

Lesson 6 on 10/11/04 by Dr. Bhikkhuni Bodhi

This is a personal note on lecture by Dr. Bhikkhuni Bodhi on Historical Survey of Buddhist Thought. This is Module 3 and the last module of the Diploma Course in Buddhist Studies conducted at the Buddhist Library by the Graduate School of Buddhist Studies (Singapore). For other lesson updates please go to: www.geocities.com/lee_mengkai/

Brief Outline of Other Schools

The last two schools we will study in the Abhidharma-period will be the Vātsīputrīyas and the Sautrāntikas, both related to the Sarvāstivāda. The later school, the Sautrāntika is very influential in the sense that the Mahāyana Yogacara, mind-only school, take a lot of inspiration from them. The first school we will discuss tonight is the Vātsīputrīyas.

Vātsīputrīyas (aka Pudgalavādins)

They are very much related to the Sarvāstivādin although records differ as to their actual relationship. One record would say that the Vātsīputrīyas was established before the Sarvāstivādin and another record said that the Vātsīputrīyas was originated from the Sarvāstivādin. We are not so concern as long as we do not get drawn into such debates but we know that their doctrines are rather close. With that in mind, we know that the Vātsīputrīyas would have agreed with the Sarvāstivādin's idea of svabhava and would have agreed with the reality of dharma existing in all three periods of time. They differ from the Sarvāstivādin in the idea of pudgala.

The doctrine of the ineffable Pudgala (Pali: puggala)

This term, *pudgala* is made very famous by the Pali book called Kathāvattu, which criticize the idea of pudgala. Because of the vast geographical separation, the Sarvāstivāda was in the North region, the Pali version that means the Tārasātīya of the Sri Lankan which is all the way South, usually they do not bother with each other or rather they kind of lost contact with each other. But the Vātsīputrīyas being so closely related to the Sarvāstivādin managed to get into the book of Kathāvattu. That shows this is really a big issue among the Buddhists in India at that time. What so worrisome or trickery about this idea? If you have read Venerable Bodhi's note you would have known that Buddhist take this as Buddhist's version of Hindu's atman.

The Vātsīputrīyas think that the Buddha had taught us about the five aggregates, that is the psycho-physical series of a human being could be broken down into the five aggregates. To the Vātsīputrīyas this is fine except that there will be the problem of convincing others about karma. This essentially comes out of the respond to the question of karma. Right after the Mahāparinibbāna of the Buddha there were many questions asked among the Buddhists. One of them was when the Buddha talked about the anatta doctrine and how are we to account for karma? He told us if we do bad things we would have to suffer the consequence even in life after death. So if there is no soul then who is the one experiencing the consequence of the action or who is the one suffering? So various schools had to respond to this question and the Vātsīputrīyas respond to this question linking the mechanism of a pudgala.

They define pudgala is something *not different from nor the same* as the five aggregates. The five aggregates when you break them down in analysis into different parts, that cannot explain how the five aggregates complex relate to karma. They say pudgala is the whole of these five aggregates and perhaps in and above the five aggregates. So it is like a substratum. To the people who do not understand the Pudgalavādin, they thought that the Pudgalavādin is referring to "something" beneath the five aggregates. And if that is the case it is like atmavādin. The Buddha had worked so hard to

break down atma and to tell us there is no atma and no continuing substratum besides the five aggregates. Now the Pudgalavādin is telling us on top of the five aggregates there is a continuum and therefore how different are they from the atma theory. Even the very close Sarvāstivādin put this question across to them. In Buddhist community they already fingered the Sarvāstivādin for being something like atmavādin because they talked about svabhava and this time the Sarvāstivādin asking the Vātsīputrīyas whether are they referring to atmavāda. So the Sarvāstivādin are not talking on the same term as atmavādin although they talked about svabhava. So if someone comes out with an idea so close to atmavādin then people will start asking questions. So the Vātsīputrīyas had to explain their stand. They say they are not saying that there is an atma. They say that within each moment of the five aggregates there is this totality, the whole combined of the mechanic of the five aggregates and they called the combined functions of the five aggregates as the Pudgala. And this can explain the continuum of the working of the five aggregates and can explain the working of the karma. To the Vātsīputrīyas, the Abhidharmika's analysis of the five aggregates are too individual and they feel that is it so compartmentalized and we cannot see any synthetic functions. So they had to come up with something that combined all five together and moment-by-moment there is this continuum and they called it the Pudgala. They formally define Pudgala as neither real entity nor a concept. This is kind of tricky. If this is just a concept the Sarvāstivādin and Buddhists can all accept because there is nothing real. We can always say a human being instead of calling a Pudgala and this is exactly what the Buddha taught us human being is just a name or a label or a designation for the five aggregates. But the Pudgalavādin says they do not think that this is just a mere declaration or a mere name, they really think that there is something real. When they say it is something real other Buddhists accuse them of having the idea of atma. Immediately they respond to these critiques and say they are not talking about something real like the atma. So it is neither an atma nor just a name. So that is why other Buddhists find it very difficult to understand them. Hence the Kathāvattu people choose to err on the side of caution, accuse the Pudgalavādin idea of Pudgala as something real and they ignore the side that the Vātsīputrīyas did say that it is neither real nor just a label. This is tricky when you say it is neither real nor just a label, exactly what are they talking about the Pudgala? So the Kathāvadu people would take it the easier way and accuse them of saying the Pudgala as something real. So among Buddhists immediately when we talked about Pudgalavāda we are educate to condemn and say they are heretics among the Buddhist in Pali. This is because their idea of Pudgala is so close to atma, which is external to Buddhism. They are trying to explain that Pudgala is not something real like the atma and they just want to be good Buddhists in the sense that they do not believe in an atma. But at the same time they want to explain to outside people how Buddhists account for the continuation of karma in one life to another. But the job is not done very satisfactory because although they succeeded in trying to explain how karma continue yet still they have a lot of questions left unanswered. This is left to the Saṃmitiyas.

The Saṃmitiyas

The Saṃmitiyas are a sub-sect of the Vātsīputrīyas. They become very powerful and influential and by the time Xuan Zang went over to China, they had occupied a vast area and in Venerable Bodhi's notes she told us the reasons. Because the Saṃmitiyas is still within the Nikaya period, which is characterized by lots of philosophical debates and Abhidharma teachings. The normal Buddhist could not really understand all these philosophical debates and teachings and finally the Saṃmitiyas is able to explain to the masses the Buddha's teachings or rather their philosophy by using stories and similes. It is so different from the Sarvāstivādin who used terms like the five aggregates, prāpti, aprāpti and so on.

The Saṃmitiyas although they have their own new ideas, they know how to get it across to the common people. For example look at the idea of avipraṇāṣa, there are mechanism to explain *how* karma is continue from one life to another. The Vātsīputrīyas has given us an idea on *why* karma can continue from one life to another by using the Pudgala to explain. As long as we have the five

aggregates we would have Pudgala and that would have continued life after life. So the Pudgala is something like a combined warehouse memory or a combined force for whatever we have done now that continue life after life. What happen if the next life we are born as an animal will there still be pudgala? Probably yes as the pudgala is the essence of the five aggregates and as an animal they might not have the full operation of the five aggregates. For example for a dog, it still has consciousness, rūpa, a bit of saññā, vedanā and probably some saṃkāra but not fully developed as a human being. Hence for the Vātsīputrīyas probably animal also have pudgala but this question was never asked so we never know what is the correct answer.

The Vātsīputrīyas talk about *why* the karma can continue and that is because of pudgala. The Saṃmitīyas will come out with *how* karma can continue from one life to another. The Saṃmitīyas came out with the idea of *avipraṇāśa* dharma to explain *how* karma can continue from one pudgala to another pudgala. Just imagine the Pudgala as owing something or the Pudgala sign an “IOU” and the “IOU” is like the *avipraṇāśa*. The Pudgala billed this something and by billing that deed, for example killing a cat, is like writing an “IOU” to the other party, somehow the other party will come and claim the debt from us because we have the *avipraṇāśa* dharma, something that is stuck with us already. So they use this kind of example to make people understand what do they mean by *avipraṇāśa*.

By saying we owe someone a debt it means that we have to repay the debt some other time no matter what as long as we have the “IOU”. Until we return the “money” then will the “IOU” be cancelled. The same applies to *avipraṇāśa*, as long as we have done a deed, whether good or bad, the reminder or traits of our deed will be with us forever until we repay the debt then the *avipraṇāśa* will be cancelled off.

This idea reminds us of what we learn from the Sarvāstivāda. The Vātsīputrīyas is closely related to the Sarvāstivādin and they get their inspiration from them. Last week we learned of the idea of prāpti and aprāpti of the Sarvāstivādin, where greed is linked to us by prāpti and to get rid of greed by aprāpti. Through our spiritual practice, this leads to the arising of aprāpti of greed and this will cuts the prāpti to greed. Last week we mention two moments to that, the first moment being the arising of aprāpti to greed and the moment is the arising of prāpti to fruit of liberation. We can be sure to get rid of greed forever otherwise even till the third sgate of anāgāmī, where greed is only being suppress and not totally eradicated yet, so the aprāpti to greed has not arisen yet. So when we come to the arahant stage then greed will be totally cut off. Coming back to Saṃmitīyas, they get their inspiration from the aprāpti and prāpti idea of the Sarvāstivādin and also the idea of avijñapti. To the Sarvāstivādin the essence of actions is vijñapti and avijñapti and not cetanā. Avijñapti is something material will never be lost, the remaining force from our action. When we do an action in Sarvāstivāda system, it is our cetanā plus let say our feeling, this feeling is not an action but a real entity by means of vijñapti. Cetanā and vijñapti will give us avijñapti and avijñapti will not be lost until the consequence of our action arises. So this is how the Saṃmitīyas get their idea of *avipraṇāśa*, which is something that will never be lost. A + vi + pra + √ṇaś + a where A = negation, vi = individually, pra = towards, √ṇaś = to disappear and last a = make the whole word a noun. So *avipraṇāśa dharma* is something that is not prone to disappear. This is not something eternal, it will still disappear once the fruition of our karma arises this will disappear. So the Abhidharmika never go against the Buddha’s teachings so they come up with different terms and there are two terms, which they used, eternity and permanent. Eternity is something that is beyond time and space, does not participate in time and space. It is there forever and ever they are there whether there is human being or not, whether there is a world or not. Just like the Hindu’s idea of a Brahma. But for permanent, it is within time and space, it participate in time and space, which means they will still disappear when the right conditions arise, just that it stays relatively longer than all the fast disappearing things. So when they say the Buddha talk about impermanence it probably means the same thing too. They kind of make the Buddha’s teachings very extreme. One extreme will be impermanent as moments, since everything is impermanent then we can see the change moment-by-moment. The other extreme they say “relatively” speaking there is

permanent, just a little longer than the usual thing so that we have to spend one or two lifetime or more to see their disappearance. They tried to understand the Buddha's teachings this way. So permanent is different from eternal.

So *avipranāśa* explains *how* karma can continue in Pudgala life after life until consequence of the action arising. This is like clearing our past "debt". The Saṃmitiyas explained *avipranāśa* like a debt or "IOU" and *avipranāśa* is there to remind or certified that we have a debt and until repay the debt otherwise it will stay with us forever. When we repay our debt the fruition of our karma arises and *avipranāśa* will be gone. From here we can see that all these schools do not just formulate ideas independently there probably will follow ideas here and there and base on those ideas create new ideas. They probably do not like the idea of *avijñapti* because *avijñapti* is something material whereas for *avipranāśa* they do not say it is material. So this is *how* they explain karma and its continuation.

If we tell people about the anatta doctrine and at the same time try to explain the karma theory it will be very confusing. So the Saṃmitiyas *how* we account for our "own" karma and this is how the Saṃmitiyas caught the heart of general Buddhists and became very influential or powerful over a very large area. The Pudgalavādin are really condemned by the Kathāvatthu as they were accused of going against the Buddha's teachings. But from the explanation above they are not as what the Kathāvatthu describes them to be and when push to a corner they say Pudgala do not mean a real entity, nor it is just a name. Unfortunately the Saṃmitiyas did not survive long enough as a school for us to understand them better and the text has not been transmitted enough for a more detail description of Pudgala. The only thing we know is that according to them Pudgala is neither a real entity nor just a name. But the Kathāvatthu would only concentrate on the part of real and not just a name and since it is not just a name it must be real entity. According to the Supervisor of Venerable Bodhi the Saṃmitiyas is trying to come up with a middle way solution of insisting something is neither just a name nor a real entity. So they say the Pudgala is neither a real entity nor just a name but what is it actually? They have no words to describe it therefore they called it the *ineffable* pudgala, ineffable means indescribable. Just like *nibbāna* which is ineffable, no words can describe Pudgala. Because if we use words to describe it then we either fall into definition or mere name or fall into real distinction, a distinction of a real entity.

Just to recap, the Vātsīputrīyas is famous for the doctrine of *Pudgala* and they are also known as the Pudgalavādin. For the Saṃmitiyas they are known for the doctrine of *avipranāśa*. The Saṃmitiyas also believe in the Pudgala because they are a sub-sect of the Vātsīputrīyas. The Saṃmitiyas used *avipranāśa* to explain *how* karma can be preserved and how it can continue from the pudgala. The Vātsīputrīyas tried to explain *why* the karma can be preserved and can continue from one life to another. But many questions were still left unanswered and they were left to the Saṃmitiyas who uses the doctrine of *avipranāśa* to explain *how* karma can continue.

Sautrānikas

In my notes "Ny" stands for *Nyāyānusāra*, a book written by sanghabhadra as a critique to the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* of Vasubandhu. And "MVS" stands for the book called *Mahāvībhāsa* which is a huge commentary on *Jñānaprasthāna*, which is the foundation of the Sarvāstivāda.

There were this group who were ultra supportive of *Mahāvībhāsa* and they think that the *Mahāvībhāsa* is the only correct representation of the doctrine of the Sarvāstivādin. These group of people are in Kaśmīra, a stronghold of the Sarvāstivāda and because they take *Mahāvībhāsa* as their "bible" they are called *Vaibhāṣikas*. Their name indicate that they take *Mahāvībhāsa* as the authority to the exclusion of all other texts and they are ultra orthodox people, very dogmatic. Among Sarvāstivāda there are not so many dogmatic people especially in *Gandhāra*, which was separated by a huge mountain range from the *Kaśmīra*, who are proud Sarvāstivādin. And among the proud kaśmīra Sarvāstivādin there is

this ultra province called the *Vaibhāṣikas*. So the Gandhāra Sarvāstivādins are the more open minded and among them are a group called *Dārṣṭāntika* who are also more open minded Sarvāstivādin. They do not stick to just one text and they do not like to preach but like to do meditation. If they preach they also use similes and stories. *Dārṣṭāntika* comes from the word *Drṣṭānta*, which means similes. So the *Dārṣṭāntika* are people who are very good at using *Drṣṭānta*, which are similes. Their idea of how karma get pass out is like dropping a dye into a plant. In their example if we drop a red dye daily into a citron plant, this baby citron plant will absorb the red dye so that when this plant bears fruit, the red color is still inside this fruit. So this is how they explain karma passed on from one moment to another.

So the *Vaibhāṣikas* is the more orthodox one and the *Dārṣṭāntika* is the more open minded ones but all these people are Sarvāstivādin and so you can understand how much clash of ideas there will have within the Sarvāstivādin. Probably due to these clashes there were a group from the *Dārṣṭāntika* who gave up Abhidharma and concentrated only on the sutta. This group of people is known as *Sūta + ika = Sautrāntika*, people who take the sutra as authority and they are against the ābhidharmaika, who take Abhidharma as their authority. And the *Vaibhāṣikas* only take the mahāvībhāsa as their authority. Therefore in Nyāyānusāra it was mention that the arch rival of the Sarvāstivādin is the Sautrāntika.

The Sautrāntika initially when they started they actually wanted to go back to the sutra because they got sick of all the arguments in the Abhidharma and the way they do it. But since Sautrāntika have to argue with the Abhidharmikas and in the course doing that they became “abhidharmised” They have to use Abhidharmic terms to talk to the Abhidharmika and in the process they become a little Abhidharmic so much so that their leader, at the time of Sanghabhadra, also wrote an Abhidharma text although he was a Sautrāntika.

Bīja Theory

Some of their teachings are explained in Venerable Bodhi’s notes. The easier one is the *bīja* theory and *bīja* is the Sanskrit word for seed. *Bīja* theory is how the Sautrāntika explained karma and also how they explained the working of the mind. So it is psychology plus karma within the *bīja* theory itself and please read through by yourself because the Sautrāntika is important, as they are the inspiration for Yogācāras’s doctrine, especially when we come to the *ālayavijñāna* theory.

Theory of Indirect Perception (*Bāhyārthānumeya*)

In Venerable Bodhi’s notes she mention two doctrines of the Sautrāntika, namely the *bīja* theory and the theory of indirect perception. The theory of indirect perception comes very close to idealism. In Abhidharma, the eye and visual object equal to eye-consciousness, that is the basic Abhidharmic idea of the Sarvāstivāda. The Sautrāntika opposed the Sarvāstivāda because they were the leading representatives of the Abhidharmika of the time. So whatever they say they would have different idea. In Sarvāstivāda within a single moment, eye-consciousness is the result of eye organ and visual object coming together. It is a very special relationship because to the Sarvāstivāda they all arise together in a same moment. But this sound very wrong to the Sautrāntika because to them they are very strict *kṣaṇikavādin*. *Kṣaṇikavādin* are the people who believe in momentarism, everything arises and ceases in one moment, everything exists only for one moment. For them this relationship is very wrong. Because eye-consciousness, as a result of eye and visual object, can only arise one moment later according to their understanding. If we talk about cause and result, the result would definitely have to follow after the cause. So how can the Sarvāstivāda tell us that eye-consciousness arise in the same moment when eye and visual object come into contact. So this is the fundamental thing which they do not agreed. Of course the Sarvāstivādin has their own explanation for it. But the Sautrāntika think that: 1st moment = eye + visual object and 2nd moment = eye-consciousness. In this way it is natural and we can qualify the statement that eye-consciousness is the result of eye coming into contact with visual object. But then there will be a problem. Everything arises and ceases in one moment then in second moment what is the object that the eye-consciousness perceives? Because in

the second moment the visual object has already ceased. But you might argue that the visual object is still in front of you. What we meant is the “same” visual object because we change moment by moment. So the Venerable Bodhi this moment that we see is not the same Venerable Bodhi we see in the next moment. The moment we talk about is not in seconds but is the smallest moment of time. So the Sautrāntika would have problem to explain the causal relationship between these three things when they split them into two moments. But what is the eye-consciousness conscious of or perceives? Because the object has already gone into the past.

Therefore they come up with the doctrine of indirect perception. They say that it is not really eye-consciousness perceives the object as it is but the eye-consciousness perceives a representation or a mental replica of the object. That means in the first moment, eye plus visual object somehow there is a wax-image of the visual object in our mind so that when eye-consciousness arises we perceive the image of the object in our mind.

Therefore there are two implications of this indirect perception theory. To the Sautrāntika, we can never perceive reality directly because it is always through representation or always through mental replica in our mind. Secondly how do we know external things exist if for moment by moment they arise and cease? Conversely if we can perceive a mental replica of the object, that proves in the opposite way that there is an external reality. For that mental replica to exist there must something externally for the mind to “photocopy” of it for other consciousness to perceive it. Therefore if we can perceive it through our senses that means there is a corresponding external reality. *Anumana* is the Pali word for inference The Sanskrit term for indirect perception is *bahyārthānumeya*. (*bāhir* = external, *ārtha* = thing, *ānumeya* = infer-ability). That means we can infer external reality because of this doctrine, which state that external reality can be inferred through our consciousness. This is very close to the Yogācāra’s idea of mind only. It is more complex when we come to Yogācāra but then they get their inspiration from this theory of indirect perception. At least for the Sautrāntika they agreed that there is external reality and there do not take one step further by denying external reality and insist that mind only exist. But for the Yogācāra they go one step further to full fledged idealism, idealism of no external reality except for the mind. To the Sautrāntika they still accept external reality, just that they say we cannot experience or cannot perceive reality directly, it has to be via our consciousness. And whether we perceive it correctly depends a lot on our consciousness. What if in darkness if we see a rope and misunderstand it as a snake? The rope in darkness is real but our mind makes us think that it is a snake. To the Sautrāntika the rope is real, it is the mind or consciousness interpreting the data wrongly. To the Yogācāra would explain it the same way but ultimately the rope is an “extension” or just a manifestation of our mind and we will discuss more when we come to their teachings later.

So far Buddhists before Sautrāntika nobody has talk about such theory so they are more innovative because of their antagonism with the Sarvāstivāda. Normal Buddhist will be very satisfy with the equation of eye plus visual object equal eye-consciousness but for these Abhidharmikas they will have to go through a lot of analysis and that is why they came out with so much details. For the Sarvāstivādin to come up with something like this will take the Sautrāntika, their archrival to come up with critique of it. To we can see how philosophy develops. Rightly or wrongly or which side you take will depend on individuals. Some people will think the Sarvāstivāda is correct and others will think that common sense tell us it is wrong and follow the Sautrāntika’s model. And this is how Buddhist’s sect got divided.

To recap on the indirect perception theory. In the first part, they objected to the Sarvāstivāda that cause and effect couldn’t be in the same moment. Therefore it is necessary to come to two moments: the first moment eye comes into contact with visual object and second moment eye-consciousness arises. But then there is a problem of what eye-consciousness perceives in the second moment? To explain that they came out with “representative perception” or conventional replica of the object that is what our consciousness perceives. With that they have the teaching that we cannot directly perceives external reality. But that does not mean external reality does not exist. In fact it proves that external

reality exist. To the Sautrāntika without something real outside there is no basis for the mental replica. So this is how they differs from the idealist who says that external reality is just an extension or a function of the mind.