V. Semi-divine beings, legendary sages and demons

Apart from the gods, one can meet several types of groups and individuals of the demons, the semi-divine beings, and the sages of various kinds in Indian mythology. Some stand almost on equal footing with the gods, some are between the gods and men, and some are even above the gods. Their roles and activities are also different from one another. They are closer to the gods in their appearances and supernatural powers, and nearer to men in their activities and styles. The semi-divine beings function as supporters, helpers and entertainers for the gods, and they are wonders and fantasies for men. The demons, having power equal to the gods, take the role of opponents and adversaries of the gods, and they create terror and fear for men. The sages, being originally men who achieve god-power, are kind of mediators between the gods and men. They are the objects of fear for the gods, and ultimate aim for meditating men. The existence and features of various semi-divine beings and the sages make Indian mythology much more rich. And these beings fill the Indian myths with diverse flavour.

Out of these various beings this chapter throws more light on the sages. The other semi-divine beings and the demons are dealt with in passing. Barring the sages, other kinds of super-human beings are commonly found in almost all mythologies. It is very unique that in Indian mythology alone the stories if sages are found.
1. The semi divine beings

A large number of semi-divine beings appear in Indian mythology both in Sanskrit and Pāli literature. The RV. refers to the *apsarasas* and the *gandharvas*, *yakṣas*, and *pitṛs*. Apart from these beings, more semi-divine beings are mentioned in the Tipiṭakas and the Mbh., such as, *nāgas, kinnaras* or *kimpuruṣas* and *siddhas, kumbhanḍas* (only in Pāli literature), and also as a peculiar type of being, *pitṛs* or *pretas* (or *petas* in Pāli). These beings are generally differentiated according to their function.

(i) The Pitṛs

The *Pitṛs* or the *pretas* (*petas* in Pāli) are departed spirits of dead persons. They are neither demons nor semi-divine beings. In the Vedas, they are considered to be the early or the first ancestors. They are the blessed dead who dwell in Yama’s world. Hence the status of the *pitṛs* is considerably higher. They are said to deserve a share of Soma¹ and they come for Soma banquet². They are supposed to

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¹ RV. X. 15. 1: *udiratāmavara uparāsa unmadhyamāḥ pitaraḥ somyāsāḥ* / “May they ascend, the lowest, highest, midmost, the Fathers who deserve a share of Soma”. Also in RV. X. 15. 5: *upahūtāḥ pitaraḥ somyāso bārhīṣyeṣu nidhiṣu priyeṣu* / “Fathers who sat in sacred grass, come, help us these offerings have we made for you; accept them.” (Griffith translation)

² RV. X. 15. 8: *ye naḥ pūrve pitaraḥ somyāsao ’nūhīre somapītham vasiṣṭhāḥ* / “Our ancient Fathers who deserve Soma, who came, most noble, to our Soma banquet” (Griffith translation)
punish men for their sin (RV. X. 15. 6). They revel with Yama and take their food
with the gods. They come in the same vehicle as Indra and the gods
(RV. X. 14. 10). They sit on the sacrificial grass (RV. X. 15. 4). They protect their
worshippers. They are invoked for riches, children, and for long life for their sons
who desire to be in their good grace (RV. X. 15. 7). Thus they are said to have
adorned the sky with stars, to have placed darkness in the night and light in the
day. The path trodden by the fathers (pitrāṇa) is different from that trodden by
the gods (devayāṇa).

The Buddhistic peta is quite different from the Rg Vedic ones. They are dead on
earth and are reborn in different worlds according to merits or demerits earned
through their deeds, and after their period of expiation shift into another form of
existence. Dīg. defined the term peta as petāṇam-kālarikatānam, ‘he whose term
of his life has expired’. ‘They are supposed to have the nearest connection with
human beings. Those who are virtuous have a happy destiny after death and attain
the status of the devas, and those who are vicious have an unhappy destiny. The
Buddhistic petas, in the narrow sense of the term, are like the Vedic pitṛs, the
dwellers of pettivisaya or pitṛloka.

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1 cf, Macdonell, ‘A Vedic Reader for the students’, p. 176, and also Ragozin, ‘Vedic India’,
p. 177

2 Śīḷa Sutta, Dīg. III. 8.
The *Pitṛs* or the *pretas*, in the *Mbh.*, are almost confined to one’s own ancestors. They often impose themselves upon their descendants and interfere in their actions, especially related to their further lineage\(^1\).

**(ii) The gandharvas and the apsarasas**

The *gandharvan* and the *apsarasas*, in most of the texts, are described as husband and wife. The *gandharva* are invoked in the marriage ceremony\(^2\) due to their connection with fertility. They are strikingly handsome beings, and might have been sexually attractive and seductive in nature, hence, in the *RV. X. 85. 22*, the newly married husband drives away a *gandharva*. Originally it was said that there was only one *gandharva* presided over the fragrance of flowery trees of the spring. But he became many when connected with the *apsarasas*, through the medium of waters\(^3\). The abode of the *apsarasas* is said to be the waters (AV. II. 2. 3). The *apsarasas* are allied not only with the gods but also with the men throughout the different texts. In the *RV*, only one *apsaras* is mentioned by name, the famous *Urvaśī* (RV. X. 95). Vasiṣṭha is said to be born of the *apsaras* (RV. VII. 33. 12).

In the Epics, both the *gandharvas* and the *apsarasas* functioned as entertainers of the gods on account of their beauty and their skill in the art of singing and dancing, *apsarasas* entertaining by their dance, *gandharvas* by their music. In the

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\(^1\) Read the following sub-chapter ‘The legendary sages’.


Epics, beauty of the *apsarasas* is used as a powerful instrument or a weapon by the gods who do not want the sages to achieve enlightenment. Some famous *apsarasas* like, Menakā, Urvaśī, Gṛṭacī etc., intentionally or unintentionally, were mothers of renowned human beings, kings or sages, even of the gods and goddesses.

In Pāli literature, the *gandharvas* (*gandhabbas* in Pāli) are described as the beings who abound in happiness. They are long-lived, and are beautiful\(^1\). They are said to be the lowest type of *devas* staying in the Cātummahārājika realm. In some *suttas*, however, they are considered as the slaves of other people (*parapessa*) because they server the gods (*kāyupagata bhavanto devānamāhacchatha pāricariyam*)\(^2\). If the *bhikkhus* are born in the realm of *gandhabba*, it is a shame for them because the *gandhabba* are lower (*hīnakāya*) than the *bhikkhus*. Ti is thought that if the *bhikkhus*, who stayed under the Buddha, were reborn in *gandhabba* state, it was due to their failure in mindfulness at that time of death\(^3\). In the Pāli literature too, they are referred to as mainly musicians of heaven. The names of famous musicians are, such as, Pañcasikha, Mātali, Timbarū, Sikkaddi, etc\(^4\). Especially the name Pañcasikha is mentioned often as one who carries a yellow *beluva*-wood lute. He used to attend on Sakka, and attracted the ear of the Blessed One with his lute. Pañcasikha drew the Buddha's attention towards Sakka who was eager to listen to His Dhamma. The *gandhabbas* are said to dwell in the fragrant roots,

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\(^1\) Gandhabbasamyutta, Saṁ. II. 1. 10.

\(^2\) Gopakha vatthu, Sakkapabha sutta, Dīg. II. 8.

\(^3\) Janavasabha Sutta, Dīg. II. 5.

\(^4\) Sakkapañha sutta Dīg. II. 8.
heartwood, softwood, shoots and leaves, and flowers and fruits, and saps and scents. The apsarasas (accharās in Pāli) are celestial nymphs who stay in the Tāvatiṃsa. On one occasion they accompany a devatā who praises the bliss of Nandana grove of Indra (Accharāsāmyutta, Saṃ. I. 1. 1).

(iii) The Yakṣas

The Yakṣas (yakkhas in Pāli) are quite different form the other semi-divine beings in their characteristics. They are ambivalent beings. Their personalities and grades are varied and far different from one another. The word yakṣa is used in the Vedas generally as synonym of yajña. In the epics and in Pāli literature, this term is used for a semi-divine being who generally attends to the Lord of wealth, Kubera. However, the term yakkha, in the Pāli, is very widely used and it is applied to almost every being. Their character, ability, moral sense, and figures are far different from one another. Thus the Buddha is called a yakkha, the king of

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1 Gandhhabbasamyutta, Saṃ. II. 1. 10.

2 RV. IV. 3. 13; VI. 12. 2 III. 4. 3.

3 Upāli sutta, Maj. II. 1. 6: The Buddha is praised as yakkha, which, perhaps, means the most mighty spirit. It runs as: tāṇhacchidassa buddhassa, vitadhūmassa anupalittassa / āhuneyya yakkhassa, uttapamuggalassa atulassa / “He has severed craving and become the Enlightened One, cleared off all clouds, completely untainted; Most worthy of gifts, most mighty of spirits, most perfect of persons, beyond estimation.” (Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translation)
devas, Sakka\(^1\) and the devaputtas\(^2\) are also addressed as yakkha, and even Māra\(^3\) is called a yakkha. Thus the term yakkha, in Pāli literature, is widely used from the Buddha and upto Māra. The term yakkha is used in the sense of spirits, or powerful beings besides the meaning of particular semi-divine beings whose leader is Vessavana, the lord of wealth. More than any other beings, the yakkhas resemble men with their diverse personalities. Their characteristics are described in Āṭānāṭiya (or Āṭānāṭa) sutta, in detail. According to Vessavana, some of the prominent yakkhas believe neither in the Buddha nor in his teachings, while others do. It seems that most of the yakkhas do not like to abstain from sensuality. It is said that atānāṭa verses are to give the yakkhas confidence by means of which monks and nuns, male and female lay-followers may dwell guarded and unharmed. They are protected from the dangers of the bad yakkhas. So Vessavana suggested to the Buddha to learn these verses. In many other suttas, however, the yakkhas come to listen to the Buddha’s preaching and some of them guard the Buddha. And some faithful followers of the Buddha are reborn as yakkhas. In some cases the yakkhas were most probably, considered to be human beings, may

\(^1\) Ambaṭṭha sutta, Dīg. I. 3: It is said in the story Yakkha Vajrapāṇi (Sakka) threatens to slay Ambaṭṭha with an iron hammer, if he does not answer the Buddha’s question the third time he is asked.

\(^2\) Kakudha sutta, Saṃ. I. 1. 2. 8: Thus a devaputta Kakudha is called a yakkha.

\(^3\) Padhāna sutta, SN. III. 2. no. 449: The verse says that the yakkha (Māra) disappeared as he was defeated by the Buddha: \textit{tassa sokaparetassa vinā kacchā abhassatha / tato so dummano yakkho tatthevantaradhyathāti} //
be either aborigines of some tribes or may be even prostitutes\(^1\). Some say that the yakkhas were originally considered as humans, but later came to be confused with non-humans\(^2\).

**(iv) The kinnaras, the kimpuruṣas and the siddhas**

The kinnaras, the kimpuruṣas and the siddhas are another type of semi-divine beings. The kinnaras or the kimpuruṣas are mythical beings with a human figure. They have a head of a horse with a human torso, or form of a horse with a human head. They appear more in the later classical literature, like Meghadhūta. The siddhas are the beings who are specially good in magic. The Kumbhandas are also described as a class of spirit, mentioned in the Pāli literature along with the asuras, the yakkhas, the gandhabbas, and also the nāgas.

**2. The demons**

**(i) General remarks**

It may be said that the central myth in Indian mythology, from the time of the Vedas onwards, is the myth of the conflict between the devas and the asuras, i.e., the gods and the demons. However, the aspects of the Indian demons are far

\(^1\) In some Vinaya texts (Bhikkhunīvibhaṅga I, 1 and also II. 5, 6, Pācittapāli), sexual intercourse with a yakka is forbidden.

\(^2\) Dic. of the Pāli proper names, Vol. II. Malalasekera.
different from those of the other mythologies. There is no distinction of nature and powers between the gods and the demons. Often the power and virtue of these demonic beings exceed that of the gods. The gods, many a time, use despicable means in order to put them down and to win over them. Virtuous demons and deceptive gods are often referred to in Indian mythology. The gods have classes like human beings, the demons too have their own specific classes. There are the brāhmaṇa gods and the demons, e.g., Agni and Prahlāda. There are the ascetic gods and the demons, e.g., Brhaspati and Bali. There are kṣattriya gods and the demons, e.g., Indra and Kamalākṣa etc. The marriage between the gods and the demons are accepted as a natural phenomenon. “By nature, the gods and the demons are alike; by function, however, they are as different as day and night”¹. The gods and the demons are physically indistinguishable as they share the power of māyā. Originally the gods and the demons are often called ‘the brothers’, the demons were the elder, and the gods were the younger bothers². The gods and the demons fought dreadfully for seeking prosperity. Then, it is said that only after converting the earth to one vast sea of blood, the gods killed the demons and occupied the celestial region³.

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¹ Cf. O’Flaherty, ‘the origins of evil in Hindu mythology’ p. 58.
² Mbh. XII. 34. 13:

    idān ca śrūyate pārtha yuddhe devāsura purā /
    asurā bhrātaro jyeṣṭhā devās cāpi yavīyasah //

³ Mbh. XII. 34. 14-15.
Various names of individuals and groups of demonic beings, as opposed to the divine beings, are mentioned in the Vedas, in the Epics, as well as in the Pāli Tipiṭakas.

The groups of demonic beings which are mentioned in the RV are, roughly: *asuras*, *rakṣasas* (*yātu* or *yātudhāna*), *pañis*, *dasyus* (in plural) etc., and perhaps, some of the *pretas* (*peta* in the Pāli) too, are among them. The names of individuals are: Vṛtra, Namuci, Śambara, Viśvarūpa, Pipru, Vala, Śuṣṇa, Cumuri and innumerable others. In the Epic period, the demons are called, as a whole, the sons of Diti, i.e., *daityas*, or the sons of Danu or *dānava*, and their representative designations, in this period, are generally confined to the *asuras*, and *rakṣasas*, though most of the names in the Vedas also occur here. The *dasyus*, in the Vedas, who were characterized as powerful atmospheric demons have been changed, more or less, into a group of thieves or barbarian tribes in the Mbh. Besides these demons, i.e., *asuras*, *rakṣasas* and also *petas*, in Pāli literature, Māra is mentioned as the most terrible devil or evil in whom lust and death are found combined.

**(ii) The asuras**

The *asuras*, in the Vedas, were said to be a special group of gods\(^1\) and also perhaps, there also was a cult of *asura* worshippers\(^2\). In the Rgveda, the word is also predominantly meant to be a designation of mighty gods. Thus, an *asura* is

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\(^1\) Cf, Kuiper, `The basic concept of Vedic Religion', History of Religion 15. p, 108.

\(^2\) Hale, `Asura, in early Vedic Religion`, `introduction to the theory of Haug, p. 5.`
often an adjective of the supreme gods, viz., Varuṇa¹, Agni² and Indra³ etc., meaning ‘lord’. The asura is also a group of mighty beings (AV. VI. 86. 3) and individuals (RV. V. 40. 5). Sūrya (RV. X. 170. 2), Indra (AV. II. 27. 3-4) and Agni are also called the slayers of asuras⁴. Asura, in singular seems to be some sort of leader who is respected and has at his command some fighting force⁵. In the Vedas, as plural they are the beings who are contrasted with the gods (AV. VI. 100. 3). An asura may wield a sort of magical power called māyā (AV. VI. 72. 2).

In the Epics, the asuras are clearly the mighty beings who oppose the gods, but several times they are not meant to be evil. Often the virtuous asuras are referred to, and their noble stories, purified lives, and their admonitions are being narrated. The Mbh. III. 29, which is filled with nobility and morality, is a discourse of the asuras viz., Prahlāda and Bali. Mbh. XII. 215-218 are also discourses between Prahlāda and Indra, and between Bali and Indra. In the discourse Indra behaves like a demon and the asura appears to be a sage. The Asura Bali is engaged in penance staying in the humble hut, and Indra tries to wean him away from his honest life. The discourse ends with Indra lauding the high-souled asuras. This episode reminds us of the Evil Māra when he allured the Buddha who was engaged in meditation under the tree, towards worldly pleasure. Māra too, like

¹ RV. II. 27. 10; 28. 7; VII. 36. 2.
² RV. III. 3. 4; V. 12. 1; 15. 1; VII. 2. 3; 6. 1 etc.
³ RV. III. 38. 4.
⁵ Hale, loc. cit. p. 52.
Indra, lauded the Buddha when he finally was defeated. It is said that so long as the asuras are virtuous Śri, the glory dwells among the asuras, however, she may shift to the gods when they destroy their dharma, and they are in the grip of desire and anger\(^1\).

In Pāli literature, the asuras are the demonic beings who fought with the gods (devāsurasangāma\(^2\)). If one is reborn as an asura, it is considered as one of the four unhappy positions of rebirth (apāya\(^3\)).

(iii) The rākṣasas

The rākṣasas are the night-wanderers. They are supposed to be the fiercest kind of demons. In the ṚV. they are the terrestrial demons, enemies of mankind. The gods are invoked to destroy the demons or are praised for having destroyed them\(^4\). It seems that they change their forms according to their will. They have the form of dogs, vultures, owls\(^5\), and also a brother, a husband, or a lover, so that they could deceive and destroy the offspring\(^6\). But, in the Epics, generally the rākṣasas and the asuras are used without much distinction between them. The asuras are said

\(^1\) Mbh. XII. 221. 26-78.

\(^2\) Dig. II. 285; Saṃ. I. 222.

\(^3\) Other three states are, niraya, tiracchāna-yoni, petā or pettivisaya.


\(^5\) ṚV. VII. 104. 20-22.

\(^6\) ṚV. X. 162. 5.
to have a birth equal with the gods\(^1\), and due to this thought they have fallen from the *dharma*, and transgressed the command of Brahmā. However, even the *rākṣasas* are often described as not the purely evil ones. They have certain merit of their own. Most of the powerful *rakṣasas* earned their power through penance or devotional acts. The most hideous and dreadful demons in the entire Indian mythology are, perhaps, Ravaṇa and Vṛtra. But neither of them are all evil. Indeed, they often show pious and learned characteristics of a *brāhmaṇa*. Vṛtra, the fiercest atmospheric demon in the Vedas, is said to appear, at one place in the Mbh., a devotee of Viṣṇu and also a philosopher. Vṛtra is described as a *brāhmaṇa* who has been created by the god Tvaṣṭṛ, and who was killed by Indra by deception. By this unrighteous act Indra incurred the sin of *brahmahatyā\(^2\).* It is also said that after his defeat by Indra he became a Yogi and he himself renounced his life-breath and attained the highest state\(^3\). It is well known that Ravaṇa never touches Śitā even while she was in his possession. A brilliant warrior *rākṣasa* called Virūpākṣa is described as virtuous, and as a giver of all things to *brāhmaṇas*, and also is a friend of Brahmā’s attendant\(^4\). The famous Hiḍimbā became chaste lady due to her love for Bhīma. Besides these, many demons, especially in the Vedas, are nothing but the opponents of the *devas* in their power game, but not demons in the moral sense. The *rākṣasa* (*rākkhasa*) appears rarely in Pāli literature. In the Suttanipāta (No. 310), the *rākkhasas* shouted along with the *asuras* and the *devas*, on slaughtering of the cows.

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\(^{1}\) Mbh. XII. 160, 29; *sarve sma tulyajātiṣyā yathā devās tathā vayam.*

\(^{2}\) Mbh. V. 10f; XII. 271-274f

\(^{3}\) Mbh. XII. 271. 58

\(^{4}\) Mbh. XII. 164-167f.
3. The legendary sages

(i) General remarks

The myths of the sages and apotheosis of the historical beings are, perhaps, one of the most attractive and exceptional items, particularly in the Indian mythology. The sages take up very important status and functions therein. It is a sage who established fire, which belonged to heaven, for men and it is a sage who came into being for spreading the human clan, and it is a sage again that showed that a man that can win over even the gods. In this way, the sages in Indian mythology conferred a great benefit on the human world. They are a source for progeny. They are the proof of what a human being can achieve maximum. They themselves are the passage to the gods, and also the bridge between the gods and the men. They brought the gods down to earth and elevated men to heaven with the help of their supernormal activities. They actively participated in the work of men and the gods. The gods yield, many a time, to the extraordinary sages.

The gods, in the Epic and the Puraṇic periods, were all the time anxious about their own post, which could be taken over by vigorous human beings. But once a man obtained godhood or a similar position as a merit of his tapas, then, not only the men but also the gods rendered their service to him and worshipped him. Elsewhere in the Mahābhārata the thirty lordly gods begged rājarṣi Nahuṣa, the
human king, to be the king of heaven\textsuperscript{1}. A God or the gods alone did not mould the beings but the gods themselves were created along with other creatures by the assigned creator(s) i.e., either by a sage or by a group of Prajāpatis.

In Buddhist literature, the status of the gods went down further. They do not stand above the great sages. The gods are merely glittering beings owing to the accumulated merits of their previous lives. There, the Buddha who is the central persona occupies the highest position among all beings, including all the deities. All the divinities show one particular trait, viz., eagerness to learn the Dhamma and admiration for the Buddha.

In fact, in Indian mythology, one cannot find much special distinction between the gods and the sages as regards their power, ability, and virtue. Both the gods and the sages have power to bestow boons when they are pleased, and to curse when they are angry with someone. But the sages are respected and honoured outside

\textsuperscript{1} Mbh. 5. 11, the story runs as follows:

Once Indra was afflicted by the sin of murder of a brāhmaṇa (brahmahatyā) in the case of Triśiras, and falsehood (anṛta) in the case of Vṛtra. He was weighed down by his guilt. He then dwelt concealed in the Waters. The kingless heaven and the world were beset by disasters. The gods and the sages in the heaven were worried about the kingless state. However, not a single god wanted the kingship. Thereupon all the sages and the thirty gods decided to ask Nahuṣa, the earthly virtuous king, to be the king of heaven. However, Nahuṣa was dethroned and was sent back to the earthly region due to his arrogance born out of his newly found power. Then Indra got back his post.
the temples only. They are generally not worshipped in the temples. Then the question remains. Why do the mortals build temples only for the gods, and why not for the sages? What could be their essential difference? The following might be answers to these queries:

(ii) Some differences between the god and the sage in Sanskrit literature

(1) The first and the most important difference lies in their purpose. The ultimate purpose of the god, including their incarnations, is to destroy demons and to dispel evils, whereas that of the sage is to achieve virtue or to reach the final liberation. So the god (sura) is the one who opposes the demons, and also is the enemy of demons (asura), whereas the sage is the one who possesses great virtue and practises austerities (tapas). The god is ready to fight against the demons to establish dharma, though sometimes they are more mischievous than the sage. The god is also less in control than the sages with regard to his anger, jealousy and passion. But the sage is much more concerned about himself than about others. Therefore, though he fights against the evil, it is only when there is a certain occasion or when there is a special request. It means the sage is not a born enemy of the demon. The god frightens the evil and evil thought, and he or she is able to send the evil being in hell after death. In the case of the sage, however, he or she does not send the evil to hell through his or her own agency. Or rather, the sage does not have any such authority. The evil person, who troubles the great sage, goes to hell because of his or her own doing. Now, to the Indians who believe in rebirth, the world of the dead is almost equally important as the present world. However, the sage is not concerned about the people of the next world. So, the people who want to be assured about their happy state in the next world, and who also wish their sins, which are committed in this world, to be forgiven need
not build temples for the sage. It is mentioned in the Mbh. that without having the quality of hurting others, i.e., without frightening others, the god cannot be worshipped by human beings. Thus Indra became Mahendra, only after killing Vṛtra\(^1\).

(2) The power of god is, so to say, inborn and universal, whereas that of the sage is achieved through penance, even though he or she is born from the god-parents, and even though he or she possesses a certain amount of inborn power. Therefore, the god has an all-pervading power while the sage has a somewhat limited power, even if the power is supernatural and sometimes it overpowers that of the god.

(4) The god is not destined to die. He or she is *amara* or *amartya* or immortal, whereas the sage, though he or she is the descendant of a god, is subjected to death, even though he or she may live for a longer period than any other mortal. The sage is not *amara*, but *martya* or mortal. That is why the sage is not termed ‘divinity’. However, as stated earlier, the sage is a sort of a mediator and a connection between the god and man. The sage is the one who introduces the god-world to the human-world.

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\(^1\) Mbh. XII. 15. 15: nāghnataḥ kīrtir astiha na vittan na punah praṇāḥ/

indro vrtravadhenaiva mahendraḥ samapadyata //
(iii) The god and the sage in Pāli literature

The differences between a god and a sage mentioned above can hardly be applied to Pāli literature. The feature of the sage and the deity in those in Pāli literature is quite different from that in Sanskrit literature. The earlier portions of Pāli texts do not contain sufficient myths. In those parts the Buddha was less mythologized. A large number of portions, which contain mythological events, are said to be later interpolations. Due to the characteristics of religious texts, in which the founder of the religion is accorded the highest position, the original myths were lead to somewhat different directions because of the newly acquired interpolations. Thus, in Buddhist literature, the Buddha who is the central persona of this religion occupied the highest position among all beings, and all deities, and a whole group of the other legendary sages, though they are prominent in other literature, became subordinate to the Buddha. The sages, more specifically ṛṣis, and the deities are merely a kind of glittering beings who accumulated merits in their previous lives. All of them show one particular trait, viz., eagerness to Dhamma and admiration of the Buddha. Therefore, without doubt, they subordinated themselves to the Buddha who achieved true Dhamma. They are eager to listen to the true Dhamma, hence they come to the Buddha who teaches it.

Generally the mythical events and accounts of the sages and the deities are connected with the Buddha and they are told with the purpose of admonishing the bhikkhus and the commoners; or to prove the soundness of the preachings of the Buddha; or to glorify Him. The reason for the appearance of the sages and the deities in Pāli literature seems either to be speak of the Buddha’s greatness or to prove the superiority of Dhamma, which the Buddha had founded. All of them are subordinate not only to the Buddha but also to his distinguished disciples.
According to the Buddhist concept, even the gods take rebirth depending on their merits just like the ordinary beings. At any time they might fall from the glorious heaven and also from their position. In this way their great power and glory are much ignored in general. Consequently they are quite colourless in their characteristics and even their mythological attractiveness is much less, though the divinities are not less in number. A number of divinities and the semi-divinities are found only in Pāli literature, especially many names of brahmās, māras, gandhabbas and yakkhas. However, compared to the divinities, the number of legendary sages who are found in Sanskrit literature is much less than in Pāli literature. The place of the legendary sages is occupied by the deeds of the Buddha(s) and bhikkhus are occupied. Then, the question arises: Who are termed as the ‘sage’ and the ‘Buddha(s) whose contribution to the human beings is immense?

(iv) The sages

The sages, in Sanskrit literature, can be defined as ‘virtuous beings possessing supernatural powers which are obtained by their tremendous austerities’. There are various categories of sages. The legendary ancient sages like Kaśyapa and Nārada on whom miraculous powers are more prominent, are of one kind. The seers of the Vedas like Grītsamada, Dirghatamas, Vasiṣṭha, Bharadvāja, Viśvāmitra, Vāmadeva etc. whose power is more authenticated by the Vedas, form another group. There are also sages like Vyāsa, Vālmīki, Yājñavalkya etc., whose erudition is more emphasized. The sages like Bṛhaspati, Śukra, Drona etc. are known as teachers. There are also sages who became leader of a particular religion, such as, the Buddha, Mahāvīra etc.
The sages, in Sanskrit literature, are divided mainly according to their inborn caste, such as, brahmārṣi, rājarṣi etc, and there is no specific spiritual gradation. However, in the Pāli Tipiṭaka, the caste system is not adhered to, and there is a clear gradation depending upon the spiritual ability, such as, sotāpanna¹, sakadāgāmin², anāgamin³, arahani⁴ etc. According to that spiritual level the Buddha is at the highest level. Ill-behaved ones (vasalo) are at the lowest level.

There are still more sages, or rather ascetics, in the Pāli literature who can be put in a different category. The legendary and the contemporary sages, and also different types of the religious practitioners are mentioned though in limited numbers. They are: tāpasa⁵, samana⁶, paribbājaka⁷, niganṭha¹, jatila², ājīvaka³.

¹ The stream enterers, or converts. They can be exempted from rebirth in purgatory, among animals, petas and in other places of misery.

² Once returners, i.e., one who will not be reborn on earth more than once. They are said to attain the second grade of saving wisdom.

³ No returners. They are said to be reborn in one of the highest heavens, and there they obtain arahantship, never to return on the earth.

⁴ The final emancipaters.

⁵ Tāpasa refers mostly to a brāhmaṇa who practices tapas (austerities).

⁶ The term ‘samaṇa’ when it is used among the non-Buddhist, especially among the brāhmaṇas, assumes contemptuous meaning, and the Buddha was often addressed by this term by the non-Buddhists, and when it is used among the Buddhist circle it means ‘recluse’, and is often used as a phrase with brāhmaṇa, ‘samaṇabrāhmaṇa’, meaning ‘the religious leaders’.

⁷ Paribbājaka refers to a wandering religious mendicant.
acela\(^4\), ekasāta\(^5\), bhikkhu, muni, isi etc. Out of these ascetics, bhikkhu and also perhaps muni in the Buddhist texts, refer to the Buddhist and the others are non-Buddhist.

\footnote{Nīganṭha is a member of the Jain Order.}

\footnote{Jaṭilā is an ascetic of matted-hair.}

\footnote{Ājīvaka is a naked ascetic whose leader is Makkali Gosāla. According to the Buddhist view, he is the worst type of sophist. Acela Kassapa is mentioned as an anti-Buddhist naked ascetic who, later on entered into the Buddhist Order. But he is mentioned not as an ājīvaka but a paribbājaka.}

\footnote{Acela is an ascetic who is not clothed, especially for an anti-Buddhist naked ascetic.}

\footnote{Ekasāta is single-garment ascetic.}

\footnote{Malalaseker, ‘dictionary of Pāli proper names’, Vol. II, p. 294.}

\footnote{ibid; sadevakasmin lokasmin natthi te patipuggalo.}

\footnote{Rājavaggo. Maj.; buddho ca kho kāruniko mahesi, yo satthā lokassa sadevakassa.}

(v) The Buddha and the Buddhas

The term ‘buddha’ can be defined traditionally as ‘a sage who has attained enlightenment’. He is a man who is superior to all other beings, human and divine, by his knowledge of the truth (Dhamma)\(^6\). It is said that no one in the human world or in the heaven can be equal to the Buddha\(^7\). The Buddha is said to be neither a deva nor a gandhabba nor a yakka nor a man. He is the teacher of all human beings and the devas\(^8\). He is the only being who has achieved perfect enlightenment, and who can enlighten others. In Sakkapaṭhasutta Dīg., a clear gradation is given as follows: The Buddha is the highest of all, then the king of

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1 Nīganṭha is a member of the Jain Order.
2 Jaṭilā is an ascetic of matted-hair.
3 Ājīvaka is a naked ascetic whose leader is Makkali Gosāla. According to the Buddhist view, he is the worst type of sophist. Acela Kassapa is mentioned as an anti-Buddhist naked ascetic who, later on entered into the Buddhist Order. But he is mentioned not as an ājīvaka but a paribbājaka.
4 Acela is an ascetic who is not clothed, especially for an anti-Buddhist naked ascetic.
5 Ekasāta is single-garment ascetic.
7 ibid; sadevakasmin lokasmin natthi te patipuggalo.
8 Rājavaggo. Maj.; buddho ca kho kāruniko mahesi, yo satthā lokassa sadevakassa.
heaven and other gods, the next are all other *samanabâhmanâ*\(^1\). The Buddha is incomparably higher than the other beings. When the Buddha is enjoying the bliss of meditation, it is very hard for the gods to get near him. So the gods would ask *gandhabba* to sing songs to attract the ears of the Buddha\(^2\). The Buddha is a category of beings whose spiritual level is the highest among all the beings including *devas*, *asuras* and the men.

The Buddhas are generally said to be of two kinds, viz., Pacceka-Buddhas and Sammâsambuddhas. The former are the Buddhas who are completely enlightened, but not preaching their doctrine, instead they retreat to the forest, withdrawing

\[\text{\footnotesize 1 The story given in this connection is as follows; Sakka, the ruler of heaven, visited the forest and he asked various questions to the *samanabâhmanas* about how he can completely be liberated. But instead of answering his question, the ascetics and the *brâhmanas* asked him who he was and where he came from. Then Sakka taught them Dhamma as much as he knew, and as much as he had heard. The ascetics were very happy by the mere fact of meeting the ruler of heaven and they became pupils of Sakka. However, when he asked the same questions to the Buddha, the Buddha kindly explained all about the Dhamma to his satisfaction. Then Sakka became a pupil of the Buddha, stream-winner and destined for full enlightenment (*sotâpanno avinipâtadhammo niyato sambodhiparâyano*).}
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\[\text{\footnotesize 2 In Sakkapañha sutta, Dīg. II. 8, in order to turn Buddha's attention, Sakka asked a *gandhabba* named Pañcasikha to sing a song which contains the praise of the Dhamma and the Buddha.}\]
themselves from the mundane world. The latter are the Buddhas of complete enlightenment who, at the same time, are preaching their doctrine to the world\(^1\).

In Buddhist literature not only Gotama the Buddha but also as many as seven or twenty-four other previous Buddhas are mentioned. It is said in the Buddhist literature different Buddhas exist in different eons. In some eons, however, the life-span of beings is too long, sometimes even upto 100,000 years. In such cases, they don’t have to experience the agony of old-age and death. Similar is the case when the life-span is too short. Hence, in those eons, there is no need, according to Buddhist thought, to have a Buddhas. However, these Buddhas are not historical beings but mythological characters.

In Sanskrit literature, the mythical features and superhuman nature of the sages are generally more emphasized than their original figures. Many myths of the sages have snow-balled in the course of time. The stories have been elaborated so much from their original forms, maybe due to the communications of people of many generations, or perhaps purposely, by their own descendants. Sometimes their human nature has almost totally disappeared, and sometimes even the origin of the myths gets lost in its tracks, covered by layers of time. Then, one forgets why and on what occasion those myths were made and told.

\(^1\) In earlier texts, the seven Sammāsambuddhas are mentioned. They are Vipassī, Sīkhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Konāgamana, Kassapa, and Gotama. In the Mahāpadānasutta, Dīg. II. 1, accounts of these seven Buddhas are given in detail, their birth, their inborn caste, their life span, and their family and also the account of how and where they are enlightened. Also in the Nidānasamyutta, Saṃ. I-2. 1, and in the Thera. Khu. etc. they are mentioned.
However, the traits of Gotama Buddha are considerably different from this standpoint. His historical evidence is well established. Though, in many cases, his human nature is covered by mystic stories, and his accounts too, have been elaborated by his devotees and disciples. It is also believed that many discourses and a considerable amount of myths were told by Gotama himself with some conjecturable and discernable changes made by his distinguished disciples. In addition he is mystified by people and time. Therefore, in the Tipiṭaka, his human nature and historical features are more emphasized than his mythological ones.

Apart from the Buddha and the Buddhas, some disciples of the Buddha, viz., bhikkhus are also given the title of sages, though they are much different from the sages of Sanskrit literature. Bhikkhu is the term for the Buddhist monks who completely renounced worldly life. Deification or mystifying of the bhikkhus was not infrequent in Pāli literature. And the status of the chief bhikkhus is almost always above the gods, though their supernatural powers were not shown as much as they are in Sanskrit literature. Especially the two most distinguished chief disciples of the Buddha, Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna were treated as men who were not overpowered by any heavenly and demonic beings, instead they overpowered these beings. In the Tipiṭakas, Sāriputta and Moggallāna appear many a time as a pair and they are described as almost inseparable friends. The former was renowned for his outstanding wisdom, the latter was famous for his iddhi power (power for miracles). They helped the Buddha greatly for winning over the mind of people, especially over the brāhmaṇas because they themselves were from well-known brāhmaṇa families. It seems that after these two eminent disciples entered the Order, the status of Buddhism moved one step ahead among all the religious sects. They used to preach not only to human beings but also to
the *devas*. These two disciples were placed in Buddhism just next to the Buddha. Even today in most of the temples of countries where Theravāda Buddhism is accepted, their images placed on at either side of the Buddha’s image.

Apart from these two chief disciples, as different styled monks who used magic before the ordination, the three matted-haired (*tebhātika jaṭilas*) Kassapas (Uruvela, Nadī and Gayā Kassapa) can be considered to. They stayed with a large number of disciples, and kept the sacred fire around which the fierce Nāga lived. The Buddha visited the eldest Uruvela Kassapa, and took lodging for the night there, and defeated with his magical power the Nāga who vomited fire and smoke¹. It is said that the Buddha took great effort, spent one whole rainy season in a grove near by, in order to convert the Kassapas. He used a variety of *iddhi* powers for Uruvela Kassapa’s conversion.

**(vi) The ṛṣis and the munis**

The English word ‘sage’, can be an analogue of two Indian terms, viz., *the ṛṣis* and *the munis*. Ṛṣi is more often translated as a ‘seer’, and muni as an ‘ascetic’². The word ‘ṛṣi’ occurs in the RV. The RV. *Sarvāṇukramaṇī* (1. 4) says, ‘one who recites, or composes mantras is called ṛṣi’ (*yasya vākyam sa ṛṣih*). Śāyāṇa derives the word ṛṣi from the base ‘ṛś’, ‘to go’³. And again, in the introduction to the RV., he derives the word ṛṣi from the base ‘dṛś’, ‘to see’. He explains the term ṛṣi as,

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¹ Vinaya I

² cf, Mitchiner, ‘Traditions of the Seven Ṛṣis, p.xvi (introduction).

³ Śāyāṇabhāṣya on the Rg Veda, I. 32.
'the sage who first visualized the Veda'. Again, among the Vedic priests, i.e., brāhmaṇas, purohitas, rtviks, etc., those who are gifted enough to be the authors - or the mediums of revelation - of the Vedic hymns are called the rṣis\(^1\). In the later literature, the term 'rṣi' denotes "a sanctified sage, a saint, an ascetic, an anchorite, a person of all the times or climes who developed an intellect endowed with prophetic vision and knowledge, righteousness and penance"\(^2\).

The term 'muni' occurs in the RV. They are depicted very graphically in the RV. X. 136, the keśi sūkta. Griffith remarks in the note of that sūkta that they were a kind of mendicants connected with the wind(s), viz., Vāta. They wandered in the forest wearing bark garments and kept their hair in long loose locks. The Vedic poet, in the keśi sūkta, expressed awe at the sight of the naked, long-haired ascetics who wandered freely in the forest\(^3\). The sūkta tells us that the munis support Agni, and moisture, heaven, and the earth. They have only the sky to look at. And they are said to be the seven sons of Vātaraśana (the wind-girdled one) and wear yellow dirty garments. The power of the muni is equal to that of the gods\(^4\). Śāyaṇa says this muni as: ‘One who becomes a god by the might of his penance’, cp., devāḥ tapaso mahimnā dīpyamānāḥ santaḥ. The munis fly through

\(^1\) Cf, Bhargava, ‘India in the Vedic Age - A history of Aryan Expansion in India’, p. 199.


\(^3\) The five rṣis are named (‘Index of the Vedic hymns’, Griffith): Jūti, Vātajūti, Vṛṣāṅaka, Etaśa, Śryaśṛiga.

\(^4\) RV. X. 136. 2: munayo vātaraśanāḥ piśaviḥ vasate malā /

vātasyānu dhṛajim tanti yaddevāso avikṣata //
the air. They are associated in the holy work of every god\(^1\). They are friends of Vāta and Vāyu. The munis have their home in the oceans, both in the eastern and in the western sea\(^2\). This hymn shows the concept that by the life of sanctity the munis can attain the fellowship of the deities of the Air, the Vāyus, the Rudras, the Apsarasas, and the Gandharvas. They can be furnished like them with wonderful powers, and they can travel along with them on their course. The beautiful-haired, the long-haired, that is to say, the munis, who during the time of their austerities do not shave their hair, uphold fire, heaven, and earth, and resemble the world of light, ideas which the later literature so largely contains\(^3\).

The word ‘*muni*’ occurs again in connection with the wind. The agitator of trees (wind) is compared with the muni in the Maruts hymn (RV. VII. 56. 8) and also in the RV, VIII. 17. 14 Indra is considered to be a friend of the munis.

Kalupahana\(^4\) and other scholars\(^5\) provide evidence that there had existed in India, side by side with the hieratic Vedic religion, various popular tribal religions. The gods and the goddesses of these tribal people were different from the divinities of the official Vedic pantheon. The ascetic culture, which later came to dominate India, is generally associated with this pre-Aryan tribal religion. These religions

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\(^1\) X. 136. 4: \textit{antarikṣena patati viśvā rūpāvacākaśat} /
\textit{munirdeśyadevasya saukrtyāya sakhā hitaḥ} //

\(^2\) X.136.5: \textit{vātasyaśvah vāyoh sakḥātho devesito muniḥ} /
\textit{ubhau samudrā vā kṣetī yaśca pūrva utāparaḥ} //

\(^3\) Roth, quoted by Griffith ‘Hymns of the Rg Veda’ Vol. II, p. 630.

\(^4\) Kalupahana, ‘Buddhist philosophy’, pp. 3-5.

are said to exist mainly in the Indus Valley civilization. Further, the most famous seal which was found in the Indus Valley is generally believed to be a depiction of a prototype of Śiva as mahāyogin, seated on a throne with legs crossed in the fashion of a yogi. These kinds of pre-Vedic ascetics are called, muni or yati. According to Rahurkar, “the ṛṣis are the sages who lived a full social life of householders and generally manifested a kind of hieratic attitude. The munis on the other hand, practiced yoga, austerities and orgiastic rites; adhered to a kind of iconism; glorified the life of renunciation, isolation and wandering mendicancy; and were refreshingly unsophisticated in their attitude”\(^1\).

In the Epic period, however, the distinction of the two terms becomes very vague and many a time both the terms are used without having much noticeable differences. Both the terms are given to one sage. For instance, the sages Agastya, Vasiṣṭha and Vyāsa are called both ṛṣi and muni.

The distinction between these two terms, the ṛṣi and the muni, is much clearer in Pāli literature. The Buddha is generally a muni but not a ṛṣi (iṣi in Pāli)\(^2\). The ṛsis are mythical and ancient sages, and the munis are generally practical and contemporary ascetics. The ṛsis, in the Pāli literature, are of two types, the Vedic

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1 Rahurkar, 'The seers of RV', p. 15.

2 If the Buddha is called isi, then he is called mahesi viz., the great isi. Apart from this designation, the Buddha is called variously, viz, by heretics he is called munḍaka or the shaveling, saman̄ka or the wretched ascetic, and even vasalaka or the outcast, and by the Buddhist he is called bhagavan or the Blessed One, arahant or the perfect one, and sammāsambuddha or the perfectly enlightened one.
and non-Vedic. The Vedic *isis* are generally said to be the sages of ancient days; the makers and expounders of mantras; the seers of the Vedas. In several books those names of the sages are mentioned. According to the Buddhist tradition there are ten such *isis*, e.g., *Aṭṭhaka, Vāmaka, Vāmadeva, Vessāmitta, Yamataggi, Aṅgirasa, Bhāradvāja, Vāseṭṭha, Kassapa* and *Bhagū*. As the non-Vedic *isis*, the sage *Kaṇha, Asitadevala* and *Asita* are often mentioned. Sometimes the term ‘*muni*’ in Pāli literature is used as a synonym of *arahant* and this *muni* is said to surpass the gods. It is said that even seeing the *munīs* is of great merit for common people. Sometimes the term *muni* is used as a synonym of the Buddha.

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1 Ambaṭṭha sutta. Dīg. I. 3; Tevijja sutta, Dīg. I. 13; Brāhmaṇa vaggo, Maj. II. 5, Bhesajja kkhandhaka, Mahāvaggaṇālī etc.

2 *Arahant* is the Buddhist term for the beings whose life-circle is extinct (*khiṇā jātī*), and for whom there is no more state of being (*nāparam itthattāvā*), and who completely did what has to be done (*katam karanīyam*). As an example of this synonymized term, ‘*arahant*’ and ‘*muni*’ Brahmasaṁyutta, Saṁ. I.-I. 6 tells a story: Brahmadeva, the son of a Brāhmaṇa renounced the mundane world and acquired arahantship. Brahma Sahampati requested Brahmadeva’s mother to stop offering oblations which are regularly given to the God Brahmā (*brahmāno āhutim niccam paggāṅhāti*), and asked her to turn that offering to her own son who became a sage (*munī*) and consequently surpassed the god (*atidevapatta*). Sahampati further said that because having seen a sage who crossed the flood she can earn merit and can depart to future bliss (*karohi puññasukhamāyati kām disvā munīṇi brahmāṇi oghatīṇa*).

3 In Mahāparinibbānasutta in Dīg. II. 3, when Gotama the Buddha declared renouncing the life principle, the earth quaked greatly. When he saw the earthquake he uttered a verse. *tulamatulafka sambhavam bhavasarkhāramavassajī muni aippattarato samāhito abhindī kavacanivattasambhavan* (Gross or fine, things become the sage abjured. Calm, composed,
Thus Gotama the Buddha is Sakyamuni and many a time he is merely called a muni or a mahāmuni. All the past and present Buddhas as well as the Buddhist ascetics are generally called ‘munis’. Thus muni is a term for the ascetic who has completely renounced the mundane world while the Vedic and the ancient sages are termed as isis and none of them is a contemporary of the Buddha.

*(vii) The life style of the sage*

Celibacy is of course very important in Indian literature but not life-long celibacy, i.e., in other words, renunciation, or samnyāsa. Every person observes celibacy, for a certain period. When a boy is initiated and sent to the teacher’s hermitage, he is supposed to observe complete celibacy, not only that, there are certain restraints on other behaviour also. This we can call as temporary celibacy. To observe it completely is necessary for fruitful āśrama, i.e., a particular stage of life. But after that he marries and is eligible to enjoy sensual and sexual pleasures.

he burst becoming's shell (Maurice Walshe's translation). Elsewhere* in the same sutta the Buddha is again called a muni.

*At that time of Blessed One's final passing, the gods and the disciples of the Buddha were gathered together. There, Ven. Aunruuddha uttered the verse; nāhu assāsapassāso thitacittassa tādino/ anejo santimārabbha yam kālamakari muni// No breathe in and out- just with steadfast heart. The sage who's free from lust has passed away to peace. (Maurice Walshe's translation)

*See also the Sakkapañhasutta, Dig. II. 8 the song of a gandhabba.

1 Apadānapāli, Khu, Sakkapañhasutta Diēi; Pāriyavanavagga Cullaniddee; Civarakkhandhako Mahāvagga; and also Samuṣṭhānasasaranikhepo Parivārapāli etc.

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This kind of limited period of celibacy is emphasized as a prerequisite to the attainment of higher spiritual goals for the *brahmacārin*. However, after marriage they do not have any restriction on sensual enjoyments. Openly the Vedic seers look for someone who would give them wives. And in the Epics, the central point of society was begetting sons. Therefore lifetime celibacy was considered rather a sin to the forefathers who could go to heaven only by the oblation offered by the descendants. It seems that in the Epic as well as in the ancient Vedic society, uncontrolled passion even on the part of the sages was not a thing to be ashamed about, but was very natural. The more important thing was to get offsprings than to control passion. From the RV. I. 179, the dialogue between the sage Agastya and his spouse Lopāmudrā, it is inferred that even the great ascetics yielded their sexual abstinence to the longing of their wives. When the sages saw

1 RV. IV. 14. 16.

2 The stories of the sages Jaratkāru (Mbh. I. 13f) and Agastya (Mbh. III. 14-15f) can be modelled on this. These sages were engrossed only in meditation. Then one day in the forest they met their ancestors who were hanging upside down in the pit, and who were anxious about the extinction of their lineage. The ancestors made them marry insisting that the most important thing is to have a son who can free the ancestors from sins and lead them to heaven. They said that neither by merits of *dharma* nor by *tapas* do people in this world gain the goal that others reach by having sons. Consoling them, Jaratkāru married Vasuki's sister Jaratkāru, and Agastya married Lopāmudrā.

3 Lopāmudrā was anxious about old age that impairs the beauty of the body. Due to ascetic practices her husband neglects her and his abstinence became long-lasting and her toil and labour to allure him through many autumns was in vain. She urged Agastya to come near her. She claimed that a woman's right is to be united with her husband. Then the sage yielded his
beautiful women, immediately they released their semen. And that semen of the
great ones was not destined to be wasted. The sages would keep it for themselves
in some container like a jar\(^1\), or in a \textit{drona} (a wooden vessel)\(^2\). Even if it had
fallen on the ground some helpful divine hands were always stretched out to beget
the sons of the sages. Thus, out of uncontrolled carnal passion of the sages and the
gods, the sperm flowed down and many non-ordinary beings were born. They
became the starter-germs of society and accounts or their births were told among
the people. It is quite interesting to note that though they left their passion
uncontrolled, they were not away from virtue; not criticized by others; not
ashamed of themselves. In fact, these uncommon births were the starting point as
well as a core and kernel of a myth. In ancient days this kind of mystic birth was
not uncommon, throughout the world, especially when the person was the
progenitor of a family. Perhaps, these sorts of accounts could have made by their
descendants or by their patrons in order to glorify and authenticate their own
ancestors and their priests, so as to distinguish themselves from other people.
Therefore the originators of a family are essentially, either blood related to the
gods or at least connected with heaven - directly or indirectly. Many a time, the
beings of uncommon birth were born outside of the woman’s (mother’s) womb,
and various objects were used as womb substitutes.

\footnote{heart to his wife and allowed himself to indulge in all desires. But thus by showing how the
sage yielded himself to his wife’s desire, this hymn also shows that already in the Rgvedic
period there must have been a tradition of ascetic practices as well as efforts to fight against
the carnal desires.}

\footnote{\textit{\textsuperscript{1}} e.g., in the case of Agasty and Vasiṣṭha.}

\footnote{\textit{\textsuperscript{2}} e.g., in the case of Droṇa Bhāradvāja}
However, in Pāli literature, it is almost totally compulsory for a sage to be a celibate and a renunciate. Lifetime aloneness, sonlessness, and homelessness are always praised\(^1\). The Buddha defined *muni* as, 'one who wanders without association, without affliction, and without desire\(^2\). Thus, *muni* is the term for a person who leads a life of celibacy without having desire. It is said that even one's view, or learning, or knowledge are not imperative to becoming a *muni* but only he is a *muni* whose mind is desireless and whose behaviour is appropriate.

*(viii) The miraculous deeds of the sages*

In the Vedas as well as in the Epics, the sages are generally reasonably concerned about heavenly life, and also they care about the next world. Their miraculous deeds are narrated more than their secular accounts. Their ordinary human details are generally ignored. Thus, the sages fly in the air, send a man with his body to

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\(^1\) The verse in Khaggavisāṇa sutta, SN, I. 3. no. 1, tells 'na puttamiccheyya kuto sahāyam eko care khaggavisānakappo. (One should not wish for a son, let alone a companion. One should wander solitary as a rhinoceros's horn'. The Muni sutta, SN. I. 12. no. 1 also says that 'santhavāto bhayaṁ jātam niketā jāyate rajo, aniketamasanthagam āṇam ve munidassanam. (From acquaintance arises fear; from a house arises pollution. The houseless state, the state without acquaintance, this indeed is the muni's view)'.

\(^2\) Nandapañha sutta, SN, V. 62, no. 1078:

\[
\begin{align*}
na \text{ diṭṭhiyā na sutiyā na ūkāna} & \text{ munidha nanda kusalā vadanti} / \\
visenikarvā anighā nirāsā caranti ye te muneyo 'ti brūmi //}
\end{align*}
\]
heaven, bring down the high mountain to a low level for thousands of years, make an ocean with his urine ...

Whereas in Pāli literature, to be concerned with the heavenly world, especially in the case of the monks whose purpose is not to gain the heavenly world but to cease life, is generally criticized. Miraculous events and worship of the gods too are equally condemned. Pīṇḍola Bhāradvāja therā (or the elder monk) was rebuked by the Buddha because he used his miraculous power for a cheap purpose\(^1\). Use of random miraculous power is prohibited as a rule in Pāli literature. Notwithstanding all this, one is surprised to see the detail and extensive description of the miraculous powers in Pāli texts. The texts also show how and on what occasion miracles are to be prohibited or encouraged. According to the text, one is able to get 'iddhi' or 'miraculous power' only after a certain level of meditation with mind concentrated, purified, and when one directs one's mind to the various supernormal powers. Iddhi is explained in detail in Kevalītha sutta. It mentions there, three kinds of miracles, viz., the miracle of psychic power (iddhipāṭikāriya), the miracle of telepathy (ādesanāpāṭikāriya), and the miracle of instruction (anusāsanīpāṭikāriya). For iddhipāṭikāriya, ten such powers are given in the suttas. They are: being one, he becomes many; being many, he becomes one; he appears; and disappears; he passes through fences, walls and mountains unhindered as if through air; he sinks into the ground and emerges from it as if it were water; he walks on water without breaking the surface as if walking on land; he flies cross-legged through the sky like a bird with wings; he even touches and strokes with his hand the sun and the moon; and he travels in the

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\(^1\) Read the section ‘Bhāradvāja in Pāli literature’.
body as far as the Brahmā world. Ādesanāpāṭihāriya is to read the mind of other beings, of other people, to read their mental states, their thought and pondering. However, it is an offence for the bhikkhu to declare in front of the laymen that he has achieved miracles (superhuman state or power) which are beyond the capacity of ordinary men. The punishment for that, when his claim is true, is simply an offence of expiation, but when it is not true, then it is one of the gravest sins for the bhikkhus (pārājika)¹, and he should be expelled from the Order. The Buddha does not consider that miracles help on the way to the final liberation, but they create misunderstanding in the minds of common people with regard to the bhikkhus and Buddhism. However anusāsanāpāṭihāriya which gives instruction in proper ways and which also gives proper knowledge about the Buddha, is advocated, and also iddhipādā. Four iddhipādā are described as the power which can lead to going to the far shore from the near shore, to dispassion, and to cessation, when they are developed and cultivated. Iddhipādā contains three main components: concentration (samādhi), the four volitional formations of striving (padhānasariṅkhārā), and the particular factor responsible for generating concentration-desire (chanda), energy (viriya), mind (citta) and investigation (vīmamsa).

¹ This sin is an offence against pārājika rule which is prescribed in the Vinaya text, viz.,

Pārājikakaṇḍapāli IV as: Yo pana bhikkhu anabhijānaṁ uttarimanussadhammaṁ attupanāyikaṁ alamariyaṇānaṁ dassanam samudācareyya-’iti jānāmi iti passāmi’ti, tato apareṇa samayena samanugāhiyamāno vā asamanugāhiyamāno vā āpanno visuddhāpekkho evam vadeyya-’ajānamevam, āvuso, avacām jānāmi apassaṁ passāmi.

Tucchaṁ musā vilapin’ti, ayampi pārājiko hoti asamvāso’ti.
(ix) The sages selected for the chapter

The present chapter selects only some particular sages, and deals with them mainly with their abnormal birth. Side by side their status in the society also will be studied. Because, many a times in mythology, the birth account implies the whole life style of the beings concerned, and the status (or, the caste) denotes not only the main characteristic of the said person, but also the social condition. The sages selected are: (i) Vasiṣṭha and the Vasiṣṭhas (ii) Bhāradvāja and the Bhāradvajas (iii) Bhṛgu and the Bhṛgus (or Bhārgavas) and, (iv) The ancient mythical ṛṣis in Pāli literature, such as, Asita (devala), Kaṇṭha etc.

(1) The Vasiṣṭha(s)

The notable sage Vasiṣṭha and his descendants won almost unique place over the entire field of Indian mythology. Vasiṣṭhas are one of the seven root families, viz., the mālagotras whose origin is considerably later than the other root families\(^1\). But, unlike the other brāhmaṇa family, they generally are said to adhere to the true brāhmaṇism, did not sway from the brahmānic personalities throughout the ages, and obtained unshakable and impeccable honour from society. It is not very difficult to meet their tracks in the RV., in the Epics, in the Purāṇas, in Pāli literature, and also in classical Sanskrit literature.

The name Vasiṣṭha, the progenitor of the family of the Vasiṣṭhas, is listed not only in the gotṛarṣis but also in the saptarṣis and in the family seers of the Rgveda as

\(^1\) Cf, Bhargava, ‘India in the Vedic Age- A history of Aryan Expansion in India’, p. 199.
the author of the seventh *mandala*. The remarkable descendants of Vasiṣṭha, such as, Śakti, Parāśara and Kṛṣṇa Dvaiḍāyana Vyāsa etc, also left their footprints on every part of the mythology, especially in the *Mbh.* whose compiler is said to be Kṛṣṇa Dvaiḍāyana Vyāsa.

As stated earlier, it is quite noticeable that throughout the world most of the originators of the family are connected with the gods or with heaven. Vasiṣṭha, the progenitor of the Vasiṣṭhas is no exception. He is said to be born of the god Varuṇa and Mītra. The following account is given in the *RV.* VII. 33. 9–13.

9; tainninyam hṛdayasya praketaiḥ sahaśravalśamabhi saññi caranti /
yamina tataṃ paridhiṃ vayanto ‘psarasas upa sedurvasiṣṭhāḥ //
10; vidyuto jyotih pari saññijhānam mitrāvaruṇaḥ yad apaśyatān tvā /
tatte janmotaikam vasiṣṭhāgaṣtīyo yatvā viśa ājabhāra //
11; utāsi maitrāvaruṇo vasiṣṭhorvaśyā brahmanmanaso ‘dhi jātaḥ /
drapasam skannam brahmaṇa daivyena viśve devaḥ puṣkare tvādadvanta //
12; sa praketa ubhayasya pravidvāntsaḥaśradāna uta vā sadānah /
yamina tataṃ paridhiṃ vayisyannapsarasas pari jaiṇe vasiṣṭhaḥ //
13; satre ha jātaviṣṭā namobhiḥ kumbhe retaḥ sīṣicatuḥ samānam /
tato ha māna udiyāya madhyātta jātam rṣimāhurvasiṣṭham //

The following is Griffith's translation:

9: They with perceptions of the heart in secret resort to that which spreads a thousand branches. The Apsaras brought hither the Vasiṣṭhas wearing the vesture spun for them by Yama.
10: A form of lustre springing from the lightening wast thou, when Varuṇa and Mitra saw thee. Thy one and only girth was then, Vasiṣṭha, when from thy stock Agastyā brought thee hither.

11: Born of their love for Urvaśī, Vasiṣṭha thou, priest, art son of Varuṇa and Mitra; And as a fallen drop, in heavenly fervour, all the Gods laid thee on a lotus-blossom.

12: He, thinker, knower both of earth and heaven, endowed with many a gift, bestowing thousands, Destined to wear the vesture spun by Yama, sprang from the Apsaras to life, Vasiṣṭha.

13: Born at the sacrifice, urged by adorations, both with a common flow bedewed the pitcher. Then from the midst thereof there rose up Māna, and thence they say was born the sage Vasiṣṭha.

Some important and uncommon points can be drawn from these verses.

(1) He took birth neither by any curse which was quite common for the deities and the sages, nor by the cycle of rebirth but he took birth by his own will. Dandekar interpreted verse no. 9. *yamena tatam paridhim vayantah*, as ‘Vasiṣṭha took birth in this world because he wanted to weave further the garment which Yama had started weaving’. According to him Vasiṣṭha took birth in the obligation of ensuring the uninterrupted continuity of the human race. This kind of ‘birth at will’ is possible only when he is recognized as an extraordinarily great being or as god’s incarnation. And this willed-birth of Vasiṣṭha very much resembles that of

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1 ‘The two births of Vasiṣṭha- A fresh study of Rg Veda’ VII. 33. 9-14, p. 4, CASS studies, No. 2.
Buddha who took his self willed-birth on earth for the final liberation. The story of the Buddha’s birth runs generally as follows:

*The Buddha, after having reflected on the five suitable objects¹, from tusita heaven, decided to be born on the earth for his final birth. Then one day, Mahā Māyā, the chief queen of Suddhodana, the chief ruler of Kapilavatthu, had a dream that a white elephant entered her womb through her side. Ten months after this dream, on the full moon day of Visākha, she gave birth to a child on the way to her parents' house, under a big sāla tree in the beautiful garden of Lumbinī with the support of four Mahābrahmās. Then the child, as soon as he was born, took seven steps and announced, 'I am the foremost of the world²'. After his birth, it had been prophesied by the renowned brāhmaṇas that he will be either a great king or an Enlightened One³.*

¹ *Pañcasilokanāni* or ‘five objects of reflection’ is generally said to take place for proper birth of the Buddha. They are normally, kāla, desa, dipa, kāla and māta.

² *Agghamasmi lokassa, in gotamabuddhavamsa, buddhavamsa aṭṭhakathā*. Similar description ‘agghamasmi lokassa, jeththohamasmi lokassa, setthohamasmi lokassa’ is seen in Mahāpadana *sutta*, Dīg. II. 1, and also in Suṇātavagga in Maj. III. 3.

³ Buddha’s birth mythologically resembles, and is historically different from that of the legendary sages. As one of the greatest sages in history, his birth is marked with mythological events. But contrary to legendary sages who had non-human parents, and who were born in other than the mother’s womb, Gotama Buddha, being an historically important man, had a father and a mother as is usual, and was born through his mother’s physical body. His birth account is not compactly compiled in one single *sutta*, but is scattered in various texts. Only his birth-day is well depicted in the Nālaka *sutta*, SN. III. 11. This account of his birth
As is seen, the Buddha selected his parents according to his own will, and he took birth on earth for his final liberation. This kind of birth is certainly a *lokuttara dhamma* (supermundane *dharma*). The will power can be earned only by the person who has a great amount of accumulated merits from his previous births. The birth of the sage Vasiṣṭha, on the one hand, it is very similar to and, on the other hand very different also from that of the Buddha. It is similar because both the births took place due to their own will, but not due to natural force. It is different because the Buddha took his last birth in order to cease the circle of life and death, and Vasiṣṭha took his first birth in order to spread the human clan.

(2) Vasiṣṭha took Varuṇa, the most prominent deity in the Vedic period, as his father. It could easily be conjectured that Vasiṣṭha too could have got the unshakable highest authority over people. And again, according to the Gopatha Brāhmaṇa¹, he was the *only* seer who had personally seen Indra, the deity who prevailed in the Vedic times with his power. Thus Vasiṣṭha, being the very son of Varuṇa, and the seer who saw Indra, had got hold of the power to win over the most important battle in the RV., the *Dāsarāyuddha*. RV. VII. 33. 3–6, inform us that Vasiṣṭha, as the chief priest of Sudās, drew Indra's help for the sake of

narrated here has become known with the help of the later day texts, such as, Nidānakathā jātaka, Buddhavamsa and its Aṭṭhākathā, and also from the scattered references in Cullavagga and Mahāvagga etc.

¹ Gopatha Brāhmaṇa, II. 2. 13,

*rṣayo vā indram pratyakṣātī nā paśyantis tāti vasiṣṭha eva pratyakṣātī apaśyat.*
defenseless Tṛtsus (or Bharatas), gave them ample room and freedom and, led them to victory in their battle\(^1\). Thus they became almost without the enemies.

(3) Vasiṣṭha took Urvaśi, the most prominent and beautiful heavenly woman but not a goddess for his mother, and again he was not born from her womb. He did not take a goddess for his mother because though his origin was in heaven, he had to live on the earth. And he was not born through the womb of a woman because he has to keep his divine purity, hence he needed a heavenly woman for his mother who was able to give birth to him out of her womb.

(4) All the gods held him with a lotus. It means that not only has he a strong father and a beautiful mother, but also has received support of all the gods.

In this way, the birth account of Vasiṣṭha suggests that he has mystic brahmanic power as the influence of the great father. His appearance must have been fair enough owing to the beautiful mother; his mind is pure because he was born on the lotus; and he was a honourable being supported by all the gods.

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\(^1\) RV. VII. 33. 3: *evennu kam sindhumebhis tatārevennu kam bhedamebhīr jaghāna /

*evennu kan dāśarājīre sudāsam prāvadindro brahmaṇā vo vasiṣṭhāḥ *

RV. VII. 33. 4: *juṣṭī naro brahmaṇā vaḥ pitṛnāmaksamavayaṇa na kilā riṣātha /

*yacchakvariṣu bhrātā ravenendre śuṣmamaddadhātā vasiṣṭhāḥ *

5: *uddyāṁivetṛṣṇajo nāthitāso dīdhyurduśarājīke vṛtāsaḥ /

*vasiṣṭhasya stuvata indro aśrodurun tṛṣṭhyo akṛṇodu lokam *

6: *daṇḍāivedgojanāsa āsanparicchinā bharatāḥ arbhakāsah /

*abhavacca puraetā vasiṣṭha ādityṛṣūnāṁ viṣo aprathanta *
Bṛhaddevatā 149-155 narrates this account with a slight modification. But unlike the significant account in the RV., the account here becomes colourless and insipid because it does not mention two points about his birth that his birth was at his own will, and he was born with a mission of continuing the human race, which has been started by Yama. The story runs as follows:

The two Ādityas (Varuṇa and Mitra), on seeing the nymph Urvasī at a sacrificial session, involuntarily discharge their semen. It fell into a jar containing water that had been standing there overnight. At that same moment two vigorous ascetics, the seers Agastya and Vasiṣṭha, came into being. While Agastya was produced in the jar, Matsya (Vasiṣṭha) was produced, in the water. Then, as the water was being taken up (grhyamāṇa), Vasiṣṭha was found standing on a lotus (puṣkara). The lotus was supported on every side by the All-gods. Arising out of that water, Vasiṣṭha, performed great austerity.

This important event, i.e., the birth of Vasiṣṭha, however, is totally blanked out in the Mahābhārata in which his personality otherwise looks more colourful and interesting than any other literature. He is simply mentioned as a son of Varuṇa.\(^1\) His main features in the Mbh. are: a symbol of tolerance; a sage who has a wish-yielding cow named Nandinī (or sometimes Nandī, Mbh. I. 65-66, and I. 93); a sage who tried to commit suicide (Mbh. I. 166); his conflict with Viśvāmitra; and a generous sage. Vasiṣṭha in the Mbh. is said to be a typical brāhmaṇa whose

\(^1\) Mbh. I. 93.5: \textit{yam lebe varuṇab putram purā bharatasattama} / 
\textit{vasiṣṭho nāma sa muniḥ khyāta āpava ityuta} //
quality of tolerance is very much glorified. His tolerance, however, breaks down in two separate cases related to the stealing of his cow Nandi. When Vasus tried to steal Nandi, he cursed that they would be born in the human world, however, he showed tremendous tolerance when Viśvāmitra committed the same crime. He is almost a unique sage who is respected as a powerful sage and, at the same time as a sage showing brāhmanic tolerance.

The stories in connection with Vasiṣṭha's cow Nandi, are given in Mbh. 1. 65–66 and also in I. 93. They are important for two different reasons. The former episode is the turning point where a king's metamorphosis into an ascetic starts, and the latter and similar story, became the starting point of the actual Māhabhārata. The story in I. 93 is as follows:

_Vasiṣṭha had a holy hermitage on the slope of the mountain Meru. There he did his penance. He had a sacrificial cow yielding all desires, the daughter of Surabhi and Kaśyapa. One day the divine Vasus together with their wives visited Vasiṣṭha's hermitage. While roaming in the forest they saw the cow. Dyaus, one of the Vasus, said that if a mortal drinks this cow's milk he will live ten thousand years without losing his youth. On hearing this, his wife who had a mortal princess as her friend, desired to give her that milk. To fulfill her request, Dyaus with the help of his brother, carried off that cow. Then, Vasiṣṭha, after returning from the forest, through his divine eyes, came to know of Vasus' stealing of his cow. He was enraged, and cursed them to be born among men. They were born accordingly. With the grace of Gangā, they were able to take her as their mother in the mortal world. Each of them was freed from that curse when they were thrown in water by the goddess Gangā, but Dyaus who was the primary accused, had to live for a longer period on the earth. This Dyaus was born as Bhiṣma, the_
grandfather of the Pāṇḍavas and the Dhārtharáśtras. On this occasion, the sage Vasiṣṭha did not restrain his anger neither did he withdraw the curse, and it became the starting point of the Mahābhārata.

Similarly, in the story in the Mbh. I. 65–66, the famous king Viśvāmitra tried to steal the same cow of Vasiṣṭha, but failed due to the wrath of the cow. Then he realized the power of the brāhmaṇa, decided to leave the kingship and started penance in order to obtain brahminhood.

Only at one place in the Mbh (III. 100) Vasiṣṭha is described as having lesser power than his brother Agastya. His enmity with Viśvāmitra which is narrated in full length in 1-165 is one of the most colourful and vivid descriptions among the stories of the sages. Through this conflict between the two great sages, and through Vasiṣṭha's victory over Viśvāmitra, one can understand that even among the sages gradation existed, i.e., the title of the brāhmaṇa ṛṣi wins more respect than that of the rājā ṛṣi. However, though the power of brāhmaṇa prevailed in the society, the story also implies that obtaining brahminhood was not impossible by the efforts of man.

Vasiṣṭha was a sage of generosity. He had been once, a matchmaker for the earthly king Saṃvaraṇa for whom he worked as a priest, and Tapatī, the daughter of the Sun-god. When they were indulging in their honeymoon for twelve long years and when, as a consequence, people were suffering from absence of rain he pulled them out of their honeymoon and, beseeched heaven to give rain (Mbh. I. 162). Thus he was soft-hearted to the love-afflicted couple, at the same time he was generous enough to people when he drew the couple out of the love game when the people were suffering of drought.
The Mbh. seems to give more emphasis on his power to perform miracles and quality of tolerance rather than on his mission of propagating human race which was mentioned in the RV. For instance, one of the most interesting features of Vasiṣṭha in the Mbh. is his trying to commit suicide on the occasion of the death of his son Śakti and other hundred sons.

A king whose body and spirit were overpowered by a rākṣasa killed all the sons of Vasiṣṭha, at Viśvāmitra’s secret instigation. Feeling dejected at the loss of his sons, he tried to kill himself. He threw himself in the river; in the fire; and also down the cliff. However, the river, the fire, and the cliff did not grant him death. This story shows his utmost tolerance, greatness and forgiveness. Further, instead of punishing the king Kalmāṣapāda who was the cause of his sons’ death, he forgave the king’s sin. Moreover, at the request of that very king, who was barren, Vasiṣṭha rendered his seed (for a son) to the queen of Kalmāṣapāda, named Madayanī, and begot her a son who was named Aśmaka. Vasiṣṭha’s tolerance and generosity are narrated on another occasion also. When his grandson Parāśara, the son of Śakti, tried to avenge his father’s death, Vasiṣṭha persuaded him not to do so.

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1 Mbh. I. 166: Viśvāmitra who always had enmity with Vasiṣṭha, saw Śakti by chance. Śakti quarrelled with the king Kalmāṣapāda and cursed him to be a human flesh-eater. Then, behind the scene Viśvāmitra controlled a rākṣasa named Kinkara to enter the body of the king. Again he controlled him to devour Śakti first and thus all hundred sons of Vasiṣṭha.
There is also a very different story in the Mbh. itself which goes against the nature of Vasiṣṭha as a great and tolerant sage. Vasiṣṭha was, once, a priest of the demons, and perhaps was dismissed by the king of demons Hiranyakaśipu who preferred to employ Viṣvarūpa, the son of a demon’s sister. Vasiṣṭha cursed the demon king by saying: ‘since you chose another priest, your sacrifice will not be completed, and you will be killed.’

Thus, the Vasiṣṭhas play different roles in the Mahābhārata. It may be said that they are involved in the major part of the book. Their accounts are very skillfully inter-woven. Vasiṣṭha’s curse to Vasus became the cause of the starting point of the book. His descendant Vyasa was the compiler as well as the actual grandfather of the heroes of the book.

However, not a single myth or a story regarding the progenitor Vasiṣṭha is found in Pāli literature. But through other sources one may know that the Vasiṣṭhas(Vā-seṭṭhas) seem to flourish in the Buddha’s time. The Vā-seṭṭhas are said to be the chief of the Mallas who stayed in Kusinārā which was the last place of the Buddha. They performed the funeral ceremony of the Buddha, according to the wish of the devas¹. The young brāhmaṇa boy Vā-seṭṭha is often mentioned in the suttas along with young Bhāradvāja².

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¹ Mahāparinibbāna sutta, Dīg. II. 3.
² See details in sub-section ‘the Bhāradvājas’.
(2) The Bhāradvājas

While the Bhṛgus were clearly connected with the fire, and the Vasiṣṭhas were one of the finest brāhmanic priests, the Bharadvājas, so far as the Vedas are concerned, do not have much distinctive personality, though they were the authors of the sixth book of the RV. They are not listed among the seven mūlagotras. Some of the verses in the Rg Veda¹, suggest that they were possessors of worldly affluence, but it is very difficult to agree with the view of Sharma that Bharadvāja particularly possessed riches (cows and horses) that made him prosperous². For, as it is noticed most of the Vedic poets sing in the same tone and ask for the same boons, i.e., wealth and sons. Therefore, praising for wealth and cows and food is quite stereotypical and humdrum in many of the Vedic hymns.

His birth account is not mentioned in the Vedas, it is found only in the Purāṇas in connection with the birth of the famous Vedic rṣi Dīrghatamas. However, the birth account of Dirghatamas in the Bhāddevatā does not contain Bharadvāja’s story. The account of BD VI. 11~15 is as follows:

¹ RV. VI. 17. 14:

sa no vājāya śravasa īṣe ca rāye dhehi dyumata indra viprān /

bharadvāje nṛvata indra sūrindivi ca smaidhi pārye na indra //

and also in RV. VI. 35. 4:

sa gomaghā jāitre aśvaścandrā vājaśravaso adhi dhehi prkṣaḥ /

plpīhṣaḥ sudughāmindra dhenum bharadvājesu suruco rurucyāḥ //

² Sharma, 'The Bharadvajas in Ancient India', p.6.
There were once two sons of the ādīsa, Ucathya and Brhaspati. Ucathya's wife was Mamatā, of the race of Bhṛgu. Now Brhaspati, the younger of the two, approached her. At the time of impregnation, the embryo addressed Brhaspati: 'Here I am previously engendered; you must not cause a commingling of seeds.' Brhaspati, however, could not brook this remonstrance about the seed. He addressed the embryo: 'Long darkness shall be your lot.' Hence the seer, Ucathya’s son, was born with the name Diṅghatamas (Long darkness). (Macdonell's translation)

The story in the Mbh. I. 98. is similar to this. The Mbh too does not tell of Bharadvāja’s birth, but only tells about the birth of Diṅghatamas: The story is as follows:

And there was once a wise seer called Utathya, who had a wife named Mamatā, whom he held in great esteem. Utathya had a younger brother of great virility, Brhaspati, the priests of the God; and he lusted after Mamatā, Mamatā said to her brother-in-law, who was a great arguer, “I am with child by your eldest brother, stop! And right here in my womb this child of Utathya’s has learnt the Veda and its six branches, my lord Brhaspati. Now you would spill your seed in vain. And since this is the case, you must stop now!” At this apposite rejoinder the greatly virile Brhaspati was unable to control his lusting itself, and he lay in love with the woman who loved him not. And he spilled forth his semen, the child in the womb said, “Bhoḥ little uncle, there is no room here for two! You have wasted your seed, and I was here first!” The blessed seer Brhaspati thereupon angrily cursed Utathya’s son in the womb, who had insulted him: “Since you at such a time that all creatures cherish spoke up as you did, you shall enter a long
darkness." And from this curse of the famed Brhaspati the seer Dirghatamas was born, Brhaspati’s peer in might. (Buittenen’s translation)

Now in connection with the birth of Dirghatamas, the Matsya Purâna 49, 16-26, and also the Vâyu Purâna 99, 141-151, briefly mention Bharadvâja’s birth. They say that he was a son of Brhaspati and the brother of the sage born blind Dirghatamas. The story says:

When the child blocked the genital organ of the mother, the seed of Brhaspati fell on the ground, from there instantly a child was born. Thereupon, Mamâtâ said: “O Brhaspati, I am going home, please take care of the boy born of two (fathers)”. While she was about to leave the place, Brhaspati said to her, “Please, you take care of it that is born of two (fathers)”. It is because of these reciprocal utterances of the parents that the child became known as Bharadvâja. Eventually, they abandoned the baby. When the Maruts saw the new born baby, deserted by the parents in such a pitiable condition, they took it under their care through their kindness. (quote from Sarmah’s ‘The Bharadvajas’, p. 52)

It can be observed that compared to the birth of Vasiñtha which has been mentioned from the Vedas onwards, and which was all blessed, Bharadvâja’s birth account was noted at a considerably later period, and his account is somewhat sad, though he was an eminent Vedic seer. If the birth story is judged by the worldly measure only, Bharadvâja appears to be an uncared for son. He was unwanted by his mother. Therefore he fell out of her womb. He was kicked by his brother, and born on the ground. After being discarded by his parents he was brought up by others’ hands. This story seems to show that the lives of the Bharadvâjas were unstable. Or perhaps, this originator’s birth itself might be an
expression of the agony of life of his descendants in the later period. Due to the
destitution, some of his later descendants were overactive with respect to earning
their livelihood. They could not lead an easy life. Sometimes they were swayed
from the brāhmaṇic nature and personality. It is quite in contrast to the Vasiṣṭhas
whose members enjoyed an easy going life with the help of their blessed birth and
inborn power. The Bharadvājas struggled hard in their lives. However, perhaps,
with the indefatigable vital power that comes out of a hard-lived life, they became
one of the most flourishing and influential lineages among the Indian families
who have a long history. Especially in the Buddha’s era it appears that they were
largely populated brāhmaṇas.

About the Vasiṣṭhas, though in the Vedic period they actively participated in
battle and led their party to victory, there is no apparent mention, from the Vedas
to the Epics, that they had a weapon in their own hands. But they took part in the
war as priests or as the counselors. They won battles with the brahmanical power
but not with the power of weapons. They seem to be spiritual leaders in the real
sense. The members of the family of the Bharadvājas were, however, on the one
hand, always well versed in the Vedas and the Śāstras, and on the other hand, they
maintained a long tradition of Dhanurveda¹. In the Vedas, there is no reference
that these Bharadvājas wielded weapons or they were of ksatriya-nature. In the
later literature, however, especially in the Mbh. it is said that the Bharadvājas,
right from the progenitor himself possessed the weapon (or astra) named āgneya
given by his father Brhaspati. He is said to have given it to Agnivesya, Agnivesya
to Droṇa and finally Droṇa to Arjuna (Mbh. I. 158). Again the weapons relating

¹ cf. Sharmah, ‘The Bharadājas in ancient India’, p. 79.
to Agni had been possessed by Droṇa Bhāradvāja. In the Mbh VII. 65-59, it is said that an armour (varma), which Indra was clad in and wearing which he had won the battle with Vṛtra was given to Aṅgiras, and Aṅgiras again gave it to his son Brhaspati, from him it came to Agniveśya and to Droṇa, then to Duryodana.

In the Mbh XII. 175-185, Bharadvāja asked Bhrigu about the origin of the world, and procreation of the beings and Bhrigu answered all of his questions. With this reference one may notice that even if there is no doubt that the Bharadvājas were said to be one of the greatest legendary sages, quite evidently they were positioned below the other distinguished sages, especially the Bhrugus and the Vasiṣṭhas.

The Mbh. I. 89. 16-20 says that the king Bharata obtained a son by the power of Bharadvāja. The story reads:

_The oldest of them (i.e., of the sons of Ilīna) was Duḥṣanta, who became the king, Janamejaya. And from him was born by Sakuntalā the wise king Bharata. It is from him that the great fame of the line of the Bhāratas began. Bharata begot nine sons on his three wives, but the king did not approve any one of them, for they were not of his stature. Thereupon Bharata offered up grand sacrifices and received a son from Bharadvāja by the name of Bhūmanyu, O Bhārata. The scion of the Pauravas deemed himself Bhūmanyu’s father and consecrated him Young King, O best of Bhāratas. Then the king himself had a little son, Vitatha, and this Vitatha became a son of Bhūmanyu...and this Bhūmanyu’s eldest son Suhotra inherited the kingdom._ (Buitenen’s translation)
Apart from this Bhūmanyu and famous son Droṇa, Bharadvāja had a son, perhaps the first son\(^1\), called Yavakrī (Mbh. III. 135-139ff). The son was not satisfied with the fact that his poor ascetic father Bharadvāja was not welcomed by the others. He was vexed and angry, and consequently took severe austerities in order to obtain complete Vedas. Being proud of himself for obtaining the entire Vedas from Indra, he insulted the son of the great sage Raibya, and was killed by him. The sage Bharadāja, then, being overwhelmed by grief, brought on by the death of the son, first cremated his son and later himself entered into the well-kindled fire, which suggests his committing suicide.

Another distinguished descendant of Bharadvāja, Droṇa Bhāradvāja’s uncommon birth account is given in the Mbh I. 121. Many parts are similar to Vasiṣṭha’s birth. The story reads: When the father of Droṇa, Bharadvāja saw a nymph Ghṛtācī his semen fell down. He collected it in a dṛṇa. From that, Droṇa was born. He played a vital role in the Mbh. He was the guru of the Kauravas and the Paṇḍavas, and was reputed to have mastered both the brāhmaṇa and kṣatriya dharma (Mbh. I. 159), but was more inclined to kṣatriya dharma by nature. In spite of his poverty, his youth seems to be normal with the strong friendship with Drupada. However, he started hating his poverty and was burning with anger of revenge against his friend Drupada when the latter once promised to give half of the kingdom, and later went back on his word. Then Droṇa decided to leave the brāhmaṇic virtues- self-restraint, asceticism and, austerities and instead he adopted the duties of a kṣatriya. His uncommon attachment to his son, which is

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\(^1\) Mbh. III. 138. 14: When Bhūmanyu was killed, Bharadvāja lamented the death of his ‘only son’.
generally said to come from his adversity, ruined whole of his life. He seemed to spend half of his life in practicing archery and training his disciples. He himself actively participated in the war. He slaughtered many warriors of Paṇḍava side and created havoc among them. Many sages, such as, Vasiṣṭha, Jamadagni, Bharadvāja, and Viśvāmitra tried to dissuade him from such sinful acts (Mbh. VII. 164).

Thus, Bharadvāja, in the Mbh, appeared to be an ascetic living in dire poverty, and most of his descendants suffered due to the paucity, and in order to overcome this poverty they took some unusual way to earn their livelihood.

Coming to Pāli literature, we come across many different names of distinguished Bhāradvājas, some about twenty individuals, are mentioned, such as, the young Bhāradvājas like Subha and Bhāradvāja the pupil of Tārakkha, and the old Bhāradvājas like Todeyya, Kaṭṭhahāra, Navakammaki and Kasi Bhāradvāja, and also the bhikkhus from the Bhāradvāja clan, such as, Piṇḍola, Ahiṃsaka, Aggika, Kāpāṭhika and Bhāradvāja therā etc. The Vedic rṣi Bharadvāja is listed among the great isis along with many other Vedic seers¹. It seems that these members of

¹ Tevijja sutta, Dig. I. 13:

The legendary sages and the famous rṣis of the Vedas are mentioned in the suttas as a unit of ten members. In several passages they occur like a refrain as; 'the early sages of those brāhmaṇas learned in the Three Vedas (tevijjānaṁ brāhmaṇānaṁ pubbakā āsaya), the makers of the mantras (mantānaṁ katāro), the expounders of the mantras (mantānaṁ pavattāro), whose ancient verses are chanted, pronounced and collected (porānaṁ mantapadaṁ gītām pavuttam samihitam), by the brāhmaṇas of today, and sung and spoken about (tadanugāyanti,
the Bhāradvāja family, in Pāli literature, were scattered all over the north India. Some lived at Rājagaha, some in Sāvatthi, and some in Kosala. They are mostly well off and some of them seem to be wealthy farmers. Many of them appear to be leaders of a certain group, and a number of them were said to be converted into Buddhism, and also many theras were from this Bhāradvāja clan. One of the Pacceka Buddhas and a yakha chief are also called Bhāradvāja. However, among all the Bhāradvājas, only Todeyya Bhāradvāja was given the title of the mahāsāla-brāhmaṇa.

Before proceeding further to the Bhāradvājas in Pāli literature, it will be better to have a brief introduction to the mahāsāla-brāhmaṇas. For, they are very significant in Pāli literature, from the point of view of understanding the social condition of those days when the Bhāradvājas flourished. In Buddhist literature, many types and various teachings of the brāhmaṇas were mentioned. There were the addhariyas, the tittiriyas, the chandokas, the chandāvas, and the brāhmaṇacariya brāhmaṇas. Each of these brāhmaṇas was supposed to teach different paths. The prominent brāhmaṇas who are mentioned in Pāli literature are said to be fully supported by the kings, and possessed many wives and ample wealth. Many of them were criticized by the Buddha as those whose teachings were unworthy. The Buddha debated with many types of brāhmaṇas, the young

1 Tevijja sutta, Dig. I. 13.
and the old. Among those brāhmaṇas the mahāsāla-brāhmaṇas were specially well-known and very prosperous. It is said that they were staying in a brāhmaṇa village called Manasākaṭa. Most of them were learned brāhmaṇas of Kosala, deeply versed in the Vedas, were used to gather at a place called Icchānaṅgala for reciting the Vedas and interpret them\(^1\). The mahāsāla- brāhmaṇas who are listed in the Tevijja sutta are: Caṅkī, Tārukkha, Pokkharasāti, Jāṇussoni, and Todeyya.

Before Caṅkī mahāsāla-brāhmaṇa, a brāhmaṇa having similar personality will be introduced. The brāhmaṇa named Soṇadaṇḍa was a man who was converted into Buddhism to partially, i.e., outwardly he kept his brāhmaṇa state but inwardly followed the Buddha. This brāhmaṇa was very interesting indeed. He showed the general human tendency through his double standards. Soṇadaṇḍa had a big group of followers as well as many worthy brāhmaṇa guests. He showed great interest in and respect to the Buddha. At the same time he was anxious about his own position and was concerned about his income also. Therefore he welcomed the Buddha and fully agreed with the doctrine of the Buddha. But he became Buddha’s follower only in secret, and kept some distance from the Buddha outwardly because of the fear of censure and the threat of adversity that might entail his reputation and income\(^2\). The mahāsāla-brāhmaṇa Caṅkī situation was the same as that of brāhmaṇa Soṇadaṇḍa. It appears that Caṅkī was much wealthier than the other brāhmaṇas. He was the ruler of a region called Opasāda which was given to him by the king. The place was teeming with life, having grass, wood, water and corn. He was staying there in a luxurious mansion. He saw

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\(^1\) Cf, ‘Dictionary of Pāli proper names’, p. 304.

\(^2\) Soṇadaṇḍa sutta, Dīg. I. 4.
and met and talked with the Buddha. But, there is no mention either of his conversion or non-conversion in the text. However, because of the extreme similarity of his circumstance with that of Soṇadaṇḍa one may infer that he too was a partly converted brāhmaṇa.\(^1\)

Many of the brāhmaṇas who are mentioned in Pāli literature were converted brāhmaṇas. Most of the Upaniṣadic teachers who belonged basically to the Vedic tradition opposed strongly, at the beginning, to the Buddha’s doctrine, specially his teaching of non-socializing (or, aloneness) and non-possession. But, it is described in Pāli literature that many of them turned into Buddhists after debating with the Buddha. Foremost among the converted brāhmaṇas, there was a greatly renowned teacher, the mahāsāla-brāhmaṇa Pokkharasati. The lineage of Pokkharasati is said to be of the Opamaṇḍa (Upamaṇḍa clan).\(^2\) It is said that he had been given a fabulous place by the king Pasenadi of Kosala kingdom\(^3\) and had many distinguished disciples such as Vaseṭṭha, Ambaṭṭha and Subha, Todeyya’s son etc. These disciples were supposed to be well versed, in the Vedas as well as in the Śastras, like him. It seems that, at the beginning, he was a very persistent and rigid brāhmaṇa, who believed in the superiority of the brāhmaṇa caste.\(^4\) Later on, he prepared himself to accept the doctrine of the Buddha, and became a Buddhist.

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\(^1\) Compare Soṇadaṇḍa sutta, Dīg. and Caṇki sutta, Maj. II. 5. 5.

\(^2\) Subha sutta, Maj. Dīg. II. 4. 9.

\(^3\) See Ambaṭṭha sutta, Dīg. I. 3.

The *mahāśāla-brāhmaṇa*, Jānuṣsoni, was another faithful lay follower of the Buddha. He was a rare old *brāhmaṇa* teacher, whose mind was filled with joy by merely hearing of the talks about the Buddha. A young *brāhmaṇa* Assalāyana and many other well known *brāhmaṇas* too, especially the young *brāhmaṇas*, including a number of Bhāradvājas, such as, Kasi and Aggika Bhāradvāja among the elders, and Subha, the son of Todeyya and Kāpatihika Bhāradvāja among the young were converted by the teachings of the Buddha.

The *mahāśāla-brāhmaṇa* Tārakkha, and Todeyya Bhāradvāja, the father of Subha, were not converted to Buddhism. Regarding Tārakkha, whose identity might be found in the Śaṅkhāyaṇa Āraṇyaka 37. 1, by the name Tāruksa, not many references are found in Pāli literature. He was enumerated along with the other *mahāśāla-brāhmaṇas* dwelling at Icchānaṭṭakala and Manasākaṭa. He was said to be the teacher of young Bhāradvāja, the companion of the young Vāsetṭha whose teacher was Pokkharasāti. Other than the rigid old *brāhmaṇas*, there was one very peculiar young *brāhmaṇa*, the young Ambaṭṭha who belonged to the Kanṭhaya clan, who did not convert himself to Buddhism even after the meeting with the Buddha. This non-conversion of Ambaṭṭha might have been the result of

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2 Assalāyana sutta, Maj. II. 4. 3.
3 Read Kasi Bhāradvāja sutta, SN. I. 4.
4 Vasala sutta, SN. I. 7.
5 Vubha sutta, Maj. II. 4. 9.
6 Cankī sutta, Maj. II. 4. 5.
7 SN. No. 594.
the insult set by the Buddha regarding his ancestry, as it will be seen in the following pages about the sage Kaṇha. Among the Bhāradvājas most of whom were easily converted to Buddhism, the rigidness of Todeyya Bhāradvāja was quite unique. He is described as one of the most rigid and aggressive brāhmaṇas. It seemed that he did not agree with any ascetic other than traditionally brahmanical brāhmaṇas.

As is observed already, the mahāsāla-brāhmaṇas were the representatives of the wealthy and renowned brāhmaṇas. The mahāsāla-brāhmaṇa teachers, well-known and different characterized, brought up many pupils of different characteristics. They represented the diverse brāhmaṇa societies, both rigid and open. These brāhmaṇas were eager to discuss true knowledge. Some of them were converted, some of them were partly converted, and some of them were not converted into Buddhism.

One of the Bhāradvājas is listed among the mahāsāla-brāhmaṇas. He is the only Bhāradvāja who was said to be very rigid, and who persisted in maintaining the brahmanical way of life and did not convert into Buddhism. Apart from this mahāsāla-brāhmaṇa Bhāradvāja, named Todeyya, the rest of the Bhāradvājas who are mentioned in Pāli literature can be divided into: 1) those who turned into the lay followers of the Buddha, 2) the young Bhāradvājas who entered into the Buddhist order, i.e., those who became Buddhist monks (the young Bhāradvājas like, Kāpathika Bhāradvāja, and the young Bhāradvāja who is the companion of

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1 Vassakāraka sutta, Aṅg. II. 179f.
Vāseṭṭha) and, 3) the renowned bhikkhus who attained arahantsip (like Piṇḍola Bhāradvāja, Sundarika Bhāradvāja etc).

1) Those who turned into lay followers of the Buddha.

In this group, the wife of Bhāradvāja therâ, Dhānañjanī, is said to be one of the most faithful lay followers. She was married to Bāradvāja gotra (gotta, in Pâli). It is said that she led her husband to the Buddha and encouraged him to be a monk. Some well-known Bhāradvājas who are well versed in the Vedas, such as, Kaṭṭhahāra and Navakammaki Bhāradvāja, belong to this group. Both Kaṭṭhahāra and Navakammaki Bhāradvāja are from Kosala country. Navakammaki Bhāradvāja who was getting some work done in the woodland thicket, saw the Buddha in the forest, and after some discussion with the latter, he became a lay follower. Kaṭṭhahāra Bhāradvāja had a number of students, and due to the report of these students who collected firewood, and who saw the Buddha meditating in the woodland thicket, met the Buddha and by the mere sight of him became a lay follower. The Bhāradvājas who were the lay followers of the Buddha turned

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1 Sam. 1-1. 7. 1. 1 reads: Once, while she was bringing the meal for her husband she stumbled, whereupon she uttered the praises of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅga. Her husband was angry, and said “for the slightest disturbance this this wretched woman spouts out praise of that shaveling ascetic!” Then he threatened her that he will refute the doctrine of the Buddha. She was glad about his plan. The brāhmaṇa met the Buddha, and had a discussion with him. Then he converted, and later, he joined the Buddhist Order, in due course, became an arahant.

2 Sam. 1. 7.
easily into Buddhism while the Bhāradvājas who became the bhikkhus were after intense argument.

2) The young Bhāradvājas who entered into the Buddhist Order

A few young Bhāradvājas entered into the Buddhist Order. Kāpaṭhika Bhāradvāja, and Bhāradvāja who is simply called young Bhāradvāja can be put in this group. Kāpaṭhika\(^1\) is a pupil of mahāsāla-brāhmaṇa Caṅkī. Kāpaṭhika was said to be a master of the three Vedas (tiṇṇaṁ vedānaṁ pāragū) when he was sixteen years old. He understood Vedas with their vocabulary (nīghanḍu) and rituals (keṭubha) together with the phonology (sākhharappabheda) and with the legendary tradition (ītiḥāsa). He was learned in the idioms (padaka) and was a grammarian (veyyākaraṇa)... Once at Opasāda, he was rebuked by the Buddha due to his interruption in conversation between the Buddha and the senior brāhmaṇas. However, Caṅkī begged the Buddha not to scold his pupil, for, 'he is a clansman, he is very learned, he has a good delivery, he is wise, he is capable of taking part in this discussion with Master Gotama\(^2\). Kāpaṭhika took part in the conversation, and after getting all his doubts cleared by the Buddha, declared himself to be a lifetime lay follower.

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\(^1\) Caṅkī sutta, Maj. II. 5. 5.

\(^2\) Caṅkī sutta, Maj. II. 5. 5: mā bhavam gotamo kāpaṭikam māṇavam apasādesi. kuluputto ca kāpaṭiko māṇavo, bahussuto ca kāpaṭiko māṇavo, pandito ca kāpaṭiko māṇavo, kalyānāvākkaraṇo ca kāpaṭiko māṇavo, pahoti ca kāpaṭiko māṇavo bhotā gotamena saddhim asmīṁ vacane paṭimantetu.

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The young Bhāradvāja (his name is known merely as Bhāradvāja māṇava) played an exclusively important role in Pāli Tipaṭaka. He occurs often with Vāsetṭha, the descendent of Vaseṭṭha (Vasiṣṭha). Bhāradvāja and Vāsetṭha were self-professed young brāhmaṇas, staying with many distinguished wealthy brahmaṇas and they were said to be adept in three Vedas\(^1\). Their questions about brāhmaṇism, created three important suttas, viz., Vāsetṭha sutta in Sutanipāta\(^2\), Teviśja and Aggaṇīka sutta in Dīghanikāya. These suttas show how the brāhmaṇa youths are turned into Buddhism. The Teviśja sutta preaches the futility of the belief that claims that mere knowledge of the three Vedas leads to the attainment of reunion with Brahма. These two māṇavas believe in the teachings of their own teachers and also in that of the Upaniṣads. At the same time they are eager to know about the views of other renowned teachers, hence they visited the Buddha and asked him about the ways to unite with Brahма. To them the Buddha declared that only a monk without hate, without ill will, and is pure, could attain union with Brahма\(^3\).

In the Aggaṇīka sutta, the young Vāsetṭha and Bhāradvāja were living among the monks as novices. In this sutta the two young novices were reproached by the

\(^1\) Vāsetṭha sutta, SN. III. 9.

\(^2\) Also in the Brāhmaṇavagga VIII. Maj.

\(^3\) The Buddha said that if one didn't see Brahма face to face (sakkhidittho) he has no right to say what is the right path to unite with the Brahма. Even for a learned Brāhmaṇa who is well versed in three Vedas (te teviśja brāhmaṇā) but is enslaved by five strands of sense-desire it is not possible to unite with the unencumbered Brahма.
brāhmaṇas for leaving the brāhmaṇa caste. The Buddha admonished them by explaining the origin of the caste system.

These three suttas, through discussion with the young brāhmaṇas, show the view of the Buddha that is opposed to the brāhmaṇa society. And these three suttas also show how the life style of the young brāhmaṇas was a serious religious life. They visited the outstanding teachers either their own or others, and asked questions to them and learned from them. It seems that they did not hesitate to renounce the world if necessary, as Bhāradvāja and Vaseṭṭha did.

Bhāradvāja and Vaseṭṭha were disciples of the two teachers whose characters and views were clearly different from each other, one is rigid, and the other is open. Still these two students seem to be close friends who share their opinions. These characteristics of Bhāradvāja and Vaseṭṭha, however, seem to be quite fictitious. Here one may wonder that if the personas of Vāsettha and Bhāradvāja were

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1 Buddha taught them to question the view that ‘the brāhmaṇa caste is the highest, is fair, they are the true children of Brahmā, born from his mouth (brāhmaṇevasaṭṭho vanno, hīnā añña anāna. brāhmaṇevasukko vanno, kaṇhā añña vanno. brāhmaṇāvasuṣṭhaṇi, na abrāhmaṇā. brāhmaṇāva brahmuno putā orasā mukhato jāta brahmaṇā brahmaṇimmitā brahmaṇadāyādā). The Buddha preached them that at the beginning of the world there was no distinction between the castes, but they occur only because of the greed of people, and the castes of people would not have present otherwise. When man felt the need to protect his fields, the khattiya, and when he needs to expiate the sin the brāhmaṇa class comes out. Therefore the meaning of khattiya was at the beginning ‘the lord of the field’ and that of brāhmaṇa was ‘one who puts aside evil and unwholesome things (pāpake akusale dhamme vāhanti)’.
created solely for the purpose of working out the dialectics of various arguments, may be because of the commonness and popularity of their names. For, these common names are easily accessible by writers to illustrate their point. For instance, in today’s times common names of Indians, such as, Joshi, Deshpande, Kulkarni may be used for that purpose. It may mean that the descendents of the great Vedic seers, Vasiṣṭha and Bharadvāja flourished in the Buddha's era, perhaps, Bhāradvājas were more popular, because their traces are seen in several suttas.

3) The renowned Bhāradvāja bhikkhus who attained arahantship

Majority of the Bhāradvājas who are mentioned in Pāli literature belong to the group of arahants. They were almost typified brāhmaṇas who were authentic, wealthy, sincere and learned but defiant. At the beginning, they were haughty and unfriendly to the Buddha and his doctrine, but later on bent themselves to him became ardent monks and then achieved arahantship. Most parts of the Brāhmaṇa Saṃyutta¹ consist of the stories of many of the Bhāradvāja. Some of them lived in Rājagaha, and some lived in Sāvatthi, and others were in Kosala. The Bhāradvāja therā who married the faithful lay follower Dhanañjānī, and all his other brothers, viz., Akkosaka, Asurindaka, Bilaṅgika, and Saṅkārava Bhāradvāja were said to become arahants. Apart from these brothers some Bhāradvājas who lived in Sāvatthi also joined the Order and became arahants. They are, Ahiṃsaka, Jāta Bhāradvāja and at the Veḷuvana, Suddhika, Aggika Bhrādvāja, and on the bank of Sundarika, Sundarika Bhāradvāja, and in a forest tract in Kosala Bahudhītika

¹ Saṃ. I. 7.
Bhāradvāja etc. Many of these Bhāradvājas were mentioned in other texts, especially in the Suttanipāta.

Kasi Bhāradvāja who is said to be a lay follower in the Brāhmaṇa Sam., is mentioned in the SN\(^1\) as the brāhmaṇa who became an arahant. According to the SN, he was a Maghadhan brāhmaṇa who lived at Dakkhināgiri in the brāhmaṇa village called Ekanālā. He was a diligent and wealthy brāhmaṇa whose occupation was agriculture having at least five hundred ploughs. He was proud of his farming, and demanded that the Buddha, who stood near him for alms, to do the same thing, to plough and sow. But impressed by the Buddha’s discourse that ‘faith is seed, penance is the rain, wisdom is yoke...he was ordained in the presence of the Buddha. It is said that he practiced vigilantly, and when he had not long been ordained became one of the arahants.

Sundarika is another Bhāradvāja who is mentioned both in the Saṃ and the SN\(^2\). Sundarika Bhāradvāja, after forming his aggihutta sacrifice saw the shaven headed, meditating Buddha. Before offering his remaining portion of the sacrificial food to the Buddha (usually for brāhmaṇa) he asked the Buddha’s lineage, but the Buddha’s answer was, “ask not of birth but of conduct...”\(^3\)

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\(^1\) His discussion with the Buddha and his consequent conversion is recorded in the Kasibhāradvāja sutta. SN. I 4.

\(^2\) Sundarikabhārdvāja sutta, SN. III. 4.

\(^3\) Cp. na brāhmaṇo no ’mhi na rājaputto / na vessāyano uda koci no ’mhi /

gottam pariṁñāya puthujjanānam / akīvano manta carāmi loke //
Moved by this answer Sundarika Bhāradvāja was ordained and soon obtained arahantship.

Aggika Bhāradvāja is also mentioned both in the Brāhmaṇa Saṁ and Vasala sutta, SN, but it seems that these two texts mention two different Bhāradvājas who performed the fire worship. The one who is mentioned in the Saṁ lived in Rājagaha, and became an arahant, and the one in the SN stayed in Sāvatti, and he is harsher to the Buddha. He requested the Buddha to accept him as a lay-follower of the Buddha. Both these Aggika Bhāradvājas were particularly proud of their brāhmaṇa caste, the latter called the Buddha as vasala, the outcaste. Both of them were preached by the Buddha about who was the real outcaster and what should be his conduct etc.

Pīṇḍola therā is another Bhāradvāja. He is of an interesting characteristic. His greediness for food seems to be famous. He seems to be having good iddhi power and due to the misuse of it, he was reproved by the Buddha\(^1\). When he was staying at Kosambi in Ghosita’s park he led the king Udena to Buddhism by preaching him about women and impurities\(^2\).

\(^1\) Vin. V. 8: Pīṇḍola therā flying up into the air, brought down a sandal wood bowl which was hung high on the pole by a sethi of Rājagaha who wanted to try the power of miracles of the samanas or the brāhmaṇas. Then he went thrice round Rājagaha in the air, and drew the attention and respect by that action. This act led the Buddha to make a rule of a dukkata that a bhikkhu should not display before the laity the superhuman powers of iddhi. And the sandal wood bowl was made to be ground to powder, and to be used as the bhikkhus’ eye ointments.

\(^2\) Saṁ. VI. 3. 4.
Thus, the Bhāradvājas in Pāli literature were perhaps the most populated, wealthy and influential brāhmaṇas. It appears that they were also the most Buddhism-friendly brāhmaṇas, many of whom became the lay followers, the bhikkhus, and the arahants.

(3) The Bhṛgu(s)

Bhṛgu(s), or the Bhārgavas, are one of the most ancient sages. Among the seven mūlagotras, they are said to be the oldest family among men, along with other three gotras, viz., the Aṅgirasas, the Ātreyas, and the Kaśapas. The Bhārgavas and the Aṅgirasas were originally one. The originator of the Bhārgavas may be said to be the most important and mythical sage in the history of Indian mythology. The most outstanding feature of Bhṛgu and the Bhārgavas, in the Vedas, is that they are clearly connected with fire. The originator of the Bhārgavas was supposed to be the sage who brought fire to man. And the Bhārgavas found Agni lurking in water as a messenger of the gods. So they pursued him like some lost creature who could be traced by his foot-prints (RV. X. 46.2). By worshipping in water, they established Agni as a treasure among men (RV. II. 4. 2; I. 58. 6). Or elsewhere (RV. I. 50.1; III. 5. 10) Mātariśvan, the messenger of Vivaśvān kindled Agni and brought him to Bhṛgu as a precious gift used in the sacrifice. Mātariśvan took the credit of establishing fire, whereas the Bhārgavas, though they did not fetch it down from the heaven,
diffused its use on earth\(^1\). Hence, Agni is called the son of Bhṛgu. Due to this pious act of introducing fire to mankind, the Bhṛgus were honoured in line with the gods\(^2\). It is said that the Bhṛgus were the most esteemed of all\(^3\), just like the gods, through their skill\(^4\). Unlike the other sages who were not praised as divinities though their powers were equal to the gods, the Br̥rgus were sometimes particularly eulogized as gods. Their godhead is also referred to in the Rg Vedic verses. Along with all the thirty-three gods, they were invoked to drink soma juice\(^5\), which the gods were reluctant to share even with Aśvins, who also are the gods. In the Brāhmaṇas and also in the Epic mythologies, they not only enjoyed soma with the gods but also enabled Aśvins to enjoy it\(^6\).

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\(^1\) V.G. Rahurkar, 'Bṛgu and Bhṛgus in the Vedic and post Vedic'. CASS studies, No.3. Rahurkar also quotes the remarks of Peterson (Hymns from the Rg Veda (p. 92) that Mātariśvan must be belonging to the demi-gods as Prometheus belongs to the superhuman class of Titans. Being from a superhuman clan, Mātariśvan assisted in fetching down the spark from heaven. Then he gave it to the Bhārgavas who could pass it to man.

\(^2\) RV. VIII. 35. 3: \textit{vīśvairdevaivstribhīrekādāsaśairiṁbhirbhirmarudbhirbhṛrgubhīḥ sacābhuvā.}

\(^3\) See, RV. X. 92.10: \textit{devā daksairbhṛrgavatī saṁ cikitrīre.}

\(^4\) May be skill of spreading fire among men.

\(^5\) RV. VIII. 35. 3: \textit{sajoṣaṣā uṣasā sūryeṇa ca somam pibatam aśvinā.}

\(^6\) Cyavana, a celebrated son (or grandson) of Bhṛgu, enabled Aśvins share Soma with the gods. Mbh. III. 122-125 reads: as the price of his rejuvenation, Cyavana promised to Aśvins a share in the Soma juice. And he did accordingly in the sacrifice. Cyavana did not pay heed to Indra’s argument, that Aśvins are not proper gods to share soma, because they are the healers and servants of the gods, he forcibly gave the juice to Aśvins. Indra, being afraid of his own
In the Epic mythology, the importance of the Bhārgavas is still more highlighted. The Mahābhārata begins with the story of the Bhārgavas. It was not only Bhrigu, the originator of the Bhrigu race who played an important role but his descendants also made their impression on the entire Mbh., with their heroic and brāhmaṇical personalities. The chapters of every parvan are replete with a great deal of the Bhārgava materials. In the very beginning of the Ādiparvan, Sūta Ugraśravas, son of Lomaharṣaṇa, comes to the hermitage of Śaunaka during the twelve-year sacrificial session which was inaugurated by the sage in the sacred Naimiśa forest and recited the Mbh. It is said that Himavat lost his jewels due to the power of curse of Bhrigu who was refused the permission to marry Uma by her father. He was a symbol of righteousness. Kṛṣṇa identified himself with Bhrigu. Bhrigu gave a discourse to Bharadvāja about the origin of the world to. It is said in the life allowed Aśvins to enjoy Soma juice in the sacrifice of Śaryāti, the father-in-law of Cyavana.

Mbh. XIII. 141. similarly reads: Indra who refused to share soma with Aśvins was defeated by Cyavana. Cyavana paralysed Indra who had his thunderbolt and a mountain in hand, by sprinkling just some water. He created a demon called Mada. Indra was forced to accept Cyavana's advice to share Soma with Aśvins.

1 Mbh. XII. 122. 38: In Brahmā's sacrifice, Mahādeva made the righteous rod (dharmasya daṇḍa), and handed it over unto the protector of righteousness, i.e., Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu gave that to Aṅgirasa and Aṅgirasa to Indra and Marici, Marici gave it to Bhrigu. Then Bhrigu gave that rod unto all the rṣis.

2 Mbh. VI. 32. 25: mahārṣiṇām Bhrgur aham.
Mbh. XIII. 151. 31 that a person who merely recites the name of Bhṛgu is purified.

The birth of Bhṛgu, in the Vedas, is connected with Prajāpati and Indra. The account of his birth is as follows:

_Prajāpati’s sperm was divided into three parts. Out of one part arose a flame from which Āditya (the sun) was born. The other part gave rise to Bhṛgu. In a subsequent blaze, the Ādityas originated. While Bhṛgu and Ādityas came out of the flames of the semen of Prajāpati, the Arīgasas came out of coals and out of the rekindled ‘coals’ came Brhaspati_.

In the Mbh., the story goes still further: Bhṛgu is the mind-born son of Brahmā and the adopted son of Varuṇa. The Mbh. XIII. 85 tells the story as follows:

_Mahādeva performed a sacrifice taking the form of Varuṇa with the help of other gods and their consorts. There, Brahmā, with passion for the beautiful damsels of heaven, let his semen fall down. Puṣan collected Brāhma’s seed and cast it into the sacrificial fire. Then again for the second time Brahmā was excited with passion and his seed came out. This time, he took it up with a ladle and poured it like a libation of ghee with mantras. As a result of this, many beings came out of

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1 Ait. Br. III. 10. quoted from Panda, ‘Bhrūga, A study’, p. 12. Taitt Br. tells the story differently: while Indra was continuing pouring soma his manly vigour fell down in three portions. The third part became Bhṛgu (indrasya sūṣvānsya tredha viryani parāpatat bhṛgu tritiyamabhavat).
the fire. One of them was Bhṛgu. He arose from the flames of fire. Bhṛgu was adopted by Varuṇa since Mahadeva who was in the form of Varuṇa, performed the sacrifice. And Bhṛgu came out of that sacrificial fire. He is called Vāruṇī. Another story in the Mbh says that Bhṛgu came out breaking the heart of Brahmā.

As mentioned at the beginning, Bhṛgu and his lineage were well known as the first beings who were acquainted with fire. They were mainly known in the Vedas as the sages who brought or introduced fire to man. But the birth account of the originator Bhṛgu in the Vedas, does not tell how and in what manner he was connected with Agni. A possible conjecture is that he was born from the 'flames' of the divided sperm of Prajāpati. And the beings-Āditya (the sun) and Ādityas, who came out of that sperm along with Bhṛgu, are connected with 'light'.

However, in the Epics, his birth account is directly connected with fire. He arose from the flames of fire of sacrifice. It is quite interesting that Bhṛgu, who was the leader of the fire-cult in the Vedic period, cursed Agni in the Epic period. He cursed Agni to be an eater of all (sarvabhaṅka)². Mythologically, due to this

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¹ Mbh. I. 60. 40 tells: brahmāno hṛdayam bhittvā nilāśrito bhagavān bhṛguḥ/
bhṛgoḥ putraḥ kavirvidvām śukraḥ kavisuto grahaḥ //

² Mbh. I. 4-6f: Agni who is the witness of all things either good or bad, being asked by a rākṣasa, said that the wife of Bhṛgu in fact belonged to the rākṣasa. Then the rākṣasa kidnapped Paulomi, the wife of the sage, forcibly, in the sage's absence. After Bhṛgu came to
curse, Agni ate everything either the purified sacrificial food or the unwanted dirty things. This suggests one important aspect of Agni, viz., Agni functioned not only as a sacred fire but also as a purifier of dirty things. It seems that as an introducer of Agni to mankind, Bhrigu brought this aspect of Agni to the surface in the form of a curse.

With several facts, such as, a fire bringer (or introducer) to the human race; as sharers of soma juice with the gods; as fine priests (maybe the first priests) who have close connection with Agni and Mātariśvan who are the essential part of sacrifice; as composers of some of the Vedic hymns etc., Bhṛgu and the Bhārgavas were the authentic and pure brāhmaṇas. However, it cannot be overlooked that the character of the Bhārgavas, like the Bhāradvājas clearly has two sides. On the one hand they were strictly followed brahmanism but on the other hand they showed their traits of the kṣatriya. Their relationship with the kṣatriyas was rather precarious. The AV. V. 19. 1 tells about the seed of this relationship between the Bhārgavas and kṣatriyas briefly. The verse is that ‘atimātramavardhanta nodiva divamasṛṣṭan, bhṛgum hirisitvā sṛṇjayā vaitahavyāḥ parābhavan (the sons of Vītahavya, the Sṛṇjayas, waxed exceedingly strong. They well-nigh touched the heavens, but they wronged Bhrigu and were overthrown (Griffith's translation).

On the basis of this verse, two stories seem to have developed in the Mahābhārata. One shows how kṣatriyas who wronged the Bhārgavas perished, know that he was in rage and cursed Agni that henceforth he would have to eat everything,

i.e., good as well as bad.
and the other tells of the connection of Vītaḥavya to the Bhārgavas, but totally differently. Only the names seem to have been borrowed from the original story.

The story in the Mbh. I. 169~171, tells how the Bhārgavas started their enmity with the kṣatriyas. The story also shows traits like haughtiness, wrath and mercy in the character of the Bhārgavas. Ironically, even though they are brāhmaṇas they chastised the kṣatriyas in the way of kṣatriya. At the end, however, they resumed their own brahmanic nature.

In the Mahābhārata XIII. 31, Vītaḥavya is another name of the celebrated king Haihayya. The story is as follows:

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1 The story is as follows: After the king Kṛtvārjya, a great patron of the Bhruga, passed away, the kṣatriyas were in need of wealth. They requested the Bhārgavas for wealth. When their request was rejected by the Bhārgavas and when they found the hidden wealth from the house of the Bhārgavas, they started to destroy all the Bhārgavas including their foetus. When all the Bhārgavas were at the point of perishing, the women of the Bhārgavas went to the Himalayas. One of them kept an embryo in her thigh (ūru) for a hundred years. This boy was called Aurva, due to his birth from āru. When the boy was born from her, he made all the kṣatriyas blind by his lustre. The kṣatriyas begged the boy to return their sight which he did. Yet, Aurva thought of destroying the whole world for revenge, and for pleasing the fathers of the Bhārgavas. However these fathers persuaded him not to do so. They had had a too long a life. Even though they wanted to end their life, they could not kill themselves. Hence they borrowed the hands of the kṣatriyas to kill them. Therefore, it is not the fault of the kṣatriyas but the wish of the Bhrugus themselves. On hearing these words of the ancestors Aurva threw his anger into the vast ocean.
Vitahavya had ten wives and hundred sons. These 100 sons of Vitahavya harassed and attacked the kingdom of Kasi, and defeated them several times. Then Divodasa the king of Kasi got a son named Pratarddana by the grace of the sage Bharadvāja. This prince Pratarddana attacked the kingdom of Vitahavya, won the battle. Now the defeated king Vitahavya sought refuge from the sage Bhṛgu. Pratarddana chased Vitahavya, to the door of the sage Bhṛgu, and demanded of him to send the king back. However, Bhṛgu told him ‘there is no kṣatriya in this hermitage. Those that are here are all brāhmaṇas (Mbh. XIII. 31. 49; neḥāsti kṣatriyaḥ kaścit sarve hīme dvijātayāḥ). On hearing the words of the sage, even Pratarddana was happy and said “the king is now abandoned by the caste he was born into (kṣatriya) in the consequence of my prowess’ (Mbh. XIII. 31. 51, cp: yadeṣa rājā vīryeṇa svajātin tyājito mayā). Then he left. In the meanwhile the king Vitahavya attained to the status of brāhmaṇa merely by virtue of the word of Bhṛgu, and also acquired complete mastery over all the Vedas through the mere words of the brāhmaṇas¹. Then his descendants Gr̄tsamada, Pramati, Ruru etc. also became the great brāhmaṇa rṣis. His whole family was known as brāhmaṇa only in the later period.

This story may be said to be an example of the class-conversion in the past. It suggests that the status of brāhmaṇa can be acquired though it is very difficult.

¹ Mbh. XIII. 31. 54: bhṛgor vacanamātreṇa sa ca brahmavādītvaneva ca //

vitatahavyo mahārāja brahmavādītvameva ca //
Especially a kśatriya could convert into a brāhmaṇa by a mere blessing or assent of a celebrated sage.¹

In connection with the class-conversion in the past, Viśvāmitra's achieving brahminhood, in the Epic period, might have been a big episode. Though there is no reference in the Vedas that Viśvāmitra was a kśatriya, he was clearly a kśatriya in the Epics. He was a celebrated king in the country of Kānyakubja. He acquired brāhmaṇahood at his own will. According to the Mbh. I. 165, shocked by the Vasiṣṭha’s brāhmaṇic power, Viśvāmitra renounced the kingship. He realized that power does not lie on physical strength but on meditative power. The Mbh. V. 104 says that he achieved brāhmaṇahood by dint of his devotional austerity. He was blessed to attain brāhmaṇahood by Dharma himself who came to him in the guise of the sage Vasiṣṭha. The story reads:

When Viśvāmitra was practising austerities, Dharma visited him in the guise of the sage Vasiṣṭha. Dharma asked for a meal of caru. By the time Viśvāmitra brought the hot rice the hungry Dharma had already been fed by the other ascetics. He simply said, ‘Wait a while’, and left that place. Viśvāmitra, then waited, stood like pillar, carrying the cooked food on his head, holding it with both hands. He waited for hundred years. Dharma came again assuming the form of Vasiṣṭha, and ate that food which was still hot and fresh. Then he departed

¹ Mbh. XIII: Yudhīṣṭhira said that he had heard Viśvāmitra acquired the dignity of brāhmaṇa (XIII. 31. 2: viśvāmitreṇa ca purā brāhmanyam prāptam) and formaly king Vitahavaya also had been succeeded in acquiring the dignity of brāhmaṇa (XIII. 31. 3: vitahavyaśca rājāraṣṭrāḥ śrutaḥ me vipratān gataḥ)
from the hermit with the words, ‘I am pleased, oh, brāhmaṇa ṛṣi (prīto’smi vipraṛṣe)’. Because of these words of Dharma, Viśvāmitra relinquished his position of being a kṣatriya and attained brāhmaṇahood (kṣatrabhāvādapagato brāhmaṇatvam upāgataḥ).

This story is very interesting from the point of view of the relationship between Viśvāmitra and Vasiṣṭha also. The long enmity between the two celebrated sages might have ended by this incident. Viśvāmitra might have overcome his inferiority complex arising out of caste and Vasiṣṭha at last accepted Viśvāmitra’s brāhmaṇahood. These two events tell us about the dignity ascribed of brāhmaṇahood and also about how the brāhmaṇas were highly esteemed among the people.

The superiority of the brāhmaṇas over the other classes is mentioned in the Vedas also. The theme of the earlier mentioned hymn, i.e., AV. V. 19 shows how the other classes collapse when they harm to the brāhmaṇas and how the brāhmaṇas are superior to other castes. This theme is in continuation with the hymns V. 17 and V. 18. The hymn V. 17 is about the abduction of a brāhmaṇa’s wife by a kṣatriya, and her subsequent restoration to her husband. Verse eight tells that if a brāhmaṇa took the hand of a woman, then only he is her husband, even if ten non-brāhmaṇa former husbands had espoused her¹. And the verse nine says that neither a vaiśya nor a rājanya can be her lord but the brāhmaṇa indeed is her lord.

¹ AV. V. 17: 8: uta yat patayo daśa striyāḥ pūrve abrāhmanāḥ / 

brahmā ceddhistamagrahīt sa eva patirekadhā //
The sun goes proclaiming this fact, to the five races of men\(^1\). And verse V. 18. 1 says about how a sacrificial cow of a brāhmaṇa is important and how it should not be touched by people of the other class \(^2\).

However, from the following birth account of the two sages, Paraśurāma and Viśvāmitra, we also know that it is not the brāhmaṇa caste that is esteemed, but it is the quality of a brāhmaṇa that is highly respected. According to the Mbh. III. 115 the characters of Paraśurāma and Viśvāmitra were predicted by the sage Bhṛgu. Once Bhṛgu bestowed a son-conceiving boon on the son-wishing daughter-in-law, Satyavatī, the princess of Kāanyakubja and on her mother. However, when Satyavatī and her mother embraced the tree different than what the sage instructed, the sage foretold to Satyavatī as ‘you will get a brāhmaṇa son whose quality is like a kṣatriya, and your mother will get the kṣatriya son the qualities of whom will be like brāhmaṇa’\(^3\). As a result of this Satyavatī gave birth to Jamadagni and Viśvāmitra was born to her mother. Due to a strong request of Satyavatī who was horrified at the idea of having a son with kṣatriya qualities, Paraśurāma was born not as her son but as her grandson.

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\(^1\) AV. V. 17. 9: brāhmaṇa eva patirna rājanyo na vaiśyaḥ  

tat sūryaḥ prabravanneti pañcabhyo mānavebhaḥ /

\(^2\) see V. 18. 1: naitan te deva adadustabhyan nrpate attave /  
mā brāhmanasya rājanya gānī jighatso anādyām //

\(^3\) Mbh. III. 115. 25:atho vāca mahāteja bhṛguḥ satyavatim snuṣām /  
brāhmaṇaḥ kṣatravrītītir vai tava putro bhavisyatī //  

26: kṣatryo brāhmaṇācāro mātustava suto mahān /  
bhavisyatī mahāvīryaḥ sādhunām mārgamāsthitaḥ //
These two births reflect the caste system indirectly: marriage between the two castes, *brāhmanas and ksatriya* was quite free, but the caste of the child was that of the father. Thus Satyavatī who married a *brāhmaṇa* would give birth to a *brāhmaṇa* son though he had the nature of *ksatriya*, and her mother, the wife of a king gave birth to a *ksatriya* child though his character was like that of a *brāhmaṇa*. And, feelings of the mothers (one grandmother) of the two sages indicate that it was the *brāhmaṇa* nature and qualities which were considered much more important than the *brāhmaṇa* caste. And as the words of the king Pratarddana mentioned earlier who said to “the king Vithahavya is abandoned by the caste he was born into (*ksatriya*) in the consequence of my prowess”, indicate one can also know that both the *brāhmaṇa* and the *ksatriya* were proud of their own caste. Yet, from Visvāmitra’s happiness and also from the gratitude of the king Vīthahavya towards Bhṛgu after becoming *brāhmaṇa*, and also from Paraśurāma who, though lived fully like *ksatriya*, did not change his caste either by force nor by his will, one can not confidently judge that only *brāhmaṇa* quality was genuinely esteemed. It seems that though these qualities were highly praised and recommended, still *brāhmaṇa* caste by itself was exceptionally honoured by society. It seems that whenever someone’s caste was elevated, the descendents kept the elevated caste but when it was degraded, they tried to regain their original higher caste as we have seen in the case of Triśaṅku and Vīthahavya. There is a reference that a son of Bharadvāja, Vidathin Bhāradvāja was adopted by the king Bharata who was without any heir. And it is said that Vidathin’s son Vīthatha was a successor of the king Bharata. It means that this Bhāradvāja became a *ksatriya*. However, there is no reference that his descendants were turned into *ksatriya* after this incident. This account is quite an important mythological event related to the sages. For, we know that there were certain sages who changed their
caste in accordance with their own will or by someone else's. To put it into other words, though the caste system had consistently been protected, and the brāhmaṇa caste had been highly praised, flexibility is also seen to some extent.

In the Pāli text\(^1\) also one finds a very important reference about the caste system of those days. A sage called Kaṇha was born from a maid servant of the king Okkaka. Later on Kaṇha became a great sage\(^2\). And his descendants claimed that they are authentic brāhmaṇas. From the cases discussed above one understands that acquiring a brāhmaṇa state was possible for a kṣatriya. However, this Pāli text creates a doubt if a descendant of the son of slave woman could obtain the state of brāhmaṇa. We have never come across a case of elevation, of a dāsiputra and his descendants, to the brāhmaṇa state. In Sanskrit literature, even though some sages are told to be of the low caste, but they are called sages but not brāhmaṇas. Considering this background the incident in Pāli literature must be a very important event\(^3\). Was it the case that the caste system depended on the mental achievement or quality one showed, rather than by his birth alone?

\(^1\) Ambaṭṭha sutta, Dīg. I. 3.

\(^2\) This sage will be dealt with in the section, 'The sages in Pāli literature.'

\(^3\) The account, mentioned in the Chan. Up. is a little different. When a brāhmaṇa asked a boy about his caste, the boy replied that he did not know about his father's caste because his mother was confused because she used to sleep with many. Then the brāhmaṇa told him that he was a brāhmaṇa because he told the truth. Due to this statement the boy was known to be a brāhmaṇa whose name is Satyakāmajabāla.
Then if elevation of caste was thus possible, how was there degradation of caste? Was degradation of caste practically in existence? Several passages in the Mbh. tell that the brāhmaṇs if they committed a grave sin the most severe punishment was to drive them out of the district, but with their caste intact. Therefore, practically by the caste of a brāhmaṇa cannot be removed by his committing sins, though a state of a sinful brāhmaṇa was condemned even by the rākṣasas. Now, a story of Tri-śaṅku shows another aspect. Due to the curse of the sage Vasiṣṭha, Tri-śaṅku was turned into a Cāṇḍāla and till Viśvāmitra sent him to mid-air, his state of Cāṇḍāla continued. But this Cāṇḍāla state was not passed on his sons and descendents, because we know that his own son Hariśandra was known as a celebrated and pious kṣatriya king. Thus there might be a short term of degradation mainly due to the curse of the powerful sage, but it was not supposed to be continued to his sons.

However, it is also true that in the Epic literature, once one obtained the title of a sage, either a ṛṣi or a muni, a caste bar did not exist. Thus the Buddha who is historically the most celebrated muni; the king Bhagīratha who brought the Gangā from heaven down to the nether land; and Nahuṣa who once ruled over heaven, and so many kings and kṣatriyas obtained the title of a sage. They were respected too. And the brāhmaṇa could give up his caste to become a kṣatriya, as is seen in the case of Vidathin Bharadvāja. But it is also true that in case of the brāhmaṇa the inborn caste was never changed. Moreover in this case, the caste does not depend only on the qualities of a person. In the case of Viśvāmitra, though he achieved brāhmmanahood by his effort, he was not considered as a true
brāhmaṇa in the later classical literature, but a rṣi whose title was once kṣatriya. On the other hand Paraśurāma, though he acts as a kṣatriya does not lose his brāhmaṇahood. The same is seen in the case of the family of Bharadvāja. Both Droṇa Bharadvāja and Vidathin BhrawdvaJA were respected to brāhmaṇas even though Droṇa Bharadvāja, a brāhmaṇa by birth, spent his whole life practising archery and teaching it to his disciples and Vidathin BhrawdvaJA changed his caste after having been adopted by the king Bharata. It means that practically among the people, the change of caste must have been very difficult to accept. However it is also true that once they obtained the title of a sage, they were highly respected in society. It is quite noteworthy that respecting a man for his wisdom and accepting his caste must have been seen as different things in practical life.

Now, one of The Buddha’s main topics of discussion is caste and its origin. His concept of caste may be said to be one of his representative doctrines. He taught that all the four castes are pure and equal. He emphasized that caste is decided not by birth but by action. Even those who are born-brāhmaṇas are lower than Caṇḍāla when they behave wrongly, and a Caṇḍāla who is righteous is a real noble brāhmaṇa. Though he concluded that caste is dependent on action only, it

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1 In Śakuntalā, especially, he is said to be a Rājaṇḍi, and due to his fathership of Śakuntalā, the kṣatriya king Duhṣanta felt relieved for his love for Śakuntalā.

2 In Vasala sutta SN. I. 7., it is: na jaccā vasalo hoti na jaccā hoti brāhmaṇo /

kammunā vasalo hoti kammunā hoti brāhmaṇo //

3 It is seen in Vasala sutta: the birth can not keep one away from being born in the world of Brahmā (na nam jāti nivāresi brahmalokāpattiya) and also from a bad transition or from blame (na te jāti nivāresi duggaccā garahāya).
must have been very difficult for him to preach the doctrine and to convince people. It must have been certainly very unpleasant to the proud brāhmaṇas that the Buddha taught of the purity of all the four castes\(^1\). About this, it seemed that, not infrequently, the Buddha tried to discuss with the brāhmaṇas, either with conservative and stubborn old people like Kasi Bhāradvāja and Aggika Bhāradvāja or with pragmatic young brāhmaṇas like Assalāyana, Bhāradvāja, and Vāsiṣṭha. The old and young brāhmaṇas used to come to the Buddha and asked about the matters of concern and the Buddha explained these issues to them. For example, a young brāhmaṇa student Assalāyana came to the Buddha and asked him whether only brāhmaṇas are the foremost and the others are lower, and whether the brāhmaṇas came out of the mouth of Brāhma\(^2\). Using a simile of fire, the Buddha explained that like all the flames of fire, either of sala or of dog-trough, all are bright and pure. So too the four castes are all pure and same.

Here, a peculiar cultural picture can be drawn in the matter of castes. While social life of an individual is bound by the rigors of caste, he is free to roam in the matter of opinion. Reason freely questions and criticizes the creeds in which men are born. That is why the heretic, the skeptic, the unbeliever, the rationalist and the free-thinker, the materialist and the hedonist all flourish in the soil of India.

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\(^1\) cf. 'History of Indian literature', Vol. II. p. 45.

\(^2\) Brāhmaṇavagga Maj. II. 5: brāhmaṇaḥaḥ setṭho vanno, hino añño vanno; brāhmaṇoḥaḥ suko vanno, kanho añño vanno; brāhmaṇoḥaḥ sujkhanti, no abrāhmaṇaḥ; brāhmaṇāvā brahmuno puttā orasā mukhato jātā brahmajā brahmanimmitā brahmadāyūdatā.
(4) The ancient mythical ṛṣis in the Pāli text

While the Buddha and his doctrine dominated society, the other religious sects and their leaders too struggled for winning over the mind of people. Various efforts of different religious sects and the leaders as well as the ancient sages are introduced, here and there, in the Tipiṭakas. However, one may have to say that most of the ancient sages, in Pāli literature, are important, only by their names, not by their activities. Yet, their heirs, sons and disciples seem to be flourishing even in the Buddha’s era. They seem to have participated in the work of contemporary society, some as renowned teachers, some as priests, and some as wealthy farmers. They debate actively with the Buddha and his disciples, and these debates form quite an important component of the Pāli texts.

The legendary sages and the famous ṛṣis of the Vedas are mentioned in the suttas as a unit of ten members. In several passages they occur like a refrain as: ‘the early sages of those brāhmaṇas learned in the three Vedas, the makers of the mantras, the expounders of the mantras, whose ancient verses are chanted, pronounced and collected by the brāhmaṇas of today, and sung and spoken about’. They are: Aṭṭhaka (Aṣṭaka?), Vāmaka (?), Vāmadeva (Vāmadeva), Vessāmitta (Viśvāmitra), Yamataggi (Jamadagni), Aṅgirasa (Aṅgirasa), Bhāradvāja (perhaps, Bharadvāja), Vāseṭṭha (Vasiṣṭha), Kassapa (Kaśyapa), Bhagu (Bhrugu)... ¹.

¹ Tevijja sutta, Dig. I. 13
These names are mentioned in the *suttas* particularly when certain matters are criticized by the Buddha. They are referred to sometimes as the legendary sages whose teachings are not verified\(^1\). The miraculous deeds of these sages, which occupy a large part of Sanskrit literature, were not told in the *Tipiṭakas*. Their great acts and personalities are almost totally ignored. Not a single life of the Vedic *rśis* was individually spoken of anywhere in Pāli literature though they seem to be very popular and deep rooted among people.

Apart from these Vedic *rśis*, some names of the *yogis*, are referred to as the ones who acquired meditative power up to a certain level. The two teachers of Siddhatta Gotama, before his enlightenment, Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, are mentioned in the *Pāsarāsi sutta* (also called, Ariyapariyesanā sutta)\(^2\) as well as in the Milinda-panha. The Buddha is said to have obtained instructions from these two teachers. They are said to have attained the stage of ‘nothingness (*ākiñcatārayatana*)’ which Gotama mastered soon. The Buddha,

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*yepi kira tevijjānaṃ brāhmaṇānaṃ pubbakā īsaya mantānaṃ kattāro mantānaṃ pavattāro, yesamidaṃ etarahi tevijjā brāhmaṇā porāṇaṃ mantapadaṃ gītāṃ pavuttām samihitam, tadanugāyanti, tadanubhāsanti, bhāsitamanubhāsanti, vācitamanuvācenti, seyyathidammatthako vāmako vāmadevo vessāmitto yamataggi arigāraso bhāradvājo vāsetṭho kassapo bhagu. tepi na evamāhaṃsu ‘mayametam jānāma, mayametam passāma, yattha vā brahmā, yena vā brahmā, yahim vā brahmā’ ti?*

\(^1\) See the Tevijja sutta, Dīg.

\(^2\) Maj. I. 3. 6.
after his enlightenment remembered them as the fittest persons to teach his doctrine, but the devatās informed him that they had died seven days earlier.

**The ‘black’ sages in Pāli literature**

Now, in the Piṭakas exceptionally, the name Asita, Asita Devala, Kaṇha Śiri, Siri Kaṇha, Kāla Devala and Kaṇha, Kaṇha Tapassi, often occur as the ancient and mystic sages. The name Asita occurs in the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa (XIV. 11. 18. 19), and in the Atharva Veda as a sage but it seems that there is no such connection with Asita(s) in Pāli literature. Some of them are perhaps identified with one or the other, and some of them are not connected with each other though the names are the same. It is rather peculiar that all the names of these sages, contain the meaning ‘black’. It is very interesting to note that ‘Kaṇha’ in the Pāli literature, means ‘a devil’ or sometimes even ‘Māra, the Evil’. This particular aspect of the names of the sages containing the word 'kaṇha', may be interpreted as: (1) the names directly indicated that the complexion of the above mentioned sages was black (2) it might be the indirect reflection of what the Buddha thought of them.

Related to the first interpretation, the question remains, how all the mentioned sages, so called ancient ṛṣis, except the expounders of the Vedas, were black in their complexion? The answer may be drawn from the tradition of asceticism. The asceticism, which was practiced in the Buddha’s time, is said to have come down not directly from the Aryan but from the Non-Aryan culture. It is quite evidently proved that there were different religious sects in different regions of the pre-Vedic Non-Aryan, such as, the muni-yati cult and the bhakti cult, which may be distinguished from the Vedic Aryan cult, i.e., the ṛṣi cult. However, these pre-Vedic cults, which laid emphasis on yoga, saṁyāsa and tapas, were suppressed
for a fairly long time by the Vedic Aryan religious sects, the so called rṣi cult. When, again, Vedism began to weaken about the end of the period of the major Upaniṣads (7th–6th B.C), the popular Non-Aryan religious cults gathered strength. Especially the muni-yati cult served as the fountainhead of Buddhism and Jainism. These two religious sects openly revolted against the hegemony of Vedism. Another pre-Vedic non-Aryan religious sect called the bhakti cult, later on, developed to the theistic bhakti religion, and constituted the very kernel of Vaiṣṇavism, centering round the deified Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa.

This background tells us that the sages of the black complexion, mentioned in the Piṭakas, are obviously from the Non-Aryan religious cults. But, though the sages seem to be of the pre-Vedic non-aryan origin, they are not termed as muni or yati, but as ṛṣis, which is normally the term for the Vedic Aryan sages. This suggests that they, at least some of them, originally belong to the bhakti cult, which was more inclined to the theistic religion that did not loathe the Vedic Aryans. However, unlike the typical Vedic Aryan ṛṣis, such as, Bhagu, Yamataggi, Bhāradvāja etc., these black sages are asked to protect the Buddha and his Dhamma. Even though they are said to be great, they are always placed below the Buddha and the Buddhas. They come to the Buddha to hear his teachings. They perform miracles only to protect the Buddhas, Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. Only one sage called Kaṇha who is mentioned in the Dīg. does not seem to be connected with the Buddha. And, this sage who is dealt with in the following pages, is very special in the entire Pāli literature. Once, the Buddha used the word kaṇha in the sense of inauspicious, and he used it as the term pisāca which is a

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term of abuse. Thus, it seems that the name Kaṇha means merely the outer complexion when it is connected with the Buddhist doctrine, and black and inauspicious when it is against the Buddhist doctrine.

The sage Asita in the Suttanipāta is the same entity as the sage Kaṇha-Siri in the same *sutta*. He seems to be a typical practitioner of pre-Vedic asceticism who had black complexion. He is referred to in the Nālaka *sutta* as an ancient *isi* who had completely mastered the signs and the *Vedic mantras*, and is said to have matted locks of hair. He must have been quite a well known sage in the Buddha’s era, judged by his important role in Buddhism, i.e., prophesying the Buddha’s future, at the time of his birth. The account of Asita given in the Nālaka sutta is as follows:

On seeing the exceedingly jubilant thirty gods (*tidasagāna*) in heaven, Asita asked them the reason for their joy. Then he came to know that the Buddha would be born in the human world. On hearing this, he quickly descended the earth wishing to see the prince. He was in raptures when he saw the prince who was like a blazing fire. He knew that the prince would be fully enlightened. Then he suddenly became aware of the fact that not much was left of his life. Shedding tears because he would not be able to listen to The Buddha’s doctrine he prophesied that the prince would be a great person.

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1 In Ambatṭha sutta, Dīg. I. 3 reads: *yathā kho pana etarahi manusā pīsāce disvā ‘pisācūṭi saṭṭānati; evameva kho tena kho pana samayena manussā pīsāce ‘kaṇhā ṭi saṭṭānanti.*

2 Jigiriṣako lakkhaṇa-manta-pāragū.
As it is seen in the story, the sage Asita resembled very much the sages in Sanskrit literature who are very intimate with the gods and their matters. The only difference is that he had faith in the Buddha. It seems that his visiting the gods was not unusual. He had power to transfer himself from the heaven to the earth at his will. He communicated with the gods as well as with human beings.

Asita Devala is another ancient *isi* mentioned in Assalāyana *sutta*. He is a sage of great power. Apart from this *sutta*, nowhere in the Tipiṭakas is he mentioned. Though his name is Asita, surely he is a different sage from the sage Asita mentioned before, or from Kaṇha Śri, for that Asita passed away just after the Buddha’s birth, and this Asita is described as one who lived much before the time of Gotama the Buddha. He taught at the equality of the all castes to the seven sages who had a pernicious view that ‘*brāhmaṇas* are the highest caste…heirs of Brahmā’. The *sutta* describes that the power of Asita is much greater than that of the sages of his period. An episode in the Assalāyana *sutta* reads:

*Once when the seven *brāhmaṇa* seers were dwelling in the hut in the forest, the pernicious view arose in them: ‘*brāhmaṇas* are the highest caste…heirs of Brahmā.’ Asitadevala heard this. Then he arranged his hair and garments, appeared in the courtyard of the seven seers. On seeing them Asita spoke: ‘where have those worthy *brāhmaṇa* gone?’ The *brāhmaṇas* were humiliated by these words, cursed Asita to turn to ashes, but the more they cursed the more comely and beautiful Asitadevala was said to become.* When the seven seers realized that

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1 Maj. II. 5. 3
their asceticism was in vain and fruitless, Devala asked them to put away their hatred towards him, and taught them the Dhamma.

The names of the seven ṛṣis are not given but it seems that the idea of saptarṣi has been borrowed by the Buddha so as to give more authority to the sage who had faith in Dhamma than those great seven ṛṣis of ancient times.

The name Asitadevala is mentioned also in the Mbh, along with other renowned legendary sages, such as, Nārada, Ātreyā, Kuṇḍajaṭhara etc, and there, he is depicted as a sage who at all times was bent upon his studies and austerities (Mbh. I. 48. 8; III. 83. 103). Asitadevala’s reason for renunciation is given in the Mbh. IX. 49.

At the beginning, Asitadevala was leading a householder’s life. He, even though a householder, was self-restrained and compassionate. He was said to be like Yama in his thorough impartiality, treating all alike. Once Asitadevala stayed with a great sage Jaigīṣavya. Impelled by the power of that sage, Asitadevala left the householder’s life and adopted renunciation and achieved the highest yogic power. He is one of the divine sages (devaṛṣis) along with Nārada and Vyāsa (Mbh. VI. 32. 13). Asitadevala is said to have obtained the great Yoga power after bathing in the Indratirtha (Mbh. IX. 48. 23). Asita devala gave a discourse to Nārada on the origin and destruction of all creation (Mbh. XII. 267. 4).
Kaṇṭha and Kṛṣṇa (Vāsudeva)

A very interesting sage is mentioned in the Ambatţha sutta\(^1\). The sage appears to be of a very different type. Judged by the account told by the Buddha, he is very ancient, and is the originator of Kaṇṭhāyan clan. He is neither a brāhmaṇa sage nor an admirer of the past and the present Buddha, which are quite common factors of the sages who appear in Pāli literature\(^2\), nor has he any connection with Buddhism or even with the Brāhmaṇism. As for the non-Buddhist sages, his personal account is given in the sutta as an exception. Before attempting to study the sage Kaṇṭha any further, a brief sketch of the Ambatţha sutta may be necessary, as this sutta seems to be very important for several reasons. The Buddha’s critical tone in this sutta, with regard to the brāhmaṇical system, is unusually strong. He is not only critical of but almost humiliates a young brāhmaṇa whose caste-pride is too persistent. The story is as follows:

The renowned brāhmaṇa teacher Pokkharasāri sent his pupil Ambatţha to the Buddha to confirm whether the Buddha has the same quality people attribute to him. Now this young Ambatţha was well versed in the three Vedas and all the sciences, and he was referred, in the sutta, to be an over-proud youth. He strutted up and down and stood cockily speaking before the seated Buddha, saying that a brāhmaṇa’s act towards the other class of men should be like what he was doing

\(^1\) Dīg. I. 3.

\(^2\) For instance, the sage Asita Devala is the mighty ancient sage who is mentioned in Sanskrit literature not infrequently. But he appears in Pāli literature only for supporting the Buddhas and their doctrines.
then¹. Being reproved by the Buddha about his untrained manner Ambaṭṭha abused the Buddha by saying that the Sakyans were menials. Ambaṭṭha introduced himself by boasting that he belonged to the Kaṇhāyan clan. Then the Buddha told Ambaṭṭha about him Kaṇhāyan lineage which had originally descended from a slave girl who belonged to the legendary king Okkāka, from whom the Sakyans had descended.

In this way the Buddha established the superiority of the Sakyans clan as compared to the Kanhayyan clan.

The account of Ambaṭṭha’s ancestor given by the Buddha is as follows:

Disā, a slave girl of the king Okkāka gave birth to a black child. When the child was born, he exclaimed: ‘Wash me mother, bathe me, deliver me from this dirt, and I will bring you profit²’. Then the people thought him to be inauspicious as he

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¹ Actually, here Ambaṭṭha insulted the Buddha severely saying that his rude actions towards the Buddha were quite appropriate because these actions are done for those shaven little ascetics, menials, black scourings from Brahmā’s foot (ye ca kho te bho gotama mundakā samanakā ibbhā kaṇhā bandhupādāpaccā, tehipi me saddhiṃ evaṃ katthāsallāpo hoti, yathāriva bhotā gotamenā’ti). And thrice he accused the Sakyans of being menial.

² dhovatha maṃ, amma, nahāpetha maṃ amma, imasmā asucismā parimocetha, atthāya vo bhavissāmi’ti
was speaking as soon as he was born\textsuperscript{1}. They started calling him ‘Kaṅha’, because in ancient days people used the word kaṅha to mean inauspicious, abusive, just as the term pisāca, the goblin. Now, this Kaṅha went to the southern region (dakkhinajanapada), learnt the mantras of the brāhmaṇas, and became a mighty sage. Then, he returned to the king Okkāka and demanded that the daughter of the king named Maddarūpi should marry him. The king remembered him as the son of the slave girl, was angry and tried to shoot Kaṅha with an arrow. But the king was able neither to shoot the arrow nor to withdraw it. Then the horrified ministers of the king begged of Kaṅha to spare the life of the king, and finally, the king gave him the princess.

Now, Okkāka, from whom the Sakyans are said to have descended, occurs only in Pāli literature as a legendary king of the solar dynasty. But which period he ruled in is unknown. Hence, it is not possible to fix the time. Accordingly it is not possible to trace the race (or descendants) of the sage Kaṅha who was said to be the son of a slave girl of Okkāka. Therefore, a different approach is needed to evaluate this sage Kaṅha, which may be done with the help of the Ambaṭṭha sutta. In fact, except in the Ambaṭṭha sutta, no mention is found in Pāli canonical texts, either to the same sage Kaṅha\textsuperscript{2}, or of the descendants of Kaṅha, or of the

\textsuperscript{1} This part is quite interesting since according to the Pāli texts, the Buddha too, talked and walked as soon as he was born. And it was considered as sacred and auspicious. The same story was told with regard to the sage Kaṅha, but in his case the event was considered as an evil happening.

\textsuperscript{2} The sages whose names are also Kaṅha, e.g., the sage Asita in the SN, occurred in the texts, but all of them obviously refer to different sages.
Kaṇhayan race. Later, only the Ghata Jāt. mentions Vāsudeva-Kaṇha, or Kaṇha-Vāsudeva.

The sage Kaṇha as he is understood from the Ambaṭṭha sutta can be described as:
1) His frame, as a whole, tells that he is of the non-Aryan race. 2) His characteristics are rather demon-like than sage-like. 3) Unlike the other sages who normally repaired to the Himalayas for their austerity, he went to the South for his learning. 4) Most of the sages who are mentioned in the Pāli literature, except the Vedic seers, are followers of the Buddha and Buddhism, but he is neither follower nor an admirer of the Buddha. These points may be very significant to trace his identity in the Vedas and also in other Pāli texts, such as, Jātakas.

In the Vedas, there is no occurrence either of Kaṇhāyan (Kṛṣṇāyana) race or Kṛṣṇa as a sage or a divinity. Only the seer Kṛṣṇa is traditionally believed to be the author of the RV VIII. 85. However, in the RV, there are some important and somewhat interesting verses which one can not ignore, which mention Indra’s fight with a demon called Kṛṣṇa, with whom Kaṇha in Ambaṭṭha sutta can be compared. The verses 13-16 of the RV. VIII. 96 are as follows:

13: ava drapso atiśumatimatiśṭhadiyāṇaḥ kṛṣṇo daśabhīḥ sahasraḥ /  
āvattamindraḥ śacyā dhamantamapa snehitirṇṛmanā adhatta //

14: drapsamapasyaṁ viśune carantamupahvare nadyo atiśumatyaḥ /  
nabho na kṛṣṇamavasthivātisamisyāmi vo vrṣaṇo yudhyatājau //

15: adha drapso atiśumatyaḥ upasthe’dhārayattavan titviśānaḥ /  
viśo adevīrabyāḥ carantīrbyhaspatinā yujendraḥ sasāhe //

16: tvam ha tyatsaptabhya jāyamāno 'satrubhyo abhavaḥ śatruindra /  
gūhe dhāvaprthivī anavindo vibhumadbhyo bhuvanebhyo raṇan dhāḥ //
Geldner translates these as follows:

13: Drapsa stieg in die Aṁśumati hinab, Kṛṣṇa ist im Anzug mit zehntausend (kriegern). Ihm stand Indra bei, dem mit aller kraft Blasenden. Der Mannhafte wendete die Heerhaufen(?) ab. (Drapsa descended into Aṁśumati (river), Kṛṣṇa approaches with 10000 (warriors). Indra stood by his side, him who was blowing with all his might. The manly one turned the army away.)

14: Ich sah den Drapsa in schlimmer Lage im Schoße des Flusse Aṁśumati, (ich sah) den Kṛṣṇa, der schwarz wie eine Wolke hinabgestiegen war. Euch, Bullen, biete ich auf; kämpft im streite!" (I saw Drapsa in bad condition in the lap of the river Aṁśumati, (I saw) Kṛṣṇa, who had descended black as a cloud. You, bulls, I challenge you: fight!)

15: Da behauptete sich Drapsa in Schoße der Aṁśumati (zorn)funkelnd. Die anrückenden gottlosen stämme hat Indra mit Bṛhaspati als Bundesgenossen bezwungen. (Then Drapsa, furious, rose in the lap of Aṁśumati. The approaching impious tribes were defeated by Indra with Bṛhaspati as his ally.)

16: Als du geboren wurdest, wardst du der Sieben, die keinen Bemeisterer fanden, Meister, O Indra. Du fandest die versteckten Welthäften wieder; du brachtest den Geschöpfen Freude, die in dir einen Gebieter hatten. (When you were born, you were the master of those seven, who could not find a master, O Indra. You found the hidden haloves of the world; you brought joy to the creatures, who found a ruler in you.)
Sāyaṇa gives two versions of the legend for the above verses. According to him, an *asura* named Kṛṣṇa occupied the bank of Arīśumātī together with his ten thousands *asuric* retinue. There Indra came where Kṛṣṇa stood in the middle of the water. Then, Indra slew Kṛṣṇa with the help of Maruts and Bṛhaspati. The other (version) is taken from BD. VI. 109-115. Oppressed by the fear of Vṛtra, Soma had fled from the gods and had joined the Kurus in the river Arīśumātī. Indra, Bṛhaspati and the Maruts attacked him. Soma fought back, because he mistook him (Indra) for Vṛtra, but was finally overpowered by Indra and brought back to the sky.

Geldner noted that Drapsa and Kṛṣṇa are two distinct entities. He pointed out that Drapsa escaped from Kṛṣṇa into the river. Kṛṣṇa followed him there. Drapsa called Indra for help and was freed by him. Further he remarked that it is quite probable that Drapsa was originally Soma and that Kṛṣṇa was an *asura*, the enemy of the Soma cult and the representative of the black race¹.

Here arises a question: Is this Kṛṣṇa, who is called a demon, and who is also said to be one of the seven enemies of Indra, identified with, or has some similarity with, at least indirectly, with Kaṇha in the Ambaṭṭha sutta? Then again, can he be the prior form of later god Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa? And further, as several scholars

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¹ Ludwig and Oldenberg consider drapsa and Kṛṣṇa as one and the same person. After Ludwig the black drop represents the completely obstructed disc of the moon. Griffith also considers Drapsa as 'black drop, i.e., darkened moon', and the river Arīśumātī is a mystical river of the air into which the moon dips to recover its vanished light. He notes the ten thousand as 'the demons of darkness'.

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raised the issue: is this Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa the amalgamated form of two separate entities, i.e., Vāsudeva and Kṛṣṇa? If yes, then, due to what are these two unidentified personalities in the history of Indian mythology are said to be so?

Before analysing the similarities of these characters, it is necessary to mention the Ghata Jātaka1, which can be interpreted as the bridge or transitional stage between Kaṇha (and Vedic Kṛṣṇa) and post-Vedic popular god Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa. The original text starts with the following verse:

\[ utṭhehi kaṇha kim sesi, ko attho supanena te, yopi tuyham sako bhātā hadayam cakkhu ca dakhīnāṃ, tassa vātā baliyanti ghaṭo jappati kesava / \]

‘Black Kaṇha, rise! why close the eyes to sleep? why lying there? Thine own born brother – see the winds away his wit do bear, away his wisdom! Ghata raves, thou of the long black hair?’ (Cowell’s translation)

In the Jātaka Aṭṭhakathā, this verse occurs in the middle of the story, and is told by Rohiṇeyya, a courtier of Vāsudeva, in order to revitalize the king from the mental frustration, caused by the death of his son. As it is noticed in the verse Kaṇha is already called Kesava, the epithet of Kṛṣṇa of the Epic period. However, the verse itself does not seem to have any relation with the story of the god Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa. The main story which is written in prose in the Aṭṭhakathā seems to be closely connected with the Epic Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa. The story is considerably long and runs as:

1 Ghaṭapaṇḍita Jātaka Pāli I. no. 454.
To the king Mahākāṃsa of the Uttarāpatha region there were two sons, called Kamsa and Upakaṃsa, and a daughter called Devagabhā. This Devagabhā had prophesied that her son would destroy the country as well as the line of Kaṃsa. So when Kaṃsa became the king and Upakaṃsa became his viceroy, she was imprisoned in a tower so that she would be husbandless. And she was watched and cared for by a serving woman called Nandagopā and her husband, Andhakaveṇhu. Now, at the same time, a king Mahāsāgara ruled the other part of the region called Upper Madhurā. He had two sons called Sāgara and Upasāgara. As time passed, Sāgara became the king and Upasāgara was his viceroy. But this Upasāgara connived at his brother's harem, and being detected, ran away to Upakaṃsa who was his bosom friend. There he heard the story of Devagabhā and fell in love with her, and Devagabhā who saw him from the tower fell in love with him too. The maid servant, Nandagopā, arranged the meeting of Upasāgara and Devagabhā. As a consequence of their meeting and staying together, Devagabhā conceived and they got married with the permission of her brothers. Their first child was a daughter. Then, Devagabhā gave birth to ten sons but due to the fear of Kaṃsa these ten sons were secretly exchanged, as soon as they were born, with the ten daughters of Nandagopā who were born on the same day. The names of the sons of Devagabhā were: Vāsudeva, Baladeva, and Ajjuna, etc. In the beginning of the story, they were all described as plunderers. When the king Kaṃsa knew of the secret of their birth, he planned to kill them, but the ten sons together, killed the king Kaṃsa before he could kill them. Then, they brought their real parents, Devagabhā and Upasāgara, to the throne. Later on, they conquered many regions of India including Dvāravatī and ruled over those places after dividing the kingdom equally among the brothers. As time passed, the eldest brother Vāsudeva lost one
son, and led his viceroy to recite the verse above— ‘uṭṭhehi kaṇha kim sesi, ko
attho supanena te, yopi tuyham sako bhātā hadayam cakkhu ca dakkhinām, tassa
vātā baliyanti ghaṭo jappati kesava’. At the end of the story, it is said that the line
of ten brothers perished as a result of their sons’ testing of the great sage
Kaṇhādipayana.

According to the Ghata Jāt., in the prose part, Vāsudeva (Kaṇha) is the eldest son
of Devagabbhā and Upasāgara. The eldest brother of Devagabbhā is Kaṇṣa, and
the younger brother of Vāsudeva is Baladeva. The hostile relations between
Kaṇṣa and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, and the brotherhood of Vāsudeva and Baladeva was
already established in this period. It is quite noticeable that, the name of
Vāsudeva’s father is not Vasudeva but Upasāgara. It is also very significant that
the stepfather of Vāsudeva, actually the husband of the maid servant, is called
Andakavenhu, which literally means, the Dark Viṣṇu (or, Viṣṇu, the blind). The
above factors may be interpreted in two ways. First, the father of Vāsudeva was
Upasāgara, and the name Vasudeva was not apparently used in the Jātaka Pāli,
but it appears only from the Jātaka Aṭṭhakathā. Therefore, Vāsudeva might not
mean ‘the son of Vasudeva’. The name Vāsudeva, which popularly is another
name of Kṛṣṇa, might not be the surname which was handed over from his father
Vasudeva. But both Vāsudeva and Kṛṣṇa (Kaṇha) might have been personal
names. It means, at least at the time of Jātaka Pāli, Vāsudeva and Kṛṣṇa might
have been different entities but by the time of Aṭṭhakathā they are known as one

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1 The period of Aṭṭhakathā is not exactly known but it is approximately considered to be 5th
century A.D, if Buddhaghosa is the author of it (Winternitz, ‘History of Indian Literature’,
Vol. II. p. 111). However, opinions differ among various scholars.
and the same entity. Secondly, at the time of the Mbh., Kṛṣṇa is known as the incarnation of Viṣṇu or Viṣṇu himself. This can be explained by the fact that in the course of time, several confusions were there and changes were made as regards the lineage and personality of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa. We can also conjecture these changes when we observe the nature of Vāsudeva’s stepfather who was called Andakaveṇhū, the Dark Viṣṇu.

One of the most intriguing problems of Indian mythology is said to be tracing the origin of the god Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa. There have been many efforts by scholars to map him out in connection with the Rg Vedic Kṛṣṇa who is referred to as a demon as well as Indra’s enemy. This Kṛṣṇa, in the RV, is believed, religio-historically, to be the (religious) leader of the dark-skinned non-Aryan tribes. And this Kṛṣṇa is believed to be the primary form of the popular god Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa in the later period, who is also mentioned in the Ghata Jātaka with a little difference. Now, the sage called Kaṇha in the Ambaṭṭha sutta, who is described as having a demonic nature, is quite assuredly said to be an originator of the Kaṇhayan clan, and due to this originatorship, he can be equated, or at least, connected with Vāsudeva Kaṇha in the Ghata Jātaka, who may be identified with the god Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa in the Epic mythology. The main reason to assume these two (or three including Vāsudeva Kaṇha in Ghata Jātaka) uncommon characters, mentioned in the two different literatures to be originally the same entity, is due to the ambiguity of the origin of the god Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa. The confirmative date and the definite germ of the god Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa is very ambiguous, therefore, to research it from the possible sources, definitely will be of much value, as no scholar has tried yet to compare the Vedic Kṛṣṇa (and also Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa) with the sage Kaṇha in the Ambaṭṭha sutta. This assumption, again, is due to the long duration of the cult-conflict, viz., between the Indra cult and the Kṛṣṇa cult, and
also, due to the names and black (dark) figures (not only their complexion but also their characteristics which are described) of the two (or three) similar personalities.

Now, one of the main reasons to connect Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa to the RgVedic demon Kṛṣṇa is the conflict between the Indra cult and the Kṛṣṇa cult in those days. When Indra first settled in India, he is said to have battled with other gods worshipped by the different tribes. Many of the demons who are referred to in the RV, with whom Indra fought, were tribal gods or religious leaders, such as Vṛtra, Kṛṣṇa and Namuci etc\textsuperscript{1}. In this connection one may assume that the god Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa appeared as a demon, in the RV VIII. 96, as one among the mighty foes of Indra. And, it is quite assured that in the religious history of India there was a long-term conflict between the Indra cult and the Kṛṣṇa cult. In the RgVedic period Indra’s overpowering Kṛṣṇa is explained in the text itself. This condition seems to be continued till the time of the Buddha. Throughout the Pāli texts, Indra (Inda or Sakka) is said to rule over all the devas as a king, though he, as a faithful devotee of the Buddha, he occupies a lower state to that of the Buddha and the bhikkhus. On the other hand, it is quite certain that, in the period of the Buddha, the religious sect, or a deity called Kṛṣṇa or Vāsudeva did not exist, or at least, was unknown. For, generally the Buddhist text used to refer to the names of the other religious sects of the contemporaries. It mentions the Nigaṇṭhās and the Ājīvakas etc, but there is no trace or mention of Kṛṣṇa or Vāsudeva, or their cult in the Tipitaka. Similarly, Asoka’s inscriptions, which mention the Śramaṇas, the Brāhmaṇas, the Ājīvakas, and the Nirgranthas, do not

\textsuperscript{1} Radhakrishnan, ‘Indian Phology’ Vol. I. p. 87.
speak of Vāsudevakas\textsuperscript{1}. Nevertheless, it is quite probable that in the Buddha’s time, there had, perhaps, already sprouted the foreboding of the Kṛṣṇa-cult centering round a blurred persona, i.e., Kṛṣṇa in whom pre-Vedic characteristics were preserved.

Now, one may assume that the sage Kaṇha in Ambaṭṭha sutta can be equated with the tribal leader Kṛṣṇa who is mentioned in the RV as a demon with mighty troops, and also somehow related to the later popular god Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa, as the Ghata Jātaka as an intermediate stage. To support this hypothesis the following points may be noted from the Ambaṭṭha sutta and Ghata Jātaka.

The sage Kaṇha in the Ambaṭṭha sutta is interesting not only for his name but also because of his nature. He is not the usual type of sages who are mentioned in the Buddhist texts. He, like the Vedic ṛṣis, was a sage who was both extra-ordinary and social, which is very rarely seen in the Pāli canon. He had great power which had been obtained by his severe austerity and he did not avoid social life as we have seen when he demanded the daughter of a king as his wife. He did not have

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\textsuperscript{1} Cf. Dandekar, ‘Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism’, p. 28-30. Dandekar remarked about this aspect i.e., the Vāsudevism, which was restricted to the regions dominated by its promoters, namely, the Vṛṣṇis, the Sātvatas, and the Yadavas-Ābhīras, had not yet spread far towards Eastern India which was the provenance of Buddhism. However, with a large amount of evidence Dandekar was convinced that in that time there must have existed the Vāsudeva religion. Pāṇini mentions the word ‘Vāsudeva’. Hence, Vāsudeva as a god might be known as early as B. C. 5\textsuperscript{th} in Pāṇini’s time. Pāṇini mentions the word ‘Vāsudeva’.
\end{flushright}
any Buddhistic idea nor was he connected with the Buddha or even with the Vedic seers. He seems to be standing alone in the field of asceticism.

The words, ‘wash me mother, bathe me, deliver me from this dirt, and I will bring you profit’, that had been said at the time of the birth by the sage Kaṇṭha, makes him more different. This kind of speech may be said to be one of the birth miracles. Birth miracles are generally found among religious leaders, or the greater sages and the founders of families. Thus, the religious leaders like Mahāvīra are said to have been transferred from other woman’s womb, and Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa was transferred from the womb of the mother by the power of Yogamāyā, and also, the Buddha declared as soon as he was born as, ‘I am the chief of the world’. In such manner, the birth miracles have been one important factor of the great leaders of certain group. Thus, the speech of the sage Kaṇṭha at that time of his birth shows that he might have been either a religious leader, or a leader of a certain group, or at least, a founder of a good family.

Another point is that, the southern country that is mentioned in the Ambattha sutta, where the sage Kaṇṭha went for accomplishing his asceticism, need not necessarily be the Deccan1. This southern direction (dākkhinajanapada) from the Himalaya where the sage Kaṇṭha was born can either be Dvāravatī or adjacent to the river Aṁśumatī (Jamuna or Jumna, where Indra overpowered the demon Kṛṣṇa, according to Sāyaṇa). This place of the southern country could have originally been the place of cowherds from where all the ten brothers of Vāsudeva

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1 Bhikkhubbodi, translation of Ambattha sutta, Dīg. I. 3, and also Māḷalasekera, Dictionary of Pāli proper names, Vol. I.
repaired and lived as rulers as it is told in the Ghata Jāt. Especially Kaṇha (Krṣṇa) might have become a hero and gained popularity among the people there. And it is noticed that here, Kaṇha is already called Vāsudeva (Vāsudeva-Kaṇha), the oldest among the brothers.

The marriage style of the sage Kaṇha in the Ambaṭṭha sutta and Krṣṇa in the later period is very similar. Both Kaṇha and later Krṣṇa demanded a daughter of renowned kings who were reluctant to give them away. Kaṇha forcibly took a princess after showing his ascetic power, and Krṣṇa got a princess by his divine valour.

In Pāli literature, the debate of the Buddha with the well-known and young brāhmaṇas generally led to their conversion. However, very queerly, there is no report of Ambaṭṭha's conversion into Buddhism even after the debate with the Buddha, though he agreed with all the points what the Buddha discoursed about, perhaps, it was due to the humiliation of his own ancestor by the Buddha. This fact shows that there must have been quite a few distinguished youngsters who had a strong aversion towards the Buddha and Buddhism due to some reason. These youngsters, along with some other strong brāhmaṇas, could have tried to re-build Vedism, or the new religion on the basis of the Vedas. And, around the biography of the powerful sage Kaṇha (or, pre-Vedic Krṣṇa), this multitude might have gathered and made him a leader of a new religious sect. Or conversely, we may even assume that this kind of movement of forming a new religion centering round Krṣṇa (Kaṇha) had already sprouted or spread in the Buddha's time. Hence, threatened by this newly spreading religion, there must have been some effort to suppress it on the part of the Buddhists and, the degradation of Krṣṇa by caste and
by his dark personality might have been emphasized in the Pāli text. As is said earlier the sage Kaṇha is different from the other sages, in several points.

Another very important reason is that, most of the foes of Indra in the Vedas, function still as his enemies or as dark characters, or as opponents of the Buddha and Buddhism, in Pāli literature. Thus, Namuci turns into the present Māra, the worst evil in Buddhist literature, and this Māra is later called Kaṇha, the Black one. Now, the sage Kaṇha referred to in Pāli literature shows clearly two different characteristics of Rg Vedic Krṣṇa. On the one side he possesses the dark demonic characteristic, and on the other side he shows a powerful pre-Vedic ascetic character. One thing to be noticed is that Namuci, a demon who is frequently referred to in the Vedas, is often mentioned by the name of the Evil Māra, in the Pāli texts. On the other hand, the sage Kaṇha who is mentioned only once in the Pāli canon in this manner, was mentioned only once as a foe of Indra in the RV also. It, perhaps, means that the strength of Krṣṇa, though he is described as one of the greatest opponents of Indra in the Vedas, was not sufficiently influential among the people. It is very interesting to note how this Krṣṇa, whose influence on society was imperceptible, gained such power and popularity in later times. This aspect was probably, as scholars pointed out, due to the amalgamation of two different sects who face the same pressure of other religions.

As it is pointed out earlier that when all the new thoughts such as Buddhism and Jainism were prevalent in society, there were a sizeable number of people who might be said to be the rear guards of Vedism. They who worshipped the declining Vedic religion feared that they would soon be overwhelmed not only by Buddhism but also by the other newly born religious sects. It is not difficult to think that they would seek to consolidate, reorganize, and thereby revitalize the
Vedic way of life and thought. For that they needed a new, powerful religious leader. Therefore, a strong religious sect based on the Vedic authority but not ignoring the newly emerging pre-Vedic asceticism was needed so as to make them withstand Buddhism and the new thoughts with their full strength. At that time most of the religious leaders were kṣatriya, whose tradition of asceticism was handed down from the pre-Vedic period. Another person who did not agree with the new currents, but whose ascetic tradition had come down from the pre-Vedic time, perhaps, was the mighty sage Kanha in the Ambāṭṭha sutta. He might have been the same person as Kṛṣṇa, who is called a mighty demon. But was a powerful leader of a certain tribe. He possessed ten thousand of his own troops (or followers), in the Vedas. Again, in other parts of the society, there might have been, though minimal, the custom of worshipping a deity called Vāsudeva who was developed on the basis of the Vedic authority, and whose fundamentals were surely from the kṣatriya race. He had emerged from the people who were so to say, the rear guards of Vedism.

Now, even if the powers of these two sects, namely, Kṛṣṇa and Vāsudeva, were not enough to withstand the new thoughts on their own, the need for putting together their strengths seems to have been felt. In the course of time when Ghata Jātaka was composed, the number of tribal devotees of Kṛṣṇa might have increased. And it is most probable that these devotees needed a god from the Vedas as another supporter. Thus, they might have started adopting Vāsudeva

1 Many scholars pointed out that Kṛṣṇa is the same person, mentioned in the Chāḍogya-Upaniṣad III. 17.6, as a pupil of Ghora Āṅgirasa and the son of Devaki (Read, Joshi, SMD with several views of the scholars, pp. 97-98).
who was recognized already as a god from the *kṣatriya* family, and whose root was in the Vedas. From the Vāsudeva sect, which might have needed a strong leader of the masses, though not of noble birth, adoption of Kṛṣṇa, the hero of the masses, seems to be inevitable. Now, Kṛṣṇa might have had a big number of followers, who were said to have followed the pre-Vedic asceticism, which most of the new religions also adopted. Vāsudeva might have been worshipped by the people, who had faith in the authority of the Vedas, and who became the rear guardians of Vedism. The three characters, viz., Vāsudeva in Pāṇini and Kṛṣṇa in the Ch. Up, and also the seer Kṛṣṇa who is known as the author of RV. VIII. 85, are evidently formed on the basis of the Vedas. However, the so called demon Kṛṣṇa in the RV, who is referred to as an opponent of Indra, and Kaṇha in the Pāli text, are clearly on a non-Vedic (or popular pre-Vedic) pedestal. Thus, it seems that all the above mentioned personalities, who were apparently different entities at least in their beginning, though the names were the same, were blended adeptly in the later period, and formed the popular god Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. In their beginning, their blend might still be meager. They were overpowered by the *kṣatriya* guardian, the powerful Vedic god Indra and also by the new leaders of the various sects, viz., the Buddha and Mahāvīra etc. However, it also appears that Indra (or the Indra-cult) which was powerful in the Vedic times, now slowly mixed and allied with the new thoughts, and was gradually absorbed by them. Then, little by little, Indra (or the Indra-cult) started disappearing from the minds of people as a religion, together with several other Vedic divinities and religions. The conflict between Indra and Kṛṣṇa continued in the Epic period, but slowly from this period, Kṛṣṇa started recovering his lost ground, as it is seen in the battle of Khāṇḍava forest (Mbh. 1 218) at which, Kṛṣṇa fought and won over Indra, his alliance with Arjuna. Then later on, stepping over Indra and his cult, the
newly allied Vásudeva-Kṛṣṇa cult, with the help of pre-Vedic asceticism and also the kṣatriya race, would have gained great popularity.

Thus, it may be that slowly from both sides an amalgamation was made, where the individuals Kṛṣṇa and Vásudeva were turned into one personality Kṛṣṇa-Vásudeva or Vásudeva-Kṛṣṇa from a kṣatriya family on the basis of the Vedic authority. And, the ṚgVedic demon Kṛṣṇa and the mystic sage Kaṇha in the Ambaṭṭha sutta, quite assuredly, became one source of the personality of Kṛṣṇa, and Kaṇha-Vāsudeva in the Ghata Jāt, became the major source of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa the popular deity. As Joshi rightly pointed out Kṛṣṇa is a deity who has emerged from the blending of various ideologies¹.