

On Identity of *Brāhmaṇa*
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1. *Brāhmaṇa* as Offspring of Ṛṣi:

It is known from the *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, and last but not the least, *Mahābhārata*, that *brāhmaṇa* is the *gotra* descendant (grandson on) of a Ṛṣi. There were seven earliest sages, namely Bhṛgu, Aṅgirā, Atri, Kaśyapa, Vaśiṣṭha, Agasta and Kuśika, to whom the *Vedas* were revealed. It is the family of these sages which received revelations, and continued on with preservation of the *Vedas* through tradition, in the form of their speech. It is because of revelation, and preservation through oral tradition that *Vedas* are called *śruti*. Names of these *ṛṣis* were accepted as *gotra*, *ādi-puruṣa* 'source person of lineage'. Most of the earliest *ṛṣis* were the offspring (by mind) of the *brahman* 'supreme being, creator'. Kuśika, the *kṣatriya* grandfather of Viśvāmitra, was accorded the status of *brahmarṣi*, only when Viśvāmitra attained the status of *brahmarṣi* and requested *Brahman* to bless his father Gādhi, and grandfather *Kuśika*, with the status of *brahmarṣi*. Many of the *brāhmaṇa gotra*-descendants (grandsons on) of these sages also became distinguished and even became *ṛṣis* by the power of their own *tapas*. These distinguished *ṛṣis* were called *pravaras*, and the names of many such *pravaras* were accepted as *gotras* subsequently. These *ṛṣis* were distinguished because of their *tapas*, and, because of *Brahman* as their source of being, were called *brāhmaṇa* 'he who knows *brahman* is a *brāhmaṇa*' (ब्रह्म जानाति ब्राह्मणः).

2. Offspring of a *brāhmaṇa* is a *brāhmaṇa*:

There should be no doubt that a *brāhmaṇa* is one who is born into a *brāhmaṇī*, from a *brāhmaṇa*; a *brāhmaṇa* is also one who is born in a *kṣatriya* and *vaiśya* woman, in that same way:

ब्राह्मण्यां ब्राह्मणाज्जातो ब्राह्मणः स्यान्न संशयः ।

क्षत्रियायां तथैव स्याद्वैश्यायामपि चैव हि ॥

It should be remembered here that *tathaiva* 'in that same way' of the preceding Sanskrit verse

requires the *brāhmaṇa* father to be distinguished by his *tapas* so that he could produce a *brāhmaṇa* son into a *kṣatriya*, or a *vaiśya*, woman. The phrase 'that same way' refers to *saṅkalpa* 'vow of invocation to accomplish'. Such an accomplishment of a *brāhmaṇa* son in a *brāhmaṇī*, or even a *kṣatriya*, or *vaiśya* woman, required the *brāhmaṇa* to be deserving, based on *tapas*. Our locus of birth, irrespective of whether in a *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, or a *vaiśya* woman, should not be identified as locus of birth requiring *tapas* on part of the *brāhmaṇa* father. Those births, and also births of *ṛṣis*, and *brāhmaṇa ṛṣis* as well, should not be identified with general human standards of births. The *Mahābhārata* mentions birth of *ṛṣis* in detail. Consider Viśvāmitra who was born to a *kṣatriya* woman. His father Gādhi gave away his *kṣatriya* daughter in marriage to the sage Ṛcīka. Ṛcīka blessed his wife with birth of the most exalted *brāhmaṇa* son. But there was a problem. Ṛcīka, at the insistence of his wife, also blessed her with birth of an exalted *kṣatriya* brother. He consecrated two sets of sacrificial *caru* 'rice-offering': one consecrated with best of the *brāhmaṇa* values for his wife; the other consecrated with best of the *kṣatriya* values for her mother. The daughter, at the insistence of her mother, exchanged her *caru* with that of her mother. Once Ṛcīka found out about the exchange of *caru* he cursed his wife with birth of a (*brāhmaṇa*) son, with qualities of a very cruel *kṣatriya*. When the wife pleaded with Ṛcīka to not to curse his own son, Ṛcīka agreed, as suggested by his wife, to transfer the curse to his grandson, instead. Thus, the son of Ṛcīka was Jamadagni, and the grandson was none other than Paraśurāma, generally considered an *avatāra*. Vishvāmitra was born as a result of his *kṣatriya* mother's eating of sacrificial *caru*, consecrated with most of the *brāhmaṇa* values. It was as a result of most severe *tapas* that he became a *brahmarṣi*, and also won the status of *brahmarṣi* for his *kṣatriya* father Gādhi, and grandfather Kuśika. Now consider the birth of Pārāśara Vyāsa, a great *ṛṣi*, compiler of the *Mahābhārata*, and the *Vedas*. Vyāsa was born as a result of the union of his father Ṛṣi Parāśara with Satyavatī, daughter of the fish named Adrikā. Adrikā was a damsel of heaven, cursed to be born as a fish. It so happened that king Uparicara went hunting, and got sexually aroused in the forest. Since he did not want his semen to go to waste, he preserved it in a leaf-cup and asked a falcon to please fly it over to his wife. As the falcon was flying over a river with the leaf-cup in its clutches, another falcon attacked. The leaf-cup fell directly into the mouth of Adrikā, the fish. The fisherman, after fishing her out of

the water, and cutting her open, found a boy and a girl. They took them both to King Uparicara who designated the boy as his chief of the army, and gave away the fish-smelling girl (*matsya-gandhā*) to the chief fisherman, to raise. This girl was Satyavatī who conceived, and gave birth to, Vyāsa right there in the river. Since Vyāsa was born at an island in the river he was also named *dvailpāyana* 'born at an island'. Right after his birth he stood up, and told his mother that he was leaving for tapas, and that he will return whenever his mother wished him to return. Satyavatī, after her sons from Śantanu passed on, wished Parāśara to return, and produce Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Pāṇḍu, and Vidura, by *niyoga*. Similar descriptions of birth of a number of other *brāhmaṇas*, or *brāhmaṇa* ṛṣis, for example Droṇa, etc., are recorded by the *Mahābhārata*. Suffice it to say that the truth of a *brāhmaṇa* being the son of a *brāhmaṇa* father and a *brāhmaṇa* mother is only human, and not super human.

3. A *Brahmaṇa* is a *sūdra* by birth:

जन्मना जायते शूद्रः संस्काराद् द्विज उच्यते ।

विद्यया याति विप्रत्वं त्रिभिः श्रोत्रिय उच्यते ॥

'a *brāhmaṇa* is *sūdra* by birth; from *saṃskāras* he is called a *dvija* twice-born; he avails *vipratva* by knowledge; with all three he is called a *śrotriya*'

There are four kinds of *brāhmaṇas*:

(i) a *brāhmaṇa*, only by birth (*janmanā*);

(ii) a *brāhmaṇa* by birth who, after going through *saṃskāras*, becomes *dvija* 'twice-born' by namely *sūdra*;

(iii) a *dvija* who, after receiving systematic education, becomes *vipra*; and

(iv) a *vipra* who, after accomplishing knowledge of the *Vedas*, becomes *śrotriya*.

It goes without saying that a *brāhmaṇa* by birth (*jāti-brāhmaṇa*), alone, is no *brāhmaṇa*, at all. He must receive *saṃskāras* so that he could be born as a *dvija*. A bird is also called *dvija* since its first birth is in the form of an egg, and second in its own form of a bird. The word *saṃskāra* is explained as 'bringing enhancement to a quality that already exists' (*सतो गुणान्तराधानम्*). It implies that a new born already has some innate qualities which, when enhanced through *saṃskāras*, enable the child to develop mentally, physically, and socially. *Saṃskāras* should not be considered mere rituals. They impact significantly towards

development of a human in life. There is a symbolic connection between the *mantras* which are woven through corresponding ritual practices, invoked at *saṃskāras*, namely *jāta-karma* 'birth-related' to *vivāha* 'wedding'. Notice that *antyeṣṭi* 'desired ritual practice at the end of body' is not accepted as a *saṃskāra*. For, no enhancement is possible to be brought to whatever quality exists there in the dead body. It is simply disposal. *Śrāddha* is similarly out since it means *śrāddhayā dattaṃ dānaṃ śrāddham* '*śrāddha* is an offering made with reverence (to a deceased relative)'. There is a lot that should be said about *saṃskāras* along these lines. I refuse to venture any further because of paucity of time and space.

Luckily we live in these scientifically, and technologically, advanced times when genetic researchers are making strides. The innate qualities of a child which receive enhancement, via *saṃskāras*, are directly relatable to patterning of human genes. Identification of genes and their genetic mappings, particularly those relatable to a specific group of human individuals, namely *brāhmaṇas*, etc., is now a reality. There is research in progress in Neuroscience whereby faith and spirituality are being studied in relation to lighting up of areas of the brain. Ritual practices relatable to *saṃskāras* may be likened to booting and rebooting, of a computer system which, with required hardware and software, could achieve enhanced performance. Let us come to *vidyā* 'education, knowledge', which is what distinguishes an human from an animal. A *brāhmaṇa*, in ancient times, was led (*upanayana*) to the *ācārya* (teacher), and from that time on till completion of his studies, served the teacher at the teacher's, while systematically receiving education. Since we are so far removed in time and space from ancient times, and also since the focus of studies have shifted, study of the *Vedas*, and related fields is not advised for pursuit of *brāhmaṇas* in general. It should however be emphasized here that a *brāhmaṇa* must distinguish himself as a *vipra*, in whatever field of knowledge he pursues. Becoming a *śrotriya* is a indeed a very tall order. *Brāhmaṇa* intellectuals who, by their accomplishments, have excelled nationally and internationally, are no less than the *śrotriyas* of the ancient times. I here remember my class-fellow at the B.H.U., Jayanta Viṣu Narlikar, whom I accept as no less than a *śrotriya*. A *dvija* may, or may not, attain the heights of becoming a *śrotriya*, but there is no reason why a *brāhmaṇa* cannot distinguish himself as a learned *dvija*.

Let us turn to yet another definition of a *dvija*:

जात्या कुलेन वृत्तेन स्वाध्यायेन श्रुतेन च ।
एभिर्युक्तेन यस्तिष्ठेन्नित्यं स द्विज उच्यते ॥

'he who always stays in tune with family, character,
studies, and the Vedas is called a *dvija*'

This stage of life of a *dvija* relates to his being a householder (*grhastha*). A *dvija* must stay in tune with the *gotra*-tradition of the family, as reflected in his characteristic conduct (*ācāra*). Furthermore, he should not ignore his self-study (*svādhyāya*). The word *vṛtta* is generally explained as conduct, though strictly not unbecoming. What is a becoming conduct of a *brāhmaṇa*? A becoming conduct is one which a *brāhmaṇa* follows in consonance with *dharma*:

जीवितं यस्य धर्मार्थं धर्मो रत्यर्थमेव च ।
अहोरात्रश्च पुण्यार्थस्तं देवा ब्राह्मणं विदुः ॥

'he whose life is all for *dharma*; and he for whom *dharma* is meant only for *rati* 'devotion'; he whose nights and days are meant for deeds that accrue him merits; he is one whom divinities know as *brāhmaṇa*'

Note that *dharma* is a difficult word to translate. Religion, as an English rendition for *dharma*, is a misnomer. This Sanskrit word is explained as *धियते अनेन* 'that which supports, or that by means of which one stays supported, or still, that by which one is saved from falling apart, in life'. *Dharma* could thus be nothing but the value system one inherits. Bringing *dharma* to one's life is a two-way street:

धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः 'dharma protects only when dharma is protected'.

For understanding of *dharma* we need *svādhyāya* 'self-study', the process of which, itself, is a two-way street. First learn the value system as practiced by elders (role-models), then bring it into your own conduct. Next study your own conduct, especially as *dharma* is reflected in your conduct. A *brāhmaṇa* must be his own harshest critic when it comes to practice of *dharma* that accrues him merits (*puṇya*). This is no easy task. It requires discipline (*tāḍana* 'beating'), as is explained by the following verse:

लालयेत्पञ्चवर्षाणि दशवर्षाणि ताडयेत् ।
प्राप्ते तु षोडशे वर्षे पुत्रं मित्रवदाचरेत् ।

'should love him for five years; discipline for ten;

should treat him as a friend when a son reaches his
sixteenth year'

Discipline received from parents in view of the value system, and then brought on to one's own self by practice of dharma, requires a *brāhmaṇa* to live his life with protection of *dharma*. This disciplined living ultimately frees him from all attachment (*विमुक्तं सर्वसंगेभ्यः*). It brings a *brāhmaṇa* to a stage in his life when:

न क्रुध्येन्न प्रहृष्ट्येच्च मानितो ऽमानितश्च यः ।
सर्वभूतेष्वभयदं तं देवा ब्राह्मणं विदुः ॥

'should not be angry, nor be pleased, whether revered, or insulted,
he who is no source of fear to all creatures; divinities know him as *brāhmaṇa*'

TRUTH has been uniquely accepted as the *dharma* of a *brāhmaṇa*. Ascertaining TRUTH, especially when pitched against its twin variables of Fact and Reality, is no easy task. The problem is that TRUTH has three faces: yours, mine, and his, where this last also includes TRUTH's own face. What makes ascertaining TRUTH rather difficult is the fact that we approach its Face from the side of its back. Negation of TRUTH, against Fact and Reality, can be absolute no to truth (*prasajya*), or it could be 'similar to but different from' truth (*paryudāsa*). Consider the interpretation the following sentence:

(1) अब्राह्मणो ऽयं यस्तिष्ठन् मूत्रयति 'he who urinates while standing is a non-*brāhmaṇa*'

If he is not a *brāhmaṇa*, who is he? If he is not a *brāhmaṇa* then he could be any non-Hindu. This will be the *prasajya* negation of a *brāhmaṇa*. However, if the *paryudāsa* view of non-negation is accepted, he could be a Hindu, similar to but different from a *brāhmaṇa*. That is, he could be a *kṣatriya* or *vaiśya*, who both share the Hindu *saṃskāras* similar to a *brāhmaṇa*. This muddies the waters a great deal when it comes to ascertaining TRUTH. Lastly, TRUTH is a concept relative to absolute reality. It reflects in conduct in thirteen facets:

सत्यञ्च समता चैव दमश्चैव न संशयः ।
अमात्सर्यं क्षमा चैव ह्रीस्तिक्षानसूयता ॥
त्यागो ध्यानमथार्यत्वं धृतिश्च सततं दया ।
अहिंसा चैव राजेन्द्र सत्याकारस्त्रयोदश ॥

The thirteen facets of TRUTH, without a doubt, are: *satya* 'truth', *samatā* 'equality', *dama* 'restraint', *amātsarya* 'no envy', *kṣamā* 'forgiveness', *hrī* 'modesty', *titikṣā* 'endurance',

anasūyatā 'not finding faults in other's qualities', *tyāga* 'giving', *dhyāna* focus', *āryatva* 'high thinking', *dhṛti* 'steadfastness', *dayā* 'compassion', and *ahiṃsā* 'no harm to any'. A *brāhmaṇa* who lives by this *dharma*, the embodiment of TRUTH, rises above all conflicts. He then becomes truly independent of others. For him, no one has malice, everyone has respect. It is this kind of a *brāhmaṇa* about whom the famous Hindi poet Jayashankar Prasad wrote in his play Chandragupta Maurya:

ब्राह्मण न किसी के राज्य में रहता है, न किसी के अन्न से पलता है;
स्वराज्य में विचरता है, अमृत बन कर जीता है।

'a *brāhmaṇa* is no resident of any kingdom; he does not subsist on other's food;
he pleasantly wanders about in his own kingdom; he lives the way of immortals'

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