

Original Buddhism And Brahminic Interference

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Friends,

A member of the UK Buddhist Society, and Psychology Ph. D. student and a researcher for an important Broadcasting channel in U. K. (Department of Religion and Ethics), wished me to clarify:

“whether it was the ‘Brahmins’ who included certain misogynous additions to the Sutta Pitaka, and why they might have done this? What would they have to gain? As these attitudes were already prevalent at the time and are only really offensive to modern sentiments.”

Yes sir! It was the Brahmins who included certain misogynous additions to the Sutta Pitaka.

Why? - To maintain their hegemony!

They did have the ability and the opportunities and they did edit the Pali Canon and did more to discredit Buddhism by changing many other teachings too! These are my personal views and there is no intention to hurt the feelings of anybody.

The fight from inside

It must be understood that the preaching of equality among the masses was detrimental to the hegemony the Brahmins were enjoying for all times before the Buddha. When that was challenged and when *yajnyas* were opposed to by the Buddha, their livelihood came in jeopardy. They fought Buddhism both ways, from outside as well as by entering the Sangha. The prejudice of supremacy was not altogether gone from the minds of the Brahmins even after joining the Sangha. Their battle from outside is well known. Here is the story of their fight from within the Sangha.

There were ‘varnas’ and no castes in the times of the Buddha. For the first time, the caste is seen in ‘Gautam Dharma Sutra’, which is dated about one hundred years after the Buddha. The Brahmins felt that they were superior to others. But the Brahmins are not superior - all are equal - said the Buddha, as can be seen in Assalayan Sutta and Vasettha Sutta and many other places. Brahmins kept the same name to their caste as their varna, whereas gave different names to castes of other varnas, thus uniting themselves and disuniting others. Later, they declared there are no Kshatriyas after Nandas and there being hardly any difference between Vaishyas and Shudras, the real struggle in India all throughout the history is between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. It may be of interest to note that Chandragupta Maurya is not mentioned in Brahmin literature till about one thousand years, when a fiction drama ‘Mudra-rakshasa’ mentions him in 8th century A.D.

It is important to realize that everything in Tipitaka is not original Dhamma of the Buddha. So scholars, specially those in Pali Text Society of London, have tried to find out original teachings. Scholars in UK have better access to their works and they could explore it better. More research is needed in this field. I believe Mrs. Rhys Davids has written a book on the subject “What was the original Gospel in Buddhism”, published in U. K. But I could not get it in India.

The First Council

Mahakassapa was the Brahmin Bhikku who presided over the First Sangiti. The Buddha had exchanged *Chivars* with him, which shows his respect and status in the Sangha. It is usually believed that Abhidhamma Pitaka is by Mahakassapa, though some believe it to be by Sariputta. It is said that Sariputta was called ‘*Dammasenapati*’, and was whole and sole in the Sangha and he would lead after the Buddha. So both were having positions of importance and prestige created for them by putting the words in the mouth of the Buddha to that effect.

Sariputta wrote “Niddesh”, which is a commentary on ‘Sutta Nipat’ in Sutta Pitaka, thus creating a tradition of writing of comentary on a book of the Tipitakas. This phenomenon seems rather strange, to say the least, because many times the comentaries become more important than the original. Many passages in the Tipitakas show glorification of Brahmins.

“Sangit pariyay Sutta” in Digha Nikaya is written by Sariputta. This does not contain “samyak” Noble eight-fold path, but “mithya” eight-fold path. This misled Mrs. Rhys Davids into saying that “Noble Eight-fold Path” was not original gospel of the Buddha. Dhamma Chakka Pavattana Sutta, containg “Noble Eight-fold Path” is the main Base of the Buddha’s teachings, and it appears that Sariputta tried to destroy its importance.

Many Nuns, who had active role in spread of Buddhism like Mahaprajapati Gotami, Vishakha, Amrapali were mostly non-Brahmins. Non-brahmin nun, Khema, the former queen of Bimbisara, actually had debated with Pasenadi, the King of Kosala. The contribution of non-brahmin nuns in spreading the Dhamma was far greater than the brahmin nuns.

Mrs. Caroline Rhys Davids wrote in “Psalms of Brothers and Sisters” about number of Brahmins in the Sangha. It was 113 Brahmins out of total 259 in Buddha’s life time.

Rhys Davids has averred that Brahmins were not loyal disciples and were not loyal preachers. Bhante Anand and Upali and other non Brahmins were the actual preachers. But Brahmins were enjoying life of comfort in viharas.

When non-Brahmin Bhikkus were visiting the non-Brahmin upasakas, then the upasakas were warning the Bhikkus that they should not have taken Brahmins in the Sangha. They will destroy the Sangha, they said. This is the opinion of Rhys Davids. So it is not a modern sentiment alone.

Two Brahmins Bhikkus Yamelu and Tekul, in Vinaya Pitaka, mentioned to the Buddha that people from different classes are likely to corrupt the Buddha ‘vachana’ and asked for permission to preserve them in Sanskrit. Buddha asked them to preserve in any language but never in Sanskrit. It was and still is the language exclusively of Brahmins. He further said that one who does that will be liable for “Dukkhitā” offense (Offense for bad deed). Sanskrit was not the spoken language of masses, it was language restricted to Brahmins.

The Second Council

Second Sangiti was the crucial point in the history of Sangha. The reason for disputes given by Sri Lankan tradition is that ten rules of Vinaya were not observed by those who broke away. Chinese Tibetan tradition says the doctrinal changes of Mahadeva was the cause. Both are very flimsy grounds to break up - an offense of ‘Sanghadises’.

There must be other reasons, which become apparent if we look at the activities of those who broke up. These Brahmins were calling themselves Mahasanghikas. They were all Eastern Bhikkus and had captured even Rajgriha and Nalanda and Vaishali. They wrote in Sanskrit. As nobody knew Sanskrit except Brahmins, it follows that they were mostly, if not all, Brahmins. It becomes clear that it was their intention, to start with, to divide the Buddhist Sangha.

After they split, they not only changed the ‘Vinaya’ — about which they had grudge and for which they had a ‘mahasangiti’ — but they also changed the ‘Dhamma’ and laid down new Dhamma contrary to established one. They claimed originality and orthodoxy, but declared Buddha as ‘lokottara’ — superhuman, having no worldly attributes — ‘sashrava dharmas’, and his ‘rupa kaya’ has limitless powers, he is always in trance — ‘samadhi’. He came to earth for enlightenment of worldly beings. Bodhisatva concept was put forward. They believed in plurality of Buddhas and changed the *summum bonum* from *Arhanthood* to *Buddhahood*. Thus degrading the ‘arhants’ - followers of Pali Buddhism. All this, you could not really say, happened because of ten rules of Vinaya. It shows their intention — to start with — was to divide the Sangha and not just ten minor rules like eating of salt etc.

Sanskrit speaking Bhikkus in Mathura region also formed their own Bhikku Sangha separating from the original Bhikku Sangha and called themselves Sarvastivadins and remaining original Sangha was Pali speaking, which was the original mother tongue and language of all northern and central India, and was known as Sthavirvadi, with their HQ at Avanti (now Ujjayini) in Central India in MP. It was the Avanti Tipitaka which was taken to Ceylon by Mahinda, son of Asoka the Great. Its language is akin to that of the Girnar Edict. These Bhikkus lost all influence in Eastern India - the original area of the Buddha. Thus Sangha got divided into three Buddhist orders.

It must be understood, as Rhys Davids pointed out, wherever the Buddha went - and he had come to west right up to Mathura and beyond - he did not require the assistance of any interpreters. The masses knew the language of the Buddha. Whereas these Bhikkus avoided the language of masses and went nearer to Brahminism by adopting Sanskrit. Their doctrines led in later times the formation of Mahayana school.

Asoka Times

Asoka was Buddhist before Kalinga war. He removed sixty thousand Bhikkus from the Sangha as they were not following original Buddhism in Pali. The Vinaya Pitaka was closed before Asoka. There is no mention of Asoka in Tipitakas and this proves that he did not interfere with the Tipitakas, as mentioned by Rhys Davids.

It is not proper to use the word Sangiti for further religious conventions. In Third conference in Asokan reign, the President was Mogalliputta Tissa, the preceptor of Asoka, who was a Brahmin. Text of whole Tipitaka was finalized by this conference.

The Buddhist Scriptures were known as “Dhamma” and “Vinaya” during First and Second Sangitis. Mogalliputta Tissa enlarged the writings of Mahakassapa and Sariputta and gave them a shape of “Abhidhamma Pitaka”

containing seven books, and one of his own books called "Katha vatthu". Abhidhamma is made difficult for the masses by adding philosophical and metaphysical discussions without any profit to common masses. The future Mahayanist developed the same concepts into full fledged philosophy. Mahayanists followed the traditions of Mahasanghikas. Tissa thus awarded recognition and prestige to Abhidhamma by putting them in Pitakas - a tradition far away from the original teachings of the Buddha.

The Buddha had said your *guru* in future will be 'Dhamma' and 'Vinaya'. Why should it be called 'Three Pitakas'?

It was Mogaliputta Tissa who introduced the nomenclature of Pitakas as Vinaya, Sutta, and Abhidhamma and introduced ordinary book like "Chariya Pitaka", which was given prestige of Pitaka, as if it was original. Incarnation and Rebirth was introduced here in Chariya Pitaka. Majjhim Nikaya - Chul Dukk Khanda Sutta clearly mentions that the Buddha had said that there is only One birth and that is the present one. Due to Chariyapitaka, with 34 short stories turned into verse, the technical Jatakas were later thought of by the *Attakathakaras*. Paramitas were added for each birth.

Thus it can be proved that Sutta Pitaka had been tampered with by the Brahmin Bhikkus. Asoka reigned from 272 - 232 B.C. In 251 B.C. the Tipitaka and Pali Attakathas got closed in India and went to Sri Lanka in 250 B.C. along with Mahinda and here, role of Indian Bhikkus was more or less finished as far as Tipitaka was concerned. In Sri Lanka, Mahinda translated the Pali Attakathas into Sinhalese but not the Tipitakas. During Vattagamini's rule around 80 B.C. the Tipitaka was reduced to writing.

Brahmins got some setback during Asoka reign socially and politically as Asoka treated non Brahmins and Brahmins on equal footing. The Shudras and forest folks were treated with respect and also got Government jobs. Even Buddha had asked to give employment to Shudras.

Counter Revolution by Brahminism

In Brahminic priestly circles, Panini around 350 B.C. brought in Sanskrit grammar, changed all old Vedic language. A century later around 250 B.C. Katyayana, who ridiculed Asoka as a 'grass eating king', flourishes and makes Sanskrit more hardened and restricted. This is furthered by Patanjali around 150 B.C. - after Pushyamitra's counter-revolution - actually started Ashwamegha sacrifices.

Last Mauryan Buddhist king Bhahidra was assassinated around 185 B.C by his Brahmin commander of army - Pushyamitra Shunga - who usurps the throne, comes to power and open massacre of Buddhists starts. They got entry to Sangha and now could manipulate, gradually and slowly but firmly changed the concepts in Pali, the concepts of Buddhist canonical words like Bodhisatva etc. and gave them new meanings. New concepts are brought in. All these concepts are Mahayanist. Mahayana spread all over the world, it slowly changed and went nearer to Brahminism.

After Pushyamitra came to power, they captured viharas, killed the Bhikkus, who were predominantly Pali speaking, as we do not see any non-Brahmin and Pali speaking Bhikku of any stature after Pushyamitra Shunga's counter-revolution. Of course, these things would not be recorded. Overseas Buddhists, who are not conversant with the *Chaturvarnya* and caste system feel that Brahmins helped Buddhism. It is not too difficult to comprehend these changes if one recollects the present day Indian scenario of previous political party passing over reigns of power to present rulers.

During the post Pushyamitra period, we see only one important book in Pali, i.e. 'Milind-Panho' having dialogues of King Milinda with Nagsena, a Brahmin Bhikku. The first three chapters of the book are in keeping with the original ideas of the Buddha, but after that the rest of the book tends to lean towards the Brahminic ideology and concepts are imaginary and miraculous. The Chinese translation of this book does not contain these last chapters.

The reign of Kanishka and later

From the beginning of Christian era, during the reign of Kaniska, the Mahayanists take over. Brahmins like Ashvaghosha and Nagarjuna flourished. Ashvaghosha wrote 'Buddha Charita'. He depicted Siddhartha in company of women and that is the only biography of the Buddha that is available today. The Buddha in original Tipitaka is forgotten.

Ashvaghosha tried to spoil character of Buddha by saying he was in company of women. Impossible stories that Siddhartha had not known what death is - though he was trained in arms - are shown as the cause of Siddhartha leaving home. Sanskrit is thrust on the Sangha, long metaphysical and philosophical treatises are created by scholars like Nagarjuna and Ashvaghosha, which are hardly intelligible to common masses, and are meant only for Sanskrit knowing scholars. The image of the Buddha is produced and its worship starts. The Brahmin priests copy this and

make images of their own gods like Vishnu. After a long drawn out battle for centuries - struggle which is the whole history of India - which can not be discussed here, the Brahmins get success in eclipsing the religion of the Buddha.

The Mahayanist changes are far reaching, as is well known. The personality of the Buddha is changed from a human being to something like a divine being, three-kaya doctrine is introduced, even the aim of Buddhism is changed from Nibbana to Buddha-hood. Concept of Arhant is replaced by that of Bodhisatva. This all bridges the gap between the Brahminic religion and Buddhist religion. From the point of view of common man, there remains not much difference between Buddhism and Brahminism.

The last phases

The last phases of Pali literature take place in Sri Lanka. There is always a contact between Bhikkus of Sri Lanka and those of India. After image of Buddha is manufactured in India, we find an image installed in Anuradhpura in Sri Lanka. The three famous Attakathakars — Buddhadatta, Buddhaghosha and Dhammapala — flourished during fourth fifth century AD. Let us only consider Buddhaghosha, the greatest name in Commentaries. He was a Brahmin from the land of the Bodhi tree i.e. Buddha Gaya, and well versed in Vedas since childhood, wandered all over India, gave a noted discourse on 'patanjala yoga', met there Bhikku Revata who converted him to Buddhism and sent him to Sri Lanka, presumably with ill intentions.

He goes to Sri Lanka, proves his ability by writing 'Vissuddhimagga', and undertakes the work of writing Attakathas, the work which was started by Buddhadatta and left unfinished. The Attakathas which were translated into Sinhalese by Mahinda are retranslated into Pali. So far so good. But then he burns the old Attakathas of Mahinda and leaves no trace of verifying the correctness of his translations. The surprising part is that Sri Lankans allow him to do that. As is well known these Attakathas are full of miracles and superhuman ideas, not in consonance with the original ideas of the Buddha.

The greatest distortion added by the Attakathakaras was the creation of technical Jatakas. They did this by adding the commentaries and identification to verses from Chariya Pitaka. Thus the old stories, fables and parables - which were in pre-Buddhist Indian folklore having nothing to do with the Buddhism - were turned into Jatakas, which now became authentic rebirth stories of the Buddha. Seeing this, one must lament at the loss of Mahinda's original commentaries.

This is in short the story of Brahminic interference and sabotaging the Buddha's religion from INSIDE. The outside battle by the Brahmins is too well known to be mentioned.

This is in no way to denigrate other forms of Buddhism, neither to say all Brahmins were against Buddha's teachings, but just to show how some important Brahmins deviated from the original tenets of the Buddha, which were simple, easy to follow and free from metaphysical speculations. Even then, they did not accept God and 'atma', 'chaturvarnya', 'veda pramanya', austerities and concept of accumulation of 'punya' by visits to tirthas. Thus the points which differentiate Buddhism from Brahminism are these five as was pronounced by Dharmakirti in later times.

Thanks!

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