

Aggika Bhāra,dvāja Sutta

The Discourse to Aggika Bhāra,dvāja

[The true fire burns brightly within]

(Saṃyutta Nikāya 7.8/1:166 f)

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2007

1 Aggika Bhāra,dvāja

1.1 AGGIKA. The name *Aggika* apparently is an epithet or sobriquet for any “fire-worshipper” (*aggi,-pāricārika*). The Vinaya, for example, speaks of the ordination of the Aggikā Jaṭilakā (fire-worshipping matted-hair ascetics) (V 1:70).¹ (VA 3:811). A similar reference is found in the parable of Aggika Jaṭila of **the Pāyāsi Sutta** (D 23).² The Commentary there glosses, “Aggika is one who tends [worship] the fire.”³

The brahmins of the Buddha’s times (and probably others, too), the god **Agni** (*P aggi*) dwells in fuel, and latent in fire-sticks, sometimes unmanifested, sometimes manifested. This popular notion is clearly expressed in **the Śvetaśvatara Upaniṣad** (almost certainly a post-Buddha work), “Just as fire lying latent in its source is not seen, and yet its seed is not destroyed” (ŚAU 1.13). When the fire ritual is properly performed, they believed, the god Agni himself is invoked, bestowing great blessings upon the worshipper.⁴

1.2 BHĀRA,DVĀJA. A number of the prominent Buddhists of the Buddha’s time, monastic and lay, come from the Bhāra,dvāja clan. The dialogues, teachings and conversions of the Bhāra,dvājas form the theme of many well known discourses, such as⁵

Kasi Bhāra,dvāja Sutta	(Sn 1.4/76-82/12-16),
Sundarika Bhāra,dvāja Sutta	(Sn 3.4/79-86/455-486),
Vatthūpama Sutta	(M 7/1:36-40; Sundarika Bhāra,dvāja), ⁶
Sundarika Sutta	(S 7.9/1:167 f),

and nearly two-thirds of the brahmins of **the Brāhmaṇa Saṃyutta** (S 7).

The Vasala Sutta (Sn 1.7) centres around a brahmin named **Aggika Bhāra,dvāja** who angrily calls the Buddha a *vasalaka* (“wretched little outcaste”).⁷ However, he seems to be a different person. The Sutta Nipāta Commentary explains that this Aggika Bhāra,dvāja’s first name similarly reflects his performing of the fire sacrifice.⁸

2 The Vedas

2.1 THE THREE VEDAS. The Vedas are the oldest collection of Sanskrit literature, comprising of religious texts, from approximately 1200 BCE and which form the foundation of the orthodox scriptures of Brahmanism and later, of Hinduism. The word *Veda* is derived from the Sanskrit root √VID, “to know,”

¹ Mv 1.38.11/1:70, where Comy glosses *aggikā ti aggi,paricāraṇakā*, “Aggikā are those who tend (or worship) fire” (VA 5:994).

² D 23.21/2:339-342.

³ *Aggiko ti aggi,paricārako* (DA 3:811).

⁴ See **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 72) = SD 6.15 Intro (4).

⁵ For a fuller list of Bhāra,dvājas, see SD 22.2 Intro (1).

⁶ See **Vatthūpama S** (M 7) = SD 22.2 Intro (2) for the identification of this Sundarika and the preceding (Sn 3.4).

⁷ Sn 1.7/116-142/21-25.

⁸ *So hi brāhmaṇo aggim juhati paricarati ti katvā Aggiko ti nāmena pākato ahoṣi, Bhāradvājo ti gottena*, “For the brahmin sacrifices to the fire and tends it; from his doing so the name *Aggika* arose. *Bhāra,dvāja* was his gotra. (SnA 1:174)

and the texts are believed to be a store of ultimate truth as revealed by the devas [divine beings] to the ancient seers. During the Buddha's time, there were only three Vedas:

- (1) the Ṛg-veda (comprising hymns to Vedic deities; the oldest of which go back to 1500 BCE),
- (2) the Sāma-veda (sacred hymnbook for the Udgātṛ or Vedic cantor), and
- (3) the Yājur-veda (comprising Vedic mantras and instructions on their proper usage in Vedic rituals).

By the Buddha's time, Vedic literature comprised several different classes: the four collections (*samhitā*) of verses attributed to ancient seers (*isī*, Skt *ṛṣī*), the ritual manuals (*brāhmaṇā*) on the elaborate Vedic sacrificial rituals, and the “forest books” (*āraṇyaka*), explaining the esoteric meanings of such rituals. The Upanishads (*upaniṣad*), the last class of Vedic literature, containing further esoteric commentaries on the rituals, were still in the formative stage. After the Buddha's time, a fourth—the Atharva-veda (mostly apotropaic spells and chants, compiled beginning around 900 BCE or later)—was added.⁹

2.2 THE THREE KNOWLEDGES. In S 632 (from the **Aggika Bhāra,dvāja Sutta**, S 7.8) [§4b], the brahmin Aggika Bhāra,dvāja mentions being “accomplished in the Three Vedas” (*tīhi vijjāhi sampanno*) as one of the qualifications for those who may partake of the brahminical sacrifice.¹⁰ The brahmin is speaking in terms of the Vedic ritual tradition, but the Buddha demythologizes¹¹ it, and the true “three knowledges” (*te,vijja*) are not the holy texts (not books), but are direct knowledges (*abhiññā*), as follows:

- (1) the knowledge of the recollection of past lives (*pubbe,nivāsānussati,ñāṇa*) (S 634a),
- (2) the knowledge of the rise and fall of beings according to their karma (S 634b), and
- (3) the knowledge of the destruction of the mental cankers (*āsava-k,khaya,ñāṇa*) (S 634cd).
(D 3:281; M 1:34; A 1:255, 258, 3:17, 280, 4:421)¹²

These three knowledges are those of the the threefold-knowledge arhat (*te,vijja arahata*), who, with samatha as basis, have attained four form dhyanas, and even the formless attainments. The threefold knowledges are briefly known as:

- (1) retrocognition, that is, the recollection of past lives;
- (2) the divine eye (*dibba,cakkhu*) or clairvoyance; and
- (3) the rebirth-ending knowledge.

3 No commercializing

The Aggika Bhāra,dvāja Sutta closes with the Buddha's exhortation on the qualities of a “true brahmin,” which inspires the brahmin Aggika Bhāra,dvāja, who then declares that the Buddha is worthy of the sacrificial offerings. In the two closing verses [§§7ab], however, the Buddha declares that he cannot accept the offering as it would imply that he is accepting a fee for his teachings.

The Saṃyutta Commentary paraphrases the significance of the two verses, thus (as the Buddha's arrièrè pensèe):

Though I have stood for such a long time waiting for alms, you would not give even a spoonful; but now that I have revealed all the Buddha-qualities to you as though spreading out sesame seeds on a mat, you wish to give. This food has been gained, as it were, by singing a song (*gāyanena gāyitvā*). Therefore, as it has been ‘chanted over with verses’ (*gāthā'bhigīta*) it is not fit to be eaten by me. Since there is the Dharma (*dhamme sati*), out of respect for the Dharma, established in the Dharma, the Buddhas sustain their life. This is their rule of conduct, this is their

⁹ On the Vedas, see Dictionary of Buddhism: Veda, & Basham, *The Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism*, 1989:27 f. For refs, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vedas>.

¹⁰ **The Sundarika Bhāra,dvāja S** (Sn 3.4) discusses who is eligible for partaking on the Vedic sacrificial remains (*havya,sesa*) (Sn 3.4/455-486/79-86) = SD 22.2.

¹¹ “Demythologize” here means to look beyond the mere symbolic, ritual or external aspects of religion, towards a personal and inner experience of true reality leading to spiritual liberation: see **Sigāl'ovāda S** (D 31/3:180-193) = SD 4.1 Intro (2).

¹² For further details, see **Te,vijja S** (D 13/1:235-252) = SD 1.8 Intro (2.2).

way of livelihood (*esā vutti ayam ājīvo*). Such food should be discarded and only what is properly gained should be eaten.” (SA 1:232; see Miln 228-232)

The Critical Pali Dictionary defines *abhigīta* as “spoken over with mantras,” suggesting that the Buddha rejects the offering by the brahmin because he has chanted over it with the sacrificial hymns. However, **Bodhi** thinks that “it is doubtful that the Buddha would reject food for such a reason. Further, according to [SED], *gāthā* is not used with reference to the verses of the Vedas, and thus here the word likely refers to the Buddha’s own verses” (S:B 446 n446).

To suggest that the Buddha rejected the brahmin’s offering simply because it has been chanted over with Vedic mantras would suggest that the Buddha is superstitious! The real reason has to do with right livelihood (*sammā,ājīva*). It is a well known fact that the monastics of the Buddha’s day keep to the rule of having nothing to do with money, commerce and wealth.¹³ This verse from **the Ossajjana Sutta** (U 6.2) is relevant here:¹⁴

<i>Na vāyameyya sabbattha</i>	One should not strive [be busy] all over the place.
<i>nāññassa puriso siyā</i>	One should not be another’s man [be used by another].
<i>nāññam nissāya jīveyya</i>	One should not live depending on others.
<i>Dhammena na vaṇī care</i> ¹⁵	One should not make a business [trade] of the Dharma. (U 6.2/66)

The message of this verse is that a renunciant has taken the vow to cut off all dealings with the material world (that is, with money, pleasure, and power) and to direct his energies to the attaining of spiritual liberation here and now, and in so doing to benefit others around him, and even posterity. And that the Dharma should be freely and generously given, especially to those who are ready.

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¹³ The key Vinaya rules here are: not accepting money (Nis Pāc 18 = V 3:236-238); not dealing in money (Nis Pāc 19 = V 3:239 f); making money donation allowable (Nis Pāc 10 = V 3:219-223); the lay attendant who makes gifts allowable (*kappiya,kāraka*, Mv 6.34 = V 1:240-243). For details, see **Money & Monastics** = SD 3.21-25 esp (7).

¹⁴ For a discussion, see **Jaṭila S** (S 3.11) = SD 14.11 Intro (3). For comy, see UA 334 = UA:M 866 f.

¹⁵ Be: *dhammena na vaṇim care*. Comy: *dhammena na vānijam care*.

The Discourse to Aggika Bhāra,dvāja

(S 7.8/1:166 f)

1 At one time, the Blessed One was residing in the squirrels' feeding-ground in the Bamboo Grove near Rāja,gaha.

2 Now at that time, the brahmin Aggika Bhāra,dvāja who had prepared his milk-rice with ghee,¹⁶ thought, "I will offer it to Agni [the fire]. I will perform the Agni,hotra [fire sacrifice]."¹⁷

3 Then, the Blessed One, having dressed himself in the morning, and taking robe and bowl, entered Rāja,gaha for alms. Walking on an unbroken alms-round in Rāja,gaha, the Blessed one approached the residence of the brahmin Aggika Bhāra,dvāja, and then stood at one side.

4a The brahmin Aggika Bhāra,dvāja saw the Blessed One standing (waiting) for almsfood. Seeing the Blessed One, he addressed the Blessed One in verse:

4b	<i>Tīhi vijjāhi sampanno jātimā sutavā bahu, vijjā.carāṇa,sampanno so maṃ bhuñjeyya pāyāsan ti.</i>	One accomplished in the Three Vedas, ¹⁸ high-born, deeply learned, accomplished in knowledge and conduct: he may partake of this milk-rice.	(S 632)
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[The Blessed One:]			
5a	<i>Bahum pi palapaṃ jappaṃ na jaccā hoti brāhmaṇo, anto kasambu,sāṅkiliṭṭho kuhanā parivārīto.</i>	Even if one mutters many chants, one is not a brahmin by birth, who is rotten within and defiled, surrounded by false followers. [167]	(S 633)

5b	<i>pubbe nivāsaṃ yo vedī saggāpāyaṇ ca passati, atho jāti-k,khayaṃ patto abhiññā vosito muni.</i>	One who knows his past lives [past abodes] and sees heaven and hell, likewise, one who has reached the end of birth, a sage attained to direct knowledge, ¹⁹	(S 634)
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5c	<i>Etāhi tīhi vijjāhi te,vijjo hoti brāhmaṇo, vijjā.carāṇa,sampanno so maṃ bhuñjeyya pāyāsan ti.</i>	by these three knowledges, is one a brahmin of the Three Vedas, accomplished in knowledge and conduct: he may partake of this milk-rice.	(S 635)
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[Brahmin:]

6 "Eat, sir, the master Gotama is a brahmin!"

¹⁶ *Tena kho pana samayena Aggika Bhāra,dvājassa brāhmaṇassa sappinā pāyāso sannihito hoti.*

¹⁷ *Aggim juhissāmi, aggi,huttam paricarissāmi ti.* On the tts here, see **Sundarika Bhāra,dvāja S** (Sn 3.4.2/79n) = SD 22.2.

¹⁸ Comy says that he speaks of "one accomplished in the three knowledges" in reference to the Three Vedas. By "high-born" (*jātimā*) he means one of pure birth through seven generations. (SA 1:231)

¹⁹ This verse refers to the three knowledges (*te,vijjā*) of the Buddhists, ie, (1) knowledge of the recollection of past lives (S 634a), (2) knowledge of the rise and fall of beings according to their karma (S 634b), and (3) the knowledge of the destruction of the mental cankers (S 634cd). See Intro (2).

[The Blessed One:]²⁰

- 7a** *Gāthā'bhigītaṃ me abhojaneyyāṃ²¹* The gatha-sung should not be partaken by me,²²
sampassataṃ brāhmaṇa n'esa dhammo O brahmin, this is not the way of those who see.²³
gāthā'bhigītaṃ panudanti buddhā Buddhas reject what is gained by the singing of verses,
dhamme sati brāhmaṇa vuttir esā. When there's Dharma, brahmin, this is the rule. (S 636)
- 7b** *Aññena ca kevalinaṃ mahesiṃ* But with other food serve a consummate²⁴ great seer,
khīṇāsavaṃ kukkucca,vūpasantaṃ, the canker-destroyed, whose restlessness is stilled.²⁵
annena pānena upatthahassu serve him with food and drink—
khettaṃ hi taṃ puññapekkhassa hotī ti. For, this is the field for those looking for merit. (S 637)

Aggika becomes an arhat

8a When this was said, the brahmin Aggika Bhāra,dvāja said this to the Blessed One:

“Excellent, Master Gotama! Excellent! Master Gotama! Just as if one
 were to place upright what had been overturned, or
 were to reveal what was hidden, or
 were to show the way to one who was lost, or
 were to hold up a lamp in the dark so that those with eyes could see forms,

in the same way, in numerous ways, has the Dharma been made clear by the Blessed Gotama.

I go to the Blessed Gotama for refuge, to the Dharma, and to the community of monks.

8b May the Blessed Gotama give me the going-forth, give me the ordination.”

And, the venerable Aggika Bhāra,dvāja, not long after was ordained, dwelling alone, aloof, diligent, exertive, and resolute, having right here and now realized for himself through direct knowledge, after attaining, dwelt in the supreme goal of the holy life, for the sake of which sons of family rightly go forth from the household life into homelessness.

He directly knew: “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done what had to be done, there is no more of this state of being.”

9 And the venerable Bhāra,dvāja became one of the arhats.

— evaṃ —

071211; 080527; 081228

²⁰ The Buddha does not accept offerings by way of “singing gathas”: **Aggika Bhāra,dvāja S** (S vv636 f = 7.8/-1:67 f) = **Sundarika Bhāra,dvāja S** (Sn 7.8/480 f) = **Sundarika S** (S 641 f = 7.9/1:168) = **Kasi Bhāra,dvāja S** (Sn 81 f).

²¹ *Ee abhojanīyāṃ; Be Ce abhojaneyyāṃ.*

²² On the reason for this, see Intro (2).

²³ “Those who see,” *sampassataṃ*, “that those who has seen the true goal and the Dharma would think that such food should be eaten: this is not natural (or such a state does not exist) (*atthañ ca dhammañ ca sampassatānaṃ* “*eva,rūpaṃ bhojanaṃ bhujitabban ti esa dhammo na hoti*, SA 1:232).

²⁴ “Consummate” (*kevalino*), “fully-accomplished.” There is no native gloss, but Comy to **S 22.56/3:59** explains that “the *kevalī* are complete in themselves (*sakala*), they have completed all their tasks” (*kevalino ti sakalino kata,-sabba,kiccā*) (SA 275 f). Comy to **Sn 82** explains, “A *kevali* is one accomplished in all excellent qualities or one detached from all bonds” (*kevalinan ti sabba,guṇa,paripuṇṇaṃ sabba,yoga,visaṃyuttaṃ vā*) (SnA 153). **Norman** notes that the Jain meaning of *kevalin* is “one who possesses *kevala* knowledge, ie omniscient” (Sn:N 1992:161 n82). The Buddhist usage similarly refers to the Buddha whose direct knowledge is complete is that he is able to know anything at any time. On Buddhist conception of omniscience, see eg **Sandaka S** (M 76) = SD 35.7. For a reflection on *kevali*, see Ñāṇananda, *Sāmyutta Nikāya: An anthology* 2 1974:100 f.

²⁵ *Kukkucca,vūpasantaṃ*, which Comy explains: “One in whom remorse has been calmed by the stilling of fidgety behaviour with the hands, etc” (*hattha,kukkucc'ādīnaṃ vasena vūpasanta,kukkuccaṃ*) (SA 1:232; cf SA 1:276; MA 3:389). Here, *kukkucca* is not a tt (meaning “remorse,” one of the mental hindrances), but has a simple sense of “fidgety behaviour.” Cf Nigrodha,kappa’s *hattha,kukkucca*: (**Vaṅgīsa**) **Ananda S** (S 8.4) = SD 16.12 Intro (1.3), under Tha 1212-1218 n.