

THE EARLIEST EXTANT VAIŚEŚIKA THEORY OF *GUṆAS*

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Anyone who works with Turfan fragments knows how rarely something hitherto completely unknown can be discovered. Many of the fragments are too small to make sense on their own, many others have their parallels either in Chinese or Tibetan translations or in the Pāli canon, still others reveal information known already from other sources. Yet occasionally one comes across fragments that disclose something about which we had no inkling before.

In what follows I will try to show that the Spitzer manuscript (= SHT 810)¹ discusses a Vaiśeṣika theory of *guṇas*, or at least of certain particular *guṇas*, that is radically different from anything known to us on the subject. This theory represents an early stage in the development of Vaiśeṣika philosophy (3rd c. at the latest) when the Sāṃkhya influence was still considerable. In the classical period, when the differences between Sāṃkhya and Vaiśeṣika became more radical, this theory must have been abandoned as an alien body.

Elsewhere I have shown how some of the surviving fragments can be happily married with Moritz Spitzer's transcriptions which represent some forty lost fragments of various size.² Drawing on these two sources has proved fruitful in the present case too and I will attempt to show how fragment 77³ and a fragment transcribed in Spitzer's Nachlass, p. 13, can be related to each other.

* I would like to thank Karin Preisendanz and Lambert Schmithausen for their very valuable comments and suggestions. — The title of this paper is meant as a tribute to D. SCHLINGLOFF's contribution "The Oldest Extant Parvan-List of the Mahābhārata" published some thirty years ago in JAOS 89.

¹ I refrain from introducing the Spitzer manuscript in this context. On the manuscript in general cf. D. SCHLINGLOFF, *Fragmente einer Palmblatthandschrift philosophischen Inhalts aus Ostturkistan* (Ms. Spitzer). WZKSO 12/13 (1968/69) [= *Festschrift Frauwallner*], 323–328. On the current DFG-project to publish the manuscript cf. E. FRANCO, *avīta* and *āvīta*. *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques* 53,3 (1999) 563–577.

² Cf. my "Lost Fragments of the Spitzer Manuscript," forthcoming in *Minoru Hara Felicitation Volume*, ed. A. WEZLER et al. (Reinbek 2001).

³ The number refers to the numbering of the glass frames containing SHT-810 preserved at the State Library, Berlin.

Page 13 of Spitzer's Nachlass is titled "*ātmā* II," and it contains the following transcription of a fragment that is also transcribed in reversed order (i.e., a. and b. are transposed) on p. 56.

a.

[1] atrāha na kha[l]u [v](i)[n](a)[ṣṭan] . [me?]⁴ ..

r

[2] ...⁵ avinaṣṭam api sat⁶ aṇusamavasthāsamhṛtam api prahīnam⁷
ity ucyate yathā ...

[3] ... y. cyante tad evam ubhayathā p[r]alay.⁸

b.

[1] ... iti atrocitate yadā [te?]⁹ [sa](r)[vv](a)[g](a)[to] . r. n

[2] ... (kā)[ra]ṇam ātmā itthaṃ camakāraṇam ātmā sukhādīnām iha
viruddhānām asamavāyah¹⁰ y.

[3] ... (pra)la[!]¹¹yagāh¹¹ khalv api vinaṣ(t)ā i[va?]¹²

The transliterations that accompany the images reproduced below generally follow the conventions used in the catalogues of the Turfan Sanskrit manuscripts: + is used for a missing *akṣara*, .. for an illegible *akṣara*, . for a partly illegible *akṣara*; *akṣaras* or parts of *akṣaras* enclosed in [] are uncertain or difficult to read, enclosed in () are added or conjectured by me, and those enclosed in { } are to be deleted (i.e., are considered scribal mistakes). /// represents the breaking point of a fragment and * stands for *virāma*. Spaces in the manuscript are marked by ∅; other spaces between words are always added by me.

⁴ me missing on p. 56.

⁵ On p. 56: [ya]t[e].

⁶ On p. 56: san.

⁷ On p. 56: *pralīnam*. Read *pralīnam*; cf. note on fragment 77a2 below.

⁸ On p. 56: *ubhayaśāp. l. y.*

⁹ te missing on p. 56.

¹⁰ Spitzer refers here to Tattvasaṅgraha, p. 80, v. 173: *sukhaduḥkhādī-samvittisamavāyas tu bhoktṛtā*.

¹¹ On p. 56: [e?]yagatāh.

¹² On p. 56: *vina(s?)ā ? i[t] ... m ... l ... l*.



1 ///... [p]ly asametam* kuta ... + + + + + (sā?)dhanaiḥ sādhyate tāni sādhanāny asmābhir vyāhata[n]i + + + + +
2 ///(ka?)ttha[m] ātmā kāraṇam ∅ yadi ca pral[ī]nā] (apy ātma?) [gu]ṇāḥ ātmasamavetā āpra[h]ṇā' api ko v(i)ś(e)ś(a)h r.///
3 ///+ atrocitate pra[!]¹nām asam(sa)[r]gg[au]² kiṃ kāraṇam iti ∅ atrāha ātm {ā} (a)manahsaṃyogaviśeṣāt (sa?)m .. + ///

¹ Read *apralīnā*: the lengthening of the initial vowel seems to indicate an emphasis in the pronunciation, and throughout the discussion one has to read (a)*pralīna* instead of (a)*prahīna*. The confusion between *hī* and *lī* is perhaps due to the fact that they are mirror images of each other: in *hī* the vowel sign rests on the left arm of the *akṣara* and the right arm is curled to the right, in *lī* the vowel sign rests on the right arm and the left arm is curled to the left.

² I suggest the conjecture *asamśargo*. The reading *asamśargo* is not impossible, but the sign for *o* is usually rotated more to the left (cf. for instance *nno* in lines 1 and 2 on the other side of this leaf). Further, even if we assume the nominative *asamśargo* we would still have to deal with irregular *sandhi* and an unusual construction with *kiṃ kāraṇam*.



1 ///[k](i)ñcin necchati ḍ ... sya nī[v]r(t)t. ... ātmany eva tu pralīnā¹ nopalabhyate ḍ tathā vācam samhṛtya tuṣṇim ā///
 2 ///... pralīnan nopa[la]bhyate ev(a)n[tadā] .. + + + + te guṇāḥ ātmasamavetāḥ pralīnā{n} nopalabhy[an(t)e] tas(m)ā///
 3 ///... [d]ṛṣṭāntavirodhād abet(uḥ) + + + + (it)[y] (u)cyate sukhaduhkham ātmani samavetaṁ nātma .. + + + +

¹ *pralīnān* is difficult to construe here; it cannot be an accusative plural because the sentence with the passive predicate *upalabhyate* could not be construed, and it is probably not an ablative singular (masculine or neuter) because in this case one would expect *pralīnatvān*. It seems preferable, therefore, to conjecture here, in analogy with the beginning of line 2, *pralīnan* (neuter nominative singular). The adjective in the singular could refer to a *samāhāradbandea* such as *sukhaduhkham* in line 3. It may be reminded that *a* and *ā* are often confused in this manuscript. Cf. also n. 13 below.

These two fragments obviously belong together and we are, therefore, justified in drawing on the one in order to understand the other. Moreover, I believe that they form parts of two consecutive leaves and I will present them in what I think was their original order. However, this assumption is not necessary for my argument; it suffices if we assume that the fragments belong to the same context, that is, that the same topic is discussed in both fragments. It is my contention (1) that the tenets presented in these fragments are those of the Vaiśeṣika school or at least of certain adherents of this school and (2) that in stark opposition to everything known to us from the surviving Vaiśeṣika texts, the Vaiśeṣika philosopher in the Spitzer manuscript claims that qualities (*guṇa*) are absorbed (*pralīna*) into the *ātman* after their disappearance and that they continue to inhere in the *ātman* in an atomic form or state.¹³ Thus, the absorption does not imply non-existence (i.e., the absorbed qualities have not perished [*avinaṣṭa*]), but a contraction into the state¹⁴ of an atom (cf. *aṇusamavasthāsamhṛta*). The affinity of this doctrine with the *satkāryavāda* of the Sāṃkhya,¹⁵ as well as its incompatibility with the causal doctrines of the classical Vaiśeṣika, is clear. On the other hand, the differences with fundamental Sāṃkhya doctrines are equally clear because the Sāṃkhya does not admit the *samavāya* relationship (cf. *ātmāsamaveta*, *ātmani samaveta*, *asamavāya*) and because according to the Sāṃkhya, mental states such as pleasure, pain, desire, hatred (which are usually not designated as *guṇas* in Sāṃkhya texts) do not belong to the soul (which is also not usually referred to by the term *ātman*), but to matter.

The first contention concerning the identity of the speaker is easily justified. *samavāya* is a unique concept of the Vaiśeṣika; of course, in

¹³ The word *pralīna* is difficult to translate here. It carries with it the connotation of the Sāṃkhya cosmic absorption or reversal of the emanation process (*pralaya*, *pratisarga*) on a small scale. One can imagine the *guṇas* entering and “hiding in”/“clinging to” the *ātman* in very much the same manner as an element such as earth, after its devastation, retreats into the waters.

¹⁴ It is not clear to me whether the prefix *sam-* plays a semantic role here; perhaps *samavasthā* means a fixed or durable state.

¹⁵ For the most recent valuable study of *satkāryavāda* cf. J. BRONKHORST, *Satkāryavāda and asatkāryavāda*. In: F. JOSEPHSON (ed.), *Categorisation and Interpretation. Indological and comparative studies from an international Indological meeting at the Department of Comparative Philology, Goeteborg University. A volume dedicated to the memory of Goesta Liebert*. Goeteborg 1999, p. 43–55. BRONKHORST, who investigates in this paper the correspondence principle in respect to the words of a sentence, points out that certain Vaiśeṣikas known to Mallavādin admitted that things exist before their connection to the universal existence (*sattāsambandha*) and come thereby dangerously close to the position of the Sāṃkhya. For a different interpretation of the same discussion cf. W. HALBFASS, *On Being and What There Is*. Albany 1992, ch. 8 passim, esp. p. 174.

later times it was accepted by the Nyāya and the Mīmāṃsā as well, but not in the 3rd c. A.D. which is the latest possible date for the Spitzer manuscript. At this time Nyāya probably did not yet exist as a philosophical school, and *samavāya* was introduced into the Mīmāṃsā around the 6th c. A.D. Other expressions used here, such as *ātmama-naḥsaṃyogaviśeṣāt* (77b3), are also typical of the Vaiśeṣika. Further, the Vaiśeṣika considers mental states such as pleasure and pain as qualities that inhere in the soul (cf. 77a2 and 77b2: *guṇāḥ ātmasamavetāḥ*). So unless we encounter here a completely unknown philosophical school which also accepted the above mentioned tenets of the Vaiśeṣika and vanished without leaving a trace, we must conclude that our text refers to the position of a Vaiśeṣika opponent.

The second contention is more difficult to prove. Let us have a look first at the surviving fragment. In 77a1 the (Buddhist)¹⁶ opponent seems to argue that a philosophical tenet is established by proofs or inferences ((*sā*)*dhanaiḥ sādhyate*) and that the proofs (of the Vaiśeṣika?) have been disproved or contradicted by “us” (Buddhists) (*sā-dhanāny asmābhir vyāhatā(n)i*). It is impossible to know whether this statement concludes a previous discussion or begins a new section. In any case, in the next line (77a2) the Buddhist opponent poses two questions against the Vaiśeṣika: 1) How could the *ātman* be a cause ((*ka*)*tham ātmā kāraṇam*)?¹⁷ 2) Further, if absorbed qualities inhere in the *ātman*, what is the difference between such qualities and non-absorbed qualities (that also inhere in it) (*yadi ca pra[l](i)[nā] (apy ātma?)[gu]ṇāḥ ātmasamavetā apralīnā api ko v(i)ś(e)ṣ(a)ḥ* ...).

The reply of the Vaiśeṣika must have been that the absorbed qualities are not in contact (with the *manas*?) whereas those that are not absorbed are. Upon this the Buddhist asks: What is the reason/cause for the absorbed qualities not being in contact (*atrocyate pra[l]īnānām asaṃ(sa)[r]jga(e) kiṃ kāraṇam iti*)? The answer is incomplete; however, the Vaiśeṣika seems to reply that the contact is due to a special conjunction between the soul and the *manas* (*ātmama-naḥsaṃyogaviśeṣāt*). Such contact presumably does not occur in the case of the absorbed qualities.

On the other side of the same leaf (77b1) the Vaiśeṣika explains that (the *guṇas* that have disappeared, such as pleasure and pain) are not perceived precisely because they are absorbed in the *ātman*; in the same way (one does not perceive speech) when one becomes silent after

¹⁶ My understanding of the discussion is that the Vaiśeṣika forms the *pūrvapakṣa* and the Buddhist *siddhāntin* argues as the *pūrvapakṣin* of the *pūrvapakṣin*.

¹⁷ The beginning of the question has probably been lost. One can imagine that it was introduced with the mention of some presupposition, e.g., as something eternal cannot be a cause, how could the eternal *ātman* be a cause?

having withdrawn speech (*ātmany eva tu pralīn(aṃ) nopalabhyate. tathā vācaṃ saṃhṛtya tuṣṇīm ā* ...). Speech seems to have been conceived here as a capacity which can be exercised or be kept dormant.

Unfortunately, no further information can be gathered from the second line. There is also a slight uncertainty about the interpretation of the text as I have to take recourse to two conjectures (cf. above) to construe it meaningfully: these qualities, as something inhering in the *ātman*, are not perceived inasmuch as they are absorbed in it.

In the next line (77b3) the Buddhist charges the Vaiśeṣika with the fallacy of *drṣṭāntavirodha*, that is, the reason employed by the Vaiśeṣika is no reason at all (*ahetu*) because it is contradicted by the example. There is considerable uncertainty about the nature of the inference, for it is possible that some of the elements of the proof, such as the example, do not appear on what is preserved of this leaf. However, if we try to operate with the information that is available on the fragment, then the only item that could serve as an example is speech, or perhaps the capacity of speaking, which is withdrawn when one remains silent. Perhaps the proof was formulated as follows: Qualities such as pleasure and pain are not perceived because they are absorbed, just like speech. If this was the form of the proof, the Buddhist could argue that the example contradicts the reason, because speech as something which does not inhere in the *ātman*, cannot be absorbed in it. From what seems to be the Vaiśeṣika's reply to this objection nothing useful for our purpose remains. It begins with the familiar statement that pleasure and pain inhere in the soul ((*it*)[*y*] (*u*)*cyate sukhadukh-kham ātmani samavetam nātma* ...).

At least one more objection must have been formulated after this reply because what remains of the next leaf (lost fragment a1) begins with the Vaiśeṣika answer that (the qualities of the *ātman* such as pleasure and pain) have not perished (*atrāha na khalu vinaṣṭan* ...). The next line explains further: Also something that has not perished, i.e., also something withdrawn into the state of an atom, is called absorbed (*avinaṣṭam api sat anuśamavasthāsaṃhṛtam api pralīnam ity ucyate*). In other words, being “absorbed” does not mean for the qualities of the soul that they do not exist.

In the next line (a3) the Vaiśeṣika concludes that there are two modes of absorption (*tad evam ubhayathā p[r]alāy...*). The one presumably consists in complete destruction, the other consists perhaps in a contraction and penetration into another entity.¹⁸

On the other side of the leaf (b1) there is a reference to an omnipresent entity probably by way of an adjective in the masculine no-

¹⁸ In this connection one has to consider fragment 471 which probably belongs to the same leaf as the lost fragment transcribed by Spitzer:

minative singular (*sarvagato*), which in this context must refer to the *ātman*. This reference is of particular interest because it has been widely assumed that in early Vaiśeṣika the *ātman* was only as large as the body.¹⁹ If this assumption is correct, our text provides the earliest reference to the new *ātman* doctrine of the Vaiśeṣika and confirms that this change in the *ātman* doctrine took place at a rather early stage in the history of the Vaiśeṣika, perhaps as early as the 2nd c. A.D. So far the earliest reference to this doctrine could be found in the work of Āryadeva whose date (3rd–4th c.?) is still unsettled.

Further, I would suggest that the reference to an omnipresent or all-pervading *ātman* indicates that the Vaiśeṣika opponent did not consider his doctrine about absorbed qualities in substances to apply to all qualities and all substances, but only to some, in any case to qualities of omnipresent substances. Indeed, it would be difficult to maintain that a quality in an atomic state – or in fact several such qualities inhering in an atom – could be absorbed, i.e., contained, in a substance that is also atomic, that is, not larger in size than the quality itself. On this point too the Vaiśeṣika qualities as presented in the Spitzer manuscript would differ from those accepted in classical Vaiśeṣika, as the latter are not spatial entities because in classical Vaiśeṣika size was conceived as a quality, and the school did not allow qualities of qualities: qualities cannot have size, neither small (atomic) nor medium nor large.

One may also consider whether medium-size composite substances could absorb qualities. Unfortunately, our fragment does not disclose anything on this point.

In the next line (b2) the *ātman* is called *camakāraṇa*. The concept of *camakāraṇa* does not seem to make sense and, as far as I know, it does not occur in the relevant literature. I have no doubt that Spitzer's

471a (1.4x4.5)



471b



a [[[*(pra?)layasabdaḥ miśrī(bhūta)*]]] a [[[*(it)y u[c]yate* ∇ *yadi cātmany* .]]]

This implies, quite correctly, that by *pralaya* is meant that two entities, the absorbed and the absorbing, have merged.

¹⁹ Cf. T. ADACHI, On the size and the mobility of the *ātman* in the early Vaiśeṣika. *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 48,2 (1994 [= Proceedings of the Panel on Early Vaiśeṣika, Hong Kong, August 1993, ed. J. BRONKHORST]) 653–663; cf. also further references therein (p. 653, n. 1) to the relevant passages in studies by NOZAWA, WEZLER, PREISENDANZ, BRONKHORST and FRAUWALLNER.

transcription is correct. He must have also had his difficulties with this concept and apparently rechecked his transcription, for above the transcription of the word *cama-* he added two small exclamation marks. Perhaps one should conjecture *ca na kāraṇam*. The whole sentence could then read: ... (in this manner) the *ātman* is (not) a cause; and in the following manner the *ātman* is also not a cause: pleasure etc., that contradict each other here (in this world / in the Vaiśeṣika system) are not inherent (in the *ātman*) when/if(?) ... (... (*kā*)[*ra*]*ṇam ātmā itthaṃ ca na kāraṇam ātmā sukhādīnām iha viruddhānām asamavāyāḥ y.*). This statement is probably due to the notion that a substance cannot possess contradictory qualities or properties. Unfortunately the precise nature of the possible contradiction is unexplained, at least in what remains of the leaf.²⁰

Finally, in the last line the Vaiśeṣika may have explained that those entities that proceed to absorption are as if they had perished (i.e., as good as destroyed or destroyed for all practical purposes, but not entirely inexistent) ((*prala*)*yagāḥ khalu api vīnaś(ā) i[va?]*).

One final remark in this connection. The adjective *pralīna* has almost completely disappeared from classical Vaiśeṣika texts. There is only one context where it is used regularly, namely, in the context of dreams. The dreaming person is called *pralīnamanaska* when the *manas* withdraws to a region of the *ātman* called “the inner heart” (*antarhṛdaya*), which is devoid of senses, and stays there without movement.²¹

²⁰ Cf., however, Vaiśeṣikasūtra (ed. MUNI JAMBUVĀYAJI, Baroda 1961) X.2 and Candrānanda's commentary thereon.

²¹ Cf. Word Index to the *Prāśastapādabhāṣya*, ed. J. BRONKHORST and Y. RAMSEIER (Delhi 1994), p. 42–43: *yadā ... antarhṛdaye 'nindriya ātmapradeśe niścalaṃ manas tiṣṭhati tadā pralīnamanaska ity ākhyāyate*.