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Aggañña Sutta

The Discourse on the Foremost Knowledge | D 27

Chinese Āgama DĀ 5 = T1.36; T10 = T1.216; MĀ 154 = T1.673; EĀ 40.1 = T 2.735

Skt Waldschmidt 1970b

Theme: On the origin or evolution of the world, society and universal values

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1 Mythology and cosmology

1.0 SUTTA SIGNIFICANCE: See SD 57.10 (1.5.3.3).

1.1 THE BUDDHA'S KNOWLEDGE

¹In the **Pāṭika Sutta** (D 24), the Buddha declares, “I know the beginning of things (*aggañña*), and not only that, but I know what is higher than that.”² This statement is very significant when we consider the fact that a central concern of the Upaniṣadic thinkers of the Buddha’s time concerns the beginnings, so that the creation stories beginning with “in the beginning” (*agre*) are common. Stories explain things or sell ideas but do not always solve problems, especially those regarding sentient pain. Understandably, the Buddha declares that he not only knows the beginning of things, but also what is beyond that, that is, the way out of suffering (and more).³

1.2 THE MEANINGS OF AGGAÑÑA

1.2.1 Meaning of *agga*

1.2.1.1 The Aggañña Sutta gives in detail what this knowledge of “the foremost” (*aggañña*), which includes the “beginning of things.” The term ***aggañña*** is *not* resolved as *agga* (“foremost”) + *ñā* (“knowledge”) but in a passive sense (as in *rattaññu* or *rattañña*, “long-standing, senior”); hence, it is closer to being a cognate of the Sanskrit *agra*,⁴ with the following senses:⁵

- (1) (mfn & n) chief, foremost, principal; primitive, original (*tad eva porāṇam aggam akkharam*,⁶ D 3:86,-24, 225,1; A 2:27,16, 4:246,1);
- (2) (n) the beginning of things, origin (D 3:4,12 + 28,8 f), or more specifically, the beginning of the world (*aggam akkharan’ti lok’uppatti,vaṃsa,katham*, DA 868,32).

Also found are its abstract noun forms, that is, *aggaṭā* (f) (D 3:155,14*; Kvu 556,2) and *aggattā* (a late form, Ap 490,30), both means “pre-eminence, chief position.”

1.2.1.2 The usage of ***agga*** first appears in §7.3, where it is an adjective meaning “the foremost,” that is, sense (1). **The arhat** is said to be “the foremost” (*agga*) of those “from any of the 4 classes who

¹ This para is also at SD 47.8 (1.3.1).

² *Aggaññāṃ cāham ... pajānāmi, tañ ca pajānāmi, tato ca uttaritaram pajānāmi* (D 24,2.14/3:28,8), SD 63.3.

³ See eg **Siṃsapā S** (S 56.31/5:437 f), SD 21.7 & also P Olivelle (tr), *Upaniṣads*, 1996:xlvi.

⁴ Cf Skt *agrānī*, acc *agranyam* (DP).

⁵ See CPD: *agga-ñña*; DP sv *agga*.

⁶ Cf *paurāṇam akṣaram agninyam*, Mvst 1:340,17, tr “ancient primeval expression” (Mvst:J 1:287), where in fn 1, Jones suggests “making the obvious emendation of *-agninyam* into *-agrajñam*.”

becomes a monk,” while **the Dharma**—what brings about arhathood—is said to be “the best” (*seṭṭha*) thing in this life and the next [§7.3]. This sense of *agga* applies from here until the end of §9.5.

After this, up to §30, the sense of *agga* is less obvious, but can be teased out from the contexts. In §31, we again see the mention of the arhat—this time with the full arhat pericope—as being “the foremost” of those “from any of the 4 classes who becomes a monk.” We can read this as meaning that the arhat is the foremost of humans.

1.2.1.3 The “4 classes” are mentioned to correct the wrong and insidious view of the brahmins regarding congenital (birth-based) social classes. In fact, one of the purposes of the Sutta is to debunk just this false class notion of the brahmins [§§3.4-3.8], the thesis of which is stated in §4, highlighted by the Buddha’s declaration that “**the brahmins have forgotten their past**” [§4.1; 6].

The rest of the Sutta—in a grand display of mythology, aetiology, history and spirituality—proves just this point, playing around the sense of the word *agga*. We can also sense a subtle, wry, humour pervading the whole process, especially the mythical narratives [§§10-25]. The humour is clearly meant for those familiar with various Vinaya rules of the monastics, as the mythical actors are often depicted as transgressing those rules [7.2].

1.2.1.4 Embedded in the mythical narratives of the Aggañña Sutta is what we would today call a “social aetiology,” that is, an account of the origin in social terms, of economic activity. Here, *dhamma* is taken as “social code” (a notion familiar to the brahmins). However, this is not a “class hierarchy” of the brahmins based on birth (*jāti*), well known in a feudal system, but a social code based on one’s work as “**profession**.”⁸

Such a vision of profession is almost modern—the way we view “professionalism” today. The members of the 4 classes are defined, according to the Sutta, by the work they do. And they should be skilled and diligent in what they profess [§§20-25]—teachings detailed in such discourses as **the Sigāl’ovāda Sutta** (D 31) and **the Dīghajānu Sutta** (A 8.54).⁹

This grand drama starts with the evolution of the world [§§10-11], of human and sexuality [§§12-16], and of socioeconomic behaviour [§§17-25]—and climaxes with the evolution of the ethical and spiritual life [§§26-31]. Clearly, of these, the ethical and spiritual life is the foremost. In fact, in the earlier sections, *dhamma* is an enlightened “social code,” but in this latter case, *dhamma* refers to the spiritual teaching and practice, the path to awakening.

1.2.1.5 Following Richard Gombrich, **Steven Collins** takes *aggañña* (*agga + ñña*) as an adjective,¹⁰ and calls the Sutta “The discourse on what is primary.”¹¹ Collins’ title is technically right in taking *agga* as meaning “primary,” hinting both at the “beginning of things,” the historical evolution of social classes, and the underlying truth of *dhamma*, both as social code and as the true teaching and its goal (that is, the teaching about true reality and spiritual freedom).

If we take “primary” as meaning “of the first order in time or temporal sequence, earliest, primitive, original” (OED), and apply it to *agga*, it would only have sense (2) [1.2.1]. However, the Sutta speaks of the “primary”—the origin of the world, life and society—only as a prelude to something more universal and totally liberating. The Sutta clearly presents the Dharma (as teaching and goal) as the “foremost”

⁷ On this statement as “paraensis,” a teaching reminding of past good, see SD 44.1 (1.1.2.2).

⁸ On *dhamma* as “social code” in the broadest sense, see SD 50.39 (1.1.2).

⁹ Respectively, D 31 (SD 4.1) & A 8.54 (SD 4.10).

¹⁰ Gombrich 1992a:169-70.

¹¹ Collins 1993a:317, 331-334.

(*agga*), and this is what is really the import of the whole Sutta. Hence, the *aggañña* is better translated as “the foremost.” [2.1.2]

1.2.2 Mythology

1.2.2.1 The account of the “beginning of things” (*agga*) then starts at §10 and ends in §25. This sense of *agga* is only implicit, but compelling, here. Hence, it is a wordplay on *agga*. This whole section is also a grand display of early Buddhist mythology presented with subtle humour. **Mythology** was a common didactic tool in ancient societies.¹²

1.2.2.2 It is important to look at the nature of mythology as used here, and **Sujato’s** insights are helpful:

How true are these stories? Or, better, what kind of truth should we seek in them? They certainly do not agree in all details with the record of the past as interpreted by scientists. Leaving aside fantastical elements, Buddhist stories typically think of very remote ages as being pretty similar to the Buddha’s time. This is one of the classic functions of myth: to explain and authorize present day customs by connecting them to archetypal events that happened ‘once upon a time’. But archaeology, the story of the stones, tells us that India was a very different place in the long past. Given that the most important teaching of Buddhism is impermanence, the archaeological account is therefore more Buddhist than the Buddhist account!

So there is some history in myth; and inevitably, there is some myth in history. Everyone who writes about history—myself included—has some point of view, some agenda to push. Fact & fable, science & superstition, do not exist in two entirely separate domains. They are complementary ways of seeing the world, and have much to learn from each other. However, it is obvious that the main purpose of myth is not to preserve historical facts. As religious stories, myths deal with moral and spiritual truths, and, importantly, how these truths are lived out in a community. In this essay, then, we should look at the way these stories fulfill classic functions of myth, such as:

- 1) authorizing customs and rituals;
- 2) providing ethical guidelines;
- 3) describing a just society;
- 4) defining a religion in its religious and cultural context;
- 5) reflecting principles of psychology and philosophy.

(Sujato, “Beginnings,” B:14, digital ed)

2 Sutta summary and highlights

2.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

The Sutta opens with a discussion on what constitute “the best” (*setṭha* = *agga*) in the world [§§1-9; 2.2], followed by a didactic mythical—and humorous—account of the origin of life and the world, that is, our “primeval” (*agga*) history [§§10-17; 2.3] and the “beginning” (*agga*) of society [§§18-26], and “concluding” (*agga*) with what or who is “primary” (*agga*) [§§27-32]. [1.2.1.5]

¹² For a def of “myth,” see SD 52.1 (1.1.2). For a study, see **Myth in Buddhism**, SD 36.1 & SD 49.8 (9.1.3).

2.2 SUTTA INTRODUCTION

The Sutta opens with two young brahmin students, Vāseṭṭha and Bhāra,dvāja [4], who probably have only recently renounced the world under the Buddha [§1]. When asked by the Buddha on the reaction of the brahmins, they reply that the brahmins regard themselves as the highest class, born of God himself, and that it is improper and condescending for them to join the Buddha's order [§§2-3].

The Buddha responds by saying that the brahmins have “forgotten their past” [§4; 6]. The instructions open with the Buddha saying that no matter whichever member of the 4 classes commits a bad act or a good act through body, speech or mind, its karmic accountability works on him all the same [§§5-6]. Of all the beings who have risen above karma, the foremost (*agga*) are the arhats [§7].

The Buddha goes on to speak on the supremacy of social order and justice (*dhamma*), on account of which king Pasenadi, although ruling the Sakyas, respects them, and they, in turn, respect the king, treating one other as equals, as it were [§8]. As renunciants of the Buddha's sangha, Vāseṭṭha and Bhāra,dvāja, like all the other sangha members from various classes, or even the unclassed, are now all “recluses, sons of the Sakyas” [§9.2]. This statement is significant as it distinguishes the biological family which the renunciants have left behind, and are now members of the spiritual family.

2.3 THE UNIVERSE AND SOCIETY IN THE AGGAÑÑA SUTTA

2.3.1 Underlying the mythology of the Aggañña Sutta is the notion of a pulsating universe elaborated by Buddhaghosa in his Visuddhi,magga.¹³ The pulsating comprises a slow progressive cycle of contracting, stability, expanding, stability, with the cycle repeating endlessly (each stage taking an astronomically long period).¹⁴

2.3.2 When the universe “contracts” (*saṃvaṭṭati*, literally, “rolls back”), it devolves or collapses.¹⁵ **The Brahmajāla Sutta** (D 1), **the Pāṭika Sutta** (D 24) and **the Aggañña Sutta** (D 27) describes, in the same worlds, that “When the world is contracting [collapsing], beings mostly [2.5] arise in the Ābhassara [streaming radiance] brahmā world.”¹⁶ [§§10.1-10.2] The significance of this statement will be discussed below.

2.3.3 **Ābhassara** is a celestial world, the highest of the 2nd-dhyana form worlds, populated by luminous beings who live on zest (*pīti*) and emanate lightning-like radiance. When the physical universe devolves or “contracts” (*saṃvaṭṭati*) due to “fire,” it destroys the whole physical or sense-world universe (*kāma,-loka*), and also the first 2 realms of the form worlds (the 1st-dhyana and the 2nd-dhyana brahma realms), that is, up to (and including) Ābhassara.¹⁷ [§10.4]

2.3.4 A stable period lasting a very long time (a quarter of a world-cycle) follows, which is best understood as a kind of “big crunch.”¹⁸ Simply put, there is no universe then, and as such no life or existence as we know it. This is, as if, the cosmic “swing” comes to a temporary halt before it swings back into an evolving universe. [§§10.4-12]

¹³ See SD 47.8 (2.4.3).

¹⁴ For details, see Appendix below.

¹⁵ For diagrams, see App (2) below. For a parallel, see **Brahmajāla S** (D 1,2.2), SD 25.2.

¹⁶ *Saṃvaṭṭamāne loke yebhuyyena sattā ābhassara,saṃvattanikā honti* (D 1:17,19 = 3:28,23 = 84,27), ie, respectively, **Brahmajāla S** (D 1,39/1:17), SD 25.2 = **Pāṭika S** (D 24,15/3:28), SD 63.3 = **Aggañña S** (D 28,10.2/3:84), SD 2.19.

¹⁷ CA 11; Vism 13.41/416 f. See SD 57.10 (1.5.3.4).

¹⁸ In reading about early Buddhist cosmology, we must take it as a pre-scientific Indian imagination of a “mythical” universe, advanced for its time, and whose purpose is not cosmology as we know it today, but as part of an explanation of the true nature of things,” ie, impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and delusion. See SD 57.10 (1.3.5).

2.3.5 After a very long period, the universe “rolls open” (*vivaṭṭati*) or re-evolves, and begins to expand again. Again, this expanding process takes a very long time. This may be understood or imagined as being set off by a “big bang” whose shock-waves spread forth bringing the physical universe into being again. [§§12.2-18.13]

2.3.6 This is followed by a stable phase or “steady state.” By this time, our world is stable enough to support vegetation and life. As humans evolve and interact, society, too, evolves. This is where the Aggañña Sutta details how agriculture arises [§§18.7-18.10], followed by definition, division and ownership of property [§§18.11].

2.3.7 With the existence of private property, there arise theft and its punishment [§19], so that social order arises through a communal consensus with the appointment of “the great elect” (*mahā sammata*), a primordial king, and the forerunner of kingship and governance [§§20-21]. As society grows and prospers under this wise and just law-enforcer, various livelihood circles (*maṇḍala*) evolve [§§22-25]. This is the ancestor of the class system in the Buddha’s time.

2.3.8 Even in these early times in our social evolution, there is a pervasive sense of moral accountability and justice (*dhamma*) [§§26-29]. What keeps a society wholesome and progressive is its sense of moral restraint and mental health: the former encourages healthy interaction and unconditional acceptance of others; the latter, inspires true beauty and creativity.

2.4 CONCLUSION

The Sutta closes with a statement on what is “primary” (*agga*) on various levels [§§30-32]. The 7 awakening-factors (*satta bojjhaṅga*)¹⁹—the spiritual stages of meditation—are the foremost of spiritual trainings, as they bring full awakening or arhathood to anyone, no matter from whichever class or none [§§29-31]. Interestingly, the Sutta ends with the statement on the supremacy of the kshatriya (*khattiya*), the noble or warrior class, who are dominant in the central Gangetic plain in the Buddha’s time. This is perhaps to show that the brahmins are not the dominant class, anyway, so they should not claim to be the highest class—they are clearly not. Even one of the highest gods, Brahmā Sanaṅkumāra, agrees with this! But it is the Buddha who approves of this, that is, has the final word here [§32-34].

2.5 “MOSTLY” (*YEBHUYYENA*)

2.5.1 An important and interesting point that needs mention is the commentaries on the word “mostly” (*yebhuyyena*) [2.3.2], which appears in the Aggañña Sutta [§10], describing the contracting of the universe, when it is destroyed. Here, **Buddhaghosa** says that “‘mostly’ is used because the other beings are born either in higher Brahmā realms or in the formless realms” (DA 1:110).

It would be interesting to consider how this word applies to the noble saints when the physical world ends. Understandably, the arhats would not be reborn anywhere, while the non-returners would arise in the 4th-dhyana pure abodes, well out of reach of the cosmic destruction.²⁰ Once-returners and stream-winners, on the other hands, would still be reborn, and if they are dhyana-attaining meditators, they would re-arise in the 1st-dhyana Ābhassara world. The question now is how the other worldlings, who know no meditation, not to say of dhyana (such as the hellbeings), arise in a dhyanic world?

¹⁹ On the 7 awakening-factors, see **Mahā Sakul’udāyī S** (M 77,20) + SD 6.18 (7).

²⁰ For a schema of the 31 realms, see SD 1.7 (Table 1.7).

2.5.2 Dhammapāla, in his subcommentary on Buddhaghosa’s texts, suggests a better alternative and explains that: “‘or (*vā*) in world-systems other than those in the process of contracting’ [that is, in parallel universes] is the alternative to be understood by the word or. For, it is *impossible* that all beings in the descent [*āpaya*, ie, the suffering states] at that time are born in the form or formless existence, since it is *impossible* for those beings in the descent with the longest life span to be reborn in the human realm ...” (DAṬ 1:201, emphases added).²¹

Thus, Dhammapāla deals with Buddhaghosa’s failure to take into account the karma of those beings who have committed one of the 5 karmas “with immediate result [arising in this life or the following birth]” (*ānantariya,kamma*, ie matricide, parricide, killing an arhat, wounding the Buddha, splitting the sangha) when the aeon (*kappa*) ends. If the karmas of such beings have not run out, then surely, concludes Dhammapāla, they must be reborn in the hells of other world-systems, and the other subhumans rearise in their respective subhuman planes there.²² (DAṬ 1:198 f) [9.5.2]

3 Related discourses

3.1 Like all other suttas, the Aggañña Sutta does not stand alone, that is to say, it is part of a fascinating network of connected teachings. The Aggañña Sutta, for the most part—from the re-evolution of the universe [§10] to the election of the first king [§21] (Mvst 1:52, 338-48)—is also found in **Mahāvastu**, a Sanskrit work of the Lokōttara,vāda²³ (a Mahāsaṅghika school).

Over half a century ago, Macdonnel already noted that the Aggañña Sutta is probably a parody of the Vedic “Hymn of creation,” that is, “parodying Veda x.90.”²⁴ Norman, too, has noted that, as in **the Assalāyana Sutta** (M 93),²⁵ that “the Buddha satirizes the Puruṣasūkta of the R̥gveda” (1991:194). [§4 nn]

However, to date, no helpful critical comparative study of the Sutta and the Vedic creation myths known in the Buddha’s time has been done. It would be interesting to read such a work along the lines of Collins’ analysis of the Sutta in the light of the Vinaya [7.2].

3.2 The Aggañña Sutta, as a socio-cosmic **aetiology** or “parable of origins” (Collins 1993a:314, 318), has parallels in the Brahma,jāla Sutta (D 1) and the Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda Sutta (D 26), and in related passages from these texts:

Brahma,jāla Sutta

(D 1,2.2-14/1:17) The cosmogony of how theistic ideas arose. (SD 25)

Cakkavatti Sīhanāda Sutta

(D 26,14-26) Poverty, social problems, Metteyya Buddha’s advent.²⁶ (SD 36.10)

Pāṭika Sutta (D 24,1.5/3:4,

D 2,14-21/3:28) It is not the Buddha’s purpose to explain the origin of the world. (SD 63.3)

²¹ *Āruppesu vā’ ti vā,saddena saṁvattāna,loka.dhātūhi añña,loka.dhātesu vā’ti vikappanam veditabbaṁ. na hi sabbe apāya,sattā tadā rūpārūpa,bhavesu uppajantīti sakkā viññātuṁ, apāyesu dīgha,tamāyukānam manussa,-lok’uppattiyā asambhavato* (DĀṬ 1:201). See Gethin, 1997:198 f.

²² The same explanation is given by Vasubandhu (late 4th century CE) in his *Abhidharma,kośa,bhāṣya*, a pre-Mahāyāna Skt work (Abhk 3.90a-b): SD 57.10 (1.4.2.3). In the Chinese Āgamas: EĀ 7125 (T2.736c17-c19 (when the world is destroyed, hell-beings are reborn in another stable universe).

²³ Also spelt Lok’uttara,vāda.

²⁴ Ie, Puruṣa Śukta 1.90.12 (R̥gveda 10.90), the source of the legitimizing myth of the 4 classes, with the brahmins born of the Primordial Being’s mouth; A A Macdonnel, *Classical Sanskrit Literature*, Oxford, 1951:201.

²⁵ M 93,5.2/2:148 (SD 40a.2).

²⁶ This sutta precedes Aggañña S (D 28).

(Agga) Kosala Sutta

(A 10.29/5:59-65)

On the vastness and composition of the universe. (SD 16.15)

(Puñña) Mettā Sutta

(A 7.58a/4:88-91)

How lovingkindness helps us choose our future rebirth. (SD 2.11a)

Abhidharmakośa (a pre-Mahāyāna Sanskrit work by Vasubandhu)

(Abhdk 3:97cd-98ab)

Vasubandhu's version of the Aggañña Sutta cosmogony.

Mahāvastu (a Mahāyāna work of the Lokottara.vāda)

(Mvst 1:52, 338-48)

Sanskrit version of the Aggañña Sutta cosmogony.

3.3 An important theme of the Aggañña Sutta is that true social status is not a matter of class, nor is spirituality a matter of birth. Our happiness and goodness are the result of our conduct. In this connection, the Aggañña Sutta should be studied with such texts as:

Ambaṭṭha Sutta (D 3)

On the Buddha's 32 physical marks of the great man. (SD 21.3)

Tevijja Sutta (D 13)

On the falsity of the God-idea. (SD 1.8)

Madhurā Sutta (M 84)

Mahā Kaccāna explains that the 4 classes are all equally pure. (SD 69.8)

Assalāyana Sutta (M 93)

Why the brahmins are not the highest class, and that social status is earned (not hereditary). (SD 40a.2)

Vāsetṭha Sutta (M 98)

= Sn no 9/p115-123): On the natural equality of the classes. (SD 37.1)

Brāhmaṇa,dhammika Sutta

(Sn 2.7/p50-55)

On how the brahmins of the Buddha's days have fallen from the ideal.

Vasala Sutta (Sn 1.7)

On the true meaning of being "twice-born" or "reborn." (SD 72.2)

3.4 Buddhaghosa's **Visuddhi,magga** also contains passages relating to Buddhist cosmogony, that is, the re-arising of the universe (Vism 414-422), twice quotes the Aggañña Sutta (Vism 417, 419) and even fills in an apparent hiatus in the Sutta [§16].²⁷

4 Vāsetṭha and Bhāra,dvāja

4.1 The Aggañña Sutta's main interlocutors are the two close friends, the brahmin youths (*maṇava*), that is, Vedic students, Vāsetṭha and Bhāra,dvāja, both experts in the Three Vedas. While Vāsetṭha is Pokkharasāti's "seniormost resident student and foremost pupil,"²⁸ Bhāra,dvāja is a pupil of Tārukkha.²⁹ The early suttas record them as having a number of important discussions that reflect the social and religious uncertainties of their times. These discussions are recorded in **the Vāsetṭha Sutta** (M 98 = Sn 3.9),³⁰ **the Tevijja Sutta** (D 13)³¹ and **the Aggañña Sutta** (D 27).³²

4.2 Buddhaghosa says that Vāsetṭha and Bhāra,dvāja first meet the Buddha, as recorded in **the Vāsetṭha Sutta** (M 98 = Sn 3.9), when they go for refuge (M 98.14 = Sn p123). They receive another long instruction from the Buddha in **the Tevijja Sutta** (D 13), and again take refuge (D 13,82/1:252). **The Aggañña Sutta** (D 27) is given to them when they are probationers for full ordination (D 27,1.2/3:80). According to Buddhaghosa, they accept the Buddha as their teacher at the end of the Vāsetṭha Sutta and

²⁷ See further **Vāsetṭha S** (M 98, SD 3.9) @ SD 37.1 (1.3.1).

²⁸ *Jeṭṭh'antevāsī agga,sisso* (SnA 2:463); see also D 2:399; cf Sn p116.

²⁹ **Vāsetṭha S** (M 98.7 = Sn 594), SD 37.1.

³⁰ M 98/2:197/98 = Sn 3.9/115/594 ff @ SD 37.1.

³¹ D 13/1:235-252 @ SD 1.8. See Collins 1993a:319.

³² D 27/3:80-97 @ SD 2.19.

join the order (as probationers) at the end of the Tevijja Sutta (DA 3:860). Later, while meditating on the teachings of the Aggañña Sutta, they become arhats (DA 3:872).

4.3 The Commentaries to both the Aggañña Sutta and the Tevijja Sutta connect the accounts of the two youths in the three Suttas into a continuous narrative (DA 406, 860), thus:

Vāseṭṭha Sutta	(M 98 = Sn 3.9)	after the events of the Vāseṭṭha Sutta, they take refuge;
Te,vijja Sutta	(D 13)	after the events of the Tevijja Sutta, they take refuge (again) (MA 406); they join the order as novices.
Aggañña Sutta	(D 27)	at the start, they are presented as aspiring to be ordained as monks (§1); after the Aggañña Sutta, they are ordained and attain nirvana (MA 406, cf 872).

5 Buddhist humour

5.1 Like the Aggañña Sutta, most of the suttas mentioned above [3] belong to the genre of religious humour.³³ The humorous language and imagery of such suttas are understandable as they deal with well-established ideas and norms, taken seriously especially by those who used them to legitimize their affluence and position in society. Like **the Brāhmaṇa,dhammika Sutta**, the Aggañña Sutta criticizes the brahmins saying that they have forgotten their past, resulting in their degeneration from an ideal way of life.

The two narratives are, on the surface level of a temporal sequence of actual events, quite different; but when read as parables using stories of the past to make a contemporary moral point, they complement each other perfectly well. (Collins 1993a:320)

5.2 Richard Gombrich, in his *Theravāda Buddhism: A social history from Benares to Colombo*, remarks that the Aggañña Sutta is “an extended satire on brahminical ideas, full of parody and puns ... As a debunking job I think the sermon is serious: its main aim is to show that the class system is nothing but a human invention”; however, “I cannot go here into all the reasons why I think that the positive statements in the myth are satirical and not meant to be taken literally.” (1988:85). In his book, “The Buddha’s Book of Genesis” (1992a), Gombrich goes on to elaborate on the significance of the Buddha’s humour in presenting a parody and pastiche of brahmanical claims, teachings and practices.

6 Why and how did the brahmins forget their past?

6.1 For an answer, we have to look at the socio-historical developments of ancient northern central India. According to **G Erdosi**, a specialist in early Indian archaeology and history, by the 6th-4th century BCE, “the technological base of the economy in this period [had] already reached a level not to be significantly exceeded until the 20th century” (1988: 112), that is, until the advent of industrialization.

The most likely time for the Buddha and early Buddhism, it now seems, is **the 5th-4th centuries BC[E]**. There are three main points in what follows: first, during this period Brahmanism was more strongly established in the countryside [more so in the west than the east] than in the rising urban centres, where a competing plurality of ideologies was emerging; second, these

³³ See O’Flaherty 1976:33, cf 25, & Piya Tan, “The Buddha’s Smile: A study in Buddhist humour” (NUS lecture, 2001).

urban centres, which arose from and encouraged a food surplus, were the market, military and administrative centres of small-scale polities, not metropolitan capitals of large empires; third, these polities were ruled, in the earlier part of the period, by oligarchies, and only gradually turned to monarchy, at the time of the Buddha himself and immediately thereafter. The society apparently presupposed by the [Aggañña Sutta] fits just this picture.

(Collins 1993a:306 f; emphases added)³⁴

6.2 With urbanization³⁵ comes *specialization of work* that not only creates surplus goods and wealth, but also surplus time for leisure and pleasure—and *philosophizing*, that is, questioning about values and the purpose of life, mostly due to the alienation that attends urban life, and challenging old beliefs due to the availability of new ideas through broader political and commercial contacts.³⁶

6.3 Since religion meditates on its belly, the established religious situation—the brahminical system—was apparently spoiled by the new surplus of wealth, and so forgetting their roots and ideals. This is not a new scenario if we consider how easily an affluent urban environment becomes a great magnet attracting and maintaining religious and quasi-religious groups even today.

7 Scholars on the Aggañña Sutta

7.1 STEVE COLLINS. In his instructive paper, “**The Discourse on What is Primary**” (which includes a new translation of the Aggañña Sutta), Collins (1993a) sets out to do 3 things, that is:

- (1) to prove, by means of close linguistic analysis, that what I shall call the “parable of origins” in [the Aggañña Sutta] is permeated by references to the Monastic Code, **the Vinaya...**,³⁷ [pp 326-331]
- (2) to provide in this General Introduction a context for reading and interpreting [the Sutta] on three levels: in relation to world history, to ancient Indian society, and to other early Buddhist texts;
- (3) to illustrate by this one case what I think is a more general desideratum in Buddhist Studies: that the familiar and standard translations of early Pali texts issued by the Pali Text Society, mostly issued at the beginning of the [20th] century, should be treated not as definitive guides to the original ... but as they were intended—pioneering attempts in need of constant revision as knowledge progresses.

(Collins 1993a:302, emphases added)

7.2 THE AGGAÑÑA SUTTA AND THE VINAYA

After showing various allusions that the Aggañña Sutta makes to the Vinaya, Collins (1993a:327 f) goes on to say that such allusions are “proven, I think, by the semantic and lexical parallels between [the Sutta], the Vinaya Code, and a list of ascetic ideals found in a number of texts,” known as the 5 “impossible things” (*pañca abhabba-ṭ, ṭhānāni*), 5 things that an arhat is incapable of doing (*so abhabbo pañca ṭhānāni ajjhācaritum*, D 3:235). The lists differ slightly, but the one from **the Sandaka Sutta** (M 76) is a characteristic one:

- (1) A monk whose mental influxes are destroyed is incapable of intentionally depriving a living being of life (*sañcicca pāṇaṃ jīvitā voropetum*). [Same as Pācittiya 61; almost identical to Pārājika 3.]
- (2) A monk whose mental influxes are destroyed is incapable of taking the not-given, intending to steal it (*adinnaṃ theyya, sañkhatam ādātum*). [Same as Pārājika 2. See V 1:46; Kkhv 26 f.]

³⁴ See esp Gombrich 1988:49-59 & also “Buddhism in India” §§2-4 in my *A History of Buddhism*, 2002a ch 1.

³⁵ See **Myth in Buddhism**, SD 36.1 (2.2).

³⁶ See Collins 1993a:309 & Piya Tan, “The Thundering Silence” in *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2004 ch 8.

³⁷ Such references are marked below in [*parenthesized italics*] with the Vinaya references: see eg §12.1.

- (3) A monk whose mental influxes are destroyed is incapable of indulging in sexual intercourse (*methunam dhammam paṭisevitum*). [Pārājika 1.]
- (4) A monk whose mental influxes are destroyed is incapable of telling a conscious lie (*sampajāna, musā bhāsītum*). [Pācittiya 1; cf Pārājika 4.]
- (5) A monk whose mental influxes are destroyed is incapable of enjoying sensual pleasures by storing them up as he did formerly when living in a house (*sannidhi, kārakam kāme paribhuñjitum seyyathā pi pubbe agāriya, bhūto*). [Cf Nissaggiya Pācittiya 23 & 38.]
(D 3:235; A 3:438-440; cf D 3:133; M 1:523; A 4:370; Sn 231)

In short, a careful study of the Aggañña Sutta will show that it ultimately attempts to point towards the higher ideals of moral virtue as embodied in these five virtues of the arhat, or at least to their lay equivalent of the 5 precepts.

7.3 In his book, *Selfless Mind* (1995), **Peter Harvey** discusses the connection between “the radiant mind” (*pabhassara citta*) and the Ābhassara devas whose brightness gradually dimmed and they became more gross in form. “As the world-process proceeds, beings then decline in morality and their lightly defiled radiant *cittas* get progressively obscured by increasing defilements” (1995:177 f = §10.38).³⁸

7.4 Sujato has composed a witty contemporary paraphrase, even a parody, in verse entitled “Beginnings” (nd),³⁹ whose overall movement comes from dovetailing the Aggañña Sutta (D 27) and **the Cakka, vatti Sīha, nāda Sutta** (D 26).⁴⁰ He has also written a very insightful, yet humorously colloquial, interpretation of the Aggañña Sutta:

The world starts as watery, dark, and featureless as the womb. The Radiant Gods arrive like the bright spark of consciousness at the moment of conception. The “tasty earth” is like the mother’s milk, for the earth was of old always the mother; the description is suitably milky. The beings suck the stuff off their fingers like babies suckling their mother’s breast. Since the little one has now come out of the womb, the days and nights appear.

Gradually, the food gets coarser, just as a growing child tries out a variety of coarser foods. But food still appears without work as if by magic (thanks to the unappreciated efforts of Mum & Dad!). Their bodies get bigger and tougher; they lose their baby cuteness and look more and more different from each other. With adolescence their sexual characteristics become more prominent. They play around with sex; and so they have to move into their own private dwellings like newlyweds.

³⁸ On *pabhassara*, see **The radiant mind**, SD 8.3.

³⁹ “It should hardly need saying that it is not a translation, not even a loose one. It is simply inspired by the ideas and the scope of these grand old stories. As well as purely whimsical and fanciful elements, I have freely included mythic motifs from other sources—even a couple of lines from an Aussie folk song! I have downplayed cultural themes that are not so relevant for most Buddhists today, such as the class system. Instead, I have tried to bring out connections with modern ideas. In particular, I wish to highlight some points of agreement and disagreement between the Buddhist world-story and those of science and Christianity. In making such changes, I hope to remain true to the Buddha’s method: to creatively engage with his times, showing how the Dhamma is a vital force moving through history” (Sujato B:13, digital). <http://www.santiforestmonastery.com/writing/>

⁴⁰ D 27 & DĀ 5. Both these suttas are found in Maurice Walshe’s D:W. “The reader should beware, however, of some translations errors. At D 26.5 [Cakka, vatti Sīha. nāda S], for example, the translation says that a righteous king should give advice to ascetics and sages; in fact, the king should listen to advice from them” (Sujato’s fn, B:28 digital ed).

But now their food doesn't just appear; they must work for it. They take to farming, become land owners, and take an active role in politics. The exaggerated lifespan of the ancients, emphasized in the Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta, also reflects a child's perspective, where Mum & Dad are giants, all-knowing and almighty, and apparently living forever.

When such correlations are pointed out, those with a one-sided scientific mind-set are wont to chortle with glee: 'See! It's all just a rehash of childhood memories!' This response trivializes [a] vital dimension of myth. It is not *just* a rehash of childhood memories; it is *even* [sic] a rehash of childhood memories. This is a most intriguing fact. The growth of each one of us as conscious, moral, rational individuals parallels the evolution of society as a whole.

This reminds me of an obscure but precise saying I dimly remember from biology class: ontogenesis recapitulates phylogenesis. Got that? What this means is that the growth of the embryo in the womb goes through stages similar to a bacteria, a worm, a fish, a reptile, etc, thus retracing the evolutionary history of humanity as a whole.

But not even the most absurd reductionist would say that the evolution of a species was nothing more than the growth of one individual! Appreciation of such patterns reinforces a core insight: what is truly good for oneself must also be good for all beings; and what leads to the good for all beings must also be good for oneself.

(Sujato, "Beginnings," B:13 digital ed; paragraphing added)

8 The universe and its cycle

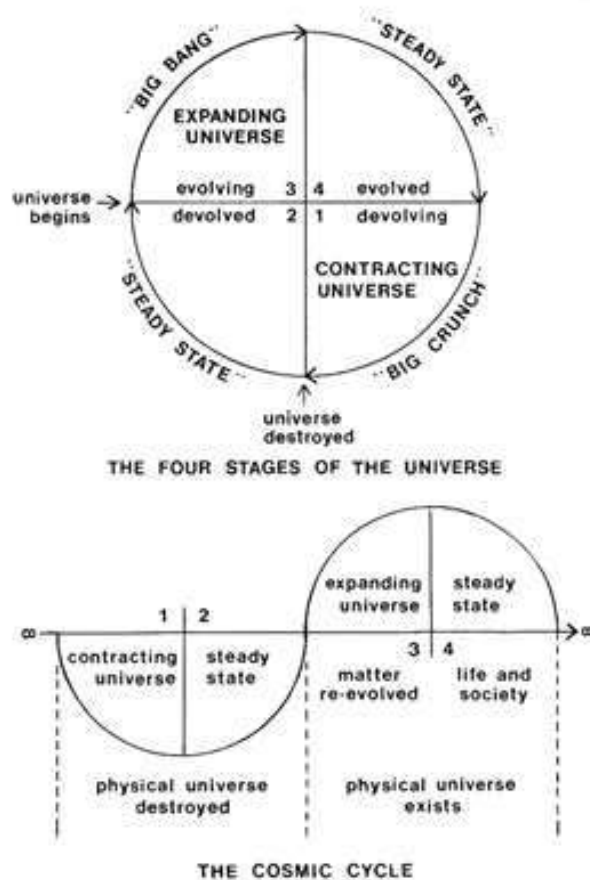


Fig. 8. The cosmic cycle:

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8.1 ⁴¹The length of time the universe takes to complete one full world cycle—known as a “**world period**”—is called a “great aeon” (*mahā kappa* or simply *kappa*).⁴² It is made up of 4 intermediate aeons (*antara,kappa*), each of which is thus also called a “small aeon.”

These 4 periods are those of (1) contraction; (2) then, the world remains stably contracted or fully devolved (the big crunch); (3) then, a period of expansion; and (4) finally, a period of expanded stability, a fully evolved world.⁴³ This world-cycle of 4 stages effectively depicts what we today know as a **pulsating universe**.⁴⁴

8.2 The (Catukka) Kappa Sutta (A 4.156) [8.3] mentions these 4 cycles of our pulsating universe, thus:

<i>saṃvaṭṭa</i> (“involution,” devolution, contracting):	a collapsing universe or “big crunch”;
<i>saṃvaṭṭa tiṭṭhati</i> (contracted, stable):	a collapsed universe or “black hole”;
<i>vivaṭṭa</i> (evolution, expanding):	an expanding universe or “big bang”;
<i>vivaṭṭa tiṭṭhati</i> (expanded, stable). ⁴⁵ [9.4.1]	an expanded or steady-state universe.

8.3 THE (CATUKKA) KAPPA SUTTA

SD 2.19(8.3)

(Catukka) Kappa Sutta

The (Fours) Discourse on the World-cycle • **A 4.156/2:142**

Traditional: A 4.4.1.6 = Aṅguttara Nikāya 4, Catukka Nipāta 4, Catuttha Paṇṇāsaka 1, Indriya Vagga 6

Theme: The 4 aeons or fourfold cycle of the universe

1 Bhikshus, there are these 4 incalculables [incalculable stages] of a world-cycle [an aeon].⁴⁶

What are the four?

2 (1) The time during which the world cycle rolls back [collapses],⁴⁷ which cannot easily be reckoned as so many years, or so many hundreds of years, or so many thousands of years, or so many hundreds of thousands of years.

3 (2) The time during which the world cycle remains in a rolled-back state [remains collapsed],⁴⁸ which cannot easily be reckoned as so many years, or so many hundreds of years, or so many thousands of years, or so many hundreds of thousands of years.

4 (3) The time during which the world cycle rolls open [expands],⁴⁹ which cannot easily be reckoned as so many years, or so many hundreds of years, or so many thousands of years, or so many hundreds of thousands of years.

5 (4) The time during which the world cycle remains in a rolled-open state [remains expanded],⁵⁰ which cannot easily be reckoned as so many years, or so many hundreds of years, or so many thousands

⁴¹ This section originally from SD 57.10 (1.5.4.1).

⁴² See SD 57.10 (1.5.3.1 f).

⁴³ See **(Catukka) Kappa S** (A 4.156/2:142) + SD 2.19 (9).

⁴⁴ See SD 57.10 (1.5.3.3).

⁴⁵ A 4.156/2:142 [below]; Vism 13.28-30/414-422; cf D 1:14, 3:109; It 15, 99; Pug 60; Kvu 11.5/455 f; Miln 232.

⁴⁶ *Cattār'imāni bhikkhave kappassa asaṅkheyyāni*. An “incalculable” (Skt *asaṅkhyeyya*): Ce Ee Se *asaṅkheyya*; Be *asaṅkhyeyya*.

⁴⁷ “Rolls back,” *saṃvaṭṭati*, ie, closes into itself, a collapsing universe, a “big crunch.”

⁴⁸ “Remains in a rolled-back state,” *saṃvaṭṭato* [vl *saṃvaṭṭate*] *tiṭṭhati*, ie, a collapsed universe or “black hole.”

⁴⁹ “Rolls open,” *vivaṭṭati*, ie, closes into itself, a collapsing universe, a “big bang.”

⁵⁰ “Remains in a rolled-open state,” *vivaṭṭato* [vl *vivaṭṭate*] *tiṭṭhati*, ie, an expanded or steady-state universe.

of years, or so many hundreds of thousands of years.

6 These, bhikshus, are the 4 incalculables of a world-cycle.

— evaṃ —

8.3.1 The whole process is called a “great cycle” (*mahā kappa*) or “great aeon,” or simply, a “world-cycle,” “world-period” or “aeon” (*kappa*; Skt *kalpa*) [9.1]. Each world-cycle has these 4 stages or “incalculables” (*asaṅkheyya*), which suggests their astronomical length.⁵¹ [9.3]

8.3.2 The teaching of the (Catukka) Kappa Sutta is illustrated with a parable in each of these 4 related Suttas to show the unimaginable length of a world-cycle. [9.1]

9 COSMIC TIME

9.1 Kappa

9.1.1 The Pabbata Sutta (S 15.5) describes the astronomical length of a world-cycle or aeon [9.1] in this manner,

Suppose, bhikshu, there were a **great mountain of rock** a league (*yojana*)⁵² long, a league wide, a league high, with neither holes nor crevices, one solid mass of rock. At the end of every hundred years, a man were to stroke it just once with a piece of Kāsī cloth. That great mountain of rock might, by this effort, be worn away and eliminated, but **the aeon**, bhikshu, would still not have ended. Bhikshu, so long is an aeon.

And through such long aeons, we have wandered through so many of them, so many hundreds of aeons, so many thousands of aeons, so many hundreds of thousands of aeons.

What is the reason for this? Because, bhikshu, this cycle of lives (*saṃsāra*) is without discernible beginning ... It is enough to be free from them. (S 15.5/2:181 f)

9.1.2 There is an interesting allusion to the immeasurability of the *kappa* in a parallel in Grimm’s fairy-tale of **the little shepherd-boy**:

“In Farther Pommerania there is a diamond mountain, one hour high, one hour wide, one hour deep. There, every hundred years a little bird comes out and whets its little beak on it. And when the whole mountain is ground off, then the first second of eternity has passed.”⁵³ [9.3.2]

9.2 Significance of the lengthiness of a kappa

9.2.1 PARABLES. Besides the Pabbata Sutta [9.1.1] There is a set of four suttas alluding to the incalculable duration of a world-cycle, and the incalculable number of world-cycles that have since passed. The incalculable duration of a world-cycle is the theme of **the Pabbala Sutta** (S 15.5) [9.2.4] and **the Sāsapā Sutta** (S 15.6) [9.2.2]. The incalculable numbers of world-cycles that have passed is the theme of **the (Kappa) Sāvaka Sutta** (S 15.7) [9.2.3] and **the (Kappa) Gaṅgā Sutta** (S 15.8) [9.2.4].

⁵¹ The PED definitions under “saṃvaṭṭa” of *saṃvaṭṭa-vivaṭṭa* should be reversed (D:W 539 n46).

⁵² A “league” (*yojana*) is the distance travelled by a yoke of oxen, ie about 7 miles (11.3 km), and is divided into 3 *gāvutā* (DhA 2:13; cf DhA 1:108). See SD 47.8 (2.4.4.1); also Dh 60, J 5:37.

⁵³ Quoted by BDict: Kappa. See SD 49.8 (15.2).

9.2.2 The Sāsapā Sutta (S 15.6), “the mustard-seed discourse,” gives a similar parable. Imagine a city a fathom (*yojana*) [9.1.1] square with iron walls a fathom high all around that is completely filled up with mustard seeds. At the end of every century, a man comes along and removes just one tiny mustard seed. Even when all the seeds have been removed, a world-cycle or aeon has not passed!⁵⁴

9.2.3 The (Kappa) Sāvaka Sutta (S 15.7) gives an interesting simile in terms of trying to recollect the world-cycles that have since passed. Suppose that there were 4 disciples, each living for a 100 years. Everyday, each of them would recollect 100,000 world-cycles. Even if they were able to do so to the end of their days, they would still not have recollect all the world-cycles that have passed. (S 15.7/2:182 f)

9.2.4 The (Kappa) Gaṅgā Sutta (S 15.8) similarly records the Buddha pointing to the number of particles of sand that there are in the Ganges banks from its source right down to where it enters the great ocean. Even very much more than all this huge number of sand particles is the number of world-cycles that have passed.

9.2.5 Each of the 4 suttas above [9.2.1-9.2.4] shows us the uncountable number of world-cycles that have passed in samsara; hence, that there is no discoverable beginning of samsara, the cycle of lives and deaths we have been going through, suffering, on account of ignorance. This is reason enough for us to want to be freed from samsara.

9.3 ASAÑKHEYYA

9.3.1 The length of an incalculable

9.3.1.1 The term *asankheyya* (Skt *asankhyeyya*), literally meaning “incalculable, uncountable,” refers to a large or astronomical number. The term *asañkheyya, kappa*, “an incalculable aeon,” is also used.⁵⁵ Its actual duration, however, is finite.

9.3.1.2 There are several accounts of the exact number of years constituting an aeon (*kappa*), and there are small, medium, great, and “incalculable” aeons. The most common values for an “incalculable” (often used as a noun) are 10^{31} , 10^{59} , or 10^{63} years.⁵⁶

9.3.2 The duration of striving for Buddhahood

Traditionally, a bodhisattva is said to become a buddha after three “incalculables” (*asankheyya*). Gotama Buddha himself first declared his aspiration to become buddha before Dīpaṅkara Buddha, the 24th past buddha before him. Presumably, the duration from Gotama’s aspiration to his buddhahood is three incalculables.⁵⁷ We may see this as a kind of Buddhist vision of full human evolution or spiritual evolution of man over cosmic time.

For our part, the Buddha keeps reminding us, through various parables, to truly understand the nature of samsara—its impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and nonself—so that we free ourselves from its rule and rut. The only way for us to free ourselves from samsaric suffering is to aspire for **streamwinning**⁵⁸—or, if we are up to it, to aspire to Buddhahood.

⁵⁴ See S 15.6/2:182 (SD 49.8(15.2)).

⁵⁵ Miln 362,11; CA 10,7.

⁵⁶ See *Oxford Dictionary of Buddhism*: kalpa; *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*: kalpa & asaṅkhyeyya.

⁵⁷ See SD 49.8b (8.1.2.2). On the 24 buddhas, see **Buddhavaṃsa**, esp ch 27.

⁵⁸ See **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

9.4 COSMIC EVOLUTION

9.4.1 The Aggañña Sutta

According to the Aggañña Sutta (D 27), the radiant beings from Ābhassara appears in the physical universe in the “expanding” (*vivaṭṭa* or *vivaṭṭamāna*) phase [§10.2], that is, what might be conjectured as after “the big bang” of modern science. This expansion stops when the radiant beings began tasting the “sweet earth” at the end of §12: “To that extent ... the world expanded” [§12]. This marks the beginning of the “expanded stable” (*vivaṭṭa tiṭṭhati*) phase of the universe, that is, in the same phase or quadrant (in cosmic time) as we are living now, as it were. [9.1.1]

9.4.2 The end of days

9.4.2.1 The Aṅguttara Commentary explains that there are 3 ways in which a world-cycle collapses or is destroyed, that is, by the elements of fire, water or wind. Modern science helps us have a better idea on how these elements work in bringing about the end of the universe. The fire element clearly refers to heat, some kind of cosmic conflagration: simply put, the universe burns up. Or, it may destroy itself by congealing together and then dissolving like water particles. Or, it simply explodes like ignited gas, and then implodes by way of a big crunch.

9.4.2.2 When the world-cycle is destroyed by the fire element, it is destroyed up to just before the heaven of streaming radiance (*ābhassara*), the highest of the 2nd dhyana sphere. When it is destroyed by the water element, it is destroyed up to the devas of radiant glory (*subha, kiṇha*). When it is destroyed by the wind element, it is destroyed up to the devas of abundant fruit (*veha-p, pohala*), the first of the 4th-dhyana realms.⁵⁹

9.4.2.3 It is interesting to note here that only the physical universe is actually destroyed. The greatest extent of the destruction only reaches the first of the form-world. The rest of the 4th-dhyana world and the whole of the formless world remain intact because of their non-physical nature.

9.5 MULTIVERSES (MULTIPLE UNIVERSES)

9.5.1 The Aggañña Sutta says that when our universe “contracts” (that is, is destroyed), “beings mostly (*yebhuyyena*) arise in the Ābhassara brahma world [§10.2]. Here, **Buddhaghosa** explains “mostly” as meaning that the other beings are born either in higher Brahmā realms or in the formless realms” (DA 1:110). [2.5.1]

9.5.2 Dhammapāla, in his subcommentary on Buddhaghosa’s texts, however, disagrees and gives a better explanation. Dhammapāla explains that it is impossible, for example, for the beings of the suffering states (*āpaya*), that is, 4 subhuman realms (the animal world, the asura world, the preta world, and the hell states), to be reborn in any form realm (such as Abhassara, mentioned by Buddhaghosa) or formless realm. Instead, explains Dhammapāla, such beings, on account of their karma, are reborn in the respective identical realms in another stable world-system. [2.5.2]

⁵⁹ AA 3:134 (given in brief, but quotes Vism for details): Vism 13.29-44/414-417. On the various realms, see chart at SD 1.7 (Appendix); SD 57.10 (1.5.3.4).

9.5.3 A multiverse

Dhammapāla's explanation here is based on, for example, **the Kosala Sutta 1** (A 10.29), where the Buddha declares that there are numerous other worlds or universes similar to ours.⁶⁰ However, that is all the suttas tell us regarding multiverses, a number of similar universes existing at the same time, that is, as independent "parallel" universes. We can, however, surmise that beings can somehow be transported by their karma from our universe, when it is destroyed, to other universes, as explained by Dhammapāla. [9.5.2]

9.5.4 Buddhas in other universes

9.5.4.1 Other than the Buddha stating the existence of multiverses (multiple universes), we should not read too much into the idea.⁶¹ Dhammapāla, of course, makes good sense in suggesting the possibility of subhuman beings from the 3 suffering states (*āpaya*) being reborn in identical states in a parallel universe, giving a better explanation than the one offered by Buddhaghosa [2.5.1]. Dhammapāla's explanation helps us better understand the workings of karma in accordance with the Buddha's teaching. In this sense, it is not teaching something new, but stating a solution to an existential puzzle.⁶²

9.5.4.2 On the other hand, to say that there are other Buddhas in other universes, and that they can appear in this universe or are accessible to us, is clearly an innovative teaching, one that, in fact, undermines the historical Buddha's teachings. First is the simple fact of silence: the Buddha has said nothing about such a possibility. He would surely have declared such an important fact if it were the case.

9.5.4.3 Belief and worship of such other-worldly or cosmic Buddhas amounts turning our backs to the historical Buddha. In fact, the creators and perpetuators of such a theology, systematically misconstrue the human nature of the historical Buddha, projecting the notion that his human nature is only an aberration, and that his real nature is almost eternal and God-like.

9.5.4.4 In short, we see here symptoms of a serious misunderstanding or rejection of the humanity and spirituality of the historical Buddha. The Buddha's death is a necessary element that authenticates the truth of his teaching on universal impermanence, that is, the nature of all existence. The theology of multiple cosmic Buddhas clearly shows a rejection of the Buddha's death. Psychologically, it suggests a case of protracted and unresolved mourning, rooted in a denial of the Buddha's death and impermanence.

As a defence mechanism, it shows that the proponents of such a theology either misunderstood the early teachings or rejected them. If they have misunderstood the early teachings, clearly such a theology (as any theology) should be rejected by us. If they have rejected the early teachings or downgraded it in their grander scheme of things, then they should not mislead others by using the label "Buddhist," definitely not "early Buddhism."

9.5.4.5 We should work to better understand the conditions and reasons for the advent and persistence of the theology multiple cosmic Buddhas. This theology clearly has historical roots, such as encounter of later Buddhism with imperial power, such as those of the Sinhala kings,⁶³ the Kushans and Indo-

⁶⁰ On parallel universes, see **Kosala S 1** (A 10.29.2/5:59 f), SD 16.15; Kvu 13.1/476.

⁶¹ Vasubandhu [above] says that many buddhas many appear, but each in a different universe, and that they would not leave their universe (Abhk 3.94d; Abhk: PR 485). See also SD 57.10 (1.5.4).

⁶² See SD 57.10 (5.1.2).

⁶³ See eg H L Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings: The new Buddhism in Sri Lanka*. Chicago: Univ of Chicago Press,

Scythians, and imperial China (especially the Sung dynasty).⁶⁴ The background and nature of post-Buddha sectarianism and the problems of a growing organized religion is another interesting area to explore for a better understanding of the rise and popularity of such a theology.⁶⁵

9.5.4.6 How can we apply Dharma-spirited tolerance and understanding towards the theology of multiple cosmic Buddhas? Without watering down the historical Buddha's nature as taught in the early texts, it is possible for us to accept that numerous cosmic Buddha and transcendental Bodhisattvas as representations or symbols of aspects of the Buddha, such as his awakening (Amitābha, "boundless light"), or the healing nature of the noble truths (Bhaiṣajya, "medicine"), or his wisdom (Mañjuśrī, "gentle glory"), or his compassion (Avalokiteśvara, "the God who looks down (in compassion)"). In other words, they are objects of reflection and meditation.

Above all, the label "Buddhist" would only be meaningful and purposeful if we recognize and respect the historical Buddha and his teachings as the living roots of any faith around multiple Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This, of course, includes the Theravāda theologies of the Buddha of the three periods (past, present and future). Anything less amounts removing the historical from his rightful spot under the Bodhi tree—an attempt by Māra that failed.⁶⁶

10 The interworld void

10.1 THE ANDHA, KĀRA SUTTA (S 56.46) opens with the words,

Bhikshus, there are world-interspaces (*lok'antarika*, "intermundia"), unsupported (*agha*), fathomless (*asarīvuta*), regions of blinding darkness and gloom, where the light of the sun and the moon, so powerful and mighty, reach not ... *But darker than this is the ignorance of the 4 noble truths!* (S 56.46/5:454), SD 53.2; D 14,1.17/2:12; M 123,7/3:120; A 4.127/2:130

10.2 COMMENTARIAL EXPLANATIONS

10.2.1 The Commentaries consistently give the following futuristic explanation of "world-interspaces" that is reminiscent of what we may call the "interworld void":

Between every three spiral world-spheres (*cakka, vāḷa*) there is one world-interspace, like the space between three cart-wheels (or almsbowls, MA) set down so that they touch. This is an "interworld hell," measuring 8,000 fathoms (*yojana*) [c900,000 km?]. It is unsupported, that is always open (*nicca, vivaṭa*), and fathomless, that is without an underlying support, and so dark that even eye-consciousness cannot arise. (DA 2:433; MA 4:177; AA 3:126; BA 29)

10.2.2 The Majjhima Commentary adds:

Beings are reborn there because of their having committed some heavy, heinous offence against their parents or righteous recluses and brahmins, or because of some habitual bad deed like killing animals, etc. (MA 4:178)

1999.

⁶⁴ See eg Peter N Gregory & Daniel A Getz, Jr (eds), *Buddhism in the Sung*, Honolulu: Univ of Hawai'i Press, 2002.

⁶⁵ See **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b (with biblio).

⁶⁶ On Māra's attempt to distract the Bodhisattva away from Bodhi tree just before the great awakening, see BA 8.

10.2.3 According to the Param’attha Mañjusā (Vism Commentary), “world-spheres” or galaxies “lie adjacent to each other in contact like bowls, leaving a triangular unlighted space between every three” (VismMṬ 199) which is called a “world-interspace” (*lok’antara*, MA 4:178; cf Vism 16.43). Their number extend thus in all directions to infinity on the supporting water’s surface. (The world-sphere is said to rest on “water,” which rests on “wind,” which rests on “space.”)⁶⁷

10.2.4 The 3 canonical passages on the dark fathomless world-interspaces are all in connection with the conception of the Bodhisattva:

When the Bodhisattva passed away from Tusita heaven and descended into his mother’s womb, a great immeasurable light surpassing the splendour of the gods appeared ... And even in those unsupported, fathomless world-interspace, regions of blinding darkness and gloom, where the light of the sun and the moon, so powerful and mighty, reach not—there, too, a great immeasurable light surpassing the splendour of the gods appeared.

(D 14,1.17/2:12; M 123,7/3:120; A 4.127/2:130)

— — —

Aggañña Sutta

The Discourse on the Foremost Knowledge

D 27

1⁶⁸ Thus have I heard.

1.2 At one time the Blessed One was staying at the Mansion of Migāra’s Mother in the Eastern Park [Pubb’ārāma] near Sāvattthī.

At that time, **Vāseṭṭha and Bhāra,dvāja**, aspiring for monkhood, were living as probationary monks.⁶⁹

1.3 Then, one evening, the Blessed One emerged from his solitary meditation, came down from the mansion, and walked up and down⁷⁰ in the mansion’s shade in the open air.

⁶⁷ See Vism:Ñ 218 n14.

⁶⁸ On the problem of paragraph-numbering, see Collins 1993a:338.

⁶⁹ “Probationary ... monks,” *bhikkhūsu parivāsanti*, ie, they are undergoing the 4-month probation period for outside sectarians (they are brahmins) seeking admission into the order. Such aspirants would first have their heads shaven, and don the monk’s robes. Then they recite the refuges, recite the formula expressing their desire for ordination and the probation, and at the end of the 4 months, if their conduct is becoming of a monk, they are formally ordained as monks (Mv 1.38/1:69-71). Cf *parivāsaṃ vasati* (V 3:186, 4:30; S 2:21); *parivāsaṃ deti* (V 1:49, 2:7, 4:30, 127); *parivāsaṃ yācati* (V 4:30, 127).

⁷⁰ “Walking up and down,” *caṅkamati*; as at D 1:39. This means that the Buddha was doing walking meditation usually on an ambulatory path between two predetermined points. In this case, the Buddha was probably mindfully stretching his leg after the sitting meditation. Another common stock phrase is “walking about on a stroll,” *jaṅghā-vihāraṃ anucaṅkamāno anuvicaramāno*, lit “wandering to and fro on foot and walking up and down” (K R Norman, *Group of Discourses II*, 1992: 63). See D 1:235; M 1:108, 227, 2:118, 3:128; A 1:138, 3:76; Sn p105, p115.

The brahmins have forgotten their past

2 Vāseṭṭha saw that the Blessed One *had emerged from his solitary meditation, come down from the mansion, and was walking up and down in the mansion's shade in the open air.*

2.2 Seeing (the Blessed One), he addressed Bhāra,dvāja:

“Avuso Bhāra,dvāja, the Blessed One, *has emerged from his solitary meditation, come down from the mansion, and is walking up and down in the mansion's shade in the open.*

2.3 Come, avuso, let us go to him. Perhaps we may get a chance to hear a Dharma talk from the Blessed One himself.”

2.4 “All right, avuso,” Bhāra,dvāja replied in assent to Vāseṭṭha.

2.5 Then, Vāseṭṭha and Bhāra,dvāja went up to the Blessed One.

And having gone up to him and greeted him, they walked back and forth together with him.

3 Then, the Blessed One addressed Vāseṭṭha (and Bhāra,dvāja),⁷¹ [81]

“Vāseṭṭhā,⁷² you are brahmins by birth, from good brahmin families, but you have gone forth from brahmin family, from the household into homelessness.

Surely, Vāseṭṭhā, brahmins must have reviled and abused you.”⁷³

3.2 “Indeed, bhante, brahmins revile and abuse us roundly in a downright personal way.”

3.3 “How, Vāseṭṭhā, do the brahmins *revile and abuse you roundly in a downright personal way?*”

3.4 “Bhante, the brahmins say,

‘Only **the brahmin** is the best class;⁷⁴ any other class is inferior. Only the brahmin is the fair class; any other class is dark. Only brahmins are pure, not the non-brahmins.

3.5 Only brahmins are **Brahmā’s** own sons, begotten of his breast,⁷⁵ born from his mouth, born of Brahmā himself, created by Brahmā, the heirs of Brahmā.

⁷¹ All MSS *vāseṭṭham*.

⁷² Or, “Vāseṭṭhas.” Be Ee *vāseṭṭha* (sg voc), but Ce Ke Se always *vāseṭṭhā* (pl voc; an elliptical voc; a rare dual vocative in Pali), referring to both “Vāseṭṭha and Bhāra,dvāja”: I follow Be Se throughout Note that the pronouns and verbs are all in the plural, esp §9 (“you ... are from various classes”) onwards. Another example of dual voc is *sariputtā* (2 voc pl), which tr as “Sāriputta and Moggallāna,” often found in Se. On loss of dual in Pali, see Geiger, *A Pali Grammar*, Oxford, 2000: §77.1. For multiple voc or idiomatic pl voc, see eg *anuruddhā* (M 128), SD 5.18; on *bhikkave* and *bhikkhavo*, see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,3) + SD 13.1 (3.1.1.4). When the Buddha teaches an assembly, he sometimes addresses a particular person, usu the questioner, a sangha member or leading layperson: **Sekha S** (M 53,5-6/1:354), SD 21.14 (where Ānanda addresses “Mahānāma” before the Sakya assembly). See R Gombrich, “The Buddha’s Book of Genesis?” *IJ* 35, 1992:159-178; S Collins, “The Discourse on What is Primary (*Aggañña-sutta*),” *JIP* 21, 1993:349 n3.1. For the elliptical dual, esp *sariputtā* (“Sāriputta and Moggallāna”) (V 2:12,29-30 = 3:12,34-35) and *vāseṭṭhā* (“Vāseṭṭha and Bhāra,dvāja”) (D 27/3:81,1). See T Oberlies, *Pali: A Grammar of the Language of the Theravāda Tipiṭaka*, Berlin & NY, 2001:130 n4, 144 n5. The dual number (*dvi,vacana*) is very rare in Pali (see J 5:375,11*), but see CPD, *Epilegomena* 24* (sv dual); Oskar von Hinuber, *Das altere Mittelindisch im Überblick*, 2001 §288; A K Warder, *Introduction to Pali*, 2nd ed, London, 1974:165 n4; K R Norman, “Middle Indo-Aryan Studies XIV” (*JOI(B)* 29:37-41), *Collected Papers* vol 2, Oxford, 1991:115-117; Oberlies, “Beitrag zur Pali-Lexikographie,” *IJ* 38:105-147, 1995: 142; Collett & Analayo 2014.

⁷³ *Tumhe khv-attha, vāseṭṭha, brāhmaṇa,jaccā brāhmaṇa,kulīnā brāhmaṇa,kulā agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajitā, kacci vo, vāseṭṭha, brāhmaṇā na akkosanti na paribhāsanti ti?*

⁷⁴ *Seṭṭho vaṇṇo* (lit, “the supreme colour”), ie, the highest class. See D 3,1.14; M 84,4 + 93. [§5.1]

⁷⁵ Suggesting that they are his only legitimate offspring. See *Ṛg,veda* 10.90 (Puruṣa Śūkta); DAṬ 3:46; also Gombrich 1992a:163 f, cf 167. The phrase *orasā mukhato jatā*, lit “the breast-born ‘sons’ born from the mouth,” is ironic as it suggests two different and incompatible places of origins.

3.6 You have left the best class and gone over to an inferior class—baldheads, wretched ascetics, dark menials,⁷⁶ born of our Kinsman’s [Brahmā’s] feet!⁷⁷

3.7 It is no good, unseemly, that you have left the best class and gone over to an inferior class—*baldheads, wretched ascetics, dark menials, born of our Kinsman’s feet!*

3.8 That is how, bhante, the brahmins *revile and abuse us roundly in a downright personal way.*⁷⁸

4 “Surely, Vāsetṭhā, **the brahmins have forgotten the past**⁷⁹ [have forgotten the ancients] when they say:

4.2 *‘Only the brahmin is the best class; any other class is inferior. Only the brahmin is the fair class; any other class is dark. Only brahmins are pure, not the non-brahmins.*

Only brahmins are Brahmā’s own sons, begotten of his breast, born from his mouth, born of Brahmā himself, created by Brahmā, the heirs of Brahmā.

4.3 *You have left the best class and gone over to an inferior class, since you have become baldheads, wretched ascetics, dark menial, born of our Kinsman’s feet!*

4.4 *It is no good, unseemly, that you have left the best class and gone over to an inferior class, since you have become baldheads, wretched ascetics, dark menials, born of our Kinsman’s feet!*

4.5 Indeed, Vāsetṭhā, we see **brahminees** [wives] of brahmins, having seasons, becoming pregnant, giving birth, [82] giving suck. And yet these **yoniborn**⁸⁰ [womb-born] brahmins say thus,

4.6 *‘The brahmin is the best class; any other class is inferior. The brahmin is the fair class; any other class is dark. Only brahmins are pure, not the non-brahmins. Brahmins are Brahmā’s own sons, the offspring from his mouth, born of Brahmā, created by Brahmā, the heirs of Brahmā.’*

4.7 These brahmins misrepresent Brahmā, tell lies and earn much demerit!⁸¹

⁷⁶ “Menials,” *ibbha* (Ved/Skt *ibhya*) (D 1:90, 91; M 1:334; J 6:214), an obscure word: “menial, retainer” (PED); “exact meaning(s) uncertain, designation of persons standing below the *brāhmaṇa* and *khattiya* classes, perhaps (almost) the same as *vessa*: a householder, merchant or farmer, layman (as opposed to *brāhmaṇa*) (CPD); “a member of a king’s entourage; a vassal; dependent; wealthy” (DP).

⁷⁷ “Baldheads ...,” *muṇḍake samaṇake ibbhe kaṇhe bandhu, pād’āpacce. Ibbha* (D 1:90, 91; M 1:334; J 6:214), an obscure word: “a member of a king’s entourage; a vassal; dependent; wealthy” (DP). “**Born of our Kinsman’s [Ancestor’s] feet,**” *bandhu, pād’āpacce* (D 1:90; M 1:334; S 4:117). MA on this phrase in **Māra Tajjanīya S** (M 50,13/-1:334) says that the brahmins believed that they themselves were born from Brahmā’s mouth, the kshatriyas from his breast, the vaishyas from his belly, the shudra from his legs, and recluses (*samaṇa*) from the soles of his feet (MA 2:418). The *locus classicus* however is the Puruṣa, sūktā, “Hymn of the (Primeval) Man” (Rg, veda 10.90), compiled prob after 1000 BCE. It tells of a mythical cosmic man larger even as the universe as we know it, and who was at first the only being in existence. In his loneliness, he divided himself and produced Virāj (Shining Forth), a feminine entity. They begot a second Puruṣa, and then the gods. The gods later decided to make sacrifice to the first Puruṣa, and chose the second Puruṣa as victim. He was slain and dismembered, and from the parts of his body the universe and humans were created. Brahmins came from his mouth; kshatriyas from his arms; the vaishyas from his thighs; and the shudras from his feet. See Basham 1989:24-27.

⁷⁸ On the status of such brahmins, see SD 50.10 (2.2.1.7).

⁷⁹ “Have forgotten the past,” *porāṇam assarantā*. The usual word for “past” is *atīta*; *porāṇa* here literally means “ancient.” This is a pun referring to the brahmins’ immediate (“historic”) past, that is, their birth, and the distant (“narrative”) past, that is, their origins, in this case in terms of the scriptures and cosmogony. See Collins 1993a: 350 n4.1. See also Intro (6) above.

⁸⁰ *Yoni* is usu tr as “womb,” but lit refers to a woman’s organ of sexuality and procreation. Here, its *literal* sense is clearly and humorously played upon to highlight the fact that the brahmins, despite claiming “high birth,” are really *biologically* (ie sexually) just like every other human!

⁸¹ “These brahmins misrepresent Brahmā,” because Brahmā has neither physical nor human characteristics. Secondly, as Comy points out, if what they say is true, then Brahmā’s mouth must be a brahminee’s yoni! (MA 862).

1. THE PURITY OF THE 4 CLASSES (*catu,vaṇṇa suddhi*)

The 10 unwholesome courses of action

5 There are, Vāseṭṭhā, these **4 classes** (*vaṇṇa*): [§3.4]
the kshatriyas [warriors], the brahmins [priests], the vaishyas [merchants], and the shudras [workers].⁸²

(1) Vāseṭṭhā, here a certain **kshatriya** [member of the warrior class]
kills [destroys life], takes the not-given, commits sexual misconduct;
speaks false speech, speaks divisive speech, utters harsh speech, speaks useless talk;
is covetous, is malevolent, holds false views.⁸³

5.2 Thus, Vāseṭṭhā, such states that are
unwholesome and regarded as *unwholesome*,
blameworthy and regarded *blameworthy*,
to be avoided and regarded as *to be avoided*,
ways unbecoming of a noble one and regarded as *ways unbecoming of a noble one*,
black with black result,⁸⁴
and blamed by the wise,⁸⁵
are found among some kshatriyas, too.

(2) Vāseṭṭhā, here a certain **brahmin** [member of the priestly class]
kills [destroys life], takes the not-given, commits sexual misconduct;
speaks false speech, speaks divisive speech, utters harsh speech, speaks useless talk;
is covetous, is malevolent, holds false views.

5.3 Thus, Vāseṭṭhā, such states that are
unwholesome and regarded as *unwholesome*,
blameworthy and regarded *blameworthy*,
to be avoided and regarded as *to be avoided*,
ways unbecoming of a noble one and regarded as *ways unbecoming of a noble one*,
black with black result,
and blamed by the wise,
are found among some brahmins, too.

They “tell lies” because all this is untrue in the first place; as such they “earn much demerit,” that is, by misrepresenting Brahmā and lying about him. In theistic theology, this is tantamount to blasphemy. We have here an example of black humour. Norman notes here, as in **Assalāyana S** (M 93,5.2/2:148 @ SD 40a.2), that “the Buddha satirizes the Puruṣasūkta of the Rgveda” (1991:194).

⁸² The 4 classes are *khattiya* (Skt *kṣatriya*), *brāhmaṇa*, *vessa* (*vaiśya*) and *sudda* (*śūdra*), respectively. The Buddhist texts invariably place the kshatriyas first since they were predominant in the region where the Buddha lived and taught. I have only transliterated the terms since they are all found in Webster’s 3rd New International Dictionary. “Leaving the terms untranslated [or transliterated] will also recall to mind that they do not denote ‘priests,’ ‘warriors’ or ‘farmers’ in any and every context, but only to people with those occupations as defined and represented by brahmanical ideology.” (Collins 1993a:352 n5.1). See §32. On the 4 classes, see **Kaṇṇaka-t,thala S** (M 90), SD 10.8, esp (6). On teaching against class system, see SD 37.1 (1.3).

⁸³ For an analysis of these 10 unwholesome course of action (*akusala kamma, patha*), see **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41) @ SD 5.7 (2). For refs on them, see **Esukārī S** (M 96,8/2:179) n (SD 37.9).

⁸⁴ “Black with black result.” See D 33,1.11(29)/3:229 (4 kinds of karma); explained at **Kukkura.vatika S** (M 57,7-11/1:389-391), SD 23.11.

⁸⁵ On “the wise” (*viññū*), see SD 35.4a (2.2); SD 54.2g (2.2.1.4).

(3) Vāsetṭhā, here a certain **vaishya** [member of the business class]
*kills [destroys life], takes the not-given, commits sexual misconduct;
 speaks false speech, speaks divisive speech, utters harsh speech, speaks useless talk;
 is covetous, is malevolent, holds false views.*

5.4 Thus, Vāsetṭhā, such states that are

unwholesome and	<i>regarded as unwholesome,</i>
<i>blameworthy and</i>	<i>regarded as blameworthy,</i>
<i>to be avoided and</i>	<i>regarded as to be avoided,</i>
<i>ways unbecoming of a noble one and</i>	<i>regarded as ways unbecoming of a noble one,</i>
<i>black with black result,</i>	
<i>and blamed by the wise,</i>	

are found among some vaishyas, too.

(4) Vāsetṭhā, here a certain **shudra** [member of the working class]
*kills [destroys life], takes the not-given, commits sexual misconduct;
 speaks false speech, speaks divisive speech, utters harsh speech, speaks useless talk;
 is covetous, is malevolent, holds false views.*

5.5 Thus, Vāsetṭhā, such states that are

unwholesome and	<i>regarded as unwholesome,</i>
<i>blameworthy and</i>	<i>regarded as blameworthy,</i>
<i>to be avoided and</i>	<i>regarded as to be avoided,</i>
<i>ways unbecoming of a noble one and</i>	<i>regarded as ways unbecoming of a noble one,</i>
<i>black with black result,</i>	
<i>and blamed by the wise,</i>	

are found among some shudras, too.

Refraining from the 10 unwholesome courses of action

6 (1) Vāsetṭhā, here a certain **kshatriya**
 refrains from killing,
 refrains from taking the not-given,
 refrains from sexual misconduct,
 refrains from false speech,
 refrains from divisive speech,
 refrains from harsh speech,
 refrains from useless talk,
 refrains from covetousness,
 refrains from malevolence,
 refrains from false views.

6.2 As such, Vāsetṭhā, such states that are

wholesome and	<i>regarded as <u>wholesome</u>,</i>
<i>praiseworthy and</i>	<i>regarded as praiseworthy,</i>
<i>to be practised and</i>	<i>regarded as to be practised,</i>
<i>ways becoming of a noble one and</i>	<i>regarded as ways becoming of a noble one,</i>
<i>bright with bright result and praised by the wise,</i>	

are found among some kshatriyas, too. **[83]**

(2) Vāsetṭhā, here a certain **brahmin**
 refrains from killing,
 refrains from taking the not-given,
 refrains from sexual misconduct,
 refrains from false speech,
 refrains from divisive speech,
 refrains from harsh speech,
 refrains from useless talk,
 refrains from covetousness,
 refrains from malevolence,
 refrains from false views.

6.3 As such, Vāsetṭhā, such states that are
wholesome and regarded as wholesome,
 praiseworthy and regarded as praiseworthy,
 to be practised and regarded as to be practised,
 ways becoming of a noble one and regarded as ways becoming of a noble one,
 bright with bright result and praised by the wise,
 are found among some brahmins, too.

(3) Vāsetṭhā, here a certain **vaishya**
 refrains from killing,
 refrains from taking the not-given,
 refrains from sexual misconduct,
 refrains from false speech,
 refrains from divisive speech,
 refrains from harsh speech,
 refrains from useless talk,
 refrains from covetousness,
 refrains from malevolence,
 refrains from false views.

6.4 As such, Vāsetṭhā, such states that are
wholesome and regarded as wholesome,
 praiseworthy and regarded as praiseworthy,
 to be practised and regarded as to be practised,
 ways becoming of a noble one and regarded as ways becoming of a noble one,
 bright with bright result and praised by the wise,
 are found among some vaishyas, too.

(4) Vāsetṭhā, here a certain **shudra**
 refrains from killing,
 refrains from taking the not-given,
 refrains from sexual misconduct,
 refrains from false speech,
 refrains from divisive speech,
 refrains from harsh speech,
 refrains from useless talk,

refrains from covetousness,
 refrains from malevolence,
 refrains from false views.

6.5 As such, Vāseṭṭhā, such states that are

wholesome and regarded as wholesome,
 praiseworthy and regarded as praiseworthy,
 to be practised and regarded as to be practised,
 ways becoming of a noble one and regarded as ways becoming of a noble one,
 bright with bright result and praised by the wise,
 are found among some shudras, too.

The foremost and best

7 Now, Vāseṭṭhā, since both of these **dark and bright qualities** blamed by the wise and praised by the wise (respectively), are found mixed up amongst these 4 classes, the wise do not accept the claim by the brahmin class that:

7.2 *'The brahmin is the best class; any other class is inferior. The brahmin is the fair class; any other class is dark. Only brahmins are pure, not the non-brahmins. Brahmins are Brahmā's own sons, the offspring from his mouth, born of Brahmā, created by Brahmā, the heirs of Brahmā.'* [§3.5]

7.3 Why is that?

Because, Vāseṭṭhā, anyone from any of the 4 classes who becomes a monk, **an arhat**, with mental influxes destroyed,
 who has lived the holy life,
 done what is to be done,
 aid down the burden,
 reached his own goal,
 destroyed the fetters of being,
 freed through his own direct knowledge—

he is justly, not unjustly, proclaimed "the foremost" (*agga*).⁸⁶ [§31]

7.4 For, Vāseṭṭhā, **the dharma** [the dhamma]⁸⁷ is the best (*seṭṭha*) for the people in this life and in the next.⁸⁸

8 Vāseṭṭhā, by this metaphor [exposition], it should be understood that **the dharma is the best for this generation and those to come, too**.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ *Agga*, here it has sense (1) adj [1.2.1.1]. For a discussion on this word, see Collins 1993a:352 n72.

⁸⁷ Pali, **dhamma** (an alt tr for current Indian context for those who have difficulty with the Hindu notion of "Dharma" as class duties, which is unequivocally rejected by the Buddha). The English tr, "the Dharma," refers to the Buddha's teaching or true reality that he directly realized. A lower-case "dharma" or "the dharma" here refers to the universal social sense of "civility, norm, truth, justice, duty, etc," which the Buddha's audience was familiar with. In this Sutta, we see the Buddha readily shifting between the 2 senses, and also overlapping them. This is to impress on the audience that the Buddha's Dharma is in harmony with the social dharma, yet is superior to it in its liberating power. This liberating power, as clearly evident in this Sutta, is both social and spiritual.

⁸⁸ Here the Buddha explains why the wise reject the brahmins' claim to be the foremost and best class by stating that it is the arhat who is truly *agga* and that the Dharma that is truly *seṭṭha*.

⁸⁹ *Tad-aminā p'etaṃ vāseṭṭhā pariyāyena veditabbaṃ yathā dhammo seṭṭho jane tasmim diṭṭhe c'eva dhamme abhisamparāyaṇ ca. Tad-aminā = taṃ iminā. On pariyāyā—as 2 kinds of teachings (provisional and absolute)—see SD 3.9 (7.5.1); SD 50.25 (1.4); SD 56.11 (3.1); **Pariyāya nippariyāya**, SD 68.2.*

Vāseṭṭhā, **king Pasenadi of Kosala** knows,

‘The recluse Gotama, the peerless,⁹⁰ is one who has gone forth from the Sakya clan.’

8.2 Now, Vāseṭṭhā, **the Sakyas** are vassals of king Pasenadi of Kosala.

The Sakyas, Vāseṭṭhā, offer humble service to king Pasenadi of Kosala,

rising (from their seat), they salute him, they pay him homage with palms together;
they offer him fitting service.

8.3 And, Vāseṭṭhā, just as the Sakyas *offer humble service to king Pasenadi of Kosala, rising, they salute him, they pay him homage with palms together, they offer him fitting service,*⁹¹ **[84]**

8.4 in the same way, Vāseṭṭhā, does king Pasenadi of Kosala offer **the Tathagata** humble service, rising (from his seat), he salutes him, he pays him homage with palms together;

he offers fitting service to the Tathagata,⁹² thinking,

8.5 ‘Now, the recluse Gotama is well-born, I am ill-born;

the recluse Gotama is strong, I am weak;

the recluse Gotama is pleasant,⁹³ I am ugly;⁹⁴

the recluse Gotama is of great influence, I am of little influence.’

8.6 Now, it is because of honouring the dharma,⁹⁵ respecting the dharma, revering the dharma, worshipping the dharma,

that king Pasenadi of Kosala *offers humble service to the Tathagata,*

rising, salutes him, pay him homage with palms together,

offers fitting service to the Tathagata.

8.7 By this metaphor, Vāseṭṭhā, *it should be understood that the dharma is the best for the people in this life and in the next.* [§8.1]

9 Vāseṭṭhā, (both of) you, though of various births, various names, various clans, various families, have **gone forth from the household into homelessness.**

9.2 If you are asked who you are, you should reply, **‘We are recluses, sons of the Sakya.’**⁹⁶

9.3 Vāseṭṭhā, he whose faith⁹⁷ in the Tathagata is firm, well-rooted, established, steadfast, unshakeable⁹⁸ by any recluse or brahmin, any deva or Māra or Brahmā or anyone in the world, can truly say,

⁹⁰ “The unsurpassed,” *anuttaro*, vl *antarā*, “interval, distance.” Comy reads *anantarā*, agreeing with *sakya, kulā*, and glosses it as *antara, virahitā attano kulena sādīsā*, ‘without (social) distance, like his own family’; that is, from the same social level (Collins 1993a:353 n8.1). It is also possible that Pasenadi was referring to a “near neighbour,” the Buddha being a Sakya who neighbored Kosala. Otherwise, it is still not out of Pasenadi’s character to accord the Buddha hyperbolic praises. See next n.

⁹¹ The text states twice the words of respect to Pasenadi. Collins thinks that this attempts to set “the tone of the Buddha’s insistence on the physical realities of subordination. The Sakyans had only recently been conquered by Pasenadi; perhaps the emphasis here is meant to suggest that their obeisance is not freely given.” (1993a:353 n8.2). Considering Pasenadi’s personality and devotion to the Buddha, the former’s words do not sound affected, see for example *Dhamma, cetiya S* (M 89,9/2:119 f).

⁹² Cf **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2) where Ajātasattu shows similar respect to recluses (D 2,17.2, 20,23,26,29,32+35-38).

⁹³ “Pleasant,” *pāsādika*. Collins, who renders it as “charismatic,” explains that the word suggests “a wide range of possible qualities, many of which do concern religious values and virtues: included in its connotations are the ideas of brightness, clarity, pleasantness, joy, serenity and faith. To describe one as *pāsādika* is to say both that he or she has these qualities and that he or she inspires them in others.” (1993a:354 n8.3). On its rendition as “pious” by K R Norman for *Tha* 432, 927, 949, see *Tha:N* 45, 87, 89.

⁹⁴ “Ugly,” *dubbaṇṇa*, lit “ill coloured, bad complexioned,” alt tr “unpleasant.”

⁹⁵ “The dharma,” see §7.4 n.

⁹⁶ “Sons of the Sakya,” *sakya, puttiyā*, that is, not in the biological sense, but the spiritual, as “heirs of the Dharma” (*dhamma, dāyāda*): see **Dhamma, dāyāda S** (M 3,2-3/1:12 f).

'I am a son of the Blessed One, an offspring born from his mouth, born of the Dharma, created by the Dharma, heir to the Dharma.'

9.5 Why is that?

Because, Vāseṭṭhā, this designates **the Tathagata**: 'the body of the Dharma'⁹⁹ or 'the body of Brahmā'¹⁰⁰ or 'one who is Dharma' or 'one who is Brahmā'.¹⁰¹

The re-evolution of the universe

10 There comes a time, Vāseṭṭhā, sooner or later, after a long period of time, when **this world contracts** [dissolves].¹⁰²

10.2 When the world is contracting [dissolving], beings mostly¹⁰³ arise in **the Ābhassara** [streaming radiance] brahmā world.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁷ "Faith," *saddhā*. There are 2 kinds of faith (*saddhā*): (1) "rootless faith" (*amūlika,saddhā*), baseless or irrational faith, blind faith. (M 2:170); (2) "faith with a good cause" (*ākāravati,saddhā*), faith founded on seeing (M 1:320,8, 401,23); also called *avecca-p,pasāda* (S 12.41.11/2:69). "Wise faith" is syn with (2). *Amūlika* = "not seen, not heard, not suspected" (V 2:243 3:163 & Comy). **Gethin** speaks of two kinds of faith: the cognitive and the affective (eg ERE: Faith & Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:387): "Faith in its cognitive dimension is seen as concerning belief in propositions or statements of which one does not—or perhaps cannot—have knowledge proper (however that should be defined); cognitive faith is a mode of knowing in a different category from that knowledge. Faith in its affective dimension is a more straightforward positive response to trust or confidence towards something or somebody ... the conception of *saddhā* in Buddhist writings appears almost, if not entirely affective, the cognitive element is completely secondary." (Gethin 2001:107; my emphases).

⁹⁸ "Firm, ... unshakeable, *niviṭṭhā mūla,jātā patīṭṭhitā dalhā asamhāriyā*."

⁹⁹ "The body of the Dharma," *dhamma,kāya*, or "the one whose body is the Dharma," a term that reflects such statements as "He who sees the Dharma sees me; he who sees me sees the Dharma" (S 3:120) and "seeing the recluses ... this is the highest blessing" (Sn 16). The Buddha made the first statement to Vakkali who had joined the sangha because he was physically attracted to the Buddha. Vakkali was "seeing" merely the external conditioned form of the Buddha. The true "seeing" is the understanding of the true nature of the first seeing, ie the vision of the 4 noble truths or the 3 characteristics. Comy explains that the Buddha, having conceived the Dharma, expresses it through speech; hence, his body is the Dharma (MA 865). The overarching idea here is that the Buddha is the *personification of the truth and teaching*, and of *godliness* (*brahmavihāra*). See S:B 1081 n168; Gombrich 1992a: 165; Harrison 1992; Collins 1993a:356 n9.2.

¹⁰⁰ "The body of Brahmā," *brahma,kāya* (D 3:84; J 1:95). Comy explains that the Buddha embodies the Dharma which is "perfect" (*brahma*) (MA 865). Here *brahma* is an adjective commonly found in the early Suttas to mean "divine, perfect, excellent, supreme, holy," as in *brahma,cakka*, "the divine wheel" (M 1:70; A 2:9); *brahma,carīya*, "the holy life" (D 1:84; sv PED); *brahma,jāla*, "the perfect net" (D 1); *brahma,danda*, "the supreme penalty" (V 2:290; D 2:154); *brahma,yāna*, "the way to the highest good; the best vehicle" (S 5:5; J 6:57); *brahma,vihāra*, "the divine abode" (D 2:196, 3:220; Tha 649; Dha 262; Vism 295 ff). See also P Harrison, "Is the Dharma-kāya the real 'Phantom-body' of the Buddha?" 1992.

¹⁰¹ "One Who is Brahmā," *brahma,bhūta*. See for example Sn 1065a.

¹⁰² "Contracts," *saṃvaṭṭati*, lit "rolls back" or devolves. See App (2). For parallel of this passage, see **Brahmajāla S** (D 1,2,2), SD 25. At this point, it is interesting to look at (**Agga**) **Kosala S** (A 10.29/5:59-65) where the Buddha applies *agga* on two contrasting levels—the worldly and the spiritual—by declaring that is Kāsī-Kosala "Pasenadi is *agga*, but even Pasenadi changes; in the ten-thousand-world-system, Brahmā is *agga*, but even Brahmā changes; when the world contracts, Ābhassara is *agga*, but the Ābhassara gods change—a monk who sees this, turns away from what is *agga*, and is disinterested in it"—and each time with the refrain "how much more so in what is lesser" (*page'va hīnasmim*). Cf **Alagaddūpamā S**: "Bhikshus, having known the parable of the raft, you should abandon even the Dharma, how much more that which is not Dharma." (M 22,14/1:135). (**Agga**) **Kosala S** concludes with the Buddha declaring that the foremost (*etad-agga*) of all these things (mentioned earlier) is "nirvana here and now" (*diṭṭh'eva dhamme ... nibbuto*). See SD 47.8 (1.3.3.2).

10.3 There they dwell, mind-made, feeding on joy [zest],¹⁰⁵ self-luminous,¹⁰⁶ moving about through the air, glorious—and they stay like that for a very long time.

10.4 There comes a time, sooner or later, after a long period of time, when **this world expands** [re-evolves].¹⁰⁷ When the world is expanding,¹⁰⁸ beings, having fallen [85] from the Ābhassara world, come to this world.

And there they dwell mind-made, feeding on joy, self-luminous, moving about through the air, glorious—and they stay like that for a very long time.

2. APPEARANCE OF “SWEET EARTH” (*rasa,paṭhavī patubhāva*)

11 During that period of time, Vāseṭṭhā, there was **nothing** but just one mass of water, and all was darkness, blinding darkness.

Neither moon nor sun appeared; neither constellations nor stars appeared;
there was neither night nor day; neither months nor fortnights; neither seasons nor years;
neither male nor female.

Beings were reckoned simply as beings.¹⁰⁹

11.2 And sooner or later, Vāseṭṭhā, after a very long period of time, **sweet earth**¹¹⁰ spread¹¹¹ itself evenly over the waters where those beings were.

It looked just like the skim of cream that forms over hot milk¹¹² as it cools.

It was colourful, fragrant, tasty like **ghee**,¹¹³ of a colour like that of **butter**,
and tasting like **pure wild honey**. [V 3:251]¹¹⁴

¹⁰³ “Mostly” (*yebhuyyena*). Here, **Buddhaghosa** says that “‘mostly’ is used because the other beings are born either in higher Brahmā realms or in the formless realms” (DA 1:110). **Dhammapāla**, however, explains that those being are reborn in other universes. See [2.5, 9.5].

¹⁰⁴ *Samvaṭṭamāne loke yebhuyyena sattā ābhassara, samvattanikā honti*. Here, *samvattanika* (cf *samvaṭṭanika*) refers to one whose rebirth process is incapable of realizing arhathood (cf M 106,3/2:262; MA 4:61): see SD 17.8a (11.1). “Ābhassarā,” a celestial world, one of the form worlds of the 2nd dhyana, is populated by radiant beings who live on zest (*pīti*) and emanate lightning-like radiance. When the physical universe devolves or “contracts” (*samvaṭṭati*) due to “fire,” it stops just before the 2nd-dhyana world (incl Ābhassara) (CA 11; Vism 13.41/416 f); SD 47.8 (2.4.2.3); SD 57.10 (1.5.3.4).

¹⁰⁵ “Zest,” *pīti*, alt tr “rapture, joy”; this term refers to a factor of the first 2 dhyanas of meditation. It is not a sensation and hence does not belong to the Feeling Aggregate (*vedanā-k, khandha*) but a mental factor (*cetasika*) belonging to the Formation Aggregate (*saṅkhāra-k, khandha*), and it may be described as “joyful interest.”

¹⁰⁶ On the Abhassara devas’ self-luminosity and *pabhassara*, see Intro (7.3) above.

¹⁰⁷ “Expands,” *vivaṭṭati*, lit “rolls open” or evolves.

¹⁰⁸ From here on, **Brahma, jāla S** (D 1), taking a different tack, describes how the empty Brahmā-mansion arises, followed by Brahmā, and in due course how he thinks he has created the other gods as they arise after him (D 1,40/1:17), SD 25.2.

¹⁰⁹ As devas from the Brahmā world, they are of refined “astral” form and as such sexless. This section echoes Rg.veda 10.129 and Bṛhad,āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1,2. See Gombrich 1992a:166 f.

¹¹⁰ Note that here and §§14-16 the various forms of food that arose for the beings are all *vegetarian*.

¹¹¹ Collins here notes the shift from narrative present tense, a general tone, to a specific one in the past tense (1993: 357). On such tenses in the Pali suttas, see **The Buddha discovers dhyana**, SD 33.1b (6.2.2.1).

¹¹² “Milk,” *payaso = paya* (milk, J 1:204, 6:572) + *so*. Some translators misread it as *pāyāso* (only Ee), “rice-milk.”

¹¹³ “Ghee,” *sappi*, clarified butter made usually from cow’s milk.

¹¹⁴ On ghee (*sappi*), butter (*navanīta*) and honey (*madhu*), which forms a conflated imagery, see **Nis Pāc** 23 (V

Appearance of the sun and the moon

12 Then, Vāseṭṭhā, a certain being, greedy in nature, said, ‘I say, what can this be?’ and tasted the sweet earth with his finger [V 4:198].¹¹⁵

Having tasted the sweet earth on his finger, he was suffused with the taste.

And craving came over him.

12.2 Then, Vāseṭṭhā, certain other beings, following him, set upon the sweet earth and tasted the sweet earth with their fingers, too.

Having tasted the sweet earth on their fingers, they were suffused with the taste.

And craving came over them, too.

12.3 Then, Vāseṭṭhā, those beings began feeding on the sweet earth, making lumps (large morsels) of it.¹¹⁶ [V 4:194-196]

12.4 And **[86]**, Vāseṭṭhā, on account of those beings making lumps of the sweet earth, and feeding on it,

these beings lost [destroyed] their self-luminance. [§18.3]

With the loss of their self-luminance,

the moon and the sun appeared.

With the appearance of the moon and sun,

the stars and constellations appeared.

With the appearance of the stars and constellations,

night and day appeared.

With the appearance of night and day,

months and fortnights appeared.

With the appearance of months and fortnights,

the year and its seasons appeared.

To that extent, Vāseṭṭhā, **the world evolved** [expanded].¹¹⁷

13 Now, Vāseṭṭhā, those beings continued for a very long time feeding on this sweet earth as their food and nourishment.

13.2 Vāseṭṭhā, just as *those beings continued for a very long time feeding on this sweet earth as their food and nourishment*,

so did **those beings’ bodies become coarser**,¹¹⁸ and among themselves they noticed differences in their looks.

13.3 Some beings were good-looking, others ugly.

Then, the good-looking ones despised the ugly ones, saying, ‘We are better looking than they are; they are uglier than we are!’ [§§14, 15]

3:251,14-18), where they are referred to separately as 3 of the 5 “medicines” allowable to monastics. This line recurs at §§14.2, 14.8.

¹¹⁵ “Tasting the sweet earth with his finger”: contravenes **Sekh** 52, 53. See Collins 1993a:359 n 12.2.

¹¹⁶ *Rasa,paṭhavim hatthehi ālumpa,kārakam upakkamimsu paribhuñjituṃ*, which contravenes **Sekh** (training-rules) **39** (V 4:194,15 f), **40** (V 4:194,25 f), poss **42** (V 4:195,10 f) & **46** (V 4:195,27 f). See Collins 1993a: 359 n12.3. Technically, taking the rare form, “making lumps,” **ālumpa,kārakam**, as adverb, we can render this as “began to eat the sweet earth, making lumps of them.” Here, we have a *ṇamul* noun used in the accusative as an adverb: see **Whitney**, *Sanskrit Grammar*, 1889 §995, which is in agreement with K R Norman (Collins 1993:328, 337 n44); also Tha:N 126 n22; Thī:N 65 f n26; Sn:N 299 n773. See §17c n on *sannidhi,karakam*.

¹¹⁷ “Evolved,” *vivaṭṭati*, lit, “rolls out,” expands. The “roiling out” or expansion of the universe stops here and the stabilization or expanded “steady state” begins, along with biological evolution and human development on a young planet like earth, as it were. For notes and diagram of Buddhist cosmology, see Appendix below.

¹¹⁸ “Coarse,” *khara* from *kharatta*, “coarseness, solidity, hardness, strength, ferocity” (PED, DP). The **Mahāvastu**, in its chapter on the world’s re-evolution, says that when the world re-arose, the beings began to eat whole mouthfuls of the earth-essence and their bodies came to possess the characteristics of heaviness (*gurutva*), roughness (*kharatva*) and hardness (*kakkhaṭva*) (Mvst 1:339). “The implication,” notes Karunadasa, “is given that *gurutva*, *kharatva* and *kakkhaṭva* represent the essential nature of *paṭhavi-dhātu*” (1967:17 f).

13.4 And through their being *proud and arrogant* by nature due to their beauty, **the sweet earth disappeared**.

13.5 When the sweet earth disappeared, they assembled and lamented,
'**Oh, the taste!** Oh, the taste!'¹¹⁹

13.6 Nowadays, when people get a taste of something good, they say,
'Oh, the taste! Oh, the taste!'
they are merely recalling a **primordial**¹²⁰ **norm**¹²¹ without knowing its meaning.¹²²

4. THE RISE OF EARTH-FAT (*bhūmi, pappāṭaka pātubhāva*)

The rise of vegetation

14 And then, Vāseṭṭhā, when the sweet earth had disappeared for those beings, **[87] earth-fat**¹²³ [fragrant earth] arose.

14.2 It grew like mushroom.¹²⁴ *It was endowed with colour, endowed with fragrance, endowed with taste. Just like ghee, just like butter, so was its colour. Just like pure wild honey was its taste.* [§11.2]

14.3 Then, Vāseṭṭhā, those beings continued for a very long time feeding upon the earth-fat as their food, as their nourishment.

14.4 Vāseṭṭhā, even as those beings *continued for a very long time feeding upon the earth-fat as their food, as their nourishment,*

even so, too, Vāseṭṭhā, **their bodies became coarser** and among themselves they noticed even greater differences in their looks. [§§15.3, 16.4]

Some beings were good-looking, others ugly.

14.5 Then, the good-looking ones despised the ugly ones, saying, 'We are better looking than they are; they are uglier than we are!' [§13]

14.6 Through their being arrogant about their complexion, being conceited and arrogant by nature¹²⁵ due to their beauty, **the earth-fat disappeared**.

¹¹⁹ *Aho rasam aho rasam*, or "Tasty, tasty!"

¹²⁰ "Primordial," *agga*. For other usages see §7.3 & n.

¹²¹ "Norm," *akkhara*, also "imperishable" Walshe renders it as "observance." See §15.9 + n on "Norm" there.

¹²² This phrase recurs 9 times in the Sutta: §§13.6, 15.7, 16.10, 21.4, 23.5, 24.3, 25.3, 26.5.

¹²³ "Earth-fat," *bhūmi, pappāṭaka* (AMg *pappāḍa, pappāḍaga*; cf Skt *papaṭaka*, Skt lex *paraṭa*, a kind of mushroom). An obscure word. BHSD: *parpaṭaka*; also *bhu-*, *bhūmi-*, *prṭhvi-p*, a kind of edible mushroom); BHSD *bhūmi, -parpaṭaka*: Mahvyut 5287 = Tib sa zhag, "earth-fat (-grease)." DP: a thin film or crust; a (fungoid?) growth; a water-fungus. Cf *pappāṭak'oja*, "nutritive essence of the earth's crust" (V 3:7,11; VA 182.10; NettA 227,29). See Vism 418; Nett (Comy) 227,29 (*pappāṭak'oja*). SED: *parpaṭa(ka)*, "medicinal plants" and (lex) "fragrant earth." We have come across *rasa, paṭhavī*, "sweet earth" [§11]. Evidently, this is a "vegetative evolution": (wet) sweet earth [§11], earth-fat [§14], creeper [§14], rice [§16].

¹²⁴ "Mushroom," *ahi, chattaka*.

¹²⁵ *Vañṇātimāna, paccayā mānātimānam, jātikanam*. See **Dhamma, dāyāda S** (M 3), where the negative qualities are amongst those that a monastic should avoid (M 3.14-15/1:15 f), SD 2.18.

5. THE RISE OF SWEET CREEPERS (*badāyata pātubhāva*)

14.7 When the earth-fat disappeared, a (kind of) **creeper**¹²⁶ appeared. They grew like convolvulus.¹²⁷

14.8 *It was endowed with colour, endowed with fragrance, endowed with taste. Just like ghee, just like butter, so was its colour. Just like pure wild honey was its taste.* [§14.2]

15 Then, Vāseṭṭhā, the beings set upon the creeper and ate it.

15.2 And, Vāseṭṭhā, those beings continued for a very long time feeding on this creeper as their food and nourishment.

15.3 And, Vāseṭṭhā, as they did so, their bodies became coarser and among themselves they noticed even greater differences in their looks. [§14.4]

Some beings were good-looking, others ugly. [88]

15.4 Then, the good-looking ones despised the ugly ones, saying, ‘We are better looking than they are; they are uglier than we are!’ [§13]

15.5 And through their being proud and arrogant by nature due to their beauty, the creeper disappeared.

15.6 When the creeper disappeared, they assembled and lamented,

‘**Alas! What was ours!** Alas! Our creeper (*badālatā*) is lost!’

15.7 Nowadays when people are touched by some hardship, they say,

‘Alas! What was ours! Alas! Lost is what was ours!’¹²⁸

they are merely resorting to **the primordial norm of the ancients**¹²⁹ without knowing its meaning. [§13.6, 21.4]

6. SELF-RIPENING WILD RICE (*akattṭha, pāka, sālina pātubhāva*)

16 Then, Vāseṭṭhā, when the creeper had disappeared, **rice** appeared, uncultivated, in the open spaces, ripening by itself.¹³⁰

It was without powder,¹³¹ without husk, fragrant and clean-grained [ready as food].¹³²

¹²⁶ “Creeper,” *badā, latā*, vll *bhadda, latā*, “fortunate creeper,” *pada, latā*. Vismṭ glosses it as *pūti, latā*, “stinking creeper,” ie the Gaḷocī creeper. The Skt eds read *vana, latā*, “forest creeper,” which actually makes good sense here. See Collins 1993a:363 n14.2.

¹²⁷ “Convolvulus,” *kalambukā*, perhaps *Ipomoea reptans*, locally called in Malay “kangkung,” that grows easily whether in water or on dry land. See Collins 1993a:363 n14.3.

¹²⁸ *Ahu vata no, ahāyi vata no ti*.

¹²⁹ “Primordial norm of the ancients” (*porāṇena aggaññaena akkharena*), ie, an ancient custom from time immemorial; it recurs at §§13.6, 16.11. Collins tr it as “the original, primary word(s)” (1990:630); Gethin: “the ancient original expression” (2008:122, 125). “Saying,” *akkhara*, here used of actions, which Gombrich feels is out of place, an example of “the leveling process typical of oral transmission” (1988:171) “and/or as having ousted some other word” (Collins 1993a:367 n 16.6).

¹³⁰ *Akattṭha, pāko sāli pāturahosi*. Comy explains *akattṭha, pāko* as meaning the rice arose in areas that are uncultivated (DA 3:869,4).

¹³¹ ie a fine red powder under the husk.

¹³² “Rice [ready as food],” *taṇḍula*. PED: “husked & ready for boiling”; but here (in this prelapsarian paradise) I think it is rice that is naturally ready for consumption (like a fruit). Anyway, there is not a hint of cooking in our story thus far; but see foll §.

16.2 Whatever they gathered in the evening for their dinner,
in the morning had grown back ripe again.

Whatever they gathered in the morning for their breakfast,
in the evening had grown back ripe again—they knew **no harvesting!**¹³³ [§17.8]

[50 Then, **vessels** appeared.¹³⁴ They put the rice into the vessels, which they placed on the tops of stones. A flame appeared spontaneously and cooked it. The cooked rice resembled jasmine flowers. It had need of neither sauces nor curries, since it would taste as whatever flavour they desired.¹³⁵

51 As soon as they ate this gross food, urine and excrement appeared in them. Then, wound openings broke open in them to let out (the urine and excrement).]¹³⁶ (Vism 13,50 f/418)

The arising of sexuality

16.3 And, Vāseṭṭhā, those beings continued for a very long time feeding on this rice as their food and nourishment.

16.4 And, Vāseṭṭhā, as they continued for a very long time feeding on this rice as their food and nourishment,

the beings' bodies became coarser still,

and among themselves they noticed even greater differences in their looks. [§14.4]

16.5 Then, **the female** developed female organs,¹³⁷ and **the male** developed male organs.

And the women became excessively preoccupied with the men, and the men with the women.¹³⁸

16.6 Owing to this excessive preoccupation with each other, lust was aroused, and their bodies burned [with passion].

Because of this burning, they indulged in **sexual activity**.¹³⁹ [V 3:23]

16.7 But, Vāseṭṭhā, when (other) beings saw them coupling, some threw dust, some threw ashes [dregs],¹⁴⁰ [89] some threw cow-dung at them, crying,

'**Away with (this) filth!** Away with (this) filth!¹⁴¹ How can one being do such a thing to another!'

¹³³ *Nāpadānaṃ paññāyati*. Comy: There was no need for storing, and no depletion of the crops was seen (*alāyikaṃ hutvā anūnam eva paññāyati*, DA 3:869,13). It means that they had a constant food supply without a break, without the fields being fallow.

¹³⁴ This narrative shortcut could be taken to mean that the beings invented or fashioned out these utensils.

¹³⁵ This in fact is how the divine beings in the lower heavens (in the sense worlds) partake of their food. These earthbound beings apparently retained some of their celestial characteristics.

¹³⁶ This episode, as much of the rest of this myth here, is a highly compressed narrative. Perhaps, we need to think in terms of long evolutionary periods for the various events mentioned here.

¹³⁷ DA: That is, those who were women in previous lives. Conversely, the others were men in their past lives.

¹³⁸ On this and foll lines, **Saññoga S** (A 7.48), SD 8.7.

¹³⁹ Note the use of *āpajjati* [§16b]. For a more extensive exposition of this episode and its spiritual solution, see **Saññoga S** (A 7.48/4:57-59), SD 8.7; also A:ÑB 185 f. Cf **Pār 1** (V 3:23,33-36).

¹⁴⁰ *Seṭṭhi* (n) (D 3:88,30 = 89,5). Not in PED. Comy glosses it as "ashes" (*seṭṭhin ti chārikam*, DA 869,24). According to K R Norman, it is derived < Skt **śiṣṭi* < *śiṣ*, "to remain," and means "remainder, dregs," and adds, "We might argue that Buddhaghosa's gloss is justifiable, as ashes are the remains from a fire, but the usage in New Indo-Aryan [CDIAL 12480: <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/contextualize.pl?p.4.soas.27503>] suggests that it is liquid dregs which are intended. If this is so, then Buddhaghosa was merely guessing the meaning from the context, perhaps with the knowledge of a marriage ceremony where ashes were thrown." (JPTS 18 1993:163 f).

¹⁴¹ "Away with (this) filth! ... " (*nassa asuci*). This is reminiscent of the use of *nāseti* as a tt for the expulsion from monkhood (V 1:85 f, 89, 173, 3:33, 40, etc; see V:H 1:xxvii). It is interesting to note that the *Viṣṇu, dharmōttara Pūrāṇa* 3.100.1 mentions that such substances as earth, cow-dung or ash were used for purification. See Collins 1993a:366 n16.5.

16.8 Nowadays, in some districts, when a daughter-in-law [a bride] is led out, some people throw dust, some throw ashes [dregs], some throw cow-dung at her,¹⁴² they are merely resorting to the primordial norm of the ancients¹⁴³ without knowing its meaning.

8. Sexual conduct

(*methuna, dhamma samācāra*)

17 Vāseṭṭhā, what was considered improper [immoral] then is nowadays considered proper [moral]!¹⁴⁴

17.2 Vāseṭṭhā, in those days those beings who indulged in sex were not allowed into a village or town¹⁴⁵ for a month or two.

17.3 Since those beings *fell into excessive [uncontrollable] intoxication*¹⁴⁶ with this impropriety, they resorted to **building houses**¹⁴⁷ just to hide this impropriety.¹⁴⁸

The rise of economy

STORING FOOD

17.4 (1) Then, Vāseṭṭhā, it occurred to a being, lazy by nature,

‘Now, why should I trouble myself gathering rice for my dinner in the evening and for my breakfast in the morning?’

Why shouldn’t I gather it all at once for **both my meals**?’

And so, Vāseṭṭhā, he gathered it all at once *for both his meals.*

(2) Then, Vāseṭṭhā, another being [90] came up to him and said,

‘Come, good being, let’s go to gather some rice for our meal!’

‘Enough, good being! I’ve gathered rice just once for *both my evening and morning meals.*’

17.5 Then, Vāseṭṭhā, that (2nd) being followed the example of the other being in gathering rice for his meals all at once **every 2 days**, saying, ‘This, sirs, I think, is good!’¹⁴⁹

¹⁴² This is an interesting Buddhist aetiology of the custom of throwing confetti at weddings!

¹⁴³ “Primordial norm of the ancients” (*porāṇena aggaññaena akkharena*): this phrase first appears at §15.9 above.

¹⁴⁴ Walshe transposes this sentence to §16, but see Collins 1993a:367 n17.1, where he suggests, “[p]erhaps best, both sections [§16 & §17] could be coalesced into one.”

¹⁴⁵ Since houses have not yet been invented, these “village and town” should be regarded as “settlements” without buildings and townification.

¹⁴⁶ “Fell into excessive [uncontrollable] intoxication with,” *pātavvyātaṃ āpajjimsu*. *Āpajjimsu* is past tense of *āpaj-jati*, “he commits (an offence)”: cf allusion to **Pār 1** [§16 para 3].

¹⁴⁷ “Building houses” contradicts the essence of monastic life, ie, of “going from the household into homelessness” (*agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajjā*, **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 1,5/1:88), SD 21.3; **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26,27/1:172), SD 1.11; **Laṭukikōpama S** (M 66,12.3/1:452), SD 28.11; **Raṭṭha, pāla S** (M 82,4/2:55), SD 92.5; Tha 46; Sn 274; cf **Cūḷa Dukkha-k, khandha S** (M 14,4/1:91), SD 4.7. See foll n.

¹⁴⁸ This interesting statement echoes the common phrase in the suttas, “The household life is stifling, a dusty path. The life of renunciation is like the open air. It is not easy living in a house to practise the holy life completely, in all its purity, like a polished conch-shell. What if I were to shave off my hair and beard, put on the saffron robes, and go forth from the household life into homelessness?” (D 2,41/1:63; Sn 406). Walshe think that these houses were built for shelter. On the other hand, Collins, agreeing with Rhys Davids (D:R 3:85), “take this point to be this: at the moment when the beings are under the intoxication of sex (*tasmim samaye* here refers to that particular time; the more usual narrative-historical ‘at that time’ is *tena samayena*, as at the beginning of the previous sentence), they cannot control themselves; thus in order to stop repeated exile from the settlements, they build houses. Note that the first ‘offence’ in §16, is committed by one couple; given the reference to houses (plural) here, one must assume that in §17, again by narrative ellipsis, the practice has spread to others.” (Collins 1993:368 n17.4).

(3) Then, Vāseṭṭhā, another being (a 3rd) came up to him (the 2nd being), and said,
‘Come, good being, let’s go to gather some rice for our meal!’

‘Enough, good being! I’ve gathered rice for my meals all at once *for 2 days*.’

(4) Then, Vāseṭṭhā, that (a 3rd) being followed the example of the other being in gathering rice for his meals all at once **every 4 days**, saying, ‘This, sirs, I think, is good!’

17.6 Then, Vāseṭṭhā, another being (a 4th) came up this being (the 3rd), and said,

‘Come, good being, let’s go to gather some rice for our meal!’

‘Enough, good being! I’ve gathered rice for my meals just once *for 4 days*.’

17.7 Then, Vāseṭṭhā, that (4th) being followed the example of the other being in gathering rice for his meals all at once **every 8 days**,¹⁵⁰ saying, ‘This, sirs, I think, is good!’

HARVESTING

17.8 Now, Vāseṭṭhā, with these beings resorting to eating rice **that had been stored up**,¹⁵¹ powder coated the clean grain, and husk then coated the grain.

When it was reaped, it grew not again. [§18.8]

Harvesting (and fallow) came to be known,¹⁵² and rice stubbles stood in clumps.¹⁵³ [§16.2]

9. Dividing the grain fields (*sāli vibhāga*)

The beings’ reflection

18 Then, Vāseṭṭhā, the beings assembled and lamented,

¹⁵⁴**Bad things**¹⁵⁵ have appeared amongst the beings. We were formerly mind-made, feeding on joy, self-luminous, moving about through the air, glorious—and we stayed like that for a very long time.¹⁵⁶

18.2 And sooner or later, after a very long period of time, sweet earth spread itself evenly over the waters where those beings were.

It looked just like the skim of cream that forms over hot milk¹⁵⁷ as it cools.¹⁵⁸

¹⁴⁹ *Evam pi kira bho sādhiṭi.*

¹⁵⁰ Storing food for 8 days contravenes **Nis Pāc 23** (V 3:251,14-18) & **28** (V 3:261,20-24). See Collins 1993a: 328-330.

¹⁵¹ **Sannidhi, karakam**, a rare, a gerund (or absolutive), found in related Comys (VA 710, Kkhv 76; DA 913): **Edgerton**, in his BSHD Grammar §§22.5, 35.5, describes what he calls “quasi-gerunds” in *-akam*, and that some are found in the Pāṭimokkha, eg **Nis Pāc 23** (V 3:251,14-18), **Pāc 38** (V 4:87,1 f), **Sekh 18-28** (V 4:188,17-190,14). See **§12a n** on *ālumpa, karakam*. The narrative here is about the symbolic beginning of a settled lifestyle, economic specialization and leisure. Cf **Brahmajāla S** (D 1,12/1:6; DA 81-84) on the Buddha’s superiority to other religious by not storing up food and goods.

¹⁵² *Apadānam paññāyittha.*

¹⁵³ *Sanḍa.danḍā sāliyo thitā.* Collins: “I take the point to be that rice-cultivation is now necessary, and so the rice, which previously grew wild, now stands in planted groups or lines.” (1993a:369 n17.7). Walshe: “and the cut place showed, and the rice grew in separate clusters.”

¹⁵⁴ This is a nested narrative, related by the “being” themselves (as related by the Buddha). This open quote ends at the close of §18.10.

¹⁵⁵ “Bad things,” *pāpaka ... dhammā*, that is, states of mind, phenomena, actions.

¹⁵⁶ On this recollection, see §10.

¹⁵⁷ “Milk,” *payaso = paya* (“milk,” J 1:204, 6:572) + *so*. Some translators misread it as *pāyāso*, “rice-milk.”

¹⁵⁸ This remark refers back to §§10.4 + 11.2.

It was endowed with colour, endowed with fragrance, endowed with taste. Just like ghee, just like butter, so was its colour. Just like pure wild honey was its taste.

18.3 Then, when we, making lumps of the sweet earth, began feeding on it,

we lost our self-luminance. [§12.4]

With the loss of our self-luminance,	<u>the moon and the sun</u>	appeared.
With the appearance of the moon and sun, [91]	<u>the stars and constellations</u>	appeared.
With the appearance of the stars and constellations,	<u>night and day</u>	appeared.
With the appearance of night and day,	<u>months and fortnights</u>	appeared.
With the appearance of months and fortnights,	<u>the year and its seasons</u>	appeared.

We continued for a very long time, feeding on this sweet earth as food and nourishment.¹⁵⁹

18.4 With the appearance of bad and unwholesome things amongst us, the sweet earth disappeared

When the sweet earth disappeared, **the earth-fat** appeared. *It was endowed with colour, endowed with fragrance, endowed with taste.* We went on to feed on the earth-fat. [§14]

We continued for a very long time, feeding on it as food and nourishment.

18.5 With the appearance of bad and unwholesome things amongst us, the earth-fat disappeared

When the earth-fat disappeared, a (kind of) **creeper** appeared.

They grew like convolvulus.

*It was colourful, fragrant, tasty like ghee, of a colour like that of butter, and tasting like pure wild honey.*¹⁶⁰

We fed on this creeper. And we continued for a very long time feeding on it as our food and nourishment.

APPEARANCE OF RICE

18.6 With the appearance of bad and unwholesome things amongst us, the creeper disappeared.

When the creeper had disappeared, **rice** appeared, uncultivated, in the open spaces. [§16.1]

It was without powder, without husk, fragrant and clean-grained [ready as food].

18.7 Whatever we gathered in the evening for our dinner, in the morning had grown back ripe again.

Whatever we gathered in the morning for our breakfast, in the evening had grown back ripe again—we knew no harvesting!

We continued for a very long time feeding on it as our food and nourishment.

18.8 With the appearance of bad and unwholesome things amongst us, powder and husk covered the grain. When it was reaped, it grew not again. [§17.8]

18.9 **Harvesting** came to be known, and [92] now the rice stubbles stand in clumps. [§17.8]

PRIVATE PROPERTY

18.10 What now if we divide up the rice and **set up boundaries?**¹⁶¹ [V 3:50]

And so, Vāseṭṭhā, we divided up the rice and set up boundaries.'

¹⁵⁹ *Te mayam̐ rasa, pathavim̐ paribhuñjantā tam-bhakkhā tad-āhārā ciram̐ dīgham̐ addhānam̐ aṭṭhamhā.*

¹⁶⁰ This section recalls events recorded in §14a.

¹⁶¹ "**Boundaries,**" *mariyāda*, which Comy glosses as *sīmā*, monastic boundary (V 3:50; A 4:237 f). The word *mariyāda* is used in two senses in the Suttas: as boundary of a field (as mentioned) and as rules for marriage, etc (A 3:227, Vism 1.41/15). **Mahāvastu** is clearer here: "Boundaries were marked around the ricefields, meaning, 'This is your ricefield, sir; this is mine!'" (Mvst 346). See *Mūla Sarvāstivādin Vinaya*, ed R Gnoli, 1977:14. This is the symbolic origin of the privatization of property.

Origin of punishment

19 (1) Then, Vāseṭṭhā, a certain being, greedy by nature, while watching over his own portion, **took the share of another that had not been given to him**,¹⁶² and consumed it. [V3:46]

19.2 So they seized him and said,

‘Good being, what a bad deed you have done! *While watching over his own portion, you took the share of another that had not been given to you, and consumed it.*

Good being, do not do this sort of thing again!’

19.3 ‘Yes, sir,’ Vāseṭṭhā, the being replied to those beings.

(2) But, a **2nd time**, Vāseṭṭhā, that being, *while watching over his own portion, took the share of another that had not been given to him, and consumed it.*

19.4 So they seized him and said,

‘Good being, what a bad deed you have done, *while watching over his own portion, you took the share of another that had not been given to you, and consumed it.*

Good being, do not do this sort of thing again!’

19.5 ‘Yes, sir,’ Vāseṭṭhā, the being answered to those beings.

(3) But a **3rd time**, Vāseṭṭhā, that being, *while watching over his own portion, took the share of another that had not been given to him, and consumed it.*

19.6 They seized him and said to him,

‘Good being, what a bad deed you have done, *while watching over his own portion, you took the share of another that had not been given to you, and consumed it.*’

Good being, do not do this sort of thing again!’

19.7 Some **hit him** with their hands, some hit him with clods of earth, some hit him with sticks.

19.8 And so, thenceforth, Vāseṭṭhā, **stealing** came into being, **censure** came into being, **lying**¹⁶³ came into being, **the taking up of a rod [corporal punishment]**¹⁶⁴ came into being.¹⁶⁵

10. The great elect as king

(mahā,sammata,rāja)

20 Then, Vāseṭṭhā, the beings assembled and lamented,

20.2 ‘**Bad things**, sirs, have appeared amongst the beings! On account of that: stealing will occur, censure will occur, lying will occur, punishment will occur!’¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Notice here, unlike the narrative in **Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda S** (D 26,10.2/3:65), SD 36.10, the thief is not poor or deprived (“while watching over his own portion,” steals from another; ie he is motivated by greed. Stealing (taking the not-given “like a thief”) is **Pār 2** (V 3:46,16-20).

¹⁶³ It is not mentioned here *how lying* arose, but understandably, some of the thieves who are caught would deny any of their wrong-doing. Deliberate lying contravenes **Pāc 1** (V 4:2,14)).

¹⁶⁴ **Daṇḍ’ādāna** = *daṇḍa* (lit “the rod”) + *ādāna* (“taking up”); *daṇḍa*, “the rod,” can have a figurative sense of “corporal or violent punishment” (eg Dh 126a), or can refer to punishment from the authorities (usu the king). Here (D 27.19b/3:92,26, 22/93,26), however, the sense of is *literal*, as in the phrase, “taking up the rod, taking up a weapon” (*daṇḍ’ādāna satth’ādāna*), ie “violence and killing,” or more fully, “taking up of the rod and of the sword, quarrels, disputes, mayhem [strife], slandering and lying” (~, *viggaha,vivāda,tuvantuva,pesuñña,musāvādānaṃ*): **D 34.2.2(4)/3:289,6; M 18.8/1:110,3, 19/1:113,24, 60.31/1:410,29; A 9.23.2/4:400,28; DA 500; MA 2:75; SA 3:64,5; AA 4:190; Vism 10.1/326.**

¹⁶⁵ “Thenceforth,” *tad-agge*, lit “from this beginning,” alt tr “from this moment on.”

20.3 What now if we appoint **one being** who would denounce¹⁶⁷ those who deserve to be denounced, [V 1:153 etc] censure those who deserve censure, and banish those who deserve to be banished!

Then, (in return,)¹⁶⁸ we will **provide him with a portion of rice.** [93]

20.4 So, Vāseṭṭhā, those beings approached the one amongst them who was the handsomest, the best-looking, the most pleasant, the most capable, and said to him,

‘Come now, good being,

denounce those who deserve to be denounced,

censure those who deserve censure, and

banish those who deserve banishment.¹⁶⁹

Then, (in return,) we will provide you with a portion of rice.’

20.5 And, Vāseṭṭhā, he agreed.

He denounced those who deserve to be denounced, censured those who deserve censure, and banished those who deserve banishment.

Then, (in return,) they provided him with a portion of rice.

21 ‘He is appointed [agreed to] by the people (*mahā, janena sammata*),¹⁷⁰ Vāseṭṭhā, therefore, he is called “the great elect” (*mahā sammata*).¹⁷¹ [V 1:94 etc]

And thus ‘great elect’ was the 1st name [norm]¹⁷² that arose (for the kshatriyas).

21.2 ‘**They are lords of the fields**’ (*khettānaṃ patī*);¹⁷³ Vāseṭṭhā, therefore, they are called ‘kshatriya’ (*khattiya*). And thus ‘kshatriya’ was the 2nd name that arose.

¹⁶⁶ *Pāpakā vata bho dhamma sattesu pātu bhūtā, yatra hi ādinn’ādānaṃ paññāyissati, garahā paññāyissati, musā, vādo paññāyissati, daṇḍ’ādānaṃ paññāyissati.*

¹⁶⁷ “Would denounce,” *khīyeyya*, from pres ind *khīyati*, “he denounces, reprimands, becomes angry”; alt tr “be angry with, criticizes,” often used when the Buddha, the public, etc, criticizes regarding what is inappropriate for the monks (V 1:153, 3:44, 4:38, 5:42).

¹⁶⁸ “In return,” appears twice in this passage, implied by *pana*. While Peter Harvey thinks this is sufficient to take the arrangement as a “social contract” (email 4 Oct 1995 replying Peter Junger), Damien Keown thinks that “a decision is not a contract” (email 4/10/95 in reply to P Junger). The appointment of the Mahā Sammata here, however, could be accepted in terms of Lessnoff’s models (1986:4 f) as a “bilateral contract” between people as a collectivity and their ruler. See Collins’ instructive discussion on Mahā Sammata, 1993a:379-386.

¹⁶⁹ From “Come now ...,” *ehi, bho satta, sammā khīyitabbaṃ khiya, sammā garahitabbaṃ garaha, sammā pab-bājetabbaṃ pabbājehi.*

¹⁷⁰ Gethin says that “this method of unpacking the true, original significance of words (known as *nirutti/nirukti*) often involves a kind of word-play that has nothing to do with etymology of words, but is related to Indian theories of the primacy of sounds and spoken words.” (2008:284 n125)

¹⁷¹ “Mahā Sammata.” This notion is modelled on monastic appointments (or removal of the appointments) to a task, etc (V 1:94, 106 ff, 109, 2:95, 133 f, 238, 283 ff, 3:150, 158, 199, 228, 4:50, 319, 320, 330). See Collins 1993a: 379 ff (Appendix 1). Mahā Sammata is evidently this is a *title* here. The Pāli Commentaries and Chronicles, however, mention it as the *name* of the first king of the Solar Race, ancestors (among others) of the Sakya rulers, hence of Siddhattha Gotama (the Buddha) (J 2:311, 3:454; Mahv 2.1 ff; Dīpv 3.1 ff; MAṬ 122 ff).

¹⁷² “Name,” *akkhara* (Skt *akṣara*), lit “imperishable” (epithet for nirvana, Abhp 7, 1063); a letter, vowel, phoneme (NA 1:264; Abhp 348; Sadd 604, 857); sound, syllable (V 4:15; S 1:38; Dh 352; Ap 43); a written character (J 2:90, 4:7; Miln 79; VA 867; Abhp 1063); expression, word (D 3:86, 93). See §§13, 16 etc where it is rendered as “norm.” See §15.9 n.

¹⁷³ “Lords of the fields.” Uma Chakravarti however says that *kṣatriya* (P *khattiya*) is derived from *kṣatra*, “which [AB] Keith translated as sovereignty, and which [AM] Hocart renders as the Roman imperium ... [R] Fick [too] ... im-

21.3 ‘He brings joy to others through the dharma [through righteousness]’; Vāseṭṭhā, therefore, he is called ‘**rajah**’ [king] (*dhammena pare rañjetīti rājjā*).¹⁷⁴ And thus ‘rajah’ was the 3rd name that arose.

21.4 Thus, Vāseṭṭhā, was the origin of **the kshatriya circle**,¹⁷⁵ in accordance with a primordial pronouncement of the ancients, [§15.7] comprising only those beings, not of others, of those like them, not otherwise,

in accordance with **the dharma** [the dhamma], not otherwise.¹⁷⁶

21.5 For, Vāseṭṭhā, the dharma is the best for the people in this life and in the next.

11. The circle of brahmins

(*brāhmaṇa, maṇḍala*)

22 Then, Vāseṭṭhā, some of the beings thought,

‘Bad things have appeared amongst us!

On that account stealing will appear,

censure will appear,

lying will appear,

punishment [taking up the rod] will appear,

banishment will appear.

Let us keep away from bad and unwholesome things!

And they kept away from bad and unwholesome things. [94]

22.2 ‘**They keep away** (*bāhenti*) from bad and unwholesome things,’ Vāseṭṭhā, therefore they are called ‘**brahmin**’ (*brāhmaṇa*).¹⁷⁷

And thus ‘brahmin’ was the 1st name that arose (for them).

22.3 They built leaf-huts in the forest-abodes and **meditated** in them.

With neither coal nor smoke (from a cooking fire), with pestle (and mortar)¹⁷⁸ set aside,¹⁷⁹

plied that the *khattiyas* were associated with the actual exercise of power” (1987:15 f). The term “satrap” (a governor of the Greek territories in Persia (modern Iran) and NW India, following Alexander the Great’s campaigns) probably has the same etymological roots as *kṣatriya*. However, the Pali etymology probably reflects that the *kshatriyas* were owners of large tracts of land at a time when agriculture and mining were reaching a high point in ancient India. See Chakravarti, 1987:16-20.

¹⁷⁴ *Rāja* is cognate of the Latin *rex, reg-*, “king,” where it is prob also linked to the root of *rāga*, “desire, lust.”

¹⁷⁵ “Kshatriya circle,” *khattiya maṇḍala*, ie, a “mandala” or circle of nobles or aristocrats. Here, *maṇḍala* refers to one of the 4 occupation-based communities, which later degenerated into a class or “caste” system. The point is that it is what people “do” (willful actions, occupations), not their birth or status in life, that makes them what they “are”: see Vāseṭṭha S (M 98,10 = Sn 612-620/p119 f). By the Commentarial period, the mandala notion had developed into a “church and state”-like dichotomy between “religious authority” (*dhamma, cakka*) and “political authority” (*āṇā, cakka*) (VA 1:10).

¹⁷⁶ *Iti kho, vāseṭṭha, evam-etassa khattiya, mandalassa porāṇena aggaññena akkharena abhinibbatti ahoṣi tesam y’eva sattānaṃ, anaññesaṃ*. Here *dhamma* has a broad social sense (civil code, norm, justice, etc), not a brahminical ideological code, nor strictly the Buddhist notion of “truth, teaching,” but including it.

¹⁷⁷ *Pāpake akusale dhamme bāhenti ti kho, vāseṭṭha, brāhmaṇā*. Cf *bāhetvā sabba, pāpakāni sabhiyāti ... brahmā* (Be has *brāhmano*) (Sn 519ad), where Norman notes, “The pun on *bāhetvā* and *brahmā* only works in a dialect where *br-* has become *b-*. That this was the original situation in this verse is shown by the fact that *br-* does not make position here.” (Sn:N2 269 n519).

¹⁷⁸ “Pestle,” *musala*; “mortar” is *udukkhala*.

¹⁷⁹ “With neither coal ... with pestle (and mortar) set aside,” *vīt’aṅgārā vīta, dhūmā sanna, musalā*. There is an

they went into villages, towns or capitals to look for food,¹⁸⁰
 in the evening for their evening meal, in the morning for their morning meal.
 When they had found their food, they returned to the leaf-huts in the forest-abodes and *meditated*.¹⁸¹

22.4 People saw this and said,
 ‘Having built leaf-huts in the forest-abodes, they meditate in them.
 With neither coal nor smoke (from a cooking fire), with pestle (and mortar) set aside,
 they go into villages, towns or capitals to look for food,
 in the evening for their evening meal, in the morning for their morning meal.
 When they had found their food, they returned to the leaf-huts in the forest-abodes and *meditated*.’

22.5 ‘They meditate (*jhāyanti*),’ Vāseṭṭhā, therefore they are called ‘meditators’ (*jhāyaka*).¹⁸²
 And so ‘meditator’ was the 2nd name that arose (for them).

23 However, Vāseṭṭhā, some of the beings, unable to meditate in leaf-huts, settled around towns and villages, and **compiled texts**.¹⁸³

23.2 People saw them and said, ‘These good beings (who are) **unable to meditate** in leaf-huts, settled around towns and villages, and *compiled texts*.’

23.3 ‘They do **not meditate now** (*na dan’ime jhāyanti*),’ Vāseṭṭhā; therefore, they are called ‘**reciters, non-meditators**’ (*ajjhāyaka*).¹⁸⁴

And thus ‘reciter’ [‘non-meditator’]¹⁸⁵ was the 3rd name that arose (for them).

allusion to the Brāhmāṇḍa Purāṇa 1.7.177 here. However, while the Sutta applies these descriptions to those who *received* the alms, the Purāṇa (including corresponding passages in the Vāyu Purāṇa) apply them to those household that *gave* the alms. See Collins 1993a:372 n22.3.

¹⁸⁰ “Food,” *ghāsa*, a Vedic word that orig meant “grass for fodder; pasturing” (J 1:511); *ghasaṁ esanā* (D 27.22), *ghās’esanā*, “search for food” (S 1:141; Sn 711).

¹⁸¹ *Ghāsaṁ paṭilabhitvā puna deva āraññ’āyatane paṇṇa, kuṭṭisu jhāyanti*.

¹⁸² Here, *jhāyaka* puns of either “meditator” (Buddhist sense) and “fire-maker or fire-worshipper” (brahminical). The noun of *jhāyati*, “to attain dhyana,” is *jhāna*, originally meaning simply “meditation” from the Pali root √JHE, to burn (ie burn away mental defilements); but the Skt cognate *dhyāna* is derived from √DHYĀ, to think (Whitney), or √DHĪ, to think (PED: *jhāyati*¹). PED gives both forms: *jhāyati*¹ (Skt *dhyāyati*), “to meditate”; *jhāyati*² (Skt *kṣāyati*), “to burn.” While the former applies to their “fire-forsaking and meditating” predecessors, the latter applies to later “fire-worshipping” brahmins, “those who tend a sacrificial fire” (*jhāyaka*). It is on this that our Sutta puns. For another view, see Collins 1993a:373 & n22.6.

¹⁸³ “**Texts**,” *gantha*. Books (as we know them) were non-existent then. Comy on *ganthe karontā* explains thus: “just compiling the 3 Vedas and teaching others to repeat them” (*tayo vede abhisāṅkharontā c’eva vācentā*) (DA 3:870). While the textual *karontā* (“doing”) is more general, the commentarial *abhisāṅkharontā* clearly connotes “creating.” Either way, there is a broad hint of the human hand in all “texts” whether “heard” (Skt *śruti*), ie inspired directly from a deity, or “remembered” (Skt *smṛti*) (see Basham 1989:69 f). The Pali cognates are *suta* and *sati* respectively. *Suta* has the general sense of “learning (esp sacred knowledge)” in the Suttas (M 120,3/3:99; S 4:250; A 1:210 f, 2:6 f); as such, *bahu-s,suta*, “heard much” refers to one who is “learned” (in an oral tradition). *Sati*, on the other hand, had a more profound meaning in the Suttas, referring to “mindfulness” (D 22; M 10, 118). The Sutta allusion can also include the rishis and teachers of the early Upaniṣads. See U Chakravarti 1987:98-100.

¹⁸⁴ The humorous wordplay on *ajjhāyaka* is obvious. “Reciters” (*ajjhāyaka*), ie brahmins engaged in learning the Vedas (D 1:88,4; M 2:154,4; A 1:163,10, 166,18, 3:223,17; Tha 1171; B 2:6); also as *mant’ajjhāyaka*, “mantra reciters” (J 6:209; SnA 192). Interestingly, in later Buddhist literature, *adhyayaka* comes to mean “teacher” (eg Rasa, -vahīni 19). See foll n.

¹⁸⁵ *Ajjhāyaka*, Skt *ādhyāyika* (one employed or occupied in reading or studying), *adhyāyin* (one engaged in reading, a student) (SED). See prec n.

23.4 At that time, Vāseṭṭhā, it was considered a lowly designation; nowadays, it is considered the best.

23.5 So this, Vāseṭṭhā, was the origin of the brahmin circle (*brāhmaṇa maṇḍala*), in accordance with the primordial pronouncement of the ancients, [§15.9] [95]

comprising only those beings,

of those like them, not otherwise,

in accordance with the dharma [the dhamma], not otherwise.

23.6 For, Vāseṭṭhā, the dharma is the best for the people in this life and in the next.

12. The circle of merchants

(*vessa,maṇḍala*)

24 Then, Vāseṭṭhā, some of the beings, indulging in sexual intercourse, took up domestic occupations.¹⁸⁶

24.2 'Indulging in *sexual intercourse*, they **take up domestic occupations**,' therefore, they are called '**vaishya**' [merchants] (*vessa*). And so the name 'vaishya' arose.

24.3 So this, Vāseṭṭhā, was the origin of the vaishya circle (*vessa maṇḍala*), in accordance with the primordial pronouncement of the ancients, [§15.7]

comprising only those beings,

of those like them, not otherwise,

in accordance with the dharma [the dhamma], not otherwise.

24.4 For, Vāseṭṭhā, the dharma is the best for the people in this life and in the next.

13. The circle of workers

(*sudda,maṇḍala*)

The shudras (the worker class)

25 Then, Vāseṭṭhā, the remaining beings led cruel, mean lives.¹⁸⁷

25.2 '**They lead cruel, mean lives** (*ludd'ācāra, khudd'ācāra*),' therefore, Vāseṭṭhā, they are called '**shudra**' (*sudda*). And so the name 'shudra' arose.

25.3 So this, Vāseṭṭhā, was the origin of the shudra circle (*sudda maṇḍala*), in accordance with the primordial pronouncement of the ancients, [§15.7]

comprising only those beings,

of those like them, not otherwise,

in accordance with the dharma [the dhamma], not otherwise.

25.4 For, Vāseṭṭhā, the dharma is the best for the people in this life and in the next.

¹⁸⁶ "Indulging ... domestic occupations," *methuna,dhammam samādāya vissuta,jammante payojesum*. "Domestic occupations," *vissuta kammante*, vl *vissu,kammante* (lemma). The word *vissuta* (Skt *viśruta*), however, is def in PED as "famous, celebrated," which prob inspired Collins' interesting interpretation that "[i]t is well-known that early Buddhism ...was closely connected to cities and trade. Thus one might interpret [the Aggañña S] here as calling vaiśya occupations 'of high repute' in relation to this context, as a deliberate rejection of contemporary Brahmanical attitudes." (Collins 1993a:375 n24.1). **K R Norman** has given a detailed analysis, concluding that *vissu-kammante* means "domestic tasks," taking *vissa* < **vessa* < Skt *veśman* or Skt *viśma*, "domestic" (*vissa* is found in Dh 266, glossed as *visama*, DhA 3:393,3; see also ThīA 257,20-22): see 1976:52-58 & Dh:N 125 n266.

¹⁸⁷ "Mean lives," *ludd'ācāra*, vl *khudd'ācāra* ("inferior lives"). Collins points to "the opposition between the nature of vaiśya activities, 'of high repute,' and the 'mean' nature of sūdra lifestyle." (1993a:376 n25.1)

The universality of moral virtue

THE RECLUSE CIRCLE

26 There came a time, Vāsetṭhā, when a **kshatriya** disapproved of his own way of life (*dhamma*) and left the household for homelessness, thinking, ‘I will become a recluse (*samaṇa*).’

26.2 Then, a **brahmin**, too, disapproved of his own way of life and left the household for homelessness, thinking, ‘I will become a recluse.’

26.3 Then, a **vaishya**, too, disapproved [96] of his own way of life and left the household for homelessness, thinking, ‘I will become a recluse.’

26.4 Then, a **shudra**, too, disapproved of his own way of life and left the household for homelessness, thinking, ‘I will become a recluse.’

26.5 This, Vāsetṭhā, was the origin of **the recluse circle** (*samaṇa maṇḍala*),¹⁸⁸ in accordance with the primordial pronouncement of the ancients, [§15.7] comprising only those beings,

of those like them, not otherwise,

in accordance with the dharma [the dhamma], not otherwise.

26.6 For, Vāsetṭhā, the dharma is the best for the people in this life and in the next.

14. On wrong conduct, etc

(*duccarit’ādi kathā*)

27 Indeed, Vāsetṭhā, a **kshatriya** who, having done bad deeds through the body, through speech, through the mind, holds wrong views; because of doing deeds rooted in wrong views, with the body’s breaking up, after death, reappears in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.¹⁸⁹

27.2 Indeed, Vāsetṭhā, a **brahmin**, too, who, having done bad deeds through the body, through speech, through the mind, holds wrong views; because of doing deeds rooted in wrong views, with the body’s breaking up, after death, reappears in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.

27.3 Indeed, Vāsetṭhā, a **vaishya**, too, who, having done bad deeds through the body, through speech, through the mind, holds wrong views;

¹⁸⁸ This interesting remark suggests that the śramaṇa movement is a very ancient (pre-Buddhist) one. See B Jain, “The Antiquity of the Śramaṇa Movement,” 1990.

¹⁸⁹ *apāyaṃ duggatīṃ vinipātāṃ nirayaṃ*. **Lohicca S** (D 12) declares that those with wrong views have two destinies: hell or the animal kingdom (D 12,10/1:228; see Walshe’s important note M:W 602 n801). I do not think these 4 words are synonyms for “hell,” which is itself, I think, a collective term for ‘suffering states’. In other words, all these four words are synonymous of the subhuman realms, sometimes incl the asuras or “fallen gods” (titans, demons, etc). See Sn 231 (*catuḥi apāyehi*), explained as: *cattāro apāyā nāma niraya, tiracchāna, petti, visaya, asura, kāyā*, “the four states of misery are hell, the animal womb, the ghost realm, the demon world” (KhA 189); cf Sn 377 :: SnA 368. See also D 3:234, 264; M 1:73; A 4:459; Nc 550; cf S 5:474-77; Vism 552. Also **Pañca, gati, dīpana** (ed L Feer, JPTS, 1884:152 ff; tr Feer, *Annales du Musée Guimet* 5:514-28). It is tempting to collate the four states of misery with the four subhuman realms as follows: *apāya* with ghosts; *duggati* with the animal realm; *vinipāta* with asuras (titans, “fallen” gods); *niraya* = hell; but closer textual study is needed for this. See also D:W 40 f.

*because of doing deeds rooted in wrong views,
with the body's breaking up, after death,
reappears in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.*

27.4 Indeed, Vāseṭṭhā, **a shudra**, too, who,
having done bad deeds through the body, through speech, through the mind, holds wrong views;
because of doing deeds rooted in wrong views,
with the body's breaking up, after death,
reappears in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.

27.5 Indeed, Vāseṭṭhā, **a recluse**, too, who,
having done bad deeds through the body, through speech, through the mind, holds wrong views;
because of doing deeds rooted in wrong views,
with the body's breaking up, after death,
reappears in a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm, in hell.

GOOD KARMIC FRUITS ARE UNIVERSAL

28 Indeed, Vāseṭṭhā, **a kshatriya** who,
having done good deeds through the body, through speech, through the mind, holds right view;
because of doing deeds rooted in right view,
with the body's breaking up, after death, rearises in a state of joy, a happy destination, in heaven.

28.2 Indeed, Vāseṭṭhā, **a brahmin** who,
having done good deeds through the body, through speech, through the mind, holds right view;
because of doing deeds rooted in right view,
with the body's breaking up, after death, rearises in a state of joy, a happy destination, in heaven.

28.3 Indeed, Vāseṭṭhā, **a vaishya** who,
having done good deeds through the body, through speech, through the mind, holds right view;
because of doing deeds rooted in right view,
with the body's breaking up, after death, rearises in a state of joy, a happy destination, in heaven.

28.4 Indeed, Vāseṭṭhā, **a shudra** who,
having done good deeds through the body, through speech, through the mind, holds right view;
because of doing deeds rooted in right view,
with the body's breaking up, after death, rearises in a state of joy, a happy destination, in heaven.

28.5 Indeed, Vāseṭṭhā, **a recluse** who,
having done good deeds through the body, through speech, through the mind, holds right view;
because of doing deeds rooted in right view,
with the body's breaking up, after death, rearises in a state of joy, a happy destination, in heaven.

MIXED KARMIC FRUITS ARE UNIVERSAL

29 Indeed, Vāseṭṭhā, **a kshatriya**
who does both (good and bad) through body, speech and mind,
holds mixed views (of both good and bad);
out of mixed views he acts; because of acting out of mixed views,
with the body's breaking up, after death, experiences both happiness and suffering.

29.2 A brahmin, [97] Vāsetṭhā

who does both (good and bad) through body, speech and mind,
 holds mixed views (of both good and bad);
 out of mixed views he acts; because of acting out of mixed views,
 with the body's breaking up, after death, experiences both happiness and suffering.

29.3 A vaishya, Vāsetṭhā

who does both (good and bad) through body, speech and mind,
 holds mixed views (of both good and bad);
 out of mixed views he acts; because of acting out of mixed views,
 with the body's breaking up, after death, experiences both happiness and suffering.

29.4 A shudra, Vāsetṭhā

who does both (good and bad) through body, speech and mind,
 holds mixed views (of both good and bad);
 out of mixed views he acts; because of acting out of mixed views,
 with the body's breaking up, after death, experiences both happiness and suffering.

29.5 A recluse, Vāsetṭhā

who does both (good and bad) through body, speech and mind,
 holds mixed views (of both good and bad);
 out of mixed views he acts; because of acting out of mixed views,
 with the body's breaking up, after death, experiences both happiness and suffering.

15. Cultivating the 7 limbs of awakening

(bodhi, pakkhiya bhāvanā)

30 A kshatriya, Vāsetṭhā, who is restrained in body, speech and mind by means of cultivating **the 7 limbs of awakening**¹⁹⁰ attains nirvana in this life.

30.2 A brahmin, too, Vāsetṭhā, who is restrained in body, speech and mind by means of cultivating the 7 limbs of awakening attains nirvana in this life.

30.3 A vaishya, too, Vāsetṭhā, who is restrained in body, speech and mind by means of cultivating the 7 limbs of awakening attains nirvana in this life.

30.3 A shudra, too, Vāsetṭhā, who is restrained in body, speech and mind by means of cultivating the 7 limbs of awakening attains nirvana in this life.

31 And, Vāsetṭhā, anyone from any of these 4 classes who becomes a monk,¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Bodhi, pakkhiya, dhamma, more common known as **the "7 awakening-factors"** (*satta bojjhaṅga*): mindfulness, dharma-investigation, effort, zest, tranquillity, concentration and equanimity. See **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22,16/2:303 f), SD 13.2. The term later applies to the 37 "limbs of awakening" (eg, M 77,15-21 @ SD 6.18, though not so called). [2.4]

¹⁹¹ "Monk," *bhikkhu*. I see no issue here of "the levelling process typical of oral transmission" (Gombrich 1992a: 171) since the whole purpose of the Sutta is to show the place of the spiritual life in society and the individual. It is significant that this statement acts as the climax of a discourse based on *agga*. The closing section [§32] seems to have been added later: it is unlikely for two young brahmins, albeit converts, to play up to the kshatriyas, esp when these two are at the centre of **Vāsetṭha S** that teaches equality of all the classes (M 98 = Sn no 9/p115-123). See Collins 1993a:376 n31.1.

an arhat, [§7.3]

with mental influxes destroyed,
 who has lived the holy life,
 done what needs to be done,
 laid down the burden,
 reached his own goal,
 destroyed the fetters of being,
 freed through his own direct knowledge,

khīṇ'āsavo
vusitavā
kata,karaṇīyo
ohita,bhāro
anuppatta,sad-attho
parikkhīṇa,bhava,samyojano
samma-d-aññā vimutto

he is justly, not unjustly, called “**the foremost**” (*agga*) amongst them.

For, Vāseṭṭhā, the dharma is the best for the people in this life and in the next.

Supremacy of the kshatriyas

32 Vāseṭṭhā, **the Brahmā Sanañ,kumāra**¹⁹² spoke this verse,

Khattiyo seṭṭho jane tasmim
ye gotta,paṭisārino
vijjā,caraṇa,sampanno
so seṭṭho deva,mānuse.

The kshatriya is the best in this generation
 for those who look up to clan.

The one endowed with knowledge and conduct:¹⁹³
 he is the best amongst gods and humans.

33 This verse, Vāseṭṭhā, is well-sung, not ill-sung, by Brahma Sanañkumāra, well-spoken, not ill-spoken, endowed with meaning, not without meaning—I approve of it.

34 I too, Vāseṭṭhā, say thus,

The kshatriya is the best in this generation *for those people who value clan.*
The one endowed with knowledge and conduct: *he is the best amongst gods and humans.*

The Blessed One said this. Satisfied, Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja rejoiced in the Blessed One’s word.

— evaṃ —

¹⁹² Sanañ,kumāra’s verse is well known. Lines cd are explained in **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 3.1.28/3:99) in terms of the *sāmañña,phala*. **Sekha S** (M 53.25/1:358, spoken by Ānanda), **Sanañ,kumāra S** (S 6.11/1:153, verse only), **Mahā Kapina S** (S 21.11/2:284, with Dh 387); **Mora,nivāpa S** (A 11.11/5:327 f); cf **Soṇa,daṇḍa S** (D 4,13-16/1:121, on the true brahmin), **Jana,vasabha S** (D 18,17-29/2:210-218, on Sanañ,kumāra). (At S 2:284, where it appears with Dh 387, it is attr to the Buddha, giving it even greater endorsement). See SD 54.3d (2.3). The name *sanañ,kumāra* means or “Ever Young” or “Eternal Virgin.” Like the true brahmins of old, he practised “the celibate divine life” or “virginal celibacy” (*komāra,brahma,cariya*, A 5.192/3:224 f), SD 36.14, a term I think that is better rendered as “living the celibate ever since he was just a boy,” since *brahma,cariya* itself connotes celibacy. Buddhaghosa says that in a former birth, Sanañ,kumāra practised dhyana while yet a boy (*kumāra*) at the stage where his hair was tied in 5 top-knots and was reborn in the brahma world. Even as a brahma, he often retained his youthful looks, hence his name (MA 3:33; SA 1:219). The oldest mention of **Sanat,kumāra** is in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad (ch 7). In the post-Buddhist work, Mahābharata (3:185, Bombay ed), he expresses a sentiment very similar to that of his verse here. Rhys Davids (D:RD 2:292 n3, cf 1:121 n1) sees the Sanañkumāra story as the Indian counterpart of the Arthurian legend of Galahad. It is possible that this closing section [§32], with the well-known verse, had been conveniently added later: it is unlikely for two young brahmins, albeit converts, to play up to the kshatriyas, esp when these two have been at the centre of **Vāseṭṭha S** that teaches equality of all the classes (M 98 = Sn no 9/p115-123). Cf Collins 1993a:376 n31.1. Further see SD 54.3d (2.2.3).

¹⁹³ “Knowledge and conduct” (*vijjā,caraṇa*), which are elaborated in **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 3.2.1-2/1:99 f), SD 21.3.

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