

Varna System In Dhammapada And Uttaradhyayanasutra

Dr. Kanhaiya Lal Chaudhary¹, Dr. Jaswant Singh Yadav²

²*Co- author, Assistant professor
IPCW_Delhi university.*

Summary: The Dhammapada and Uttaradhyayana Sutra provide glimpses of the attitudes of Buddhist and lay traditions toward the ancient Indian Brahmin caste system. While the Dhammapada lacks much of this material, its references to the Brahmin caste system clearly point to the existence of the Brahmin caste system. Ancient Buddhist literature contains abundant material on this subject elsewhere, and numerous scholars have compiled and translated it.¹ Even in that era, society was divided according to the four varnas: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. The Dhammapada defines Brahmins as an independent category. It is a different matter that the caste system, plagued by the notion of superiority and inferiority, was crippling society at that time. This is why Buddhist texts strongly condemn the caste system and emphasize the place of birth. The Dhammapada states that one cannot be called a Brahmin simply because one is born from a mother's womb.² If he is wealthy, he is merely a materialist. Buddha does not accept the superiority of Brahmins. He says that any human being is superior or inferior on the basis of moral development, not on the basis of caste or occupation. The explanation of Lord Buddha's above-mentioned concept is found in the Asalayana Sutta of Majjhima Nikaya, in which Lord Buddha has refuted the false notions related to caste distinctions and has established the concept of salvation or moral purification of all the four classes.³ Thus it is known that in the Buddhist period, the basis for determining the caste system was a person's actions, his conduct and thoughts and his virtuous-moral life.

Important words- Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra.

Introduction

¹Fick, Richard, Social Organization in North East India in Buddha's Time, pp. 85, 253, 321, 322, Singh, Madan Mohan, Society and Religion during the Age of Buddha, p. 22, Majjhitanipakaya, Vol. 2, pp. 84, 128 Digha Nikaya, Vol. 1, pp. 90-91, 103, Suttanipata, 1/21, 3/9/57, Anguttaranikaya, 1, p. 19 Udana, 1/5 Mehta, N. Rati Lal, Pre Buddhist India, p. 245, History of the Development of Buddhism Pandey, Govindchandra, pp. 27-31, Buddhist India, Rees, Davids, T. W, Buddhist India, p. 50-55 and A Comparative Study of the Ethics of Jainism, Buddhism and the Gita, Part 2, pp. 178-1791.

² Na chah brahminam brumi yonijam matti sambhavam. The name 'Bhoavadi' is so hoti sechehote sakinchano. Dhammapada, 396 and comparative study of the ethical philosophies of Jainism, Buddhism and Geeta, Part 2, page 179.

³ Assalayanassutta (Majjhimnikaya, 2/5/3) p. 390.

The Jain caste system is centered on self-discipline. Breaking away from the confines of theism and growing within the embrace of effort, action, and egalitarianism, Jain culture and its social system embody a revolutionary philosophy. Its central principle is to present a socialist system based on action, in opposition to the Vedic caste system based on birth. Which Jain monk has forgotten the story of the great sage from the twenty-fifth chapter of the Uttaradhyayana Sutra? Born into a Brahmin family, there was a yajna-performing Brahmin named Jayaghosh. At that time, a celibate, great sage, a shraman, wandered into the city of Varanasi and stopped in a garden outside. A Brahmin well-versed in the Vedas, Vijayghosh, was performing a yajna. Upon seeing the sage, the yajna-performing Brahmin refused to accept alms, stating that only those Brahmins who were versed in the Vedas and knew astrology could receive alms there. The great sage was neither angry nor pleased with this response. He said, "You don't understand the Vedas, sacrifices, religion, and the divine principle. If you do, please tell me." The sacrificial Brahmin was unable to answer the sage's question. He folded his hands and said, "Mahamuni, tell me about the Vedas, sacrifices, religion, and the divine principle. How can one attain supreme bliss? Clear my doubts by telling me this." Describing the divine principle, the great sage said, "A person becomes a Brahmin by religion, a Kshatriya by action, a Vaishya by action, and a Shudra by action itself. A person does not become a Shramana merely by shaving his head, a Brahmin by chanting the Omkara, a Muni by living in the forest, or an ascetic by wearing Kusha robes. Rather, one becomes a Shramana by equanimity, a Brahmin by celibacy, a Muni by knowledge, and an ascetic by practicing penance with perfect knowledge."⁴

The great sage said that only those truly endowed with such noble qualities, who truly understand the essence of the Supreme Being, understand the essence of the Supreme Being. A similar story is also found in the twelfth chapter of the text. This story concerns the sage Harikeshi. Harikeshi was born into a Chandala clan. Through his austerities, he became a renowned sage. Like the great sage, when he went to the sacrificial hall to beg for alms, the sacrificial leaders scorned him and refused to give him alms. In the eyes of the sacrificial leaders, he was unworthy of alms. In their view, birth in a Brahmin family was essential to become a sacrificial hall beggar. When Harikeshi revealed the true nature of the alms bowl, it struck them as harsh and, intoxicated with anger, they began to attack the sage. The Yakshas immediately protected the sage and meted out appropriate punishment to those who attacked him. Seeing the miracle of the sage's penance, everyone was astonished and said, "The speciality of penance is clearly visible and the speciality of caste is not visible anywhere. Despite being the son of a Chandala, Harikesi Muni has attained such great wealth due to the influence of penance."⁵ Jain texts, too, harshly criticize the caste system, which is based on caste discrimination and discrimination based on high and low. Thus, it is known from

⁴ Jahinta puvvasanyogam naisange ya bandhve.

Visese Kammuna Hoi Suddo Havai Kammuno. Uttaradhyayan, 25/28-33.

⁵ Sakkham khudisai tavo viseso

Nā di sai jaivises koi.

Sovagputta Hariṣa Sahu

Jasserissaidi mahānubhāga. Ibid., 12/37.

classical, historical, and other evidence that since time immemorial, the status of the caste system in Jainism has been based on caste, not birth. The basis of superiority is not caste or occupation, but moral development. Caste is changeable. The door to moral practice is open to all. All four castes are eligible to enter the Shramana order.

Comparative studies reveal that the caste system in Buddhism and Jainism was initially based not on birth but on merit. According to them, a person who possesses outstanding abilities in knowledge, truth, righteousness, study, and spiritual wisdom is a true Brahmin; one who is adept at heroic deeds is a Kshatriya; and one who devotes his life to service can be called a Shudra. The principles of both religions did not oblige a person born into a Shudra family by divine grace to perform menial tasks throughout his life. The organization of human society was based on the principles of merit and excellence. Due to changes in time, place, and circumstances, divergent views arose within both Buddhism and Jainism, but within both religions, a glimpse of the same culture remains as before.

The Buddhist and Jain traditions considered good conduct to be the epitome of highness and lowness in human life. That is, good conduct is considered the symbol of a Brahmin. The 26th chapter of the Dhammapada and the 25th chapter of the Uttaradhyayana Sutra provide detailed descriptions of who a Brahmin is and what their characteristics are. First, the significance of the word Brahmin is described. In reality, Brahmin status cannot be attributed to a specific caste or lineage; it merely symbolizes human qualities. According to Lord Buddha and Mahavira, a Brahmin is one who has properly cultivated human qualities in his life, which include purity of conduct, purity of mind, purity of thought, purity of behavior, and spiritual attainment. Against this backdrop, the concept of a Brahmin can be depicted in the following sequence:

A true Brahmin is revered and worshipped by people, like fire, and possesses radiance.⁶ One who has no attachment to anyone, is free from joy and sorrow and is engaged in self-study, is the true Brahmin because he possesses all the qualities of Brahminhood.⁷ Similarly, the soul which has made itself completely pure by removing the external fear and the internal attachment and hatred through the means of material things, is truly called a Brahmin, because within it, the four qualities which lead to Brahminhood, i.e., the ritual of penance, suppression of senses, observance of the rituals and complete equality are present.⁸ He who does not cause pain to any living being, whether moving or stationary, through mind, speech, or body, and does not inspire anyone to cause pain, and who does not consider it good if someone does cause pain. The meaning is that only he who follows the religion of non-violence for the three yogas and three reasons, is worthy of being called a true Brahmin.⁹ Along with describing the nature of Brahminhood, it was also stated that people lie due to reasons like anger, pride, illusion, greed, humor and fear. Some people lie in the heat of anger. Some people are restrained from telling lies due to greed. And many people have been seen lying due to fear

⁶ Dhammapada, 410, 411, 416, Uttaradhyayana Sutra, 25/20, 211.

⁷ Dhammapada, 394, 400, Uttaradhyayana Sutra, 25/22.

⁸ Dhammapada, 405, 406, Uttaradhyayana, 25/22.

⁹ Dhammapada, 400, Uttaradhyayana, 25/241.

and humor. But the person who does not lie even when these valid reasons are present is actually a true Brahmin.¹⁰ All the objects in the world are divided into two parts: Sachitva (living, conscious) and Achiitva (non-living, lacking consciousness). This means that one desires to accept something without being offered. Therefore, no matter what the object is, the scriptures prohibit taking it unless its owner gives permission. Meaning, a person who does not accept anything offered is considered a true Brahmin.¹¹ Even mental thoughts of lust and the prevention of arousing subjects through words are forbidden for a celibate. Because those who harbor sexual desire and who, through their speech, describe arousing objects in beautiful words cannot be said to be fully practicing celibacy. Rather, one who has renounced sexual intercourse, who is calm and free from suffering, abandoning love and aarti, is called a complete celibate, a hero who has conquered all worlds, and a true Brahmin.¹² Just as a lotus, being born from the stem, stays above the water and despite getting growth due to water, does not get engulfed by water, in the same way, the one who gets growth due to sensual pleasures but does not get engulfed in it, is called a true Brahmin.¹³ Thus, the basic qualities of Brahminhood were described. Now, it is also being described through the secondary qualities. A person who is free from greed, that is, not intoxicated by pleasures, who travels by water through begging, who is free from home and attachments, who has renounced material things, and who does not have much contact with householders, and who possesses these ethical qualities is called a Brahmin.¹⁴ A person cannot become a Shramana simply by shaving his head, unless he possesses Shramana qualities. Nor can a man become a Brahmin simply by chanting the Gayatri mantra Omkara (Om Bhur Bhuvah Swaha). Rather, it is essential to possess Brahmin-like qualities. Similarly, merely residing in a forest cannot make one a sage, nor can wearing bark clothes make one an ascetic.¹⁵ The meaning is that all these external pomp and show are only for identification; they have no relation to the accomplishment of the task. The accomplishment of the task is related to the inner means only. One whose soul is free from attachment, hatred etc. and is culminating in equanimity is called a Shramana. Similarly, one who observes celibacy in mind, speech and body is called a Brahmin. Similarly, one becomes a Muni through knowledge. That is, one who is proficient in the knowledge of the elements is a Muni. Similarly, one who practices penance is called Tapas. The control of desires is called Tapas. That is, one who has controlled desires is an ascetic. Thus it is seen that a person can become a Shramana, Brahmin, Muni and Tapasvi only through qualities and not just through external appearance.¹⁶ In this way, by worshipping these religions, this soul graduates and becomes completely free from the bondage of karma.¹⁷ The meaning is that by following the Mahavratas of Ahimsa properly, this soul attains only knowledge and completely

¹⁰ Dhammapada, 390, 409, Uttaradhyayana, 25/25.

¹¹ Dhammapada, 418, Uttaradhyayana, 25/26.

¹² Dhammapada, 401, Uttaradhyayana, 25/27.

¹³ Dhammapada, 404, Uttaradhyayana, 25/28.

¹⁴ Dhammapada, 264, 266, 268, 270, 393, Uttaradhyayana, 25/31.

¹⁵ Dhammapada, 265, 269, Uttaradhyayana, 25/32.

¹⁶ In Jainism, the name of a graduate is Kevalin, and in Buddhism, Buddha is considered a graduate. Uttaradhyayana Sutra, Atmaram Commentary, pp. 11, 331.

¹⁷ Dhammapada 422, Uttaradhyayana, 25/341.

destroys all types of karma. He is the true Brahmin. In this way, the characteristics of a Brahmin described are actually the truth.¹⁸ That is, only the person who is marked by these characteristics or is endowed with these qualities should be called a Brahmin. The true form of Brahminhood has been displayed very well in both the texts. The answer to which man can be capable of saving his own and others' souls has been given in the present text.

Only a soul that possesses all the qualities of Brahminhood, such as non-violence and truth, is capable of liberating itself and others, and therefore is the best among the twice-born. Conversely, a soul lacking these qualities is not truly a true devotee of sacrifice or a follower of the Dharma. Just as mud cannot be purified by mud, so too can the soul be purified by committing cruel acts like violence. Therefore, to become a true Brahmin and to become the savior of self and others, it is absolutely essential to possess the aforementioned qualities. The descriptions of the true Brahmin found in both texts not only share conceptual similarities but also clear verbal similarities.

¹⁸ Dhammapada, Verses 361-362.