

## **Six Contemporary Teachers During The Time Of The Buddha**

The doctrines of the six heretical teachers' contemporary with the Buddha are of great importance in the context of the development of Buddhist thought. In the Pali Canon one always comes across here and there passages referring to the teachings of the six heretics. Their doctrines were in sharp contrast with those of Buddhism, and they were criticized by the Buddha as well as by his disciples.

The six heretical teachers were no doubts historical personalities, but we know very little about them apart from their doctrine. Except for Nigantha Nataputta or Mahavira, the twenty-fourth Tirthankara Of Jainism, the other five heretical teachers were regarded as the holders of some or other form of Akiriyavada views.

In the Pali Tipitaka, the passages referring in detail to the doctrines of the six heretics can be found in the Samannaphala Sutta of the Digha-Nikaya. It is said in the Sutta that on one full moon night King Ajatasattu, the King of Rajagaha, went to pay a visit to the Buddha who was, staying in the Jivakambavana or the Mango Grove of Jivaka with a company of 1250 bhikkhus. The King, having referring to other sorts of occupations and services which would bear fruit in the present life, asked the Buddha if the life of a recluse (samana) could bear fruit in this very life in the same manner. He declared that he had previously put the same question to the other six heretical teachers but so far obtained no satisfactory answers. The six heretics mentioned by King Ajatasattu were Purana Kassapa, Makkhali Gosala, Ajita Kesakambala, Pakkudha Kacayana, Nigantha Nataputta and Sanjaya Belatthaputta. The Buddha being so asked elucidated to king Ajatasattu the fruits of the religious life which were attainable here in this very existence and which belonged by their nature to the present life.

As the rival doctrines of the six contemporary teachers had some negative contribution to the development of the Buddhist doctrines of karma and rebirth, our present attention is focused on the critical study of each of them respectively.

## PURANA KASSAPA

The heretical teacher whom King Ajatasattu first mentioned in the Samannaphala Sutta, the Discourse of the Fruits of the Life of a Recluse, was Purana Kassapa. He was one of the famous six heretical teacher's contemporary with the Buddha. His family name (gotta) was Kassapa. He belonged to a religious sect of asceticism called in the Pali scriptures 'Ajivaka'. Purana Kassapa is said to have been an exponent of the theory that there is no after-effect or result of action or karma.

According to this, a person committing an evil act or causing someone else to do so, experiences no evil result. Similarly, no merit is obtained by the performed. His view is clearly mentioned in the Samannaphala Sutta, which may be rendered as follow:

He who acts, O King, or causes another to act, who cuts or causes another to cut, who troubles or causes another to trouble, who causes grief or causes another to do so, who tortures or causes another to torture, who struggles or causes another to struggle, who destroys life, steals, break into house or on a desolate way, commits adultery, and speaks lies, commits no sin. Even if with a razor-sharp discus a man deprives all living creatures on the earth of life and makes them become a single heap of flesh, he commits no sin and no result of such demeritorious action will come to him. Were he to go along the south bank of the Ganges, slaying, mutilating, and torturing or causing another to slay, to mutilate and torture, there would be no sin thence resulting, and neither would sin approach him. From charity, self-control, abstinence, speaking truth, is derived no merit, nor does merit approach him.

From this passage of the Samannaphala Sutta attributed to Purana, it is clear that he was the expounder of Akiriyavada doctrine. He absolutely denies the efficacy of karma, either good or bad, in producing its result. It is obviously the denial of moral cause and effect. Purana is, therefore, called elsewhere an Ahetukavadin, i.e., the profounder of the doctrine that there is neither cause nor condition of the existence of things. He denies the possibility of morality. What are called merit and demerit are without meaning; a

person who performs an evil act commits no sin and no merit results from meritorious action.

Purana Kassapa is also said to have taught the theory of six classes of mankind (chalabhijati). The six classes are black, blue, red, yellow, white, and supremely white. The butchers, hunters, fishermen, thieves, executioners, gaolers and all those who live by slaughter and cruelty are included in the black class(kanhabhijati); the bhikkhus who live as thieves, or the Kammavadin or Kiriyavadin are included in the blue class (nilabhijati); the Niganthas who use only one piece of cloth are included in the red class(lohitabhijati); the householders who wear white clothes are the disciples of Acelakas (the naked ascetics) are included in the yellow class(haliddabhijati); the Ajivakas and Ajivikas are included in the white class(sukkhabhijati); and the heretical teachers named Nanda-Vacchagotta, Kisa-Sankiceagotta and Makkhali Gosala are included in the supremely white class(paramasukkhabhijati).

Purana Kassapa is said to have claimed omniscience. He claimed that he was the all-knower and the all-seer and that his knowledge was so perfect that when he was either walking or standing, either sleeping or walking, the full vision (nandassana) appeared in him continuously. He maintained that he knew the infinite insight.

Purana's teaching is diametrically opposed to the Buddha teaching. While the Buddhists believe in the law of karma, Purana absolutely denies the potency and efficacy of the law. Moral actions have full meaning for the Buddhists, but for Purana there is no possibility of morality. He is thus characterized by Buddhists as an Akiriyavadin and his teaching as Akiriyavada. Purana Kassapa's doctrine is fundamentally similar to that of Makkhali Gosala, another contemporary teacher of the Buddha.

## **2. Makkhali Gosala**

Very little of the life of Makkhali Gosala, as well as those of the other heretical teachers, is known from the Buddhist scriptures. In the Jaina scriptures the story of his life is mentioned in considerable detail. His name appears variously in various texts; in Buddhist Sanskrit texts it appears as Makarin Gosala, Gosaliputra or Gosalikaputra; in Jaina Prakriti as Gosala Makhaliputta; and in Tamil as Markali.

Makkhali Gosala, however, was the second famous heretical teacher mentioned by King Ajatasattu in the Samannaphala Sutta. In reply to the King's question about the present advantage of a recluse he delivered the following details of his teaching:

There is neither cause, O King, nor basis for the depravity of living beings; they become depraved without cause and basis. There is neither cause nor basis for the rectitude of living beings; they become pure without cause and basis. No result depends either on one's own acts, or on other's acts, or on the acts of human beings. There is no such thing as power or effort, or human strength or human energy. All beings (satta), all lives (pana), all existent things (bhuta), all living creatures (jiva), are without power, strength, or effort. They are bent this way and that by their fate. By the necessary conditions (of the class which they belong), by their individual nature; and it is in accord with their position in one or the other of the six classes that they experience happiness and suffering.

In the above passage ascribed to the teachings of Makkhali Gosala the theory of the six classes of man (chalabhijati) is also mentioned. It is evident that the teachings of Makkhali Gosala and Purana Kassapa are in some respects identical. This theory has already been discussed in detail in the case of Purana's teachings. With regard to Makkhali's doctrine this theory is, however, the only one included in many other theories. The following passages is Makkhali's definite conception of numerous grades of beings:

There are 1,406, 600 principal sorts of birth; 500 sorts of karma, 5 karma, 3 karma, 1 karma and half a karma; 62 paths; 62 lesser periods (or kappa): 6 classes (of human existence); 8 states of man; 4,900 Ajivakas; 4,900 Paribbajakas; 4,900 Nagas abodes; 2,000 faculties; 300 purgatories; 36 passionate grades; 7 sentient births; 7 insentient births; 7 Nigantha births; 7 grades of gods; 7 grades of human beings; 7 grades of devils; 7 lakes: 7 (great) pavuta: 7 (great) precipices; 700 (small) precipices; 7 (great) dreams; 700 (small) dreams; and 8,400,000 great periods (mahakappa) during which both fool and -wise alike will wander in transmigrations (samsara) and at last they will make an end to

suffering. There is no possibility in hoping that the unmature karma will be matured, or the mature karma will be exhausted, by virtue, by observing the rules of conduct, by penance, it were with a measure, cannot be made possible in the increase nor decrease thereof. Just as when a ball of string is cast forth it will spread out just as far as it is, just so fool and wise alike, -wandering in transmigrations exactly for the allotted term, shall then, and only, then, make an end to suffering.

The above passage, quoted from the Samannaphala Sutta, reveals to us the full picture of Makkhali's conception of the world and life. His cosmology seems to be very fantastic and very difficult to comprehend. In his Dictionary of Pali Proper Names, Dr Malalasekara says, "Makkhali's views as given in the Buddhist books are very difficult to understand, the Commentators themselves finding it a hopeless task." It is apparent, however, that Makkhali had definite concepts of numerous grades of beings and all these beings will travel in the recurrent cycle of existence (samsara) for a definite time. The last phase of his views which says, "...both fool and wise alike, wandering in transmigrations exactly for the allotted term, shall then, and only then, make an end to suffering", seems to imply that each transmigrating soul will have to follow the same course in its wandering through samsara. Or in other words, the total number of births of all living beings is exactly the same, i.e., 4,900 times as Ajivaka, 4,900 times as Paribbajakas, 4,900 times in Nagas abode, etc., before its emancipation. All types of things and all species of beings seem to have equal chances of transformation through the rigidly fixed course of transmigration. At the end of the course every being will be emancipated, and emancipation will become possible only by completing the rigid course of transmigrations. This is Makkhali's theory of purification through transmigration (samsarasuddhi).

Makkhali denied morality; he denied action (karma) and the result of action (vipaka) altogether and advocated fate or destiny (niyati) for all beings. He clearly maintained that there is neither good karma nor evil karma and the results thereof. All living beings are bent this way and that way by their fate and not by the results of their actions. There is no cause for the depravity or purity of beings; they become impure or pure without any basis. All actions performed with a hope that they will bring forth certain desired consequences will surely be in vain. It is fate and fate alone that guides the whole animate (sajivika) and inanimate (ajivika) world. Morality is nothing but a pseudo-concept or imagination. In reality there is no such thing as morality. No effect can render possible the increase or decrease of mental qualities of a man; he does not become virtuous by good action and vicious by evil action. Nobody can put an end to suffering (dukkha) by observing precepts (sila) or by following certain rules of conduct (vatta), nor can he do so by penance (tapa) and by chastity (brahmacariya). The end of sorrow occurs because it is destined to occur and it will occur only when a man in question has finished his course of transformation. The fool and the wise alike will have to

travel the same path for the fixed period of 8,400,000 mahakappas and then there will be an end of suffering. This implies that no one can be emancipated, however much he may try, before he finishes the rigidly fixed course of transmigration.

Makkhali Gosala, by his doctrine of fate (niyati), was evidently a fatalist or determinist, and as he denied both action and its result, he can also be correctly characterized as an Akiriya-vadin or Akamma-vadin. His Akiriya-vada doctrine is diametrically opposed to those of other systems of Indian thought which uphold the power and efficacy of karma or action.

In the passage of the Samannaphala Sutta ascribed to Makkhali Gosala we also come across the word 'karma' as the phrase reads, "...500 sorts of karma, 5 karma, 3 karma, 1 karma and half a karma..." But what Makkhali means by "karma" here is a matter of doubt. Dr. Basham in his History and Doctrines of the Ajivikas says, "We have seen that the place of karma in early Ajivikism was taken by niyati (fate). Yet on the lower level of truth the transmigratory chain of cause and effect does not seem to have been categorically denied. Possibly the numerous karmas are the ways in which an individual's behavior can, on the vyavaharika plane only, affect his future condition. On the paramarthika level of truth, of cause, the only effective agent is niyati." Basham may be right in some respect, or at least in his own way of interpreting Makkhali's concept of karma. But one thing is certain, that one never comes across any passage anywhere in the Pali texts which is ascribed to Makkhali and which confirms that he denied the possibility of karma only on transcendental level (paramarthika) and admitted it on the empirical level (vyavaharika). It reveals to us everywhere that he absolutely denied karma and its result on every level of life, and advocated fate and fate alone to be the fundamental principle of all beings. The Buddha himself evidently asserted the Makkhali Gosala was a denier of karma and human effort. His view is a non-action view (Akiriya-ditthi). As he clearly denied the possibility of both karma and its result, so the word 'karma' as it appears in his teachings may possibly not bear the meaning ordinarily ascribed to the term. But exactly what he meant remains a very difficult task for every interpreter of his doctrine. It seems that only Makkhali Gosala can say what the word 'karma' means in his teaching.

Nigatha is spread with alt water" means that he is suffused with the sense of evil held at bay.

The record of the Samannaphala Sutta contains only a part of Nataputta's teachings; it does not include all the teachings of this heretical leader. Nataputta was evidently a Kiriya- or Kamma-vaadin who propounded, as did the Buddha, the doctrine of karma. But his concept of karma is somewhat different from that of the Buddhists. In the Upalivada Sutta of Majjhima-Nikaya, Nataputta's doctrine of karma is fairly discussed, but instead of using the word "karma" or "action", as used by the Buddha, he employed the word danda for the same purpose. The word 'karma', according to the Buddhist, purely means action, which does not particularly carry the sense of good or bad. Only when it is combined with the word 'kusala' or akusala' is its meaning fixed, e.g., kusala karma -good or meritorious action, and akusala-bad or demeritorious action. The Nigatha's term danda seems, however, to carry a fixed meaning, i.e., it means a hurtful act. It is threefold corresponding to three ways of performing action, namely, kaya-danda-bodily (hurtful) action, vaci-danda-verbal (hurtful) action, and mano-danda-mental (hurtful) action. According to Nataputta, kaya-danda or bodily action is, in doing evil deeds, far more criminal than the danda of words and thoughts. This conception is diametrically opposed to that of the Buddhists which regards mano-karma or mental action as more forceful than karma performed through words and deeds. This point of controversy between the teaching of Nataputta and that of the Buddha will be discussed later.

In the Culadukkhakkhanda Sutta of Majjhima-Nikaya, Nigantha Nataputta is also said to have taught his disciples to get rid of all evil deeds performed in the past by practicing austerities. The passage of the Sutta referring to his teaching reads:

There were evil deeds, O Niganthas, done by you in the past. You should cast them away by following a practice of austerity. When you are now practicing self-control in deeds, words and thought, your new evil karma is not accumulated. Because old karma is washed away by austerity (tapa) and new karma is not accumulated, you are free from compulsion. And being free from compulsion, an expiration of karma, suffering is exhausted, sensations (vedana) come to an end; and because sensations come to an end, all your sufferings are eradicated.

Moksa (emancipation), according to Nataputta, seems to lie in an exhaustion of old karma, and at the same time, new karma is not accumulated. Karma is the cause of bondage and when all karma is exhausted a person is said to have attained liberation. The complete exhaustion of karma is made possible only by the practice of austerities, such as to vow to observe only the standing posture or

other physical tortures. The practice of austerities must be strictly followed if a Nigantha wishes to attain emancipation.

A parallel distinction between the Buddhist and the Jaina concept of emancipation is worthy of note here. According to Buddhism, suffering is uprooted only when all desires (tanha) are eradicated, and it is because of the eradication of desires that a person is said to be emancipated. According to Nataputta's teachings, it is not desires that are to be eradicated but karma. Only when karma has been exhausted is emancipation said to be fully obtained. This is one of the controversial concepts in these two parallel systems of Kiriyavada, Buddhism and Jainism.

The followers of Nigantha Nataputta, believe in the existence of the permanent and indestructible soul. This soul will undergo birth and death as long as karma has not been exhausted. On the exhaustion of karma by practicing austerities the soul becomes emancipated and will after death, ascend to reside forever on the top of the world. It is free from birth and death and will never again return to this world.



## 6 Sanjaya Belatthaputta

Sanjaya Belatthaputta was the last heretical leader to whom a visit was paid by King Ajattasatu. In the former case of the other heretics, we have seen that each teacher had a particular doctrine of his own, but in the case of Sanjaya, no definite doctrine is attributed to him in the passages of the Samannaphala Sutta or elsewhere. According to the Sutta, when asked a question about the present conceivable fruits of the life of a recluse by King Ajattasatu, Sanjaya just tried to wriggle out of it like an eel, without committing himself to one point or another. He is said to have replied to King Ajattasatu as follows:

If you ask me whether there is another world, and if I thought there were, I would tell you so. But I do not say so. I do not say that it is thus or thus; I do not say that it is otherwise; I do not say that I deny it; I do not say that I do not deny it; I do not say that there is, there is not, is and is not, neither is nor is not, another world. If you ask me whether there are beings of spontaneous birth...whether there is any fruit, any result, of good or bad actions...whether a man who has won the truth continues to be after death... (The same answer is repeated after each of these problems as in the answer of the first question).

The above passage quoted from Samannaphala Sutta apparently shows the skeptical attitude of Sanjaya, but his answer has nothing in connection with the question of King Ajattasatu. Being asked one thing, he says another thing; and as his expression was just an attempt to wriggle out of the problems without giving any substantial view or doctrine, King Ajattasatu formed an impression of him as the most foolish and stupid of all the other famous teachers.

Sanjaya did not enunciate any definite doctrine as the other heretical teachers did. We are, therefore, left with only one choice, that is, to take his skeptical attitude as his way of philosophical speculation. In this sense we may say that Sanjaya adopted skepticism as his philosophy. To the thinker of this type all metaphysical propositions appear as barren and fruitless and any attempt to solve them is futile. But Sanjaya seemed to be a naive skeptic, who, according to the Samannaphala Sutta account, adopted skepticism out of sheer stupidity. It seems that he employed the fourfold logical alternative as a method of wriggling out of problems merely because he did not know the answers to the questions put to him. The Brahmajala Sutta of the Digha-Nikaya speaks of this type of skeptics as an Eel-wiggler (amaravikidiepika) who, when asked a question, would equivocate and wriggle like an eel. The view of the Eel-wiggler is the only one out of the sixty-two that is picked out as being product of sheer stupidity. It is said that the amaravikkhepika, being ignorant of the correct answers to the questions put to him, adopts the skeptical method of solving problems as it is the

safest way for him. He fears that, since he does not know the nature of the questions and their proper answers, in any attempt to answer them he might commit a mistake which would land him in trouble. In order to avoid such undesired trouble he tries, therefore, to wriggle out of every question by employing at the same time the whole set of logical alternatives as a means of dealing with the problem.

In the Vinaya Pitaka of the Pali Canon we come across a heretical teacher called Sanjaya Paribbajaka. The Buddhists regard him as identical with Sanjaya Belatthaputta. He is said to be the former teacher of Sariputta (Upatissa) and Moggallana (Kolita) and two hundred and fifty other followers. When Sariputta and Moggallana were converted to Buddhism they left Sanjaya to become the pupils of the Buddha and they were joined by those two hundred and fifty Paribbajakas. Sanjaya tried in vain to persuade them to stay with him. He was overcome by sudden bereavement and disappointment, so much so that hot blood issued from his mouth.

One point that should not be overlooked here is that Sariputta and Moggallana, after their conversion to Buddhism, were praised by the Buddha as the best of his disciples in wisdom (panna) and psychic powers (iddhi) respectively. A teacher to whom such a person of profound wisdom like Sariputta submitted himself as a pupil should not be so stupid as Sanjaya is said to have been. And the questions were put to him were mostly metaphysical questions which even the Buddha himself rejected as unanswerable or inexpressible (avyakata). Sanjaya might as well as the Buddha, have been well aware of the inexpressible nature of such metaphysical questions and hence he advised suspension of judgment towards them. However plausible this interpretation may seem to be, there is still another fact, which should not be overlooked. While the Buddha viewed only some kinds of questions as indiscriminately, Sanjaya adopted an agnostic attitude towards all of them. Or, in other words, while Sanjaya's point of view was mostly negative, the Buddha adopted a positive approach to the discussion of important problems by enunciating the doctrine of causal genesis of the Paticasamuppada. By this law of causal connection the Buddha reveals to us the relative nature of empirical reality. What lies beyond the realm of relativity is absolutely beyond the grasp of language or even transcendent to thought. It becomes inexpressible, inexplicable and indeterminable, which is called in the Buddhist terminology "avyakata panha".

Sanjaya Paribbajaka or Sanjaya Belatthaputta (as these two names are supposed to be identical) is criticized in the Pali texts as an amaravikkhepika or *the Eel-wiggler* and not as an Akiriyavadin like some other heretical teachers of his time. He is also described as an agnostic (annanavadin), a teacher unwilling to give any definite answer to all types of questions. He took a skeptical attitude even with regard to questions relating to moral responsibility. He was as famous as the other heretical leaders of his age and his skeptical philosophy had an important role to play in the development of Indian thought of the time.