

A Comparative Study of the Classification of Male Offspring in Hinduism and Buddhism

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to give a short account of one aspect of the patriarchal culture in India during the time of the Buddha and before. Both Hinduism and Buddhism were founded by Aryans, i.e. Brāhmanas and Ksatriyas. Many Aryan elements can be seen in these two religious traditions. Even though Buddhism, as a branch of Sramana (recluse) movement, was against the orthodox Brāhmana religious tradition, Buddhist society was very much influenced by well established Hindu social system. It seems that some social custom and practices of both systems are very much alike. Both Hinduism and Buddhism strictly followed the patriarchal system.

Hindu society was very much dominated by the male and the position of women was similar to that of Sūdra. According to Manusmṛti, for women regular religion was not necessary. Husband was her savior and the source of religious inspiration and immortality. Even though Buddhism did not approve Manusmṛti's idea of religion for women, regarding social matters, male dominance can be seen in Buddhist society too. Both systems accept equally that it is the duty of male children to perform religious rites in the name of departed ones to make their after life happy by performing sacrifice (pitṛyajña) and giving alms (dakṣiṇā) It was to send the efficacy of sacrifice (srāddha) and transferring merit (puñña). This is very well emphasized in Hindu Dharmasāstras as well as Pāli sutras. It may be due to this patriarchal element, both systems have taken a special interest to classify male children into many categories. The present paper is a brief analysis of these classifications found in Sanskrit Dharmasāstras and Pāli canon.

The present study of the classification of sons (Putras) in Hindu and Buddhist societies depicts the fact that both the cultures have emphasized the centrality of male children in their social systems. We do not find in the Sanskrit literature such an emphasis laid on female children. Nevertheless, Buddhist texts have paid some attention to female progeny while emphasizing male's overall importance. Both the Hindu and Buddhist societies were patriarchal and therefore, male children played a dominant role in society with regard to religious, family and social functions in ancient India.

According to Hindu and Buddhist social systems female children usually leave their natal home on their marriage. On the other hand, male children live with their parents in their natal homes even after their marriage. This is, in terms of sociology, the virilocal joint or extended family system. Under this system the responsibilities such as maintenance of children, family and parents, taking care of family property, transference of merit to departed ancestors, continuation of family line and so forth were devolve upon male children. Sociologists who studied the

institution of family have pointed out that family performs four universal functions. Two of these functions are biological reproduction and maintenance of immature children. In this respect biological reproduction in Hindu and Buddhist societies is mainly to have male children.

Biological reproduction is a phrase used in biology to convey the idea of giving birth to or production of new generations in living organism. All living organisms in the universe have an innate power of producing new generations depending on necessary conditions to continue and multiply species. The definition given to this phrase is the act of producing new organisms. This process has no ending and is governed by the law of nature, to put in Buddhist terms *Dhammaniyāma*.¹ Indian Religions and philosophies have played a considerable role in investigating into this process of reproduction in different perspectives. The origin of the universe and species, according to Hindu theory, is derived from Brahma, the creator God. This theory has been well established in India from very early times. In addition to this, we find an idea of evolution of the universe and species in the *Rgveda*. Aghamarshana, the earliest philosopher of the *Rgveda*, has pointed out the time (*kāla*) and the warmth (*tapas*) as creative principles working in the manner of an evolution.² Prajāpati Paramesthin too emphasizes the warmth (*tapas*) as the creative principle.³ Both Aghamarsana and Prajapati paramesthin maintain a naturalistic view of the origin of the world.

In this article I propose to examine briefly the Hindu and Buddhist ideas of biological reproduction. The phrase, biological reproduction, is frequently used by sociologists in relation to family and its functions. Sociologists mention that there are four universal functions performed by family: 1. Biological reproduction, 2. Maintenance of immature children, 3. Socialization and education and 4. Placement in society.⁴ The second, third and fourth functions depend on the biological reproduction. If the family is unable to achieve the first function the question of last three functions does not arise. In such cases the option of adoption was followed by Buddhist and Hindu communities.

The importance of gender in biological reproduction was very much emphasized in Hinduism. The male gender was given the highest position in the Aryan society in India. Thus the reproduction of sons was considered more a religious function in Hindu society and sons were connected to the ritual of sacrifice and other religious activities. The reason for this preference is many. The most important of them is religious in terms of Hindu social philosophy. The priestly functions always devolved upon male in Hindu society. We do not hear of women priests officiating religious rituals and sacrifices. Manusmṛti mentions that there are five domestic sacrifices to be performed by male children: 1. Brahma yajña (the sacrifice in the name of creator God), 2. Pitṛ Yajña (the sacrifice in the name of departed ones), 3. Deva yajña (the sacrifice for gods) 4. Bhūta yajña (the sacrifice for manes) and 5. Nṛ yajña (the sacrifice for guests).⁵ It is vitally important to have sons in order to perform these sacrifices. On the other hand female did not have an important function to perform in this religious system. Another reason is that the family system was exclusively virilocal. The male had all rights to be the head of the family as well as

the household after his marriage. The continuation of family line and inheritance of wealth and property were exclusive rights of male children in this social system. Female upon their marriage had to leave parents and the natal household and went to live with husband's party. Buddha referring to this practice mentioned that one of the five woes woman undergo is that at a tender age she goes to her husband's family and leaves her relatives behind. The position of women was very much lower in the Hindu society compared to men. Manusmṛti mentions that women should be subject to father's supervision in their childhood, to husband's after marriage and to children after husband's death. They must never be independent. Male was the breadwinner as well as the guardian of the family. Female was the protector of the household fire and the housewife.

On these grounds the biological reproduction in Hindu society laid more emphasis on the production of sons. The term Putra was used in Sanskrit texts to denote son. Manu has accorded the following definition to the term, Putra. A son delivers (trāyate) his father from hell, therefore he is called put-tra (a deliverer from put (hell) by the Self-Existent himself. 'According to Monier Williams, the etymology of the term, Putra, is not clear.' Benjamin Walker states that the term is of Dravidian origin.⁶

In Sanskrit as well as Pāli texts we find some classifications of sons. In the Manusmṛti there is a list of twelve kinds of sons divided into two groups on the basis of affinity and inheritance.⁷

1. Aurasa: (figuratively born from the chest) the son aurasa putra is the only legitimate son with full rights. This is the son begotten by a father on his lawfully married wife of equal caste (varṇa). Aurasa means belonging to or being in the breast or produced by one's self. According to Hindu law the Aurasa son is the legal heir to the family wealth.
2. Kṣetraja: the son born according to the custom of levirate (Niyoga). Kṣetraja means field-born or born on the field (kṣetra) or property (wife). Usually this custom is followed, if the husband is impotent or dead without producing a son. In this respect the Hindu law permits the wife of the impotent or dead husband, with the approval of husband's relatives, to have a son begotten by the brother or the nearest kinsman of the husband. There is a religious reason for this practice, that is to say, to set free the sonless father from the debt to the ancestors.
3. Datta: the son given for adoption.
4. Kṛtrima: the son made.
5. Gūdotpanna or Gūdaja: the son secretly born.
6. Apavidha: the son excommunicated from his own family and caste group due to breach of endogamous rules of marriage.
7. Kanina: the son of an unmarried damsel.
8. Sahoda: the son received with wife, i.e. the son conceived but not born at the time of marriage.
9. Krita: the son bought from his parents.

10. Paunarbhava: the son of a widow who has married a second husband.
11. Svayam datta: self-given, i.e. the son who gives himself to a new family for adoption.
12. Śaudra: the son of a man of either of the first three castes by a Śūdra woman.

According to Manu, the first six kinds of sons of the list are legal heirs to the family wealth and the last six are only kinsmen. Manu does not mention the sons called Parāsara (Parāsvara) and Putrikāputra. Parāsara is the son begotten by a concubine.⁸ Putrikāputra is the son of the daughter. This is a special custom followed by Hindus in the case of no male children produced at all. The eldest daughter's son is considered as the Putrikāputra⁹ and the grandfather becomes the father (non-biological) of daughter's son according to this custom. This can be considered as a form of adoption. In such cases daughter follows the virilocal practice by settling down in the parental household.

The Buddhist position is different slightly from that of Hindu. The classification found in the Pāli texts can be divided into two: canonical and non-canonical. The Buddhist social system also gives preference to sons. Generally Indian society whether Buddhist or Hindu accepted the patriarchal system. Even though the Buddha attempted to reform this mentality, the Buddhist community too gave a special preference to male children. This may be due to the joint and extended family systems in India during the time of the Buddha. Buddha emphatically mentioned that there are women endowed with good qualities like intelligence, virtue and integrity and that they are superior to men.¹⁰ Buddha also accepted some social and family values already established in India during his time. He too, accepted that in a patriarchal society males are more prominent than females. Buddhist family system was the same as that of Hindu. In joint and extended family systems males play a leading role regarding inheritance, maintenance and looking after the old parents, filial piety and ancestor worship. In the Sigālovāda Sutra Buddha mentions parents' preference of sons to daughters.¹¹ There are five duties devolve upon sons according to this Sutra, i.e. fostering and looking after the parents, attending on them, continuing the family line, taking charge of the family wealth and performing due religious practices after the death of parents. This was the family system based upon duty (dhamma) during the time of the Buddha and he might have assumed it as a good system. Within the context of already established patriarchal social system Buddha attempted to reform some misconceptions regarding female children.

Buddhist classification of sons has reduced the number of sons in the Hindu texts to four. Niddesa mentions four kinds of sons, i.e. 1. Atraja or Attaja, 2. Khettaja, 3. Dinnaka and 4. Antevāsika.¹² Pandara Jātaka of Jātakapāli mentions only three kinds of sons: 1. Antevāsi, 2. Dinnako, and 3. Atrajo.¹³ Khettaja (born on the field) is excluded from the list of four. Katthahāri jātaka records four kinds of sons including Khettaja.¹⁴ However, Buddhist tradition is very precise in this respect.

The Buddhist definition of each category of sons is similar to Hindu explanation. The Pāli term for son is *putta*, which is derived from the Sanskrit word *putra*. The first category of sons in the list is *Atraja*. *Atraja* means born of oneself.¹⁵ According to Pāli texts this is the legitimate son born of the parents of equal social status or otherwise. The term, *Atraja*, has been used for both male and female in Pāli texts. In the *Therīgāthā* we read 'I am *Majjhima*'s daughter born of oneself (*dhītā majjhassa atrajā*).¹⁶ It seems that both the Hindu and Buddhist societies observed the same law regarding inheritance of family property. In this virilocal system son was the exclusive heir to the family property, and daughters had no rights to claim family property as they were given away (*vivāha*) from their natal homes on their marriage

Regarding the second category of sons, *Khettaja*, Pāli texts do not provide a clear definition. The *Jātakatthakathā* definition of *Khettaja* is that the one who is born on bed, sofa or chest is *Khettaja*.¹⁷ As this does not provide a clear idea about the *Khettaja* son we have to assume that the Hindu definition as the standard one. Buddhist society also followed the rules of *levirate* (*niyoga*) in the case of no sons produced due to the death of the husband. In such cases wife was granted social and legal sanction to live with the brother of the dead husband in order to have a son. This son begotten under this custom is called the *Khettaja*.

The third, *Dinnaka*, is the son adopted. Buddhist texts have a clear definition of this category of sons. The commentary of the *Jātaka* gives this definition: 'Dinnaka is one who is given by others as a son.'¹⁸ There is another definition in the *Jātakatthakathā*: 'Dinnaka is the son given for bringing up.'¹⁹ It is clear that the practice of adoption was followed by Buddhists as well as Hindus in India when families have no sons biologically reproduced.

The *Antevāsika* is the fourth category of sons. *Antevāsika* is 'the one who learns arts and crafts under the guidance of a teacher.'²⁰ There is no biological reproduction involved in this respect. In the Buddhist monastic tradition this is similar to the practice of adoption. In the case of Buddhist *Sangha* the status of the person after the ordination is transformed to that of a son. The teacher or the preceptor becomes the spiritual father of the novice. In the lay community the status of *Antevāsika*, (pupil) is limited to the period of learning. But the relationship between the teacher and the pupil remains life-long.

There is another list of sons in Buddhist texts. In the *Itivuttaka*²¹ of the *Khuddaka Nikāya* mention is made of three kinds of sons on ethical basis. The first category of sons are called *Atijāta* (well-born or super born) in relation to parents. In this respect, the son is virtuous, well mannered and endowed with good qualities and free from all blamable behavior. And the parents are vile, unvirtuous and full of immoral behavior. In such cases, the son is considered *Atijāta* in the sense that he is ethically and morally superior to his parents. The second category, *Anujāta* (equal born), is the son full of good qualities and moral behavior. Parents are also virtuous and well mannered. Such sons are called *Anujāta* in relation to his parents. The third *Avajāta*, (low-born), is the son unvirtuous and immoral compared to his parents.

Parents are virtuous and well mannered. Such sons are called Avajāta in relation to parents.

In the case of no sons were born into families, the practice of adoption was followed by Hindu and Buddhists families during ancient times in India. Hindu lawgivers have paid a careful attention to systematize the practice with legal procedures. The terms Kṛtrima,²² and Datta (the son made, the son given) are used in Sanskrit texts to designate the adopted son. In Pāli texts the word Dinnaka²³ has been used instead. In both Hindu and Buddhist societies the practice of ancestor worship was very important and it was the duty of sons to perform due religious practices in the name of departed ancestors to make their after life happy by transferring merit. And also it was an important duty to continue the family line of the departed ancestor (father). Inheritance of the family wealth and looking after the old parents were also necessary social obligations devolved upon sons in both Hindu and Buddhist societies.

Both Vaśiṣṭha and Baudhāyana have carefully elaborated the formal procedure of adoption. According to Hindu Dharmasāstras, the adoption should be sanctioned legally, socially and religiously. The person who is going to adopt a child should announce his intention in an assembly of relatives and then the decision should be conveyed to the king.²⁴ According to Baudhāyana, the father to be should procure a spiritual guide who is versed in the Veda, i.e. a Brāhmana priest. The adopter, after giving gifts to all the priests assembled for the function, should approach the giver of the child and make a formal request regarding the grant. The biological father formally should announce his willingness to give the son. The adopter pronounces 'I take thee for the fulfillment of my religious duties, I take thee to continue the line of my ancestors.'²⁵ According to Vasistha, the child should be adopted from the nearest among the relatives, not from remote kinsmen.²⁶

In conclusion it should be mentioned that both Hindu and Buddhist societies took a special interest with regard to male children. The classification of sons was done in order to emphasize son's legal status regarding inheritance and ancestor worship. Buddhist society was very much influenced by Hindu ideas in this respect. Buddhist community followed the Hindu custom in all cases regarding the legality of sons. Buddha also accepted the existing patriarchal system and he never attempted to reform it. What the Buddha did was to dispel the deep-rooted misconception regarding the biological reproduction of female.

Endnotes

¹ According to Buddhism there are five laws in the world governing living organisms. 1. The law of season (utuniyāma), 2. The law of seeds (bījanīyāma), 3. The law of karma (kammanīyāma) 4. The law of mind (cittanīyāma) and 5. The law of nature (dhammanīyāma).

² Ṛgveda, X. 190

³ Ṛgveda, X. 129

⁴ Murdock, G. P., Social Structure, p. 11

⁵ Manusmṛti, III. 68-69

⁶ Walker, Benjamin, Hindu World, Vol. II. P. 243

⁷ 'Aurasah ksetrajās ca iva dattah kṛtrima eva ca gudotpanno' pavddhas ca dayadabandhavas ca

sat Kaninas ca sahodas ca kritah punarbhavas tatha Svayamdattas ca saudras ca sadadayadabandhavah' Manusmrti, IX. 159-160

⁸ Renou, Louis, *The Civilization of Ancient India*, pp. 69-70

⁹ See Benjamin Walker's *Hindu World*, Vol. II. 423

¹⁰ 'Itthi'pi ekacciya seyya posa janadhipa

medhavini silavati sassudeva patibbata.' *Samyutta Nikaya*, Vol. I. 86

¹¹ 'Panca imani bhikkhave thanani sampassanta matapitaro puttam icchanti kule jayamanam.

Bhato va no bharissati, kiccama va no karissati, kulavamsam va thassati, dayajjam patipajjissati, atha ca pana petanam kalakatanam dakkhinam anupadassati.' *Digha Nikaya*, Vol. III. 189;

Anguttara Nikaya, III. 43

¹² 'Putta'ti cattaro putta, attajo putto, khettajo putto, dinnako putto antevāsiko putto.'

Niddesa I. P. 247; *Niddesa* II. 448; *J. I.* 135; *Suttanipata Atthakatha*, II. 550

¹³ 'Tayo hi putta na hi anno atthi, antevāsi dinnako atrajo ca.' *Jatakathakatha* V. pp. 83-84

¹⁴ 'Tattha putto tya han'ti putto te aham. Putta ca nama ete, atrajo khettajo antevāsiko

dinnako'ti catubbidha.' *Jatakathakatha*, I. 135

¹⁵ 'ettha attanam paticca jato atrajo nama.' *Jatakathakatha*, I. P.135

¹⁶ 'Dhita Majjhassa atrja.' *Therigatha*, II. 151

¹⁷ 'Sayanapitthe pallanke ure'ti evam adisu nibbatto khettajo nama.' *Jatakathakatha*, I. 135

¹⁸ 'Dinnako'ti ayam te putto hotu' ti parehi dinno.' *Jatakathakatha*, V. 84

¹⁹ 'Posavanatthaya dinno dinnako nama.' *Jatakathakatha*, I. 135

²⁰ 'Santike sippuggahanako antevāsiko nama.' *Jatakathakatha*, I. 135

²¹ *Itivuttaka*, p. 62

²² *Manusmrti*, IX.159

²³ *Jatakathakatha*, V. 83; *J. I.* 135; *Niddesa*, 240; 247; *Suttanipata Atthakatha*, II. 550

²⁴ *Vasistha*, XV. 6

²⁵ *Baudhayana*, VII. 5, 9-11

²⁶ *Vasistha*, XV. 6

Throughout history, we see that the differentiation of *us* versus *them* is the cause of many conflicts and wars. The Holocaust is one of the ugliest examples of such differentiation. Likewise, in the Balkans, the atrocity of ethnic cleansing was the cause of many large-scale tragedies. Instead of rejecting those who are different from us, we should learn to embrace them. The peace and harmony that ensue from mutual respect and acceptance make the initial efforts all worthwhile. Instead of accentuating our differences, we should highlight our similarities. While we may look or act differently, we are fundamentally alike. After all, it is because we share similar causes and conditions that we were reborn in this world at this time. All beings share an inherent connection, and we can either embrace or deny this, living in a manner that draws this out or leaves it dormant. We should treasure the similar conditions that bring us together as neighbors, friends, and fellow inhabitants of this precious world.

-Living Affinity, Hsing Yun, p.21