

## **Brahminism and Buddhism**

The Brahmanic caste is the highest caste, other castes are base;

The Brahmin caste is fair, other castes are dark;

Brahmins are pure, non –Brahmins are not

Brahmins are true children of Brahma;

Born from his mouth, born of Brahma, heirs of Brahma

*Aggañña Sutta, D.N. #27, On Knowledge of Beginnings*

**“The Brahmanic caste is the highest caste.”**

In *Ambaṭṭha Sutta, D.N.#3*, Khattiya caste appeared to be the highest caste as an offspring from a Brahmanic spouse would not be acknowledged by Khattiya. They would not sprinkle him with the Khattiya consecration water as he was not well born. However, the Brahmins would accord to him seat and water, allowed him to eat at sacrificial and funeral occasions; teach him mantras; and have their women unveiled in his presence.

Brahmins would accord above due respect to Khattiya offender but not to a Brahmin who had committed a similar offence.

Khattiya was considered superior to Brahmin caste.

**Brahmins are pure, non-Brahmins are not.** In the ancient tradition, Brahmin priests “put aside evil and unwholesome things. They meditated in leaf huts, collected alms food. They were “Jhayaka” as they meditated. With time, Ambaṭṭha agreed that the Brahmins were no longer pure as they did not practise as the first sages. The Brahmins of the day indulged in the pleasures of the five senses. They were well bathed, well perfumed, with hair and beards trimmed, adorned with garlands and wreaths, dressed in white clothes, ate well, rode in chariots drawn by mares with braided tails and lived in fortified towns guarded by men with long swords.

Buddha advised that “One is not born a Brahmin; by action, is one born a Brahmin. One is not born an outcaste; by action is one born an outcaste.”

A Brahmin, Khattiya, Vessa or a Sudda who led a bad life in body, speech and thought with wrong views upon breaking up of his body would take rebirth in a woeful state. But one who is a Brahmin, Khattiya, Vessa or a Sudda who led a good life in body, speech and thoughts with right views upon breaking up of his body would take rebirth in a happy state. Any being from whatever caste, who practises restraint in body, speech, thought, developed 7 requisites of enlightenment, will attain to Parinibbana in this very life.

In the *Sonadanta Sutta, DN #4*, the Brahmin Sonadanta eventually settled for the essential qualities of being a Brahmin, namely morality and wisdom. Other qualities like being well born on mother and father’s side; pure descent for 7 generations; well versed in mantra and being handsome, pleasing in appearance were not essential qualities to being a noble being, a Brahmin. Moreover, it is also difficult

to know whether one truly has a pure lineage as in the case of Ambaṭṭha , whose ancestor , Kanha was an offspring from a Sakyan king and a slave girl.

### **Brahmins are true children of Brahma.**

In the Tevijja Sutta, The Threefold knowledge of the Way to Brahma; none of the early sages and later generations of sages had seen the face of Brahma. They were teaching a path leading to union with Brahma whom they did not know nor see. Buddha likened this to a youth who wished to seek out and marry the most beautiful girl in the country, without knowing her name, clan; or appearance- whether she is tall, short; dark or fair.

In the Aggaṇṇa Sutta, Buddha emphasized that Brahmin women, wives of Brahmin men, become pregnant, have babies and give suck. Yet these wombs- born Brahmins talk about being born from Brahma's mouth.

Buddha explained that the caste origin was occupation based. The Khattiya was initially "Lord of Fields"; Mahasammata, the People's Choice and Raja who gladdens others with Dhamma as he censured those who committed offences and crimes, mete out punishment and kept law and order in the land. He was also required to be handsome, pleasant and capable.

Brahmins were priests as they had put aside evil and meditated in leaf huts. Vessas were unable to meditate, and took to various trades. Suddas were the hunters as they live by chase.

With time, the Brahmins, students of Vedas, expounded rules and rituals, mantras, performed sacrifices where hundreds of animals were killed and burnt as offerings to the gods. Instead of wasting resources, grain should be given to farmers to plant; fodder for cattle herders, capital to traders, proper wages to civil servants; to reduce poverty and crimes in the country. Acts of sacrifices would not be attended by Arahants as they would not wish to see beatings and suffering of beings. More appropriate offerings were butter, oil, ghee, honey, molasses; requisites to virtuous ascetics; shelter to sangha from the 4 quarters. More important sacrifices are taking of 3 refuges in Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha; undertaking precepts; homeless life and perfecting morality; jhanas, and gaining of insights with cessation of all corruptions

Buddha arose in a caste dominated society but opened the doors of Sangha to members of all castes as the taste of Nibbana is one and same.