

THE ARAHAT AND SOCIAL AFFILIATION

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By

JAMES NATHAN PANKRATZ, B.A.

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AUTHOR: James Nathan Pankratz, B.A. (McMaster University)

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS:

The thesis is an examination of the relationship between social affiliation and spiritual achievement in the Pali canon. It begins by describing the meaning and use of the word 'arahat', the term used in the canon to designate one who has achieved spiritual perfection. It then analyzes the canonical references to caste distinctions, concluding that caste affiliation is irrelevant to spiritual achievement. Finally, it examines the purpose and standards of membership in the saṅgha, and concludes that although membership in the saṅgha is not a requirement for arahatship, it is nevertheless considered the single most important form of social affiliation on the path to arahatship.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of social affiliation in spiritual achievement in the Pali canon. We shall begin by studying the meaning and use of the word 'arahat', the term used in the Pali canon to represent the one who has achieved spiritual perfection. Then we shall study the development of the caste system in India as this development is reflected in the Pali Canon, and suggest what the relationship between caste affiliation and the arahat is. Finally, we shall examine the standards of membership in the saṅgha to determine what importance it had for the arahat.

Our dependence upon I. B. Horner's study The Early Buddhist Theory of Man Perfected: A Study of the Arahan¹ will be evident throughout this thesis, particularly in the discussion of the meaning and use of the term 'arahat'. Miss Horner's work is the most complete discussion of the arahat available in the English language, and her description of the ethical and intellectual qualities which characterize the arahat is a thorough analysis of the canonical references to the arahat. Her work contains occasional references to

¹I. B. Horner, The Early Buddhist Theory of Man Perfected: A Study of the Arahan, 1936.

the relationship between social affiliation and arahatship, but these are peripheral to her investigation and so the matter is never systematically examined. This study is intended to supplement her work by analyzing references to social affiliation more thoroughly.

This study is based upon the literature of the Theravāda canon, the most completely preserved collection of early Buddhist texts. Of the canon's three principle divisions, the Sutta Piṭaka, the Vinaya Piṭaka, and the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, the first two are of most interest to us. The Sutta Piṭaka consists of five collections of discourses, the collections being distinguished from each other by the length of the discourses which they contain. The collections are called Nikāyas, and of the five, Dīgha, Majjhima, Saṃyutta, Aṅguttara, and Khuddaka, the Dīgha Nikāya is most useful for our study since questions of social affiliation are raised more frequently in it than in the others. The Vinaya Piṭaka is a collection of rules of discipline for the bhikkhus to follow, and the rules, with their accompanying commentary, provide a vast amount of useful information about the purposes and organization of the saṅgha. The Abhidhamma Piṭaka is a systematization and development of doctrinal matters which arise from the discourses in the Nikāyās, and makes no new contribution to our knowledge of the arahat or to our understanding of social affiliation.

The accounts in the canon are most frequently at-

tributed directly to the Buddha, and when they are attributed to someone else they are always said to be based upon what was heard from the Buddha. It is impossible to determine to what extent the canonical record fairly represents the Buddha's words or intentions, but it is quite clear that many of the passages ascribed to the Buddha were composed after his death in 486 B.C.² The tradition attributed all doctrine and discipline directly or indirectly to the Buddha, because Buddhists disclaimed the authority to make new regulations.

...the Order should not lay down what has not been laid down, nor should it abolish what has been laid down. It should proceed in conformity with and according to the rules of training that have been laid down.³

But, as Oldenberg puts it, in ascribing all doctrine and discipline to the Buddha, "The liturgical conscience was

² This date is based on R. C. Majumdar, ed., The Age of Imperial Unity, vol. II of The History and Culture of the Indian People, 1951, pp. 36 and 700. The records place the coronation of Aśoka 218 years after the death of the Buddha, and by using the chronology of the Magadhan kings this date can be fixed at about 269 B.C. This would put the Buddha's death at 487 B.C. The Chinese "dotted record" records 486 B.C. as the date of the Buddha's death. E. J. Thomas, The Life of Buddha as Legend and History, third edition 1949 (first published 1927), p. 27 uses the same information but calculates the date to be 483 B.C. All records are unanimous in accepting the Buddha's age at his death to be 80, and this would place his birth at 566 B.C.

³ I. B. Horner, trans., Book of the Discipline, part V, Sacred Books of the Buddhists, vol. XX, 1951. Vinaya II. 288 (Cullavagga XI).

stronger than the historical."⁴

Buddhist tradition⁵ has it that there was a Council at Rājagaha very shortly after the Buddha's death to compile an accurate record of his life and discourses.⁶ Those who came, told what they recalled of his life and teachings.⁷ and the composite formed the beginning of the canon. Aside from the canonical account of this Council there is no evidence for its existence, and the canonical account tells us little about the proceedings. Therefore the record of this Council, whether it actually met or not, is of little use in determining the date at which the canon reached its present form.

At Cullavagga XII we find an account of a second Council, this one convened at Vesāli one century after the Buddha's death. The purpose of the Council was to deal with those holding heretical opinions. Those whose opinions were declared heretical met after the Council and revised their Scriptures to conform more to their own interpretations.⁸

⁴Hermann Oldenberg, Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order, 1927, p. 334.

⁵Cullavagga XI.

⁶Oldenberg, op. cit., p. 334. Also Maurice Winternitz, A History of Indian Literature, vol. II, Buddhist Literature and Jaina Literature, 1933, p. 4.

⁷Tradition states that Upali recited Vinaya (discipline), and Ānanda recited Nikāya (doctrine).

⁸Thomas, op. cit., p. 252.

Again we have little to substantiate these canonical reports, and again we have no substantive information about what may have transpired at the Council. We do receive some indirect help in dating the texts of the canon with the information that there was already a schism among the Buddhists. G. C. Pande⁹ suggests that since the Nikāyas for the most part reflect a situation prior to schisms, they may well have already taken a form much like the one we have. He suggests that by the middle of the fourth century B.C. the Dīgha, Majjhima, Saṃyutta, and Anguttara Nikāyas were known much as they are today.

A third Council is reported to have been held in the third century B.C. during the reign of King Aśoka (169-237 B.C.), and perhaps under his auspices.¹⁰ Most scholars, however hesitant they are to accept the reports of the first two Councils, are willing to acknowledge the probability of this third Council, held, according to tradition, at Pāṭaliputta. This Council was called so that unorthodoxy, which was apparently growing, could be stopped. From the descriptions of this Council it is apparent that the canon was still being transmitted orally, for those who came to the Council are

⁹ G. C. Pande, Studies in the Origins of Buddhism, 1957, p. 15.

¹⁰ Winternitz, op. cit., p. 6 accepts the record of this Council and Aśoka's association with it. He says some of Aśoka's inscriptions attest to his interest in orthodoxy.

reported to have come as "repeaters". (bhāṇakās)¹¹ of the parts of the tradition which they knew.

How much of the canon was compiled at the third Council we do not know. We do know that by the late second century B.C. there were five Nikāyas, for on the stūpas of Bharhut and Sāñchi which date from that time, there are inscriptions referring to the "knower of the five Nikāyas."¹² It is almost certain that a major part of the Vinaya Piṭaka was extant well before this time, for the 227 rules, Pātimokkha, were the regulations of the saṅgha.¹³ We would suggest that the Sutta Piṭaka and Vinaya Piṭaka had attained substantially the same form in which we now have them by the second century B.C., and that it is probable that they had reached this form by the time of the third Council.

The date of the first written version of the canon can be fixed with considerable certitude as being in the first century B.C. It was set to writing in Ceylon during the reign of Vaṭṭagāmani.¹⁴ Since the canon was so highly

¹¹Horner, op. cit., p. 28.

¹²Winternitz, op. cit., p. 17.

¹³I. B. Horner, trans., Book of the Discipline, part I, Sacred Books of the Buddhists, vol. X, 1938, viii.

¹⁴Pandē , op. cit., p. 16 simply says "first century B.C." Thomas, op. cit., p. 251 puts Vaṭṭagāmani's reign at 29-17 B.C. A. L. Basham, The Wonder that Was India, p. 266 puts the reign at 89-77 B.C., but the Sinhalese tradition upon which he bases this, puts most dates 60 years too early

regarded, it is unlikely that it has changed very much after that time.

Two later references to the canon are of interest as well. The Milindapañha, written in the first century A.D.¹⁵ speaks of the "three Piṭakas", thus confirming the composition of the canon at that time. The Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa, written in the late fourth or early fifth century A.D.¹⁶ expounds on canonical doctrines, confirming not only the structure of the canon but the substance as well.

From these considerations we draw the following conclusions. Those parts of the canon upon which this study is most dependent, the Dīgha Nikāya and the Pātimokkha, are among the earliest parts of the canon, having been developed between the fifth and third centuries B.C. Because of their antiquity, these sections of the canon provide us with the most accurate picture that we have of society at the time of the Buddha and the Buddha's opinion of that society. They also provide us with the best available literary record of the early years of the saṅgha.

(for example the Buddha's death is put at 544 B.C.). Thomas seems right in this case.

¹⁵Sukumar Dutt, Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India, 1962, p. 250f.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 251, and also Bhaddantācariya Buddhaghosa, The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga), trans., Bhikkhu Nyānamoli, 1964 (second edition) xii.

A final note about the use of Pali terms in the text. Those terms which refer to groups or institutions (e.g. bhikkhu, brāhmaṇa, saṅgha), we have incorporated into the text, even though some of them have reasonably accurate English equivalents which could be used.¹⁷ Other Pali words which represent concepts (e.g. nibbāna, āsavas, dhamma) we have chosen to treat as Pali terms and thus underline them. This was considered advisable since these concepts have no single English equivalents, and therefore require explanation rather than exact translation.

Passages from the Pali are referred to according to the numbering system of the Pali texts, unless this is impossible, although English translations have been used throughout. Only when notes of the translators are referred to are page numbers of English translations used.

¹⁷Although the difficulties are manifest in some instances. I. B. Horner, trans. Book of the Discipline, part I, xl-lvi explains the possible English equivalents for bhikkhu.

CHAPTER I

THE ARAHAT: THE MEANING AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT

Pali has three forms of the noun constructed from the root arh: arahan, arahant, and arahat. The Sanskrit noun formed from the root arh is consistently arhat. In Pali the verb formed from the root arh is arahati (present, third person, singular), and in Sanskrit the same verb is arhati. Both languages form an abstract noun from the root, the Pali being arahatta and the Sanskrit arhattva. Throughout the text of this study the noun form used will be arahat, and the abstract noun will be anglicized as arahatship.

In both Sanskrit and Pali the root arh means "to deserve, merit, be worthy of" or "to be able."¹ In the translations of the verb arahati the nuances present in the meaning of the root are evident. Arahati is rendered as "to be worthy of" by Woodward,² as "to deserve, to be entitled to, to be equal to" by Trenckner³, and as "to be worthy of,

¹Monier Monier-Williams, ed., A Sanskrit-English Dictionary, 1960, p. 93.

²F. L. Woodward, Pali Tripitakam Concordance, Vol. I, 1956, p. 243.

³V. Trenckner, A Critical Pāli Dictionary, Vol. I, 1924-1948, p. 420.

to merit" by Rhys Davids.⁴ Although there are slight shades of meaning in the various translations, the central meaning of arahati is "to be worthy of", and in all instances of its use in the Pali texts this meaning is accurate and adequate.

The noun arahat, on the other hand, cannot be translated so easily, for its meaning changes from its earliest uses in the Rg Veda to its later uses in Jain and Buddhist literature. Even within the Pali literature the noun arahat and its adjective araha are used in several different ways. An arahat has always signified a person deserving respect and veneration, but at different times and in different texts the criteria upon which respect was based have varied.

In the Rg Veda we find the following verse addressed to Rudra:⁵

Worthy [arhan], thou carriest thy bow and arrows,
 worthy [arhan] thy many-hued and honoured necklace,
 Worthy [arhan], thou cuttest each fiend to pieces: a
 mightier than thou there is not, Rudra.

And in Rg Veda 5.86.5 this verse in a hymn to Indra-Agni:

These who give increase day by day, Gods without
 guile for mortal man,
 Worthy [arhanta] themselves, I honour most, Two
 Gods as partners, for my horse.

⁴T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, eds., Pāli-English Dictionary, 1959, p. 76.

⁵Rg Veda 2.33.1- from R. T. H. Griffith, trans., The Hymns of the Rg Veda, Vol. I, 1963.

In both of these hymns, and in others in the Bṛ Veda,⁶ it is a god or a group of gods that is addressed as "worthy." This exclusive use of the word changes in the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa, where men are also called "worthy."

For (they argue) where people do not show respect to a worthy person (arhant) who has come to them, he becomes angry...⁷

...whenever a worthy person [arhant] comes, there all the inmates of the house bestir themselves, for thus he is honoured.⁸

Throughout non-Buddhist and non-Jain literature there are other occasional references to "worthy ones," references which at first apply to the gods, then to kings and other leaders, and finally also to men with particularly noteworthy characteristics.⁹ The verb is used somewhat more frequently than the noun, but the instances of its use are of no significance for us here, since nearly all of them mean

⁶For example Bṛ Veda 5.52.5.
Praiseworthy [arhanto] giver of good gifts,
Heroes with full and perfect strength-
To Maruts, Holy Ones of heaven, will I extol the
sacrifice.

⁷Julius Eggerling, trans., Satapatha Brāhmaṇa, part II, Books III & IV, 1885. 4, 1, 3.

⁸Satapatha Brāhmaṇa. 4, 1, 6.

⁹For a fuller account of this development, see I. B. Horner, The Early Buddhist Theory of Man Perfected: A Study of the Arahan, 1936, Chapter II, "The Arahan Concept in Non-Buddhist Literature."

simply "be able."¹⁰

In Jain literature arhat is used as an appellation to designate a person with special spirituality. The following is a description of Māhāvira:

When the venerable one had become an Arhat and Jina, he was a Kevalin, omniscient and comprehending all objects, he knew all conditions of the world, of gods, men, and demons; whence they come, where they go, whether they are born as men or animals (cyavanna), or become gods or hell-beings (upapāda); their food, drink, doings, desires, open and secret deeds, their conversation and gossip, and the thoughts of their minds; he saw and knew all conditions in the whole world of all living beings.¹¹

Later in the same text there is an even fuller description of the Arhat.

Reverence to the Arhats and Bhagavats; to the Adikaras the Tirthakaras, the perfectly-enlightened ones; to the highest of men, the lions among men, the flowers among mankind, the Gandhahastins among men; to the highest in the world, the guides of the

¹⁰The noun never appears in the Upaniṣads, and the verb when used means "be able."

"A non-Brahman (a-brāhmaṇa) would not be able [arhati] to explain thus." Chāndogya 4.4.6

"Who else than I (mad) is able [arhati] to know The god)(deva) who rejoices and rejoices not (madāmada)."
Katha 2.21

These quotations are taken from R. E. Hume, trans., The Thirteen Principle Upaniṣads, 1965 (second edition).

In the Bhagavad Gita there are no uses of the noun, and again the verb is used as "be able." The following passages are cited from Franklin Edgerton, trans., The Bhagavad Gita, 1964.

- II. 17- "...no one can [arhati] cause."
- II. 25, 26, 27- "Thou shouldst [arhasi] not mourn."
- II. 31 - "Thou shouldst [arhasi] not tremble."
- III. 20 - "Thou shouldst [arhasi] act."

¹¹Hermann Jacobi, trans., Jaina Sūtras, 1884, p. 201f.

world, the benefactors of the world, the lights of the world, the enlighteners of the world; to the givers of safety, to the givers of sight, to the givers of the road, to the givers of shelter, to the givers of life, to the givers of knowledge; to the givers of the law, the preachers of the law, the lords of the law, the leaders of the law, the universal emperors of the best law; to the light, the help, the shelter, the refuge, the resting-place, the possessors of unchecked knowledge and intention, who have got rid of unrighteousness; to the conquerors and the granters of conquest, the saved and the saviours, the enlightened and the enlighteners, the liberated and the liberators, to the all-knowing ones, the all-seeing ones, to those who have reached the happy, stable, unstained, infinite, unperishable, undecaying place, called the path of perfection, whence there is no return; reverence to the Jinas who have conquered fear.¹²

The descriptions of these two passages focus on the Arhat as a knower and as a teacher or guide. The Arhat is the highest among men, the perfectly enlightened, the omniscient. He knows the road to salvation, has followed it successfully, and now he leads others to this road, giving them knowledge, light, and help, and guiding them to salvation. It is particularly because of his ability to lead others to salvation that the Jain Arhat is known as a Tirthakara ("ford-maker").¹³

¹²Ibid., p. 224f.

¹³The term 'Tirthakara' is clearly the preferred one in the Jain tradition, and I suspect there are nuances of meaning which distinguish it slightly from the term 'Arhat'. But they are very often used interchangeably, and are considered interchangeable in this study. It is clear in the Jain texts that the terms are used to apply to precisely the same people. I have found no discussion in Jain literature or in secondary sources which distinguishes the meanings of the two terms.

Jain literature presents the Arhat or Tirthakara as the highest spiritual ideal, but this ideal is quite clearly not presented as the ideal which all men may reach. From the literature we learn that there have been twenty-four Arhats, of whom Vardhamāna, better known by his honorific title Mahāvīra (Great Hero), was the last. A person can attain salvation by austerities, but no amount of austerities can make a man an Arhat. Arhats are destined to be so; they have a special ancestry¹⁴, are granted special powers, and have a unique task.

Before proceeding to the special Buddhist use of arahat, we should note that Pali literature contains numerous instances in which arahat is used without reflecting any specifically Buddhist meaning. Sometimes an arahat is simply someone who is worthy of respect and veneration.¹⁵

¹⁴Arhats are born into noble families belonging to the race of Ikshvāku or Hari. They cannot be born into low families, indigent families, or brahmanical families. Hermann Jacobi, op. cit., p. 225.

¹⁵Among the catalogue of virtues of Soṇadaṇḍa the brāhmaṇa appears the statement, "That he was honoured, held of weight, esteemed worthy, venerated and revered by Seniya Bimbisāra, the king of Magadha." Dīgha Nikāya 1.114. All quotations from the Dīgha Nikāya are taken from T. W. Rhys Davids, trans. Dialogues of the Buddha, parts I & II, Sacred Books of the Buddhists, vol. II & III, 1956 & 1959 (first published 1899 and 1910). And in Dhammapada 10 we read: "But he who has cleansed himself from sin, is well grounded in all virtues, and regards also temperance and truth, he is indeed worthy of the yellow dress." Translated by Max Müller, Sacred Books of the East, vol. X, 1881. (In both quotations the emphasis is mine.)

In other passages an arahat is someone capable of performing extraordinary feats because of his psychic powers.¹⁶ There are numerous additional examples¹⁷ which demonstrate conclusively that even as the Buddhist use of the word arahat became more specific, the more general meaning of "a worthy one" remained in use.

The special importance of the arahat in Buddhist cononical literature is indicated by the frequency with which the arahat and arahatship are the subjects of discourses. This particularly evident in the Sutta Piṭaka. Each of the thirteen Suttas of the first volume of the Dīgha Nikāya is

¹⁶Vinaya I. 25-32. This is an account of five wonders performed by the Buddha for an ascetic, a deva and a brāhmaṇa. All quotations from the Vinayapiṭaka are taken from I. B. Horner's translations Book of the Discipline, parts I-VI, Sacred Books of the Buddhists, vols. X, XII, XIV, XX, XXV. 1949-1966.

¹⁷Horner op. cit., pp. 76-95, discusses and amply illustrates uses of arahat in the Pāli canon which are not specifically Buddhist in meaning. She implies that the meaning of arahat was gradually changing until it reached the particularly Buddhist meaning which we shall shortly discuss. It seems to me that it is more accurate to speak of a general meaning of "a worthy one" which remained vestigially even when the more specific meaning of a "spiritual ideal" was present. To speak of the first meaning as earlier and the second meaning as later, suggests that it would be possible to categorize the sections of the text which use the general meaning as earlier than those which use the specific meaning. I can see no basis in the textual material for assuming that such a division of the literature would be accurate.

about the arahat or the attainment of arahatship.¹⁸ The Majjhima Nikāya¹⁹ refers repeatedly to the destruction of the āsavas (lust, becoming, false views, ignorance) as the means to attainment of arahatship. The Anguttara, Saṃyutta and Khuddaka Nikāyas deal with the theme of arahatship to a lesser extent than the Dīgha and Majjhima Nikāyas, but even they show considerably more interest in the arahat than is apparent in non-Buddhist literature. In the Vinaya Piṭaka the arahat is mentioned in passing with some frequency,

¹⁸The first Sutta speculates about possible ways of entering arahatship. The second Sutta discusses the advantages of arahatship. In the third Sutta arahatship is said to be the highest possible social rank, and a similar theme is present in the fourth Sutta which identifies the arahat as the true brāhmaṇa. In the fifth Sutta arahatship is described as the only sacrifice worth making. In the sixth and seventh Suttas arahatship is described as a goal which is even higher than self control. The eighth Sutta presents the Buddha's path to arahatship as the best asceticism. In the ninth Sutta the relation between the self and the arahat is examined. The tenth Sutta is almost completely identical to the second. The eleventh Sutta discusses the relationship between iddhi (magical powers) and arahatship. The twelfth Sutta asks whether an arahat should teach others the way to arahatship. The thirteenth Sutta does not actually lead to arahatship, but only to the Brahmā Vihāras (supreme conditions in the world of Brahmā). This Sutta appears to be an answer to the Upaniṣadic ideal of union of Ātman and Brahman, and is intended to point beyond itself to arahatship.

¹⁹I. B. Horner, op. cit., pp. 120-124. In fact, in the Majjhima Nikāya the destruction of the āsavas is regarded as the only condition sufficient in itself for the attainment of arahatship. The arahat is said to be khīṇāsava, purged of āsavas.

but no long discourses are devoted to arahatship. The Abhidhamma Piṭaka is a systematization and elucidation of difficult logical and doctrinal matters. It mentions the arahat, but does not add to what appears by then to have been an accepted understanding of arahatship.

The importance of the arahat is further emphasized by the care with which the term appears to have been used by Buddhists during the early centuries of that tradition. In Vinaya III.103-4 a brāhmaṇa invites some bhikkhus to visit with him, and in his invitation he addresses them as arahats. The bhikkhus, who insist that they are not arahats, are afraid that they will be held responsible for this form of address, and will therefore be expelled from the saṅgha. They are afraid that even by being addressed as arahats they have broken the fourth Pārājika rule, which states that a claim of arahatship by one who is not an arahat, is an offence necessitating expulsion from the saṅgha.²⁰ In this

²⁰The Pārājika rules are enumerated and explained at Vinaya III.1-109. These are rules against what are considered the most grave offenses. The first three rules are against unchastity, stealing, and taking life. The fourth rule is against claiming a state or quality of spiritual development beyond what has been attained. According to Vinaya III.90 this involves boasting "of a state of furthermen (uttarimanussadhamma), sufficient ariyan knowledge and insight, though not knowing it fully..." Such a claim, according to the explanation given at Vinaya III.91-92, is equivalent to claiming to be an arahat. Offenses against any of the Pārājika rules involve 'defeat', that is, expulsion from the saṅgha. They are, therefore, the most serious offenses for Buddhists.

case the text declares that since the monks did not advance the claim to arahatship themselves, they are not guilty of an offense. But in Vinaya III.90-91 a monk does improperly claim to be an arahat and is consequently expelled from the saṅgha. The following unequivocal condemnation of an improper claim to arahatship illustrates how serious an offense this was considered to be.

The unsaintly (anarahā) claiming saint (araham) to be, is master-thief of all the universe, the vilest wastrel of the wastrel crowd.²¹

The seriousness of a claim to arahatship and the frequency with which the arahat is mentioned, are sufficient indication of the importance of the arahat in Pali literature. As we have already pointed out, the literature uses arahat in a general way to mean "a worthy one" or "a person worthy of respect", and in a special, uniquely Buddhist way. It is this special Buddhist meaning which is used with such care in the texts, and we turn to examine it now.

At Dīgha Nikāya I. 87²² we find this said about the

²¹Quoted from Chalmer's translation of the Sutta-Nipata by I. B. Horner, *op cit.*, p. 117. In Fausböll's translation, Sacred Books of the East, vol. X, part II, 1881, this is Sutta-Nipata 134.

²²Within the Dīgha Nikāya this passage appears in exactly the same way at I. 111, 150 and 224. All of these passages, including the one quoted above, are immediately followed by: "And good it is to pay visits to Arahats like that."

Buddha:

That Blessed One is an Arahāt, a fully awakened one, abounding in wisdom and goodness, happy with knowledge of the worlds, unsurpassed as a guide to mortals willing to be led, a teacher for gods and men, a Blessed One, a Buddha. He, by himself, thoroughly knows and sees, as it were, face to face this universe,--including the worlds above of the gods, the Brahmas, and the Māras, and the world below with its recluses and Brahmans, its princes and peoples,--and having known it, he makes his knowledge known to others. The truth, lovely in its origin, lovely in its progress, lovely in its consummation, doth he proclaim, both in the spirit and in the letter, the higher life doth he make known, in all its fullness and in all its purity.²³

This passage is reminiscent of the description of the arahat quoted earlier from Jain Scripture. In both accounts the arahat is venerated for his knowledge of the truth and for his ability to lead others by teaching them the truth. He is superior to all men, and even to the gods, for they must

²³This same passage occurs in the Vinaya Āṅga as well. There I. B. Horner translates it as follows:

The highest praise has gone forth concerning the lord Gotama: he is indeed lord, perfected one [arahat], fully enlightened, endowed with knowledge and conduct, well-farer, knower of the worlds, unrivalled trainer of men to be tamed, teacher of devas and mankind, the enlightened one, the lord. Having brought to fulfillment his own powers of realization, he makes known this world, together with devas including the Māras, and the Brahmas; creatures, together with devas and men. He teaches dhamma, lovely at the beginning, lovely at the middle, and lovely at the ending. He explains with the spirit and the letter the Brahma-life completely fulfilled and wholly pure. Good indeed it were to see perfected men [arahats] like that. Vinaya III.1

be taught by him. The Buddhist arahat, as the Jain,²⁴ is the revealer of truth. The Pali canon has numerous passages in which the special status of the arahat as a spiritual guide is clear.²⁵

The Jain use of the term 'arahat' to indicate a special revealer of truth is the only way in which the term is used in that tradition. As we have already seen, Pali literature does contain a considerable number of passages in which the arahat is spoken of in almost precisely the same manner. But in the Pali canon there is another use of arahat, and it is this other use which is uniquely Buddhist. The specifically Buddhist understanding of the arahat makes the arahat the spiritual ideal. Arahata is used to mean not

²⁴It is true that the most commonly used term for the Jain spiritual leader is Tirthakara, but as pointed out earlier, Arahata is used in this sense as well. Jains and Buddhists share many of the terms by which they refer to their spiritual leaders: Jina, Arahata, Mahāvīra, Tathāgata, Buddha and Sambuddha. Each tradition has come to use some terms more than others. Buddhists most often use Buddha and Tathāgata, while Jains use Mahāvīra (Great Hero) more often. For Jains, Tirthakara is a preferred name for their leader, but for the Buddhists Tirthakara is the name applied to the leader of a heretical sect.

²⁵In Dīgha Nikāya II. 2, 11, 35, 36, 37 (twice, 38, 39 (twice) the phrase "Vipassī, the Exalted One, Arahant, Buddha Supreme" is used, and it certainly carries this sense. This occurs also at Majjhima Nikāya III.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 (twice), 7. In the passages quoted earlier which conclude with the formula "And good it is to pay visits to Arahats like that," the same sense is given to the word 'arahata'.

only a spiritual leader, but also anyone for whom rebirth has come to an end. The Jain Arhat was never a spiritual ideal, but the Buddhist arahat is the spiritual possibility and ideal of every man. The arahat is the person of ultimate spiritual attainment.

We find this meaning reflected in numerous passages in the Pali canon. Two Suttas in the Digha Nikāya conclude with a person who has heard the Buddha speak accepting the Buddha's teaching, joining the saṅgha, and finally becoming an arahat. In the Kassapa-Sihanāda Suttanta it is Kassapa, the naked ascetic (probably a Jain), who attains arahatship.

So Kassapa, the naked ascetic, received initiation, and was admitted to membership of the Order under the Exalted One. And from immediately after his initiation the venerable Kassapa remained alone and separate, earnest, zealous, and master of himself. And e'er long he attained to that supreme goal for the sake of which clansmen go forth from the household life into the homeless state: yea, that supreme goal did he by himself, and while yet in this visible world, bring himself to the knowledge of, and continue to realize, and to see face to face. And he became sure that rebirth was at an end for him, that the higher life had been fulfilled, that everything that should be done had been accomplished, and that after this present life there would be no more beyond.

And so the venerable Kassapa became yet another among the Arahats.²⁶

²⁶Digha Nikāya I. 178. The same formula-like passage appears at Digha Nikāya I.204; there it is Citta, the son of an elephant trainer, who becomes an arahat. In Saṃyutta Nikāya I. 160-170 the same formula appears at the end of eight sections, recording how eight persons attained arahatship.

The "supreme goal" is arahatship. It is spoken of as the end of a journey, as freedom from fetters, as unconditional freedom (nibbāna: Sk. nirvāṇa). Two verses from the Dhammapada²⁷ illustrate these features.

There is no suffering for him who has finished his journey, and abandoned grief, who has freed himself on all sides, and thrown off all fetters.

His thought is quiet, quiet are his word and deed, when he has obtained freedom by true knowledge, when he has thus become a quiet man.

Throughout the Thera-Therī-gāthā²⁸ arahatship is presented as the spiritual goal, although there is little description of the arahat. Theragāthā XXXII is a psalm of Suppiya, spoken as he was "striving for arahatship". Abhaya, to whom Theragāthā XCVIII is attributed, "so developed insight as to win arahatship." Nowhere in the psalms or in their commentary is an ideal beyond arahatship envisioned.

There are enough references to the arahat which mention one or more of his characteristics to provide a basis for a comprehensive description of this spiritual ideal. I. B. Horner, in The Early Buddhist Theory of Man Perfected, says that the cumulative effect of all canonical references to the arahat is to describe a person in whom all

²⁷Dhammapada 90, 96.

²⁸The quotations are from Mrs. Rhys Davids translation Psalms of the Early Buddhists, 1964. (First published in two parts in 1909 and 1913.)

intellectual and ethical qualities are brought to perfection.²⁹ She suggests that the following formulae, based upon recurring passages in the Dīgha, Majjhima, Saṃyutta and Anguttara Nikāyas are the most adequate summary of all the descriptions of the arahat.³⁰

- A. "Destroyed is rebirth, lived is the good life, done is what had to be done, and now there is no more of this state of things."³¹
- B. "Alone withdrawn, zealous, ardent, with a self that has striven."³²
- C. "The arahant, in whom the āsavas are destroyed, who has greatly lived, who has done what ought to be done, who has shed his burden, and has won his aim (attha), whose bonds to becoming are no more, is, having rightly come to know, set free."³³

²⁹Horner, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-136 gives an extensive account of how the arahat achieves his goal and how this goal is characterized in the various texts.

³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 133-34.

³¹Mrs. Rhys Davids renders one instance of this passage as:

He came to understand that birth was destroyed, that the holy life was being lived, that his task was done, that for life as we conceive it there was no hereafter.

Mrs. Rhys Davids, trans., The Book of Kindred Sayings Saṃyutta-Nikāya, part I, 1950. I. 139.

³²For example Saṃyutta Nikāya I. 139. "...remaining alone and separate, earnest, ardent, and strenuous..."

³³Saṃyutta Nikāya I. 70. "Even those almsmen, sire, who are Arahants, for whom the intoxicants have perished, who have lived the Life, have done that which was to be done, for whom the burden is laid low, who have won their own highest good [sadatthā], for whom the chain of becoming is utterly destroyed, who by right insight are free."

D. "There arose in me the knowledge: unshakable for me is release of mind, this is my last birth, there is now no further becoming for me."

This state in which there is no more craving, no more becoming, no more rebirth, is nibbāna.³⁴ Nibbāna is freedom or liberation from the "fetters" which bind a person to the endless cycle of transmigration. Because the arahat is freed from the "fetters", even apparent immortality does not affect him, for he is released from dependence and identification with his body. This is vividly illustrated in Vinaya III. 37-38. A bhikkhu is sexually assaulted by a woman and the matter is brought to the lord's attention. The lord tells the bhikkhus that since the bhikkhu involved was an arahat, there was no offense involved for him. The finality and perfection of the arahat's attainment of nibhāna is declared in the Abhidhammapitaka.³⁵ doctrine that it is impossible for a person to fall away from the state of arahatship.

Among post-canonical texts the Milindapañha is of interest to us because a great deal of discussion in it is devoted to the arahat. Some of the understanding of the

³⁴For a detailed discussion of Western scholars' views on nibbāna see Guy Richard Welbon, The Buddhist Nirvāṇa and its Western Interpreters, 1968.

³⁵Horner, op cit., p. 160.

arahat present in the Pali canon is evident in the Milindapañha as well. In Milindapañha 6-7, Sakka, king of the gods, is visited by a company of arahats, and he bows to them in respect. Nāgasena, in describing the arahat to King Milinda tells him that the arahat is far superior to other men, and even far superior to other bhikkhus.

...just so, O king, does he who has attained to Arahatship, he in whom the Great Evils (lusts, and becoming delusion, and ignorance) are rooted out, he who has put on the diadem of emancipation of heart, just so does he outshine other Bhikkhus...³⁶

But in the Milindapañha there are very significant shifts from the canonical understanding of the arahat. In the Pali canon the arahat was the spiritual ideal, the intellectually and ethically perfected man. In the canon the arahat is clearly thought to be incapable of committing any offence, but in the Milindapañha this attitude is qualified. Nāgasena, when asked whether the arahat can be guilty of an offence, replies that the arahat cannot commit a moral offence,³⁷ but may very likely commit an offence against the rules of the saṅgha. Such an offence, says Nāgasena, will be committed unintentionally, and will be the

³⁶T. W. Rhys Davids, trans., The Questions of King Milinda, Parts I & II, 1963 (first published in two parts in 1890 and 1894). Milindapañha 338.

³⁷A moral offense involves the ten modes of evil action: killing, theft, unchastity, lying, slander, harsh language, frivolous talk, covetousness, malice, false doctrine.

result of incomplete knowledge rather than of ill-will.

It is not within the province of every Arahāt to know everything, nor indeed in his power. He may be ignorant of the personal or family name of some woman or some man. He may be ignorant of some road over the earth. But every Arahāt would know about emancipation, and the Arahāt gifted with the six modes of transcendental knowledge would know what lies within their scope, and an omniscient Tathāgata, O king, would know all things.³⁸

This passage indicates that although an arahat would have the knowledge necessary for emancipation (to achieve nibbāna), he would not necessarily also have knowledge of all details of social and physical life. The passage also suggests grades of arahatship, something unknown in the Pali canon. There is apparently a distinction between an arahat and an arahat gifted with the six modes of transcendental knowledge, and a further distinction between any arahat and an omniscient Tathāgata. This suggests that arahatship is no longer the highest spiritual ideal, or at least that there are degrees of perfection within arahatship.

Earlier in the Milindapañha there is a lengthy account of seven classes of minds. Were such a passage to appear in the canon, we would properly expect that the arahat would be the seventh, or highest, class. In the Milindapañha, however, the arahat is the fifth class,

³⁸ Milindapañha 267.

superceded by the Pacceka-Buddha³⁹ and the complete Buddha.⁴⁰ This description lists the qualities and the limitations of the arahats.

...in whom the four Great Evils have ceased, whose stains have been washed away, whose predispositions to evil have been put aside, who have lived the life, and accomplished the task, and laid aside every burden, and reached up to that which is good, for whom the Fetter of craving after any kind of future life has been broken to pieces, who have reached the higher insight, who are purified as regards all those conditions of heart in which a hearer can be pure,--their thinking powers as regards all that a disciple can be or do, are brought quickly into play, and act with ease. But as to those things which are within the reach of the Pacceka-Buddha (of those who are Buddhas, but for themselves alone) they are brought into play with difficulty, and act slowly. And why is this so? Because of their having been made pure as regards all within the province of a hearer, but not as regards that within the reach of those who are Buddhas (though for themselves alone).⁴¹

Although the description of the arahat is still very close to the canonical one, the arahat is no longer the highest

³⁹A Pacceka-Buddha is "one who has attained to the supreme and perfect insight, but dies without proclaiming the truth to the world." Har Dayal, The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature, 1932, p. 3.

⁴⁰A complete Buddha is one who attains perfect insight and declares it to the world before dying.

⁴¹Milindapañha 104.

spiritual ideal. The arahat still is the one who has destroyed the āsavas, still has attained nibbāna; but these achievements alone are no longer valued as the highest spiritual achievements.

In our earlier consideration⁴² of the recurring formula used to describe the arahat in the Dīgha Nikāya, we drew attention to the two aspects of arahatship stressed there: knowledge of the truth and instruction of others in the way to realization of the truth. These two characteristics of the arahat are separated in the Milindapañha, each one of them becoming a definitive feature of an independent state. Realization of the truth, or enlightenment, remains a special characteristic of the arahat, and the ability to teach and lead others to enlightenment becomes the special additional feature of the Buddha.⁴³

The only post-canonical text aside from the Milindapañha which adds anything new to the canonical understanding of the arahat, is the Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa. All subsequent Pali literature presents a stereotyped version of the arahat based on the Visuddhimagga.⁴⁴ The Visuddhimagga

⁴²Above, pp. 12-14.

⁴³Even the Pacceka-Buddha is potentially a teacher, but he dies before he teaches others, and thus is kept from becoming a complete Buddha.

⁴⁴I. B. Horner, op cit., pp. 178-181.

continues the distinction between the arahat, the Pacceka-Buddha, and the complete Buddha,⁴⁵ and thus contributes to the devaluation of the arahat ideal. What is new in the Visuddhimagga is the emphasis upon victory over the kilesas⁴⁶ as the way to arahatship. In the canon the arahat was spoken of as the one who had destroyed the āsavas. But the shift in emphasis from āsavas to kilesas, although worth noting, had no effect upon the social implications of arahatship, and is therefore of only peripheral interest to us here.

In Buddhist Sanskrit literature the devaluation of the arahat is more pronounced. Sanskrit texts do not usually include the names of arahats, but refer to them very generally. For example, in the Larger Sukhāvatī⁴⁷ the

⁴⁵Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa, The Path of Purification. (Visuddhimagga), trans., Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, second edition, 1964. XXXIII. 11.

⁴⁶Visuddhimagga VII. 4ff. The kilesas (corruptions) are: lust, ill-will, illusion, false pride, torpor, excitement, inward scruples, fear of blame.

⁴⁷Max Müller, trans., Sukhāvatī-Vyūhu in Buddhist Mahāyāna Texts, vol. XLIX, Sacred Books of the East, 1965 (first published 1894), p. 2. This is the description of the bhikkhus: "...all holy (arhat), free from frailties and cares, who had performed their religious duties, whose thoughts had been thoroughly freed through perfect knowledge, with inquiring thoughts, who had broken the fetters of existence, who had obtained their desires, who had conquered, who had achieved the highest self-restraint, whose thoughts and whose knowledge are unfettered..."

Buddha is described dwelling with thirty-two thousand arahats. The description of the arahats is nearly identical to the common formulae in the Sutta Piṭaka, but it clearly carries a good deal less prestige than it does in the Sutta Piṭaka. In the canon such a generalization about arahats is unlikely,⁴⁸ for there the arahat is regarded as so special that when arahats are referred to they are usually referred to by name, even when this requires the enumeration of a long list.⁴⁹

The devaluation of the arahat as a spiritual ideal is perhaps exemplified most clearly in the Saddharma-Pundarika.⁵⁰ In the Introductory Chapter there is a description of the setting in which the events of the text take place, and in that account the Buddha is staying at Rājagṛha with 1200 bhikkhus, all of them arahats. Two things about this passage are significant. The generalization which we

⁴⁸ Although it should be noted that this tendency begins in the Milindapañha. At Milindapañha 6 there is a reference to "an innumerable company of Arahats."

⁴⁹ I. B. Horner, *op cit.*, p. 109 refers to a list of twenty names given at Anguttara III.451.

⁵⁰ There are, however, occasions when the arahat is still spoken of with the canonical meaning. "This Mañjuśrī, the prince royal, must have witnessed before such signs of the former Tathāgatas, those Arhats, those perfectly enlightened Buddhas." H. Kern, trans., The Saddharma Pundarika, vol. XXI Sacred Books of the East, 1965 (first published 1884), p. 8.

have just referred to is apparent here, an indication that arahatship was no longer a very special and rare achievement. Additionally, we note that in this passage all the bhikkhus in this large company are declared to be arahats. This seems to equate arahatship and membership in the saṅgha, an equation which would have been impossible in the Pali canon.

This Introductory Chapter contains the following description of the arahats:

...stainless, free from depravity, self-controlled, thoroughly emancipated in thought and knowledge, of noble breed, (like unto) great elephants, having done their task, done their duty, acquitted their charge, reached the goal; in whom the ties which bound them to existence were wholly destroyed, whose minds were thoroughly emancipated by perfect knowledge, who had reached the utmost perfection in subduing all their thoughts; who were possessed of the transcendent faculties...⁵¹

And soon after it, the following description of the bodhisattas who also accompany the Buddha:

...all unable to slide back, endowed with the spells of supreme, perfect enlightenment, firmly standing in wisdom; who moved onward the never deviating wheel of the law; who had propitiated many hundred thousands of Buddhas; who under many hundred thousands of Buddhas had planted the roots of goodness, had been intimate with many hundred thousands of Buddhas, were in body and mind fully penetrated with the feeling of charity; able in communicating the wisdom of the Tathāgatas; very wise, having reached the perfection of wisdom; renowned in many hundred thousands of worlds; having saved many hundred thousand myriad of kotis [ten millions] of beings...⁵²

⁵¹Ibi d., p. 1.

⁵²Ibid., p. 3.

The differences between these two descriptions are illustrative of the shifts which occurred in the conception of the arahat from the Pali canon to this Sanskrit work. The description of the arahat is certainly complimentary, and yet it lacks an essential aspect found in the Pali canon's descriptions of the arahat. In the canon the arahat had conquered evil, had gained knowledge, and now taught the way of freedom and knowledge to others. This description in the Saddharma-Pundarika involves only the first part of the canonical conception; namely, the conquest of evil and the attainment of knowledge. The teaching function is now ascribed only to the bodhisattas; just as in the Milindapañha it was ascribed only to the Buddhas. Although this description of the bodhisatta and the Sutta Piṭaka description of the arahat use quite different language, it is obvious that the two central aspects of both descriptions are personal attainment and assistance to others. It is significant that by the time the Saddharma-Pundarika was written, the arahat was no longer thought to exemplify the spiritual ideal, but represented only the apex of personal spiritual achievement.

Currents within Buddhist literature and history appear to account for the devaluation of the arahat as the spiritual ideal. The theme of altruism runs throughout Pali literature, and bursts into the fore in later Sanskrit literature. The most common expression of this theme is that the one who has

gained knowledge himself is now the best one to guide others.

What now if I, having attained the highest enlightenment, having embarked in the ship of Dhamma, and having brought the many-folk across the ocean of samsāra, should afterwards attain parinibbāna? That is fitting for me.⁵³

...the one who has crossed over is the best of those who can help others to cross over.⁵⁴

Of the Buddha it is said that in his previous existences he wished "that he would not merely attain his own salvation by putting an end to the impurities which he could easily have done, but he would also become a Buddha in order that he might rescue endless beings from the stream of existence."⁵⁵

But somehow this spirit of altruism seems to have declined, and the bodhisatta ideal was a manifestation of a renewal of this concern for others. The decline in altruism may in part have been the result of an increased

⁵³Jātaka I.14 quoted by Horner, op cit., p. 197.

⁵⁴Quoted from the Itivuttaka by Horner, op cit., p. 261-62.

⁵⁵Nalinaksha Dutt, Early Monastic Buddhism, 1960, p. 79. Other examples of this theme may easily be found. For example:

Walk, monks, on tour for the blessing of the many folk, for the happiness of the manyfolk, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the blessing, the happiness of devas and men. Vinaya I.21.

Let each man direct himself first to what is proper, then let him teach others. Dhammapada 158.

separation of bhikkhus and the rest of society. Whereas in the early years of the Buddhist tradition the bhikkhus seem to have wandered from town to town for most of the year, congregating in separate communities only for the three month rainy season, it appears that the bhikkhus soon began to spend more and more time in their own communities.⁵⁶ This resulted in decreased contacts with the rest of society, and very likely in less interest in leading others "across the ocean of samsāra."

But the protest against the lack of altruism was not enunciated as a social protest, but as a criticism of the self-centredness of the arahat's spiritual goal of nibbāna. In the Pali canon, nibbāna and enlightenment are the same; for with the realization of the Four Noble Truths and the completion of the eight-fold path, one put an end to rebirth. What remained was simply for the wheel of life to run out. The Mahāyāna criticism of nibbāna as understood in these terms, was that it was conceived of too negatively and too selfishly. It was overly negative because it was thought of in terms of samsāra, in terms of what was being brought to an end. It was too selfish because it did not include the welfare of other beings. The ideal in Mahāyāna texts is the

⁵⁶ Sukumar Dutt, Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India, 1962, pp. 53-57 discusses the change from the wandering to the settled life.

bodhisatta, the one who is enlightened but who spurns the possibility of nibbāna so that he may remain to help others. Only when all his fellow creatures have been enlightened will the bodhisatta enter nibbāna.⁵⁷

⁵⁷For a detailed discussion of the difference between the arahat and the bodhisatta, see Har Dayal, op cit., pp. 3-19.

CHAPTER II

CASTE AND THE ARAHAT

Descriptions of the Buddha often portray him not only as a seminal spiritual teacher, but also as a daring social reformer, fearlessly challenging brāhmaṇa assertions of superiority. Some, who feel less sure that the available Pali literature fairly represents the Buddha's own opinions and attitudes, suggest that whatever the Buddha's position may have been, at least it is clear that early Buddhist literature reflects a great deal of interest in opposing brāhmaṇa pretensions and advancing khattiya claims to social superiority. G. S. Ghurye, in Caste and Class in India, represents this latter, somewhat more cautious attitude when he says, "Whatever be the express statements about caste in the original preachings of Mahāvīra and Buddha, a close student of the early literature of these religious movements will feel convinced that the chief social aim of the writers was the assertion of the preeminence of the Kshatriyas."¹ In this chapter we intend to investigate the basis and validity of this viewpoint. We will examine to

¹G. S. Ghurye, Caste and Class in India, 2nd ed., 1957, p. 69.

what extent the general structure of Indian society can be determined from Pali literature, what the Buddhist attitude toward this structure was, and what importance social structure had in the attainment of the spiritual ideal of arahatship.

It is probably impossible to determine the precise stage of development of the Indian social system at the time of the Buddha from the evidence in the Pali canon.² Pali literature reflects the social structure only incidentally and unsystematically. Narendra Wagle³ has attempted to reconstruct the status system of Indian society by analyzing the forms of address used in the texts, but the model which results from such an analysis, while it tells us a good deal about the respect paid to the Buddha by different members of society, gives us little information about the social

²The non-Buddhist, Sanskrit literature of this period may be of little use as well, since it may reflect a situation quite different from the one out of which the Pali canon arose. Nripendar Kumar Dutt, Origin and Growth of Caste in India, vol. I, 1968. p. 214 suggests that the formulation of the caste system and its concomitant social regulations probably took place in north-west India, and that in the eastern provinces, especially Magadha, which were Buddhist strongholds, caste restrictions were somewhat less rigidified. Thus the Sanskrit literature of the west would not accurately reflect the social situation in the east.

³Narendra Wagle, Society at the Time of the Buddha, Popular Prakashan: Bombay, 1966.

structure of Indian society at that time. Recluses,⁴ whether Buddhist or otherwise, were treated with great respect during the time of the Buddha, and it is clear that the respectful forms of address used in addressing them were not acknowledgements of high social status based on lineage, but were tributes to their spiritual achievements.⁵ Therefore analysis of the terms of address used in speaking to the Buddha is likely to inform us about the respect others had for him, but it is unlikely to tell us very much about the formal social structure. But there are other clues to be found in the Pali canon, which, when systematically organized, can provide us with a general picture of the structure of Indian society at the time of the Buddha.

⁴The Kassapa-Sīhanāda Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya lists ten groups of recluses at the time of the Buddha. They are: 1) Ājivakā, 2) Niganthā (Jains), 3) Muṇḍa-Sāvaka (disciples of the Shaveling), 4) Jatilakā (those who wear their hair in braids), 5) Paribbājakā, 6) Magandikā, 7) Tedandikā (bearers of the triple staff), 8) Aviruddhakā (the friends), 9) Gotamakā (not the regular Buddhist order, but probably a sub-group of the Sākya clan), 10) Devadhammikā (those who follow the law of God).

⁵This seems clear from the respect which gahapatis (heads of households) use when addressing members of all religious groups in the Pali canon. See Wagle's analysis of the forms of address used by gahapatis speaking to members of religious groups and recluses. Op cit., pp. 53, 70-75.

From the evidence in the texts we can see that there was a system of social differentiation and status based on heredity. The most general statement of this is in Saṃyutta Nikāya I. 93-95, where it is said that a man may be born into a family of "low degree" or into a family of "high degree". This passage emphasizes that regardless of birth, it is a man's actions which determine his destiny; but the immediate point of interest for us is that the principle of hereditary social differentiation is accepted. The principle is evidently also accepted at Vinaya IV. 6, and in that passage there is some enumeration of examples of high and low "birth".

Birth means: there are two kinds of birth: low birth and high birth. Low birth means: birth as (a member of) a despised class, birth as a bamboo-plaiter, birth as a hunter, birth as a cartwright, birth as a refuse scavenger -- this means low birth. High birth means: birth as a noble, birth as a brahmin--this means high birth.

An even more precise differentiation appears in the Ambaṭṭha Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya. There Ambaṭṭha, in conversation with the Buddha, says that society is made up of four castes⁶: the khattiya (Sk. ksatriya), the brāhmaṇa (Sk.

⁶The word here rendered as "caste" is 'varṇa' (Sk. varṇa). Its literal meaning is 'colour' or 'complexion', and therefore it is possible that the origin of the caste system in India may be traced to some early racial or colour division. This may have been a distinction between the Aryans and the darker-skinned Dravidians.

brāhman), the vessa (Sk. vaiśya), and the sudda (Sk. śūdra).

This description of society, so like the structure outlined in the Dharmasāstra of Manu, has led Nalinaksha Dutt⁷ to suggest that by the sixth century B.C. Indian society had rigidified into the structure outlined in the Dharmasāstra.

T. W. Rhys Davids⁸ objects to any such interpretation of the material in the Pali canon pointing out that the key to the classical caste system in India, brāhmaṇa superiority, was being asserted at this time, but was by no means generally accepted.⁹ Furthermore, in a developed caste system there would be connubiality and commensality between members of the same caste, but none between members of different castes, while in the Indian situation at this time there do not seem

⁷Nalinaksha Dutt, op cit., p. 1. Dutt says that any religious, philosophical, or social position outside of what he calls "Brahmanism", was nearly impossible at this time.

⁸See the introduction to the Ambaṭṭha Sutta, T. W. Rhys Davids, trans., Dialogues of the Buddha, part I, 1956 (first published 1899). Rhys Davids insists that it is no more accurate to speak of "caste" in India at this time than it is to use the same term to apply to the Mediterranean world of the same period. He prefers to translate vaṇṇa in this passage as "groups", thereby avoiding the implications of the word "caste".

⁹In the Pali canon brāhmaṇa supremacy is regularly denied by listing the castes with the khattiya at the head of the list with the brāhmaṇa following. The Ambaṭṭha Sutta is devoted largely to proving that the brāhmaṇa claim to supremacy is ill-founded. At Dīgha Nikāya I.99 we read: "The Kshatriya is the best of these among this folk who put their trust in lineage."

to have been rigid rules regarding commensality, and connubiality between members of the same caste was often not permitted because of considerations stronger than caste.¹⁰

We agree with Rhys Davids that what we see in the Pali canon is "caste in the making"¹¹ rather than caste fully developed, but we do not accept his judgment that this is sufficient reason for rejecting the use of the word 'caste' to characterize the Indian social system at this time. As we have already pointed out, the principle of a social hierarchy based upon heredity was accepted at this time. It

¹⁰The gotta or family, often imposed obligations upon a person which overruled vanṇa, or caste, obligations. See T. W. Rhys Davids introduction to the Ambaṭṭha Sutta. The gottas were brāhmanic family divisions based traditionally on the eight legendary seers who were the ancestors of all brāhmaṇā. The khattiya and vessa adopted this system of distinctions as well, but they appear to have chosen the gotta name of the family of brāhmaṇā who performed their domestic rituals. The chief social significance of the gotta divisions was that marriage between members of the same gotta was forbidden. For further details see the introduction to the Mahāli Sutta in T. W. Rhys Davids translation of the Dialogues of the Buddha, part I, and A. L. Basham, The Wonder That Was India, 1959, pp. 153-55.

¹¹T. W. Rhys Davids, op cit., p. 101.

is true that the division of society was not made exactly into four castes; for although the khattiya, brāhmaṇa, vessa, and sudda are the most commonly mentioned social divisions, there are references to other groups as well.¹² This suggests that precise caste divisions were still being defined; it does not mean that the principles underlying the caste system were not yet accepted. The significance of caste divisions in marriage is also accepted in the canon.¹³ What may conclusively be said is that by this time Indian society was largely organized into a hierarchy based on heredity, but the exact occupants of each level of the hierarchy had not as yet been determined, and the rules governing the relationships between those of different social levels had not yet rigidified.

The Buddhist attitude toward the social system is

¹²At Vinaya IV.6 reference is made to birth as a member of a "despised class, birth as a bamboo-plaiter, birth as a hunter, birth as a cartwright, birth as a refuse-scavenger." At Saṃyutta Nikāya I.93 the following are listed as families of low degree: Chāṇḍālas, basket-weavers, trappers, leather workers, flower-scavengers. There are references to slaves as well. Slaves are defined in Vinaya IV. 224 as those "born within, bought for money, taken in a raid." Other references to slaves may be found at Dīgha Nikāya I. 5, 60, 72, 93, 141.

¹³At Dīgha Nikāya I. 99-100 the Buddha tells Ambaṭṭha that birth and lineage are relevant when there is talk of "marrying or of giving in marriage."

to accept the hereditary divisions while maintaining that these divisions are unimportant and at times irrelevant in determining a man's worth. The emphasis is upon conduct rather than birth. Yet despite the stress on moral excellence rather than hereditary relationships there is no indication that this was meant as an attack upon the structure of Indian society. In the canon the Buddha accepts the general fourfold division of society, and even accepts the special right of the two highest castes (khattiya and brāhmaṇa) to receive salutes, respect, and services from the lower castes.¹⁴ The two upper castes are definitely regarded as superior, for in the stories of the previous lives of the Buddha he is always born as a khattiya or as a brāhmaṇa.¹⁵ There is no indication that the Buddha was a social reformer who wished to destroy the caste system.

And yet, while the Pali canon does not betray any general Buddhist attack on the whole caste system, there certainly are indications that the Buddhists were opposed to the brāhmaṇa assertions of superiority based on birth. In several passages the Buddha is engaged in debate with

¹⁴G. S. Ghurye, op cit., p. 69. And also N. K. Dutt, op cit., p. 222.

¹⁵G. S. Ghurye, op cit., p. 70. According to the texts, he was born into whichever of the two castes was the highest at the time of his birth. This suggests some status fluctuation, and also implicitly makes a claim to khattiya superiority during the last life.

brāhmaṇa about the question of social superiority. Evidently the Buddha, although opposed to brāhmaṇa pretensions, had great respect for the brāhmaṇa caste. This is particularly evident in the Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta, in which the discussion concerns the characteristics of the true brāhmaṇa. Soṇadaṇḍa, a venerable brāhmaṇa, decides to go to visit the Buddha, who is lodging in a nearby village. Other brāhmaṇā insist that it would be humiliating for Soṇadaṇḍa to visit the Buddha, and in an attempt to persuade him to forego the visit they list Soṇadaṇḍa's outstanding qualities. Soṇadaṇḍa replies that the Buddha has the same qualities and more, and that since he is a visitor he must be treated with honour and veneration. When Soṇadaṇḍa arrives at the place where the Buddha is staying he is reverent and polite. The Buddha returns the respect and politeness, and to put Soṇadaṇḍa at ease asks him a question which Soṇadaṇḍa is most competent to answer: "What are the things, Brahman, which the Brahmins say a man ought to have in order to be a Brahman, so that if he says: 'I am a Brahman,' he speaks accurately and does not become guilty of falsehood?"¹⁶ From the ensuing discussion it becomes clear that although the Buddha wishes eventually to redefine the term 'brāhmaṇa,' he is quite willing to let it mean "the highest among men"; in fact,

¹⁶ Dīgha Nikāya I. 119.

the discussion concludes with the Buddha defining the "true brāhmaṇa" in terms of "uprightness and wisdom",¹⁷ the same terms which he uses for the arahat. Thus the arahat is the true brāhmaṇa. The Buddhist point here is that the brāhmaṇa, just as the arahat, should be defined in terms of moral and intellectual achievement rather than by birth.

What is confusing about the passages dealing with caste is that occasionally the Buddha debates the validity of brāhmaṇa assertions in strictly social terms. Taken alone, these passages may seem to justify the contention that the Buddha is interested in promoting the claims of the khattiya. The argument in the Ambaṭṭha Sutta is an example of such a discussion. The brāhmaṇa Ambaṭṭha accuses the Sākyaas, the tribe to which the Buddha belongs, of being menials. The Buddha then questions Ambaṭṭha about his ancestry, and is told that Ambaṭṭha is of the Kaṇhāyana family. Then, says the Buddha, the lineage of Ambaṭṭha is far inferior to the Sākya clan, for Ambaṭṭha is a descendent of the child of a girl who was a slave of king Okkāka, the ancient ancestor of the Sākyaas.¹⁸ In the same Sutta the Buddha asks Ambaṭṭha if a son born to a khattiya man and a brāhmaṇa woman would be accepted by the brāhmaṇā. Ambaṭṭha

¹⁷Dīgha Nikāya I: 124.

¹⁸Dīgha Nikāya I: 93-94.

replies that he would. Then, says the Buddha, the khattiyā have more stringent standards and a purer caste, for they would not accept such a child.

There are additional examples of the debate between the castes being carried on in strictly social terms. At Dīgha Nikāya I. 99 the Buddha tells Ambaṭṭha, "The Kshatriya is the best among this folk who put their trust in lineage." When castes are listed in the Buddhist literature the khattiyā are placed before the brāhmaṇā, and interestingly enough this order is put into the mouth of the brāhmaṇa Ambaṭṭha even when he asserts the superiority of the brāhmaṇā.

There are these four grades [vaṇṇa], Gotama,-- the nobles [khattiyā], the Brahmins, the tradesfolk, and the workingpeople. And of these four, three -- the nobles, the tradesfolk, and the workingpeople,-- are, verily, but attendants on the Brahmins.¹⁹

But these examples should not mislead us to think that it was a major purpose of the Buddha or of the Pali texts to assert the superiority of the khattiyā over the brāhmaṇā, as Ghurye has suggested. The aim of these passages seems to be negative rather than positive; that is, they seem intended more to oppose brāhmaṇa claims to superiority than to assert khattiya superiority. It is as though the Buddha was saying, "If you wish to promote your claim to superiority by an appeal to birth and lineage, I can show you that your

¹⁹Dīgha Nikāya I. 91.

arguments are fallacious by those very standards; but there are more important criteria by which worth and superiority may be judged."

The Kshatriya is the best of these among this folk who put their trust in lineage. But he who is perfect in wisdom and righteousness, he is the best among gods and men.²⁰

The Buddha's willingness to use the term 'true brāhmaṇa' as the equivalent to arahat is sufficient indication that he was not interested in quibbling long over social categories. Had the purpose of these discussions been to advance a claim to khattiya superiority, we could reasonably expect that the Buddha would have identified the arahat as the 'true khattiya', but this never occurs. It is also significant that the texts never advance a claim to khattiya superiority except to counter brāhmaṇa assertions. The purpose of these discussions is to point to the futility of basing claims to superiority on lineage.

In the supreme perfection in wisdom and righteousness, Ambaṭṭha, there is no reference to the question either of birth, or of lineage, or of the pride which says: "You are held as worthy as I," or "You are not held as worthy as I." It is where the talk is of marrying or of giving in marriage, that reference is made to such things as that. For whosoever, Ambaṭṭha, are in bondage to the notions of birth or of lineage, or to the pride of social position, or of connection by marriage, they are far from the best wisdom and righteousness. It is only

²⁰ Dīgha Nikāya I. 99.

by having got rid of all such bondage that one can realize for himself that supreme perfection in wisdom and in conduct.²¹

The correct standards for determining true worth are discussed in the *Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta*.²² When asked to give the characteristics of the true brāhmaṇa, *Soṇadaṇḍa* replies that there are five: a person must be well born on both the mother's and father's side through seven generations; a person must know the sacred verses by heart; a person must be handsome and fair in colour; a person must be virtuous; a person must be learned and wise. When pressed by the Buddha to say which are the most important four characteristics, which are the most important three, which the most important two, and finally which is the one most important characteristic, *Soṇadaṇḍa* progressively eliminates colour, knowledge of the sacred verses, and lineage. He then says that virtue and wisdom, the two remaining characteristics, cannot be separated. The Buddha praises *Soṇadaṇḍa*'s insight and agrees with him.

This theme that virtue and wisdom constitute true worth is recurrent in Pali literature. In *Saṃyutta Nikāya* I. 166 the Buddha is confronted by the *Bhāradvāja brāhmaṇa*, who advances the following opinion of the value of lineage

²¹Dīgha Nikāya I. 99-100.

²²Dīgha Nikāya I. 119-124.

and obedience to caste obligations:

Though he be virtuous and penance work.
 There is in all the world no brahmin found
 Thus rendered pure.
 'T is by the Veda-lore and by the course
 His class lays down that he is purified,
 Unique 'mong men.

To this the Buddha replies:

Nay, though he jabber multitudes of runes,
 Thus is no brahmin made regenerate,
 Garbage-defiled within, propped by deceits.
 But he be noble, brahmin, commoner,
 Or labouring man, or of a pariah class,
 Who stirs up effort, puts forth all his strength,
 Advances with an ever vigorous stride,
 He may attain the Purity Supreme.
 Brahmin, know this!

In a later passage²³ a brāhmaṇa, wishing to determine whether the Buddha is worthy to receive an oblation as a gift, asks, "What art thou by birth, sir?" The Buddha answers, "Ask not of birth, ask of the course of conduct." Chapter 26 of the Dhammapada is a discussion of the characteristics of the true brāhmaṇa, and the theme of the chapter is clearly that morality is a far superior criterion of a person's worth than is birth.

A man does not become a Brāhmaṇa by his platted hair, by his family, or by birth; in whom there is truth and righteousness, he is blessed, he is a Brāhmaṇa.²⁴

²³ Saṃyutta Nikāya I. 167. The same story appears at Sutta-Nipata 454-486. The Buddha's answer there is "Do not ask about descent, but ask about conduct." Sutta Nipata 462.

²⁴ Dhammapada 393.

I do not call a man a Brāhmaṇa because of his origin or of his mother. He is indeed arrogant, and he is wealthy; but the poor, who is free from all attachments, him I call indeed a Brāhmaṇa.²⁵

In light of what has been said so far about the early Buddhist teaching that worth is not determined by caste, it is not surprising to find that arahatship is nowhere associated with caste or heredity in the Pali canon. As we stated earlier, the arahat is the person in whom all intellectual and ethical qualities are brought to perfection, and this perfection is not dependent upon birth. When we recall that an essential element in the description of an arahat is the freedom which he has from the fetters of human life which bind one into the cycle of rebirth, then we can understand why concern with lineage and interest in caste obligations are foreign to him. The arahat is to free himself from all the bonds which tie him to this life, and caste obligations are part of the burden which he must discard. Max Weber²⁶ has seen this point clearly. He says that the spiritual goal of the early Buddhists was to be pursued with singular dedication, and that all means which had nothing to do with the attainment of arahatship were regarded as useless. Thus the extreme asceticism of the Jains was rejected. For similar reasons the appeal to lineage and the

²⁵Dhammapada 396.

²⁶Max Weber, The Religion of India, 1958, p. 206.

fulfillment of caste obligations was regarded as tangential to the spiritual quest. It is likely that the Buddha's careful and constant refusal to be drawn into discussions of abstruse metaphysical questions²⁷ was based on the conviction that the pursuit of such matters could do nothing to help one gain arahatship. The Buddhist position in the Pali canon is that lineage is irrelevant in determining who may or may not become an arahat, and that caste obligations are unacceptable bonds for those on the path to arahatship.

Most of the evidence of this attitude is implicit. There are some direct statements about the irrelevance of lineage to arahatship in the twenty-sixth chapter of the Dhammapada, and these have been adduced above.²⁸ But for the most part the evidence is indirect. Rather than systematically establishing the irrelevance of caste the Buddha simply insists that the only standards for arahatship are wisdom and virtue. We have seen that the canon clearly disassociates lineage from the determination of a man's worth, and we may properly infer that since the arahat is the most worthy of men, the ties of lineage are unimportant for him.

The most conclusive evidence of the irrelevance of caste association to the attainment of arahatship is found in the commentary to the Thera-Therī-gāthā. The commentary

²⁷ Specifically the Ten Indeterminates (Avyakatani) referred to at Digha Nikāya I.188. See also T. W. Rhys Davids' discussion of these in his introduction to the Mahali Sutta.

²⁸ Above, pp. 41-42.

or at least that brāhmaṇā were in the majority among those who comprehended and followed the Buddha's teachings. The analysis also shows that the preponderance of those attaining arahatship came from the two upper castes of society, perhaps an indication that the teachings of the Buddha, just as the teachings of other religious leaders in India, were directed mostly to the "twice-born." This seems to be substantiated by the fact that the group with the third largest number of arahats listed in the Theragāthā is the vessa caste, the merchants and citizens, and this caste is the third and last of those considered twice-born. But the proportion of arahats belonging to the twice-born castes may well be exaggerated somewhat by the fact that our source of information is a collection of poetry. The arahats most likely to produce memorable poetry would be those who had been exposed to traditional literature, whether oral or written. Even with the probable laxity of the caste system at this time, it is likely that the twice-born castes were more likely to be exposed to the literary tradition than were the other members of society. It is probable, therefore, that the literary contribution of the upper castes was out of proportion to their actual membership in the Buddhist community, and that although twice-born caste members did constitute a majority in the Buddhist community, their majority was slightly less than the literary evidence in the

Thera-Therī-gāthā would lead us to imagine.

We conclude that caste identity was considered neither a requirement nor an aid in attaining arahatship, although we acknowledge that statistically it is certain that arahats were more often members of high castes than members of low castes.

CHAPTER III

THE ARAHAT AND THE SAṂGHA

[The saṅgha] was and is simply a body of people who believe that the higher life cannot be lived in any existing form of society and therefore combine to form a confraternity.... They were not a corporation of priests and they had no political aims. Any free man, unless his parents or the state had a claim on him and unless he suffered from certain diseases, was admitted; he took no vows of obedience and was at any time at liberty to return to the world.¹

We turn our attention now to the saṅgha, the organized, corporate form of asceticism which developed during the early years of the Buddhist tradition. Throughout Pali literature admission to the saṅgha is considered the most important single step on the path to arahatship. In this chapter we wish to determine if the procedures of ordination or the criteria for membership in the saṅgha excluded some from taking this important step. We will also see if the attainment of arahatship was considered possible for lay adherents, those who accepted the Buddha's message and supported the bhikkhus, but remained outside the saṅgha. First, however, we will attempt to reconstruct the development of the saṅgha during the first hundred years of its existence.

¹Sir Charles Eliot, Hinduism and Buddhism, 1921, p. 243.

During the early years of the Buddhist saṅgha there were many non-Buddhist forms of asceticism, some of which almost certainly antedated the Buddha. Seventeen of the 108 Upaniṣads deal with the theme of world-renunciation (sannyāsa)² and those who practice it are variously called bhikṣu, sannyāsin, parivrājaka, avadhuta, and paramahansa. They are presented as typifying in practice the central doctrine of the Upaniṣads.³

He who passes beyond hunger and thirst, beyond sorrow and delusion, beyond old age and death-- Brahmins who know such a Soul overcome desire for sons, desire for wealth, desire for worlds, and live the life of mendicants. For desire for sons is desire for wealth, and desire for wealth is desire for worlds, for both these are merely desires. Therefore let a Brahmin become disgusted with learning and desire to live as a child. When he has become disgusted both with the state of childhood and with learning, then he becomes an ascetic (muni). When he has become disgusted both with the non-ascetic state and with the ascetic state, then he becomes a Brahmin.⁴

The ascetics referred to in the Upaniṣads seem to have lived alone rather than in groups, and from Buddhist sources it is

²Sukumar Dutt, op cit., p. 37.

³Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.5.

⁴T. W. Rhys Davids, Dialogues, pt. I, p. 215 suggests that "Brahmin" here is meant as the one who has realized the truth, in much the same way as the Somaśāstra Sutta declares the arahat to be the true Brāhmaṇa. He takes the ascetic to refer to the hermit, and the "Brahmin" to refer to the wandering ascetic or mendicant, and thus concludes that the wanderer is considered superior to the hermit.

clear that ascetics were often alone or in the company of a few others. The Buddha himself first sought instruction from two teachers, then practiced austerities for six years with five other ascetics, and finally went off alone and gained enlightenment. But there were communities of ascetics as well, and T. W. Rhys Davids, in the introduction to the Kassapa-Sihanāda Sutta⁵ enumerates ten such communities. The information available on these communities is scanty, for they are simply named and occasionally quickly characterized; it is therefore impossible to determine to what extent they may have resembled the Buddhist saṅgha.

The origins of the Buddhist saṅgha can be traced to the life of the Buddha.⁶ After his enlightenment the Buddha

⁵These have already been listed above, p. 30, n.4.

⁶This does not mean, however, that the Buddha instituted the saṅgha in the form which it soon took. Weber, op cit., pp. 213-14 considers it a contradiction that the Buddha should have preached that "Salvation is an absolutely personal performance of the self-reliant individual." Weber, op cit., p. 213, and yet have instituted the saṅgha. The resolution to the contradiction, he says, is that the saṅgha was the creation of the followers of the Buddha. Sukumar Dutt says that the Buddha showed no interest in forming a unified body with a system of rules." Between the time when the Saṅgha came into existence as a unitary body of disciples and the Buddha's last missionary tour, the Bhikkhu-saṅgha must have grown in strength and cohesion. Yet the Founder refused to the last to recognize it as a circumscribed body or himself as its head or to limit it to sectarian bondage by a system of rules." Sukumar Dutt, op cit., p. 51. Dutt bases this on the Mahāpari-nibbāna Suttanta, in which Ānanda asks if the Exalted One has any instructions for the saṅgha which he would like to give before his death. The Buddha replies that

went to Benares, where he found the five ascetics with whom he had practiced austerities for six years. He preached to them, and they became his followers. From this time on the Buddha always had a group of followers with him as he travelled. In the Dīgha Nikāya the Suttas nearly all begin with a formula-like introduction which states that the Blessed One was travelling to a certain town "with a great multitude of Brethren", the number usually being five hundred. The numbers are most likely invented, but what is significant is that in all these accounts the Buddha is described as accompanied by disciples. This picture is surely accurate, since it was the practice at that time for disciples to be associated with teachers.⁷

The bond of common allegiance to the Buddha which united the disciples during the Buddha's lifetime, was

there is only Truth to be followed, and that having spoken the Truth to his followers, there is no need for him to leave additional instructions for them. Dīgha Nikāya II. 99-101.

⁷We find this substantiated in the story of Sāriputta's conversion at Vinaya I. 39-40. Sāriputta saw Assaji, one of the five original converts of the Buddha, entering Rājagaha for almsfood. Impressed by Assaji's "pleasant behaviour," Sāriputta inquired, "Your reverence, your faculties are quite pure, your complexion very bright, very clear. On account of whom, your reverence, have you gone forth, or who is your teacher, or whose dhamma do you profess? What is noteworthy for us here is the assumption that Assaji would be associated with some teacher.

replaced by loyalty to a common dhamma after his death.

A legend purports to relate an occasion "soon after the passing away of the Lord", when Ananda was loitering at dawn near the ramparts of Rājagaha, then under repairs. The king's officers posted there, seeing and recognizing him, were curious to know how the Order, founded by the Buddha, was faring, now that the Lord was no more. They put to him several questions on that point. Vassakāra, a minister of the Court, asked whether Gotama had nominated a successor to himself. "No", replied Ananda. "Is there then a Bhikkhu chosen by the Sangha to fill the place?" asked Vassakāra. Being answered again in the negative, he expressed mild surprise how, in the absence of a leader, unity could be maintained in the Order. Ananda proceeded to explain the situation. The Sangha did not lack a refuge, said he:--it was the Dhamma laid down by the Lord in his lifetime; and, as for the unity in the Sangha, they had an institution among them by which it was maintained. "Every sabbath all of us who live in the precincts of a village meet as a body, and in meeting enquire what each is doing. If, when this is being told, an offence or transgression by a Bhikkhu is disclosed, we make him act according to the Dhamma and scriptural ordinances. It is not by us, we hold, but by the Dhamma that he is constrained."⁸

This story points to a change in the character of the saṅgha, which may have begun during the lifetime of the Buddha. It was already the practice for wandering ascetics, these associated with the Buddha as well as others, to settle at one place during the three month rainy season.⁹ The common practice was for ascetics to build themselves rudimentary shelters near villages, and to remain alone in these except

⁸Sukumar Dutt, The Buddha and Five After-Centuries, 1957, p. 65.

⁹Sukumar Dutt, Buddhist Monks, p. 53-54.

for the daily begging rounds. The Buddhist idea of the rain-retreat (vassāvāsa) was not to live alone during this period, but to gather in groups. At first these gatherings probably lasted only three months at a time, but in the story quoted above it seems that within a short time after the Buddha's death, his followers were meeting regularly during the rest of the year as well.

To accomodate the bhikkhus during the three months of the rain retreat, and perhaps during their regular meetings as well, two kinds of residences came into being. The āvāsa, in the countryside, was built and maintained by the bhikkhus themselves. The ārāma, in or near a town, was built and maintained by a donor.¹⁰ These residences accelerated the change of the saṅgha from a loosely unified group of wanderers to a settled community of bhikkhus. The residents of a rain-retreat tended to return to it each year, and those who habitually lived in one retreat (samāna-saṁvāsaka) were distinguished from those who lived in another (nānā-saṁvāsaka).¹¹ The original conception of the saṅgha as a unitary body comprised of all bhikkhus was in practice replaced by groups of bhikkhus identified with particular

¹⁰ Sukumar Dutt, Buddhist Monks, pp. 54-55.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 55.

retreats.¹² This transition from a group of wanderers to many settled communities was probably accomplished by the beginning of the fourth century B.C.,¹³ and by this time many of the rules and practices outlined in the Vinayapiṭaka were in force.

Admission into the saṅgha seems originally to have been accomplished by a very simple procedure.¹⁴ The canon provides an account of how Koṇḍañña, one of the five ascetics who were the Buddha's companions prior to his enlightenment, "attained the knowledge that everything that is subject to origination is also subject to cessation,"¹⁵ and thereafter became the first member of the saṅgha. He did so by receiving the pabbajjā, the ceremony of leaving the world, and the upasampadā, the ceremony of ordination. In this account, which probably reflects the earliest procedure, the pabbajjā consisted of a simple declaration of intent to leave the world and "enter the homeless state," while the upasampadā consisted

¹²Sukumar Dutt, Buddhist Monks, p. 56 refers to the phrases "Saṅgha of Sāvattthi" and "Saṅgha of Jetavana" among others to substantiate this.

¹³Ibid., pp. 57 and 103.

¹⁴E. J. Thomas, The Life of Buddha as Legend and History, 3rd edition, 1949, p. 88. See also T. W. Rhys Davids trans., Dialogues of the Buddha, part II, Sacred Books of the Buddhists, vol. III, 1959, (first published 1910), p. 169f, n.2.

¹⁵Thomas, The Life of Buddha, p. 88.

of the Buddha saying, "come, monk (ehi bhikkhu), well proclaimed is the doctrine; lead a religious life for making a complete end of pain."¹⁶

Another procedure, also very early, involved the pabbajjā and the upasampadā as well. Again, the pabbajjā involved simply the declaration of intention to leave the world, but the upasampadā ceremony was more involved. Thomas suggests that this form of admission ceremony was introduced so that bhikkhus already in the saṅgha could admit new candidates without referring them to the Buddha.¹⁷ Once the candidate had declared his intention to enter the saṅgha, his hair and beard were shaved, he was dressed in the robe worn by bhikkhus, and he was asked to repeat the three refuges three times: "I go to the Enlightened One for refuge, I go to the dhamma for refuge, I go to the saṅgha for refuge."¹⁸

This second procedure was replaced as well. At Vinaya I. 56 the Buddha tells the bhikkhus that he is abolishing the "ordination by going to the three refuges" and

¹⁶Ibid., p. 88. See also Vinaya I. 43. "Come, monks," the Lord said, 'well taught is dhamma, fare the Brahma-faring for making an utter end of ill.' So this was these venerable ones' ordination."

¹⁷Thomas, The Life of Buddha, p. 90.

¹⁸This declaration is found frequently in the texts. Two occurrences are Dīgha Nikāya II. 152 and Vinaya I. 69.

replacing it with ordination by a formal resolution. The saṅgha should be informed by a bhikkhu that a candidate requests membership. This request is to be repeated three times, and if the saṅgha accepts it they will signify this by remaining silent. This new procedure is markedly different from the first two in that the corporate body rather than one member of that body must now agree to accept a candidate.

All these procedures taken together later became just the first step in an ordination procedure which was far more complex.¹⁹ The second step, or higher ordination, began with the candidate begging for admission to the saṅgha. He was then examined and asked if he was a member of any of the groups excluded from membership in the saṅgha.²⁰ Once it was determined that he was acceptable for admission the candidate was informed of the four great rules of outward austerity which he would be expected to follow:²¹ his food would have to be the morsels he received on his daily begging round; his clothing should be made from rags which he collected or from special material acceptable for bhikkhus' robes; his lodging

¹⁹Hermann Oldenberg, Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order, 1927, pp. 347, 351.

²⁰See below. They are described at Vinaya I. 69-93.

²¹Oldenberg, op cit., p. 350.

should be under the trees of the forest; his medicine should be made from the urine of cattle. Having been told these rules of outward austerity he was informed of the four great prohibitions, the Pārājika rules, infringement of which would lead to expulsion from the saṅgha. They were:²² abstinence from sexual intercourse, abstinence from stealing, abstinence from killing, and abstinence from pride.²³

Upon joining the saṅgha, the bhikkhu renounced all worldly possessions. The robe, begging bowl, and other requisites which he received upon admission to the saṅgha were considered lent to him by the saṅgha.²⁴ He was not required to make any vows,²⁵ but was expected to obey the rules of the saṅgha. Infringement of the four Pārājika rules led to dismissal from the saṅgha, and breaches of other rules resulted in a tightening of discipline. If a bhikkhu wished to leave the saṅgha he was free to do so after declaring his

²²Vinaya III. 1-109 is the detailed discussion of these rules. The list occurs throughout the text, for example at Vinaya I. 96.

²³As we have already pointed out, this is specifically directed against the pride of spiritual attainment, which means claiming the condition of arahatship before it is actually attained.

²⁴I. B. Horner, trans., Book of the Discipline, part I, Sacred Books of the Buddhists, vol. X, 1949 (first published 1938), xlvii.

²⁵See I. B. Horner, "Monk, Buddhist & Christian," Hibbert Journal, vol. 39, January 1941, pp. 168-178.

intention.²⁶ He left with no obligations to the saṅgha, and could return to take up the life of a bhikkhu again if he wished to.

For some people, however, there were special restrictions put upon their admission to the saṅgha, and for others admission was impossible. This situation comes to our attention first at Vinaya I.18. The mother and the former wife²⁷ of Yassa approached the Buddha and were given a progressive talk, "that is to say, talk on giving, talk on moral habit, talk on heaven." At the conclusion of the talk they "saw and attained dhamma" and repeated the three-fold refuge. Then they were accepted as woman lay-disciples. This sequence of events is noticeably different from what is usually recorded in the text. It was customary for the Buddha to invite those who had "seen and attained dhamma" to join the saṅgha, pronouncing the special invitation, "Come bhikkhus, well preached is dhamma, fare the Brahma-faring for making an utter end of ill." The lack of such an invitation in this

²⁶Oldenberg, op cit., pp. 353f. and I. B. Horner, trans., Book of the Discipline, part I, xlvii. Horner says, "If there were no initial vows, far less were there any 'final vows', making a return to life 'in the world' extremely difficult, if not impossible. For even after the second ordination ceremony, the upasampadā, a bhikkhu was able, if he wished, to 'leave the Order,' vibhamati, as is the Vinaya word, and to 'turn back to the low life of the layman,' hīnāyavattati, as is the Pitakan expression."

²⁷She was his "former" wife because he had become a bhikkhu and was therefore no longer bound to any of his past relationships.

account is obvious. The only circumstance which sets this story apart from others recording similar "conversions" is that the "converts" in this story are women. It appears that women were not allowed to join the saṅgha even if they had "seen and attained dhamma."

This is confirmed at Vinaya II. 253ff. in the story of the institution of a saṅgha for bhikkhunīs. Mahāpajāpatī the Gotamid asked the Buddha to allow women to "renounce their homes and enter the homeless state." At first the Buddha refused to allow this, but after Ānanda had intervened on Mahāpajāpatī's part, he declared that women could enter the saṅgha if they lived up to eight special conditions.²⁸ Mahāpajāpatī agreed to the conditions and bhikkhunīs became

²⁸ The conditions, briefly, are as follows: 1) A bhikkhunī, regardless of her seniority, must pay reverence to any bhikkhu. 2) A bhikkhunī may not spend the rainy season away from the supervision of a bhikkhu. 3) Every half month a bhikkhunī must ask the bhikkhu-saṅgha the date of the Uposatha ceremony and the time at which the exhortation will be given. 4) After the rainy season the bhikkhunī is to be examined before bhikkhunīs and bhikkhus with respect to what she has seen, what she has heard, and what she has suspected. 5) A bhikkhunī guilty of a serious offence must be disciplined by both the bhikkhu and bhikkhunī saṅgha. 6) A novice bhikkhunī must ask for upasampadā initiation from both saṅghas after a two year novitiate. 7) A bhikkhunī must never revile a bhikkhu. 8) A bhikkhu may officially admonish a bhikkhunī, but a bhikkhunī may never officially admonish a bhikkhu.

members of the saṅgha. But the Buddha was disappointed, and told Ānanda that if women had not been allowed to enter the homeless state, dhamma and discipline would have stood fast for a thousand years; but since women had entered the homeless state, dhamma and discipline would stand fast for only five hundred years.

Others upon whom special restrictions were placed, were those who came to the saṅgha after having been members of other sects. For them a special four months probation period was legislated.²⁹

There were several groups to whom admission in the saṅgha was denied. These included those who were seriously diseased or deformed,³⁰ those who were under twenty years of age,³¹ those who were in the service of the king,³² those who

²⁹Vinaya I. 69. Oldenberg, op cit., p. 347 makes reference to this rule. At Dīgha Nikāya II. 152 there is an exception to this rule. The Buddha allows Subhadda, formerly a member of another dhamma, to be received into the saṅgha immediately.

³⁰Vinaya I. 71-73, 90.

³¹Vinaya I. 77-78, 93. But at Vinaya I. 79 two boys of less than fifteen years of age are admitted as exceptions, because they are "scarers of crows."

³²Vinaya I. 74. The instance which prompted this rule, according to the text, is the desertion of a group of warriors, and their subsequent ordination in the saṅgha.

were thieves,³³ escaped prisoners,³⁴ debtors,³⁵ and slaves,³⁶ Bhikkhus who ordained any of these people committed a dukkata³⁷ offence.

Since the saṅgha was the body in which the spiritual quest was organized, it is interesting to notice that some members of society were excluded from its membership, and thereby excluded from the discipline and nurture which it provided. The stories which accompany these prohibitions on membership suggest some reasons for the restrictions. The restrictions placed upon women's membership in the saṅgha and the exclusion of children from the saṅgha are based on the assumption that women and children do not have the proper endurance and determination to follow the standards of saṅgha life. In the story accompanying the prohibition against those in the king's service joining the saṅgha, there is a threat by some of the kings "who are of no faith" to harm the bhikkhus who ordained the warriors. The prohibition may well have been introduced to avoid antagonizing the rulers, and thus probably reflects an interest in self-preservation

³³Vinaya I. 74.

³⁴Vinaya I. 75.

³⁵Vinaya I. 76.

³⁶Vinaya I. 76.

³⁷This is a minor category of offences, usually translated as "a wrong-doing." The offender was required to confess his fault, but no harsh disciplinary action was involved.

rather than a bias against those in the king's service. The prohibitions against debtors, thieves, and escaped prisoners were indirectly prompted by the favour of King Seniya Bimbisāra of Magadha. He declared that nothing should be done to harm the bhikkhus,³⁸ and it seems that this announcement was followed by a good number of social miscreants joining the saṅgha to avoid their social obligations or escape from social justice. For those who had been despised and misused in society, membership in the saṅgha would have been a way to gain respect and honour. In the Sāmañña-Phala Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya there is a list of the thirteen advantages of joining the saṅgha, and the first (and lowest in order of merit) advantage mentioned is the honour and respect shown a member of the saṅgha. King Ajātasattu is asked how he would treat one of his slaves who left his service and became a bhikkhu. The king replies that he would treat him with respect and deference, supplying him with his needs and begging him to accept lodging nearby. Such a dramatic change in status must have provided a tremendous incentive for social outcasts to join the saṅgha. The implication of the prohibitions is that these people were joining the saṅgha out of selfish reasons, and their improper motivation made them

³⁸ Vinaya I. 75.

ineligible for membership.³⁹ The same suggestion is made regarding those who had diseases, for in the Vinaya account some of these entered the saṅgha only to receive medical help, and left when they were cured.

We conclude that although the earliest admission procedures did not exclude any people or group of people from entering the saṅgha⁴⁰ if they wished to do so, subsequent prohibitions excluded those whose presence constituted a threat to the saṅgha (those formerly in the service of the king), those who were considered unable to endure the ascetic regimen (children), and those whose motivations for joining the saṅgha were suspect (debtors, slaves, etc.)

³⁹It would not be correct to interpret these examples as proof that the Buddha did not wish to have people leave their social responsibilities, for he clearly had no objection to this. He himself left his wife and son when he entered the "homeless state" and many of his disciples were former householders who had left their homes, families and occupations to enter the saṅgha. What is legislated against in these prohibitions is acceptance of those whose motivations for leaving their household and other social responsibilities are likely to be selfish. Many of those prohibited had already broken one or more of the ten basic moral precepts (sīlas) which every bhikkhu was to obey. The ten sīlas are: Abstinence from 1) killing 2) stealing 3) impurity 4) lying 5) intoxicants 6) eating at forbidden times 7) dancing, music, theatres 8) garlands, perfumes, ornaments 9) high or large beds 10) accepting gold or silver. Eliot, *op cit.*, p. 244, n.1. They are listed at Vinaya I. 83-84.

⁴⁰Here the one exception is women, and, as we have already said, this was resolved with the establishment of the bhikkhunī-saṅgha.

Membership in the saṃgha was quite clearly the preferred path to arahatship in the canon.

Full of hindrances is household life, a path for the dust of passion. Free as the air is the life of him who has renounced all worldly things. How difficult it is for the man who dwells at home to live the higher life in all its fullness, in all its purity, in all its bright perfection! Let me then cut off my hair and beard, let me clothe myself in the orange-coloured robes, and let me go forth from the household life into the homeless state.⁴¹

But despite the importance of the saṃgha, it was still considered possible to become an arahat while still in the household life.

In the story of Yassa's mother and his former wife which we spoke of above, it is clear from the phrases used that they became arahats upon hearing the Buddha preach. And it is also clear that they were still in the household life when they became arahats. Since there was no saṃgha for women at the time, they became lay-disciples of the Buddha, although it is possible that they may have become members of the bhikkhunī-saṃgha after its establishment. In the Thera-Therī-gāthā there are numerous references to those who became arahats and joined the saṃgha afterward. At Anguttara Nikāya III. 451 there is a list of twenty-one lay arahats.⁴²

⁴¹ Dīgha Nikāya I. 62.

⁴² B. C. Law, "Nirvāṇa and Buddhist Laymen", Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute Annals, vol. 14, Poona, 1933, pp. 80-86. Law lists the names of these arahats.

It is customary in the texts for laymen who become arahats to join the saṅgha immediately afterward.⁴³ To what extent this was regarded as necessary in the canonical texts is not clear, but in the post-canonical Milindapañha it is regarded as absolutely essential.⁴⁴ Nāgasena declares that a lay arahat must join the saṅgha on the same day on which he attains arahatship, and if he fails to do so he will die. The lay state, says Nāgasena, cannot support arahatship. This passage is puzzling, for it suggests that death comes to the lay arahat as a punishment. Nowhere else in the texts do we find such a suggestion, and in fact, as we noted above,⁴⁵ the canon regards the arahat as unimpeachable. What is clear in this passage is the insistence that the saṅgha is superior to the household state.

This emphasis upon the superiority and necessity of the homeless state emerges from another illuminating passage in the Milindapañha. Nāgasena tells the king at Milindapañha 352:

And all they, O king, who as laymen, living at home and in the enjoyment of the pleasures of

⁴³With the exception of Yassa's mother and his former wife, and this is likely because there was no bhikkhunī-saṅgha at the time.

⁴⁴Milindapañha 264-266.

⁴⁵Above, p. 16.

of sense, realize in themselves the condition of Peace, the Supreme Good, Nirvāṇa,--all they had in former births accomplished their training, laid the foundation, in the practice of the thirteen vows, had purified their walk and conduct by means of them; and so now, even as laymen, living at home and in the enjoyment of the pleasures of sense, do they realize in themselves the condition of Peace, the Supreme Good, Nirvāṇa.

What this passage means is that if a man achieves arahatship as a layman, it is only because in some past life he was a bhikkhu. Thus the way to arahatship must pass through the saṅgha at some time, even if it is in a previous life.

Two major purposes of the saṅgha emerge from these considerations. The saṅgha is intended first as a community which will, by its teaching and discipline, prepare the one who has renounced the household state for arahatship. In the canon there is a distinct emphasis that the saṅgha is the best context in which one may prepare for and ultimately achieve arahatship, but there is no claim that arahatship is unattainable outside the saṅgha. But the importance of the saṅgha appears to have increased by the time of the Milindapañha, for as we have seen, that text declares that arahatship cannot be attained without some time spent in the saṅgha. This amounts to a denial of the possibility of arahatship for those who are "pure laymen"; that is, those who have never been bhikkhus in any of their lives.

The other purpose of the saṅgha is to be a community for those who have already become arahats. All the texts seem

to agree with the Milindapañha that the householder's life is too weak to support the arahat,⁴⁶ although none of the canonical texts go so far as to declare that the lay arahat will die if he does not enter the saṅgha. The saṅgha is the community in which the arahat can live out his life, free of the cares and obligations of household life, free to hear and rejoice at the teaching of dhamma.

⁴⁶Milindapañha 265.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that the term 'arahat,' which is used in the Pali canon to represent the person "in whom all intellectual and ethical qualities are brought to perfection", is not a uniquely Buddhist term, but that its use may be traced back to the Rg Veda. It is only in the canon, however, that the arahat is the spiritual ideal for all men. We have noted as well, that in canonical literature any person, regardless of caste or occupation, may become an arahat. Social status is considered neither an asset nor a deterrent for arahatship. Finally, we have observed that while the texts regard membership in the saṅgha as a highly important step on the way to arahatship, none of the canonical texts preclude the laity from arahatship. As a general conclusion then, we are able to say that in the Pali canon social affiliation and the attainment of arahatship are not related.

It is clear that the separation of caste affiliation and spiritual achievement did not create serious social difficulties for the Buddhists during the early years of the tradition. Those who left the household life for the homeless state were highly regarded, and indications are that there was no status loss for even the khattiyā and brāhmaṇā

who became bhikkhus. Those who chose to leave the saṅgha were free to do so, and there is no indication that they were rejected by society when they returned to it. There is no evidence that those who returned were treated as outcastes; all indications are that they returned to the same social affiliation which they had prior to their entry into the saṅgha. The lay adherents, of course, retained their social affiliation while they supported the bhikkhus, and their status was not affected by their identification with the Buddhist dhamma.

Social tensions are evident though, but these tensions are between the saṅgha and the laity. The root of these tensions is to be found within the definition of the arahat. We have drawn attention on more than one occasion to the canonical emphasis that the arahat is the intellectually and ethically perfected man. Separation of the two constituents of this ideal can lead to two quite different conceptions of the arahat. An over-emphasis on intellectual perfection can lead to an over-estimation of the importance of doctrine in attaining arahatship. An over-emphasis on ethical perfection can lead to an over-estimation of the importance of discipline in attaining arahatship.

The formulae which are used to describe how the Buddha's early followers became arahats, quite clearly emphasize the importance of understanding doctrine. The

arahats are said to have "seen and attained dhamma." Since nearly all of these first arahats attained arahatship before there was any saṅgha, it is obvious why the texts do not praise their adherence to discipline. But this glaring lack of emphasis upon discipline must have proved difficult for the bhikkhus who had a considerable stake in legitimating the existence of the saṅgha. If laymen could achieve the spiritual perfection which the bhikkhus sought, and if the laymen could do this without the regimen of the saṅgha, then King Milinda's question, "what is the distinction between the layman and the recluse?"¹ became a pressing one. The answer of the saṅgha is found either implicitly or explicitly in nearly every account in the canon. The answer is that the things which hinder a man's comprehension of dhamma are mostly moral impurities, "fetters" which bind a person to the cycle of rebirth. The best way to destroy these "fetters" is to leave the household life and enter the saṅgha with its regimen calculated to destroy the "fetters". This emphasis is recurrent in the canon, and the Scriptures were, after all, compiled and transmitted by the saṅgha. The emphasis upon moral purification eventually became so powerful that Nāgasena could tell King Milinda² that no one could become an

¹Milindapañha 242-245.

²Milindapañha 352.

arahat who had not in one of his lives been a bhikkhu.

This elevation of the saṅgha and of discipline contributed to the denigration of the laity and dhamma. Historically this is illustrated best by the growth of monasteries, the symbols of a more independent and self-sufficient saṅgha, intent upon personal purification. The reaction against this is Mahāyāna with its celebration of dhamma.

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