

85-110; Samuels: "Tahe Baodhisattva ideal in Theravada Buddhist Theory and Practice", *Philosophy East and West*, 47.3, 1997: 399-415.

5 Skilling op.cit. : 142

6 Cf. Monier Williams: *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*, Delhi 1999: 1296; and Rhys Davids: *Pali-English Dictionary*, Delhi 1993:732. Kimura: *A Historical Study of the Terms Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna*, Calcutta 1927: 116, suggests that the term Hīnayāna may have come into use in retaliation for such terms as *adharmavādin*, which apparently were used by opponents of the Mahāyāna.

7 On this topic cf. esp. Cohen: "Discontented Categories: Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna in Indian Buddhist History", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 63.1, 1995: 1-25.

8 Nattier : *A Few Good Men*, Honolulu 2003:174 note 6

9 Vetter: "Once Again on the Origin of Mahayana Buddhism", *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Sudasiens*, 45, 2001: 62 ff. Har Dayal: *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, Delhi 1970: 321 note 22, suggests that though "yāna... originally denoted 'way, career'... the connotation... changed after the publication of the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* with its famous parable of the three yānas (chap. III). That play on words led to the substitution of the idea of 'vehicle' for that of 'way'.

YAÑÑA stands for "sacrifice", whose performance formed a central role in the thought world of ancient India. The present entry will briefly survey a few instances in the Pāli canon that refer to sacrifices or display knowledge of various aspects of its performance, followed by assessing the early Buddhist attitude towards *yaññā*.

A list of sacrifices, found in several discourses, includes the *assamedha*, *purisamedha*, *sammāp* *sa*¹ *v* *capeyya* *lv* *japeyya* and *niraggaḷa* (*S. I*, 76; *A. II*, 42; *A. IV*, 151; *Sn*. 303; *Jt*. 21).²²

The same listing is also found in verse 196 of the *Gāndhāri Dharmapada*, reading a *spa-veka Puruṣa-*

veka same-paśa vaya-veka niraga ḍa, cf. Brough: The *Gāndhāri Dharmapada*, The *Ambaṭṭha Sutta* refers to offerings made by Brahmins for the departed and to the *thālipāka* offering (*D. I*, 97). The efficacy of offerings, undertaken on behalf of the departed, is the subject of a discussion between a Brahmin and the Buddha in a discourse in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (*A. V*, 269). In a list of qualities that make up a worthy Brahmin, given in the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*, such a Brahmin's role as the first or second to hold the sacrificial ladle is explicitly noted (*D. I*, 120).

The *somayāga* is mentioned in a *Jātaka* verse (verse 263; *J. IV*, 365), and a discourse in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* describes a Brahmin who has just completed a fire-sacrifice, *aggihuta*, (*S. I*, 167). The *Mahgovinda Sutta* refers to spreading *kusa* grass for the performance of a fire-sacrifice (*D. II*, 244), which according to a verse found in several passages is the supreme sacrifice, just as *Sāvittī* is the supreme Vedic hymn (*Vin. I*, 246; *M. II*, 146= *Sn*. 568).³ The *Kandaraka Sutta*, as an example of someone who torments himself as well as others, depicts a king or Brahmin engaged in a sacrifice. In addition to having various animals slaughtered for sacrifice, according to its description the king undertakes the practice of living on the milk of the single teat of a cow, sleeps on the bare ground, clad in a hide and with hair and beard shaved off (*M. I*, 343). A *yaññā* that apparently involves sacrificing tetrads of living beings is mentioned in *Jātaka* tales, referred to as the *sabbacattuka yaññā* (e.g. *J. I*, 335 or *J. III*, 44).

According to the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, some of the Buddha's contemporaries completely rejected sacrifice. The *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* reports that Pūrana Kassapa affirmed that no merits would result from sacrificing, *yajanto yajāvento n'atthi tato nidānaṃ puññāṃ* (*D. I*, 52); and Ajita Kesakambali denied that anything could meaningfully be sacrificed or offered, *n'atthi yittha n'atthi hutam* (*D. I*, 55; see also SĀMAÑÑAPHALA SUTTA). While early Buddhism was also critical or contemporary sacrificial practices, it did not go so far as to reject them entirely. In fact, the *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta*'s definition of right view, in direct contrast to the position taken by Ajita Kesakambali, affirms that there is what is sacrificed and offered, *atthi yittham atthi hutam* (*M. III*, 72).

Instead of a wholesale rejection of sacrifice, early Buddhism re-interpreted the meaning and purpose of *yaññā*. "The brahmanic ritual of Vedic times has been given a changed and deeper meaning. Buddhism has discarded the outward and cruel form and has widened its sphere by changing its participant, its object as well as the means and ways of 'offering', so that the *yaññā* now consists entirely in a worthy application of a worthy gift to a worthy applicant".⁴ "The word *yajña* has thus lost its original meaning in the Brahminical sense and has come to equal *dāna*, *pūja*, *dakkhiṇā* or *deyyadhamma*".⁵

The early Buddhist re-interpretation of the concept of *yaññā* finds its expression in the use of *yaññā* in several discourses as a referent to gifts of food to the virtuous (e.g. *A. II*, 63 or *A. III*, 337). Such gifts of food to the virtuous may even take on the outer aspects of preparations for a sacrifice, if the gift is to be given to the whole monastic community with the Buddha at its head. Thus several passages report that the busy activities in a household about to receive the Buddhist order for such a meal would cause outsiders to wonder if a sacrifice is under preparation (cf. *Sn. Prose p.* 105 or *Vin. II*, 155).

Hence when asked if he approved of *yaññā*, according to a discourse in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* the Buddha replied that he did not commend the type of sacrifice where animals were slaughtered, but only a sacrifice that does not involve any killing, such as regular gifts in charity or on behalf of one's family (*A. II*, 42). The same theme recurs in the *Pāyāsi Sutta*, which contrasts sacrifices where animals are slaughtered to those that do not involve any killing (*D. II*, 353). In this way, early Buddhism redirected the ancient Indian disposition towards offering *yaññā* by providing the alternative of offering *dāna*, which still forms a distinct feature of the Buddhist tradition today.

According to early Buddhism, even before an actual sacrifice is undertaken, even merely having the plan to kill animals for its sake will already be demeritorious (*A. IV*, 42). A description of the preparation for a sacrifice to be undertaken on behalf of King Pasenadi indicates that not only the victims of the sacrifice suffer, but also those who have to carry out the menial tasks required for its performance. According to this

description, the slaves and workers executed their tasks with tearful faces, being forced to do so by beating (*S.I*, 76). The introductory narration to the *Pārāyanavagga* of the *Sutta Nipāta* reveals the strain that the performance of a sacrifice puts on the resources of the sacrificer himself. It records that, after having performed a great sacrifice, the brahmin Bāvāri had exhausted his wealth to such an extent that he was unable to give support to another Brahmin who begged him for help (*Sn.* 978 and 982). Hence from an early Buddhist perspective the performance of sacrifice simply causes suffering to all those who are involved in it.

A chief motivation for performing sacrifices, according to the *Puṇṇakamāpavapucchā*, is hope for a better form of existence and desire for sensual pleasures (*Sn.* 1044 and 1046). According to the *Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta*, during former lives the Buddha had performed various sacrifices, but had found out that no purity can be developed thereby (*M. I*, 82). A Buddhist monk, who earlier used to perform the *aggihuta*, concludes that only blind worldlings will believe that fire-sanctifiers lead to purity. (*Th.* 341). As a verse in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* points out, instead of maintaining external fires, the Buddha rather kindles the fire of concentration within (*S.I*, 169). In sum, the performance of external sacrifice and oblation will not purify. (*Sn.*249).

Hence performing various sacrifices is not worth even a sixteenth part of the value of developing loving kindness, *mettā* (*A. IV*, 151 and *It.* 21). Even a thousand sacrifices will not be able to equal a meagre gift given by one who, though poor, lives righteously, (*S. I*, 19). In particular the offering of *Dhamma*, *dhammayāga*, is superior to any material offering (*It.* 102). A discourse in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* takes up the Brahminic criticism that, while the performance of sacrifice is undertaken on the behalf of many, to go forth is only for one's own sake (*A. I*, 168). In reply, the Buddha points to his role as a teacher of the *Dhamma* to many, making it clear that to go forth can be of immense benefit to others.

The *Brahmaṇadhammika Sutta* contrasts the conduct of Brahmins of former times, who did not slaughter for the sake of sacrifice (*Sn.* 295), to greedy Brahmins of later days, who out of covetousness for

riches instigate the king to perform sacrifices that involve massive slaughter (*Sn.* 302-308). The same discourse concludes that those who sacrifice in this way have fallen away from the principle of justice (*Sn.* 312). Criticism of the way contemporary Brahmins would perform sacrifices is also voiced in the *Subha Sutta*, which depicts how a Brahmin might get upset when he does not receive the foremost seat and best share of food at a sacrifice (*M.* II, 204). The *Balapaṇḍita Sutta* is quite outspoken in its criticism, as it compares the greed of Brahmins who come running at the smell of sacrifice to dung feeding animals (*M.* III, 167).

A rather humorous depiction of the early Buddhist attitude to sacrifice and to offerings for the gods can be found in a discourse in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, which features an elderly lady who makes daily oblations to Brahma (*S.* I, 141). Brahma eventually appears in mid-air, only to inform his devotee that, instead of trying to offer him what he will not take anyway, she would do better to give the food to her son, who as a Buddhist monk was out on the roads of the town begging his daily alms.

In fact, while from the point of view of the Brahmins the proper recipient of offerings would be a Brahmin of pure descent who is knowledgeable in the Vedas, from the early Buddhist perspective mental purification and the attainment of the three higher knowledge makes someone a worthy recipient of gifts (*A.I.*, 1661). That is, an awakened one is the best recipient of the sacrificial cake, *tathāgato arahati pūraḷasaṃ* (*Sn.* 467 ff).⁶

A good dose of humour also seems to underlie the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* treatment of the theme of sacrifice. This discourse describes a king of the past who performed a great sacrifice at which no living being is killed, a sacrifice that did not require any enforced labour and where the king refused offerings made to him on behalf of the sacrifice by others, indicating that he had sufficient to carry out the sacrifice on his own account (*D.* I, 141). "It is all ironical, of course – just the very contrary, in every respect, of a typical Vedic sacrifice".⁷ The *Kūṭadanta Sutta* does not stop at this, but concludes by depicting a series of sacrifices superior to this idealized ancient sacrifice. These are making regular offerings to virtuous recluses; providing shelter for the sangha; going for refuge; undertaking

the five precepts; and supreme of all, going forth and attaining liberation.

*Māse māse sahasseṇa
Yo yajetha sataṃ samaṃ
Ekañca bhavitattānaṃ
muhuttam api pūjaye
sāyeva pūjanā seyyo
yañce vassasataṃ hutaṃ*

Month after month for a hundred years,

One might offer sacrifices by the thousands,

Yet, if only for a moment one were to worship,

Those who are well trained,

Such worship is superior indeed,

To a hundred years of offerings (*Dhp.* 106)

Analayo

References

1. Bapat: "Sammā-Pāsa and Other Allied Sacrifices in Pali Literature", *Journal of the University of Poona*, I, 1954: 80, explains that *Sammāpāsa* stands for a preliminary procedure, where a peg is thrown and the place where it alights indicates the proper location for the performance of the sacrifice: also Falk: "Vedische Opfer im Pali-Kanon", *Bulletin d'Étu des Indiennes*, 6, 1988:231 ff. Delhi 2001: 150. For a study of this verse in different Buddhist traditions cf. Skilling: "On the Agnihotra mukhā Yajñāḥ Verses", *Jainism and Early Buddhism*, California 2003: 637-667.
2. Rhys Davids et al.: *Pali-English Dictionary*, Delhi 1993: 547, s.v. *yaññā*.
3. Barua: "Early Buddhism and the Brahmanical Doctrines", *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan*, 12.1, 1967: 76.
4. This is one of the relatively few instances where *tathāgata* stands for an *arahant* in general, cf. also TATHAGATA.
5. Rhys Davids: *Dialogues of the Buddha*, Oxford 1899: 164. The Chinese parallael describes the Actual sacrifice in more detail (T. I, 99a8), based on which Meisig: "Zur Entritualisierung des Opfers im frühen Buddhismus", *Mitteilungen für Anthropologie und Religionsgeschichte*, 7, 1992:216, concludes that the description has the *Agniṣṭoma* in mind.

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