only reference to the castes of the present day; they are obviously of modern origin, for neither in the lawbooks nor anywhere else are found any traces which point to their existence in a former age. (The caste in the Brahmanical theory is, although no less strictly isolated and self-contained, still externally not so well organised as the modern caste.) A chief, a council, we notice as little as common festivals or assemblies for other purposes; what unites the castes of ancient times and isolates them from one another—be it well-understood, according to the theory—is, along with the confinement of every class within a wholly fixed profession, those customs which rule the modern

caste. (Precise rules with regard to marriage, food and even touch govern the mutual relationship of the castes in its minutest detail and try to prevent their fusion. Thus a Brâhmana, although he is allowed wives of other castes, should have for his first wife one belonging to his own caste; for only such a one can attend to his bodily needs and can stand by his side in the performance of religious rites<sup>1</sup>; she alone

[p. 25.] assures for the son his belonging to the caste of the father. The Brâh-

mana is forbidden<sup>2</sup> to take food from a man belonging to a lower caste, and as especially impure, the leavings of a Sudra's table<sup>3</sup> are regarded. Even the sight of a despised human being, especially, of a *Caṇḍāla*, whose touch itself causes impurity<sup>4</sup>, is sufficient to spoil a Brâhmana's meal.<sup>5</sup> All these prescriptions have the force of laws, a transgression of which involves

<sup>1</sup> Manu IX. 86:

Bhartuḥ śariraśuérūśhām dharmakāryaṁ ca naityakam svā caiva kuryāt sarveśhām nāsvajātiḥ kathamcana.

<sup>2</sup> Manu IX. 210 sq; Vasishṭha XIV. 1 sq; Āpastamba I:16:22; Gautama XVII 17; Viṣṇu LI. 7 sq.

<sup>3</sup> Manu XI. 153; Vasishṭha XIV. 33; Viṣṇu LI. 50, 54, 56.

<sup>4</sup> Manu V 85: "If he (a Brâhmana) sees a *Caṇḍāla*, a menstruating woman, a man excommunicated from the caste, a woman in childbed, a corpse, or a person rendered impure by the touch of a corpse, he will purify himself with a bath.

<sup>5</sup> Manu III. 239: "A *Caṇḍāla*, a hog, a cock, a dog, a menstruating woman and a eunuch should not be seen by a Brahman while eating.

special expiatory ceremonies and as the severest expiation, excommunication from the caste.)

If we can thus see in the practices mentioned here, an essential and permanent characteristic of the caste, we shall—in order now to pass to the caste-relations, as they are described in the Jātakas—look here for their presence. The scrupulous care with which the proximity of a person belonging to a despised or even a very low caste is avoided is evident in numerous instances contained in the Jātakas.

In Kālingabodhi Jātaka (IV. 231), there occurs the following conversation  
 [p. 26.] between a king's son living as an ascetic in the forest and a princess likewise seeking shelter with her kinsmen in the forest, whom he sees sitting on a mango tree: "Well, who are you?", he says to her. "I am a human being, gentleman", "Then descend" "That is not possible, my dear sir, I am a Khattiyā. "Well, I am also a Khattiya, so descend" "That means nothing, my dear sir, nobody is a Khattiya by his word merely; if you are a Khattiya, say the Khattiya formula."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dhammapadam, ed. Fausbøll p. 155. For the explanation of the expression "Khattiya-formula" (Khattiyamâyā) a practice prevailing among modern castes may be cited, which Jacobi mentions in the "Zeitschrift d. Deutsch. Morgen. Gesellschaft" Vol. 48. p. 417 According to an oral communication from Mr. Grierson, caste in Behar has got its own epic song, romance or ballad, of which everybody knows something and very few know everything.

They recited together the Khattiya formula and then it was that the king's daughter descended.

[The first question which the Brāhmaṇa youth Satadhamma asks a *Candāla* who happens to travel the same way with him is about the caste. "To what caste do you belong" (*Kimjātiko si* II. 82), asks the Brāhmaṇa his travelling companion. "I am a Candāla", answers the other and asks the Brāhmaṇa the same question. Haughtily comes the latter's reply, "I am a Brāhmaṇa from the northwest" (*aham udicca-brahmaṇo*)<sup>1</sup> and it seems to be a wonder when it is further narrated that the two continued to go by the same road. Another person, likewise a youth belonging to a Brāhmaṇa family in the northwest, of whom it is expressly stated that he is very proud of his caste (*tassa jātim nissāya mahanto māno ahosi* III. 232) exhibits greater anxiety for "atmospheric purification". On his return to the town of Benares he meets a Candāla. "Who art thou", he asks him and as the latter replies, "I am a Candāla", he tries to run away from him, for fear lest the wind which has moved through the body of the despised creature should touch him, and cries out loudly, "Damn you, Candāla, raven of evil omen, move out of the wind."

[p. 27.]

<sup>1</sup> Cf. what is said in the eighth chapter on the *Udiccabrahmaṇa*.

Of a Brāhmaṇa ascetic whose hermitage lies on the banks of a river, it is said (IV. 388) that one day as he takes water to rinse his mouth, a toothpick floating in the water which a Caṇḍāla living near by has thrown into the water, is caught in a tuft of his hair. He notices it and cries out "Damn you, wretch."<sup>1</sup> With the words, "I will now see whence this evil omen has come," he moves up-stream and as he notices the Caṇḍāla he asks him, "To what caste do you belong." The reply comes, "I am a Caṇḍāla." "You have then thrown the toothpick in the river?" "Indeed, I have," replied the Caṇḍāla, and the Brāhmaṇa said, "Damn you, wretched Caṇḍāla, you bird of evil omen, you shall not live here any longer, move your dwelling down the river."<sup>2</sup>)

As even in this narrative the pride of the Brāhmaṇa in his caste (*jatiṃ nissāya mahantaṃ mānam akāsi*) is strongly indicated, it is possible that the scrupulous care with which in the last two cited instances, (the contact of the Caṇḍāla is forbidden or the way in which pollution from

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<sup>1</sup> *nassa vasala*. The Brāhmaṇa curses, without knowing who has thrown the piece of wood into the stream, the man who has polluted the water through the tooth-pick. That this tooth-pick was hanging from a tuft of his hair is an unfavourable omen for him and as he now learns that a Caṇḍāla has used it, his indignation knows no bounds.

<sup>2</sup> A narrative of a similar kind is found in *Vinaya Piṭaka* (ed. Oldenberg, Vbl. 4, p. 203 sq.).

his proximity is feared, is a manifestation of this pride, this arrogance of caste, and that on the other hand, the proximity of a Caṇḍāla had nothing of the character of a pollution. (We find instances in which a Caṇḍāla has intercourse with a high-born without the latter making any objection to this.) In Chavaka Jātaka (III p. 27 sq.) it is narrated how a Caṇḍāla in order to get a mango for his pregnant wife, ascended a tree in the park of the king. He was surprised by dawn and continued to sit on the tree, waiting for night. In the meantime, the king came with his teacher, the *purohita*, to the garden, in order to learn the Vedas; they sat under the mango-tree, the king on a higher and the teacher on a lower seat. When the Caṇḍāla saw this, he descended from the tree and explained the impropriety of their conduct (towards each other). The king was greatly edified by the instruction he received and asked him his caste. "I am a Caṇḍāla, O King." "A great pity,<sup>1</sup> for if you had been born of a higher caste (*jāti-sampanno*), I would have resigned the sovereignty in your favour; however, I will remain king during the day and you will be king at night." He gave the Caṇḍāla a cross

<sup>1</sup> Manu, V. 93. "The fault of impurity does not apply to king" cf. *ibid.*, V. 94, 97.



which he himself suspended from his neck and made him the town sentinel (*nagaraguttika*).

Now a king was no doubt permitted intercourse with the *Caṇḍāla*, for as king he seemed to be placed above the danger of pollution ; but even generally, people did not seem to be much afraid of the proximity of such a person, and it is doubtful whether there was a custom or a prescription whereby the higher classes were forbidden contact with the lower or residence in their vicinity, and if such a custom existed,<sup>1</sup> it is doubtful whether it was universally observed and was not rather violated every day and every hour. (From the *Jātakas* what appears clearly is only this, that the fear of such pollution was not confined to *Brāhmaṇas* proud of their caste. For specially sensitive feminine natures proud of their high descent, the mere sight of a despised person sufficed for the production of the feeling of impurity in their minds. As the daughter of the *setthi*, who as the daughter of a *gahapati* belonged to a respectable but always middle class family and that of a *purohita* of *Ujjayini* who had gone to the city

[p. 29.]

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<sup>1</sup> That the law-books contain such a prescription for the *Brāhmaṇas* has been already mentioned. This, however, does not prove its existence at the time and in the places with which we have to deal.

gate to play, noticed two Caṇḍāla brothers, they washed their eyes with scented water and returned to the town. The people, to whom on such occasions food and drink were provided gratis, regarded themselves as cheated of a fine meal by the maiden's going away and so gave the Caṇḍālas such a sound beating that they were almost dead (IV. 391). A similar thing happened to another Caṇḍāla who wanted to go to the gate of Benares, but encountered the daughter of the *setthi* and attracted by her beauty, stood gazing. The maiden who was peeping through the curtain of the palanquin in which she was carried, saw him and asked, "Who is this?" and as the answer came, "A Caṇḍāla, noble one," she washed her eyes with scented water, saying, "Oh, I see something which I should not see" and went back. Her escort struck the Caṇḍāla with his hands and feet till he fell down (IV. 378).

It is clear that the impurity of a person extended to the objects touched by him; this was especially the case with everything that had reference to food. When we remember how great a religious importance<sup>11</sup> the meal had at all times for the Aryans<sup>ss</sup> how eating together served as an external sign<sup>g</sup> of sameness of blood, it seems possible t

assume that this principle of the exclusion of all impure people from the common table came from ancient times, was carried from the family over to the caste and was here developed with great precision. It should not, however, be overlooked that traces of such an exclusion of low persons from participation in the meal,

[p. 30.] as we see it in India to-day, are only found, when they are found at all in

the Jâtakas, extremely rarely. The only passage which serves as evidence of the presence of special rules and customs relating to a common table, does not occur in a Jâtaka but in a *paccuppannavatthu*, in the introductory explanation in Bhaddasâla Jâtaka (IV. 144 sq.). Here it is narrated that the messengers of the Kosala king, sent to the Sâkiyas of Kapilavatthu, in order to bring a girl of this family for their chief, express doubts about the purity of her birth; they are afraid of being cheated by the Sâkiyas who are proud of their family and so demand that the girl should dine with them. The Sâkiyas who as a matter of fact, wanted to pass on to them an illegitimate girl, namely, a Vâsabhakhattiyâ, the daughter of Mahânâma and a slave, are embarrassed and don't know what to do. Mahânâma says that they should not give themselves any trouble about the matter, for he knew a method: when he was

eating, they should bring the Vāsabhakhattiyā, adorned with her ornaments, and as soon as he swallowed one mouthful, show him a letter with the words : “O prince, King so and so sent a letter, hear first this message.” The Sākīyas are satisfied with the plan and when Mahānāma sits at his dinner, they adorn the maiden with ornaments. Mahānāma cries out, “Bring my daughter here, she shall eat with me.” After making some delay under the pretext that she must be adorned first, they bring her. With the words, “We will dine together with my father,” she held a dish. Mahānāma takes with her a lump and puts it into his mouth; when he, however, stretches out his hand for the second lump, he is brought a letter, as previously arranged. He puts his right hand into the dish, encouraging his daughter to eat and takes the letter with his left hand and reads it : the latter, however, continues to eat, whilst he explains the message. When she finishes eating, he washes his hands and rinses his mouth. In this way the messengers come to the conclusion that she is his daughter and overlooks any distinction of caste.

The father avoids not only eating with his illegitimate daughter but even eating the food brought by her. In the first place,  
 [p. 31.] he puts his hands without any scruple into the dish simultaneously with his

daughter; as soon, however, as the hands of the impure have touched the food, it becomes impure for him; he stops, therefore, taking a second mouthful and lets the daughter eat alone, apparently absorbed in reading the letter. Not eating in the same table, but only eating from the same dish out of which the table companions have already eaten, the contact with the food already touched by them, is the criterion for a common caste.

Consequently, we cannot speak of any rule relating specially to persons having a common table which excludes lower castes<sup>1</sup>; on the other hand, there can be no doubt that prescriptions which forbade contact with food touched by the impure and, specially, with the leavings of their table, and punished transgression, existed and too often showed themselves effective.

The eating of the leavings of a Caṇḍāla's table was looked upon, according to the Jātakas, as such a great sin for the Brāhmaṇa that it had for its consequence exclusion from the caste.<sup>2</sup> In the Mātanga Jātaka it is narrated

<sup>1</sup> Senart's remarks on this point (*Revue des deux mondes*, vol. 125, p. 328 sq.) seem to me to go too far, as they do not apply to all stages of evolution of the Indian caste.

<sup>2</sup> Acc. to Mann XI. 149, a Brāhmaṇa who had drunk water which had previously been drunk by a Sūdra, must drink *kuśa* water for three days and a Brāhmaṇa who had eaten the table leavings of a Sūdra or a woman must drink barley water for seven days (XI. 153).

how sixteen thousand Brahmanas had to undergo rebirth, because water which had been mixed with rice which was the remnant left out of a Caṇḍāla's meal, dropped into their mouths. The immediate consequence of this pollution, for which they themselves were in no way to blame, was their exclusion from the caste. They ceased to be Brāhmaṇas (te brāhmaṇāḥ imehi caṇḍā-lucchiṭṭhakam pītan' ti abrahmaṇe karimsu. IV 388) and left Benares in disgrace.) This passage—so far as I have seen, the only one in the Jātakas which speaks of a punishment prescribed by

the caste and thus, to some extent,  
[p. 32.] of a jurisdiction exercised by it—  
sounds extremely legendary; (still the actual occurrence of an excommunication from the caste, or at least, of any other difficult expiation for the sin of eating impure food, will appear extremely probable if we consider the realistic account given in the Satadhamma Jātaka (II. 82 sq.).)

(The Bodhisatta, re-born as a Caṇḍāla, undertakes a journey after providing himself with some rice as viaticum and a provision basket and comes across a youth belonging to a rich Brāhmaṇa family in the north-west who for some reason has not taken any of these things with him. After they have narrated to each other their castes—as has already been explained

above—they travel together. At the time of breakfast the Bodhisatta sits down near a well, washes his hands and opens his basket while he invites the youth to eat with him. "I don't want to eat, Caṇḍāla," runs the answer. "Good" thinks the Bodhisatta and takes, that there may not remain anything in his dishes, only that much which he requires and places it on a leaf. Then he fastens his basket, places it by his side, eats and drinks. After his meal is finished, he washes his hands and feet, takes his rice and the remainder of his food and moves on with the words, "Come let us go, young man." They travel the whole day. In the evening, they come to a sheet of water and take both a bath. After finishing this, the Bodhisatta sits down at a pleasant spot, opens his basket and begins to eat without asking the young Brāhmaṇa to eat with him. The youth tired with the day's long march and feeling hungry stands by his side and looks on, reflecting, "If he gives me anything to eat, I will accept it." The other says nothing and continues to eat. The Brāhmaṇa reflects, "This Caṇḍāla eats all without saying anything to me. I will ask him for a crumb. If he gives it to me, I can throw away the outer portion which is impure and eat the rest." He carries out his intention and eats the food that remains out of the Caṇḍāla's meal. No

sooner, however, did he eat this than he was seized by the thought that he had  
 [P. 33.] eaten the table leavings of a Caṇḍāla and had thereby done a thing which was most improper for his caste, his family, his land and felt so repentant that he vomited out the food that he had swallowed mixed with blood. "For the sake of a trifling thing I have done a most improper act," so he laments, full of grief and recites the verse:

"It was a trifle that remained uneaten and he gave it to me against his will—to me, who am a Brāhmaṇa by caste! What I have eaten, I must throw out of myself" so he weeps and decides, sick of life which is worthless after such improper conduct, to die of starvation. He goes to the forest and as he does not allow himself to be seen by anybody, perishes helpless."

The instances hitherto cited which may be looked upon in several respects as typical, give us a view which represents the society of that time as governed by strict traditional morality or caste-rules. However much in the eastern countries, where the authority of the Brahmanical theory was less strong, practice may have transcended these limits, a sharp distinction between the despised people and the rest of the population was made here also. (In the eyes of the aristocratic Aryans, the lower castes, such as the Caṇḍālas, are impure. Their very sight causes pollution; consequently, they must be excluded



from the general society and must live in a special village of their own outside of the town and earn a living by means of lower occupations. That under these circumstances, any mixture with these lower elements is sought to be prevented appears self-evident. Surely, there existed from ancient times certain usages regulating marriage among the aristocratic Aryan families which must have been built up into strict rules, as the danger of a mixture with the aboriginal tribes and the merging of themselves in these was always felt by the Aryan races, and the existence of these rules is even perceived in the

[p. 34.]

Jātakas.) When it is narrated in the Mātāṅga Jātaka that the Caṇḍāla gets the *setthi's* daughter as wife, this is due only to his position as Bodhisatta: "For the resolve of such a man—so it is said (IV. 376)—" always realises itself" In the course of the narrative it is expressly stated that he is not guilty of a transgression of the rules relating to the distinctions of caste (*jātisambhedavītikkamaṃ akatvā*), that is, that he abstains from sexual intercourse with the *setthi's* daughter who stands by virtue of her caste much higher than he.

In general and as a rule, we can suppose that the *jātis* of this age were endogamous; marriage within one's own *jāti* was the rule. Everywhere in the Jātakas, we meet with the

effort to keep the family pure through marriage confined to people of one's own standing and profession and not to allow it to degenerate through mixture with lower elements. When the parents desire to marry their son, they seek a maiden of the same caste for him or give him the advice :

“Take a girl out of a family who belongs to the same family as we” (*ekaṃ samajâtikakulâ kumârikam gaṇha. III. 422*). The Brâhmaṇa agriculturist marries his son to the daughter of a Brâhmaṇa belonging to a similar family (so [*brâhmaṇo*] *puttassa vayappattassa samânakulato kumârikam ânesi. III. 162*. So also *IV. 22*) ; the Brahmana parents give express instructions to the people whom they send for finding a girl for their son to bring a Brâhmaṇa girl (*brâhmaṇakumârikam ânetha. III. 93*). Among the Brâhmaṇas, it is principally the rich and aristocratic families who wished to secure riches and aristocracy through equal marriage : the son of a good family (*kulaputta*) is married by the parents to the daughter of one belonging to an equal family (*assa mâtâpitaro samânajatiyaṃ kulato dârikam ânayimsu. I. 199*). To the inclinations of young people, very little or no weight was attached ; we always read that the elders consult with each other without consulting their children—who, it is remarked, are

grown up ; to the Bodhisatta who is re-born in a village not far from Benares in a gahapati family the elders send a girl of good family from Benares

(kuladhitaram ānesum II. 121) and  
[p. 85.] a *setthi* living in a small market-town

in the province courts <sup>1</sup> for the sake of his son the daughter of a *setthi* in Benares. (II. 225.)

In spite of all this it seems to me to go a little too far if we are to speak of a strict rule of endogamy; there are instances in the Jātakas in which the caste barriers are considered not insurmountable and thus the sharp lines of demarcation which we are inclined to draw by reason of the numerous instances prescribing marriage within the caste to be the rule are wiped away. If marriage within the caste was more than a universal custom, if it had been a law prescribed by the caste, then its transgression would have led to the non-recognition of children born of an illegitimate marriage. This seems, however, as a matter of fact, not always to have been the case. We have seen that the *purohita* recognises the son born of his union with a public woman, after he is satisfied about his identity, as his own son ; a fact, which if universalised makes the influence of caste upon actual life very small for us. Are we, however, justified in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. further the introductory explanations in *Asitābhu Jātaka* (II. 229) and in *Suvappamiga Jātaka* (III. 182).

making such a generalisation? It almost seems that we are, when<sup>N</sup> (we read the introductory explanation in Bhaddasâla Jâtaka (IV. 144 sq.), where the question whether the wife of a *khattiya* belonging to a low caste and the children born of such a wife are to be looked upon as of the same rank as the *khattiya*, is made the principal topic of discussion between Buddha and the Kosala King. The latter had—so it is narrated here—sent a messenger to Kapilavattu for getting for him a Sâkya daughter. The Sâkya princes, very little inclined, on the one hand, to fulfil his desire,<sup>1</sup> and on the other hand, fearing the wrath of the king, to whom they stand in a dependent relationship, resolve,

[p. 36.]

on the advice of Mahânâma, to send him his daughter, the Vâsabhakhattiyâ, who, on her mother's side is born of a slave but had a *khattiya* for her father. The messengers are deceived—in the manner already mentioned—by a stratagem and bring the daughter of Mahânâma to their king who makes her his principal consort (*aggamaheśī*) and gets a son by her. This son wants, when he grows up, to see the family of his grandfather (maternal) and takes from his mother who tries in vain

<sup>1</sup> They are afraid of the traditions of the family (*kulavamsa*) being broken according to which, the Sâkya daughters can only be married to Sâkyas. Cf. Weber, *Indische Studien*, Vol. 5, p. 427.

to dissuade him, a letter to Kapilavatthu in which she asks her kinsmen not to notice any difference in point of birth between themselves and her son. What is feared happens, however, although things begin very well : He is taken to the audience hall and placed before his kinsmen. "This," people say to him, "my dear, is your grandfather, this your uncle." He goes round, accosting everybody with reverence, wonders why whilst he gets pain in the back through continuous bowing, he sees nobody who bows to him. But the Sâkiyas want to clear his doubts and explain to him, "The young princes, my dear, have gone to the country" and heap courtesies upon him. A few days later, he goes away in great pomp. Just at this time, however, a slave washes the place where he has eaten with milk water<sup>1</sup> and cries aloud, "At this place the son of the slave Vâsabhakhattiyâ has eaten." A man belonging to the retinue of the prince who has forgotten to take his weapons and returns, hears this insulting cry, asks for its cause and when he has heard the whole story, narrates it to others. Thus, the Kosala king also learns of the descent of his wife from a slave ; in a fit of wrath, he divests her and her son of all honour and throws them in the company of slaves only. Some days

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. above.

later Buddha comes to the place and he narrates to him the incident, complaining of the deceit practised upon him by his kinsmen. The master replies that no doubt the Sâkiyas have

done wrong, they ought to have  
[p. 37.] given him a girl of the same caste,

but that his wife is a king's daughter and the marriage took place in the house of a khattiya king and his son also is a king's son : for—he adds—"the old wise men acted according to the principle : *the family of the mother does not matter ; the family of the father alone is important* (mâtigottam nâma kim karissati, pitigottam eva pamānaṃ) and cites as proof the *Katthahâri Jâtaka*.)

Have we to see in this pronouncement which is put into the mouth of Buddha, an expression of a view which was current among the people of his time, or does the prevailing conception exhibit itself in the spontaneous, unreflecting action of the king who does not look upon the son of a *dâsî* as of equal rank with him but classes him as well as his mother, as soon as he is aware of her descent from a slave, with the slaves ? The question can hardly be answered definitely ; many things seem to me to point to the prevalence of the law stated by Buddha. We meet with a tendency similar to that noticed in Buddha's pronouncement in Brahmanical law-books ;

also here the principle is expressed that—in a marriage of a higher with a lower caste—the caste of the father is the most important and seems to determine that of the son.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the view, according to which the marriage of a *dvija* with a *Sûdra* woman is considered objectionable, appears to be predominant in the law-books ; it is true, a *Sûdra* woman is allowed even to a *Brâhmaṇa*, along with women of higher castes, but it is added that such marriages bring about with certainty the degradation of the family.<sup>2</sup> ) If we add to this circumstance the tendency which is manifestly noticeable in the *Jâtakas*, of preventing a degradation of the family through mixture with lower castes and mention further the fact that even in Greek accounts<sup>3</sup> the prohibition of marriage between the different classes is pointed out as a characteristic feature of Indian Society, I should believe that the king followed the general rule and especially, the traditions of his class in

[p. 38.]

<sup>1</sup> Manu, X, 6 : " Sons of the twice-born by women of the next lower caste are of equal rank (with the father, with reference to the caste) but bear the stain attached to the mother."

<sup>2</sup> Manu, III, 115 : " The twice-born who in their foolishness marry women of a lower caste, bring their families and their descendants rapidly to the position of *Sûdras*." Cf. *Vasishṭha* I, 25-29; *Apastamba* I. 18-33.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the quotation from *Arrian* which occurs below.

his views concerning the degradation of his wife and the son born of her. Exceptions—we can find these in the case of this proposition, if they are not already self-evident—occur, and here belongs the incident narrated in the Katthahâri Jâtaka (I. 134 sq.), namely, the installation of a wood-gatherer (Katthahârikâ) as the *aggamahesî* and the handing over of the viceregency to the illegitimate son; here belongs the story (contained in the paccupannavatthu of Kummâsapinda Jâtaka III. 406) of the queen Mallikâ who is brought by the Kosala king from the house of her father and made the principal queen. There are again exceptions which maintain the principle of endogamy as the rule, but on the other hand, show that the boundaries of the caste organisation were not inviolable, at any rate, not for one who, like the king, stood above the prescriptions of caste and represented a power which at least at that time and in that part of India of which we are speaking, had not yet been rendered inert through priestly influence, namely, the political power, the State.

What concerned us hitherto in our investigation was to show that we find precisely the attributes which the caste of the Brahmanical theory has in common with modern caste and in which we must look for the essence of a



caste, in the *jāti* of the Pali texts and that we have to recognise in them—without maintaining the existence of a strict caste order—a factor of great power which lies deeply rooted in the life of society as well as of the individual.

[p. 39.] Now the question arises, how the particular castes of that time stood, whether and how far we are justified in applying the term “caste” to all the numerous groups of Indian society which we come across.

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## CHAPTER III

### THE HOMELESS ASCETICS

Before we attempt to analyse the structure of the social body and to look more closely to its separate parts, we must point to a circumstance which is of great importance for the whole condition of culture in the East and especially, for the position of the dominant classes and peoples with regard to the Brahmanical caste, the circumstance, namely, that the Khattiya, no less than the Brāhmaṇa, nay, even the people belonging to the middle class, renounced the world and lived as hermits in the forest. And indeed, we meet with this view not as an exception, not as a chance occurrence, of which we can speak as we do of an unusual, extraordinary thing. No, the practice seems to be as common with the king, with the householder as it is with the pious Brāhmaṇa. We have, in my opinion, to see here the key to what is often called the social reform of Buddhism, what, however, in reality, is only a further development of prevailing conditions—I mean the admission of all to the Buddhistic fold irrespective of their caste.)

When later, as the followers of Buddha formed an organised body and introduced special rules, the admission of people of the Buddhist faith into the order was effected through the act of initiation and this was characterised as *pabbajjā* as going out, no new thing was created; and nothing that was not known to Brahmanical law—the entrance of a Brāhmaṇa into the state of a hermit (*vānaprastha*) was extremely well-known—was introduced into the life of the Buddhistic order. Even before Buddha's time, the custom of escaping from the worldly state and retiring from home into the isolation of the forest, was not confined to the Brāhmaṇas. As he himself, a *Khattiya* of the proud family of Śākya princes, exchanged the glitter and pomp of worldly life for the homeless condition of the ascetic, so other sons "of aristocratic families" followed the tendency of that time and renounced their home in order to obtain possession of "the highest perfection of a holy striving."<sup>1</sup> Among the disciples who followed his doctrine we find, along with young Brāhmaṇas, people belonging to his own station and sons of rich tradesmen and high officials. They are all to be looked upon by us not as members of a well-organised order of monks—such an order was created centuries later—but rather as nothing else than

<sup>1</sup> See Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 158.

*Tāpasas* on *Samaṇas*, whom we come across so often in the *Jātakas* who group round the person of a teacher (*gaṇasatthā*) and listen to his word.

It will perhaps be stated against me that precisely at this point the *Jātakas* do not exhibit the actual conditions of the pre-Buddhistic period but that their authors have put the later rules of the Buddhistic order back into earlier times. For this supposition, however, there is no sufficient ground, for, in the first place, the possibility that all Aryan Indians in ancient times could embrace the homeless condition appears from the Brahmanical law books themselves.<sup>1</sup> Then again—and this in my opinion places the correctness of the accounts in the *Jātakas* beyond question—we find this very thing in the report of Megasthenes who was sent about the year 300 B.C., as a messenger of Seleukas to the court of Candragupta in Pātaliputra—and thus in eastern

[p. 41.]

India, the heart of Buddhism. He places at the head of the Indian society which he divides into 7 *γένη* as first *γενοσ* the *σοφισται* and says of these that they again fall into two *γένη*, namely, the *βραχμαναι* and the *Σαρμναυ*. Whilst he understands by

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<sup>1</sup> A limitation of this to *Brāhmaṇas* only follows, when in a passage of Mann in which he speaks of the homeless condition of a *dvija*, one understands by the word only a *Brāhmaṇa*.

the first Brâhmanas in general—whom he, probably impelled by the fact that they, like the Samanas led the life of a hermit, puts with these in the same class—he makes the description which he gives of the Σαρμαναι applicable to the Samanas or ascetics of our text<sup>1</sup>; above all—and this concerns us here—he applies to them the proposition which is used wrongly in Greek reports with regard to the σοφισταί in general, the proposition, namely, that whereas marriages between the separate castes are not allowed, nor is any change from one profession to another permissible, every man can adopt this condition.<sup>2</sup>

Also in Sanskrit literature we find instances  
 [p. 42.] of a non-Brâhmaṇa entering into the ascetic state and especially, of a râjarshi, king, abdicating and becoming an ascetic. The story in the Râmâyana of the quarrel between Vaśishṭha and Viśvâmitra

<sup>1</sup> Strabo, Geographica, Lib XV., Cap. 1, 60.

<sup>2</sup> Arriani, Indica, Cap XII. 8. 9. Departing from this Strabo says (XV. l. 49) that every class is assigned its special profession which cannot be exchanged for any other, that, however, the φιλοσοφοί were an exception, that is, they could adopt any profession. Whilst that which Arrian has said of the σοφισταί in general is true of the Samanas and not of Brâhmanas, what Strabo says is true of the Brâhmanas and not of the ascetics. These sources supplement each other and give us the result to which the Jâtakas lead, namely, that on the one hand, ascetics were recruited from all classes and on the other, the most divergent professions were followed by the Brâhmanas.

is well-known. In order to obtain the cow of the holy Vasishṭha, king Viśvamitra retires into the solitude of a forest, after handing over the reins of government to his son, where by means of severe austerities he tries to acquire mastery over his opponent. He obtains through his asceticism the weapon of the gods and attacks Vaśishṭha *de novo* but the latter survives this attack by reason of his rank as Brāhmaṇa. Then the king resolves, as only a Brāhmaṇa can defeat a Brāhmaṇa, to attain the rank of a Brahmana. After a thousand years of severe austerities, he receives from Brahmā the title of a "kingly seer (râjarshi)"; not satisfied with this, he practises further penance till he frightens the gods and at the request of these, Brahmā raises him to the rank of a Brāhmaṇa.

Now one cannot here properly speak of the entrance of the king into the state of an ascetic, as Viśvamitra practises austerities for the sake of a special, transitory object; but here in the Rāmāyaṇa the practice is repeatedly mentioned, by which kings when in advanced age exchanged the crown for the solitude of the forest; thus, for example, we notice it when Lakshmaṇa points out to his brother Rāma (II. 23, 26) that according to the custom of the old kingly seers (pûrvarâjarshivṛittyâ) residence in the forest

takes place after one has left the subjects to the care of the sons, so that they protect them like children, as well as in Râma's words (II. 94.19), "This the kingly seers (râjarshayaḥ), my ancestors, named nectar, this residence in a forest for the sake of the life after death." . . .

Very often we meet with the form *râjarshi* in the Mahâbhârata. In the celebrated Sâvitri episode in the third book, Sâvitri chooses as his consort Satyavâna, the son of the blind Dyumatsena who was robbed of his kingdom and practises austerities in the forest with his wife and his son.<sup>1</sup> In the ninth book

[p. 43.]

it is narrated how Duryodhana voluntarily offered Yudhishtira of his own free will an uncontested kingdom, explaining that he wanted to go into the forest, clad in two animal skins (vanam eva gamishyâmi vasâno mṛigacarmanî IX.31.52). Yudhishtira declines the offer and challenges him to a duel ; but after Duryodhana is defeated and his kingdom falls to Yudhishtira, the latter resolves, being himself tired of sovereignty, to practise austerities in the forest. "The wrong that has happened," so he explains to his brother Arjuna (XII. 7.37 sq.) "is expiated by virtue, by open confession, repentance, begging alms or by castigation, world-renunciation,

<sup>1</sup> III. 291.9: sa bâlavatsayâ sârdham bhâryayâ prasthito vanam mahâranyam gataś cāpi tapas tepe mahâvratāḥ.

pilgrimage to sacred places or recitation of sacred verse. He who has renounced the world cannot sin any more, so goes the revelation. When, as the revelation teaches, a man renounces the world, he has neither birth nor death, then he is merged, after he has found the right path by conscious striving, in Brahma. So will I alone, a seer in possession of knowledge, go into the forest and take leave of you all."

In the later classical Sanskrit poetry, many imitations of these old stories are found, among other places, in the *Raghuvamśa* when it is said of Raghu that "withdrawing his heart from the sensuous world he gave the young son as a token of kingly dignity the white umbrella and went with the queen to the shades of the trees of the ascetic's forest: This was what the custom of the *Ikshvāku* family demanded when a man's youth was over" (III. 70). "For," so it is said in another place (VIII. 11), "the descendants of *Dilīpa* led in their old age, after handing over the reins of government to their virtuous sons, through extreme self-discipline the life of an ascetic, clad in the bark of trees."

Consequently, the phenomenon, although in Brahmanical literature it is treated as an unusual phenomenon<sup>1</sup> and as the custom of a

<sup>1</sup> One should consider that *Viśvāmitra* seeks to attain by his penance a special object, that *Dyūmatsena* is robbed of his kingdom,



legendary king of ancient times, and although more frequently—as in the later chapters of the Mahâbhârata—the rightness of such an act is doubted,<sup>1</sup> the phenomenon of a king abdicating in favour of his grown-up son and himself retiring into the solitude of the forest was not at all unknown in Brahmanical lands. What was characteristic, however, of the culture of the East, as it was reflected in the Jâtakas, was the universality which attached to the phenomenon of homeless asceticism.

Not only did world-sick old people renounce the world but even kings who were in undisputed possession of sovereignty and in the fulness of their power; young princes preferred the severe life of the ascetic to the glitter of sovereign power; rich tradesmen gave away their riches

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that Duryodhana has before his eyes the enjoyment of sovereign power and that Yudhishtîra is stricken with grief at the death of his brother Karṇa.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. E. W. Hopkins, *The social and military position of the ruling caste in ancient India, as represented by the Sanskrit Epic*. In the "Journal of the American Oriental Society," Vol. 13, p. 179 sq., Hopkins speaks of the entrance of a king into the ascetic state as a change of caste. A change of caste, however, this action does not itself produce, especially, when, as is related of Viśvamitra, a king tries through austerities to reach the rank of a Brâhmaṇa. The priestly compilers of the epics wanted to see in the resignation of the kingdom and acceptance of the homeless condition, as they looked upon the last as a privilege of the Brâhmaṇas, an inadmissible change of caste.

and heads of families their wives and children in order to build a hut in the forests of the Himâlaya and to live on roots and fruits or to eke out an existence by begging alms. The thought of the transitoriness of earthly goods, of the unworthiness of human existence supplies generally the impulse to renounce the world. Similar narratives to those we find in the holy texts of the Buddhists about Buddha himself and his taking leave of his home,<sup>1</sup> we meet with even in the Jâtakas and are to some extent like

these of great poetical beauty.  
[p. 45.]

Thus, in Yuvañjaya Jâtaka (IV. 119 sq.) it is narrated how the heir-presumptive one day drives early in his carriage and goes with a brilliant following to a delightful spot in the park. And as he sees dew-drops sparkling like pearls in a necklace on the leaves of the trees, on blades of grass and in the webs of the spiders he asks the driver of the carriage what they are. "They are dew-drops, O King, which arise in cold weather," the latter replies. In the evening, when the heir to the throne comes again, the dew has disappeared; he asks the driver, "Friend, where are the dew-drops, I don't see them any more?" "O King, when the sun rises they vanish and disappear in the earth." When the prince hears this, he cries

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Oldenberg, Buddha, p. 105 sq.

out in grief, "Even this life,<sup>1</sup> this being is like the dew-drop which hangs from the top of the blade of grass; I will take leave of my parents and become an ascetic before disease, age and death overcome me." Thus, a dew-drop produces in him the thought of the non-reality of existence;<sup>2</sup> he goes home to his father who sits in great pomp in the Council Hall, accosts him with reverence and requests to be allowed to adopt the homeless condition:

"The lord of the chariot-driver surrounded by friends and ministers, I adore; I will go into solitude, O great king, may the Lord permit me to do this."

The king, however, wants him to desist and recites the second verse:

"If you lack pleasure, I will create this for you. I will crush him who gives you pain, don't go away, O Yuvañjaya."

To this the prince replies:

"I don't lack pleasures nor do I know anybody who hurts me; but I want to light a light which age cannot extinguish."

Repeated requests of his father do not succeed in dissuading him from his resolve and even to the imploring mother he replies:

<sup>1</sup> Jīvitasaṃkhārāpi, properly, "the phenomena of life, what seems, real is life."

<sup>2</sup> "Iti ussāva-bindum eva ārammaṇaṃ katvā āditte viya tayo bhava passanto," lit. "whilst he, starting from the dew-drops, looks upon the three states (disease, age, death) as flames."

"Like a dew-drop on the blade of grass at sunrise is the life of man (*i.e.*, as transitory as this); don't try to dissuade me, dear mother."

When finally the king gives him permission, he leaves the city with his younger brother Yudhiṭṭhila; the great mass of people who accompanies them, they send back and both go to the Himālaya and after building a hermitage at a charming place, they lead the life of a homeless ascetic; they feed upon the roots and fruits of the forest and reach, after acquiring the highest knowledge with the help of meditation, the world of Brahma after death.

As in this narrative, a dew-drop, so in other cases (I. 138; III. 393) a grey hair, is the *ārammaṇam*, the cause which gives the king the thought of renouncing the sovereign power and going into the forest. In the Cullasutasoma Jātaka (V. 177 sq.), the father of king Sutasoma whose barber has plucked a grey hair, tries to dissuade him from his resolve and points to his minor children. "If you, O dear Sutasoma, do not have so much love for your parents, see, you have sons and daughters of tender age who cannot live without you; when they are grown up you may go into the homeless condition." These representations, however, succeed as little in dissuading Sutasoma as the earnest prayers

of his pregnant wife and his seven-year-old son who clings to his neck.

In another case, the signs of the heavens show the king the transitoriness of his worldly pomp. In the Gandhâra Jâtaka (III. 364) the minister informs the king that the moon is seized by Rahu.<sup>1</sup> The king looks at the moon and reflects, "This moon is soiled by accidental dirt, and rendered lustre-

[p. 47.]

less; my filth is this kingly pomp; it is not, however, proper that I should become lustreless like this which is seized by Râhu. Therefore I will, like the disc of the moon in a clear sky, renounce my kingdom and lead the life of a hermit. What do I care for other people's opinion? Released from my family and my followers, I will consult only myself and move about from place to place; this is proper for me." With the words, "Act according to your wishes," he gives the reins of Government to the ministers.

We should not be surprised at the fact that the prescription which among the Brâhmaṇas the law makes concerning residence in the forest as the third stage (âśrama) of life, is found also in the Jâtakas. Less obvious is the fact, that even among worldly Brâhmaṇas who, as we

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<sup>1</sup> Name of the Demon who attacks the moon and the sun, thereby causing their eclipses.

shall see, have often nothing in common with the proper representatives of their caste except the name, the adoption of the homeless condition is mentioned. So far as these Brāhmaṇas were in the service of the king, they had probably to get the permission of their lord before they could exchange their worldly state for the homeless condition; for the king did not always agree in this way to lose his servants. Kassapa, the son of the king's house priest, reflects in the Lomasakassapa Jātaka, "My friend has become a king and will lend me powerful help. But what should I require help for? I will take leave of my parents and the king (or "ask their permission," *mātāpitāro ca rājānañ ca āpucchitvā*, III. 515) and adopt the homeless condition."

When a rich Brāhmaṇa on an inspection of his jewel-room reads on a gold tablet the name of his ancestor by whom the properties were acquired, the thought occurs to him, "Those by whom the riches were accumulated are no more; the treasures are still there, not a single person has taken them with him during his departure. Verily, one cannot put money into a bag and take it with him to the other world." He goes to the king, begs his permission, gives away his entire wealth and goes as an ascetic to the Himālaya (IV. 7).

That even a whole Brāhmaṇa family, including the parents and two sons, [p. 48.] renounces worldly life is mentioned (V. 313). As the eldest son is not willing to lead the life of the householder and as the younger brother also wishes to adopt with him the homeless condition, the parents reflect, "These treat with contempt the enjoyment of the senses, though they are so young; how much more contemptuously should we then treat it; we will all together renounce the householder's life." They inform the king of their resolve, give away their entire wealth (eight hundred millions!) from which they keep only a legitimate portion for their kinsmen, set their slaves free and move out of the city to the Himālaya.<sup>1</sup>

Often an insight into the efforts and activities of people in one's own station, the knowledge of the deceits practised by them through greediness, makes homelessness appear to a virtuous Brāhmaṇa more worthy than honour and wealth in worldly life. The young Brāhmaṇa scholar (II. 422) who receives from his teacher, in answer to the question, How can one succeed

<sup>1</sup> That women, either alone or along with their own people, retire into the solitude of the forest is very often mentioned in the Jātakas, e.g., III. 382; IV. 23, 484. According to the law books, the dvija is free when he renounces worldly life to leave his wife to the care of his sons or to take her with him into the forest. Manu VI. 3. Cf. Apastamba II. 9, 22, 8-9; Viṣṇu LXXXIV. 3; Yājñavalkya III. 45.

in the world? the reply that he can do so only by intrigue and bad practices, chooses *pabbajjā* with the words:

“Even when a man wanders homeless, dish in hand, this is better than this immorality.”

Whilst we meet with instances in Sanskrit literature of Kshatriyas embracing the ascetic life, the preference among people for this practice of world-renunciation seems to be confined to eastern countries; here, however, it seems to prevail very much. Thus, we are told of members of aristocratic families who were fitted by their education to take part in the spiritual life, that even they follow this practice which owes its origin principally to spiritual

causes. The rich *setthi* makes over,  
[p. 49.] as soon as his son can walk, all

his possessions, along with his wife and child, to his younger brother, in the consciousness of the worthlessness of worldly enjoyments and the bliss of world-renunciation, and goes as an ascetic to the Himālaya (III. 300). The same thing is narrated in the Veluka Jātaka of the members of a very rich family (*mahābhogakula* I. 245). As is natural, in these circles of householders, difficulties arise in the way of their carrying out their resolve; the relations who have to suffer in consequence of their supporter going away, try to dissuade him



in every way. Many of the Jātakas relate the opposition between the wish of the family head to renounce the world and the claims of the family remaining at home.<sup>1</sup> Thus, for instance, we read in the Bandhanāgāra Jātaka (II. 139 sq.) "Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta ruled in Benares, the Bodhisatta was re-born in the family of a poor *gahapati*. When he grew up, his father died and he supported his mother by working for a salary. His mother, however, quite against his will brought for him as his wife a girl of good family and died soon after. Now, his wife [p. 50.] became pregnant; he, however, knew nothing of her condition and said to

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<sup>1</sup> Of an inner conflict between one's conviction of the worthlessness of the world and the duties towards one's dependents which in our view must arise when, on account of the bread-winner going away, the family is thrown into poverty, no trace is found; such duties don't exist for the Buddhists or are subordinate to the strong desire for emancipation. In this respect Buddhism comes in contact with the views of the older Christian Church. Hieronymus writes a letter to Heliodor, urging him to leave his family and become a monk. "Even if your little nephew throws his arms round your neck, if your mother tears her hair and cloth and beats her breast which sucked you, even if your father throws himself upon the ground before you — move even the body of your father, flee with tearless eyes to the sign of the cross. In this case, cruelty is the only virtue." "For," says the same Hieronymus in another letter, "how many monks have lost their souls, because they had pity for their father and mother!" Cf. Eicken, *Geschichte und System der mittelalterlichen Weltanschauung*, Stuttgart, 1887, p. 125.

her one day, "My wife, you must see to it that you can maintain yourself by work, for I will renounce the world." "O Lord, I am pregnant; wait till the child is born and you have seen it, and then become an ascetic." He was pleased with this and as soon as she was confined, he said. "Now, my dear, as you are happily confined, I will go into the homeless condition." "Wait till the child is weaned." And she became pregnant for the second time.

"If I wait for her word," reflected the man, "I shall never be able to come away. I will flee and become an ascetic without saying a word to her." So he said nothing to her, got up one night and fled. The city guards arrested him. "I have to support a mother," he cried, "let me go." In this way, he got his release and went straight to the Himālaya, when the main gate was opened. Here he lived as a hermit, became possessed of supernatural powers and enjoyed the pleasures of meditation. "The fetters of wife and child, the fetters of passion, so difficult to break, I have broken," so he shouted triumphantly and recited the verses :

"The wise have not named the fetters which are made of iron, wood or rope, but the love of precious stones and ear-rings, of wife and child.

These fetters they have called strong, rooted to the ground, broad,<sup>1</sup> difficult to break; when they have broken these, the wise men wander, free from passion, desire and earthly happiness."

After the Bodhisatta in this way gives vent to his feelings without disturbing his meditation, he entered the world of Brahma.

Similar domestic difficulties a potter encounters who wants to exchange his profession for the life of an ascetic (III. 381). It appears in all

these stories where the question is of  
[p. 51.] the retirement of people of a lower

class into the ascetic life, that there is some irony which rests upon this, that in the later Buddhist society such *pabbajitās*, although no doubt they had the right to be initiated, were not considered to have attained full asceticism. Only rarely in the Pali texts are people of a lower caste spoken of as members of the Buddhist order,<sup>2</sup> and as this represents according to its external organisation only a development of pre-Buddhist asceticism, it is probable that even among ascetics the lower castes were only represented in exceptional cases. No doubt in the Jātakas we come across even Candālas who adopt the homeless condition (IV. 392);

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<sup>1</sup> *Sithila*, properly, "loose"; the meaning is, the fetters sit comfortably but are difficult to loosen.

<sup>2</sup> See Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 159.