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Anekāntavāda

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ANEKĀNTAVĀDA, THE CENTRAL PHILOSOPHY OF ĀJĪVIKISM?

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B. K. Matilal, already in the title of his book that came out in 1981, called *anekāntavāda* the central philosophy of Jainism. Others, most notably (and perhaps most recently) Jayandra Soni (2007: 5), have protested, describing *anekāntavāda* as “a small, albeit basic, part of Jain thought”.¹

Anekāntavāda is “the theory of the many-sided nature of reality”. Matilal (1981: 26 ff.) has drawn attention to the fact that *anekāntavāda* was, or came to be, a solution to what he calls the “paradox of causality”.² Matilal maintained that Mahāvīra himself played a crucial role in the formulation of the *anekāntavāda*.³ Whatever the truth in this matter, the paradox of causality came to occupy the mind of Indian thinkers long after him, so that the *anekāntavāda* as solution to this paradox is much more recent than Mahāvīra, too.⁴ We will return to this question below.

¹ Soni 2007: 5 further sounds a note of warning: “One is led to ignore the fact that Jain philosophy has made other contributions apart from the *syād-* and *naya-vāda* aspects of *anekāntavāda*, e.g., insightful deliberations concerning *dravya*, *guṇa* and *pariyāya* (substance, quality and mode).” According to Flügel 2012: 164, *anekāntavāda* “is nowadays seen as a trademark of Jaina philosophy”.

² At a later time, the *anekāntavāda* came to be used to classify non-Jaina systems of thought; see Bronkhorst, forthcoming a.

³ There is some ambiguity in Matilal’s (1981) remarks on this matter. On the one hand, he accepts “the hypothesis that the beginnings of the *anekānta* doctrine are to be traced in the teachings of Mahāvīra the Jina”, and states that “what was known as the *vibhajya-vāda* in the later part of the śramaṇa movement in India culminated in the *anekānta-vāda* of Mahāvīra” (p. 3). Less clear are: “[T]his second sub-variety of the *vibhajya* method was adopted chiefly by Mahāvīra the Jina. And thus, this was developed into the *anekānta* method” (p. 11): “the *vibhajya* method in the hands of Mahāvīra was transformed into the *anekānta* philosophy of the Jainas” (p. 22), and “Mahāvīra thus developed a philosophy of synthesis and toleration, which later came to be designated as the *anekānta-vāda*” (p. 23). Note that Pāsādika (2012), following Matilal, argues for a forerunner of the *anekāntavāda* in the Buddhist canon.

⁴ Bronkhorst 2003; 2011: 70-79. Scholars have looked for precursors of *anekāntavāda* both inside and outside Jaina literature. For an overview, see Matilal 1981: 1-16.

Recall what the paradox of causality is all about.⁵ The problem with which it is confronted can be illustrated with a simple example. How can a pot, or anything else for that matter, be produced? If there is no pot as yet, what is produced? And if the pot is already there, it need no longer be produced. I have argued elsewhere⁶ that the problem is the result of the acceptance of the “correspondence principle”: people implicitly believed that the words in a statement correspond to entities in the situation depicted by that statement. In other words, there had to be a pot in the situation depicted by the statement “the potter makes a pot”. This implicit belief — it is but rarely given an explicit formulation — inevitably led to the “paradox of causality”, which all Indian philosophers from the early centuries CE had to face, and which they all proposed to solve, be it in different ways.

A good illustration of how the Jainas dealt with the paradox of causality is provided by the following passage from Jinabhadra's *Viśeṣāvaśyakabhāṣya*:⁷

“In this world there are things that are being produced having been produced already, others [are being produced] not having been produced already, others [are being produced] having been produced and not having been produced, others again [are being produced] while being produced, and some are not being produced at all, according to what one wishes to express. ... For example, a pot is being produced having been produced in the form of clay etc., because it is made of that. That same [pot] is being produced not having been produced concerning its particular shape, because that was not there before. ...”

Confronted with the question how a pot can be produced, given that there is no pot at that moment, Jinabhadra would answer that there *is* already a pot at that time, at least in one sense, in the form of clay. In another sense it is not yet there, because its particular shape is not yet there. In this way the “paradox of causality” disappears (or is believed to disappear) like snow in the sun.

I have argued elsewhere (Bronkhorst, 2003: 105-106) that this particular solution appears for the first time in the story of the heretic Jamāli in the *Viyāhapannatti*. As a matter

⁵ The following lines also occur in Bronkhorst, forthcoming a.

⁶ Bronkhorst 2011.

⁷ Jinabhadra, *Viśeṣāvaśyakabhāṣya*, Part II, p. 385 (under verses 2183-84): *iha kiñcit jātaṃ jāyate, kiñcid ajātam, kiñcij jātājātam, kiñcij jāyamānam, kiñcit sarvathā na jāyate, vivakṣātaḥ. ... yatheha ghaṭo mṛdrūpādibhir jāta eva jāyate, tanmayatvāt. sa evākāraviśeṣeṇājāto jāyate, prāgabhāvāt. rūpādibhir ākāraviśeṣeṇa ca [jātā]jāto jāyate, tebhyo 'narthāntaratvāt. atītānāgatakālayor vinaṣṭānutpannatvāt kriyānupapattir vartamānamātrasamaya eva kriyāsadbhāvāj jāyamāno jāyate.*

of fact, the story of Jamāli brought together two kinds of statements that had been separately attributed to Mahāvīra by earlier tradition. The specific combination we find here, along with Jamāli's literal interpretation of one of these statements, provided a solution to the problem of production (or causality) that had come to occupy the minds of virtually all Indian thinkers. The statement to the effect that what is being made has been made was here, perhaps for the first time, taken literally, and provided a solution to the problem of production. However, the undesired consequence that this way a completely static picture of the world would arise, in which nothing would ever change, could be avoided by recalling Mahāvīra's habit to approach questions from various sides.

Let us now leave Jainism on one side, and turn to a remark about the Ājīvikas that occurs in a Sāṃkhya text, the *Māṭharavṛtti* on *Sāṃkhyakārikā* 9. The *Sāṃkhyakārikā* introduces here the doctrine known as *satkāryavāda*, according to which the effect (*kārya*) exists (*sat*) already in its cause before it is produced. In concrete terms, if the effect to be produced is a pot, this doctrine states that the pot is already present in the clay out of which it will be made. It will be clear that the *satkāryavāda* is the Sāṃkhya solution to the “paradox of causality”.

The *Māṭharavṛtti* introduces this verse as follows (p. 16):

*tiṣṭhatu tāvad etat. anyat pṛcchāmaḥ: kim etad mahadādi prāg utpatteḥ
pradhāne saj jāyata utāsat sambhavati. atrācāryāṇāṃ vipratipattir ataḥ
saṃśayaḥ. atra vaiśeṣikā vipratipannā asataḥ sad bhavatīti manyante.
mṛtṭpiṇḍe hi prāg utpatter ghaṭo nāstīti vyavasitās te. asti nāstīti varākā
ājīvikāḥ. naivāsti na ca nāsti. eṣa bauddhānāṃ pakṣaḥ. evam
anyonyavirodhavādiṣu darśiṣu ko nāma niścayaḥ.*

The passage is here quoted as given by Isabelle Ratié (forthcoming), and deviates from the printed edition in one respect: instead of *jīvakāḥ* it has *ājīvikāḥ*, a conjectural emendation proposed to Ratié by Vincent Eltschinger and Alexis Sanderson.

Ratié translates the passage as follows:

“Let us admit what [has been said] so far. [But] we [now] ask something else: do [the evolutes that are] the Great, etc., arise [while they already] exist in matter before [their] arising, or are they nonexistent [at that time]? In this respect, there is a disagreement (*vipratipatti*) among masters, therefore there is a doubt. [Thus] the Vaiśeṣikas, who are of a wrong opinion (*vipratipanna*) in this respect, consider that that which exists comes from that which does not

exist. For they consider that in the lump of clay, before the arisal [of the pot], there is no pot. *The wretched Ājīvikas [consider] that [the effect] is [both] existing and nonexistent.* And the thesis of the Buddhists is that [the effect] is neither existing nor nonexistent. Thus, since those teachers hold theses contradicting each other, what certainty [could we get]?”

We are here primarily concerned with the sentence: “The wretched Ājīvikas [consider] that [the effect] is [both] existing and nonexistent.”

It is not difficult to understand the use of this particular position. We find ourselves, once again, in the midst of a discussion about the paradox of causality. How is it possible to make something that is not there? What does one make when one makes a pot, given that there is no pot at that time? The followers of the *satkāryavāda* maintained that, in spite of appearances, the pot is there, other thinkers opted for other solutions. The Ājīvikas, according to this passage from the *Māṭharaṅgī*, stated that the pot is both there and not there. The advantage of their position would clearly be that they had an answer to the following, potentially embarrassing question: If the pot is already there at the time you are making it, why do you bother to make it?

But this is also the solution offered in Jinabhadra's *Viśeṣāvaśyakabhāṣya*, as we have seen. What is more, this is in essence the position known as *anekāntavāda*. In other words, the Sāṃkhya commentator Māṭhara ascribes to the Ājīvikas the position that we know came to be held by Jainas. How is this possible?

Two possibilities come to mind. One is that Māṭhara uses the expression Ājīvikas⁸ to refer to Jainas. We know that the former term was sometimes used in the early Buddhist canon to refer to the followers of Mahāvīra,⁹ but this was many centuries before Māṭhara.¹⁰ It seems unrealistic to assume, without proof, that this custom had survived until Māṭhara's time.

Alternatively, Māṭhara knew Ājīvikas, and these Ājīvikas had adopted the same response to the “paradox of causality” as the Jainas. This, if true, almost forces us to consider that the Ājīvikas had taken this response from the Jainas (or, perhaps, that the Jainas had taken it from the Ājīvikas). This in its turn is only conceivable if we assume that Ājīvikas and

⁸ Or rather Jīvaka; see below.

⁹ Bronkhorst, 2000.

¹⁰ Jain 1984: 311 claims that Śīlānka, in the ninth century CE, identifies Ājīvikas with Digambaras in his commentary on the Sūyagaḍa, but Basham 1951: 174 ff. shows that this is not the case.

Jainas had remained in close contact right until the time when the paradox of causality began to occupy the minds of Indian thinkers. We have some reason to suppose that Ājīvikas and Jainas still knew each other in Kuṣāṇa times,¹¹ but we are in the dark as far as more recent times are concerned.¹²

When did Māṭhara live? Frauwallner (1953: 478 n. 149) observed long ago: “Über die Zeit der Kommentare zur Sāṃkhya-Kārikā, vor allem der Māṭharavṛttiḥ und des Gauḍapādabhāṣyam ist mehr geschrieben worden, als ihrem inhaltlichen Wert entspricht.” That may be so, but for our specific enquiry the date of the *Māṭharavṛtti* is very important. Larson and Bhattacharya (1987: 291) sum up research as follows:¹³

“[O]ur extant *Māṭharavṛtti* has a common core of content with four other early commentaries on the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*. Although for many years it was thought that the *Māṭharavṛtti* may have been the original upon which the other four were based, there is now a general consensus that our extant *Māṭharavṛtti* is the latest of the five commentaries and may be dated anywhere from the ninth century onward. The commentary contains quotations from the Purāṇas, appears to presuppose a much more sophisticated logic (based most likely on later Nyāya discussions), and presents overall a fuller and more systematic treatment of Sāṃkhya (strongly suggesting that it is a later expansion of the earlier and briefer discussions in the other related commentaries). E. A. Solomon has suggested that our extant *Māṭharavṛtti* closely follows her recently edited *Sāṃkhyasaptativṛtti*, and that the former may be an expanded version of the latter (with some borrowing also from the other three). She also suggests that *Sāṃkhyasaptativṛtti* may have been an original *Māṭharabhāṣya* by the ancient Sāṃkhya teacher Māṭhara, mentioned in the *Anuyogadvārasūtra* of the Jains, and that our extant *Māṭharavṛtti* may be the same as the commentary referred to by Guṇaratnasūri in his commentary (from the fifteenth century) on the *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* by the expression *māṭharaprānta* (the Māṭhara ‘corner’ or school).”

¹¹ Bronkhorst, forthcoming.

¹² See, however, Bronkhorst, 2012: 827f. and Qvarnström, forthcoming.

¹³ See also Larson & Bhattacharya 1987: 167-9 for a more detailed presentation of the scholarly literature, with detailed references. See further Hulin 1978: 139.

If the above estimates are correct, we are led to conclude that a Sāṃkhya commentator from the ninth century or later was acquainted with Ājīvikas, and knew that these Ājīvikas adhered to the *anekāntavāda* in some form or other.

All this is highly surprising, to say the least, and we are entitled to wonder whether we are not drawing far-reaching conclusions from shaky evidence. Our first question therefore has to be: Was the emendation from *jīvaka* to *ājīvika* (or *ājīvaka*) in Māṭhara's text justified? As a matter of fact, none of the other surviving commentaries on *Sāṃkhyakārikā* 9 refer to the Ājīvikas. Ratié (forthcoming) summarizes their observations like this:

“[T]hese commentaries vary greatly as regards the number of theses involved in the debate and the authorship of these theses: thus the *Gauḍapādabhāṣya* merely opposes the Sāṃkhya contention that the effect exists before the operation of its cause to that of the ‘Buddhists, etc.’ who consider the effect as nonexistent, whereas the *Māṭharavṛtti* explains that according to the Vaiśeṣikas, the effect is nonexistent, and attributes to the Ājīvikas the thesis that the effect is both existing and nonexistent, and to the Buddhists, the thesis that it is neither; the *Jayamaṅgalā* mentions the theses that the effect exists, that it is nonexistent, and that it is both, and contents itself with attributing the second to the Vaiśeṣikas; the *Yuktidīpikā* mentions the thesis that prior to its arising the effect is nonexistent (and ascribes it to the Vaiśeṣikas and Naiyāyikas), the thesis that the effect is both existing and nonexistent (and ascribes it to the Buddhists) and the thesis that it is neither (without any explicit attribution); the *Tattvakaumudī* mentions the thesis that the effect comes to exist from a nonexistent cause, the thesis (obviously, that of the Vedāntins) that the effect is only an illusory manifestation (*vivarta*) and therefore no existing entity, the thesis (ascribed to the Naiyāyikas and Vaiśeṣikas) that the nonexistent effect arises from an existing cause, and the Sāṃkhya thesis.”

Clearly, only the *Māṭharavṛtti* refers to the Ājīvikas, if we accept the emendation proposed. But is this emendation justified?

This question leads us to an interesting and perhaps important observation. The non-emended form *Jīvaka* exists as a synonym of *Ājīvika*, but, judging by Basham's (1951: 182-4) book, only the lexicographer Halāyudha and the astrologer Vaidyanātha Dīkṣita are known to have used it. That is to say, even without emendation the passage from the *Māṭharavṛtti* refers to Ājīvikas, but by using *jīvaka* rather than *ājīvika* it may tell us something about Māṭhara's time and place.

Consider the following passage in A. L. Basham's (1951: 182) *History and Doctrines of the Ājīvikas*:

“Halāyudha gives two lists of unorthodox ascetics in separate verses, the first of which ... contains clothed heretical ascetics, and the second members of the naked category:—

nagnāto digvāsāḥ kṣapaṇaḥ śramaṇaś ca jīvako jainaḥ
ājīvo maladhārī nirgranthaḥ kathyate sadbhiḥ

‘By the educated a naked wanderer is called *digvāsāḥ*, etc.’”

What do we know about Halāyudha? If the lexicographer of that name is also the Halāyudha who composed the *Kavirahasya*, which serves as a eulogy of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king Kṛṣṇa III, he must have lived in the former half of the tenth century in southern India.¹⁴ Basham (1951: 182) concludes from this that he “had no doubt come into contact with the Tamil Ājīvikas”. We have already seen that Māthara “may be dated anywhere from the ninth century onward”. Like Halāyudha, he may have come into contact with the Tamil Ājīvikas. If so, he may have become acquainted with their position as to the “paradox of causality”.

Vaidyanātha the author of the *Jātakapārijāta*, the work in which he mentions the Jīvaka (15.15-16), wrote in South India before 1450 CE (Pingree, 1981: 91f.).

It may here be recalled that the tenth century Vaiśeṣika commentator Śrīdhara shows in his work acquaintance with Ājīvika thought (as did the Mīmāṃsaka Kumāriḥa Bhaṭṭa before him).¹⁵ Śrīdhara, it appears, belonged to Bengal.¹⁶

Conclusion

The tentative conclusion we arrive at is that the Ājīvikas of southern India of the end of the first and/or beginning of the second millennium were known by the name Jīvakas, and shared with the Jainas the *anekāntavāda*, the view that reality is multiplex. Given that the two religions were originally close to each other¹⁷ and appear to have remained close for a number

¹⁴ Keith 1920: 133; Winternitz 1920: 72, 413; Vogel 1979: 321.

¹⁵ Bronkhorst 2007.

¹⁶ Potter 1977: 485.

¹⁷ See Bronkhorst 2003a.

of centuries, we are led to conclude that they were still close when the *anekāntavāda* was applied to the paradox of causality. When was that?

We have already seen that some scholars attribute the *anekāntavāda* to Mahāvīra himself.¹⁸ Whatever the truth in this matter, it became the Jaina response to the paradox of causality, and this paradox did not yet occupy the minds of Indian thinkers until long after Mahāvīra. In this form the *anekāntavāda* was introduced into Jainism before the closure of the Śvetāmbara canon, as I have shown elsewhere. It is also already known to Kundakunda's *Pravacanasāra* (2.22-23), as I have argued (Bronkhorst, forthcoming a). The position of the *Tattvārthasūtra* remains obscure.

It appears, then, that Ājīvikas and Jainas were still in close contact during the first half of the first millennium CE, so close that the Ājīvikas borrowed wholesale the solution to the paradox of causality that the Jainas elaborated at that time, or vice-versa. This relatively late example of Jaina influence on Ājīvikism or vice-versa would have remained unnoticed, had it not been for the fact that a Sāṃkhya commentator, Māṭhara, felt the need to mention the Ājīvikas in passing in his otherwise unremarkable commentary.

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¹⁸ Soni 2007: 6 says the following about it: "This famous doctrine of manifoldness, often erroneously taken as a synonym for Jain philosophy as a whole, is based on Mahāvīra's method of seeing the truths concerning all objects of inquiry from particular standpoints or perspectives. Later thinkers developed this basic idea into an elaborated systematic theory in such a way that the link to the canonical works either becomes lost or is blurred."

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