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The Quality of Venerable Nāgasena from Milindapañha.

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Abstract

This paper reveals and describes the important intelligence and wisdom. Milindapañha is the text stated the questions and answers of king milinda and Venerable Nāgasena. King Milinda was good question and Venerable Nāgasena was straight answer. One should decide to do something associated with intelligence and wisdom not only mundance affair but also supermundane. This paper helps to be rich intelligence and wisdom in literature and relationship society.

Introduction

Milindapañha contains the questions of King Milinda and the answers of Venerable Nāgasena. Some five hundred years after the Parinibbāna of the Buddha. These are five Nikāya in Piṭaka there one Dighanikāya, Majjhima Nikāya, Samyatta Nikāya, Aṅguttara Nikāya and Khuddaka Nikāya. Among them Kkhudaka Nikāya contains eighteen divisions. Milindapañha is the last division in this Nikāya. King Milinda was Yanaka (Graeco - Bactrian) ruler of Sāgala. He was very learned and highly skilled in the art of debating. The Venerable Nāgasena, a fully accomplished Arahat, was on a visit to Sāgala at the request of the Samigha. King Milinda, Who wanted to have some points on the Dhamma clarified, asked the Venerable Nāgasena abstruse questions concerning the nature of man, his survival after death, and other doctrinal aspects of the Dhamma. The Venerable Nāgasena gave him satisfactory replies on each questions asked. These erudite questions and answers on the teaching of the Buddha are compiled in the to the book known as the Milindapañha pāḷi.

Appearing the Milindapañha Text

In Sāsana Era 500, about 100 years before Christ, there was a wise King named Milinda in Sāgala city, Gonaka Kingdom. The king asked his complicated facts dealt with the Buddha's ideas and concepts to the arahat named Venerable Nāgasena and the Venerable explicated his questions. Combined the questions of the king and the answers of the arahat and made a record text, it came out as "Milindapañha text". This is the source of revealing Milindapañha text.

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Different sections divided in the Milindapañha text

Six sections are divided in the Milindapañha text.

These are as follows: Bāhirakathā, Milindapañha, Meṇḍakapañhārambhakathā, Meṇḍakapañha, Anumānapañha and Opammakathāpañhā.

Of these six sections, exception of Bāhirakathā and Meṇḍakapañhārambhakathā, the remaining four sections are divided into groups (vagga) again.

In the Milindapañha, 86 questions are included and 7 groups are divided.

In Meṇḍakapañha -81 questions are included and 5 groups are divided.

In Naumanapañha -33 questions are included and 4 groups are divided.

In Opammakathāpañha-67 questions are included and 7 groups are divided.

Nāgasena Thera

An arahant, celebrated for his discussion with King Milinda. He was the son of the brahmin so¹/₄uthara, in the village of Kafarigala in the Himālaya. He was well versed in the Vedas, and entered the Order under Roha¹/₄a to learn the Buddha's teaching later he went to Assagutta of the Vattaniya-senāsana and studies under him. There, one day, at the conclusion of a meal, while giving thanks to a lay woman who had looked after Assagutta for more than thirty years, Nāgasena became a sotāpanna. Then he was sent to pāḷaliputta, where he studied under Dhammarakkhita, and there he attained arahatship. Subsequently he went to the sa³kheyga-parivena in sēgala, where he met milinda. It is said that in his previous birth he was a deva, named mahāsena, living in Tāvātimsa, in a palace called ketumatø, and that he consented to be born among men at the insistent request of sakka and the arahants led by Assagutta. In an earlier life he had made an aspiration to be able to defeat milinda in discussion.

Meeting of King Milinda and Venerable Nāgasena

On hearing about Venerable Nāgasena, the minister named Devamantiya reported to King Milinda thus: “Your Majesty, the monk named Venerable Nāgasena resided in this monastery was competent in Buddhist literature (pariyatti), widely wise, deeply intuitive, brave and able to preach the wonderful Dhamma. The Venerable can speak with you making a competition and the doubt of you can be dispelled.”

As soon as King Milinda heard the name “Nāgasena”, he felt fear with standing his body hairs. However, the king asked to the minister Devamantiya, “Can Venerable Nāgasena you said speak with me making a competition?” The minister said, “Don’t say your Majesty,

he can speak with even many gods, king of gods and Brahmars by competing.” Then the king said, “If so, go to the Venerable and ask for the permission to meet him.” After getting the permission from the Venerable and the minister’s coming back, King Milinda surrounding five hundred male ministers called “Yonaka” by riding a chariot into the wallor fencing and came to the Venerable. At that moment, Venerable Nāgasena was residing in the very huge ground surrounding great amount of monks.

As seeing the great amount of monks surrounded Venerable Nāgasena from the far distance, the king felt fear and his body hairs became standing up. Of the monk audience, a half of monks were of higher years in monkhood than the Venerable had, but the rest were of lower years in monkhood than the Venerable had. As seeing all the monk audience from the front to the last, the king saw a monk sitting in the middle of the monk audience as brave as a lion who is the king of all animals. As soon as he saw the Venerable, without saying anyone the king suddenly recognized for his courageous behavior, “This monk is certainly Venerable Nāgasena” and had great joyful. Yet on seeing Venerable Nāgasena, fear was arisen in the King and his body hairs stood up.

Later, the king approached to Venerable Nāgasena, spoke the greeting words and sat in a proper place. Venerable Nāgasena also made the king joyful by delightfully responding the kind words to him. From that time, King Milinda asked a variety of difficult and complicated questions concerning the Dhamma and Venerable Nāgasena explicated extensively all his questions with many proper examples, the objectivity of the Buddhist scripture (*āgama yutti*) and the objectivity of nature (*sabhāva yutti*).

The Quality of Venerable Nāgasena Wisdom

Milindapañha is the text stated the questions and answers of King Milinda and Venerable Nāgasena. King Milinda was a good questioner and Venerable Nāgasena was a straight answerer. Asking the good questions is wisdom as well as giving the good answers is wisdom too. The quality of Venerable Nāgasena’s wisdom can be seen by seeing the facts answered to the king. That is why, the nature of question and answer should be explained firstly.

(1) The Questioner is the cowherd and the answerer is the Buddha-to-be

In the question and answer, which one is difficult? Question? Or Answer?

The questioner makes a question for he knows himself, he hears from others, he thinks or he wants to know its meaning, thus the question is burdensome, but not difficult.

Merely the answerer have to give the answer comparing with examples (upamā), that which is to be likened (upameyya) and the objectivity of a proof (sādhaka yutti), the answer is therefore difficult.

In other words, to question appropriately after looking for the cause of objectivity (yutti) and to answer suitably after looking for the certain facts are quite difficult. Such kinds of questions and answers exist only in the sense of those who have steadfast mindfulness and deep wisdom.

In Milindapañha, since even from the arahats, who were Paṭisambhidāpatta tipīṭakadhara, are unable to answer all questions asked by the ordinary wise man (puthujjana), King Milinda, they departed from Yonaga kingdom and resided near by the Himavanta forest. Only when Venerable Nāgasena, who had great perfection in the previous existences, the monks dared to come Sāgala city. Referring to such kind of proof of canonical texts, there was a case of questioning of a boy guarded buffaloes; once a boy guarded buffaloes heard the sound of eating grass, “byupegang”, from a buffalo hung a bamboo bell in its neck and asked the question to a wise monk, “What is the meaning of the word of “byupegang”? but the monk could not find out this word in the text.

Another example is in Pukkam kingdom, once a female lay devotee approached to the learned teacher and asked the question, “Let me ask a question to me, Venerable Sir. The Buddha is said as “Buddhe saddhā, Buddho saddhā, Buddhaṃ saddhā”. I would like to know what is the meaning of the word “Buddhine”? but the Venerable could not reflect on this word.

Depending on these examples, there is an ancient saying “the questioner was a boy guarded buffaloes and the answerer was the Buddha-to-be”. As regard to the texts, properly it is to be taken the word, “question is easy, but answer is difficult”.

(2) Five kinds of questions and four kinds of answers

Five kinds of questions are:

1. Adīṭṭhajotanā pucchā - the question which is asked for knowing the nature of being unable to see and unable to decide by wisdom
2. Dīṭṭhasaṃsandana pucchā - the question which is asked for discussion and sharing the nature of knowing already by wisdom
3. Vimaticchedana pucchā - the question which is asked for cutting off the doubt

4. Anumati pucchā - the question which is asked for taking the idea of the listener in the Dhamma
5. Kathetukamyatā pucchā - the question which is asked for answering by oneself
- King Milinda asked the questions by these five ways appropriately.

Four kinds of answers are as follows:

1. Ekambyākaraṇīya - the answer must be answered; one answer for one question
2. Vibhajjabyākaraṇīya - the answer which is to be replied by distinguishing; which is to be extensively replied with respective examples
3. Paṭipucchābyākaraṇīya - the answer which is to be replied for re-asking the long question that is to be answered if ask again
4. Ṭhapanīya - the answer which is not to be replied the question; which is to be answered indifferently

In answering of Venerable Nāgasena, he used former three kinds of answers, but did not use the way of Ṭhapanīya.

(3) The counterfeit wise one and the authentic wise one

Paṇḍitapatirūpakānañci santike kathetuṃ dukkhaṃ hoti. Te pade pade akkhare vanati. Ekantapaṇḍitā pana kathaṃ sutvā sukasitaṃ pasamsanti. Dukkasitesu pāḷipadaatthabyañjanesu yaṃ yaṃ viujjhati. Taṃ taṃ ujukaṃ katvā denti. Bhagavato ca sadiso ekantapaṇḍito nāma natthi.

It is difficult to tell in front of a counterfeit wise person. The counterfeit wise persons show the fault in each word and in each character. But the authentic wise persons praise the words said well when they hear the words. In the words said badly, as Pāḷi, word (pada), sense and grammar goes astray from the Pāḷi rule, they make them to be correct. Needless to say, there is no wise man likened to the Buddha.

Venerable Nāgasena was an authentic wise monk in fact. He could answer well whatever King Milinda asked to him; he could convey the king to know the truth; he could make the king to be straight forward from the wrong thoughts. The questioner, King Milinda and the answerer, Venerable Nāgasena were not the counterfeit wise persons, but the authentic wise persons.

(4) Discussion of the wise one and discussion of the kings

“Venerable Nāgaseana, will you discuss with me?”

“King, if you want to discuss with me by the nature of the wise, I will do; but if you want to discuss with me by the nature of kings, I won’t do.”

“Venerable Sir, how do the wise discuss?”

“King, in making discussion of the wise, sometimes, they catch and tie others by words, then they make others released; sometimes, they condemn others; sometimes, they praise others; sometimes, they make friendship to others; sometimes, they accept friendship of others. No matter how treat by others, the wise never arise hatred. In these ways, the wise make discussion.”

“Venerable Sir, how the do kings discuss?”

“King, in making discussion of the kings, some facts are agreed with each other. If one breaks the agreement and argues the fact, he was punished. In this way, the kings make discussion.”

“Venerable Sir, I’ll make discussion with you by the nature of the wise, but not the nature of the kings. Please discuss with me like talking or discussing with monks, novices, lay devotees and the guardians. Don’t be afraid of me!”

“King, it is right.”

It is to be known the discussion of the wise and the discussion of the kings. It is also the objectivity of nature (*sabhāva yutti*). If the discussion is the way like discussing of the kings, it will never reach the truth as well as the peace. Thus, it should be known that only with the way of discussion of the wise, there will reach the truth as well as the peace.

“Venerable Sir, may I ask you a question?”

“King, you may.”

“I have already asked you a question?”

“I have already answered to you too.”

“Venerable Sir, what did you answer?”

“King, what did you ask to me?”

On seen this answer, Venerable Nāgasena’s quick witted wisdom and manner are to be known by the readers. It is the character of covering an askew lid for an askew pot.

(5) Knowing of the Buddha is completely or not

“Venerable Sir, the monks said the Buddha knows all things completely. Reversely the monks taught after the Buddha drove out the monks leading the Most Venerable Sāriputta and the Most Venerable Moggalāna, because of the request of King Sakya from Cātuma town and Sahampati Brahmana to the Buddha by illustrating with the example of seeds and a young bull, the Buddha pleased, tolerated and forgave the faults.”

“Venerable Sir, didn’t the Buddha see these examples? Suppose. If the Buddha knew these examples, the Buddha would not be the One who knows all things completely (sabbaññuta). If the Buddha knew all things completely, with the aim of investigating, the monks were grasped, oppressed and drove out. In such situation, it seems to be no compassion of the Buddha. In this case of two views able to be taken, if such kind of problem comes to you, can you solve it?”

“King, the Buddha is also the One who knows all things completely as well as knows the example of seeds and a young bull. Regardless to say, the Buddha is the owner of all the Dhammas. For instant, the barber makes the king to be pleasing and satisfied by combing the king’s hairs with a golden comb which is belonging to the king. The king praises the barber for his making to him to be satisfied. In the same way, King Sakya from Cātuma town and Sahampati Brahmana made the Buddha to be pleased, tolerated and forgave the faults by illustrating with the example of seeds and a young bull preached by the Buddha. The Buddha pleased with their re-telling of the Buddha’s teachings then accepted their request.”

“Venerable Sir, your answer is good.”

Venerable Nāgasena’s quality solvable the doubts of King Milinda on the Buddha by explaining with clear examples is the quality of the skillful one. The skillful one is certainly the wise one. It is necessary to know the characteristic of the skillful one.

(6) The illuminating characteristic of wisdom

“Venerable Sir, what are the characteristic of wisdom?”

“King, in the issue of manasikāra, I have already answered that wisdom is of the deciding characteristic. To answer in another way, wisdom is of the illuminating characteristic.”

“Venerable Sir, what kind of illuminating characteristic has in wisdom?”

“King, as soon as wisdom comes out, the dark mass of ignorance (avijjā) is destroyed; the light of wisdom (vijjā) becomes illuminating; as a consequence, the noble truths (ariyasaccā) are come to see. Thus, the practitioner contemplated the meditation subject

comes to see rightly the nature of impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha) and non-self (anatta).”

“Venerable Sir, please show the example for this statement.”

“King, suppose a man lights up the dark house, the lightening dispels the mass of darkness. The light becomes brighten. With that light, the colors and features of all things in the bedroom can be seen distinctly. Likewise, when wisdom is arisen, the dark mass of ignorance is vanished. The light of wisdom becomes brilliant. The noble truths can be doubtlessly seen. Thus, the practitioner contemplated the meditation subject comes to see rightly the nature of impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha) and non-self (anatta).”

“Venerable Sir, your answer is complete.”

Conclusion

In the end of the questions and answers of King Milinda and Venerable Nāgasena, the great mass of the entire earth had the eighty-four thousand (Yujanā) measurement of mass shook in different ways; the rays of flash of lightning passed; gods made flowers to rain; Mahābrahma made great blessing; the sound like thunder appeared from the inside of the vast ocean. On obviously seeing on those amazing events, King Milinda and all his female attendants paid obeisance with great respect by raising their palms on their heads. King Milinda had great respect in the virtue of Venerable Nāgasena and said. “Venerable Sir, your solving the problems are good. You can answer the problems able to answer only the Buddha. There is no one who can solve the problems like you in the sāsana exception of Most Venerable Sāriputta who is the General of Dhamma. Venerable Sir, if I have any fault, please forgive me. From today onwards, please regard me as your lay devotee paid respect to you in my whole life.” King Milinda, then paid respect to Venerable Nāgasena together with his attendants. He built a magnificent building and donated to Venerable Nāgasena. Also he provided Venerable Nāgasena and many hundreds monks by four requisites. Because King Milinda respected to Venerable Nāgasena’s wisdom, he conferred the kinship to his son and he received higher ordination. After becoming monkhood, Venerable Milinda practiced insight meditation with ardent effort and eventually he attained arahatship. Wisdom is to be praised in the world and it is very supportive for enduring the noble Dhamma. The wise dispel perplexity by wisdom and attain the supreme bliss extinguished the fire such as lust (raga) etc. In a certain Dhamma portion, there is wisdom. Therein, one who keeps steadfast heedfulness or is without lacking of mindfulness, is worthy of veneration. He is also a noble

person and peerless one who is worthy of praise. Hence, the clever one sees one's welfare and pays obeisance with great respect to the wise person like paying homage to a temple. King Milinda is of higher wisdom. Venerable Nāgaseana is very skillful and learned. Questions and answers of King Milinda and Venerable Nāgaseana pinpointed that like appropriately answering is wisdom, wisely questioning is also wisdom. Therefore, it is wished to answer nobly for the proper questioning and to answer well for the straight questioning.

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