

‘NĀTAPUTTA’ IN EARLY NIRGRANTHA LITERATURE

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The Pāli canon of the Buddhists refers to Jina Vardhamāna Mahāvira as ‘Niggantha Nātaputta’ (Ceylonese version) or ‘Niggaṇṭha Nātaputta’ (Burman version). The appellation ‘Nātaputta’ is after Vardhamāna’s clan-nomen ‘Nāta’, Jñāṭṛ; the prefixed term ‘Niggantha’ (Nirgrantha) alludes to the Śramaṇic Church of which he was the leader. No scholar, however, seems to have investigated in depth as to the situation as it obtains in regard to this specific (clanic) appellation inside the literature of the Nirgranthas. The present paper addresses itself to exploring this particular aspect of inquiry.

The earlier texts of the Ardhamāgadhī canon do contain clear as well as copious references to ‘Nātaputta’ (Jñāṭṛputra, scion of the Jñāṭṛ clan). The broad temporal bracket of the relevant passages (or verses as the case may be) inside the different texts is c. B. C. 250—A. D. 250. While this epithet virtually disappears after that period, the reminiscences of it echo in the post-Gupta, pre-medieval and medieval commentaries, laxicons, and sometimes also in the hymns, the phase with which the present paper shall not deal.

Unlike the Buddhist references which allude to Mahāvira singularly by his clan epithet, the early Nirgrantha canonical texts employ it alongside a large variety of other honorifics and epithets.¹ Moreover, the Nirgranthas had not needed to prefix the qualificatory ‘Niggantha’ to his clan epithet ‘Nātaputta’ since for them he was not an outsider but the leader of their own Order, Nirgrantha Church. For them it, therefore, went without specifically so saying.

The earliest pertinent references to Nātaputta figure inside the two relatively later chapters of the *Ācārāṅga* (Book I) which of course do not seem later than the third and the second century B. C. The eighth chapter’s eighth lecture (*uddeśa*) therein refers to ‘Nātaputta’ in a verse :

अयं से अवरे धम्मे नातपुत्तेन साहिते ।
आयवज्जं पडियारं विजहेज्जा तिघा तिघा ॥

—आचारांग, प्रथम स्कन्ध, ८.८.२७

Next the “Uvadhāna-sutta” (“Upadhāna-sūtra”, c. 3rd-2nd cent. B. C.), which forms ‘Chapter 9’ (Book I) of the selfsame work, twice refers to this epithet (once as ‘Nātasuta’) in one and the same verse :

गथिते मिधुकथासु समयम्हि नातसुत्ते विसोगे अदक्खु ।
एताति से उरालाति गच्छति नातपुत्ते असरणाए ॥

—आचारांग, प्रथम स्कन्ध, ९.१.५०.

In the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* (Book I), several important references (c. 3rd-2nd cent. B. C.) containing this appellation occur : moreover, the variant 'Nātiputta', and the abbreviation 'Nāta', besides the usual 'Nataputta' also figure.

उच्चावतानि गच्छन्ता गम्भमेस्संतंजंतसो ।
नातपुत्ते महावीरे एवमाह जिनोत्तमे ॥

—सूत्रकृतांग १.१.२.२७.

जे एत चरंति आहितं नातेनं महता महेसिणा ।
ते उट्ठित ते समुट्ठिता अन्नोन्नं सारंति धम्मओ ॥

—सूत्रकृतांग १.२.२.२६.

एवं से उदाहु अनुत्तरनाणी अनुत्तरदंसी अनुत्तरनाणदंसनधरे
अरहा नातपुत्ते भगवं वेसालीए वियाहिते ॥

—सूत्रकृतांग १.२.३.२२.

(The variant 'Nātiputta' is the result of pronouncing 'Jñāṭṛ' as 'Jñātri' as is done in Hindi, Bāṅglā, etc., and not as 'Jñāṭru' or 'Jñātra (rural)' as rendered in Gujarāṭi, Oriyā, etc.)

Also in the "Mahāvīra-stava" (c. 2nd cent. B. C.) inside the selfsame *āgama*, a question is thus asked in regard to Nātaputta's knowledge and insights :

कतं च नाणं कतं दंसनं से सीलं कतं नातसुत्तस्स आसी ।
जानासि नं भिक्खु जथातथेनं अथासुत्तं बूहि जथा निसंतं ॥

—सूत्रकृतांग १.६.२

Next, in the same hymn, Nātaputta's dimensions of glory are compared with those of the Sudarśana-giri (Sumeru-parvata) :

सुदंसनस्सेस जसो गिरिस्स पवुच्चती महतो पव्वतस्स ।
एतोवमे समणे नातपुत्ते जाती-जसो-दंसन-नाणसीले ॥

—सूत्रकृतांग १.६.१४

And thereafter it is said : "Just as lending protection (*abhayaḍāna*) is best of helps, an unhurting right utterance is best in the category of truth-telling, and celebacy (*brahmacarya*) is best among austerities, so is best Bhagavān Nātaputta among the world :"

दानान सेट्ठं अभयप्पदानं सच्चेसु या अणवज्जं वदंति ।
तवेसु या उत्तमं बंभचेरं लोगुत्तमे भगवं नातपुत्ते ॥

—सूत्रकृतांग १.६.२३

And finally the following verse in the selfsame hymn once more refers to Nātaputta : “And just as the one who possesses seven *lavas* (in the five ultimate heavenly worlds) are best among those beings who remain in stable state, and as the heaven Sudharmā’s is the finest of all assembly-halls, and among all orders the one that leads to the path of liberation is the best, so is Nātaputta matchless (among the “knowers”) :

ठितीण सेट्ठा लवसत्तमा या सभा सुधम्मा व सभाण सेट्ठा ।

निच्चाण सेट्ठा जथ सव्वधम्मा नातपुत्ता परमत्थि नाणी ॥

—सूत्रकृतांग १.६.२४

Also in Book II of the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, in the chapter “Ardrakiya” (c. 3rd-2nd cent. B. C.) references to Samaṇa Nātaputta and Isiṇo Nātaputta figure :

पन्नं जता वणिण्ण उदयट्ठी आतस्स हेतु पगरंति संगं ।

ततोवमे समणे नारापुत्ते इच्चेव मे होती मती वियक्का ॥

—सूत्रकृतांग २.६.१९

सव्वेसि जीवान दयट्ठताए सावज्ज दोसं परिवज्जयंता ।

तस्सकिणो इसिणो नातपुत्ता उदिट्ठभत्तं परिवज्जयंति ॥

—सूत्रकृतांग २.६.४०

The *Daśavaikālika-sūtra* also refers to Nātaputta in its chapter on “Piṇḍeṣaṇā” (c. 3rd-2nd cent. B. C.) which dwells upon monastic rules for begging food and permissible alms. The two verses cited below (without translation) is the first case in point :

एतं च दोसं दट्ठूनं नातपुत्तेन भासितं ।

अणुमातं पि मेधावी मायामोसं विवज्जए ॥

—दशवैकालिकसूत्र ५.२.४९

विडमुब्भेइमं लोणं तेल्लं सप्पि च फाणितं ।

न ते सन्निहिमिच्छंति नातपुत्तवचोरता ॥

—दशवैकालिकसूत्र ६.१७

The next two verses claim that, if clothes, begging bowl, blanket, and the feet-cleaner are accepted (by a friar) for the sake of modesty and for the maintenance of ascetic practices, it cannot be construed as possession (*parigraha*); because it is (in the final analysis) the ‘attachment’ which is possession *par excellence* as enjoined by ‘Nātaputta’ :

जं पि वत्थं च पातं वा कंबलं पादपुच्छनं ।

तं पि संजम-लज्जट्ठा धारंति परिहरे वि च ॥

न सो परिग्गहो वुत्तो नातपुत्तेन ताइना ।

मुच्छा परिग्गहो वुत्तो इति वुतं महेसिणा ॥

—दशवैकालिकसूत्र ६.१९-२०

In the famous "sa-bhikhu" chapter of this work, Nātaputta is once more referred to in connection with the six living substantialities (*ṣaḍ[jīva]nikāya*), the five great vows (*pañca-mahāvratas*) and the fifty kinds of channels for control (*saṁvara*) over passions :

रोतिय नातपुत्तवचनं अत्तसमे मत्तेज्जा छप्पि काए ।

पंच च फासे महव्वतारिं पंचासवसंवरए जे, सभिकवू ॥

—वशवैकालिकसुत्र, १०. ५.

In the *Uttarādhyayana-sūtra*, the reference to Nātaputta figures only once, as an ending sentence to its chapter six : This same sentence also figures in the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* (I.2.3.22), cited in the foregoing. In both cases this seems a later addition, probably of c. first century B.C.-A.D.², though it is hard to determine which text was the first to receive it.

Among the last works to notice 'Nātaputta' is the *Vyākhyāprajñapti*, a scholiastic compilation very largely of c. 2nd-3rd cent. A.D., which uses earlier sources and occasionally incorporates phrases in the style of c. 1st cent. B.C.-A.D., particularly in its *kathānuyoga* passages. The work in the first place, and at two separate but otherwise identical situations, brings in Śramaṇa Nātaputta as the expositor of the five existentialities (*pañcāstikāyas*) and statements about which of them possess form and which other are formless; this figures inside the 'Kāludāya-pṛcchā' passage where Nātaputta (sometimes with the qualifying word 'Śramaṇa') is five times mentioned :³

एवं खलु समणे नातपुत्ते पंच अत्थिकाए पन्नवेति, धम्मत्थिकायं अधम्मत्थिकायं जीवत्थिकायं पोग्गलत्थिकायं आगासत्थिकायं ।

तत्थ नं नातपुत्ते चत्तारि अत्थिकाए अजीविकाए पन्नवेति, धम्मत्थिकायं अधम्मत्थिकायं आगासत्थिकायं पोग्गलत्थिकायं ।

एगं च समणे नातपुत्ते जीवत्थिकायं अरुविकायं जीवकायं पन्नवेति ।

तत्थ नं समणे नातपुत्ते चत्तारि अत्थिकाए अरुविकाए पन्नवेति — धम्मत्थिकायं अधम्मत्थिकायं आगासत्थिकायं जीवत्थिकायं ।

एगं च नं समणे नातपुत्ते पोग्गलत्थिकायं रूविकायं अजीवकायं पन्नवेति ।

Also, in the queries of the *śramaṇopāsaka* Madduā, 'Śramaṇa Nātaputta' once again figures in connection with the exposition of the five existentialities.⁴ (The date of this phrase may be the same as the last-noted.)

एवं खलु मद्दुया ! तव धम्मायरिए धम्मोवएसए समणे नातपुत्ते पंच अत्थिकाये पन्नवेति.....

In a long passage concerning Somila brāhmaṇa, Śramaṇa Nātaputta once again appears in a phrase, though the passage may not be very early and in point

of fact may be belong to the 2nd or 3rd century A.D. since it incorporates a term *pūrvānupūrvi*⁵ :

एवं खलु समणे नातपुत्ते पुब्बानुपुर्व्वि चरमाने गामानुगामं दूइज्जमाने सुहंसुहेनं.....(इत्यादि)

Contemporaneous to the last noted, and final reference to 'Nātaputta' is to be discerned in the third appendix "Bhāvanā" in the second book of the *Ācārāṅga-sūtra* :

तेनं कालेनं तेनं समयेनं समणे भगवं महावीरे नाते नातपुत्ते नातकुलविनिव्वत्ते विदेहे विदेहदित्रे विदेहजच्चे विदेहसुमाले तीसं वासात्तिं विदेहे त्ति कट्टु.....(इत्यादि,)

After this, references to 'Nātaputta' are virtually absent in the *āgamas*.⁶

Notes and References

1. Besides Vira and Mahāvira, he is also called Buddha, Rṣi, Maharṣi, Muni, Mahāmuni, Kāśyapa (after his *gotra*), etc.
2. In the *Daśavaikālika-sūtra*, the whole chapter is in the ancient Vaitāliya metre, the sentence appears as verse; but since it has no metrical consistency, it creates unconformity. The next verse numbered 23 seems an interpolation by virtue of its style, wording, and content. In point of fact this chapter of the *Daśavaikālika* ends with the verse 21. The whole of the chapter 6 of the *Uttarādhyayana* is in Anuṣṭubha metre, the end marked by the sentence under discussion appears separately in prose form with nothing after that.
3. While the *Vyākhyā-prajñāpati's* main bulk is stylistically dateable to the 2nd-3rd cent. A.D., its *Kathānuyoga* passages and chapters, some of which could be of the 1st, 2nd, originally belonged to other works; these have been shunted to this work possibly in the period between the late fourth and the early sixth century A.D.
4. There is no evidence that Mahāvira has expounded the *pañcāstikāyas*. These were known to, and collectively mentioned by Jina Pārśva in the *Rṣibhāṣitāni* and possibly the detailed nature of the *astikāyas* was first defined by the pontiffs of the sect of Pārśva.
5. The term does not figure in earlier texts.
6. The *Praśnavyākaraṇa*, a pretender *āgama* of c. seventh century A.D., mentions *nātamuni*; and Dhanañjaya, the Digambara poet of the 7th-8th century A.D., includes 'Jñātṛputra' in the list of the epithets of Mahāvira. (I forego citing these later references, which in any case are secondary; for in the age of these later authors, the epithet 'Nātaputta' for Mahāvira was not in currency, and if at all appearing as rare instances, the usage derives from or harks back to the early āgamic sources.)

N. B. In the citations from the *āgamas* the language has been restored to Ardhamāgadhī by eliminating the Mahārāṣṭri Prakṛta affectations.