**Brāhmana Tradition**

* With the advent of the Aryans in the early Vedic period, the belief in many gods gradually evolved into the belief of one supreme and creator God known as Brahmā, which gave rise to the beginning of the brāhmana era.
* They propagated the theory of creation and are categorized under one of the three pre-Buddhist thinkers or heretical institutions (titthāyatana) as revelationists or traditionalists.
* The word Veda means knowledge and it refers to sacred knowledge about ultimate matters. Brāhmana is derived from the word Brahmā which means sacred Vedic text. It also refers to a priest who is in possession of the sacred text.
* The brāhmanas texts were commentaries of the Vedas. The ritualistic aspects of the Vedic religion were found in the Satapaha brāhmana text, such as offering to God, funeral service and detailed formulas of sacrificial practices.
* The brāhmanas were identified as composers and reciters of the brāhmanas texts. They were also professional priests who performed ritual services and they were the wealthy brāhmanas who owned lands.
* With the development of the caste system (varna dharma), brāhmanas proclaimed that they were born from the mouth of the creator god, Brahmā. They enjoyed the privilege in pursuit of Vedic study; and recitation of these hymns from the text which was an essential part of performing sacrifice, became part of their daily lives. Hence, brāhmana’s duty is to preserved, study and teach the Vedas; perform sacrifice and to give or receive gifts.
* Another development of the institution is the four stages of life (āsrama dharma). Early Brahmanism only recognized and practiced the first and second stages that continue to emphasize on the practice of sacrifice, rites and rituals. The third and fourth stages were not mentioned and did not encourage this ascetic practice which they considered as destructive to society.
* The brāhmana were not compromising towards such practice; they envisaged renunciation only after proper fulfillment of social duties. However, due to the struggle with the sramana movement who were very much into ascetic practices, gradually brāhmanism introduced the third and fourth stages of life.

**Aranyaka and Upanishad Periods**

* The development of the four stages of life gradually paves a way and gave rise to “inner” practice in meditation. Thus from mere reciter of the Vedas and the sacrificial practices, they went into the forests (aranya) and became forest dwellers (aranyakas) and further develop their intellectual thinking.
* The Aranyakas were transitional between the Brahmanas and the Upanishads in that they still discuss rites and have magical content, full lists of formulas and some hymns from the Vedas as well as the early speculations and intellectual discussions that flowered in the Upanishads. Their texts were composed and compiled in the forest, and became more philosophical.
* The emphasis on external rites and rituals were shifted to internal thinking and later meditation. New development in the teachings of the Upanishad, like concepts of good and evil, theory of kamma, samsara, the transmigration of soul, liberation (moksha) were gradually beginning to develop during this period.
* Upanishad meaning sitting near-by and receiving secret instructions under a teacher. The Upanishad is a collection of texts that form the last part of the Vedas known as Vedanta (Conclusion of the Vedas).
* The emphasis shifted from sacrifice or ritual (karma marga) to knowledge (jñāna marga). Three stages of development were suggested to transform the whole nature of man:-

1. Sravana – hearing or reading
2. Manana – contemplation or continued reflection.
3. Nidhidhyāsana – internalizing or meditation

* As a result of yogi concentration, they believed in soul and distinguished it as individual soul (ātman) and universal soul (brahman). Otherwise called microcosmic soul and macrocosmic soul respectively.
* The ultimate reality is the identification in the merger of ātman and brahman is considered liberation (moksha). Thus monism was developed.

**Buddhist Critiques of the Brahmana Tradition**

The Buddha rejected all that was in pre-Buddhist Vedic culture and gave rational critiques on the following issues:

**(1) Critiques of Brāhmanas’ Claims**

1. In Tevija sutta (DN13) and Cankí sutta (MN95), the Buddha refutes the theory of the divine origin of the Vedas and rejected them as authoritative. According to him, the authors of the Vedas are the ancient sages.
2. In Tevijja sutta, Buddha criticized the brāhmanas’ claim that the Vedas are divine revelations from Brahmā and that they are the final authority. Since none of the teachers of Vedic traditions, as far back as seven generations, have direct knowledge or seen Brahmā who is said to be revealers of the Vedas, therefore, the brahmins were like a line of blind men leading the blind – a blind claim.
3. Similarly, in Cankí sutta, the brāhmanas’ claim that what is sanctioned by the Vedas, ancient scriptural statements is true and all else is false. However, none of these brāhmanas can claim to have personal knowledge of the truth. Thus, without direct knowing and seeing, having no direct experiential basis, the knowledge of the Vedas is just theological. It is subjected to doubt and verification, therefore cannot be considered as a source of valid knowledge. The claim for exclusive validity of the Vedas that *“this alone is true, all else is false”* is therefore, a mere baseless faith (amūlikā sadhā) and dogmatic – a blind tradition.

**(2) Theory of Creator-God (issaranimmānahetuvāda)**

1. The Buddha rejected the theory of world-creation by Brahmā.
2. The theory of creation is ascribed to the self-consciousness of the primeval person, who felt fear, loneliness and the need for companionship. In Brahmajāla sutta (DN1), it exposes the unsoundness of the belief about the origin of Brahmā as the first creator. The sutta describes how coincidentally other beings come into existence in his lonely world (Brahmaloka) and he misunderstood this to be a result of his wish. Consequently, as other beings saw him already present there before them, they considered him as their creator.
3. In Titthayatana sutta (AN172), the supreme- being with the moral responsibility for all ills was being questioned - *“There are recluses and brahmins who maintain and believe that whatever man experiences, be it pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, is caused by God’s act of creation. If that is so, then people commit murder, theft and unchaste deeds; indulge in lying, slanderous, harsh and idle talk; they are covetous, full of hate and hold wrong views – are all due to God’s act of creation.”*
4. The Bhūridatta Jātaka (J543) reflected the utter incompatibility of the belief in the creator God with the prevailing evils of the world – *“If Brahmā is the lord of the whole world and creator of the multiple beings, then why has he not made the entire world happy without ordaining any misfortune in the world? Why has he made the world full of injustice, deceit, falsehood and conceit? The lord of beings, then, is evil, since he has ordained unrighteousness where there could have righteousness”.*

**(3) Brāhmana as Householder (gahapatikas)**

1. It was mentioned in the Pāli suttas that many of the brāhmanas were not priests; some of them were landlords, some were engaged in administration, some even own considerable estates, and yet others were petty cultivators.
2. Kasíbhāradvāja sutta (Sutta Nipāta 76) mentioned a brāhmana farmer who cultivated a tract of land. Some of the brāhmanas like Canki, Tārukkha, Jānussoni etc were mentioned in the Vāseţţha sutta (MN98) as distinguished and wealthy brāhmanas.
3. Therefore, not all brāhmanas were ordained priests and is allowed to maintain a household life, but because by birth they are brāhmanas, so enjoying the privileges meant for the brāhmanas caste.
4. According to Cūļahatthipadopama sutta (MN27) and Mahāsaccaka sutta (MN36), such a householder life style is an obstruction to the “highest life” because – *“Household life is crowded and dusty; it is not easy, while living in a home, to lead the holy life utterly perfect and pure as a polished shell.”*

**(4) Critique of Sacrificial Practice**

1. Some brāhmanas were tempted by the materialistic orientation of the society around them that simple sacrificial ritual was transformed to an elaborate and cruel one involving the slaughter of numerous animals as a means of gaining wealth for them.
2. As sacrificial rites became more complex, the poor and less powerful members of the society could not afford to perform the complex and expensive rituals; thus were excluded from many of the more elaborate rituals of their religion.
3. The Buddha criticized the practice of animal sacrifice as violent and gives the Buddhist’s view of what a right sacrifice should be as found in Kúţadanta sutta (DN5). In the sutta, the Buddha gives new interpretation to the concept of sacrifice, eliminating on the one hand the aspect of animal slaughter, and adding on the other some ethical principles.
4. The Buddha recommended better ways of performing sacrifices by making regular gifts to the meritorious persons (dāna), by constructing monasteries (vihāras), by taking refuge in the triple gem (tisarana), by observing the moral precepts (síla), by absorbing into four form of meditation (jhāna), by acquiring insight knowledge (vipassanā-ńāna) and by abstaining from worldly desires.

**(5) Critique of the Caste System**

1. The claim of the purity of the caste and the Brahmin’s superiority is represented as such “*Brahmins are the highest caste, those of any other castes are inferior; Brahmins are the fairest caste, those of any other castes are dark; only Brahmins purified, not non-brahmins; Brahmins alone are the sons of Brahmā, born of his mouth, the offspring of Brahmā, born of Brahmā, created by Brahmā, heirs of Brahmā.”*
2. In the Assalāyana sutta (MN93), the Buddha describes that purification is for all castes. The concept of the purity of castes is dismissed on the grounds that the Brahmin cannot be certain whether caste-purity or intermarriage was strictly observed by one’s parents and grandparents even up to the seventh generation. Thus, the boast of caste-purity is based on ignorance. Furthermore, Buddha refuted that Brahmins are being born like everyone else. Therefore there is no basis for their superiority’s claim.
3. The Buddha explains in the Vāseţţha sutta (MN98) that biologically, there is no distinguish characteristics among the species of men; unlike grass, trees, insects, fish, birds etc. The apparent division made among people are merely ‘conventional’ classifications (samańńā) such as differences in skin colour, hair form, shape of head and nose etc, are not ‘absolute categories. All human are biologically the same.
4. In the Ambattha sutta (DN3), the Buddha further condemned the caste system in respect to the ethical facts, that one is considered a brāhmana not merely by reason of his birth but by his knowledge (vijjā) and conduct (carana). In other words, a person’s attitudes and behavior (kama) made a man superior or inferior.
5. Sociologically, the conception of brāhmana society was static and based on the four castes. The duties of each caste are fixed and the whole social caste structure is explained in terms of divinity and absolute. Buddha rejected it in Assalāyana sutta (MN93), since in certain societies of ancient India, there are only two classes, namely the masters and slaves, and even this distinction is not rigid for – “One who is a master may become a slave and one is a slave may become a master.”
6. In the Esukārí sutta (MN96), the Buddha questioned a Brahmin whether the world has authorized and agreed upon the services assigned by the Brahmins. The reply was negative, to which the Buddha answered that it is like forcing food down the throat of a man who does not want to eat.
7. The Buddha pointed out in Kaņņakatthala sutta (MD90) that all four castes alike are on equal footing, had the capacity to attain liberation. In addition, there was no caste distinction or difference concerning quality of liberation attained and that diversity lies in their striving. Similarly, when using different firewood to make fire, there is no difference in the flame, color and radiance, the fire is the same.
8. According to ideological point of views, brahmanical ideals of seeking immortality through progeny would prefer male to female. Though it was not certain whether girls were killed in the Vedic time as soon as they were born. However, there is reference in the Taittiriya Samhita that expressed the joyous celebration of the birth of a boy rather than a girl’s birth. Conversely, Buddha acknowledged the value of girls to king Pasenadi that “a female offspring may prove even nobler than a male” when queen Mallika had given birth to a girl.
9. In spite of the Buddha’s denunciation of brahman’s claims, many of his eminent brahmana contemporaries became his disciples or supporters – Assalayana, Kutadanta, Sonadanda are a few of such converts. In later centuries, among those who helped in the propagation of Buddhism were great brahmana scholars such as Nagarjuna, Asanga and Aryasura.