

The Base Text and Its Commentaries: Problems of Representing and Understanding the Cārvāka/Lokāyata

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ABSTRACT

The base texts of most of the philosophical systems of ancient India are in the form of a collection of aphorisms (*sūtra-s*). The aphorisms are so brief and tersely worded that their significance can seldom be understood without the help of a commentary or commentaries. Sometimes, the literal meaning of an aphorism needs to be qualified or modified by an explanation found in the commentary. If a reader relies exclusively on the literal meaning of the aphorisms in the base text without having recourse to any commentary or disregards all commentaries, he or she may miss the point. Contrariwise, if a reader relies exclusively on a commentary and disregards the literal meaning of an aphorism, he or she will commit another kind of blunder. Ideally, equal attention should be paid to the base text as well as the commentary or commentaries. Even then, all problems are not automatically solved, for it is an uphill task to decide when to go by the literal meaning of the aphorisms and when to follow the commentary. In their polemics against the Cārvāka/Lokāyata, Jayantabhaṭṭa (c. ninth century C.E.) and Hemacandra (eleventh century C.E.) erred because they did not follow the golden rule stated above and consequently misunderstood and misrepresented their opponents' contentions.

KEYWORDS

base text, the Cārvāka/Lokāyata, Indian philosophy, commentary, inference, perception

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I

The base texts of most of the philosophical systems of ancient India are in the form of a collection of aphorisms (*sūtra*-s). The aphorisms are as a rule very brief and terse, even to the point of being incomprehensible. The task of the guru was to make his pupils understand what was in the mind of the author/redactor of the *sūtra*-s. The base text was meant to be committed to memory, not to be consulted as and when necessary. Hence, the shorter the better. Since the extreme brevity was meant for facilitating learning by heart, there is a maxim: “Grammarians rejoice over the saving of (even) the length of half a short vowel as much as over the birth of a son”, *ardhamātrā lāghavena putrotsavam manyante vaiyākaraṇāḥ* (NĀGEŚABHAṬṬA 1960–1962: 122). The Kalpasūtras, ancillary works of Vedic ritual literature, and more importantly the ancient grammatical work, the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini (sixth/fifth century B.C.E.) were the models of composing such brief aphorisms. The custom was followed by the founding fathers and/or redactors of the philosophical systems.

Brevity may be the soul of wit, but it entails a fundamental problem: for the sake of terseness the aphorisms were sometimes composed in the form of incomplete sentences without verbs. Sometimes just a word was considered sufficient to form an aphorism. The task of the guru was to fill in the gaps by supplying the missing words (technically known as *adhyāhāra*, supplying). Not all gurus agreed on the right *adhyāhāra*. There is a Cārvāka aphorism (I.4): *tebhyaścaitanyaṃ*, ‘Consciousness out of these’ (BHATTACHARYA 2009: 79, 87). From a preceding aphorism (I.2) it is to be understood that the word *tebhyah*, ‘out of these’, refers to the four elements, namely, earth, water, fire and air. Nevertheless, does consciousness arise (anew) or is it merely manifested (as if it was pre-existing)? Two anonymous commentators offered two such *adhyāhāras*, *utpadyate* and *abhivyajyate*. Later writers merely repeat the alternatives or opt for either one or the other (KAMALAŚĪLA II: 633–634).¹ Similarly, one guru would suggest one explanation; another guru, something else. Such a difference of opinion inevitably led to confusion. The student was expected to accept either or both as equally probable.² In any case, book learning, that is, learning from written commentaries, was not considered to be a proper substitute for learning from the mouth of a guru (*gurumukhī vidyā*). As Rangaswami Aiyangar says:

Reliance on a book for elucidation was therefore held as likely not only to mislead but to convey wrong impressions of [the] authentic doctrine. This is why we find in smṛti literature, even in ages in which documents and writings came to be the mainstay of judicial decisions, denunciations of dependence on books, side by side with praise of gifts of *purāṇas*

¹ For further details, see BHATTACHARYA 2009: 121 n. 49.

² For such an instance, when commentators retain both explanations as two equally valid alternatives, see BHATTACHARYA 2009: 159–160.

as among the donations of most sanctity. Devaṇṇa Bhaṭṭa (thirteenth century) quotes the authority of Nārada for including dependence on books along with women, gambling, addiction to the stage, idleness and sleep among the impediments to the acquisition of knowledge. Mādhava also quotes Nārada to show that “what is learnt from books, and not from the teacher, will not shine in the assembly of the learned”. The familiar denunciation of the sale (*vikraya*) of knowledge is aimed as much at teaching under contract for a fee as at the sale of the books which will supersede the teacher. The result of the prejudice was twofold: first, improvement of the memory to make its retentiveness greater; and secondly, to make citation in books aim at the utmost accuracy to escape the familiar charge (AIYANGAR 1941: 10).

Yet commentaries and sub-commentaries began to appear to meet the need of the students who could not find any guru to guide them through the maze of the base text. Even though a poor substitute, the commentary literature ultimately turned out to be the most viable means of understanding of the philosophical systems. Surendranath Dasgupta, however, notes:

[T]he Sanskrit style (*sic*) of the most of the commentaries is so condensed and different from literary Sanskrit, and aims so much at precision and brevity, leading to the use of technical words current in the diverse systems, that a study of these becomes often impossible without the aid of an expert preceptor (DASGUPTA 1975, I: 67).

Thus, in spite of the written commentary, oral exposition by a guru cannot be dispensed with. We are back to square one. Commentaries and sub-commentaries, however, served one important purpose. As early as 1805, Henry Thomas Colebrooke noted:

It is a received and well grounded opinion of the learned in India, that no book is altogether safe from changes and interpolations until it have been (*sic*) commented: but when once a gloss has been published, no fabrication could afterwards succeed; because the perpetual commentary notices every passage, and, in general, explains every word. [...] The genuineness of the commentaries, again, is secured by a crowd of commentators, whose works expound every passage in the original gloss; and whose annotations are again interpreted by others (COLEBOOKE 1977: 98–99).

Nevertheless, there is no denying the fact that different systems of Indian philosophy developed and grew out of the expositions, commentaries and sub-commentaries composed by the adherents of the systems. When such secondary works are written by the professed adherents of the respective systems, they become a part of the tradition. Yet such works would have to digress to at least some areas that might very well have been totally alien to the *sūtrakāra*/s, the originator/s or the original systematizer/s.

Moreover, it is well known that commentaries or sub-commentaries are sometimes written to defend a system of philosophy that has been attacked by some exponents of another antagonistic system. Uddyotakara’s (sixth century

C.E.) *Vārttika to the Nyāyasūtra* is a case in point. The *Vārttika* was basically a work of defence against the objections to Gautama raised by the Buddhist philosophers, especially Diñnāga and Vasubandhu, and also Nāgārjuna. Such an apologia is bound to introduce new matters and invent novel interpretations of the original *sūtra*-s.³

Another sort of problem crops up when the expositor or commentator does not belong to the system he is elucidating, yet for reasons best known to him he composes a commentary on the base text. When a versatile scholar like Vācaspatimīśra, the *sarvatantrasvantra* (independent) expositor, writes commentaries on the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* or the *Vedāntasūtra* or other base texts, he does not represent the tradition of any of the systems; he relies wholly on his personal understanding and perhaps what he had learnt from his gurus. How much reliance is to be placed on his exposition? We know of at least two commentators on the *Cārvākasūtra*, Aviddhakarṇa and Udbhāṭabhaṭṭa, whose works are permeated with the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika terminology. Their names are known from other sources as belonging to the Nyāya tradition.⁴ There is no way to ascertain whether they were Cārvākas themselves or merely assumed the role of being so. Would it be wise to accept their interpretations as reflecting the mainstream view of the Cārvākas?

All the same commentaries are useful aids to the understanding of all sorts of texts, not merely philosophical ones. Damodar Dharmananda Kosambi is not alone in grumbling that no good Sanskrit text can be interpreted without a commentary (KOSAMBI 1975: 284). A variety of commentaries, from the brief *ṭippanī* to the elaborate *bhāṣya*, with many varieties of glosses and interpretations, such as *anutantra*, *avacūrṇī*, *cūrṇī*, *pañcīkā* (*pañjikā*), *vyākhyāna*, *vārttika*, *vṛtti*, etc., lying in between, have made their presence felt in the corpus of Indian philosophical literature.⁵

The same base text generates a number of commentaries and even sub-commentaries. As it is to be expected, the commentators do not agree among them-

³ The situation is similar to what happened in the grammatical tradition. Kshitish Chandra Chatterji put it succinctly: "It would appear that it took several centuries for Pāṇini's grammar to establish itself and that even at the time of Patañjali [second century B.C.E.] grammarians belonging to other schools tried their level best to point out errors of omission and commission in the grammar of Pāṇini. Patañjali had to meet the objections put forward by these captious critics and for this purpose he had often to turn and twist the rules of Pāṇini. This is why in some cases we remain in doubt as to the true views of Patañjali, his words conveying the impression that they are merely intended to silence his antagonist." (CHATTERJI 1972: vii). Emphasis R.B.

⁴ For a detailed analysis, see BHATTACHARYA 2010a; BHATTACHARYA 2010b; BHATTACHARYA 2010c.

⁵ For a general discussion on Sanskrit commentaries with special reference to philosophical works see the two essays by Jonardon Ganeri (2008) and Karin Preiszdanz (2008) respectively. See also BHATTACHARYA 2010a and BHATTACHARYA 2010b.

selves; sometimes they erect new hurdles by introducing matters not found in the *sūtras* themselves. Vātsyāyana, for example, in the introductory sentence of his comments on *Nyāyasūtra*, 4.2.18 mentions a mysterious person whom he calls *ānupalambhika*. Neither he nor any sub-commentator such as Uddyotakara or Udayana bothered to explain exactly who or what kind of a person is meant by this strange appellation. Widely divergent identifications have been made, but it is still a far cry from unanimity or even near-unanimity.⁶

The Nyāya and the Vedānta systems have the largest number of commentarial apparatus. It is rather odd that, in spite of the existence of so much explanatory materials for these systems, or perhaps because of it, some cruxes in the base texts cannot still be resolved. Plurality of interpretations confuses rather than convinces the learner about the true intention of the *sūtrakāra*, composer of the aphorisms. Too many cooks spoil the broth, sometimes irredeemably. For example: what is meant by *ākasmikatva* (accident) in the *Nyāyasūtra* (NS) 4.1.22–24? Does it signify the absence of the material cause (*upādānakāraṇa*) or of the instrumental cause (*nimittakāraṇa*) or of both? Vātsyāyana, the first known commentator of the NS (but writing many centuries after the redaction of the base text) explains the opponent's thesis as "effects have material causes only, but no efficient cause". However, later commentators, such as Varddhamāna Upādhyāya and others take the *sūtra* to mean that "an effect has no invariable or fixed (*niyata*) cause," thereby eliminating both material and instrumental causes. In the interpretation of Vātsyāyana and Uddyotakara, *ākasmikatva* = *yadr̥cchā* (chance). According to Varddhamāna and Varadarāja, however, *ākasmikatva* = *avyutpanna* (non-derivable).⁷ A new learner is free therefore to choose either of the two interpretations, but the earlier one is more probable.

The problem arises because some *sūtra*-s are too brief to indubitably suggest one or the other interpretation; without the help of the commentator/s, one cannot form any opinion from the words of the text itself. Moreover, the irreconcilable differences in the two interpretations offered by earlier and later commentators makes the task more difficult. There are also other factors, such as partisan approach (due to affiliation to particular schools), factional quarrels, etc., which vitiate some commentaries. We need not go into all the details here. It is wise to follow the sage advice: don't rely exclusively on the commentator. One should initially try to make out the intention of the *sūtrakāra* from the words of the aphorisms themselves, but when the words are of dubious significance or open to more than one interpretation, help from the commentators has to be sought. Even then, it is not obligatory to accept the view of the commentator who is as much fallible as we are. Uncritical acceptance of whatever a commentary says is inadvisable; at the same time, however, total rejection of the commentaries is

⁶ For further details, see BHATTACHARYA 2007: 13–18.

⁷ TARKAVAGISA's elucidation of NS 4.1.22. [In:] GANGOPADHYAYA 1973: 27–31.

equally impracticable. In any case, a student at first should try whenever possible to make the most of the literal meaning of the aphorisms and then turn to the commentaries and other aids (such as secondary works, expositions, etc.).

Even this golden rule of following the middle course — paying due attention to both the base text and the commentary (or commentaries) but not accepting any of them uncritically — does not solve all problems. A commentator, one would naturally expect, should be faithful to the author; he must not say anything that the author did not mean or could not have meant. Such a fond expectation is often belied by the commentaries. A commentator is seldom satisfied with merely providing glosses. He adds to or modifies or qualifies the statements of the author. All this is recognized to be the duty of the commentator. He is expected to clarify what is rather opaque in the text, supply whatever the author of the *sūtra*-s had forgotten to provide and even what he failed to notice!⁸ The problem is that every commentator on a philosophical text is himself a philosopher of a sort who is sometimes tempted to rewrite the contents of the base work by elaborating certain points that are not mentioned or even hinted at in the extremely concise *sūtra*-s. There should be a permanent caveat for the students of Indian philosophy: Beware of the commentator! Never cease to ask yourself: is he being faithful to the intention of the author or using the base text as a peg on which to hang his own speculations? Blind acceptance of the commentator's interpretation, whoever and however exalted he may be, is not to be recommended under any circumstances.⁹ At the same time, some aphorisms are so obscure that one is at a loss without a commentary. There is no denying that some explanations are indeed illuminating. The crux of the matter is: when to abide by the literal meaning of an aphorism and when to follow the interpretation given in a commentary. Everything depends on a judicious choice on the part of the student of Indian philosophy.

⁸ Cf. HARADATTA 1965 (*Padamañjarī* 9): *yad vismṛtam adṛṣtam vā sūtrakāreṇa tat sphuṭam | vyākhyākāro vṛavītyevaṃ tenādṛṣtam ca bhāṣyakrt.*

⁹ DASGUPTA (1975, II: 462, n. 1) provides an excellent example from Śaṅkara's commentary on *Gītā* 14.3: "*mama yonir mahad brahma tasmīn garbhaṃ dadbhāmy aham...* Śaṅkara surreptitiously introduces the word *māyā* between *mama* and *yonī* and changes the whole meaning." To take another example: Vātsyāyana in his comments on NS 1.1.1 writes: "[...] The inference (*anumāna*) which is not contradicted by perception (*pratyakṣa*) and scripture (*āgama*) is called *anvīkṣā*, that is, knowing over again (*anu*, literally 'after') of that which is already known (*ikṣita*) by perception and scripture [...] the inference which is contradicted by either perception or scripture is pseudo-*nyāya*." Trans. M.K. GANGOPADHYAYA 1982: 4 (emphasis R.B.). The repeated addition of scripture is totally unwarranted, for NS 1.1.5 states that inference is to be preceded by perception — *tat* (sc. *pratyakṣa*) *pūrvakam*, and nothing else. The preceding *sūtra* defines perception without mentioning scripture at all.

II

I apologize to learned readers for this disproportionately long proem. They certainly know all this from their own experience. Like them I too had to pay a price — a very heavy one at that — for placing absolute trust on the words of the base texts on some occasions as well as for relying blindly on the commentaries on others. Nevertheless, before getting into the problematic of this paper, I found such an exordium necessary for putting the enquiry into a question: How many instruments of cognition (*pramāṇa*) did the materialists in India admit?

When we set ourselves to study the rise and development of materialism in India, we are confronted with an overriding problem, that of the paucity of materials. This is unlike studying some idealist systems such as Vedānta, where the opposite is the case. As to materialism, all we have, besides a few scattered verses of doubtful origin and unknown authorship, are very few fragments, quotations and paraphrases of certain aphorisms and short extracts from commentaries, which are all found in works seeking to refute materialism.¹⁰ It is common knowledge that there was no continuous chain linking the materialists in India from the days of Ajita Kesakambala (sixth/fifth centuries B.C.E.) down to the advent of the Cārvākas (c. eighth century C.E.).

From whatever little evidence we possess it is, however, evident that there were more than one materialist school long before the appearance of the Cārvākas. In certain earlier and later works, a more general term, *nāstika* (as in Pāṇini, 4.4.60: *asti nāsti diṣṭam matih*, from which the words *āstika*, *nāstika* and *daiṣṭika* are derived)¹¹ or *nāhiyavādī* or *natthiyavādī* (negativist), is employed to suggest some pre-Cārvāka materialists.¹² However, we have no evidence that they had a common base text and each materialist thinker had enough adherents to form his own school. It is probable that one or some of them might have spoken of five elements as well (as in *Mahābhārata*, 12.267.4 and the *Sūtrakṛtāṅgasūtra* (SKS), 1.1.1.1–20). Guṇaratna in fact refers to “another kind of Cārvākas,” *cārvākaikadeśīyāh*, who spoke of five elements instead of four (300), but apparently he employs the name Cārvāka as a kind of ‘brand name’ for all materialists, past and present.

In or around the sixth century C.E. we come across a group of philosophers called the Lo(au)kāyatikas. This group is not at all like its namesake, which was

¹⁰ For a collection of such fragments see BHATTACHARYA 2009: 78–86 (text), 86–92 (translation).

¹¹ By *nāstika*, at first only the denier of the after-world was meant (as explained by the commentators of PĀṆINI, 4.4.60. See BHATTACHARYA 2009: 227–228. See also ĀRYAŚŪRA 23.57.

¹² As in HARIBHADRA, *Samarāicca Kabā* 164, SAṄGHADĀSAGANIVĀCAKA 169, 275.

known at least as early as the fifth century B.C.E. in Buddhist literature. The members of the older group used to indulge in disputation for disputation's sake and because of this irksome habit incurred the disapproval of the Buddha.¹³ The new Lokāyatikas of the Common Era are known to have been rabidly opposed to religion (in Bānabhaṭṭa, *Kādambarī*: 513: *lokāyatikavidyayevādharमारुचेह*). By the eighth century C.E. however the word *cārvāka* appears as synonymous with the new Lokāyata school.¹⁴

Another name, Bārhaspatya (related to Bṛhaspati, the preceptor of the gods), came to be associated with the Cārvāka/Lokāyata. The story was derived from some Purāṇic tales, particularly those found in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* (VP 3.18) and copied out in the *Padmapurāṇa*, *Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, chapter 13. So all the four names, Bārhaspatya, Cārvāka, Lokāyata and Nāstika came to signify the same materialist school. In his lexicon *Abhidhānacintāmani*, Hemaandra provides three synonyms for Bārhaspatya: Nāstika, Cārvāka and Lokāyatika (3.525–27).

There seems to have been another school of materialists in southern India. Its existence is recorded in the Tamil epics *Manimekalai* and *Neelakesi*. They called their system *bhūtavāda*.¹⁵ The presence of several groups of pre-Cārvāka materialists is also testified to by an old Jain canonical work, the *Sūtrakṛtāṅgasūtra* (SKS) (1.1.1.1–20). Many of them (if not all) were *bhūtapañcakavādin*, holding that the number of elements was five, not four (as the Cārvākas did).¹⁶ Bhūtavāda and the Lokāyata doctrine had much in common but, as a Bhūtavādin in the the *Manimekalai*, 27: 273–274 says, there were some differences too. For example, the Bhūtavādins believed in two kinds of matter, lifeless and living, where life originates from living matter, the body from the lifeless. The Lokāyatas did not think so (VANAMAMALAI 1973: 38).

A problem arises when some writers adhering to the pro-Vedic systems (*āstika*-s) set out to criticize the Cārvākas but make no distinction between the pre-Cārvākas and the Cārvākas. So much so that they either rely on a particular commentary at the expense of the base text or disregard the existing commentaries of the *Cārvākasūtra* altogether. Sometimes they resort exclusively to the base

¹³ For references see CHATTOPADHYAYA 1975: 143–148.

¹⁴ See HARIBHADRA, *Ṣaddarśanasamuccaya*, chapter 6. The chapter is devoted to the exposition of Lokāyata – *lokāyatā vadanty evam*, etc., (80a), but in 85d we read: *cārvākāḥ pratipediṛe*. See also KAMALAŚĪLA who, in his commentary on a chapter in ŚANTARAKṢĪTA's *Tattvasaṅgraha* entitled *Lokāyataparikṣā*, uses the names Cārvāka and Lokāyata interchangeably as if they were synonymous. See TSP, II: 639, 649, 657, 663, 665, also II: 520, 939 and 945.

¹⁵ See VANAMAMALAI 1973: 26, 36–38. Also ILANKO ADIGĀL and SATTANAR 1989: 153–154 (27.264–276); ILANKO ADIGĀL and SATTANAR 1996: 170.

¹⁶ ŚĪLĀNKA in his comments on *Sūtrakṛtāṅgasūtra* 1.1.1.20 calls them *pañcabhūtavādyādyāḥ*, and more elaborately *pañcabhūtāstivādivādinō lokāḥ* (19). Earlier he has explained *ekēṣāṃ* (1.1.1.7) as *bhūtavādinām* but identifies them as followers of the Bārhaspatya doctrine.

text; on other occasions, they follow a commentary but err in making the wrong choice. Some of them mistake a particular commentator's personal view to be the mainstream view, disregarding the words of the aphorisms; other stick to the words of the aphorisms, ignoring the commentaries. I shall give two examples to show how the opponents of materialism misrepresented the Cārvāka view concerning the instrument of cognition by shifting their ground rather injudiciously from the aphorism to a commentary or *vice versa*.

III

Jayantabhaṭṭa, a luminary of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school (ninth century C.E.) was a domicile in Kashmir although he was a *Gauḍa brāhmana* by origin. His exegetical work *Nyāyamañjarī* (NM) contains stringent attacks against the Cārvākas. Speaking of the instruments of cognition, Jayanta at one place says: "the Cārvākas say that there is only one kind of *pramāna*, which is perception (*pratyakṣa*)."¹⁷ Jayanta assures his readers that he would establish the validity of inference (*anumāna*), which the Cārvākas allegedly do not admit as a *pramāna*.

Apparently, Jayanta is here going by the Cārvāka aphorism: "Perception indeed is the (only) instrument of cognition" (BHATTACHARYA 2009: 80, 87).¹⁸ So far so good. Had this been the only example of going by the literal meaning of an aphorism, we could have dispensed with Jayanta. After all, he takes the words of the aphorism as they appear in the base text and stands firmly on its basis. However, he soon changes his track; instead of the *sūtra* work, he takes his stand on a commentary, presumably the *Tattvavṛtti* written by his fellow Kashmirian, Udbhaṭabhaṭṭa. Jayanta does not name him anywhere in his work but refers to him in various indirect and ironical ways and refers to Udbhaṭa's view three times in successive pages.¹⁹

After referring to the alleged one-*pramāna* position of the Cārvākas (quoted above), Jayanta writes: "The Cārvākas, the well-learned ones (*suśikṣita*), say that it is really impossible to specifically state the number of *pramāna*-s."²⁰ In another instance Jayanta complains that the Cārvāka, the cunning one (*dhūrta*), does not explain the principle (*tattva*) but merely expatiates on "the impossibility

¹⁷ NM, I: 43. Translation in: C/L, 154.

¹⁸ For variant readings of the same (III.1), see BHATTACHARYA 2009: 60, n. 23.

¹⁹ CAKRADHARA, author of the *Granthibhaṅga*, a commentary on the NM, identifies the person/s referred to in such ways (*suśikṣita* and *dhūrta*) as UDBHAṬA and others (I: 52, 100). CAKRADHARA is corroborated by VĀDIDEVASŪRI who quotes at length from UDBHAṬA's commentary on several occasions and provides the title of the work (*Tattvavṛtti*) as well (265). *Tantravṛtti* (270) in all probability is a misprint. See BHATTACHARYA 2009: comm. 11, 13. 81–82, 89.

²⁰ NM I: 52. Trans. in: C/L, 154.

of making a specific rule regarding the number and definition of *pramāna* and *prameya* (the object of cognition).²¹ It is no longer the number of *pramāna*-s but those of *prameya*-s as well. On yet another occasion Jayanta derides the Cārvākas by saying: “The *nāstika*-s, not having enough intelligence to determine the power of the *pramāna*-s have been clamouring in vain that in the case of *pramāna*-s, there is no specific rule as to the number.”²² The same kind of contempt is manifest again on the same page: “By declaring before the assembly of the learned that *tattva* is nothing but the impossibility of determining (the true nature of *pramāna* and *prameya*), they (*sc.* the Cārvākas) have only revealed their dullheadedness.”²³

It is to be noted that Jayanta does not ridicule Udbhaṭa alone, or even those who allegedly adhere to his views, for holding this agnostic position regarding the number of *pramāna*-s and *prameya*-s. In the first two instances he does so, but in the last two he condemns the Cārvākas as a whole, not a section of them or a particular individual.

The charge is not true, for it goes against the statement made earlier by Jayanta himself that the Cārvākas admit one *pramāna* only, as the *sūtra* says. Even though we have to work on the basis of very few Cārvāka fragments, we at least know that Udbhaṭa in some respects differed from the ancient (*cirantana*) Cārvākas (NM II: 257) and that Cakradhara himself tells us, as does Vādidevasūri that Udbhaṭa sought to explain some *sūtra*-s in quite unconventional and novel ways.²⁴ Therefore, Udbhaṭa’s view concerning the number of *pramāna* and *prameya* should not be taken as the opinion generally held by all *nāstika*-s or Cārvākas, past and present.

Moreover, Udbhaṭa’s view flatly contradicts the *sūtra*, which specifies that the principle is earth, air, fire and water and nothing else (*iti*) (I.2) (BHATTACHARYA 2009: 78, 86). Udbhaṭa himself was aware of his departure from the old way of interpretation. He tried to reinterpret the word *iti* in the text in a tortuous way by saying that here *iti* does not denote the end but instead is illustrative.²⁵

Jayanta, then, is inconsistent in representing the opponent’s view (*pūrvapakṣa*). He knew full well that the Cārvākas interpreted the *sūtra* in a very different way than the wording suggests. At least three commentators, Purandara,

²¹ NM I: 100. Trans. in: C/L, 155.

²² NM I: 101. Trans. in: C/L, 156.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ CAKRADHARA I: 100. Cf. VĀDIDEVASŪRI (SVR 764): “This respectable veteran twice-born is revealing to us a novel way of answering criticism.” (comm. 15 in: BHATTACHARYA 2009: 82, 89).

²⁵ Cf. VĀDIDEVASŪRI (SVR 1087), and BHATTACHARYA 2009: comm. 16.82, 89–90. Cakradhara too points out in relation to other *sūtra*-s that Udbhaṭa’s explanations go against the conventionally proposed ones. Also BHATTACHARYA 2009: comm. 8, 81, 88; NM I: 100, 257–258.

Aviddhakarna and Udbhaṭa, took pains to point out that although they did not consider inference to be an independent instrument of cognition, they did not reject inference as such. Only such inferences as are drawn from scriptures or unverifiable sources are rejected by them; inferences established in everyday life and verifiable by sense perception are admitted by them (BHATTACHARYA 2009: 81–82, 88–90, commentaries 3, 12, 18). Jayanta in fact paraphrased the view of those whom he calls “the better educated ones” (*suśikṣitatārāḥ*)²⁶ as follows:

Indeed who will deny the validity of inference when one infers fire from smoke and so on; ordinary people ascertain the probandum by such inferences though they may not be pestered by the logicians. However, inferences that seek to prove a self, God, an omniscient being and the other-world and so on, are not considered valid by those who know the real nature of things. Simple-minded people cannot derive the knowledge of probandum by such inferences so long as their mind is not vitiated by cunning logicians (NM I: 184; BHATTACHARYA 2009: 86, 92, verses 18–20).

By refusing to abide by the commentator’s interpretation of the *sūtra* concerning the partial validity of inference but by generalizing the same commentator’s purely personal opinion about the impossibility of determining the number of *pramāṇa* and *prameya* to be the original Cārvāka view, Jayanta merely betrays his personal antipathy for Udbhaṭa in particular and the Cārvākas in general. He would at one point go by the literal meaning of a *sūtra* in the base text but at another point accept the commentator’s view rather than what the *sūtra* says. No doubt the commentator (Udbhaṭa in this case) provided an opportunity to an opponent of his system by resorting to a far-fetched interpretation; Jayanta makes full use of it. Instead of bringing the charge of *sūtrabhāṅga*, going against the aphorism (which Udbhaṭa definitely does while interpreting *iti* in the Cārvāka fragment I.2), he refers to the view as if it represents the true position of the Cārvākas. On another occasion, he refers to the *sūtra* itself just because it suits him. On yet other occasions he conveniently forgets the *sūtra* and picks up Udbhaṭa alone. If he believed that a particular commentator’s view properly reflected the intention of the *sūtrakāra*, why did he suppress the same commentator’s interpretation of a vital *sūtra* (III.1, discussed above) and stick to the letters of it instead?

²⁶ Unfortunately, Cakradhara does not identify these persons as he did in case of the well-educated Cārvākas and the cunning Cārvāka (see n23 above). The use of plural may be ironically honorific. On the basis of the extract quoted by VĀDIDEVASŪRI (SVR comm. 12. 81–82, 88.265–266) we may safely conclude that this person cannot but be Udbhaṭa.

IV

Hemacandra, the Jain savant (twelfth century C.E.) also criticizes the *nāstika*, or heterodox view in his *Anyā-yoga-vyavaccheda-dvātriṃśikā* (AYVD) solely on the ground that it does not admit inference as a valid instrument of cognition (verse 20). Malliṣeṇa (thirteenth century), in his *Syādvādamāñjarī* (SVM), a commentary on the AYVD, identifies this *nāstika* with the Cārvāka. Rightly so, for the two words are synonymous (see above). Malliṣeṇa then explains the point as follows: the Cārvākas accept only perception as the sole instrument of cognition; hence they do not accept anything else, not even inference, as a means of valid knowledge.²⁷

We have already seen that this is a common charge brought against the Cārvākas by many of their opponents, both Vedists (Brahminical, such as Jayanta) and non-Vedists (the Jain, Hemacandra in this instance. See also KAMALAŚĪLA, II: 520, but see also II: 528, quoted below). In fact, the point that the Cārvākas accepted nothing but perception as *pramāṇa* is so widely – almost universally – believed by so many authorities, both ancient and modern, that it may appear to be an exercise in futility to question the veracity of this oft-repeated objection. Yet the fact is that long before Hemacandra wrote this, Purandara, a Cārvāka philosopher (fl. eighth century C.E.) whose name is connected with both the base text of the Cārvāka/Lokāyata system of philosophy as well as with a short commentary (*vr̥tti*) on it,²⁸ had clearly stated: “The Cārvākas, too, admit of such an inference as is well-known in the world, but that which is called inference [by some], transgressing the worldly way, is prohibited [by them].”²⁹

Purandara was not alone in asserting this view. Aviddhakarṇa (not later than the eighth century), another commentator on the *Cārvākasūtra*, also declared:

It is true that inference is admitted by us as a source of knowledge, because it is found to be so in general practice; (but what we only point out is that) the definition of an inferential mark is illogical (BHATTACHARYA 2009: comm. 3.81, 88).

And last but not least, Udbhaṭa, the last known commentator on the *Cārvākasūtra*, who in other respects was rather atypical in his interpretation of certain Cārvāka aphorisms (see above), states the Cārvāka position *vis-à-vis* inference more elaborately:

Failure of concomitance is not seen even in the case of probanses well-established in the world; so also it is not noticed in the case of the probanses established in the scripture; so, on the basis of the quality characterized by ‘non-percep-

²⁷ For a detailed study of SVM, chapter 20, see BHATTACHARYA 2009: 167–168.

²⁸ See BHATTACHARYA 2009: 67.

²⁹ As quoted by KAMALAŚĪLA in TSP II: 528 (on TS, Ch. 18, verse 1481, comm. 18 [in:] BHATTACHARYA 2009: 82, 90).

tion of failure of concomitance' being common to them, the probanses established in the scriptures are admitted as being *gamaka*. It is because of this that inference is secondary. Now the knowledge of non-failure of concomitance in respect of worldly probanses is instrumental in bringing about the knowledge of the probandum. But that is not there in the concept of probanses established by the scriptures. So it is not proper that non-perceptible things should be known with the help of these. Hence it is said that the ascertainment of things is difficult to attain by dint of inference (BHATTACHARYA 2009: comm. 12.81–82, 88).

The position of the Cārvākas is perfectly clear. They do not admit inference as an independent instrument of cognition on a par with perception, but at the same time they do admit the limited validity of inference insofar as it is confined to the material world, which is perceivable and verifiable by sense experience. It is in this sense that Udbhaṭa in response to some opponent makes a distinction between “incapable reasons” and “capable reasons” (BHATTACHARYA 2009: comm. 14.82, 89). Jayanta certainly knew all this. Hence, he makes “better educated ones” declare this in clear terms (as quoted above).

Given the incredible mobility of mss from Kashmir to Kerala and the custom of getting such mss speedily copied in various local scripts from Śāradā to Nāgarī to Malayalam, it is inconceivable that Hemacandra (respectfully called the “omniscient one of the Kali era,” *kalikālasarvajña* by the Jains) did not know any of them. Ratnaprabhā (fourteenth century), another Jain scholar, echoes the view of the three *Cārvākasūtra* commentators mentioned above:

The Cārvākas, however, contend that they admit inferences which are of practical utility, such as the inference of fire from smoke, and deny only those which deal with such supernatural matters as the heaven, the unseen power (*apūrva*) which generates in a next birth fruits of acts done in a present life, etc. etc. (VADIDEVASURI 1967: 540).

Guṇaratna (fifteenth century), yet another Jain commentator, also repeats all this³⁰ as do both anonymous author of the *Avacūṛṇi* to the ŚDSam (1969: 508) and another digest-writer of a small, anonymous and undated work called the *Sarvamatasamgraha* (BHATTACHARYA 2009: 58).

Hemacandra and Malliṣeṇa do not shift their position from the base text to the commentary (as Jayanta does) in their criticism of the Cārvākas. They err in completely ignoring the commentaries and thereby, like many others before and after them, misrepresent the Cārvāka view of inference. In fact, as has been shown time and again by other scholars before, partial acceptance of inference distinguished the Cārvākas (among other things) from the earlier materialists, some of whom might

³⁰ TRD, on ŚDSam verse 83, 306.13–15; C/L, 273.

have held one-*pramāna* position as alleged by their opponents.³¹ Very much like Jayanta, he too conveniently avoids mentioning the view of the “better educated Cārvākas” in this regard.

*

One last word. Why did Jayanta and Hemacandra, two stalwarts in the field of Indian philosophy, make such injudicious choices between the base text and the commentary? It will be insulting them to say that they did not know or understand the actual position of the Cārvākas in regard to inference. Yet to say that these savants deliberately distorted their opponent’s view will be equally ungenerous. Then why?

The only explanation I may venture to offer is that their desire to trounce their opponent blurred their vision and made them recourse to the shortest and easiest way. By damning the Cārvākas as ‘wretched’ (*varāka*) and undeserving of any serious discussion (NM I: 299),³² both chose to portray them as simpletons, which they were not. *Jigīṣā* (desire to conquer) is the greatest enemy of objectivity, as a learned friend of mine is fond of saying.

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³¹ Whether all pre-Cārvāka materialists too held such a one-*pramāna* position is open to further enquiry. A passage in the MBH mentions three *pramāna*-s, namely, perception confirmed in the world (*lokataḥ siddham pratyakṣam*), doctrines having the Veda to support them, and the practice of eminent persons, *śiṣṭa*-s (13.147.9). Dandekar has noticed that inference is absent in the list but suggests that presumably inference is understood to have been included in perception (critical edition, *Anuśāsanaparvan*, notes, 1119). This would suggest that inference was required to be confined to this world only and not to be derived from the Veda, etc. to prove the existence of supernatural objects. Cf. *Nyāyasūtra* 1.5: *tad* (sc. *pratyakṣam*) *pūrvakam*. See also MBH 12.211.26–27 where reasoned-out truth (*kṛtānta*) is called nothing but perception. See BHATTACHARYA 2010a: 426.

³² Cf. HEMACANDRA 1926 (*Yogasāstra* 2.38, f. 96b). Śīlānka (19) also uses this insulting word to denigrate *nāstika*-s who speak of five elements (on SKS 1.1.1.21).

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