

IS NIRAYA AN INTIMATION OR SO-CALLED SPHERE OF THE EARTH? A CRITICAL STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO THE PALI CANON

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Introduction

Niraya is a concept that is difficult to be acquired in the ordinary sense, having controversial remarks even in the human mind. Not only in the human mind but also the Buddhist treatises. So that *niraya* is a questionable entity furthermore. In the First Four *Nikāyās* the word and the description on *niraya* are found in several *suttas*. With reference to the *Aṅguttaranikāya niraya* is resulted with one's unwholesome deeds in relation to body, speech and mind. The reference from the above *sutta* shows that an image of court which was ready to be punished the offenders. Here we find the guard of death (*yamo rājā*) who was capable with announcing the final judgment of the offenders. After they were accused they are recommended to be punished for severe punishments. Here we do not identify such a difference in *niraya* and *apāya* or *mahāniraya*. The reference clearly points that the *mahāniraya* is a quadrangular space, one hundred leagues each way, four doored, walled all around and above with steel and with floor of incandescent molten steel". As it is recorded in the *Devatūta sutta mahāniraya* is one of five purgatories. The *sutta* classifies the whole *niraya* (in the sense of severe pains there...) into five categories namely:

- I. *mahāniraya* (the great purgatory)
- II. *gūthaniraya* (the filth purgatory)
- III. *kukkuḷa Niraya* (the ember purgatory)

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IV. *simbali-vana* (the forest of silk-cotton-trees)

V. *asipattavana* (the sward-leaved Forest)

The *sutta* records the results to be reborn in the *niraya* or *apāya* as it is recorded in the *Devadūta vagga* of *Aṅguttaranikāya*. But in the *Aṅguttaranikāya* we do not find ‘*Khārodakā-nadī*’ (the river of caustic water) as it is in the *Majjhimanikāya* reference. These two references take similar attributions in the meeting of *Nirayapāla* (a guardian in hell), the judgment of *Yama* location of *mahāniraya* and so on. In this reference, five or six (including *khārodakānadī*) purgatories and their location are described in detail. But, in accordance with the *Mahāsīhanāda sutta* *niraya* is one of the Five Destinies of Bourns. The *sutta* also refers that rebirth into the hell/*niraya* is resulted with one’s demerits. And the *sutta* illustrates the beings from the *niraya* hell are experiencing feelings that are exclusively painful, sharp, and severe. Reference from the *Niraya sutta* categorically points that rebirth into the Hell is of breaking Five-precepts in this very life. In the *Niraya vagga* of the *Dhammapada* also illustrates from nine *gāthās* the results that could be resulted to be reborn in the Hell. The reference from the *Sutta Nipāta* is somewhat different and remarkable than the other definitions on *Niraya*. Why it is remarkable and different? Here we find 10 names of *nirayas* that are categorically collected as *Niraya* or Hell.

I. *abbuda*

II. *nirabbuda*

III. *ababa*

IV. *aṭaṭa*

V. *ahaha*

VI. *kumuda*

VII. *sogandhika*

VIII. *uppalaka*

IX. *punḍarīka*

X. *paduma*

These 10 names of *nirayas* have been illustrated in the sense of their geometrical progression of twenty. As recorded in the *Samyuttanikāya* twenty *abbuda* hell is one *nirabbuda* hell too.

When we consider the *Māratajjanīya sutta* it is evident that the *Mahāniraya* is having three synonyms like:

- I. *Chapassāyataniko* (the Hell of the six bases for contact)
- II. *San̄kusamāhato* (the Hell of the impalement with stakes)
- III. *Paccattavedanyo* (the Hell to be felt for oneself)

In this sutta too, we do not find such a different purgatory, only the *Mahāniraya*, the Great Hell. All these names for the Great Hell are known to its modes of suffering.

Discussion

Niraya or Hell is a questionable matter which is beyond the human mind. Literary, it means ‘the Downward-path’ and usually translates by Hell.

The references on the *niraya /apāya* are proved that it is after resulted of evil deeds and far-away or somewhere from the human world. But the problem we face is that we can not find such a purgatory through our physical eye. It is noteworthy to remark that for humans, they can only see whatever they can perceive in this human world. According to Ven. Henpitagedara Gnanaseeha ordinary being are dreaming in this worldly life and they are having so-called intimation which says all the phenomenon are true and limited to physical eye. Even for all the being who have spontaneous births are put under this categorical evidence. This proves that the *Sakkāra sutta*'s description on the mental eye of the Buddha. There, the Buddha said that he could see all the beings who were suffering in the Hell

in order to their evil deeds. The *Sagātha sutta* refers the same reference of the Buddha's knowledge on seeing the beings of the *niraya*.

These facts say that *niraya* can be visualized by the mental eye which was practiced gradually. As well we are confused where there is such a sphere of the earth with reference to the *Devadūta sutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya* and *Devadūa vagga* of the *Aṅguttaranikāya*. Those references have made such a mythical identification on *niraya* for the ordinary beings. But we believe that all those references have been revealed by the Buddha, not an ordinary being. Prof. GP Malalasekera has collected the controversies that rose from various treatises regarding the *niraya* in his 'Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names'.

- It places outside the sphere of the earth (*Milindapañha*)
- Tradition says that *avīci* is seven hundred miles directly under the Bodhi tree at *Gayā* (Spence Hardy, Manual of Buddhism)
- *Niraya* is represented as being under the earth, we are told that the earth opened wide to allow the flames of *Avīci* to escape and drag down sinners into its bowels (DhA)
- The word and the description on *niraya* or *avīci* are mostly occurred in the commentaries. According to Ven. Buddhaghosa *avīci* is often called *mahā niraya*.

In this writing we would not pay our attention on the commentarial definition of the selected topic. I believe that the writers of commentaries have influenced with some of canonical notes and illustrated in detail. I think that they had to go in detail when they described even a small matter.

Conclusion

- I. *Niraya* is not a so-called sphere of the earth
 - In general, in the earth there can not find such a world
- II. Rebirth into the Hell is resulted with one's own evil deeds (*atha kho tayā vetaṃ pāpaṃ kammaṃ kataṃ, tvaññavetassa vipākaṃ paṭisaṃvedissasīti, Aṅguttaranikāya I*)
- III. The location of *Niraya* takes a similar description in many detailed accounts (*catukkaṇṇo catudvāro vihatto bhāgasō mito, ayopākārapariyanto ayasā paṭikujjito, Aṅguttaranikāya I*)
- IV. The detailed reference of the *niraya* was revealed by the Buddha in many times, sometimes *arahants* too.
- V. The feeling that related to being of the Hell is quite individual phenomena which resulted after the death not in a particular place but an intimation of contemporary feeling.

Keywords: Intimation, *niraya*, mental eye, *apāya*

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