

Puggala

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Puggala (Skt. *Pudgala*) means an individual as opposed to *parisā* which means a group of people. When one says *aggapuggala*, *ariya puggala* or *abhabba puggala*, what he means is the senior most person, noble person and incapable person respectively. *Gūthabhāṇī puggala*, *pupphabhāṇī puggala* and *madhubhāṇī puggala* respectively mean a person who says he has seen what he has not seen in a court of Law, a person who says only what he has seen in a court of Law and a person who giving up harsh speech speaks gentle, pleasant and sweet words in such a nice way that directly go to one's heart.

Different types of persons have been elaborately enumerated and described in the *Puggala Paññāṭṭī* – one of the seven books of the *Abhidhamma piṭaka*. Here persons have been enumerated according to their characteristics, achievements and their temperaments. One who has entered the stream which will take him to *nibbāna* is called a *sotāpanna*, one who is to be born once in this world and then attain *nibbāna* is called a *sakadāgāmī* (once-returner), one who will be born in some other world but not in this world and attain *nibbāna* there is an *anāgāmī* (non-returner) and one who has eliminated all his cravings in this very lifetime is called an *arhat* (or *arahant*). In other words, an *arhat* is he who has attained liberation and has come out of the cycle of birth and death.

One is called a *samaya vimutta* if he is finally emancipated and an *asamaya vimutta* if not finally emancipated. In the *Puggala Paññāṭṭī*, persons have been categorized from under one term to under ten terms. It gives a very exhaustive description of different types of persons. But all these different descriptions of persons come under *paññatti* (conception or designation).

Puggala is not real. It is just a conception, a designation as said above. From the ultimate point of view, a being (*satta*) does not exist (*Sattoti vā purisoti vā puggaloti vā paññattimattameva, paramatthato satto nāma natthi*).

In Buddha's philosophy, there are two truths, one conventional (*sammuti sacca*) and the other ultimate (*paramattha sacca*). The Buddha has shown very clearly that a *puggala* consists of five aggregates, namely *rūpa* (corporeal group or matter), *vedanā* (feeling group), *saññā* (perception group), *saṅkhāra* (group of mental formations or mental states) and *viññāṇa* (consciousness group).

Rūpa khandha comprises four underived (no-*upādā*) elements such as *paṭhavī* (earth), *āpo* (water), *tejo* (fire) and *vāyo* (air) and twenty-four derived (*upādā*) or secondary phenomena like the five physical sense organs of seeing (*cakkhu*), hearing (*sota*), smelling (*ghāṇa*), tasting (*jihva*) and touching (*photabba*) and four sense objects such as form (*rūpa*), sound (*sadda*), odour (*gandha*) and taste (*jihvā*), femininity (*itthindriya*), virility (*purisindriya*), physical base of mind (*hadaya vatthu*), physical expression (*kāya viññāti*), vocal expression (*vacī viññāti*), physical life (*jīvita*), space element (*ākāsa dhātu*), physical agility (*rūpassa lahutā*), elasticity (*mudutā*), adaptability (*kammaññatā*), growth (*upacaya*), continuity (*santati*), decay (*jarā*), impermanence (*aniccatā*) and nutriment (*āhāra*).

Vedanā khandha (feeling group) consists of five kinds of feelings such as *sukha vedanā*, *dukkha vedanā*, *somanassa*, *domanassa* and *upekkhā*. The first two are physical and the next two are mental.

Perception group consists of six classes of perceptions such as *rūpa saññā* (form), *sadda saññā* (sound), *gandha saññā* (odour), *rasa saññā* (taste), *photabba saññā* (touch) and *dhamma saññā* (mental impression).

Mental formations (*sankhāra khandha*) are fifty in number. Eleven of them are general, twenty-five of them are karmically wholesome (*sobhana*) and fourteen of them unwholesome.

Conscious group (*viññāṇa-kkhandha*) consists of *cakkhu viññāṇa* (eye consciousness), *sota viññāṇa* (ear consciousness), *ghāṇa viññāṇa* (nose consciousness), *jihvā viññāṇa* (tongue consciousness), *kāya viññāṇa* (body consciousness) and *mano viññāṇa* (mind consciousness).

So ultimately what is a *puggala*? It is a combination of all that has been described above. The purpose of analyzing and dividing *puggala* into separate constituents is to show that there is nothing permanent here. All that is here is constantly changing and is impermanent.

The whole idea in so analyzing a *puggala* is to show that there is nothing permanent here for one to be attached to. *Puggala* is just a concept and a designation. Just as different parts of a cart when joined together in a certain way become a cart, in the same way the five aggregates join in a certain way to be called a *puggala*. In the words of Vajira Bhikkhuni:

“Just as, with an assemblage of parts,
The word ‘chariot’ is used.
So, when the aggregates exist,
There is the convention ‘a being’.”

Questions:

1. Define *puggala*. What is the general meaning of *puggala*?
2. Define *puggala* in the ultimate sense.
3. *Puggala* is an assemblage of parts just like a chariot. Discuss.
4. Define *rūpa*. How many kinds of *rūpa* are described in the Abhidhamma?
5. What is the purpose of analyzing a *puggala* into separate parts? Explain.
6. Do you agree with Vajira Bhikkhuni in defining a being?
7. What do you mean by *kāya viññāti* and *vacī viññāti*?
8. Define *kāya lahutā* and *kāya kammaññatā*.
9. Explain *hadaya vatthu*.
10. Explain *viññāṇa-kkhandha* in detail.