
THE CONCEPT OF PUGDALA IN THE BUDDHIST SCHOOL OF PUDGALAVĀDA: THE PROBLEM OF INTERPRETATION AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPTION

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The article investigates the notion of the self in Pudgalavāda — one of the least studied schools of Buddhism. The Pudgalavāda is an “unorthodox” trend of early Buddhism, which holds the doctrine of the existence of the self, or person — pudgala. The author examines the history of the formation of the Pudgalavāda, makes an overview of available literature on the topic and analyzes the concept of the self in the key texts of this philosophical trend, analyzes in detail the philosophical arguments of debating parties — classical Buddhism and Pudgalavāda Buddhism. The author comes to the conclusion that the apparent contradictions in the interpretation of pudgala can be explained by the consistent and logical evolution in the understanding of the concept of pudgala in the school of Pudgalavāda. The article will be of interest to researchers in the fields of history of philosophy, philosophy of mind, cognitive psychology and to scholars investigating the problem of the self.

Key words: Buddhism, Pudgalavāda, self, person, pudgala, soul, ātman, anātman.

The problem of existence of the self and the problem of its properties seems to be one of the most important for the whole Indian philosophy. The largest contribution to the development of this problem was made by the controversy between the Buddhists and the Brahmanists. The catalyst for these discussions was the emergence of the Buddhist doctrine of the “non- self” (anātmavāda).

In the debate on the self in Buddhism the school of Pudgalavāda (Pali Puggalavāda) comes forth. In contrast to most of the Buddhists it advocated the teaching of the existence of the self (“pudgala”).

The doctrine of anātman, as presented in the Pali Canon (hereinafter — the PC), was not entirely clear because of its lack of rationalization and hence necessarily required some sort of philosophical and exegetical interpretation. The main “intra-Buddhist” problem in the doctrine of anātman was that the Buddha nowhere in the PC directly denied the existence of the ātman, but also nowhere did he openly claim it. Moreover, in many discourses he refused to directly answer this important philosophical and religious question, relating it to the category of avyākṛta (Pali avyākata — lit. “indeterminate” questions, to which it is impossible to give any answer). The followers of the Buddha, who tried to somehow rationalize Master’s words, were to solve in a philosophical way the problem deliberately excluded by him from the discourse. In addition, the doctrine of anātman as such was fraught with considerable difficulties and inevitably caused heated controversy by other philosophical schools.

Thus the concept of the existence of pudgala, i.e. the self with a specific ontological status, was designed, on the one hand, to rationalize the philosophical teachings of the Buddha and to explain the dark places of anātmavāda for the Buddhists them-

selves, and on the other — to answer to the criticism of the Brahmanists and to give a rational explanation of the phenomena of rebirth and karmic retribution given the actual exclusion of the subject of these phenomena from the ontological and epistemological system of early Buddhism.

Although Pudgalavāda continues to be regarded as a “heretical” trend in Buddhism, the followers of this school considered themselves to be loyal to the ideas of the Buddha. They believed that their treatment of the self allows to protect the Buddhist teaching against many absurdities which arise, in their opinion, from a mere denial of ātman as a reality.

However, Pudgalavāda, which offered an alternative to the traditional interpretation of anātmavāda, still remains one of the “dark spots” among the variety of the Buddhist schools for the most part of Russian and foreign scholars. This happens, on the one hand, because the original Sanskrit texts of the Pudgalavādins didn’t remain (being now available only in a small number of Chinese translations), and on the other because the concept of the self as proposed by the Pudgalavādins, proved to be itself quite complicated and difficult to expound. Due to these facts, in various texts we have seemingly contradictory accounts of the concept of the self in Pudgalavāda. As a result this notion appears to be extremely hard for interpretation. This article makes an attempt to explain the above mentioned apparent contradictions and to give more or less adequate interpretation of the concept pudgala in Pudgalavāda Buddhism.

In Russian there are no works devoted entirely to Pudgalavāda, the texts of the school still remain untranslated. Among the foreign works we know of only one monograph of Canadian scholar L. Priestley “Pudgalavāda Buddhism. The Reality of the Indeterminate Self” [8] (main ideas of which are summarized in his article in the “Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy” [9]). The classic edition on early schools of Buddhism is A. Bareau “Les sectes bouddhiques du petit véhicule” [2]. It is possible to find in it information on all the schools of Pudgalavāda Buddhism, including their basic theoretical guidelines. The monograph of bhikshu Thich Thien Chau “The Literature of the Personalists of Early Buddhism” [10] contains the most complete account of the history of the Pudgalavādins and their ideas.

A. Bareau [2], (1) considers that Pudgalavāda emerged from a split among the Sthaviravādins (the future Theravādins), which occurred c. 280 BC during the reign of King Bindusāra Maurya. The first school of Pudgalavāda trend was Vātsīputrīya (Pali Vajjiputtaka), from which in the period from about the 3rd century BC and up to the 3rd century AD four schools separated (listed in order of their appearance): Dharmottarīya and Bhadrāyānīya — both appeared about three centuries after the Buddha’s Parinirvana, Sāṃmatīyā — emerged in the period from approximately the 2nd century BC to the 1st century AD, and Śaṅṅāgārika — the latest school of Pudgalavāda, emerged c. the 3rd century AD. Thus Pudgalavāda consists of five schools of early Buddhism in total. The gradual split of the Pudgalavādins was caused mainly by disagreement on some theoretical questions of Buddhist doctrine and philosophy (such as, for example, the problem of the nature of Arhat).

C. the 7th century this school, nowadays known only to the limited number of specialists in the history of Buddhism gains tremendous popularity. As early as by the 3rd

or 4th centuries Sāṃmatīyā, which was identified by contemporaries with the previously famous but later disappeared ancient school of Vatsīputriya, known also as Vātsīputrīya-Sāṃmitīya or Arya-Sāṃmatīyā, becomes the dominant school in one of the largest Buddhist centers Sarnath, where it even surpasses the popularity of “orthodox” Sarvāstivāda. Since the 7th century it turns into the most popular and in fact the only one school of Pudgalavāda Buddhism. At this time Sāṃmatīyā is a set of two schools separated, most likely, mostly by geography: Kurukula and Avantaka.

The famous Chinese monk and traveler Xuánzàng (602—644/664) reports that at the time of his stay in India (c. 630—645) Sāṃmatīyā community had more than 60 thousand monks, being the most numerous of the Buddhist communities [3. P. 117.]. The school also enjoyed the sympathy of the royal power: chronicles say that even the sister of King Harṣavardhana (606—646) joined the Pudgalavādin sangha as a nun.

Despite its popularity, unlike Theravāda and Mahāyāna, Pudgalavāda still didn't manage to spread beyond the Indian subcontinent (although some interest in the school was in China — this is evident because Pudgalavādin treatises preserved only in Chinese translation). Therefore, c. 11th century due to the Muslim conquest and expulsion of Indian Buddhism into the neighboring regions Pudgalavāda completely ceases to exist. Thus, other schools of Buddhism turned out to be “historic winners”. Nowadays they have the status of “orthodox” and regard Pudgalavādin current as “heretical”.

Due to the mentioned historical reasons very few textual sources of this school are available to us. We have only four writings, preserved only in Chinese translation: the “Vinaya-dvāviṃśati-vidyā-śāstra” (in Chinese “Lu erh-shih-erh ming-liao lun”), a treatise with a Chinese name “Ssu-a-han-mu ch'ao chieh”, the “Sāṃmitīya-nikāya-śāstra” (hereinafter — the SNSH) and the “Tridharmaka-śāstra” (2).

Apart from the mentioned treatises, the most important source of our knowledge of Pudgalavāda is the criticism of its views preserved in the writings of the philosophers of other Buddhist schools. Among them we should mention the “Kathāvatthu” (2nd century AD), “Satyasiddhi-śāstra” of Harivarman (3rd century AD), “Vijñānakāya” of Devasharman (2nd century AD.), “Mahāyāna-sūtra-lamkāra” of Asanga (5th century AD), “Tattva-saṃgraha” of Shantarakshita, or the compendium of the teachings of all schools (8th century AD), “Madhyamaka-hṛdaya-vṛtti” of Bhavaviveka, “Bodhicaryāvatāra” of Shantideva (8th century AD.). The most important sources for the formation of various Buddhist schools and their views also include works of Vasumitra, Bhavya and Vinitadeva (3). The teaching of the Pudgalavādins also was subject to severe criticism by famous philosophers such as Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu and Chandrakirti.

From all sources regarding the Pudgalavādins the oldest and one of the most important is the “Kathāvatthu” (c. 2nd century AD), or “The Topics for Discussion”, part of the Abhidhamma-Pitaka of the PC. The “Kathāvatthu” reflected numerous discussions which took place between various Buddhist schools during the 3rd Buddhist Council at Pāṭaliputra under Emperor Ashoka (reigned from 268 to 232 BC). It should be noted that the text is written by “orthodox” Buddhists, supposedly the Theravādins, so it may significantly distort the original teaching of Pudgalavāda.

Consider a small excerpt from the debate on pudgala from the “Kathāvatthu”:

“Controverted Point. — That “the person” is known in the sense of a real and ultimate fact.

[§ 1] Theravādin. — Is “the person” known in the sense of a real and ultimate fact? Puggalavādin. — Yes.

Th. — Is the person known in the same way as a real and ultimate fact is known?

P. — Nay, that cannot truly be said.

Th. Acknowledge your refutation: (i.) If the person be known in the sense of a real and ultimate fact, then indeed, good sir, you should also say, the person is known in the same way as [any other] real and ultimate fact [is known].

(ii.) That which you say here is wrong, namely, (1) that we ought to say, “the person is known in the sense of a real and ultimate fact”, but (2) we ought not to say, the person is known in the same way as [any other] real and ultimate fact [is known].

(iii.) If the latter statement (2) cannot be admitted, then indeed the former statement (1) should not be admitted.

(iv.) In affirming the former statement (1), while (v.) denying the latter (2), you are wrong” [7. P. 8—9].

The essence of the debate is as follows. From the point of view of classical early Buddhism ontology (Sthaviravāda, Sarvāstivāda etc.) only 75 dharmas, or elements of psycho-physical flow of existence. The Pudgalavādins argue, that the self, or pudgala is known, or “perceived” (upalabbhati) as “real and ultimate” (saccikattha-paramatthenā), but refuse to admit that it actually is “real and ultimate”.

Indeed, the introduction of pudgala, which was not recognized (but at the same time was not denied) by the Buddha as the 76th dharma would have been a flagrant violation of the tradition, which would have been regarded not even as a “heresy”, a “false view”, but also as a denial of anātmavāda, the cornerstone of Buddhist teaching. This could lead to an automatic exclusion of the Pudgalavādins from the number of the Buddhists. Also the position of the Pudgalavādins seems for the Theravādins to be internally inconsistent. They argue that if pudgala is known, or “perceived” as “real and ultimate” (1), it must be in fact “real and ultimate” (2). It only remains to add that from the statement (2) inevitably follows that pudgala is a dharma (3).

It is obvious that the Theravādins and the Pudgalavādins use different ontological systems of reasoning. The Pudgalavādins believe that there is a category of things (namely, pudgala), which, on the one hand, is known as “real and ultimate”, but on the other is not a dharma. But as far as they realize that frank assignment of pudgala to the domain of “real and ultimate” — will make it a dharma from the Theravādins point of view, they are forced to deny that it is “real and ultimate”. In the case of classical Theravāda Buddhism we are dealing with a two-part ontology (the “real and ultimate” dharmas and all other objects, which are conventionally real). Pudgalavāda, on its part, offers a completely new three-part ontology: the “real and ultimate” level, conventionally real and the third — pudgala, which is known as “real and ultimate”, but at the same time is not a dharma. Perhaps here we are dealing with the treatment of pudgala as a so-called “unspeakable” (avaktavya), the thing which is neither absolutely real nor conventionally real and constitutes therefore a separate ontological level.

The most important treatise of the Pudgalavādins themselves is the “Sāṃmitīya-nikāya-śāstra” (the Sanskrit name is a reconstructed one, the Chinese name is “San-

mi-ti pu lun”, c. 350 AD). This is the only text of the Sāṃmatīyā school that has survived till our time. Like the rest of the Pudgalavādin treatises it has preserved only in Chinese translation.

The treatise offers a fundamentally new approach to the notion of the self (pudgala), which is not found in the texts of the other Buddhist schools (4).

Sāṃmatīyās argue that pudgala can be perceived (prajñapta-pudgala) on the three different grounds.

1. Pudgala which is perceived in relation to its location (āśraya-prajñapta-pudgala). By this they mean that pudgala is perceived as a self based on a particular set of aggregates, which is present in this birth. The treatise clearly states that pudgala is a concept: «Although the self exists, it is conceptual; the self is not substantial» (TI649, 464b6). However, the text notes that pudgala is not identical with aggregates, although not different from them.

2. Pudgala which is apprehended in relation to transmigration (saṅkrama-prajñapta-pudgala). The self is one who was someone in a past life and will be someone else in the future. Pudgala is understood in the perspective of rebirth. It is in this sense, according to the Pudgalavādins, the Buddha said that in the past life he was that person or other.

3. Pudgala which is perceived in relation to cessation (nirodha-prajñapta-pudgala). By this they mean the self which before the complete cessation (nirodha), i.e. before Nirvana, had such and such skandhas. Here pudgala is regarded from the point of non-existence of the previously existed aggregates (skandhas). From the point of view of the Pudgalavādins even in the state of Parinirvana when skandhas disappear and it is impossible to point to a specific denotation of the word “self” it is still wrong to say that pudgala doesn't exist.

Another text which is very interesting in case of the debate on the notion of the self between the Pudgalavādins and the “orthodox” Buddhists is the “Pudgalaviniścaya” (“The Investigation of the Self”, hereinafter the PV) of Vasubandhu (c. 4th cent.).

Here is a quite representative passage from the first part of the PV.

“...Nonetheless, the Vātsīputrīyas hold that there is a person.

Now, this must be examined: do they hold it to be substantial, or conceptually constructed?

What is [meant by] “substantial”, and what [by] “conceptually constructed?”

If, like physical form, etc., it is a discrete entity, then it is substantial. But if like milk, etc., it is a collectivism, then it is conceptually constructed.

What follows from this?

If it is substantial, then because it is essentially separate, it must be said to be discrete from the bundles, just as the bundles are one from the other.

...this would imply [that the Vātsīputrīyas hold] a non-Buddhist view...” [6].

On this the Pudgalavādins answer that pudgala “...is neither substantial nor conceptually constructed...” [6. P. 351].

Pudgala is perceived “As is fire, depending upon fuel.

How is it that fire is conceptually constructed depending upon fuel?

Though the fire is not conceptually constructed without fuel, one can neither assert that fire is discrete from fuel, nor that it is non-discrete. For if it were discrete, the

fuel would be not hot; and if it were not discrete, then the combustible would itself be the combustion. Just so, though the person is not conceptually constructed in the absence of the bundles, one cannot assert that it is discrete from the bundles, because that implies permanence; nor that it is not discrete, for that implies annihilation” [6. P. 351—352].

Thus, in the PV we see a new significant modification of the teaching of the Pudgalavādins. In this text pudgala appears not as a concept, but at the same time not as a reality, that is, is neither one nor the other, in other words — it is avaktavya, or ineffable.

Tracing the history of the teachings of the Pudgalavādins from the early treatises (the SNSH, the “Kathāvattu”) until the era of the developed Buddhist philosophy (Vasubandhu), the apparent contradictions in the interpretation of pudgala can be explained by the consistent and logical evolution in the understanding of the concept of pudgala in the school of Pudgalavāda. If in the early texts pudgala was understood as a mere concept, so their teaching was difficult to be separated from the teachings of the “orthodox” Buddhists, then by the 4th century they state more clearly their understanding of pudgala as, on the one hand, not just a mere designation, and on the other — not as a separately existing dharma. So happens the assertion of hitherto unprecedented teaching of a new type of ineffable realities — avaktavya, or avacya.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Here and after we follow the reconstruction of historical events and dating made by Dutt and Bareau: Dutt, Nalinaksha. *Buddhist Sects in India*. D.: Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1998.
- (2) For the exposition of the four treatises see: Thich Thien Chau, Bhikshu. *The Literature of the Personalists of Early Buddhism*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999.
- (3) See: Bareau, André. “Trois traités sur les sectes bouddhiques attribués à Vasumitra, Bhavya et Vinītadeva.” I partie: *Journal Asiatique*, 242. Paris, 1954, P. 229—66; II partie: *Journal Asiatique*, 244. Paris, 1956, P. 167—200.
- (4) In the presentation of the main ideas of the SNSH we use mostly the exposition made by R. Buswell: *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*. Vol. VIII. *Buddhist Philosophy from 100 to 350 A.D.* Ed. by K.H. Potter. D.: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999. P. 353—365. English translation of the *Sāmmiṭṭīyanikāyashāstra*: Venkataramanan, K. “*Sāmmiṭṭīyanikāya Sāstra*.” *Visva-Bharati Annals*, 5 (1953), 155—243.

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ПОНЯТИЕ ПУДГАЛЫ В БУДДИЙСКОЙ ШКОЛЕ ПУДГАЛАВАДА: ПРОБЛЕМА ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИИ И ЭВОЛЮЦИИ КОНЦЕПТА

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В статье исследуется понятие субъекта в пудгалаваде — одной из наименее изученных школ буддизма. Пудгалавада является «неортодоксальной» школой раннего буддизма, которая придерживается учения о существовании субъекта, или «пудгалы». Автор рассматривает историю формирования пудгалавады, дает обзор имеющейся литературы по данной теме и анализирует концепцию субъекта по ключевым текстам этого философского течения, подробно анализирует философские аргументы обеих сторон — «классического» буддизма и буддизма пудгалавадинского. Автор приходит к выводу, что кажущиеся противоречия в интерпретации пудгалы можно объяснить последовательной и логичной эволюцией в понимании концепта пудгалы в школе пудгалавада. Статья может представлять интерес для исследователей в области истории философии, философии сознания, когнитивной психологии и для ученых, изучающих проблему «я» и субъекта.

Ключевые слова: буддизм, пудгалавада, я, человек, пудгала душа, атман, анатман.