

Pārasaka the fifth varṇa

P. V. Bapal,

In the *Assalayana sutta* No. 93 of the *Majjhimanikaya*, there is a discussion between Gotama Buddha and a young Brahmana, Assalāyana by name, about the superiority of the Brahmanas, claimed by the latter, over the other three social groups, Ksatriyas, Vaiśyas and Sūdras. He maintained that only the Brahmanas can be considered to be pure as against the view held by Gotama Buddha, that purity can be attained by all the three groups of Ksatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras as much as by the Brahmanas.

In this connection Buddhaghosa tells us that, apparently, in his time there were not merely four social groups (varṇas), but actually there were five varṇas—Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, Sudras and a group, which he calls Pārasaka.

The Commentator, Buddhaghosa, tells us that the fifth group was the result of a mixed marriage between persons belonging to different varṇas. One who is born of a Ksatriya man and a Brāhmaṇa woman is called Ksatriya Pārasaka and one who is born of a Brāhmaṇa man and a Ksatriya woman is called a Brahman Pārasaka. Both the kinds of progeny are considered to be of low birth (*hīna-jāti*). They are considered to be an independent group, the fifth group (*pañcamassa varṇassa atthitaya*.) Here he definitely asserts that there was a fifth varṇa. Thus in his time, the theory of four varṇas only was definitely exploded and a fifth varṇa had already come to be recognised (*Ettha catuvanno ti niyamo natthi; Pañcama hi Parasika—vanno pi atthi*). *Manusmṛti* (X. 4) denies the existence of a fifth group (*nasti tu pañcamah*)

Now about the name Pārasaka, There is no certainty about the correctness of this reading. The variants found are (*Parisaka Padasaka*.) I am inclined to believe that the reading here is corrupted, and the original may be Pārasava, corresponding to the Sanskrit word Pārasava. This word is found in *Manusmṛti* and other Dharmasastra¹ texts which all confirm that this is a name given to the progeny of a mixed marriage. *Manusmṛti*, however, restricts this word to the progeny of a Brahmana father and a Sudra mother. This progeny is also described in *Manu* (X. 8) as Nisāda. Even in the *Mahabharata* (BORI ed. 13. 48. 5) Parasava is described as follows—

*Param savad Brahmanasy esa putrah
Sudraputram Parasavam tam ahuh*

Vidura is also spoken of as Parasava (Sorensen's Index to the Mbh. I. 4361)

The identification of Parasava with Nisada has perhaps led to the use of this term (*pañcama varṇa*) in south India for the out-caste people. And it is evident from the evidence of Buddhaghosa that this term had already come into existence by the time of Buddhaghosa.

1. See p. 140 in the *Glossarial Index to Prasina Smṛti* by Suresh chandra Bannerji (*Annals*) of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, XL. 1960