

VAMMIKA SUTTA, the "discourse on the anthill", is the twenty-third discourse in the *Majjhima Nikāya* (M. I, 142-145). This discourse has four parallels preserved in Chinese translation (T. I, 918b-919a; T. II, 282a-c; T. II, 379c-380a; T. II, 733b-c).¹

The *Vammika Sutta* describes how a *deva* presented the monk Kumāra Kassapa with a riddle-like description of an anthill and various items that are to be unearthed from it, such as a bar, a toad, a fork etc. Once all these items are taken out of the anthill and discarded, a *nāga* will appear, which is to be worshipped. Kumāra Kassapa approached the Buddha with this riddle and received the explanation that these various items stand for different mental defilements that are to be eradicated, while the *nāga* represents the attainment of liberation.

The commentary reports that, after receiving this explanation and practising diligently in accordance with it, Kumāra Kassapa became an arahant (MA. II, 134; cf. also J. I, 148 and T. II, 733c26). This successful outcome of the explanation given by the Buddha is what makes the *Vammika Sutta* worthy of note, as it depicts a rather unique mode of instruction that enabled a monk to reach final liberation.

Kumāra Kassapa apparently had a personality that was prone to the use of imagery, as can be seen from the *Pāyāsi Sutta* (D. II, 319). This discourse reports that he delivered a whole series of imaginative similes in a discussion with a sceptic Brahmin, so much so that the Brahmin, even though already convinced, continued to oppose Kumāra Kassapa just in order to hear more similes and explanations (D. II, 352).

The *Vammika Sutta* indicates that the Buddha would have been aware of this propensity of Kumāra Kassapa and was able to skilfully employ the series of images related to the anthill in order to bring home to his disciple that he should meditatively unearth within himself all those states and conditions that obstruct the attainment of liberation.

Anālayo

Reference

¹ T. stands for the Taishō edition.

VĀSEṬṬHA SUTTA, the "discourse to Vāseṭṭha", is found twice in the Pāli canon, once as the ninety-eighth discourse in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, and again as the ninth discourse in the third chapter of the *Sutta Nipāta*. According to the introductory narration, the Brahmins Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja had approached the Buddha in order to get his opinion on whether one becomes a true Brahmin by dint of birth or rather through virtue. In reply, according to the *Vāseṭṭha Sutta* the Buddha delivered a series of verses in which he set forth what, according to his understanding, is required in order to become a true Brahmin. The significance of the *Vāseṭṭha Sutta* derives from these verses, which offer a vivid testimony to the early Buddhist conception of sainthood, and at the same time clarify its stance on matters of race and caste. The present article will briefly survey these verses and then examine the main points they make.

The first theme broached in these verses is that essential differences of the type that are seen between different animals cannot be found between human beings. To illustrate this point, a survey of the plant and animal world is undertaken - such as grass, trees, insects, quadrupeds, snakes, fish, and birds - concluding that the variety that can be observed here shows that there are indeed many kinds of birth, *aññamaññā hi jātiyo* (Sn. 601-606). In contrast to such variety, a survey of differences among human beings shows that, in as much as essential bodily components are concerned, no essential differences can be found (Sn. 607-611).¹

Thus "according to the Buddha, *jāti* or caste is primarily a biological term and it signifies 'species'. The social divisions among men cannot be treated as '*jātis*' or castes in this sense. These divisions are merely occupational and not congenital, as a *Brahmin* and a member of one of the other castes can mate together ... for the purpose of procreation, while a male of one species and a female of another species cannot procreate offspring as in the case of men".² This leads to the inevitable conclusion that distinctions among humans are merely based on conventions, *vokārañca manussesu samaññāya pavuccati* (Sn. 611).

Such conventions are then examined in the next verses, which indicate that human beings are to be reckoned in accordance with their respective occupations (Sn. 612-619). This examination culminates by announcing the principle underlying

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