

The Designation of the Noble Individuals in Puggala-Paññatti Scripture of Abhidhamma Piṭaka¹

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1. Introduction

Apart from a worldly person or an ordinary man (puthujjana), Theravāda Buddhism points out and expounds another type of person called “Noble One”. Of these, the classification is made comprehensively through a book named Puggala-Paññatti. A canonical scripture of Abhidhamma Piṭaka with the systematic teaching of Theravāda-Buddhism.

However this paper will mainly examines firstly on the Puggala-Paññatti Scripture. Then, further proceeds to the Designation of the Noble Individuals.

2. The Puggala-Paññatti Scripture

The Puggala-Paññatti is the fourth work of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka.² The Puggala-Paññatti is considered to be probably the earliest work of the Abhidhamma books.³ The title “Puggala- Paññatti” derived from two Pāli words: puggala and paññatti. The word ‘puggala’ means an individual or a person.⁴

According to the Abhidhamma viewpoint, the individual has no real existence. The term ‘**puggala**’, in this context, does not mean anything real. It is only sammutisacca (conventional truth) as opposed to paramatthasacca (ultimate or absolute truth).⁵ For example, ‘Peter’ is a hypothetical word for calling five aggregates (pañca-khandha). As such, all constituents; corporeality and mentality integrate as a whole. Despite when the five aggregates disintegrated, name of Peter simultaneously disappeared, as stated in The Questions of King Milinda; “Just as it is

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² The Abhidhamma Piṭaka comprises of seven books commonly known as Sattapakarana; Dhamma-saṅganī (Enumeration of Phenomena), Vibhaṅga (The Book of Divisions), Dhātukathā (Discussion with Reference to the Elements), Puggalapaññatti (Designation of Individuals), Kathāvatthu (Points of Controversy), Yamaka (The Book of Pairs) and Paṭṭhāna (The Book of Relations).

³ “The Abhidhamma books; the last of which is the Kathā Vatthu, and the earliest probably the Puggala paññatti” - T.W. Rhys Davids, **Buddhist India**, 3rd ed. (London: T Fisher Unwin, 1911), p. 188.

⁴ A.P. Buddhadatta Mahāthera, **Concise Pāli-English Dictionary**, 2nd ed., (Ceylon: University of Ceylon, 2008), p. 203.

⁵ AA.I.95; KvuA.34.

by the condition precedent of the co-existence of its various parts that the word ‘chariot’ is used, just so is it that when the khandhas are there, we talk of a ‘being’ ”⁶. Just as the name of the car, the house, the named things etc. They are conventionalized by human being.

The word ‘**paññatti**’ means ‘designation’, ‘description’, ‘concept’ or ‘revealing’⁷ etc. as stated in the Expositor; “revealing”⁸ whilst stated in Compendium of Philosophy; “paññatti means what the mind both conceives and renders articulate.”⁹ Puggala-Paññatti, altogether, means “classification of individuals”.¹⁰

At the beginning, paññatti was classified into the following six designations namely; groups (khandha-paññatti), sense-organs and their objects (āyatana-paññatti), the elements of cognition (dhātu-paññatti), truth (sacca-paññatti), sense-organs (indriya-paññatti), and human types (puggala-paññatti). Of these six, the last one relates to what we are focusing to study.

The types of individual were stated as many as 365 individuals.¹¹ From the division of human types by one, two, three, etc. until ten as follows:

Table 1: Shows the Division of Human Types from Ones to Tens

Division of human types by	Group (s)	Number of Individuals
One	-	45
Two	(pairs) 26	52
Three	18	54
Four	32	128
Five	6	30
Six	1	6
Seven	2	14
Eight	1	8
Nine	1	9
Ten	1	10
Totally	-	365

⁶ **The Questions of King Milinda (Trans. Of Milinda Pañha)**, S.B.E., Vol. xxxv., Tr. Mrs Rhys Davids, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 45.

⁷ Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P.A. Payutto), **Dictionary of Buddhism**, 16th ed., (Bangkok: S.R.Printing Mass Product Ltd., 2008), pp. 367-68.

⁸ Buddhaghosa, **The Expositor (Atthasālinī)**, Vol. II, tr. Maung Tin, ed. Mrs. Rhys Davids, (London: The Oxford University Press, 1921), p. 499.

⁹ S.Z. Aung, Mrs. Rhys Davids, **Compendium of Philosophy A Translation of the Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha**, (Oxford: PTS, 1995), p. 264.

¹⁰ A.P. Buddhadatta Mahāthera, **Concise Pāli-English Dictionary**, p. 203.

¹¹ Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, **Abhidhammapiṭaka: Puggala-Paññatti**, (Thai Version). vol. 36, (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2539), p. [122]-[123]. (Thai version).

The Puggalapaññatti starts with its own matika, which begins with some standard lists but then continues with lists of persons grouped numerically from ones to tens. This latter portion of the matika is then explained in the main body of the work. It lists human characteristics encountered on the stages of a Buddhist path.

3. The Designation of the Noble Individuals

Amongst the designation of the individuals, from ones to tens divisions, the numerous noble individuals are designated as follows:

I. Grouping of human types by one¹²

At least 30 types of noble individuals, in a total of 54 individuals, are designated. It may be summarized that the Buddha exhibited types of noble individuals more than half in this group. For instance, “The once-returner”, “The never-returner”.

II. Grouping of human types by two¹³

Many types of noble individuals are specified here. For example, “The gratified and the gratifier” which imply the one Enlightened for himself (pratyeka Buddha) and the perfectly Enlightened One (sammāsam Buddha) respectively.

III. Grouping of human types by three¹⁴

Not less than 14 noble individuals are designated in the group of three such as the stream-attainer, the once-returner, the never-returner, and the Arahant:

A man who fulfils the moral laws, but incompletely practices meditation and the way of insight [the stream-attainer, and the once-returner]. A man who fulfils the moral laws, completes the practice of meditation, but incompletely practices the way of insight [the never-returner]. A man who fulfils the moral laws, completes the practice of meditation, but completely practices the way of insight [the Arahant].¹⁵

IV. Grouping of human types by four¹⁶

More than 10 noble individuals are designated such as a person is quick in acquiring, a person learns by exposition, and a person is one who may be led.

V. Grouping of human types by five¹⁷

In this group, noble individual is designated as monks comparable to a professional warrior who freed from ignorance:

. . . he has the knowledge that it is free, he knows that birth is exhausted, the holy life is led, what is to be done is done, and ‘there is nothing further of these

¹² Pug.I. 1-50.

¹³ Pug.II. 1-27.

¹⁴ Pug.III. 1-17.

¹⁵ Pug. III. 15.

¹⁶ Pug.IV. 1-29.

¹⁷ Pug.V. 1-14.

conditions.’ It is this that victory in battle means for him. Just as that professional warrior endures dust, endures the top of the flag, endures war cries, endures fight from a distance, he winning the battle, being victorious in the battle, survives on the scene of battle.

VI. Grouping of human types by six¹⁸

In this group of six, the designation of the Noble Individuals has made up six types; a perfectly enlightened one (sammāsambuddho), one enlightened for himself (paccekasambuddho), one attained the perfection of discipleship (Sāriputta and Moggallāna), the other Arahants, the non-returner (anāgami), and the stream-attainer (sotāpanna) and the once-returner (sakadāgāmi).

VII. Grouping of human types by seven¹⁹

In the total number of 14 individuals, there are 7 types of individuals specified as the noble one who emerges from drowning is unwholesome:

1. Ubhatobhāgavimutta (one emancipated in both ways),
2. Paññavimutta (one emancipated by way of insight),
3. Kāyasakkhī (the body-witness),
4. Diṭṭhippatta (one attained to right view),
5. Saddhāvimutta (one emancipated by faith),
6. Dhammānusārī (the truth-devotee), and
7. Saddhānusārī (the faith-devotee).

It is noteworthy that such sevenfold is commonly known in suttantra piṭaka as ‘Seven Dakkhiṇeyyapuggala’ which literature means “An individual deserving a donation; one worthy of a donation”.

VIII. Grouping of human types by eight²⁰

The group of eight classified the particular eight noble individuals “Who are the four persons identifiable with the path and who are the four identifiable with the fruition?”:

1. The stream-attainer
2. The one who proceeds to realize the fruition stage
3. The once-returner
4. The one who proceeds to realize the fruition stage
5. The never-returner
6. The one who proceeds to realize the fruition stage
7. The Arahant (elect or worthy)
8. The one who proceeds to attain Arahantship

These are the four persons who are identifiable with the path and these the four identifiable with the fruition.

¹⁸ Pug.VI. 1-6.

¹⁹ Pug.VII. 1-2.

²⁰ Pug.VIII.

IX. Grouping of human types by nine²¹

The group of nine is the combination between the group of “two” and the group of “seven”. As initiated by the first two highest level of the sammāsam Buddha and the pratyeka Buddha, then followed by the sevenfold noble individuals from the group of “seven”.

Table1 2: Grouping of Human Types by Nine

1.	Pratyeka Buddha	the one Enlightened for himself
2.	Sammāsam Buddha	the perfectly Enlightened One
3.	Ubhatobhāgavimutta	one emancipated in both ways
4.	Pañnavimutta	one emancipated by way of insight
5.	Kāyasakkhī	the body-witness
6.	Ditṭhippatta	one attained to right view
7.	Saddhāvimutta	one emancipated by faith
8.	Dhammānusārī	the truth-devotee
9.	Saddhānusārī	the faith-devotee

X. Grouping of human types by ten²²

In this group, the classification is made according to the planes of existence (Bhūmi), that is to say by which five is consummation reached here;

1. The stream-attainer destined not to undergo more than seven births
2. The stream-attainer transmigrating through a few families
3. The single-seeded stream-attainer
4. The once-returner
5. The one attaining Arahantship in this very existence

By which five is consummation reached after leaving this world;

6. The one who dies and attains Nibbāna before half the age he should have lived in a Brahmanic world expires
7. The term-curtailling passer-away
8. The automatic passer-away
9. The one attaining Nibbāna through strenuous exertion
10. The one proceeding upstream to the Akaṇiṭṭha region

The tenfold individuals can exhibit in the following way:- 1. Sattakkhattumparama; 2.Kolaṅkola; 3.Ekabījī; 4.Sakadāgāmī; 5.Arahant; 6.Antarā-parinibbāyī; 7.Upahacca-parinibbāyī; 8.Asaṅkhāra-parinibbāyī; 9.Sasaṅkhāra-parinibbāyī; 10.Uddhamsoto-akaniṭṭhagāmī.

²¹ Pug. IX.

²² Pug. X.

Table1 3: Grouping of Human Types by Ten

1. Sattakkhattuṃparama	The stream-attainer destined not to undergo more than seven births
2. Kolaṅkola	The stream-attainer transmigrating through a few families
3. Ekabījī	The single-seeded stream-attainer
4. Sakadāgāmī	The once-returned
5. Arahant	The one attaining Arahantship in this very existence
6. Antarā-parinibbāyī	The one who dies and attains Nibbāna before half the age he should have lived in a Brahmanic world expires
7. Upahacca- parinibbāyī	The term-curtailing passer-away
8. Asaṅkhāra-parinibbāyī	The automatic passer-away
9. Sasaṅkhāra-parinibbāyī	The one attaining Nibbāna through strenuous exertion
10. Uddhamsoto-Akaniṭṭhagāmī	The one proceeding upstream to the Akaniṭṭha region

4. Conclusion

As we have seen from the above specification relating to the noble individuals, the Puggala-Paññatti Scripture of Abhidhamma Pitaka contained multitude dimension of noble one. However, the most popular types of noble individuals, in Theravada Buddhism, are commonly known as the Four Noble Individuals or the Holy Persons; the stream-enterer, the once-returned, the non-returned, and the worthy one.

A stream-enterer (sotāpanna) is one who has developed first path wisdom. He has entered the stream to Nibbāna and is not reborn into the lower realms, he is certain to become enlightened in the future.

The once-returned (sakadāgāmī) is one who has developed second path wisdom. The once-returned will be reborn in this world only once before attaining Nibbāna.

The non-Returned (anāgāmī) is one who has developed third path wisdom. The Non-Returned will not be reborn in this world. He will be reborn in the pure abodes in the Brahman world until attaining Nibbāna.

The Arahant is far from defilements and has broken kamma and the cycle of rebirths. He is said to have disentangled all bondages during attainment of the noble path and to have completely disentangle them upon attainment of the noble fruit. He or she is worthy of veneration and respect of all people and is classed as the highest Noble Person in Buddhism.

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