

PŪRVĀPARAPRAJÑĀBHINANDANAM
EAST AND WEST, PAST AND PRESENT

**Indological and Other Essays
in Honour of Klaus Karttunen**

EDITED BY

BERTIL TIKKANEN & ALBION M. BUTTERS

STUDIA ORIENTALIA 110

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CONTENTS

BERTIL TIKKANEN

Preface xi

Select Bibliography of Klaus Karttunen 1980–2010..... xv

Tabula Gratulatoriaxxiii

I INDOLOGY

GREG BAILEY

“Him I Call a Brahmin”: Further instances of intertextuality
between the Mahābhārata and some Pāli texts..... 3

HANS BAKKER

Origin and Spread of the Pāsupata Movement:
About Heracles, Lakulīśa and symbols of masculinity..... 21

JOHANNES BRONKHORST

Archetypes and Bottlenecks:
Reflections on the text history of the Mahābhārata 39

MANS BROO

Drama in the Service of Kṛṣṇa: Rūpa Gosvāmin’s Nāṭaka-Candrikā55

RAHUL PETER DAS

The Classical Āyurvedic Representation of Human Anatomy..... 67

MADHAV M. DESHPANDE

Ārṣa versus Anārṣa in Pāṇini and Allied Literature 85

HARRY FALK

Die Kurus und Ihre Jungen Frauen..... 93

MASATO FUJII

The Recovery of the Body after Death:

A prehistory of the *devayāna* and *pitryāna* 103

JAN MEULENBELD

Lakṣmaṇa's Yogacandrikā 121

PATRICK OLIVELLE

War and Peace: Semantics of *Samdhi* and *Vigraha* in the *Arthaśāstra*..... 131

ASKO PARPOLA

The Three Ways of Chanting in a Sacrificial Laud: Chapter two of Jaimini-
Paryadhya (Jaiminiya-Śrautasūtra III) with Bhavatrāta's commentary:

Sanskrit text with an annotated English translation..... 141

RICHARD SALOMON

The Macedonian Month Xandikos in Gandhāran Inscriptions 165

HENRI SCHILDT

Rare Mediaeval Kerala Murals at Kumbla, near Kasargode 171

BERTIL TIKKANEN

Domaki Noun Inflection and Case Syntax 205

II CLASSICAL AND INDO-EUROPEAN STUDIES

OUTI MERISALO

In Horis Sanguinis:

Physiology and Generation in the Pseudo-Galenic *De Spermate* 231

PETRI POHJANLEHTO	
Nasal Reduction in Late Luwian.....	243
JOUNA PYYSALO	
Fourteen Indo-European Etymologies in Honour of Klaus Karttunen.....	249
III HISTORY OF ORIENTAL STUDIES	
HARRY HALÉN	
Henrik Grenman and Olga Sederholm – Two unlucky Finnish Orientalists from the town of Vasa.....	273
TAPANI HARVIAINEN	
Syriac Poems Written by Finnish Scholars in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries	285
NADJA JOHANSSON	
Abraham Ibn Ezra on “The Scholars of India” – A twelfth century Jewish view of Indian astrology.....	297
KAJ ÖHRNBERG	
Georg August Wallin: An Orientalist between national and imperial orientalism	309
YAROSLAV VASSILKOV	
From the History of Indian Studies in Russia: Gerasim Lebedev and the Freemasons	317

“HIM I CALL A BRAHMIN”: FURTHER INSTANCES OF INTERTEXTUALITY BETWEEN THE MAHĀBHĀRATA AND SOME PĀLI TEXTS

Greg Bailey

The *Vāseṭṭha Sutta* occurs twice in the Pāli Canon (*Suttanipāta* [*Sn*] pp. 119–122;¹ *Majjhima Nikāya* ii No. 98) and one part of its content involves twenty-eight verses containing as their fourth *pāda* the words: *tam ahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇam*. These verses have also been extracted and included in the *Brāhmaṇavagga* of the *Dhammapada* (*DhP*).² In each of the three cases they form part of an attempt to define the image of the *brāhmaṇa* from a Buddhist perspective and in the case of the two *suttas* the Buddha is instructing the young *brāhmaṇa* Vāseṭṭha about the exact nature of the qualities that go to make up a brahmin. Not just the qualities, but also their mode of characterization by others. The teaching is that the brahmin is not one who is born such, but one who is observably such through his conduct.

All these passages are well known, but have not to my knowledge been compared to similar passages found at four places in the *Mahābhārata* (*MBh*). The equivalent phrase in all of these cases is: *taṃ devā brāhmaṇaṃ viduḥ* and all are framed in a relative-correlative clause in parallel with many of the Pāli verses. Though the enframing subjects are different – as they must be, given the different sources of authority in the two sets of texts – the syntactical constructions are sufficiently similar to be worthy of comparison from an intertextual perspective. In addition, there is certainly overlapping of content, though maddeningly no exact literal repetition,³ and a seemingly common purpose – explaining the identity of the brahmin – where there appears to be an expressed doubt as to the conditions whereby this identity should be categorized.

1 Andersen & Smith (1965). Norman, draws attention to a comparison of these verses with some occurring in the Jain *Sūyagaḍaṃga* and *Uttarādhyāyanasūtras*, which suggests the existence of a floating body of such verses. See Norman (1992: 263). I have not used the Jain material for this article. Nor do these verses seem to occur in Buddhist Sanskrit texts.

2 Carter & Palihawadana (1987: 391–416).

3 Avoidance of any sign of direct (or indirect) borrowing marks most, but not all, *MBh* passages that might show an intertextual relation with Buddhist literature in Pāli or Sanskrit.

Given the importance of the definition of the brahmin as opposed to that of the *bhikkhu*,⁴ and perhaps the *arahant*, in many parts of the Pāli Canon and the *MBh* it is not surprising that such verses should be found where (implied) debates about the image of the brahmin occur. It is clear the Buddha and the early monks regarded the brahmins as their intellectual opponents⁵ and he took pains to demonstrate a muted superiority over them. Equally, with the consolidation of *jāti* divisions as the fundamental ordering system of society and the elevation of the brahmin to the highest position, the *MBh* has as one of its fundamental sub-texts the exploration and definition of the normative relationship between the brahmin and the king, possibly with a view to counter the emerging influence of the *bhikkhu* in secular affairs in the background. Behind both sets of arguments is the distinction raised mainly by the Buddhists between ascribed and prescribed status.

The intertextual relation need not just be one of direct borrowing, though this is what Indologists have traditionally sought after. It can also be implied similarities and differences on the basis of common material, though it requires more than just a thematic similarity. The latter of course reflects common ideas in early historical Indian culture of a kind found across the literature of the three main religions. In the specific case I am concerned with here there is mainly thematic correspondence and, in one case, a contextual correspondence as well. I am making the assumption that the Buddhist material is earlier than the *MBh* equivalences, but that is simply an assumption, which is unprovable at this point of time. Pre-Buddhistic equivalences do not exist on the basis of the searches I have done.

THE BUDDHIST VERSION

Whilst the *Dhammapada* version is not contextualized in the sense of being embedded in a broader narrative plot, considerable narrative contextualization is given to the other two identical versions. In both the Buddha is depicted dwelling in Icchānaṃkala, an area inhabited by many wealthy and distinguished brahmins (*sambahulā abhiññātā brāhmaṇamahāsālā*). Two young brahmin students, Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja, are engaged in a debate about the manner in which one becomes a brahmin. For Bhāradvāja it is as a direct consequence of a good birth on both parents' side, a lineage that is irreproachable, hence status is determined solely by birth (*akkhitto anupakkuṭṭho jātivādena ettāvatā kho brāhmaṇo hotīti*).⁶

4 This might be a problematic category as the *bhikkhu* is a role model accepted in both Buddhist and Hindu texts.

5 See Bailey & Mabbett (2004: Ch. 5); Tsuchida (1971: 51–95).

6 Andersen & Smith (1965: 115).

Vāseṭṭha puts the opposite side in asserting that it is as a result of conduct, saying that "When one possesses virtuous conduct and is endowed with (good) vows, to such an extent one becomes a Brahman."⁷ (*yato kho bho silavā ca hoti vattasampanno ca ettāvata kho brāhmaṇo hotiti*).⁸ The former explanation seems to have solidified by the time of the *MBh*.

Unable to resolve the problem, Vāseṭṭha suggests approaching the Buddha – described in a stock phrase highlighting his special knowledge and status – for a solution. Clearly, neither thought it appropriate to approach one of the many distinguished brahmins living in the area, and by omitting them an initial criticism of the intellectual capacity of brahmins is tacitly implied. This further reinforces the apparent inadequacy of brāhmaṇical knowledge given the statement of their own qualifications (vs. 594–595) as being adept in the three Vedas and grammar, as well as having distinguished teachers.

In a tone of understated self-confidence the Buddha begins his response in verse, starting with the proposition that creatures other than men are distinguished by species (*liṅgaṃ jātimayaṃ tesam aññamaññā hi jātiyo* 601–606) and that the differences between them are obvious where they are not so amongst men (*evaṃ natthi manusseṣu liṅgaṃ jātimayaṃ puthu* 607). Amongst them "difference is spoken of as a matter of designation" (*liṅgaṃ jātimayaṃ neva yathā samaññāya pavuccati* 611), men do not differ in respect of their different bodily features. Then over a space of eight verses the Buddha distinguishes different livelihoods (*jīvati*), each having its own designation, none of which makes the person a brahmin. Arguably they correspond to what became the four classical *varṇas* of Hinduism. And then the point of standard in vs. 620:

Nor do I call (him) a brahman (who is) born in a (particular) womb, and has his origin in a (particular) mother. If he has possessions, he becomes a man who addresses others disrespectfully. If he has nothing and is without grasping, him I call a brahman.⁹

7 Norman (1992: 103)

8 Rephrased in 596:

Tesaṃ no jātivādasmiṃ vivādo atthi Gotama,

"jātiyā brāhmaṇo hoti" Bhāradvājo iti bhāsati.

ahañ ca kammanā brūmi, evaṃ jānāhi cakkhuma.

Cf. 599. *Cakkhūṃ loke samuppannaṃ mayaṃ pucchāma Gotamaṃ,*

jātiyā brāhmaṇo hoti udāhu bhavati kammanā,...

9 Norman (1992: 105), slightly modified.

620. *na cāhaṃ brāhmaṇaṃ brūmi yonijaṃ mattisambhavaṃ,*

bhovādi nāma so hoti sa ve hoti sakiñcano.

–akiñcanaṃ anādānaṃ tam ahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇam.

Following this there are twenty-seven verses (all repeated in the *DhP*) where the *brāhmaṇa* is defined and not one of these verses attributes any definitional authority to occupation or lineage. I cannot reproduce them all here; instead I have attempted to summarize the main themes of the actual component (the first three *pādas*) of each verse that defines the brahmin. What is immediately striking on reading these verses is the extent to which negatives are used everywhere, usually to indicate the total detachment from physical or psychological ties that the *arahant* seeks to achieve. The first verse is syntactically indicative of all the rest:

621. *sabbasaṃyojanaṃ chetvā yo ve na paritassati,*
saṅgātiḡaṃ viṣaṃyuttaṃ taṃ ahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇaṃ.

Whoever indeed, having cut every fetter, does not tremble, gone beyond attachment, unfettered, him I call a brahman.¹⁰

The following imply negation or the completed process of moving on from habitual ties: *sabbasaṃyojanaṃ jetvā*, *saṅgātiḡaṃ*, *viṣaṃyuttaṃ*. Each of these collectively is the reason as to why the brahmin does not tremble. Each is also a virtual cliché for describing the state of the liberated *arahant* and accordingly is repeated throughout this series of verses. *Viṣaṃyutta* occurs elsewhere at 626, 634 and 641 and the broad theme of being unfettered/beyond bonds is also found at 622, and may also be related to the general theme of “going beyond attachments”, see 621, 635, 636 (*saṅgaṃ upaccagā*), 643, and to the theme of having conquered/abandoned desire and craving (625, 634, 635, 638, 639–640, 646). Ontological descriptions of the enlightened state are also present 631, 635 (arrived at the deathless) 636 (*asokaṃ virajaṃ...*), 637, 638 (has gone beyond *saṃsāra*), 644 (*khīṇāsavaṃ arahantaṃ...*), 646 (*usabhaṃ pavaraṃ vīraṃ mahesiṃ vijitāvinaṃ...*), 647 (*jātikkhayaṃ patto...*), including two occasions where he is called *buddha* ‘enlightened’ (622, 646), 627 (having attained the supreme goal). Still others designate the kind of knowledge such a brahmin is believed to possess: 626 (knowing the destruction of his own *dukkha*), 627 (possessing profound wisdom, and skilled in the right and wrong paths), 635, 638 (having no doubts), 643 (knowing the rise and fall of living beings), 647 (knowing his past existences, and heaven and hell). Finally, some verses indicate his mode of behaviour in the world: 620, 630, 633, 645 (not taking anything), 623 (without hatred he endures ill-treatment and abuse, possesses endurance), 624 (he is not angry, is virtuous in conduct and keeps his vows, has no pride), 628 (he has no attachments to householders or

¹⁰ Norman (1992: 105), slightly modified.

ascetics), 629, 630 (he is non-violent), 632 (he speaks truly and not harshly), 630, 638 (*nibbuta*).

All of these categories definitely overlap as they do elsewhere in Pāli texts, but usually they are not found in as concentrated manner as they are here. In short, this is a description of a Buddha, though not one who is engaged yet in communicating the *dhamma*. Nor is it possible to find any sign of a diachronic development in these verses in the sense that they might describe the transition from the non-enlightened to the enlightened state for the individual being described, though in broad outline they do point to the conditions defining the two different states.

After these declarative verses about the proper designation of one who is a *brāhmaṇa*, the Buddha draws the only possible conclusion. In 648 he declares that what has been designated as name and clan in the world has been done so by agreement, and that only the ignorant (*ajānanta* 649) are of the view that a person becomes a brahmin by birth, whereas in truth, "By action one becomes a brahman; by action one becomes a non-brahman."¹¹ This leads to a brief disquisition about *kamma* and the point of the whole discussion is that one must fully understand *kamma* and *paṭiccasammupāda* until, "By austerity, by the holy life, by self-restraint and self-taming (*tapena brahmacariyena saṃyamena damena ca* 655ab), by this one becomes a brahman. This is the supreme state of being a brahman."¹²

What the Buddha is describing in this collection of verses is obviously an *arahant* figure who has completed the path, but he is attempting to universalize it by using the word *brāhmaṇa* to describe it. He is not just giving a picture of any monk. The verses are much stronger than this and should be read as describing a Buddha or an *arahant* in their most complete form.

A second version occurs in the *Dhp* and closely resembles what is found in the *Sn*, with the exception of a few additional verses using the same syntax and some other general statements about the *brāhmaṇa* derived from other sources. I have given (Carter and Palihawadana's rather literal and slightly modified) translations of these as they differ in some ways from the verses found in the *Vāsetṭhasutta*.

11 Norman (1992: 107). *kammanā brāhmaṇo hoti kammanā hoti abrahmaṇo* 650. Noted also by Black in the Upaniṣads. See Black (2007: 16), "Many of the narrative sections in particular are critical of those who are brahmins only by birth and those brahmins who continue to perform sacrifices. In other words, the Upaniṣads both criticize the old ways of achieving the status of brahmin and establish new ways of becoming a brahmin." Cf. pp. 40–41.

12 Norman (1992: 74).

For whom the farther shore or the nearer shore
Or both does not exist,
Who is free of distress, unyoked,
That one I call a *brāhmaṇa*. 385

The one meditating, free of passion, sitting,
His tasks done, free of the intoxicants,
Who has obtained the goal supreme,
That one I call a *brāhmaṇa*. 386

Of whom there is nothing wrong done
By body, speech or mind,
Who is restrained in these three bases,
That one I call a *brāhmaṇa*. 391

A person (*jantum*) who wears rags from a dust heap,
Lean, having veins [visibly] spread over his body,
Meditating alone in the forest,
That one I call a *brāhmaṇa*. 395¹³

Following this, verses 396–423 are identical with the totality of verses in *Sn* 623–650.

These are not contextualized in the same manner as the other two versions, for the very reason that the *DhP* serves a quite different purpose to the other two texts. Being a collection of pithy statements on twenty-six different subjects, it offers an accessible summary of what was considered of fundamental importance in Buddhist doctrine. Six (Chs 5, 6, 7, 14, 25 and 26) different role models are contained in the various chapters of this text and perhaps invite comparison with each other.

I have included these because they do not have the strong Buddhist imprint of the other brahmin verses found in the *Vāseṭṭhasutta* and the *DhP*. Vs. 385, 391 and 395 could virtually refer to any renouncer who has reached a state of dispassion. It does not present an image of the “social Brahmins” to which the Buddhist idea of the *brāhmaṇa* is opposed, focussing instead on the ascetic meditator.

THE MAHĀBHĀRATA VERSIONS

Of the five places where similar verses occur in the *MBh*, two (12, 229, 21cd–22ab; 12, 255, 33) consist of a single verse only and the other three total between six

¹³ Carter & Palihawadana (1987: 392–93, 397, 399).

and ten verses each.¹⁴ It is the latter, those occurring in 3, 197, 31–36; 12, 237, 11–14, 22–24, and 12, 261, 29–32, which are the most significant and each is contextualized in a different way, with the first inviting some comparisons with the *Vāseṭṭha Sutta*. Whilst this is significant from an inter-textual perspective, the totally different contexts of the two later passages are also noteworthy as an indicator of how the brahmin verses can easily be adapted to different contexts and purposes.

My reason for suggesting this is that the first of them occurs in a situation where the true identity of the brahmin is being contested and where the interlocutor providing the instruction is not a brahmin. Certainly this parallels the situation in the first two Buddhist versions, though in the *MBh* passage it is not a question of "religious rivals" coming into play, rather it concerns the status that should be accorded to brahmins in the light of conflicting demands of behaviour.¹⁵ That this passage occurs in the *Mārkaṇḍeyasamāsyaparvan* is also of significance given the likelihood of that very section containing other references to Buddhism.¹⁶

The relevant section begins with Yudhiṣṭhira questioning (196, 2) Mārkaṇḍeya about the greatness of women (*strīṇāṃ māhātmyam uttamam*) and the subtlety of dharma (*sūkṣmaṃ dharmam*), and this ultimately leads on to a discussion about *pativrata* and an illustration of how it is applied. In Ch. 197 Mārkaṇḍeya illustrates this with the story of a brahmin beggar, a wife and her husband, and the complexities of precedence involving gift-giving. The brahmin, Kauśika, is the absolute epitome of what a brahmin should be: he is a Vedic scholar, rich in austerities, he practices austerities and his conduct is based on dharma (197, 1). But he cannot control his anger. His power is such that once when a heron released its dung on him, he cursed it and killed it, leading him to be remorseful when he realized what he had done. Overcome with compassion he attributed his deed to being overwhelmed by *rāga* and *dveṣa* (197, 6b). Then he left for a begging round, going only to a pure house (7a) and requested the woman (*strī*) who greeted him to give him something. It is significant that no elaboration of her class status is given. She told him to wait so that she could clean a bowl with which to feed him. In the meantime, her husband returned and she forgot about the brahmin in order first to serve her husband scrupulously. Finally, she remembered the brahmin and took him something to eat. The brahmin was intensely

14 I exclude those occurring in star passages at 12, 177, 59–66 (replicating in part 12, 237, 12–13); 5, 92, 37d; and 14, 96, 15d. They are significant only in reaffirming the possibility of a floating collection of similar verses.

15 See Smet (2005).

16 See Bailey forthcoming.

annoyed at being kept waiting, but she defended herself by declaring that her husband had to take precedence over all else.

At this he lost patience and said, “Are not brahmins more important? You have made your husband more important. You are living by the householder’s law, yet you are treating the brahmins with contempt. Even Indra bows to them! What about a mortal on earth?” (21–22ab) To this she apologized and revealed her great knowledge of the brahmin’s power, yet continued to declare that her husband must receive precedence. She revealed that she knew the brahmin had killed the heron by virtue of his anger (*roṣāt* 30) and then for the next ten verses defined the true nature and conduct of a brahmin. These verses include those ending in the phrase “the gods know him to be a brahmin”, which can be read as verses given in justification of her own behaviour, now seemingly based on an excellent knowledge of a brahmin’s obligations:

Anger is the enemy that lives in the body of men, excellent brahmin, and he who abandons anger and delusion, him the gods know to be a brahmin.
 He who speaks truth here and satisfies his teacher, and does not engage in violence when violence is done to him, him the gods know to be a brahmin.
 He who has conquered his senses, who is fully focussed on the Law, devoted to Vedic study, pure, and who has brought desire and anger under control, him the gods know to be a brahmin.
 He who knows the law, has integrity, who considers the world to be identical to himself, and who is devoted to all the laws, him the gods know to be a brahmin.
 He who teaches and learns, sacrifices and makes others sacrifice, and who gives to his capacity, him the gods know to be a brahmin.
 The excellent brahmin who is celibate, studies the Vedas, and is utterly diligent in his Veda study, him the gods know to be a brahmin.¹⁷

Apart from the very general declarative statements about what is required for a person to be legitimately considered a brahmin, there is a definite commitment

17 *krodhaḥ śatruḥ śarīrastho manuṣyāṇāṃ dvijottama /
 yaḥ krodhamohau tyajati taṃ devā brāhmaṇaṃ viduḥ //
 yo vaded iha satyāni guruṃ saṃtoṣayeta ca /
 hiṃsitaś ca na hiṃseta taṃ devā brāhmaṇaṃ viduḥ //
 jīteṇdriyo dharmaparāḥ svādhyāyanirataḥ śuciḥ /
 kāmakrodhau vaśe yasya taṃ devā brāhmaṇaṃ viduḥ //
 yasya cātmasamo loko dharmajñāsyā manasvinaḥ /
 sarvadharmeṣu ca ratas taṃ devā brāhmaṇaṃ viduḥ //
 yo’ dhyāpayed adbhīta yajed vā yājayīta vā /
 dadyād vāpi yathāśakti taṃ devā brāhmaṇaṃ viduḥ //
 brahmacārī ca vedān yo adbhīta dvijottamaḥ /
 svādhyāye cāpramatto vai taṃ devā brāhmaṇaṃ viduḥ // (3, 197, 31–36)*

here to the maintenance of narrative continuity within the broader context of the verses. This is above all marked in the allusion to anger in the first two verses, a direct comment on the brahmin's own anger in cursing the heron. Beyond that the verses are rather bland and focus on that aspect of a brahmin's role directly associated with Vedic learning, sacrifice and dharma. This stands in sharp contrast with the Buddhist equivalents where ascetic detachment is given ultimate priority.

Once these verses are finished, she declared that a brahmin's wealth is study, calmness, honesty and restraint of the senses (38a–d), finishing up by suggesting that her brahmin interlocutor does not truly know dharma (*na tu tattvena bhagavan dharmān vetsīti me matiḥ* 40ef). She suggested that he will be educated about the law by visiting a hunter who lives in Mithilā. Agreeable to this he left for Mithilā. The next eight chapters convey what the hunter told him.

When he reached Mithilā, located in Janaka's exemplary kingdom, he finds the hunter, described as a *tapodbana* (198, 3) and subsequently as a *śūdra* (205, 19), in a slaughter-house selling venison and buffalo meat. The hunter realised who he was and took him to his home, where the brahmin expressed his sympathy for his cruel plight, only to be told by the hunter that this is a job considered appropriate for his family (*kulocitam idaṃ karma pitṛpaitāmahaṃ mama* 198, 19ab). But he was no ordinary hunter and proceeded over the next eight chapters to deliver teachings focussed on the various kinds of dharmas and *vṛttis* associated with the particular *varṇas*, extending even to some speculations about the *guṇa* theory and the *bhūtas*. It is really a manifesto of a society governed from the brahmin's perspective. Near the end of this section it becomes clear the hunter is really a fallen brahmin who was cursed (205, 24–206, 8) to lose his original status after hitting an ascetic with an arrow, thereby showing both his carelessness and also the breaking of his own *svadharma*.

Only at 204, 20 ff. is the original problem the brahmin experienced with the wife answered, for here the hunter says that his mother and father are his supreme deity, and because of this, even if it is not consistent with dharma (*adharmenāpi saṅyuktam*), he will do what he can to please them. The idea here is that service to one's parents is equivalent to the law, but the contradiction involved in breaking it is not answered.

A constant theme throughout these chapters is the need for brahmins to give up desire and anger and there is even the statement that: "Any serf who always rises to self-control, truthfulness and Law, I judge him a brahmin; for one becomes a brahmin through one's conduct."¹⁸ This has a very similar ring to *Sn* 650, though *kamma* is used there instead of *vṛtti*.

18 3, 206, 12–13ab *yas tu śūdro dame satye dharme ca satatotthitaḥ* /

It seems surprising that this extensive disquisition should be given to the brahmin, who, after all, already possesses the exemplary qualifications of brahminhood. But there is more to it than straightforward exposition, for the whole narrative raises the question of conflicting obligations within different categories of behavioural requirements: class and family. We are seemingly left with the conclusion that there are irreconcilable differences between correct forms of behaviour in different situations and this applies irrespective of the general motherhood statements about the conduct of the good (*sat*), understood as a general category.¹⁹ Yet the definition of a brahmin, whilst giving specificity in regard to the mention of Vedic study and sacrificial performance, seems to some extent to be independent of class.

In some respects the other two passages where our verse occurs in a concentration are less interesting than the one just cited, because they are found in contexts where there is little explicit conflict that seems to have required their usage. Occurring in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*, admittedly a text canvassing many diverse opinions, they form an uncontentious part of Bhīṣma's ongoing instructions to Yudhiṣṭhira relating to the nature of personhood and class behaviour. The first of them occurs in a chapter that has seemingly brought together a considerable amount of textual material for presenting a description of the fourth stage of life. As such it attempts to show a seamless transformation from one stage to the other after each has successfully been completed. Where the complication comes in is in the names given to the male who lives in the fourth stage of life. The subject of the practice is said to be a *muni* (237, 6) and in one verse preceding the brahmin verses the characteristics of a *bhikṣu* are given.²⁰ The brahmin verses are embedded in a series of others depicting the brahmin as a renouncer, a very similar intent to the passage from the *Sn* summarized above. Nonetheless, this chapter is difficult in content, containing many technical terms, and focussing in its later portion on the interpretation of the sacrifice as an offering of the interior fires. My translation is literal:

By himself alone the sky always becomes filled, by whom a place filled with people becomes empty:²¹ him the gods know to be a brahmin.

taṃ brāhmaṇam ahaṃ manye vṛttena hi bhaved dvijaḥ //
karmadoṣeṇa viṣamāṃ gatim āpnoti dāruṇām /

19 As in 3,198.70 *satyam eva garīyas tu śiṣṭācāraṇiṣevitam /*
ācāraś ca satāṃ dharmāḥ santaś cācāralakṣaṇāḥ //

20 See *kapālaṃ vṛkṣamūlāni kucelam asahāyatā /*
upekṣā sarvabhūtānām etāvad bhikṣulakṣaṇam // (12, 237, 7)

21 P.C. Roy, rightly, I think, associates this obscure verse with the effects achieved in practicing *pratyāhāra*, though I suspect the first line could be taken as a variant of what we find in the

He who clothes himself in anything, who eats anything, and who sleeps anywhere: him the gods know to be a brahmin.
 Who is as frightened of a group of people as of a snake, of good fortune as of hell, of a corpse as of women: him the gods know to be a brahmin.
 Who does not become angry when disparaged or rejoices when praised, who gives security to all creatures: him the gods know to be a brahmin. (12, 237, 11–14)
 ...
 Freed from all attachments is the sage who is like the sky, without possessions, who lives alone and is calm: him the gods know to be a brahmin.
 Whose livelihood is for the sake of the law, and for whom the law is superlative, night and day seeking for merit: him the gods know to be a brahmin.
 Who has no desires, no undertakings, makes no homage, does not praise anybody, who has not waned, but the effect of whose actions has waned: him the gods know to be a brahmin.²²

It is difficult to see a coherent thematic pattern here except for the very general statements about behavioural attitudes and the ontological state (without karma, freed from attachments) of the figure being described. Contextually it fits with the behavioural and ontological expectations of one ensconced in the fourth state, but any real specificity to the verses seems lacking.

The next passage is contextualized by some discourses attempting to reconcile the goal of liberation as one possible both for the renouncer and the householder. It rehearses a hackneyed theme pervasive in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* of the conflict between renunciation and life in the social world as offering the best path, either to heaven or escape from *saṃsāra*. The point seems to be that the *brāhmaṇa* is required to straddle both possibilities, as difficult as this really was believed to be, judging from the large amount of space it is allocated in this *parvan*. And whilst there is an implied conflict here, this particular *adhyāya* turns

Buddhist *brahmavihāras*. See Roy (1976: 197, n. 2).

22 *yena pūrṇam ivākāśaṃ bhavaty ekena sarvadā /
 śūnyaṃ yena janākīrṇaṃ taṃ devā brāhmaṇaṃ viduḥ //
 yena kena cid ācchanno yena kena cid āśītaḥ /
 yatrakvacanaśāyī ca taṃ devā brāhmaṇaṃ viduḥ //
 aber iva gaṇād bhūtaḥ sauhṛityān narakād iva /
 kuṇapād iva ca strībhyas taṃ devā brāhmaṇaṃ viduḥ //
 na krudhyen na prahṛīyec ca mānito mānitaś ca yaḥ /
 sarvabhūteṣv abhayaḥ taṃ devā brāhmaṇaṃ viduḥ // (12, 237, 11–14)...
 vimuktaṃ sarvasaṅgebhyo munim ākāśavat sthitam /
 asvam ekacaraṃ śāntaṃ taṃ devā brāhmaṇaṃ viduḥ //
 jīvitaṃ yaśya dharmārthaṃ dharmo ratyartham eva ca /
 aborātrāś ca puṇyārthaṃ taṃ devā brāhmaṇaṃ viduḥ //
 nirāśiṣam anārambhaṃ nīnamaskāram astutim /
 akṣīṇaṃ kṣīṇakarmāṇaṃ taṃ devā brāhmaṇaṃ viduḥ // (12, 237, 22–24)*

out to be very wide ranging in its content, and in the end succeeds in arguing for the validity both of sacrificial performances and renunciation as correct means for paying off the debts to the ancestors, the gods and the sages. The verses in question are the following:

Who, when he is resting, does not wear an upper garment, nor sleeps on something beneath him, and whose pillow is his arm: him the gods know to be a brahmin.

In circumstances where all people enjoy living together, that sage (*muni*) delights in being alone, and does not worry about others: him the gods know to be a brahmin.

He who understands all this, both fundamental nature and its modifications, and knows the destiny of all beings: him the gods know to be a brahmin.

He who has no fear from all beings and towards whom nobody has any fear, and who has become the self of all beings: him the gods know to be a brahmin.²³ (261, 29–32)

This certainly differs from the first two, although it shares the ascetic imperative found in Ch. 237. It is quite apparent that the description of the brahmin here is of a figure living in the fourth stage of life, even if it does cut this down to the fundamentals of behaviour, attitude, knowledge and the effect of his personal demeanour on other beings. And whilst it is consistent with the general teachings on asceticism found throughout the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*, it does not seem to add anything obvious to the argument made in the first verse of this chapter.

COMPARISON OF THE VERSES

The syntactic structure of the declarative phrases in all of these verses I have just presented is similar. It is a typical feature that the first three *pādas* are taken up by the delineation of particular qualities enabling a person to be judged a brahmin, with *pāda* d containing the assertion that he is a brahmin. As such the fourth *pāda* should be considered as placing precise limits on the theme treated in the verse and so governs the material that can be slotted into the first three *pādas*. Though the verbs used differ in the Hindu and Buddhist versions and though the subjects

23 *anuttarīyavasānam anupastīrṇaśāyīnam /*
bāhūpadhānaṃ śāmyantaṃ taṃ devā brāhmaṇaṃ viduḥ //
dvaṃdvārāmeṣu sarveṣu ya eko ramate munīḥ /
pareṣāṃ ananudhyāyaṃ taṃ devā brāhmaṇaṃ viduḥ //
yena sarvaṃ idaṃ buddhaṃ prakṛtir vikṛtiś ca yā /
gatijñāḥ sarvabhūtānāṃ taṃ devā brāhmaṇaṃ viduḥ //
abhayaṃ sarvabhūtebhyaḥ sarveṣāṃ abhayaṃ yataḥ /
sarvabhūtātmabhūto yas taṃ devā brāhmaṇaṃ viduḥ //

of the declaration are in the plural and the singular, the fourth *pāda* is so similar in all cases as to suggest the presence of a standard set of verses capable of being drawn upon to describe a brahmin. This in turn suggests that these verses must have been accorded a degree of status outside of the traditions from which they originated, which suggests these traditions were much closer in outlook than might be thought at first glance.

The verses from the Buddhist texts do not overlap literally with any of the verses found in the *MBh*, and only a few are remotely similar in wording, even though many overlap in content. Here are the only examples I could find where both wording and content show some similarity:

1. *MBh* 3,197, 32cd *hiṃsitaś ca na hiṃseta taṃ devā brāhmaṇaṃ viduḥ //*
Sn 630ab. *aviruddhaṃ viruddhesu attadaṇḍesu nibbutaṃ /*
2. *MBh* 12, 237, 24ab *nirāśiṣam anārambhaṃ .../*
Sn 634ab. *āsā yassa na vijjanti asmin loke parambhi ca /*

Accordingly it is to content and context we must turn in order to make any sensible comparison. It is easy to see the verses in the Buddhist texts as exclusively depicting a person who is entirely disengaged from any networks, both psychological and social, in which he could be potentially involved. In fact, these verses are dominated by this tendency of disengagement to such an extent that of the twenty-eight verses fifteen allude to the necessity for the disentanglement from social networks of the person who can be considered a brahmin. 628 exemplifies the strength of this disengagement: "Not in contact with householders and houseless ones alike, not frequenting houses, having little desire, him I call a brahmin."²⁴ Hence the social and psychological isolation. Such a person is not just a monk, and in theory need not even be a Buddhist. What is created here is probably more an ideal (increasingly becoming so the longer the gap between the death of the Buddha and the growth of the *saṃgha*) than a reality as all these declarative verses represent idealized situations. If anything they describe the Buddha himself as he would have liked to be seen just after he has attained enlightenment.

The concentration of words for non-attachment gives these verses a much stronger imprint than the equivalent verses in *MBh* 3, 197, though the verses at 12, 237, 11–14, 22–24 are certainly similar in the emphasis on social disengagement and the withdrawal they imply. Contextual factors lie behind this. The brahmin of *MBh* 3, 197 is a much more social figure and his connection with dharma and

²⁴ Norman (1992: 106).

Vedic learning is very strongly highlighted. And here is a significant difference between the two sets of texts. As one might expect Vedic learning is stressed in a positive manner, where it is, unsurprisingly, never mentioned in the *Sn* version, though it is strongly countenanced in the frame story. Dharma is stressed in the *MBh* version (197, 33a) *dharmaparaḥ*, (34,b) *dharmajñāsyā*, (34c) *sarvadharmeṣu*, concepts entirely absent in the Buddhist versions. In part because the orthoprax brahmin in these texts is much more of a social figure – he is required to teach the Veda, to give and to perform sacrifices – than the stringent renunciatory figure of the *Sn*. This reflects the ambiguity often found in the *MBh* view of the brahmin where either the renunciatory side is stressed or the socio-ritual side.

In the *Sn*, *MN* and *MBh* 3, 197, the occurrences of the declarative verses are found where a non-brahmin is declaring to a brahmin the defining characteristics of a role the brahmin is expected to follow if he fits the norm. The Buddha is certainly not a brahmin and is implicitly contrasted against the brahmins of named lineages who are *mahāsālā* brahmins of great renown. The two brahmins, Vāsetṭha and Bhāradvāja, engaged in the debate come from famous lineages, both know the three Vedas and are educated in grammar and recitation. Similar is the case of the brahmin in *MBh* 3, 197 who is instructed by the woman. His potted biography matches closely those of Vāsetṭha and Bhāradvāja, because he is a superb brahmin (*dvijātīpravaro, dvijasattamaḥ*), studies and knows the Vedas (*vedādhyāyī, sāṅgopaniṣadān vedān adhīte*), has practised tapas (*tapodhanaḥ, tapasvī*) and typically adheres to the law (*dharmasīlaś*) (3, 197, 1–2b). Such an exemplary figure is he that one can wonder why he needed instruction at all. Nonetheless he is instructed by a woman whose *varṇa* identity is not revealed to us, though she is scrupulous in observing her own *svadharmā* as a *patnī* and is aware of a weakness in the brahmin exemplified in his loss of control when he cursed the heron. Then at his guidance he is given instruction by a man of such low class that he would have polluted the brahmin, yet this possibility is never mentioned in the text at all.

Given the self-confidence exhibited by brahmins in early Buddhist literature the Buddha's quiet modesty is often employed as a weapon to debunk them. However, considering the centrality of brahmin influence in the Sanskrit *MBh* it is not at all clear why non-brahmin figures should be lecturing brahmins about their own dharma, yet there are a string of these in the *MBh*, e.g. Vidūra and Bhīṣma, who engage in such instruction.

Both sets of texts differ on their treatment of the justificatory weight that should be accorded to tradition. In the qualification of the brahmins given in the *Sn* and the names of several prominent lineages of brahmins also provided there, the weight of Vedic tradition, and the knowledge of it, as a hereditary mark of a

brahmin is definitely implied. Of course, this is overturned by the Buddha who focuses simply on conduct, the nature of which is elaborated in the declarative verses defining the condition of a brahmin. In contrast, the wife and the hunter who advise the brahmin do not shrink from citing the Vedic learning as a pre-eminent source of authority (3, 197, 39; 200, 1), with study of the Vedas being recommended frequently (see 3, 198, 56–59, 78), yet this seems to have left gaps in Kauśika's knowledge.

Context differs the two other *MBh* passages (12, 237, 11–14, 22–24; 261, 29–32) from the first and from the Buddhist versions of the verses. Both are embedded in chapters where there is not an explicit disjunction between brahmin and non-brahmin and where seemingly the problems about the identity of the brahmin have been resolved. Yet the occurrence of the verses in these chapters in an apparently neutral context suggest the problems of brahmin identity had not been resolved, just transformed with the recognition that several such identities could be asserted depending on the stage of life they are in and whether emphasis is laid on renunciation or social engagement.

CONCLUSION

Brian Black in his recent book on the image of the brahmin in the Upaniṣads has shown the extent to which the status of the brahmin as teacher and ritualist was not just being developed in the earliest Upaniṣads, but was at the same time being highly contested.²⁵ This was not necessarily a contestation between brahmins and non-brahmins as between brahmins with each other. No doubt this was a necessary part of the development of the image of the brahmin. And it is also raised in a different context throughout the Pāli Canon and to a lesser extent in Jain literature. This has resulted in an enormous amount of literary material in the Pāli Canon and the *Mahābhārata* dealing with the conditions under which a person can be called a brahmin. This material includes the verses analysed in this article which may well come from a floating body of oral texts that could be drawn upon by whoever sought to use them. These verses are highly rhetorical in their intent and operate at the level of ideology, prescriptiveness and polemic rather than at a descriptive level of how brahmins may have actually functioned in an empirical sense.

The whole idea of brahminhood (if that is the right term?) is highly contested in both Buddhist and brahmin/Hindu texts, especially so judging from the number of brahmins praised as being converts to the *saṃgha*. Yet the idea of the brahmin

²⁵ See Black (2007).

as a particular kind of religious figure is not contested, only what the word might actually mean and, by implication, how the different social manifestations of the brahmin may or may not conform to this ideal. In both our literary sources the latter becomes extremely important because of the developing rigidity in the *varṇa* system, because of the necessity for the brahmin to engage in “secular” occupations whilst retaining the profound religious foundation to his identity, and because of the increasing depiction of the brahmin as a specialist for the purposes of attracting patronage.

Knowing this does not tell us why the Buddhists and the Jains needed to present an ideal image of the brahmin when they could have drawn from their own lexicon of religious specialists. Indeed, the brahmin in the verses found in the Buddhist verses is probably a Buddha and at least an *arahant*. Is it because the Buddhist imaging of the brahmin was primarily for polemical purposes, standing in sharp contrast to the actual avaricious behaviour of brahmins depicted in narrative situations in the Pāli Canon? In contrast did the brahmin redactors of the *MBh* take the level of brahmin conversion to Buddhism seriously or was it just the conspicuous success of the institutionalized *saṃgha* that had become a point of concern for them? Whatever the case (and both could be relevant here), in the ongoing project of the brahmins to catalogue normative views about themselves, and to do this repeatedly, existing oral traditions from non-brahminical sources would surely have been taken into consideration. Consider that the *Dhammapada*, in particular, is a popular compilation the monks used for teaching to lay Buddhists, then emergent Hindu brahmins may have had a cause to appropriate extant material, known to lay-people and to turn this into a weapon they could use for themselves.

Finally, what does this tell us about intertextuality, specifically about the connecting links and the motivations for borrowing and adaptation if this is what it should be called? In the first instance I am assuming the chronological priority of the Buddhist verses over the *MBh* verses, though of course I am unable to prove this. But the evidence for determining who borrowed these verses and adapted them to fit a revised agenda of brahminical identity can certainly not be determined in our present state of knowledge. Yet if the brahmin verses were known as a floating stock of oral tradition, the temptation by brahmin apologists to use them must have been considerable, and given the requirements of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* to present critically as much material about the brahmin as possible the use of these verses would have been irresistible.

One final question may be raised, though not answered at this stage. Does the word *brāhmaṇa* in each of these verses carry exactly the same meaning or are different meanings implied? Difference here would arise out of taking the word

brāhmaṇa to mean ‘he who possesses/relates to the Brahma’, where the latter could bring with it a range of possibilities. Simply to accept the understanding that we are dealing here with the *brāhmaṇa varṇa* may be taking the whole question too narrowly. And this is clearly established in the *Vāseṭṭhasutta* where the definition of a brahmin as one who conforms to the ritualist role associated with the *brāhmaṇa varṇa* is rejected (*Sn* vs. 618).

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