

*aṁśalá*

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Among the rules to be observed during the Dikṣā ceremony we read the following in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (3.1.2.21): *áthainam śálām prápādayati / sá dhenvái cānaḍúhaś ca nāśniyāt / dhenvanaḍuhaú vá idám sárvaṁ bibhṛtaḥ / ... tād dhaitát sarváśyam iva yó dhenvanaḍuháyor aśniyād ántagatir iva / ... tásmād dhenvanaḍuháyor nāśniyāt / tād u hovāca yājñavalkyaḥ—aśnāmy evāhám aṁśalám céd bhávaṭīti* "He (the Adhvaryu) then makes him enter the hall. Let him not eat (the flesh) of either the cow or the ox; for the cow and the ox doubtless support everything here on earth. . . . Hence, were one to eat (the flesh) of an ox or a cow, there would be, as it were, an eating of everything, or, as it were, a going on to the end (or, to destruction). . . . let him therefore not eat (the flesh) of the cow and the ox. Nevertheless Yājñavalkya said, 'I, for one, eat it, provided that it is tender'" [Eggeling].

Thus Eggeling translates *aṁśalá* as 'tender'. Similarly Jacobi<sup>1</sup>, *Encycl. of Religion and Ethics* s.v. Cow (Hindu), remarks: "The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, when prohibiting the eating of the flesh of the cow (iii 1,2,21) adds the interesting statement: Yājñavalkya said: "I, for one, eat it provided that it is tender"." The meaning 'tender' has been assigned to *aṁśalá* also by Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Aśoka*, p. 127, f.n. 8.

According to BR., however, *aṁśalá* means 'strong'. They derive the word from *áṁsa* 'shoulder' and refer to P. 5.2.98 where it is noticed that the suffix *-la* is added to *aṁsa* in the sense 'strong' [*vatsāṁsābhyāṁ kāmabale*]. The Sanskrit lexicons<sup>2</sup> also give the same meaning [*balavān, balī*] for *aṁśala*. In this meaning *aṁśala* is used also in the classical literature. Apte's dictionary cites Raghu 3.34 and 16.84, and Daśakumāra. 169 (ed. by Godbole and Parab, Bombay 1883)<sup>3</sup>.

Weber, *Ind. Stud.* 17.281 (1885), rendered *aṁśalá* as 'feist', while Oldenberg, *Die Weltanschauung der Brāhmaṇa-Texte*, p. 209, foot-note, used just the word 'gut' to render *aṁśalá*. Keith (*Cambridge History of India* I. 137—138) observes as follows in connection with the above passage from the *Śat.Br.* "... the great sage Yājñavalkya

<sup>1</sup> For this and the other references in this paper I am indebted to L. ALSDORF's *Beiträge zur Geschichte von Vegetarismus und Rinderverehrung in Indien* (1961), pp. 55/56.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Amara 2.6.44 *balavān māṁsalo 'śśalaḥ*. Hemacandra 448 *aṁsalo balī*. On Amara, the commentator says *aṁso balam asyāstīty aṁśalaḥ*.

<sup>3</sup> On the Daśakumāra. passage, the Comm. says *aṁśalapuruṣaḥ māṁśalapuruṣaḥ*.

ate meat of milch cows and oxen, provided that the flesh was *aṁsala*, a word of doubtful import, rendered either 'firm' or 'tender' by various authorities."

Thus Keith does not wish to commit himself to any particular meaning of the word *aṁsalá*. In the opinion of Alsdorf, op. cit. p. 56, foot-note 1, the meaning of *aṁsalá* is unknown. He observes that the different translations of the word, referred to above, are no more than mere guesses. He adds: "daß es 'zart', 'saftig', 'gut', 'feist' o. dgl. heiße, ist mir äußerst unwahrscheinlich; viel eher dürfte es irgend eine rituell relevante Eigenschaft bezeichnen, die das Rindfleisch nach Yājñavalkya auch während der Dikṣā unbedenklich macht . . .".

One would readily agree with the above observation of Alsdorf. It seems further possible to define the 'rituell relevante Eigenschaft' which, according to Alsdorf, is denoted by *aṁsalá*, and which, according to Yājñavalkya, renders beef unobjectionable even during the *dikṣā*. As will be shown below, the ritually relevant quality is only indirectly, and not directly, denoted by *aṁsalá*.

The word *aṁsalá* occurs once again in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (3.8.4.5-6)<sup>4</sup>. There in the context of the cutting off of the hind-part (*gudā*) of the sacrificial animal for the principal, the *sviṣṭakṛt*, and the *upayāja* offerings, we read: *sá ha tv évá paśúm ālabheta yá enam médham upanáyet/ yádi kṛśáh syád yád udaryàsyá médasah pariśiṣyéta tád gudé nyṛset/ . . . gudó vái paśúḥ / médo vái médhaḥ / tád enam médham úpanayati / yády u aṁsaló bhávati svayám upetá evá tárhi médham bhavati* "He alone, indeed, should slay the animal who may take to it sacrificial essence (*medha*). If it (i.e. the animal) be lean, let him put into the hind-part what may remain from the fat of the belly (after a portion for the *idā* offering has been cut off). . . . The hind-part, verily, is the animal, the fat, verily, is the sacrificial essence. (When he puts the remainder of the fat from the belly into the hind-part of the lean animal), he carries in this way the sacrificial essence to it (i.e. to the animal). If, however, it (i.e. the animal) be *aṁsalá*, then it has itself approached the sacrificial essence".

The context in which the word *aṁsalá* occurs in the above passage leaves no room for doubt with regard to its meaning. *aṁsalá* is contrasted with *kṛśá* 'lean'. Further we are informed that if the animal be lean, it does not itself contain enough sacrificial essence. Hence it is necessary to add some fat from its belly to its hind-

<sup>4</sup> *aṁsalá* occurs also in the Taitt. Br. 3.4.17.1 in the context of the Puruṣamedha. An *aṁsala* animal is bound for Agni (*agnáye 'ṁsalám*). But this occurrence does not help in determining the meaning of the word. Sāyaṇa explains *aṁsalam* = *balavan-tam*, and Bhaṭṭa Bhāskara explains it as *pināmsam*. In the Kāty. Śr.S. 7.2.24 we read *aṁsalabhojanam vā*. The option indicated here by the word *vā* has, as explained in the commentary of Karka, a reference to the view held by Yājñavalkya in regard to beef-eating referred to in the Sat.Br. above.

part because fat is identical with sacrificial essence. This is as good as adding sacrificial essence to the animal since *gudá* is identified with *paśú*. We are further told that if the animal is *amśalá*, and not *kṛśá*, no such addition is necessary, for, the animal itself in that case is supposed to be full of sacrificial essence. *amśalá*, therefore, clearly means 'full of, rich in, fat'<sup>5</sup>. Sāyaṇa is nearer to the correct interpretation of the word when he explains *amśalah* as *puṣṭāṅgaḥ*, although one may not be sure about his derivation of the word from *amśa* 'shoulder' which he indicates by the use of *pravṛddhāmśaḥ*<sup>6</sup>. But Eggeling is not so good when he translates the above line as, "But if it be tender (juicy), then it has itself obtained the sacrificial essence."

*amśalá* thus primarily means 'full of fat', and secondarily denotes, through the Brahmanical identification of *médas* with *médha*, 'full of sacrificial essence'. Hence, when Yājñavalkya says that he has no objection to eating beef even during the *dīkṣā* if it is full of fat (*amśalá*), he does so presumably because in his opinion the fat in the beef makes it full of sacrificial essence. The presence of *médha* in the beef is the 'ritually relevant quality' which renders it unobjectionable for him. As rightly observed by Alsdorf<sup>7</sup> it is not proper to misunderstand Yājñavalkya and make fun of him by imagining that he was only fond of 'tender' beef.

A reference to the above peculiar Vājasaneyā teaching regarding beef-eating is found also in the Dharmasūtras<sup>8</sup>. In the Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra (14.45f.) we read: *dhenvanaḍuhāv apannadantāś ca / bhakṣyau tu dhenvanaḍuhau medhyau vājasaneyake vijñāyate*. Bühler translates the passage as "Not milch-cows, draught-oxen, and animals whose milk teeth have not dropped out<sup>9</sup>. It is declared in the Vājasaneyaka that (the flesh of) milch-cows and oxen is fit for offerings." As already noted by Alsdorf (p. 60), Bühler has inadvertently left out the word *bhakṣyau* in his translation. Alsdorf next refers to J. J. Meyer's view who does not agree with Bühler's translation of *medhyau* as 'fit for offerings'. In Meyer's view, the word means 'magisch-rituell rein'. In the Āp.Dh.Sū. (1.5.17.30f.), where the same topic is dealt with, we find: *dhenvanaḍuhor bhakṣyam / medhyam ānaḍuham iti Vājasaneyakam*: "(Fleisch von) Kuh und Ochs ist eßbar. (Eßbar ist) opferreines Ochsenfleisch laut Vājasaneyaka". In the opinion of Alsdorf we have to understand the word *medhya*

<sup>5</sup> In the Taitt. Saṁ. we find the use of the word *sthāvimat*. In 6.4.1 we read *jagha-nārdhād āva dyati ... sthāvimatō 'va dyati* "He cuts off from the hind portions, ... he cuts off from the thick side ..." (Keith). Also cf. Maitr. Saṁ. 3.10.4 where *sthāvimat* is contrasted with *animat*.

<sup>6</sup> As for the etymology, perhaps it would be better to extrapolate \**amśa* 'fat'.

<sup>7</sup> ALSDORF, op. cit., p. 56, foot-note 1.

<sup>8</sup> ALSDORF, op. cit., pp. 59-60.

<sup>9</sup> i.e. their flesh should not be eaten.

in the two passages above in a highly significant sense<sup>10</sup>, viz., as 'intended for sacrifice', i.e. consecrated for sacrifice, or, when freely expressed, 'coming from a sacrificial animal'<sup>11</sup>. He, therefore, translates the Vas.Dh.Sū. passage as, "(Verboten sind) Kuh und Ochs und Tiere, deren Milchzähne noch nicht ausgefallen sind. Eßbar aber sind Kuh und Ochs, wenn es sich um Opfertiere handelt, nach der Lehre des Vājasaneyaka".

One can agree with Alsdorf when he says that the word *medhya* in the above passages from the Dharmasūtras is to be understood as having a highly significant sense; but, in the light of the view held by Yājñavalkya (Vājasaneyaka), as expressed in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, it seems that the word *medhya* has to be interpreted differently. The secondary derivative *medhya*, with the suffix *-ya*, means, not 'intended for sacrifice', but 'full of sacrificial essence (*medha*)'. As already mentioned in the Śat.Br. passage cited above, *medha* and *medas* are identical. Hence the word *medhya* can secondarily denote 'full of fat'<sup>12</sup>, i.e. the same thing as *aṃśalā*.

The Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra 14.45 f. should therefore be translated as: "The cow and the ox and the animals whose milk teeth have not yet fallen (are forbidden for eating). But it is learnt in the Vājasaneyaka that cow and ox which are full of sacrificial essence can be eaten"<sup>13</sup>. The Āpastamba Dharmasūtra 1.17.30 f. should be translated as: "(The flesh) of cow and ox can be eaten. The flesh of an ox<sup>14</sup>, which is full of sacrificial essence (can be eaten) according to Vājasaneyaka."

Understood the way suggested above we may draw the following inferences regarding the view held by Yājñavalkya and the tradition established by him with regard to beef-eating. At the time of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, when beef-eating was not prohibited generally, a restriction was put on its eating by the sacrificer during the *dikṣā*. But Yājñavalkya held the view that even during the *dikṣā* a sacrificer might eat beef if it was full of fat (i.e. also full of sacrificial essence). Later, in the period of the Dharmasūtras, when beef-eating as a general practice was being prohibited, those who followed the teaching of Yājñavalkya held the view that beef might be eaten if it was full of sacrificial essence (by virtue of its being full of fat).

<sup>10</sup> 'in einem sehr prägnanten Sinne'.

<sup>11</sup> "zum Opfer bestimmt", also zum Opfer geweiht oder freier ausgedrückt "von einem Opfertier stammend".

<sup>12</sup> It may be noted that the Kośakalpataru Vol. 2.7253 (Deccan College edition, 1966) gives *medura*, which may mean "full of fat", as one of the meanings of the word *medhya* (*medhyaṃ śucau medura āśrame ca*).

<sup>13</sup> As noted above, they are full of sacrificial essence, if they are full of fat.

<sup>14</sup> And by implication, also of a cow.