

A Gripping Narrative of the Buddha's Great Victory over Saccaka: Reflection of the Cu¹Asaccaka Sutta

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Abstract

Though there are many stories concerning victories of the Buddha, the stanzas of the eight victories are so famous as they are believed to ward off various troubles, dangers and be auspicious for those who remember and recite regularly. Among them the victory over *Saccaka* is worthy to study here since it was composed mainly depend on the data drawn from the *Cu¹asaccaka Sutta* of *Majjhima Nikāya*. *Saccaka*, the teacher of *Licchavis* princes lived in *Vesālī* who was clung to the theory of *atta* and held the debate with the Buddha in order to refute the Buddha's *anatta* doctrine. The Buddha won over him by shining the light of wisdom. Finally *Saccaka* had to admit his own defeat in the midst of the audience including his students.

Keywords: *Atta, anatta, Jayamangala-gāthā, Saccaka, Licchavi, anicca*

Introduction

Though there are many conquests of the Buddha the stanza of eight external victories (*Aṭṭha Jayamangala-gāthā*) of the Buddha is as famous as they are believed to ward off various troubles and dangers of human beings. Moreover, auspiciousness will be achieved for those who remember and recite regularly. Among them, the victory over *Saccaka* will be narrative with reference to the lesser discourse? On *Saccaka of Majjhima Nikāya* in order to understand the Buddha's doctrine of *anatta* distinct from the theory of *atta* which flourished then. In this discourse, *Saccaka* the wandering ascetic challenged the Buddha's teachings of five aggregates are *anatta* by negation that they are under one's control.

Victory over Saccaka: Study of Cu¹asaccaka Sutta

Though the *Aṭṭha Jayamangala-gāthā* (Stanza of Eight external victories of the Buddha) is well-known for Buddhists its authorship, year of composed and sources for each victory are not known exactly. It seems to be composed by the wise individual who was learned and has much faith in the Buddhist literature. Thus the author would like to give information about them through study based on specific *sutta* concerned.¹

Two *Suttas* relating to *Saccaka* are found in the *Majjhima Nikāya Mūlapannāsa* of *Mahāyamaka vagga*. They are *Cu¹asaccaka Sutta* and *Mahāsaccaka Sutta*. In spite of the two discourses we would like to study here the *Cu¹asaccaka Sutta* only as it alone is connected with the Buddha's conquer of *Saccaka* in the *Aṭṭha Jayamangala-gāthā*.

This event of debate between the Buddha and *Saccaka* occurred when the Buddha was residing his 5th rain retreat in *Vesālī*.² It is said that *Saccaka* was the youngest and only son of *Nigaḥṭha* parents; both are skilled debaters and possessed five hundred views

¹ U Paññāsāmi, *Ten Treatises Training Myanmar Translation* (Yangon: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1992), p.16.

² *Ibid*, 20.

each.³ His four elder sisters became expertise in contest in the matter of doctrinal views for they inherited total one thousand views from their parents. After defeated by the *Thera Sāriputta* in the debate they entered the *Bhikkhunī* Order and attained *arahantship* within a short time.⁴ *Saccaka* being the wisest among their siblings, he had not only one thousand views of his parents but also well learned in more unorthodox views in addition. He lived in *Vesāli* as an instructor of *Liccavis*⁵ princes. He was portrayed as that he was wearing iron plates in order to prevent the bursting out of his belly which was full of wisdom having potential to rupture at any time.⁶

Saccaka, who was proclaiming himself as one skilled in debating, one who was very learned and people, also took him to be a holy person.⁷ He used to go about in the city and boast himself to the citizens of *Vesāli* as follows,

“I do not see any person who is a sectarian leader having a group of followers, a recluse or a brahman or one worthy of Homage, a Perfectly Self-Enlightened Buddha, who could resist without perspiring from their armpits when I refute and rebuke them on grounds of views, and even senseless logs or wooden blocks could not remain unshaken when I talk about things in terms of views, leave alone the living creatures.”⁸

One morning, while *Saccaka* was strolling about, he saw *Thera Assaji*⁹ who was on his alms round. He greeted friendly and asked him about the chief instruction of the Buddha with the intention to challenge the Buddha on the doctrinal views in a verbal contest.

Having heard of the Buddha’s teachings of the impermanence, suffering, and non-self of the five aggregates, (corporeality, sensation, perception, volitional activities and consciousness) he thought that it is the proper time to have a debate with the Buddha as he acquired his rival’s doctrine ahead. Then he declared in the convention of the *Licchavi* princes that he is going to challenge the Buddha and invited them to witness the grand show.

Thereupon *Saccaka* accompanied with a huge mass of people including his five hundred *Licchavis* princes headed to the *Mahāvana* forest where the Buddha stayed. When he arrived there, he greeted the Buddha, took a suitable place and asked permission to ask a question concerning a certain subject. After receiving the Buddha’s acceptance, he started to ask what the Buddha taught to His disciples. Though he actually had already known the Buddha’s teachings since he enquired from *Thera Assaji*, he wanted to confirm the Buddha’s doctrine before the audience.

On being assured of it *Saccaka* said, “Gotama, all seeds and plants grow and flourish depending on the earth. Besides, all actions are done in dependence on the earth. Likewise, all merit or demerit arises depending on a substantial entity called *atta*, which is the combination of corporeality, sensation, perception, volitional activities and consciousness.” In saying so, he asserted his idea of *atta* which is permanent, controllable and substantial while rejecting the Buddha’s doctrine of *anatta*.

Then the Buddha asked him if he meant the five aggregates are controllable and substantial. He answered, counting on the audience to be on his side by saying thus, “Yes, I

³ G.P. Malalasekera, Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names. Vol. II. (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd, 1998), p.994.

⁴ Thera Buddhaghosa, *Papañcasūdanī* (Majjhima Nikāya Mūlapannāsa Aṭṭhakathā) Vol. II (Mahāyamaka vagga). (Yangon: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1997). 169.

⁵ A powerful tribe of India in the time of the Buddha. The Licchavis were famous for their beauty even the Buddha once compared them to the gods of Tāvātimsa and greatly admired for their system of government which was a republic (gana, sangha), all the leading members of which were called rājā

⁶ Buddhaghosa, op.cit., 170.

⁷ Bhaddanta Vicittasārābhivamsa tr by U Ko Lay, The Great chronicle of Buddhas. Vol. III. (Yangon: TiNi Publishing Centre, 1996), 279.

⁸ Majjhima Nikāya Mūlapaṇṇāsā Pāli. (Yangon: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1998). 289.

⁹ One of the pañcavaggiya and teacher of Thera Sāriputta

mean that they are controllable and substantial. Not only I but all these people also mean so.” The Buddha would like to make His conquest over *Saccaka* alone, He asked him to tell his own view, not of others. *Saccaka* was thus made to admit his own view as before.

Having affirmed *Saccaka*'s view in public, the Buddha proceeded to ask him if an anointed king like King *Ajātasattu* and King *Pasenadi* of *Kosala* have the power in their own territory to kill one deserving to be killed, to confiscate one whose property deserving to be confiscated and to banish one deserving of banishment. *Saccaka* answered affirmatively. Then the Buddha said that you have stated that the corporeality is your self (*atta*), and if so can you command your corporeality follow your wish?” At that point *Saccaka* became conscious of his tricky circumstance that if he said he could command his corporeality, *Lichavi* princes would ask him to make himself handsome like them. Unless he could make so, it would amount to supporting the theory of *anatta* (non-self), the Buddha's doctrine which he wanted to refute. He kept complete silent as he realized that he has placed himself on the horns of a dilemma.

The Buddha asked him again, he still remain silent. Then the Buddha said that, the descendent of *Aggivessana*, *Saccaka* do answer now. It is not the time to keep silent. One's head will get to split into seven pieces, if one does not answer on being asked a reasonable questions by the Buddha for three times in succession”.

At that time the *Sakka*¹⁰ appeared holding a thunderbolt in the guise of a *Yakkha*,¹¹ appeared above the *Saccaka* head in the sky. The *Sakka* appeared in order to threaten *Saccaka* to answer the Buddha's question. It is said that the appearance of the *Sakka* was seen only by *Saccaka* and the Buddha.¹² When finding no one but the Buddha to seek protection, shelter, and refuge, *Saccaka* told the Buddha to ask and let him to answer. Then he gave answer that he cannot command his corporeality according to his wish. At last he admitted the impermanence, suffering and non-self of the five aggregates.

Thus the Buddha conquered *Saccaka* to admit his defeat by his own mouth just as an expert snake charmer caused the snake concerned to suck its venom out of the bitten part of the body of the victim in the presence of the same audience comprising his students of *Licchavi* princes.¹³ Moreover, the Buddha said to him that just like no pith could be found in the stem of a plantain, there is no essence in your words. It is from your brow, not mine that drops of sweat are pouring and having soaked through your robes, are falling to the ground. But not there is not at present any sweat on my body. By saying so the Buddha disclosed His golden coloured body by unveiling His robe.

Dummukha, one of the students *Licchavi* princes knowing the failure of *Saccaka* compared him to a crab which was taken out from the water and cut away all it claws would be unable to get down into the water again. Even so *Saccaka* will be incapable to approach the Buddha again for all his distorted, conceited, twisted views have been cut by the Buddha. Accordingly the *Buddha* won over *Saccaka* with his view of *Atta* has no essence by shining the light of wisdom (*paññā padīpa jalito*).

The loser *Saccaka* asked the Buddha to pardon him and praising Him by saying that, “There might be safety for a man after attacking a rutting elephant, a blazing mass of fire, a poisonous snake, but there could be no safety for a man assailing the Buddha”. Then he invited the Buddha together with His disciples to accept his offering of alms food at his place the next morning. At the same time he urged his students of *Licchavi* princes to prepare and bring five hundred pots of cooked food to his place. After finishing the alms giving ceremony

¹⁰ The ‘King of Gods’ (devānam-into), is the lord over the celestial beings in the heaven of the ‘Thirty Three’ (Tāvatisa)

¹¹ A class of non-human beings (amanussā). In popular belief, a kind of ghost, goblin, or orge.

¹² Buddhaghosa, op.cit., 178.

¹³ Ibid 180.

Saccaka said that, “May the merit of this good deed will be for the well being of the donors (i.e. the *Licchavis*).” The Buddha, however, removed his wrong impression by saying thus, “*Saccaka*, the merit goes to the *Licchavi* princes for gifts offered to you, who is not free from *lobha*, *dosa*, and *moha* but the merit goes to you for gifts offered to me, who is free from *lobha*, *dosa*, and *moha*.”

Conclusion

Though the Buddha’s conquest of *Saccaka* is recorded as sixth victory in the *Aṭṭha Jayamangala-gāthā*, when study this *sutta* and list of the Buddha’s rain retreat it should be the second one. The lessons we have learnt from this *sutta* are, one should make acquaintance with his rival idea before any contest, not to be conceited to assume that only I am the best, the wisest and having great knowledge if so one will lose the greatest opportunity for deliverance from all masses of suffering even meeting with the Buddha and chance to listen to His teachings.

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