‘NĀTAPUTTA’ IN EARLY NIRGRANTHA LITERATURE

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The Pāli canon of the Buddhists refers to Jina Vardhamāna Mahāvira as ‘Niggantha Nāṭaputta’ (Ceylonese version) or ‘Niggantha Nāṭaputta’ (Burman version). The appellation ‘Nāṭaputta’ is after Vardhamāna’s clan-nomen ‘Nāta’, Jñātṛ; the prefixed term ‘Niggantha’ (Nirgrantha) alludes to the Śramanīc 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 ‘Nāṭaputta’ (Jñātṛputra, scion of the Jñātṛ 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, lexicons, 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. Moreover, the Nirgranthas had not needed to prefix the qualificatory ‘Niggantha’ to his clan epithet ‘Nāṭaputta’ 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 Nāṭaputta 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 ‘Nāṭaputta’ in a verse:

अर्थे से अवरे धम्मे नातपुत्तेन साहिते ।
आयवः पहियार विजेत्तुमा तिष्ठा तिष्ठा ॥

—आचारण, प्रथम स्कन्ध, च.च.२७

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

...
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गच्छिते मिथुकथावु समवम्यः नातुःचे विसोगः अदक्षः।
एताति से उराञ्जति गच्छिति नातुःले असरणाए॥

—आचारणः, प्रथम स्कन्धः, ९.१.६०।

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.

उच्चालवताति गच्छति गम्भर्षसङ्गसंज्ञतसो।
नातुःले महावरे एवमाह जिनोत्तमो॥

—सूक्तकरणः २.१.२७।

जे एत चर्ति वाहिनि नशेऽन महता महेविनाः।
ते उद्धःस्वते समुदिष्ठता अस्मां सार्वतं धम्माऽ॥

—सूक्तकरणः २.२.२६।

एवं से उद्धः अनुसरनानि अनुसरदसिः अनुसरनाणवसनघरे
अर्हा नातुःले भगवं वेसालीए वियाहिते॥

—सूक्तकरणः २.३.२२।

(The variant ‘Nātiputta’ is the result of pronouncing ‘Jñāṭ‘ as ‘Jñāṭri’ as is done in Hindi, Bāṅgla, etc., and not as ‘Jñātru’ or ‘Jñātra (rural)’ as rendered in Gujarāti, Oriyā, etc.)

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

कर्ति च नायं कर्ति दंसंसे सिलं कर्ति नातुःसत्तम्य आसी।
जानिषः नं भिक्षु ज्ञानाथि सृणामुः भुद्धि ज्ञाता निसंतं॥

—सूक्तकरणः १.६.२।

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

सुंदरसङ्गसे जसो मिरसस पचसुचक्ति महतो पवनतःस।
एतोभे समणे नातुःले जानी-जसी-दंस-नाणसीले॥

—सूक्तकरणः १.६.१४।

And thereafter it is said: “Just as lending protection (abhaya-dāna) 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 सेठाप्यदयान सच्चेषु या अणववर्जनमेवति।
तत्सु यथा उत्तम बलमेवं लोपुत्तमें भगवं नातुःले॥

—सूक्तकरणः 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’):

\[ \text{तिथीण सेद्दा लवसत्तामा या सभा सुधम्मा व समाण सेद्धा।} \\
\text{निवाण सेद्धा जय सववयमा नातपुत्ता परमस्थि नापि।} \]

--- भद्रसुक्तांग १६.२४

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

\[ \text{परं ज्ञत विषयेऽदवट्टी आलस्य हेतु प्रवर्ति संगं।} \\
\text{ततोभेदे समपेन नातपुत्रे इववेय मेत होती मली वियक्ष्या।} \]

--- भद्रसुक्तांग २६.११

समेतां जीवाण दयाद्धारा वासवज्य दोषे स्वरितोतं \\
तत्रसंक्षिप्तो इस्तिनो नातपुत्राः उद्विद्धान्तत स्वरितं।

--- भद्रसुक्तांग २६.४०

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:

\[ \text{एवं च दोषे ददृश्ये नातपुत्रे भस्वस्य।} \\
\text{वाणाम् पि मेघानी भयामोमिसं विवर्जेण।} \]

--- वर्षावैकालिकसूचन ५.२.४९

\[ \text{विद्मभेदम् लोण सेद्दा संपिन्य च फाणित्य।} \\
\text{न ते सदहिममिच्छति नातपुत्रमविश्रतत।} \]

--- वर्षावैकालिकसूचन 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’:

\[ \text{जं पि वर्गं च पालं वा कंबलं पादपुरुषं।} \\
\text{तं पि संज्ञभेद्धा धारणं परिहरे पि च।} \\
\text{न सों परिसमेल वृत्तो नातपुत्रेः ताइना।} \\
\text{मुख्यं परिसमेल वृत्तो इति वृत्तं महत्स्वं।} \]

--- वर्षावैकालिकसूचन 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 (pad[\textit{jiva}]nikāya), the five great vows (pañca-mahāvratas) and the fifty kinds of channels for control (saṃvara) over passions:

रोतिय नातुपत्रवर्म अतसमेत मलेञ्जा छपि काए।
परं च फासे महावरानी पंजासरसंबरेन जे, समस्ये॥

—वर्षेकालिकच्चुत्र, १०. ५.

In the \textit{Uttarādhyayana-sūtra}, the reference to Nātaputta figures only once, as an ending sentence to its chapter six: This same sentence also figures in the \textit{Sūtrakṛtāṅga} (1.2.3.22), 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 \textit{Vyākhyāprajñāpti}, 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 \textit{kathāmyoga} 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 (pañcaāstikāyas) and statements about which of them possess form and which other are formless; this figures inside the ‘Kāludāyapīchā’ passage where Nātaputta (sometimes with the qualifying word ‘Śramaṇa’) is five times mentioned:\(^3\)

एवं खलु समये नातुसेपंच अतिकाये पञवेति, धम्मतिकाये अधम्मतिकाये जीवतिकाये
पोजातिकाये आयातिकाये।
तत्थ न नातुसेपंच अतिकाये अजीवकाये पञवेति, धम्मतिकाये अधम्मतिकाये आयातिकाये
पोजातिकाये।
एवं च समये नातुसेजीवतिकाये असहित्याये जीवकाये पञवेति।
तत्थ न समये नातुसेजीवतिकाये असहित्याये पञवेति—धम्मतिकाये अधम्मतिकाये आयातिकाये
जीवतिकाये।
एवं च न समये नातुसेपोजातिकाये रहित्याये अजीवकाये पञवेति।

Also, in the queries of the \textit{śrāmapopāsaka} 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 मदुया! तव धम्मायिने धम्मोववासे समये नातुसेपंच अतिकाये पञवेति………

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 pūrvānupūrvi⁵ :

एवं क्षुद्र समग्रे नातपुत्ते पुज्जापुर्वम् नरमाने गामानुगमम् हृदाङ्गमाने शुभसुमहेरे (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 :

तेन्न कालिन्न तेन समयं वेषम सराम भगवं महावीरे नाते नातपुत्ते नातकुलविनिवय्ये विवेधे विवेधिति

विवेधक्षण्ये विवेधसुमाले तीसं वासाति विवेधे तिकट् इत्यादि (ित्यादि,)

After this, references to ‘Nātaputta’ are virtually absent in the āgamas.⁶

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Notes and References

1. Besides Vira and Mahāvīra, he is also called Buddha, Rṣi, Maharṣi, Muni, Mahāmuni, Kāśyapa (after his gotra), etc.

2. In the Daśavaikaśikā-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 Vyākhya-prajñāpati’s main bulk is stylistically datable 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 Mahāvīra has expounded the pāñcāstikāyas. 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 Prāṇavyākaraṇa, a pretender āgama of c. seventh century A.D., mentions nātamuni; and Dhanañjaya, the Digambara poet of the 7th-8th century A.D., includes ‘Jñātrputra’ in the list of the epithets of Mahāvīra.

(I forego citing these later references, which in any case are secondary; for in the age of these later authors, the epithet ‘Nātaputta’ for Mahāvīra 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 Prākṛta affectations.