

## Semen, Viagra and *Paṇḍaka*: Ancient Endocrinology and Modern Day Discrimination\*

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In a *Vinaya* passage, the Buddha laid down a rule to bar *paṇḍakas* from ordination. Although there have been several attempts to shed light on whom the word *paṇḍaka* referred to, all of these were based on the circumstantial evidence in the *Vinaya*. This article argues that this approach is a red herring and conclusions drawn from it are at odds with other parts of the Canon.

Based on an overlooked *Abhidhamma* passage which characterises *paṇḍakas* as those unable to emit semen, the author reconstructs an Indian proto-endocrinology – with support from ancient medical treatises – to identify *paṇḍakas* as impotent men, and to reveal the connection between different *paṇḍaka* types and related terms. He then examines various considerations which the Buddha may have had in banning them from the Order.

The article finally discusses the implications of all this for modern Buddhist societies where gay men and transgenders are often confusedly categorised as *paṇḍakas* and discriminated against for that reason.

In 2004, Kittirat Sukhapool, a male-to-female transgender woman, recently crowned the first runner up in Thailand's world-famous Miss Tiffany beauty pageant for transgenders, went on air to express her desire to ordain for a short period

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as a Buddhist monk. In Thailand, it is still common for a son to do so, so that his mother can “catch the tip of his saffron robe to heaven”, as women are not allowed ordination.

Public reaction was swift and strong. The majority of Thai Buddhists saw Kit-tirat’s wish as a violation of the Buddhist monastic rule, the *Vinaya*, which denies ordination to *paṅḍakas*.

In the minds of most Thai Buddhists, this two-millennia-old word is equated with the indigenous term *kathoey* – a male-born person who adopts female roles, dresses and mannerisms or, less commonly, *vice versa*. Some also use this Pāli term to refer to gay men. As a result, the Thai translation of the *Tipitaka* is littered with the use of *kathoey* as though it were an interchangeable equivalent for *paṅḍaka*. Therefore the negative attitude to *paṅḍakas* in the *Tipitaka* provides a basis for prejudice and discrimination against Thai gays and transgenders, as documented by Peter A. Jackson in “Male Homosexuality and Transgenderism in Thai Buddhist Tradition.”<sup>1</sup>

The heart of this misconception lies in the following story in the *Vinaya*.

At that time a certain *paṅḍaka* was ordained among the monks. He approached a number of young monks and said: “Come, Venerable Ones, defile me.” The monks reproached him: “Begone *paṅḍaka*, away with you! What have we to do with that?” Reproached by the monks, he approached a number of large stout novices: “Come, Venerable Ones, defile me.” The novices reproached him: “Begone *paṅḍaka*, away with you! What have we to do with that?” Reproached by the novices, he approached elephant keepers and grooms and said: “Come, sirs, defile me.” The elephant keepers and grooms defiled him. They grumbled, became angry and irritated: “These recluses, these followers of the Buddha are *paṅḍakas* and those who are not *paṅḍakas* defile *paṅḍakas*. Thus do they all lack discipline.” Monks heard those elephant keepers and grooms who grumbled, were angry, and irritated, and those monks told this matter to the Blessed One, who said: “Monks, if a *paṅḍaka* is not ordained, let him not be ordained. If he is already ordained, let him be expelled.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Published in *Queer Dharma: Voices of Gay Buddhists*, Vol. 1, edited by Winston Leyland, Gay Sunshine Press, San Francisco, second printing 2000.

<sup>2</sup>Vin I, 85-6. Adapted from Leonard Zwilling’s translation in “Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts”, published in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, p. 207-208.

The story does not tell us anything about the offending *paṅḍaka*, except his solicitation to be “defiled” (*dūseti*) by men. Other mentions of *paṅḍakas* in the *Vinaya* do not impart much more information, except that they can act as passive partners in oral and anal sex.

Based on modern preconceptions, it is tempting to jump to the conclusions that 1) a *paṅḍaka* is a male-born person with same-sex desire – therefore, a gay man or a male-to-female transgender; 2) and this is the reason the Buddha banned them from ordination. This paper argues that both of these conclusions are false.

### A red herring

The popular Thai understanding of *paṅḍakas* as gays and transgenders runs into problems when it becomes clear that the Buddha did not condemn homosexual acts simply for being between members of the same sex. There is a story in the *Vinaya* about two novices, Kaṅḍaka and Mahaka, who “defiled” (*dūseti*) each other, but were not expelled from the Order. Rather the Buddha established a rule to forbid monks from having more than one novice at the same time.<sup>3</sup> There is no hint that they were considered *paṅḍakas*.

Later, one of them, Kaṅḍaka, had sex with a *bhikkhunī*. This time it led the Buddha to lay down a rule to expel a novice from the Order in ten cases, one of which is having sexual intercourse with a *bhikkhunī*. However, no other sex-related offense is mentioned in the list.<sup>4</sup>

Another case that implies homosexual attraction is the case of Elder Vakkali, who was obsessed with the appearance of the Buddha.<sup>5</sup> Again, there is no hint that he was considered a *paṅḍaka*. He is even said to have attained enlightenment in the end.

In Buddhism sexual activity is seen as an impediment to spiritual progress, whether it be between people of the same sex or different sexes. As José Cabezón notes, “The principal question for Buddhism has not been one of heterosexuality vs. homosexuality but one of sexuality vs. celibacy. In this sense homosexuality, when condemned, is condemned more for being an instance of sexuality than

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<sup>3</sup>Vin I, 79.

<sup>4</sup>Vin I, 85.

<sup>5</sup>*Dhammapada Commentary* XXV.11.

for being homosexuality.”<sup>6</sup> In fact, it must be added that the modern concept of sexual orientation did not exist, so was not an issue in ancient Indian minds.

Regarding the social attitude of the time, John Powers describes: “There are several stories of monks having sexual encounters with other men, but they are not depicted as homosexuals; rather, their orientation is clearly heterosexual, and the underlying assumption is that they are motivated by lust and would prefer to satisfy it with women, if such were available.<sup>7</sup>... Indian Buddhist literature assumes that men do not form strong, lasting commitments in the way heterosexual couples do, and so this sort of activity is not seen as having the destabilizing effects on the order attributed to affairs between men and women.”<sup>8</sup>

Sex changes are also found in the *Tipiṭaka*. Although the events appeared supernatural, the Buddha dealt with them in a matter of fact way. A monk in whom female sexual characteristics (*itthilingaṃ*) appeared was told by the Buddha to join the *bhikkhunī* Order, and a nun in whom male sexual characteristics (*purisalingaṃ*) appeared was similarly told to move to the *Bhikkhu* order.<sup>9</sup> Kittirat would, one would imagine, be told to ordain as a nun instead, if the Buddha were alive today to re-establish the *bhikkhunī* Order in Thailand.

The story of the Elder Soreyya told in the *Dhammapada Commentary* is also remarkable. Because of his attraction to the Elder Kaccāyana, he magically experienced sex change not once but twice. And yet he was allowed to become a monk and eventually attained enlightenment.<sup>10</sup> In none of these stories is there any mention of *paṇḍaka*.

Therefore, drawing conclusions based on circumstantial evidence (soliciting sex with men) can be misleading, because it may pertain only to a particular *paṇḍaka* who happened to be caught in the limelight and so acquired everlasting notoriety.

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<sup>6</sup>José Ignacio Cabezón, “Homosexuality and Buddhism” in *Homosexuality and World Religions*, ed. Arlene Swidler (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993), p. 82, as quoted in *A Bull of a Man*, p. 94.

<sup>7</sup>Same-sex sexual behaviour seems to be of little importance for ancient Indians. In the legal treatise *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, the penance for “ejaculating semen in a man” is fasting during one day while subsisting on cow’s products. If the offender is a Brahmin, the penance is bathing with his clothes on. (11.174-175). By contrast, a man of inferior caste who has sex with a woman of superior caste is punishable by execution. (8.366).

<sup>8</sup>*A Bull of a Man*, p. 94.

<sup>9</sup>Vin III, 35.

<sup>10</sup>*Dhammapada Commentary* III.9.

Another problem with the popular understanding is that *ubhatobyañjanakas* – those with both male and female sex organs – are not included under, although often confused with, *paṇḍakas*. If *paṇḍaka* refers to those who are not really either male or female, it would make more sense to include *ubhatobyañjanakas* as a kind of *paṇḍakas* and not a separate category. In the Pāli Canon, however, *ubhatobyañjanaka* is clearly a separate category and never conflated with *paṇḍaka*.<sup>11</sup> The barring of *ubhatobyañjanakas* from ordination also happened separately and for quite a different reason.<sup>12</sup>

### Canonical leads

There is danger in jumping to conclusions about the meaning of a term which occurs in a period and a culture far removed from ours. It is prudent to avoid imposing our values and biases on the ancient Indians, because it may turn out that they have prejudices entirely of their own. In this case, they may have had a different meaning in mind for the word *paṇḍaka* which was not spelled out because it was obvious to everyone. As L.P.N. Perera writes in his book *Sexuality in Ancient India*: “...in ancient Indian society the [*paṇḍaka*] (and to a lesser degree the hermaphrodite) constituted a factor to be reckoned with. The [*paṇḍaka*] and hermaphrodite moved freely with the rest of the population, and the peculiarities of their sexual life were taken for granted.”<sup>13</sup>

Leonard Zwilling traces it back further: “Even as early as the period of the *Atharva Veda*, *paṇḍakas* were viewed as a distinct group, different from ordinary males and females, and apparently transvestite.<sup>14</sup> The *Vinaya*, in fact, goes so far as to distinguish sexual activity between normative males from sexual relations between a socially normative male and a *paṇḍaka*.”<sup>15</sup>

In the *Vinaya*, sexes are often classified into four categories: male, female, *ubhatobyañjanaka* and *paṇḍaka*, fitting the four-way categorization commonly found elsewhere in the Canon. Since we know that *ubhatobyañjanakas* are true hermaphrodites – those with both male and female sex organs – it is most likely that *paṇḍaka* refers to those with neither – a neuter.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Sārattha Saṅgaha* has *ubhatobyañjanaka-paṇḍaka*, but this is almost certainly a confusion.

<sup>12</sup> *Vin I*, 89.

<sup>13</sup> *Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 160.

<sup>14</sup> *Ubhatobyañjanaka* is probably meant here.

<sup>15</sup> “Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts”, *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, p. 205

<sup>16</sup> Peter Harvey came to the same conclusion in *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, p. 414.

In the *Mahānārada-kassapa Jātaka*, there is a “neither female nor male” (*n’ ev’ itthī na pumā*) person whose immediate past lives were as a castrated donkey, a monkey whose testicles had been bitten off by the alpha male, and a castrated ox. (This person was at the end revealed to be none other than the Buddha’s half brother Ānanda.)<sup>17</sup> Again, in the *Isidāsī Therī Gāthā* the Elder Isidāsī told of her past life as a “neither female nor male” (*n’eva mahilā na puriso*) person, following births as a monkey whose testicles had been bitten off by the dominant male, a goat whose genitalia were cut off, and a castrated ox.<sup>18</sup> It is most likely that these two cases refer to those who lack “maleness” yet are not female – *paṅḍakas* or, in particular, *napuṃsakapaṅḍakas* (literally, non-male).

Although scholars continue to debate the existence of castrated eunuchs in ancient India<sup>19</sup>, it’s clear that *napuṃsakapaṅḍakas* can be found in nature, and are commonly referred to in ancient Indian texts.<sup>20</sup> The *vassavara*, traditionally translated as “eunuch”, mentioned along with the king’s wives, in the *Vessantāra Jātaka* (J. vi 502), also likely refers to this type.<sup>21</sup>

### Clarification and confusion: *paṅḍakas* in the Commentaries

This is by no means the end of the story. If *paṅḍakas* were simply those without sex organs, it would have been easy to define them as such, and a simple physical examination would have sufficed for identification.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Synopsis at <http://dictionary.buddhistdoor.com/chi/word/10538/mahānārada-kassapa%20jā-taka>

<sup>18</sup>Synopsis at <http://dictionary.buddhistdoor.com/chi/word/8860/isidāsī%20therī>

<sup>19</sup>Zwilling considered intentional castration “virtually unknown” in pre-Muslim India. (*Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender*, p. 204) Perera, on the other hand, suggested that, this foreign concept imported from Persia was already well known at the time of the Buddha. In support, he cited individual acts of castration mentioned in the *Tipiṭaka*. In the *Cullavagga*, a monk frustrated with lust is said to cut off his own penis. [Vin. II, 110] Also in the Vinaya, it is said that a male sex organ was found discarded in a street in the city of Sāvattthi. [Vin. II, 269] And in the *Upāli Sutta* (M. 56), the word “one who removes testicles” (*aṅḍahāraka*) was used. (*Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 140-1)

<sup>20</sup>Such condition occurs not only in humans. The medical treatise *Caraka Saṃhitā* mentions *napuṃsaka* snakes, along with male and female ones, as well as the symptoms of their bites and appropriate treatments. *Caraka Saṃhitā* Ci23 #130-131, Vol. IV, p. 358

<sup>21</sup>[www.sacred-texts.com/bud/j6/j6o13.htm](http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/j6/j6o13.htm). The Thai version translated this term as “*khanthee*”, or castrated eunuch – the only place it appears in the whole Thai-language Canon.

<sup>22</sup>In “Avoidance and Exclusion: Same-Sex Sexuality in Indian Buddhism”, Zwilling translated the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivāda school, the version of the monastic code adopted and still adhered to

However, it appears that *paṇḍaka* has a broader meaning beyond the *napuṃsaka* archetype. This is implied in the terms *vassakamma* and *vossakamma* mentioned in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (D.1) as one of “base arts and wrong means of livelihood”. *Vossakamma* is turning a man into a *paṇḍaka*, while *vassakamma* is turning a *paṇḍaka* into a man.<sup>23</sup> Obviously, *paṇḍaka* here cannot refer to persons without sex organs, because making them functionally male would be impossible.

So who are the *paṇḍakas* in the broad meaning? Buddhaghosa’s often quoted exposition on *paṇḍakas* was perhaps aimed to clarify the broad meaning of *paṇḍaka*. Unfortunately, it is itself nothing short of perplexing. The five types of *paṇḍakas* he described are:<sup>24</sup>

1. *Yassa paresaṃ aṅgajātaṃ mukhena gahetvā asucinā āsittassa pariḷāho vūpasammati, ayaṃ āsittapaṇḍako*
2. *Yassa paresaṃ ajjhācāraṃ passato usūyāya uppannāya pariḷāho vūpasammati, ayaṃ usūyapaṇḍako*
3. *Yassa upakkamena bijāni apanītāni ayaṃ opakkamikapaṇḍako*
4. *Ekacco pana akusalavipākānubhāvena kālapakkhe paṇḍako hoti, jūhapakkhe panassa pariḷāho vūpasammati, ayaṃ pakkhapaṇḍako*
5. *Yo pana paṭisandhiyaṃ yeva abhāvako uppanno, ayaṃ napuṃsakapaṇḍako*

At first glance, the list seems to include incongruous groups of individuals. The last, namely, *napuṃsakapaṇḍaka* (“non-male” *paṇḍaka*) is described as one who “from conception, is lacking” – the archetypal sexless *paṇḍaka*. The rest, however, appear curious almost to the point of being bizarre.

*Āsittapaṇḍaka* (“sprayed” *paṇḍaka*) is described as one “whose sexual burning is assuaged by taking another man’s member in his mouth and being sprayed by semen”.

*Usūyapaṇḍaka* (“jealous” *paṇḍaka*) is one “whose sexual burning is assuaged by watching other people having sex” – in other words, a voyeur.

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in Tibet, in which the offending *paṇḍaka* was explicitly shown to be a *napuṃsaka*. (*Queer Dharma*, p. 50).

<sup>23</sup>*vasso ti puriso, vosso ti paṇḍako iti; vossassa vassa- karaṇaṃ vassa-kammaṃ, vassassa vossa-karaṇaṃ vossa-kammaṃ* (DAI, 97).

<sup>24</sup>I follow the order given in the Commentary. The translation is my own.

*Pakkhapaṇḍaka* (“fortnight” *paṇḍaka*) is one “who is *paṇḍaka* during the waning fortnight due to maturation of non-virtuous conduct, but his sexual burning is assuaged during the waxing fortnight.”

*Opakkamikapaṇḍaka* (“by-assault” *paṇḍaka*) is one “whose seeds are annihilated by assault or violence.”<sup>25</sup>

The list’s disjointed nature makes it easy for modern minds, even farther removed geographically, temporally, and culturally than Buddhaghosa, to hold on to the impression that a *paṇḍaka* is a gay man or a transgender. But an unbiased examination shows that only the “sprayed *paṇḍaka*” appears more or less classifiable as a homosexual or transgender in the modern sense (or does it?). Meanwhile, the “jealous *paṇḍaka*” can be equally applicable to heterosexuals and non-trans people.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the category of *pakkhapaṇḍaka* seems to make no sense. If *paṇḍaka* is a homosexual or a transgender, how can someone be *paṇḍaka* every other fortnight?

It gets more confusing. According to the Commentary, the *Kurundi Atṭhakatthā* insists that only *napuṃsakapaṇḍaka*, *opakkamikapaṇḍaka*, and *pakkhapaṇḍaka* are barred from ordination, with a caveat that the last can still be ordained during the “bright fortnight”.

The same sense of confusion can be found in academic studies of the term. In his 1993 book *Sexuality in Ancient India*, L.P.N. Perera uses the phrases “sexual weaklings” and “persons with peculiar psycho-sexual problems”<sup>27</sup> to describe *paṇḍakas*, which “embrace all eunuchs and sexual deviants, but of course to the exclusion of hermaphrodites.”<sup>28</sup>

Leonard Zwilling comes closer to the mark in his 1998 paper “Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts”, pointing out that, “Rather, *paṇḍaka* and its

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<sup>25</sup>Zwilling translates this as “individual who attains ejaculation through some special effort or artifice.” (“Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts”, *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, p. 204) Harvey takes it to mean “by-a-means *paṇḍaka*” or “one for whom semen is expelled using some special means.” (*An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, p. 414) If correct, this category could refer to those who use aphrodisiacs or other “aggressive means” to achieve ejaculation. The author, however, agrees with the Thai Commentary that the word refers to castrated eunuchs and others whose genitalia have been destroyed with violence. Professor Richard Gombrich remarks that *upakkama* means an assault or act of violence. (Personal communication.)

<sup>26</sup>I am indebted to Phra Chai Woradhammo, whose article on *paṇḍaka* pointed this out to me, and piqued my interest to delve into more research on the term.

<sup>27</sup>*Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 142.

<sup>28</sup>*Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 143.

synonyms are to be interpreted metaphorically as we do in English when it is said of a weak or pusillanimous person that he (or even she) ‘has no balls.’”<sup>29</sup>

Upon considering Buddhaghosa’s list of five *paṇḍaka* types, he concludes, “It is evident, then, that we are dealing with a variety of sexual dysfunctions and variations categorized under the general rubric ‘*paṇḍaka*,’ and the reason for this is that they all share the common quality of being ‘*napuṃsaka*,’ ‘lacking maleness.’”<sup>30</sup>

Although his contribution to this issue cannot be underestimated, Zwilling’s paper looks at *paṇḍaka* through the lens of sexuality, undoubtedly influenced by the circumstance of the *Vinaya* episode. Indeed, this *a priori* assumption sets the tone for the foregone conclusion that the various *paṇḍaka* types are united by the fact that “for one reason or another they fail to meet the normative sex role expectations for an adult male.”<sup>31</sup>

Zwilling comes to an even more specific conclusion in a 1998 paper, “Avoidance and Exclusion: Same-Sex Sexuality in Indian Buddhism”, when he equates *paṇḍaka* with an otherwise normative male who takes a passive role in homosexual relations, stating, for example, that “In the *Vinaya*, *paṇḍaka*, or *passivos*, are considered in the same light as common prostitutes, widows, and grown up unmarried girls...”<sup>32</sup>

This is a bold conclusion, considering his much vaguer characterization of *paṇḍaka* in “The First Medicalization: The Taxonomy and Etiology of Queerness in Classical Indian Medicine” which he co-wrote with Michael J Sweet. In this article, he lumps *paṇḍaka* with other terms: “For Indians of the classical era, the various forms of queerness that have been catalogued above - gender role atypicality, homosexuality, impotence and other sexual dysfunctions, paraphilias and hermaphroditism - were not viewed as discrete and unrelated instances of pathology. Rather, they were seen as instances of a general term known variously as *klība*, *sandha*, *napuṃsaka* and *paṇḍaka* (to mention only the chief examples which have been cited so far). Despite the etymological differences in meaning that may be distinguished among these terms, they came to be used nearly synonymously.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, p. 204.

<sup>30</sup> *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, p. 205.

<sup>31</sup> *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, p. 205.

<sup>32</sup> *Queer Dharma*, p. 48.

<sup>33</sup> “The First Medicalization”, p. 599.

## The essence of *paṇḍakas* or the lack thereof?

The author, however, would like to argue that the circumstantial evidence in the *Vinaya* incident is a red herring. Contrary to Zwilling, I propose that the various types of *paṇḍakas*, as far as the *Tipitaka* is concerned, can be more clearly understood as related instances of a discrete pathology based on the criterion of functional impotence – rather than a sundry list of sexual dysfunctions, non-conforming sexual/gender expressions, roles or practices, as Zwilling has suggested. More specifically, I contend that these *paṇḍaka* types are grouped together as special types of those suffering impotence due to seminal absence/deficiency.

### Sexless = sonless

First, let us look at what life must have been for *napuṃsaka-paṇḍakas*. Like other early civilizations, ancient India places great importance on procreation, and siring sons is the ultimate purpose of lay life for males. This is illustrated in the background story of the first *Vinaya* rule, where a monk, Sudinna, is asked by his mother to have sex with his former wife to sire offspring lest the family's properties be seized by the state.<sup>34</sup>

Legal treatises of the time bear testimony to the plea of Sudinna's mother. The *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, the *Laws of Manu*, prescribes, "The sons inherit the father's estate – not the brothers, not the fathers. The estate of a man who has no sons, however, is inherited by his father or by his brothers."<sup>35</sup> And under the "Alternative Heirs" section, when no other heirs are available, "...pure and disciplined Brahmins learned in the triple Veda share the estate... [I]n the absence of any heir, the king may take the property of persons belonging to the other classes."<sup>36</sup>

Not only does the lack of progeny greatly inconvenience one's family in this life, it also troubles them enormously in the afterlife. The *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* describes how sons from certain types of marriage (classified by rites) can purify and "rescue from evil" generations of forefathers before him and generations after him.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Vin III, 18.

<sup>35</sup> *Manu's Code of Law*, 9.185, p. 199.

<sup>36</sup> *Manu's Code of Law* 9.188-189, p. 199.

<sup>37</sup> *Manu's Code of Law* 3.37-38, p. 110.

This clearly puts those without sons in great difficulty. Even today, a Hindu who dies without a male heir is believed to head to the *Put* hell specially reserved for the sonless. It is reasoned that sons are called *putra* in Sanskrit because "... only a son can achieve the gift of immortality for his father, whom he delivers from hell by the ceremonies he performs. 'There is no heaven for a sonless man... Even the beasts of the field know that the creature who does not beget offspring has no place in the world.'"<sup>38</sup>

The medical treatise *Caraka Saṃhitā* spares no words in extolling the virtues of having children and condemning the vices of childlessness. "A person without a child is like a tree just with one branch, devoid of fruits and shadows, with an unwanted smell... like an idol made of grass wearing the garb of a man... like a lamp in sketches [not the actual lamp which emanates light]... like a dry pond... is comparable to a metal that just looks like gold without any properties of gold... is not established, naked, empty, having only one sense organ and devoid of any useful activity."<sup>39</sup>

"A person who has many children has many images, many faces, many dimensions, a multitude of activities, many eyes, multi-dimensional knowledge, a multitude of souls. This type of person is auspicious, praiseworthy, blessed, potent, and has many branches. Such persons are hailed in this world. Love, strength, happiness, professional excellence, wide influence, vastness of kinsmen, fame, utility to the world and happiness at the later stage of life and pleasure – all these are dependent upon children."<sup>40</sup>

It is easy to see how in such a society a *napuṃsaka-panḍaka*, guaranteed to have no children, must have been considered a shameful burden – even a curse – on the family. Very likely such a person would find themselves living at the periphery of society, left to fend for themselves. Many would no doubt resort to prostitution for survival.

It is probably the stigmatization of *napuṃsaka-panḍakas* as outcastes, often prostitutes, that earned them notoriety in the Buddha's time. The *Vinaya* suggests that *panḍakas* were considered promiscuous and lascivious, as they are often listed among prostitutes, widows, coarse young girls and nuns as those whose company a monk should avoid lest he become suspected of mischief.<sup>41</sup> More-

<sup>38</sup> *Hindu Life and Customs*, p. 10.

<sup>39</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C12.1#16-18, Vol. III, p. 75.

<sup>40</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C12.1#19-22, Vol. III, p. 75-76.

<sup>41</sup> A. III.128, Vin I, 70. *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, p. 416.

over, they were thought to be born in such conditions due to past karma. Both the *Mahānārada-kassapa Jātaka* and the *Isidāsī Therī Gāthā* cited such rebirths as results of adultery in earlier lives.

### Seedless = Sonless = Sexless

Now let us look at the fate of the impotent. There are endless pieces of evidence showing the disdain for them in ancient India. For the classical Indians, being “seedless” is not much better than being a sexless *napuṃsaka*.

Zwilling fully captures this cultural attitude: “Ancient Indian society was thoroughly patriarchal and male potency was considered of very high value; one of the means by which a man might attain high social status was through his potency and its loss was greatly feared. Anxiety over the loss of potency can be seen in the hymns, charms, and prayers of the *Atharva Veda* and the sacrifices of the *Brāhmaṇa* dedicated to its preservation, augmentation, restoration and destruction in others. It is in these texts belonging to the eighth to sixth centuries BCE that we get our first view of men who did not fulfill the most important male gender role of all, that of procreator.”<sup>42</sup>

The legal treatise, *Nārada-smṛti*, devotes its chapter 12 to the relationship between a man and a woman, with a substantial exposition regarding *paṇḍakas*. The treatise forbids the marriage of a woman to a man with an incurable type of impotence, because “Women were created for the sake of offspring. The woman is the field; the offspring belongs to the possessor of the seed. A field should be given to one who has seed; one without seed is not entitled to a field.”<sup>43</sup>

Another term commonly used for the impotent in Sanskrit is *klība*.<sup>44</sup> They are mentioned in *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* under the section *Disqualification from Inheritance*: “The following receive no shares: the impotent, outcastes, those born

<sup>42</sup> *Queer Dharma*, p. 46.

<sup>43</sup> *Nārada-smṛti*, 12.19, p. 382.

<sup>44</sup> Like *paṇḍaka*, the term is also under debate. But it seems clear that it refers to impotence, as opposed to homosexuality or transgenderism, as in *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* 9,167: “When a wife of someone who is dead, impotent, or sick bears a son after she has been appointed in accordance with the Law specific to her, tradition calls him a son begotten on the wife.” (*Manu’s code of Law*, p.198). And in 9,59, “When the line of descendants dies out, a woman who has been properly appointed should get the desired children from a brother-in-law or a co-feeding relative... The woman may be appointed by her husband, if he is alive and has failed to give her sons (because he is *klība* or sick, the commentators suggest) or by his relatives, if he has died before producing a son. (*The Laws of Manu*, p. 204).

blind or deaf, the insane, the mentally retarded, mutes, and anyone lacking manly strength.”<sup>45</sup> They are similarly included among the disinherited in the *Arthaśāstra*, “An outcaste, a son born to an outcaste and an impotent person are not entitled to a share, also an idiot, a lunatic, a blind and a leprous person.”<sup>46</sup>

Another legal treatise, *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra*, advises the king to “... maintain those who are legally incompetent with food and clothing, namely, those who are blind, mentally retarded, impotent, addicted to vice and sick...”<sup>47</sup> The reason for such ‘kindness’ to the impotent becomes clear when one reads in *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtras* that, “the king should maintain people who are impotent or mad, because their estates go to him.”<sup>48</sup>

If disenfranchisement is not enough, they are considered unlucky and openly discriminated against by being excluded from sacrificing<sup>49</sup> and from ceremonies for the dead.<sup>50</sup> *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* says, “A *cāṇḍāla*, a pig, a cock, a dog, a menstruating woman, or an impotent man must not look at the Brahmins while they are eating.”<sup>51</sup> Needless to say that being mentioned in the same breath as inauspicious animals, *cāṇḍāla* and menstruating women is as bad as it gets in ancient India.

## Seminal Importance

However, these pieces of evidence by themselves do not amount to a proof that these various types of *paṇḍakas* in the *Tipiṭaka* refer to those with impotence due to seminal absence/deficiency. The proof must lie in a coherent theory of such pathology and how well it clarifies the hitherto unclear relationships between seminal deficiency on one hand and *fellatio*, voyeurism and lunar fluctuation on the other.

<sup>45</sup> *Manu’s Code of Law* 9.201, p. 200.

<sup>46</sup> *Arthaśāstra*, 3.5.30, Vol. II, p. 211.

<sup>47</sup> *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* 2.3.37, *Dharmasūtras*, p. 255.

<sup>48</sup> *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* 19.35, *Dharmasūtras*, p. 429.

<sup>49</sup> “A Brahmin must never partake of food at a sacrifice offered by someone who is not a vedic scholar or who officiates as a priest for a large number of people, or at one offered by a woman or an impotent man. When such persons offer an oblation, it is unpropitious for virtuous people and disagreeable to gods; therefore, he should avoid it.” (*Manu’s Code of Law* 4.205, 206 and 211, p. 134-135).

<sup>50</sup> “Brahmins who are thieves, fallen from their caste, or impotent, or who follow the livelihood of infidels – Manu has declared these unfit to participate at divine or ancestral offerings.” (*Manu’s Code of Law* 3.150, p. 116).

<sup>51</sup> *Manu’s Code of Law* 3.239, p. 120.

As the monastic order was tasked with following the Buddha’s rule, this list of *paṇḍaka* types is likely the result of a conscious effort to give a precise definition of *paṇḍaka* according to current knowledge. Such a definition has to be understandable and not appear arbitrary to intelligent people of the time. (In this, I follow the general approach Professor Richard Gombrich used in his chapter “Who was Angulimāla?”<sup>52</sup> to shed light on the eponymous brigand.)

In the *Parūpahāarakathā* section of the *Kathāvatthu*<sup>53</sup> in the *Abhidhamma*, the interlocutor (with orthodox view) attempts to corner the responder (with heterodox view) into accepting the orthodox view that, despite food consumption, an enlightened *bhikkhu* (*arahant*) does not emit semen, due to his constant mindfulness and self-control. During the debate, there is an interesting section which seems to give an essential characteristic of *paṇḍakas*.<sup>54</sup> It reads<sup>55</sup>:

*atthi arahato asuci sukkavissatṭhī ti? āmantā.*

Does an *arahant* emit semen? Yes.

*arahato asuci sukkavissatṭhī kissa nissando ti? asitapītakhāyitasāyitassa nissando ti.*

What causes an *arahant*’s seminal emission? It is caused by eating, drinking, chewing and tasting.

*arahato asuci sukkavissatṭhī asitapītakhāyitasāyitassa nissando ti? āmantā.*

Does eating, drinking, chewing and tasting cause an *arahant* to emit semen? Yes.

...

*ye keci asanti pivanti khādanti sāyanti, sabbesaṃ yeva atthi asuci sukkavissatṭhī ti? āmantā.*

Do all those who eat, drink, chew and taste emit semen? Yes.

*dārakā asanti pivanti khādanti sāyanti, atthi dārakānaṃ asuci sukkavissatṭhī ti? na hevaṃ vattabbe.*

Young boys eat, drink, chew and taste. Do they emit semen? No, that cannot be said.

<sup>52</sup>See Richard F. Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began*, pp. 135-164.

<sup>53</sup>Translated in *Points of Controversy*, II.1, p. 111.

<sup>54</sup>This *Abhidhamma* characterization of *paṇḍakas* has not, as far as the author is aware, been commented upon by previous studies.

<sup>55</sup>My own translation.

*paṇḍakā asanti pivanti khādanti sāyanti, atthi paṇḍakānaṃ asuci sukkavissatṭhī ti? na hevaṃ vattabbe.*

*Paṇḍakas* eat, drink, chew and taste. Do they emit semen? No, that cannot be said.

*devā asanti pivanti khādanti sāyanti, atthi devatānaṃ asuci sukkavissatṭhī ti? na hevaṃ vattabbe.*

*Devas* (gods) eat, drink, chew and taste. Do they emit semen? No, that cannot be said.

Here, *paṇḍakas* are grouped with young boys and *devas* as those without seminal emission despite food consumption. It nicely echoes classical Indian medical theory, according to which semen is the byproduct of a process of gradual refinement of food. The passage also finds a close parallel in the medical treatise, *Suśruta Saṃhitā*: “Again, it may be asked, how is it that semen is not found in an infant?”<sup>56</sup>

Therefore, I propose that this key *Abhidhamma* passage together with numerous passages in classical Indian medical treatises points to common knowledge shared by the early Buddhists and the emerging Āyurvedic science: a physiological theory of semen under which the five *paṇḍaka* categories can be understood as specific manifestations of seminal deficiency.

## Buddhism and classical Indian medicine

In his book *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India*, Kenneth Zysk showed how the empirico-rational Āyurvedic medicine began to take shape around the time of the Buddha, drawing from a common source of medical doctrines which was partially recorded in the *Tipiṭaka*. His close examination of the classical medical treatises such as the *Caraka Saṃhitā* and *Suśruta Saṃhitā* and the *Vinaya* found close parallels between many prescriptions in the Āyurvedic treatises and treatments the Buddha allowed monks to use.

In the same *Brahmajāla sutta* where *vassakamma* and *vossakamma* appeared, the Buddha also demonstrated detailed knowledge of medical treatments by mentioning “giving emetics, purges, and purges of the upper and lower parts of the body and of the head; administering oil in the ears, refreshing the eyes; nasal ther-

<sup>56</sup>*Suśruta Saṃhitā*, 1.14, Vol. I, p. 111.

apy; applying collyria and ointments; ophthalmology; major surgery; pediatrics; giving root medicines; and administration and evacuation of herbal remedies.”<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, the Buddha also showed a profound familiarity with the medical theory of the time in the *Sīvaka Sutta* when he was asked if all experience, whether pleasure or pain, is caused by karma. His reply was, “There are cases where some feelings arise based on bile [*pitta*] ... based on phlegm [*semha*] ... based on internal winds [*vāta*] ... based on a combination [*sannipāta*] of bodily humors ... from the change of the seasons... from uneven care of the body... from being subjected to violence... from the result of kamma.”<sup>58</sup>

The first three – bile [*pitta*], phlegm [*semha*], and winds [*vāta*] – as well as their combinations are in fact the central etiology of diseases according to the medical theory of the time. According to Zysk, “Although its exact origin cannot be determined, the etiology particular to Indian medicine is the three-humor (*tridoṣa*) theory. Nearly all maladies plaguing humans are explained by means of three “peccant” humors, or *doṣa* – wind, bile and phlegm – either singly or in combination.”<sup>59</sup>

## Reconstructing ancient endocrinology

Why should semen matter so much for ancient Indian medicine? This may perplex modern minds, but it will become less strange if we consider it as an early theory – proto-endocrinology, if you will – of male impotence/virility. Therefore, while modern medicine examines the roles of the male hormone testosterone, ancient Indian medicine look at it in terms of the most obvious sign of virility – semen. We will find that similar ideas still linger today. For example, it is still common for a sports coach to forbid his team members to have sex with their partners before important matches. In Thailand, an incompetent man is called *Mai Mee Naam Ya* or “lacking (sexual) fluid”.

*Here I will attempt to reconstruct the physiology of semen from classical sources. Sentences and phrases in italics are my own attempts to fill in the gaps and shall be kept at minimum.*

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<sup>57</sup>Zysk’s translation, *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India*, p. 27.

<sup>58</sup>Slightly adapted from Thanissaro Bhikkhu’s translation. [www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn36/sn36.021.than.html](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn36/sn36.021.than.html)

<sup>59</sup>*Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India*, p. 29.

### *General theory of semen*

The unmanifested soul, which takes different forms in this world, manifests itself in the form of semen. Semen is the final product par excellence of food consumed.<sup>60</sup> The food is fully digested with the help of the internal heat and ultimately assimilated into the system, giving rise to lymph chyle (*rasa*)... The chyle produces blood. From blood is formed flesh. From flesh originates fat, which gives rise to bones. From bones originate marrow, which, in its turn, germinates semen.<sup>61</sup>

Semen gives rise to valour and courageousness, makes the man amorously disposed towards the female sex, increases his strength and amateness, is the sole impregnating principle in the male organism, and is possessed of the virtue of being quickly emitted.<sup>62</sup>

Semen is the basis of lust; on it depends the energy of man, his power to know and act. It can be used either as a deadly substance or as a giver of immortality. Semen poisons the man of pride but pacifies and illumines the man who controls his passions.<sup>63</sup>

There are persons who gain sexual vitality only at an appropriate time. There are others who are capable of indulging in sex because of their regular habit. There are others who indulge in sex by taking aphrodisiacs, and there are persons who are virile by nature.<sup>64</sup>

Sexual power gets reduced by old age, worry, diminution of semen because of disease, emaciation, exertion, fasting, excessive indulgence with women, consumption, fear, suspicion, grief, witnessing of the faults in women, non-excitement of the female partner, absence of passionate determination and complete avoidance of sex acts.<sup>65</sup> One should preserve his own semen because its diminution leads to many diseases and even death.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>60</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Ci2.4#49, Vol. III, p. 103.

<sup>61</sup> *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, 1.14, Vol. 1, p. 108.

<sup>62</sup> *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, 1.15, Vol. 1, p. 122.

<sup>63</sup> *The Myths and Gods of India*, p. 77.

<sup>64</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Ci2.4#7, Vol. III, p. 96.

<sup>65</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Ci2.4#43, Vol. III, p. 102.

<sup>66</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Ni6#9, Vol. II, p. 82.

### *Diagnostic test*

The entire sugarcane plant is pervaded by its juice. Ghee is available in the whole of curd, and oil is available in all parts of the sesame seed. Similarly, semen pervades the entire body, which has the sensation of touch.<sup>67</sup>

One should examine a man's virility by his congenital physical characteristics. If his virility is certain, then he is eligible to take a girl. His vertebrae, knees, bones, shoulders, and neck should be well-built. The nape of his neck should be tough, as well as his torso, thighs and skin. He should have a smooth gait and voice. His feces should sink in water, his urine should be noisy and foamy. If he has these characteristics he is virile; if not, he is [a *paṇḍaka*].<sup>68</sup>

Even if the man is cleansed of his physical morbidities by the administration of *pañca karma* (five elimination therapies), his semen should be examined. And from its colour, the nature of the afflicting *doṣas* (if any) should be ascertained.<sup>69</sup>

### *Etiology*

*Popular beliefs attribute impotence to various causes – from congenital, physical, and psychological to magical.<sup>70</sup> Some even attributed it to past karma.<sup>71</sup> A legal*

<sup>67</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C12.2#46, Vol. III, p. 103.

<sup>68</sup> *Nāradaśmṛti*, 12.8-12.10, p. 380.

<sup>69</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C130#127, Vol. V, p. 161.

<sup>70</sup> Several such are preserved in the *Atharva Veda* (IV, 4; VI, 10 1) to give virility; VI, 138; VII, 113 to cause impotence) <http://www.ebooksread.com/authors-eng/t-w-rhys-thomas-william-rhys-davids/dialogues-of-the-buddha-iva/page-4-dialogues-of-the-buddha-iva.shtml> In the *Artharva Veda*, there are several charms concerning impotence. One example is VI, 138. "Charm For Depriving A Man Of His Virility": "As the best of the plants thou art reputed, O herb: turn this man for me to-day into a eunuch that wears his hair dressed! Turn him into a eunuch that wears his hair dressed, and into one that wears a hood! Then Indra with a pair of stones shall break his testicles both! O eunuch, into a eunuch thee I have turned; O castrate, into a castrate thee I have turned; O weakling, into a weakling thee I have turned! A hood upon his head, and a hair-net do we place. The two canals, fashioned by the gods, in which man's power rests, in thy testicles... I break them with a club. As women break reeds for a mattress with a stone, thus do I break thy member."

<sup>71</sup> "The inclusion of past actions (*karman*, *kamma*) as a category of medical etiology is clearly quite old and deserves special attention. The notion that past actions contribute to an individual's overall physical state is... in conflict with the general empirico-rational physiology of Indian medicine. The *Caraka Saṃhitā* mentions that a certain *Bhadrakāpya* was the principal proponent of the theory, but the context in which the passage occurs demonstrates that it was by no means universally followed." *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India*, p. 30-31.

"The magical medicine of the Veda never completely disappeared in India. It survived in classical Āyurvedic medicine principally in the treatment of ailments that have Vedic parallels, in the

*treatise holds that “[Paṇḍakas] are known by experts in the science to be of fourteen different kinds, some curable, some not... They are: one who is impotent from birth, one who has been castrated, ‘one who is capable of sexual intercourse fortnightly’, one whose impotence is the result of the curse of his teacher or illness or anger of the gods, one who is impotent except when jealous [watching others in intercourse], one who is enjoyed by other men, one who ejaculates prematurely, one who engages in oral intercourse, one who cannot ejaculate, one who is sterile, one who is shy, and one who is virile with others than his wife.”<sup>72</sup>*

*In this exposition, however, only paṇḍaka types whose impotence is due to seminal absence or deficiency are dealt with.*

### ***General signs and symptoms of impotency***

Even though a man is constantly desirous of sexual intercourse with the partner who is cooperative, he – because of the looseness (absence of erection) of the phallus – becomes incapable of performing the sexual act. Even if he rarely attempts a sexual act, he gets afflicted with shortness of breath as well as perspiration in the body, and gets frustrated in his determined efforts. His phallus becomes loose (because of the lack of erection), and he does not ejaculate any semen.<sup>73</sup> *He is called a paṇḍaka.*

### **Treatments**

The therapy which creates potential for getting offspring for the maintenance of the continuity of the lineage; which causes instantaneous sexual excitation, to such a degree that one is capable of indulging in sexual acts with women without interruption, like a strong horse, and is exceedingly loved by women; which nourishes the tissue elements; by which even in old age one does not get seminal debility; which enables one to remain firm like a big tree with innumerable branches, and to earn respect from people by virtue of having procreated several children; which is conducive to enjoying happiness and eternity in this world

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cures for childhood diseases, and in remedies involving the elimination of malevolent entities... Aspects of magico-religious medicine were practiced alongside the techniques of the more empirico-rational tradition of Āyurveda...” *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India*, p. 19-20.

<sup>72</sup> *Nāradaśmṛti*, 12.11-13, p. 381.

<sup>73</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C130#155-157, Vol. V, p. 169.

and beyond in view of one's offspring; and which brings about longevity, beauty, strength and nourishment – is known as aphrodisiac therapy.<sup>74</sup>

*The general principle is this:* "... all *dhātu* (elements) get increased by the use of substances with similar properties and reduced by the use of those having opposite properties. Therefore, among other *dhātu* of the body, the muscle gets increased by the administration of meat, blood by blood, adipose tissue by fat, muscle-fat by muscle-fat, bone by cartilage, bone marrow by bone marrow, semen by semen<sup>75</sup> and fetus by immature fetus (egg).<sup>76</sup>

If a particular *dhātu* is to be increased and the homologous dietary articles cannot be taken because of non-availability or, though available, they cannot be used because of unsuitability, aversion or any other cause, then food preparations of different nature but having the predominance of the attributes of the *dhātu* to be promoted should be used. *In particular*, when there is a deficiency of semen, with a view to promoting it, milk, ghee and other substances known to be sweet, unctuous and cold should be administered.<sup>77</sup>

The physician should collect, *among other things*, the semen of sparrows, swans, cocks, peacocks, tortoises and crocodiles [*for use as aphrodisiacs*]... By the administration of these eatables, a man becomes fully potent, and with strongly erect genital organ enjoys optimal sexual delight in women with stallion vigour.<sup>78</sup>

A person should always seek to take aphrodisiacs because he can earn *dharma*, wealth, love and fame through this therapy alone. A person gets these benefits through his progeny and the aphrodisiac therapy enables him to procreate sons.<sup>79</sup>

*In addition to the general kind of impotence, there are also special types of paṇḍaka:*

### *Napūṃsakapaṇḍaka*

Being affected with *vāyu* and *agni* (*pitta*) [*in the mother's womb*], if the testicles of the fetus get destroyed, then there is eviration [*loss or deprivation of masculine qualities with assumption of feminine characteristics*] in the offspring.<sup>80</sup> *This*

<sup>74</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Ci1.1#9-13, Vol. III, p. 8-9.

<sup>75</sup> This adds weight to the explanation for *āsittapaṇḍaka's* semen ingestion.

<sup>76</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Śā6#10, Vol. II, p. 433.

<sup>77</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Śā6#11, Vol. II, p. 434.

<sup>78</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Ci2.2#10-13, Vol. III, p. 83-84.

<sup>79</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Ci2.1#3-4, Vol. III, p. 71.

<sup>80</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Śā#2.21, Vol. II, p. 356.

condition is called *napuṃsakapaṇḍaka*: one who is paṇḍaka because of lack of sex organs.

### ***opakkamikapaṇḍaka***

A man whose genitalia have been destroyed with violence (*upakkama*) lose his seminal function – similar to a *napuṃsakapaṇḍaka*. He is called *opakkamikapaṇḍaka*: one who became paṇḍaka because of an assault.<sup>81</sup>

Both *napuṃsakapaṇḍaka* and *opakkamikapaṇḍaka* are incurable.

Other manifestations of seminal deficiency also have organic causes, but show no physical signs. Only behavioral patterns due to functional impotence are found in such cases, as a result of congenital deficiency of semen.

### ***usūyapaṇḍaka***

Reduced passion along with jealousy of the parents' cohabitation produces mixoscopia [*voyeurism*] in the offspring.<sup>82</sup> [Such a] man who cannot copulate with a woman without previously seeing the sexual intercourse of another couple is called *īrṣaka*,<sup>83</sup> also known as *usūyapaṇḍaka* [*jealous*].

The semen is ejaculated from the body because of eight factors, namely, excitement, passionate desire, fluidity, sliminess, heaviness, atomicity, the tendency to flow out, and the force of *vāyu*.<sup>84</sup> *If the father lacks excitement in love making, the son is affected by the low quality of his seminal discharge.* Because [the power to perform a sex act with a woman] is dependent upon excitement and the latter is dependent upon the strength of the body and the mind,<sup>85</sup> *an usūyapaṇḍaka son needs to witness sexual intercourse of another couple to increase his exhilaration, which is the base of potency.*

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<sup>81</sup> Castrated eunuchs would naturally belong in this category. However, upon Professor Gombrich's suggestion that this category can also include other kinds of assaults (personal communication), the author came to think that it can also include those whose genitalia have been severed by others – for example, a jealous wife.

<sup>82</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Śā2#20, Vol. II, p. 356.

<sup>83</sup> *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, 3.2, Vol. 2A, p. 131.

<sup>84</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C12.4#48, Vol. III, p. 103.

<sup>85</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C12.4#44-45, Vol. III, p. 102.

### *āsittapaṇḍaka*

A child born of scanty paternal sperm becomes an *asekya* and feels no sexual desire (erection) without previously (sucking the genitals and) drinking the semen of another man.<sup>86</sup> *He is known as āsittapaṇḍaka and ingests semen to compensate for his own inadequacy.*<sup>87</sup> The semen-carrying ducts of an *asekya* are expanded by the drinking of the semen as above described, which helps the erection of his reproductive organ.<sup>88</sup>

*Because their organic conditions are congenital, the usūyapaṇḍaka and āsittapaṇḍaka are considered incurable.*<sup>89</sup>

### *pakkhapaṇḍaka*

Semen is spoken of not only as *bīja* (the seed) and *vīrya* (the male essence) but also *soma* (the offering) and *candra* (the moon).<sup>90</sup> Another common name of semen, *śukra*, also means bright, resplendent. From the same Vedic root derived *śukla-pakṣa*, bright fortnight of the moon.<sup>91</sup>

*These etymological connections reveal the nature of yet another particular type of impotence: those who experience temporary impotence due to sexual indulgence like the waning fortnight of the moon. Sexual indulgence is one important cause of semen diminution.*<sup>92</sup>

*Temporary impotence is related to the mythological story narrated by the gods to the sages about the habitual sexual indulgence of Candra (the Moon). The Moon had twenty-seven wives (corresponding to the twenty-seven stations of the moon)*

<sup>86</sup> *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, 3.2.37, Vol. 2A, p. 131.

<sup>87</sup> Zwillling came to this very conclusion about this type of *paṇḍaka* in “The First Medicalization” p. 594. According to Perera, “Buddhaghosa suggests that this deviant derives sexual satisfaction only by submitting to oral intercourse. This practice may have a connection with a belief in the absorption of virile powers, the matter being completely psychological, as implied even by Buddhaghosa” (*Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 148). A comparable practice has been documented among some Papua New Guinean peoples such as the Sambia and the Etoro who believe that young boys can gain virility by ingesting the semen of adult tribe members.

<sup>88</sup> *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, 3.2.44-45, Vol. 2A, p. 132.

<sup>89</sup> *Nāradaśmṛti* 12:15 permits the wives of these two types to “leave their husbands as if they were outcastes.” (p. 382).

<sup>90</sup> *The Myths and Gods of India*, p. 226.

<sup>91</sup> *Sukka* in Pāli as in *sukavissatthi*. *Sukkapakkha* means bright fortnight of the moon – synonymous with *junhapaṅkha*, which appears in Buddhaghosa’s description of *pakkhapaṇḍaka*.

<sup>92</sup> For example, Ci2.4#43, Vol. III, p. 102.

who were all daughters of Dakṣa Prajāpati. Dakṣa felt that the Moon was paying too much attention to one of his daughters, thereby neglecting the rest. The Moon, being exceedingly attached to Rohiṇī (the star Aldebaran), did not care for his health. He became emaciated due to depletion of unctuousness. He was therefore not able to satisfy the sexual urge of the rest of the daughters of Dakṣa. Therefore, Dakṣa's anger came out of his mouth in the form of breath and took a physical form.<sup>93</sup> Dakṣa cursed the Moon to die a withering death. But his wives intervened, and so the death became periodic. [Dakṣa] cursed him, saying: "Since you failed in your promise, you shall be seized by consumption, and your seed shall be wasted. You will recover during the second fortnight of each month, that consumption may again devour you during the next fifteen days." Having thus received a curse and a boon, [the Moon] shines in the sky, increasing and decreasing alternately.<sup>94</sup>

*The waxing and waning fortnights of the Moon thereafter signify temporary impotence due to sexual indulgence. Therefore a person who experiences this kind of impotence is called pakkhapāṇḍaka or "fortnight paṇḍaka".*

[Phthisis] is caused by the deficiency of śukra (semen) and ojas (vital essence) due to overindulgence in sex, etc.<sup>95</sup> If a person because of excessive mental excitement indulges in sexual intercourse in excess, his semen gets diminished soon, and he gets emaciated. He succumbs to serious diseases, even death.<sup>96</sup>

*However, unlike the previous four special types of paṇḍakas, this type can be cured. As digested food is converted into semen in one month,<sup>97</sup> a pakkhapāṇḍaka treated with appropriate aphrodisiac treatments will replenish his semen in an even shorter period. His wife will not have to wait one month to find her husband has regained his virility and will have no reason to leave him.<sup>98</sup>*

In [pakkhapāṇḍakas], [vitiated] vāyu afflicts the pelvic region. To such patients, recipes which are alleviators of vāyu, promoters of nourishment and aphrodisiacs are to be administered.<sup>99</sup> *They will benefit from aphrodisiacs made of the*

<sup>93</sup> Caraka Saṃhitā, Ci8#3-12, Vol. III, p. 365. The myth is also mentioned in Suśruta Saṃhitā 6.41, Vol. 3, p. 237.

<sup>94</sup> Padma Purāṇa, Sarga khaṇḍa, and Mahābhārata, Śalya parvan, ch.36 [159]; see also Bhāgavata Purāṇa 6.7.23-24). Summarized in *The Myths and Gods of India*, p. 101.

<sup>95</sup> Caraka Saṃhitā, Ci11, Vol. III, p. 458.

<sup>96</sup> Caraka Saṃhitā, Ci30#186, Vol. V, p. 176.

<sup>97</sup> Suśruta Saṃhitā, 1.14, Vol. 1, p. 109.

<sup>98</sup> Nāradaśmṛti 12:14 allows the wife of pakkhapāṇḍaka to leave him if his condition doesn't improve in one month. (p. 381).

<sup>99</sup> Caraka Saṃhitā, Ci11#78, Vol. III, p. 477.

cream of curd which is like the autumn moon and free from impurities.<sup>100</sup> They can again become (sexually) like a bull if they use the aphrodisiac formula with *ṣaṣṭika* rice, which is white like moon-rays.<sup>101</sup>

However, if the patient suffering from phthisis is not given appropriate treatment in time, then this may lead to tuberculosis,<sup>102</sup> which occurred in the Moon, the King of stars, due to excessive sexual indulgence.<sup>103</sup>

*End of semen theory and organic paṇḍaka conditions.*

### Rain as celestial semen

With the recognition of the relationship between *paṇḍakas* and semen in mind, the etymology of *vassakamma* (turning *paṇḍaka* into man = causing virility) and *vossakamma* (turning man into *paṇḍaka* = causing impotence) becomes clearer.

Rev. R. Morris discussed the etymology of these words in the *Journal of the Pali Text Society*:<sup>104</sup> “Vassa-kamma (‘causing virility’). Here vassa = Sk. *varṣa* (from root *vṛṣ*). Cf. Sk. *varṣadhara*, and Pāli *vassavara*, ‘a eunuch.’ In *vossakamma*, ‘making a man a eunuch,’ *vossa* = *paṇḍaka*, from *vy-avassa* (= *vy-assa*), from *aṛṣa*, with *vi-ava* (from the root *ṛṣ*).”

Perera also suggests that *vassakamma* is from the root *vṛṣ* (to wet or to rain), while *vossakamma* is probably from a root implying ‘drying up’.<sup>105</sup>

It is clear that semen is associated with rain, as the first fertilizes human beings and the latter all life on earth. *Vṛṣṭi* (rain) and *vṛṣan* (a powerful, virile, or lustful man, or a bull) are also derived from the same root.<sup>106</sup>

The relationship between semen and rain does not stop at the etymological and metaphorical level, but extends to the soteriological one. According to the early Upaniṣads, both are connected pathways through which the ancestors are reborn on earth after a sojourn in the moon. In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, for example, it is said that “... and then they return [from the moon] by the same path they went – first to space, ... to the wind. After the wind has formed, it turns into smoke; ...into thundercloud; ...into rain-cloud; and after a rain-cloud

<sup>100</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C12.2#24-26, Vol. III, p. 86.

<sup>101</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C12.2#27, Vol. III, p. 87.

<sup>102</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C111#95, Vol. III, p. 481.

<sup>103</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, N18#12, Vol. II, p. 104.

<sup>104</sup> *Journal of the Pali Text Society*, 1889, p. 208.

<sup>105</sup> *Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 113.

<sup>106</sup> *Women, Androgynes and Other Mythical Beasts*, p. 20.

has formed, it rains down. On earth they spring up as rice and barley, plants and trees, sesame and beans, from which it is extremely difficult to get out. When someone eats that food and deposits the semen, from him one comes into being again.”<sup>107</sup>

### Differential diagnosis: Who is and is not *paṇḍaka*?

Because semen was believed to be intimately linked with virility, almost all men who experience impotence with women, including those who use traditional aphrodisiacs, must have been considered as suffering absence or deficiency of semen – therefore, *paṇḍakas*.

The only kinds of impotence not considered in the *Caraka Saṃhitā* to be related to semen are those with non-erectile phallus due to external causes<sup>108</sup> such as taking meals irregularly; sexual intercourse in parts other than the vagina; sexual intercourse with quadruped animals; emaciation because of disease; injury to the phallus by weapons, teeth, nails, beating by a stick or compression; suppression of the urge to ejaculate during intercourse, etc.<sup>109</sup> Men whose impotence is caused by these factors were probably not considered *paṇḍakas*.

Although the medical treatise holds that semen generally decreases with age, it also cites an exception “if the person is *śukra-sāra* (having the excellence of semen) and if he habitually takes aphrodisiac drugs.”<sup>110</sup> Therefore, older men are not necessarily considered *paṇḍakas*.

Furthermore, men who take a passive role in an act of sodomy, *kumbhika*, and those who sodomize them may not be considered *paṇḍakas* in the medical treatise, because such behaviours are not considered congenital or caused by seminal deficiency and the behaviours are not seen as its compensation. Zwilling states that “[t]he preference for passive anal intercourse, unlike fellatio, is seen as an acquired behavior and not as congenital; anal intercourse is practiced, according to the *Suśruta* (3.2.39), by the ‘unchaste and others [*abrahmacāryādi*] who treat their own anus as a man does women.”<sup>111</sup>

<sup>107</sup> *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5.10.3-6, *The Early Upaniṣads*, p. 237. Similarly in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 6.2.15-16, p. 149.

<sup>108</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C130#153-155, Vol. V, p.169.

<sup>109</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C130#162-168, Vol. V, p.171-172.

<sup>110</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Vol. V, p.175.

<sup>111</sup> “The First Medicalization”, p. 596.

It now becomes less certain which *paṇḍaka* type the original offender was, *napuṃsakapaṇḍaka* or perhaps *āsittapaṇḍaka*? And what was meant by the word *dūseti*? Defiling by oral or anal intercourse?

Regardless of whichever *paṇḍaka* type it was, *dūseti* in this context now seems more likely to refer to oral intercourse. Perera states, "... with regard to oral practices... it has to be stated that in ancient India such practices have been considered to be the specialty of the [*paṇḍaka*], and such other deviants."<sup>112</sup>

Zwilling provides additional information: "Anal intercourse does not appear as prominently in Sanskrit sources as fellatio; the practice is barely touched on in the *Kāmasūtra* and the other extant treatises on erotics, and then only in a heterosexual context. Historically, this practice is known to have aroused strong negative feelings among the Indians, perhaps because of the Hindu horror of the pollution attached to defecation, as well as the belief in the general ritual impurity of all orifices below the navel."<sup>113</sup>

#### Four considerations for comprehensive ban

The Buddha's ban on all *paṇḍakas*, based on the misconduct of one bad apple, is broad-sweeping, suggesting that the Buddha had other considerations in mind.

The first possible reason is administrative: whether the existence of *paṇḍakas* would disrupt the Sangha. This is widely believed to be the reason behind the Buddha's ban. However, the Buddha could simply expel the offending *paṇḍakas* and lay down rules to prevent the repetition of the specific misconduct in the future, as he had done with various misdemeanours recorded in the *Vinaya*. The fact that he acted otherwise suggests that he had other reasons.

#### Semen as spiritual energy

The second possible consideration is more fundamental. Although semen deficiency causes impotence and lack of progeny was of grave concern in the lay life, that did not apply to monks. So why should this shortcoming of *paṇḍakas* preclude them from ordination?

One possibility is that the seminal deficiency may have been thought to cause effeminacy and/or homosexual desire, but if those were the concern, it would be much easier to interpret the Buddha's ban along those lines. Instead, we have

<sup>112</sup> *Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 147.

<sup>113</sup> "The First Medicalization", p. 596.

the five *paṅḍaka* types, which, as we have seen, are not characterized by gender expression or sexual desire.

In India, a land, as Perera put it, of the “sharpest contrasts” where “sensuality and asceticism existed side by side,”<sup>114</sup> it was the Buddha who proposed the “Middle Way” between these two extremes, although his soteriological method shared characteristics with other religious movements of the time – in particular, what Perera calls “the mastery of instinct and impulses and the channeling of their energies for spiritual purposes.”<sup>115</sup>

We have seen earlier in the medical treatises how semen was thought to be the source of virile energy. In *A Bull of a Man*, Powers puts this in a spiritual context: “In ancient India, semen was associated with the energy of life, and men who recklessly shed their seed were said to become physically diminished. By contrast, the heroic ascetic who retains his seed is the most manly and virile of men and enjoys robust health, tremendous physical energy, and mental alertness, and he also develops supernatural powers (*siddhi*). Those who practice celibacy and other acts of austerity accumulate an energy called *tapas*, which literally means ‘heat.’ Sages who remain chaste for long periods and who combine this with advanced levels of meditation can even challenge the gods in terms of power and wisdom.”<sup>116</sup>

The same is held in Yoga, where it is said that “‘ambrosia’ is the name given to sexual energy. Semen is of the same substance as the mind. By sublimating his seed, the yogi acquires prodigious mental powers.”<sup>117</sup>

This idea seems echoed in the key *Abhidhamma* passage above on the impossibility of an *arahant*’s seminal discharge. Towards the end, the interlocutor cites in his support the Buddha’s teachings in the *Vinaya* and *Aṅguttara Nikāya* that constantly mindful monks do not emit semen. The passage reads: “Bhikkhus! Those bhikkhus who are but average men, yet are proficient in virtue and are mindful and reflective, can go to sleep without seminal discharge. Those Rishis who are outsiders, yet are devoid of passion in matters of sense, also have no seminal discharge. That an *arahant* should have seminal discharge is anomalous and unnatural.”<sup>118</sup>

In this line of thought, an ideal monk must possess sexual potency and be able to triumph over it. *Paṅḍakas*, on the other hand, are considered sexually

<sup>114</sup>*Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 80.

<sup>115</sup>*Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. viii.

<sup>116</sup>*A Bull of a Man*, p. 79.

<sup>117</sup>*The Myths and Gods of India*, p. 98.

<sup>118</sup>Translation slightly adapted from *Points of Controversy*, p. 114.

defective, depraved and, therefore, deviant. Powers puts it succinctly, “...while monks and nuns are required to maintain total sexual abstinence they must also have no sexual impairments.”<sup>119</sup>

Moreover, another name for semen is *vīryā* (Pāli *virīya*)<sup>120</sup> with the primary meaning of manliness, valor, strength, power, heroism, virility. As *virīya* is also one of the seven factors of enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*), it is no surprise that some commentators would consider *paṇḍakas* who lack semen as incapable of nirvana.<sup>121</sup>

Buddhaghosa holds that *paṇḍakas* – along with *ubhatobyāñjanakas* and those with fixed wrong views – are “those who are described as ‘hindered by defilement’<sup>122</sup> and cannot develop any meditation subject at all.”<sup>123 124</sup>

In the *Milindapañho*, *paṇḍakas* are among sixteen types of individuals to whom “there is no attainment of insight... even though they regulate their life aright.”<sup>125</sup>

Perera summarizes, “The *brahmacariya* or the religious life of the *pabbajita*, as recognized in Buddhism, was considered a life of strenuous exertion. It is a psycho-physical discipline demanding perfect alertness of body and mind.<sup>126</sup> ... It may also be said that a conscious effort had been made in the *Sāsana* to make the *Bhikkhu Sangha* a community of normal human beings inheriting no physical and psychological problems which were likely to hinder spiritual progress.”<sup>127</sup>

<sup>119</sup> *A Bull of a Man*, p. 84.

<sup>120</sup> Monier Williams (1899), entry for “*Vīrya*,” defines *vīrya* in part as: “manliness, valour, strength, power, energy, RV [ Rig Veda ] &c. &c.; heroism, heroic deed, ibid.; manly vigour, virility, semen virile, MBh. [ Mahabharata ]; Kāv.&c; ...” *Vīryāvṛiddhikāra*, mfu. causing an increase of virile energy; n. an aphrodisiac. *Vīryāhāni*, f. loss of vigour or virile energy, impotence.

<sup>121</sup> I have not tried to analyze the meaning of *paṇḍikā*, the female *paṇḍaka*, who are also barred from ordination. By the same logic, a *paṇḍikā*, is most likely a biological female who lacks the female equivalent of semen (the female hormones estrogen/progesterone in modern terms.) However, unlike in the case of men, it is not clear what sexual fluid was thought by ancient Indians to be the essence of the female sex. Milk seems to be the dominant fluid of female sexuality in ancient India, but according to Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, “the Vedas begin to suggest that the woman has seed, just as the man does; significantly, this fluid is called ‘virile milk’ (*vr̥ṣṇyam payas*, more literally ‘bull-like’ or ‘seed-like’ milk): ‘The wife embraces her husband. Both of them shed the virile milk. Giving forth, she milks (his) juice [*rasa*]’ (RV 1.1-5.2bc)”, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, p. 21.

<sup>122</sup> *Vibh* 341.

<sup>123</sup> *Vism* 177.

<sup>124</sup> *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, p. 417.

<sup>125</sup> *Milindapañho* 310. *The Questions of King Milinda*, Part 2, p. 177.

<sup>126</sup> *Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 77.

<sup>127</sup> *Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 160.

In regards to *paṇḍakas* and hermaphrodites, Perera adds, “Taking the group as a whole, one feels that this has been done to preserve the image of the *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī*, and also confine the Order to physically and psychologically normal individuals.”

### The equal-minded Buddha

However, there are reasons to believe that the Buddha did not personally share the stereotypical view of *paṇḍakas* as sexual deviants, nor buy the seminal energy theory. Evidently he did not expel the monk who cut off his penis out of frustration<sup>128</sup> even though such irreversible injury must have been considered an incurable form of impotence.<sup>129</sup>

A stronger argument against the seminal energy theory would be from the *Vāsetṭha Sutta* (M.98), where the Buddha proclaimed human unity and rejected the differences among humans based on various traits. He went on to state that the only thing that differentiates people is conduct. This sutta demonstrates the Buddha’s strong belief in human equality – among males, females, *ubhatobyañjanakas* and *paṇḍakas*.

“... with humans no differences of birth make a distinctive mark in them; nor in the hair nor in the head,... nor in the buttocks or the breast, nor in the genitals or ways of mating,<sup>130</sup>... nor in their color or in voice. Here birth makes no distinctive mark as with the other kinds of birth. In human bodies in themselves, nothing distinctive can be found. Distinctions among human beings are purely verbal designation.”<sup>131</sup>

Indeed the *Suttanta-piṭaka* as a whole is virtually silent about *paṇḍakas*. The Buddha himself never made any characterization of them. It is only in the later strata of the *Tipiṭaka* and the Commentaries that they are portrayed as psychological unstable, a spiritual lost cause, and unable to attain enlightenment – probably

<sup>128</sup> Vin. II, 110.

<sup>129</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C130#188.

<sup>130</sup> *na sambādhe na methune*.

<sup>131</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi and Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli’s translation, *The Middle Length Discourse of the Buddha*, Wisdom Publication, 1995.

due to the belief in the seminal energy theory. On the other hand, the commentators do not seem to be too concerned about how *paṇḍaka* ordination would affect the Order as a whole.

But if the Buddha did not believe that *paṇḍakas* were a spiritual lost cause, what other reasons were there to ban them? In other words, if the *paṇḍakas* are not at disadvantage *dharma*-wise, why are they banned *Vinaya*-wise?

### A Bull of a Man

While the previous consideration concerns the inner ability of a *paṇḍaka* to become the ideal monk, the third possible consideration relates to whether their outer physique allows them to perform and look the part. This is based on a powerful thesis proposed in John Powers' book *A Bull of a Man* pertaining to the "pervasive concern with bodies— particularly male bodies" in Indian Buddhist literature, where "the Buddha's is held up as the highest development of the male physique."<sup>132</sup>

Powers points out: "Status is a prevalent concern in Indian Buddhist literature. It relates to possession of a perfect body that proclaims Sakyamuni's spiritual attainments and substantiates his claim to Buddhahood as well as his social position...The Buddha's perfect body is particularly important in these tropes, and it serves to persuade skeptics of his claims to ultimate authority. In a number of such stories, unconvinced Brahmins ... examine his body to determine whether he has the marks of a great man."<sup>133</sup>

It is also impossible to overlook how the Buddha is commonly portrayed as the epitome of manliness and virility, with epithets such as "bull of a man," "fearless lion," "lion-hearted man," "savage elephant," and "stallion."<sup>134</sup> These are – except the lion, which has its own symbolism – the very animals cited repeatedly as symbols of male virility and sexual prowess in the medical treatises.<sup>135</sup>

This unmistakable image of supreme masculinity is also expected of the Buddha's followers. Powers detects: "As we saw with the Buddha, the bodies of Buddhist monks are viewed as public spaces on which their virtues are displayed.

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<sup>132</sup> *A Bull of a Man*, p. 9.

<sup>133</sup> *A Bull of a Man*, p. 22.

<sup>134</sup> *A Bull of a Man*, p. 26.

<sup>135</sup> Bull: Ci2.1#40-41, Ci2.1#50-51, Ci2.2#24-27, Ci2.3#20-25, Ci2.4#7; Stallion: Ci1.1#9-12, Ci2.1#24-32, Ci2.1#38-41, Ci2.2#10-13, Ci2.2#28-30, Ci2.4#51; Elephant: Ci1.3#15-23, Ci2.2#28-29, Ci2.4#33-35.

Physical beauty, good health, an athletic frame, and sexual virility are all associated with good conduct, practice of morality, and attainment of advanced meditative states.”<sup>136</sup>

He describes how the notion that Buddhist monks exhibit exemplary manly toughness is repeated throughout the Canon, showing that “[t]hey endure hardships of the ascetic lifestyle that would defeat ordinary men, live in the wilderness among fearsome beasts in complete equanimity, and subsist on meager alms food and the bare necessities of life.”<sup>137</sup>

The *Caraka Saṃhitā* describes the “embryology” of the sexes: “The characteristic features which determine its male or female sex are either of spiritual or material nature. Sex difference is caused by the dominance of one or the other of these factors. For example, weakness, timidity, lack of wisdom, ignorance, unsteadiness, heaviness of lower limbs, intolerance, slackness, softness, presence of the uterus and ovary and other characteristic features determine the female sex; opposite traits determine the male sex and in a [*napuṃsaka*] both these traits are equally present.”<sup>138</sup>

The sexual prejudice is unmistakable, as Powers writes: “There is a clear bias in favor of male bodies, which are assumed to be stronger and more conducive to development of self-control.”<sup>139</sup> Therefore in *Atthasālinī*, Buddhaghosa claims, ‘of these two [sexes], the masculine sex is superior, the feminine is inferior. Therefore the latter may be brought about by weak morality.’”<sup>140</sup>

Although medical treatises suggest that the cause of *paṇḍaka* conditions are organic, Buddhaghosa’s comment is clearly a remnant of another set of beliefs that women’s “inferior” physical and physiological characteristics are brought about by bad karma in previous lives – the same reason that causes birth as a *paṇḍaka* in the *Mahānārada-kassapa Jātaka* and *Isidāsī Therī Gāthā*.

*Paṇḍakas* were, therefore, seen as antipodal to ideal monks and must have caused doubts about their suitability for monkhood. Powers points out, “The Buddha indicated on several occasions that he only wished to admit exceptionally gifted men and women to his order.”<sup>141</sup>

<sup>136</sup> *A Bull of a Man*, p. 91.

<sup>137</sup> *A Bull of a Man*, p. 102.

<sup>138</sup> *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Sā4#14, Vol. II, p. 394.

<sup>139</sup> *A Bull of a Man*, p. 125.

<sup>140</sup> *Atthasālinī* p. 322-323, as quoted in *A Bull of a Man*, p. 125.

<sup>141</sup> *A Bull of a Man*, p. 85.

However, Powers recognizes that external appearance by itself does not provide a strong basis for the Buddha's comprehensive ban. Rather, there is another consideration that it feeds into and helps tip the balance against *paṇḍakas* in the Buddha's mind.

### Guilty by public opinion

That consideration is a familiar one. Many *Vinaya* rules were laid down by the Buddha as a result of public opinion.<sup>142</sup> The most well-known example is the observation of the annual rains retreat. Among the ten reasons repeatedly cited for the promulgation of *Vinaya* rules, two are directly linked to winning public confidence.<sup>143</sup>

In addition to the *paṇḍaka*, full ordination is also denied to, among others, those who had been punished by scourging or branding, whose hands, feet, ears, nose, fingers, thumbs or Achilles tendons have been cut off, humpbacks, dwarves, those with goiters, those who had been branded [slaves], those with elephantiasis, those afflicted with serious illness, one-eyed persons, persons with crooked limbs, lame persons, those paralyzed on one side, cripples, persons weak from age, the blind, the deaf, etc.<sup>144</sup> These prohibitions are, undoubtedly, in response to the cultural prejudices of the time.<sup>145</sup>

Powers points out: "If the Sangha were to admit the crippled and lame—or, like sexual deviants, people with moral deficiencies—laypeople would regard

<sup>142</sup> An excellent study on the social reasons for the promulgation of *Vinaya* rules can be found in Bhikkhu Giac Hanh's "A Critical Study of the Social Dimension of the Causes and Conditions that influenced the Origin of the Buddhist Vinaya", available online at <http://www.buddhanet.net/buddhas/ebud/ghvin/ghvino1.htm>.

<sup>143</sup> I follow Bhikkhu Giac Hanh's translation: 1) Well being of the Saṅgha (*saṅghasutthutāya*) 2) Convenience of the Saṅgha (*saṅghaphāsutāya*) 3) Restraint of evil-minded individuals (*dummaṅkūnaṃ puggalānaṃ niggahāya*). 4) For the comfort of well-behaved monks (*pesalānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ phāsuvihārāya*) 5) For the restraint of influxes that are here and now (*ditṭhadhammikānaṃ āsavānaṃ samvarāya*) 6) For the destruction of influxes in the next life (*samparāyikānaṃ āsavānaṃ paṭighātāya*) 7) For developing confidence in those who yet have no confidence (*appasannānaṃ pasādāya*) 8) For the increase of confidence of those who are already having confidence (*pasannānaṃ bhiyyobhāvāya*) 9) For the firm establishment of the good doctrine (*saddhammatṭhitiyā*) 10) To enhance discipline (*vinayānuggahāya*).

<sup>144</sup> Vin I, 91.

<sup>145</sup> Some of them are also legally disinherited, as seen above. (*Manu's Code of Law* 9.201, p. 200)

them as a group of social outcasts, rather than as an admirable order of monks deserving of support.”<sup>146</sup>

After considering these four considerations, it seems that this last consideration most likely provided the strongest basis for the ban.

It seems likely that in the beginning, the Buddha, with his belief in human equality, had not thought anything about allowing *paṇḍaka* ordination, despite doubts in some quarters about their spiritual capacity and appropriate physique for ideal monks as well as the negative perception and discrimination against them in the general population.

With all these factors aligned against them, the offending *paṇḍaka*'s scandalous misconduct only served to support the pre-existing public stereotype of all *paṇḍakas*. With this final straw, the Buddha was left with no choice but barring all *paṇḍakas* in order to safeguard the reputation of the Order, otherwise it would appear to be harboring social miscreants and other undesirable types.<sup>147</sup> In other words, despite his belief in people's equal capacity to achieve enlightenment, the Buddha had to make a decision to suit the context of the time.

Powers bluntly says that the Buddhist Order was “one among a number of rival groups that is constantly scrutinized by a wary public that regards some self-styled ascetics as charlatans seeking a free meal. The laity polices the conduct of those who seek alms from them to ensure that their gifts go to worthy recipients and thus yield maximum merit.”<sup>148</sup>

### Different times, different prejudices

Can a *kathoey* be ordained? The answer is easy if the transgender in question already has had a sex reassignment surgery. According to the *Vinaya* sex change story, it would appear that she would be eligible to join the Bhikkhunī order. This is no consolation, however, because the Thai Sangha resists the re-establishment of the Bhikkhunī Order, insisting that it is against the *Vinaya* due to discontinuity of the lineage. (This strict adherence to the *Vinaya*, however, does not stop

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<sup>146</sup> *A Bull of a Man*, p. 85-86.

<sup>147</sup> Although *paṇḍaka* does not refer to gays, their exclusion from ordination finds a parallel in the now defunct ban against homosexuals serving in the US military. The ban was probably based on similar objections 1) whether homosexuals make good soldiers 2) whether their existence causes organizational problems (morale/order/etc.) and 3) whether their existence affects the reputation of the organization.

<sup>148</sup> *A Bull of a Man*, p. 109.

many Thai monks from adopting practices which would be frowned upon by the Buddha, such as having fat bank accounts and competing for the feudal rankings dished out by the Thai State.)

Unfortunately, that is the only more or less clear-cut case. Because the barring of *paṇḍakas* appears to be based on an ancient prejudice partly supported by an outdated medical theory, it is difficult to justify its enforcement today.

Firstly, it is not clear whether the *napuṃsakapaṇḍaka* archetype includes modern-day transgenders. Although the word seems originally to have referred to those with non-male anatomy, Zwilling suggested that it came to include those with non-male behaviour as well.<sup>149</sup>

But even if we accept Zwilling's theory and are to adhere to the ban as it was originally intended, the people to be denied ordination will not only be (pre-operation) transgenders, but also normative heterosexual males who experience impotence, including many Thai men who gleefully welcomed the recent arrival of a cheap generic Viagra on the market, and those who have used traditional aphrodisiacs or medicine for erectile dysfunction at one time or another.

In order to enforce the rule fairly, the Sangha will have to perform a potency test to verify whether a would-be monk is "male" according to the standard of the Buddha's time.

Secondly, given that semen deficiency was not thought to be related to sexual preference, it seems to leave out normative males who engage in same-sex sexual behaviors. In particular, the story of Kaṇḍaka and Mahaka suggests that the rule exempts men who have sex with men without identifying themselves as exclusively homosexual. (Think of the two protagonists in the film *Brokeback Mountain* and their equivalents in many traditional cultures.)

The bigger question, though, is whether this two-millennia-old rule still makes sense today. In practice, the Thai Sangha has allowed all male-born persons to or-

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<sup>149</sup>He writes, "While some of these 'impotent men' were otherwise normative males who happened to be sterile or impotent, there were other non-procreators who were associated with transgender behavior such as wearing long hair (perhaps in braids), which was already regarded as a characteristic marker of women, the adoption of women's ornaments, and dancing, which was an activity otherwise restricted solely to women. Such persons were considered to be 'neither male nor female' (*napuṃsaka*) in as much as they were biological males and hence not female, but in as much as they incorporated characteristics belonging to females, they could not, strictly speaking, be considered male. Needless to say, the social position of such radical transgressors of male gender norms was very low, and we find them linked together with other despised members of society like the slut (*pumścālī*) and the wastrel, and associated with sin (*pāpman*)."  
(*Queer Dharma*, p.46).

tain as long as they conform to male gender expression at the time of ordination and do not belong to other prohibited types.

Nevertheless, this unenforced rule against *paṇḍakas* still provides a basis for discrimination against Thai gays and *kathoey* in both religious and secular contexts. Interpreting the term *paṇḍaka* to fit their own homophobia and transphobia, many Thai Buddhists say that the presence of gay and *kathoey* monks is causing a crisis of faith. Gays and *kathoey*s also are regarded as not only psychologically but also morally defective, influenced by the negative attitude towards *paṇḍakas* in the Canon.

Such prejudice will become increasingly untenable, as science and modern medicine have come to recognize the diversity of human sexuality. On May 17, 1990 – a day now annually commemorated as the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia - the World Health Organization belatedly removed homosexuality from the International Classification of Diseases. Currently, there is also a long overdue discussion on removing transgenderism from its new version.

Even His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that, “If science proves some belief of Buddhism wrong, then Buddhism will have to change.”<sup>150</sup> There is now overwhelming evidence that gay men and transgenders are no different from the general population in term of physiology or psychology – apart from stresses caused by social rejection and difficulties imposed by legal discrimination.

Another counter trend is the emerging global consciousness of human rights, which can bring a new balance to the issue. In this 21st century, blatant discrimination against gays and transgenders by Buddhists can also be seen as a violation of human rights standards and shake the faith of those who have such a nature, as well as among those who believe in the principle of human equality and justice – which is in fact more in accordance with the *Vāsetṭha Sutta* and other Buddhist teachings on compassion.

In the end, the decision whether to scrap this obsolete unenforceable rule altogether will have to come from Buddhism itself. During his lifetime, the Buddha amended many rules to suit evolving situations. Before his demise, he also permitted the modification of minor rules, allowing the Order to adapt the *Vinaya* to social changes. Since the rule to ban *paṇḍakas* appears to be due to public opinion, it should logically evolve with public opinion. Unfortunately, Thai Bud-

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<sup>150</sup><http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/12/opinion/12dalai.html>

dhism, priding itself as true “Theravada”, is unlikely to take this approach, and as a result will increasingly be seen as outdated and irrelevant in modern society.

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