

Patañjali and the Buddhists*

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Medhātithi's commentary on Manu 1.5 cites the following proverb (*janapṛavāda*) (Jha, 1920–1939: I: 8, l. 7): *āmrāṇ prṣṭaḥ kovidāraṇ ācaṣṭe*. Wezler (1999: 139) translates: "Being questioned about mangoes he acquaints [one] with the *kovidāra* (trees)", and observes in a note (p. 151, n. 9): "Note that this proverb does not belong to those dealt with by Hopkins 1887 and Pischel 1893." It is however mentioned in the Nyāyokti-kośa of Chhabinath Mishra (1978: 22, s.v. *āmrāṇ prṣṭaḥ* ...), where it is pointed out that the proverb occurs in the Mahābhāṣya (*Mahā-bh* I, p. 219, l. 16, on P. 1.2.45 vt. 8).

However, a closely similar expression occurs in the early Buddhist Śrāmaṇyaphala Sūtra. The different versions of this text can be most easily cited from Meisig's *Das Śrāmaṇyaphala-Sūtra* (1987). We find the proverb in Sanskrit in the Saṅghabhedavastu: *tad yathā bhadanta/puruṣaḥ āmrāṇi prṣṭaḥ lakucāni vyākuryāt, lakucāni vā prṣṭaḥ āmrāni vyākuryāt, evam ...*, in Pāli in the Dīgha Nikāya: *seyyathāpi bhante ambaṃ vā puṭṭho labujam vyākareya, labujam vā puṭṭho ambaṃ vyākareyya, evam ...* (Meisig, 1987: 130, 140, 148, 156, 162, (168)). The Chinese parallels translated by Meisig confirm that the translators used a similar text, even though the precise nature of the fruits mentioned may not have been preserved in translation.

In spite of the differences of detail, it is clear that Patañjali here uses essentially the same expression as certain Buddhist texts. This is interesting, for it suggests that Patañjali the author of the Mahābhāṣya may have been influenced by Buddhist texts, and may therefore conceivably have undergone Buddhist influence. Influence in the opposite direction, from Patañjali to the Buddhist texts concerned, seems excluded, since the Śrāmaṇyaphala Sūtra is a canonical text, which we may assume to be older than Patañjali, if not exactly in its surviving form than at least in some earlier form. Given that our

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proverb occurs in all the different versions of the Sūtra, it seems safe to conclude that this earlier form already contained the proverb under consideration.

It goes without saying that the occurrence of a similar proverb both in a Buddhist canonical text and in the Mahābhāṣya does not, by itself, prove that Patañjali has here been influenced by that particular Buddhist text, or by Buddhists in general. It is conceivable that this proverb was in use in Patañjali's circles, as it was in use in the circles of those who composed (or redacted) the Śrāmaṇyaphala Sūtra. However, this is not the only example of striking similarity between Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya and certain Buddhist texts.

Patañjali speaks at one occasion about "sciences which have something auspicious in the beginning, in the middle and in the end" (*maṅgalādīni maṅgalamadyāni maṅgalāntāni śāstrāṇi*; *Mahā-bh* I, p. 253, l. 5–6, on P. 1.3.1 vt. 1a). He uses this expression in connection with Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī, but a closer inspection shows that it does not very well fit this text. The Aṣṭādhyāyī has, to be sure, "something auspicious" in the beginning: P. 1.1.1 (*vṛddhir ād aic*) begins with the word *vṛddhi*, which is auspicious. But this text does not have something auspicious in the middle; or rather, the presence of *bhū* in P. 1.3.1 which Patañjali mentions in this connection does not occur in the middle at all: it occurs at the beginning of the third Pāda of a text which altogether has thirty-two of them. The "something auspicious" at the end remains unspecified in the Mahābhāṣya. Some commentators propose the use of *udaya* in P. 8.4.67, which is not the very end of the Aṣṭādhyāyī.

It appears that Patañjali got the notion of "sciences which have something auspicious in the beginning, in the middle and in the end" from elsewhere. Once again it is not very difficult to identify a possible source. A number of early Buddhist texts speak of the Dharma taught by the Buddha as being "auspicious in the beginning, in the middle and in the end". The Pāli expression is: *ādikalyāṇa, majjhekkalyāṇa, pariyoṣānakalyāṇa*; the terms used in Sanskrit are: *ādau kalyāṇa, madhye kalyāṇa, paryavasāne kalyāṇa*. The Pāli expression is frequent, especially in the Vinaya and Sutta Piṭakas (cf. *PTC* s.v. *ādikalyāṇa*); the Sanskrit expression has been preserved in the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, the Daśottara Sūtra, the Nidānasamyukta, and elsewhere (cf. *SWTF* s.v. *ādi*).

For a third parallel consider the following passage from the Mahābhāṣya (*Mahā-bh* II, p. 120, l. 20–21):

athavā bhavati vai kaścij jāgrad api vartamānakālaṃ nopalabhate/ tad

yathā/

vaiyākaraṇānāṃ śākaṭāyano rathamārga āsinaḥ śakaṭasārthaṃ yāntaṃ nopalebhe/

"Alternatively, there are people who, though awake, do not perceive the present. For example: Śākaṭāyana from among the grammarians, while sitting at [the side of] the carriage-road, did not perceive a group of carts that passed by."

A variant of this account occurs in the Buddhist Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra and its parallels. Here the story is of course not told about the grammarian Śākaṭāyana, but about someone called Ārāḍa Kālāma. The Sanskrit version reads (MPS 28.18):

saṃjñi evāhaṃ ... samāno jāgran nāśrauṣaṃ pañcānāṃ śakaṭasatānāṃ vyatikramamāṇānāṃ śabdāṃ

"Even though conscious and awake I did not hear the sound of five hundred carts passing by."

In this particular case Patañjali's story about a grammarian who did not hear a deafening noise sounds rather improbable. Let us not forget that early Indian literature shows little interest for or acquaintance with absent-minded professors. The story fits much better in an originally ascetic context, where practitioners were deeply concerned with suppressing the activities of the senses. Here too, the Buddhist milieu may be the source from which Patañjali drew this story. Once again, however, it must be admitted that without further evidence it may be difficult to prove this with certainty.

Consider now the following two expressions used by Patañjali: *guṇasaṃdrāvo dravyam* (*Mahā-bh* II, p. 366, l. 26, on P. 5.1.119 vt. 5) and *guṇasamuḍāyo dravyam* (*Mahā-bh* II, p. 200, l. 13–14), to which attention has been drawn by Albrecht Wezler (1985). Both state that material objects are collections of qualities; the context makes clear that the qualities concerned are sound (*śabda*), touch (*sparsa*), colour (*rūpa*), taste (*rasa*) and smell (*gandha*). There is no reason to believe that Patañjali himself accepted this position, yet its very mention proves that there were thinkers at the time of Patañjali who did. Who were they?

It is known that the Sāṃkhya philosophy accepted the position that material objects are collections of qualities during a part of its history (Bronkhorst, 1994). There is however no reason to think that Sāṃkhya as a

developed philosophy existed already at the time of Patañjali. His Mahābhāṣya, at any rate, contains no clear indication that he was acquainted with this school of thought. But Sāṃkhya was not the only philosophy that accepted this position. Buddhist Sarvāstivāda accepted it well before Sāṃkhya (see, e.g., Bronkhorst, 2000: 113–114). Patañjali's remarks are most easily explained by the assumption that he was, whether directly or indirectly, acquainted with Sarvāstivāda Buddhism.

Patañjali's last considered remarks have taken us out of the domain of literary themes into that of philosophical ideas. They suggest that Patañjali may have undergone Buddhist influence (perhaps indirectly) in both these domains. This raises the question whether further Buddhist-like features of a philosophical nature can be found in the Mahābhāṣya.

This is indeed the case. The Mahābhāṣya does not contain many philosophical ideas, but some of them are noteworthy. Particularly important are Patañjali's ideas about the nature of words and sounds. Nothing in the grammatical discussions dealt with requires him to take a position in this matter, yet he does.

Patañjali distinguishes the individual speech sound as an entity, which he sometimes calls *sphoṭa*, from the noise (*dhvani*) that expresses it. The *sphoṭa*, as he puts it, is the sound itself, whereas the *dhvani* is a quality of the sound (*Mahā-bh* I, p. 181, l. 19–20, on P. 1.1.70 vt. 5: *evaṃ tarhi sphoṭaḥ śabdō dhvaniḥ śabdaguṇaḥ*). Elsewhere it becomes clear that he considers words and their speech sounds eternal and unchanging. He does, for example, call the speech sounds fixed (*Mahā-bh* I, p. 181, l. 14, on P. 1.1.70 vt. 5: *avasthitā varṇā[h]*). The following passage is particularly clear (*Mahā-bh* I, p. 18, l. 14–15, on Śivasūtra 1 vt. 12):

nityās ca śabdāḥ/ nityeṣu ca śabdeṣu kūṭasthair avicālibhir varṇair bhavitavyam anapāyopajanavikāribhiḥ/

“And words are eternal. And the speech sounds in the eternal words must be permanent, unchanging, free from diminution, augmentation and modification.”

This last passage suggests that also words, and not only their constituent sounds, are eternal. Patañjali's discussion of the first part of what is presented in Kielhorn's edition as the very first vārttika of the Mahābhāṣya (*siddhe śabdārthasambandhe*; there are reasons to think that this is not the first vārttika, see Bronkhorst 1987a) confirms this in a long discussion. It is hard to think that a mere collection of speech sounds can be eternal.

It is clear from other passages that *Patañjali* considers words to be more than just collections of speech sounds. Indeed, he postulates the word as being one single entity (*Mahā-bh* I, p. 31, l. 10, on Śivasūtra 5 vt. 13: *saṃghāṭasyaikatvam*). He explains that the sounds of words do not occur simultaneously. He states this in the following passage (*Mahā-bh* I, p. 356, l. 5–8, on P. 1.4.109 vt. 10):

gaur iti yāvad gākāre vāg vartate naukāre na visarjanīye/ yāvad aukāre na gākāre na visarjanīye/ yāvad visarjanīye na gākāre naukāre/ uccaritapradhvamsitvāt/ uccaritapradhvamsinaḥ khalv api varṇāḥ/

“In the case of *gaur*, as long as speech is concerned with the sound *g*, [it is] not [concerned] with the sounds *au* and *h*. As long as [it is concerned] with *au*, [it is] not [concerned] with *g* and *h*. As long as [it is concerned] with *h*, [it is] not [concerned] with *g* and *au*. Because they disappear as soon as they are pronounced. Sounds indeed disappear as soon as they have been pronounced.”

Patañjali is not particularly prolix about the nature of words, but a relatively clear picture is obtained by piecing together various remarks which he makes in different contexts. It seems clear, for example, that the single entity which is the word according to Patañjali, has an objective existence, not a merely mental one. The word, as he states somewhere, is situated in ether, where it can be heard by the ear and grasped by the mind (*Mahā-bh* I, p. 18, l. 19–20, on Śivasūtra 1 vt. 12: *śrotopalabdhir buddhinirgrāhyaḥ prayogeṇābhijvalita ākāśadeśaḥ śabda[h]*).

I have dwelt a bit on Patañjali's ideas about words and sounds (without being exhaustive), since these ideas are remarkably similar to ideas developed in Sarvāstivāda Buddhism. The classical enumerations of dharmas of the Sarvāstivādins contain, as is well known, the following three linguistic dharmas: *nāmakāya*, *padakāya* and *vyañjanakāya*. These dharmas already occur in the lists of *cittaviprayukta saṃskāras* found in several canonical Abhidharma texts of this school, viz., the Dharmaskandha, the Prakaraṇa-pāda and the Jñānaprasthāna, as well as in the so-called Pañcavastuka.

This is not the place to discuss the original meaning of these three terms in detail. It may be significant that the earliest translation of the Pañcavastuka into Chinese knows only two linguistic dharmas; perhaps there were only two of them in the beginning. However that may be, it seems clear that these linguistic dharmas covered, right from the beginning, words and sounds. Words and sounds, being dharmas, were conceived of as being independent

entities: the word being different from its "constituting" sounds, and each sound being different from the noise that manifests it.

The introduction of linguistic dharmas by the Sarvāstivādins fits in well with their ontological concerns. Their lists of dharmas were thought of as lists of all there is. The Sarvāstivādins were deeply concerned to determine what does and what does not exist. Chariots, houses, and everything that is composite does not really exist, they claim. Only the ultimate constituents of those objects, that is to say the dharmas, do really exist. By including words and sounds into their lists of dharmas they gave expression to the view that these linguistic entities are independent entities that have no constituent parts, and that are no sequences of sounds or anything else. Reflections like these fit naturally in their philosophical concerns.

Contrary to the Sarvāstivādins, Patañjali the grammarian had no such ontological concerns. Ontology plays no role whatsoever in his Mahābhāṣya. And yet we find there, somewhat hidden away in grammatical discussions, these unnecessary and quaint ideas about the ontological status of words and sounds, claiming that words and sounds have a separate existence independent from their constituent parts. The question is inevitable: where did Patañjali get these ideas from?

An easy answer presents itself, of course. Patañjali may have undergone the direct or indirect influence of the early Sarvāstivādin thinkers. It may be necessary to recall that with regard to the early period of Indian thought that we are dealing with our evidence is lacunary, and the nature of the texts concerned such that we cannot expect explicit mention of the sources that influenced them. It follows that all conclusions have to be tentative. Keeping all this in mind, it seems yet safe to consider Buddhist influence on Patañjali a probable proposition.

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Abbreviations

- ADAW Abhandlungen der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Klasse für Sprachen, Literatur und Kunst
- Mahā-bh Patañjali, (Vyākaraṇa-) Mahābhāṣya, ed. F. Kielhorn, Bombay 1880–1885
- MPS Ernst Waldschmidt, Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra, T. 1–3, Berlin 1950–1951 (ADAW 1949, 1; 1950, 2,3)
- P. Pāṇinian sūtra
- PTC Pāli Tipiṭakam Concordance, ed. F.L. Woodward, E.M. Hare, London 1952ff.
- SWTF Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfan-Funden, begonnen von Ernst Waldschmidt, ed. Heinz Bechert, bearb. Georg von Simson und Michael Schmidt, Göttingen 1973ff.
- vt. vārtika on Pāṇinian sūtra