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BHIKKHU PĀSĀDIKA

A Hermeneutical Problem in SN 42, 12 (SN IV, 333) and AN X, 91 (AN V, 178)*

Both the *Samyutta* and *Aṅguttara Nikāya*¹ contain a considerable hermeneutical problem, and it is rather amazing that, to the best of my knowledge, hitherto no Pāli scholar and no translator² has pointed it out. The problem is found in a) the *Rāsiyasutta* of the *Gāmaṇisaṃyutta* and b) in the section of the *Dasaka-Nipāta*, *Upāsaka-Vagga*, treating the *kāmabhogī* and being largely identical to the major part of SN 42, 12. In the endnotes to his German translation of the *Rāsiyasutta*, HECKER says that this discourse is a 'precisionisation' of SN 56, 11, viz. the Buddha's 'first sermon' on the two extremes of self-indulgence and mortification known from the *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinayaṭṭaka*.³

* I am indebted to Rudolf Knauf of Volkshochschule Kassel who, together with his students, detected the hermeneutical problem dealt with here.

1. Abbreviated to SN, AN; for all the Pāli references, including those to the SN, AN commentaries, see the PTS editions.
2. The following translations were consulted by me: a) W. GEIGER, NYANAPONIKA, H. HECKER 1997: *Die Reden des Buddha. Gruppierte Sammlung IV*, Herrnschrot: Beyerlein-Steinschulte, p. 188; b) Jagadish KASHYAP, DHARMARAKSHIT 1954: *Samyutta-Nikāy, Dūsarā bhāg*, Sarnath/Varanasi: Mahābodhi Sabhā, p. 590; c) Anand KAUSALYAYAN 1969: *Aṅguttar-Nikāy, Caturth bhāg*, Calcutta: Mahābodhi Sabhā, p. 228; d) NYANATILOKA 1984: *Die Lehrreden des Buddha aus der Angereichten Sammlung V*, Freiburg i. Br.: Aurum, p. 84; e) Fritz SCHÄFER 1995: *Der Buddha sprach nicht nur für Mönche und Nonnen. Die ganze Lehre erstmals nur nach seinen Reden für Nichtasketen*, Heidelberg-Leimen: W. Kristkeitz, p. 206; f) F.L. WOODWARD 1927: *The Book of the Kindred Sayings IV*, London: PTS, p. 237f; g) F.L. WOODWARD 1936: *The Book of the Gradual Sayings V*, London: PTS, p. 121. Thanks are due to Ven. Dr. Tampalawela Dhammaratana who consulted for me the Sinhalese translations in: h) Editorial Board and Tripiṭaka Translation Committee 1981: *Samyuttanikāya with the Sinhalese Translation IV*, Colombo: Buddha Jayanti Tripiṭaka Series XVI, published under the patronage of the Govt. of Sri Lanka, p. 598f.; i) Editorial Board... 1977: *Aṅguttaranikāya with the Sinhalese Translation V*, Colombo: Buddha Jayanti Tripiṭaka Series XXII, p. 320f.
3. Cf. GEIGER et al. 1997, part IV, p. 191.

The two versions in which the said problem occurs deal with ten types of 'enjoyers of sense-pleasures':⁴

- the 1st type: a) seeks wealth unlawfully and with violence
b) he does not enjoy his wealth
c) he does not share his wealth with others and does no meritorious deeds
- the 2nd type: a, c) as with the 1st type
b) he enjoys his wealth
- the 3rd type: a) as with the 1st type
b) as with the 2nd type
c) he shares with others and does meritorious deeds
- the 4th type: a) seeks wealth both lawfully and unlawfully, with violence and without it
b) he does not enjoy his wealth
c) he does not share...
- the 5th type: a, c) as with the 4th type
b) he enjoys his wealth
- the 6th type: a) as with the 4th type
b) as with the 5th type
c) he shares with others and does meritorious deeds
- the 7th type: a) seeks wealth lawfully and without violence
b) he does not enjoy his wealth
c) he does not share...
- the 8th type: a, c) as with the 7th type
b) he enjoys his wealth
- the 9th type: a) as with the 7th type
b) as with the 8th type
c) he shares with others and does meritorious deeds

The 9th type, nevertheless, makes use of his wealth 'with greed and longing' and is thus 'blind to his own salvation', whilst

the 10th type (a, b, c as with the 9th) uses his wealth 'without greed and longing' and therefore is 'alive to his own salvation'.

After the enumeration of these various types of *kāmabhogīs* the Buddha is given as making his judgement about their conduct one by one, and

4. Cf. WOODWARD 1927, p. 234ff.; Woodward 1936, p. 119ff.

the words employed by him for doing this are *gārayha*, 'blameworthy', and *pāsamsa*, 'praiseworthy'. In his translation of AN X, 91, in a footnote WOODWARD refers to the *Rāsiyasutta* and remarks on the enumeration of the above ten types as being 'arranged in the same tedious way, but doubtless held suitable for the comprehension of house-fathers'. Taking a closer look in particular at the behaviour of the second type of a *kāmabhogī* being judged by the Buddha, from a fundamentalist point of view one may have no qualms about the text as it stands. However, paying attention to it in a common-sense manner, one cannot, I think, help having serious misgivings. For the sake of convenience, here WOODWARD's translation of the problematic passage is quoted:

Now, headman, this one who, given to sensual pleasures, seeks wealth by unlawful means, with violence, is blameworthy in two respects, praiseworthy in one respect. In what two respects is he blameworthy? Seeking wealth by unlawful means and by violence, he is first to blame for that. Secondly, in so seeking wealth he shares it not nor does meritorious deeds, that is the second respect. And what is the one respect in which he is praiseworthy? In getting ease and pleasure for himself. In this respect he is praiseworthy.⁵

Given the comparatively long enumeration of various types of *kāmabhogīs*, it is somewhat easy to overlook this passage according to which a *kāmabhogī* who selfishly enjoys *bhoga*, 'any object of enjoy-

5. Cf. WOODWARD 1927, p. 237f. Comments on SN 42, 12 and on AN X, 91 made in a) WOODWARD: *Sārattha-Ppakāsinī* III, p. 108f. and in b) H. KOPP: *Manoratha-Pūraṇī* V, p. 62, yield nothing conducive to a solution of the hermeneutical problem. As for the fundamentalist point of view, there might be one possibility – which, however, I do not consider a very convincing one – to explain away the problem: There is no dearth of instances in the Pāli canon where the Buddha makes use of irony. So also the 'praiseworthy' behaviour of the second enjoyer of sense-pleasures in particular could be cited as an example of the Buddha's irony.

Thanks are due to Professor R. Gombrich who kindly offered his comments on the present paper. According to him, there is good reason to regard the supposedly 'dubious' passage as an authentic piece of the Buddha's irony. The very title of the SN discourse already indicates, as he points out, that irony is likely to be found here: *Rāsiyo / Rāsiyasutta*, deriving from *rāsi*, 'heap, mass', and implying 'someone intent on amassing *bhoga* (lit.: 'relating to heaps')'. – If one accepts this interpretation which, as Professor Gombrich says, follows the general principle of text editing *lectio difficilior prior*, "it is the more difficult reading which is likely to be correct," one might be prompted to look on the Chinese translations of the text in question as attempts to iron out what was felt to be an issue by means of new versions of the original text.

ment', appropriated by unlawful means and with violence, is considered by the Buddha *pāsaṃsa*, 'praiseworthy'. This kind of estimation certainly does credit to a votary of Cārvākadarśana. In his main work JAYATILLEKE states that the impact of Materialist thinking on the thought of the Pāli canon is strong and that 'it therefore seems desirable to study the epistemological doctrines of the Materialists in so far as they seem to have a bearing on the thought of the Canon.' He also writes, however, that the theories of *karma*, rebirth and moral responsibility, accepted on the ground of the verifiability of their truth, became almost universally accepted in the post-Buddhistic Indian tradition largely due to the fact that the Jains and Buddhists accepted them while the Materialists, repudiating and ridiculing them, 'came under fire' from these schools with the result that the Cārvākas 'gradually faded out of the Indian philosophical scene'.⁶

As for large parts of SN taken for *Buddhavacana* in a quite literal sense, Mrs RHYS DAVIDS already asked emphatically: 'Where in these pages is Gotama?'⁷ Well-known are also PANDE's attempts at stratifying the canonical texts of the Pāli *Tipiṭaka*. He also refers to the *sutta* nos. 10 and 12 of the *Gāmaṇisaṃyutta*. In respect of the controversy figuring in the former discourse, he observes that it 'could easily have arisen in the minds of laymen during the epoch of the second council...' and regarding the latter, viz. our *Rāsiyasutta*, he remarks that it is 'long and straggling, and does not appear an organically unified composition. Its different parts are but loosely connected.'⁸ Although one may readily concede that the latter discourse is 'long and straggling' one could, nonetheless, also well regard it as an organically unified composition, the dubious passage, of course, put aside. Moreover PANDE presents his stratification of SN and AN in tabular form, tentatively dividing the discourses into those belonging to early and late strata and those of uncertain provenance. The two discourses in SN and AN relevant to the present discussion are both considered to be of uncertain provenance.⁹

6. Cf. K.N. JAYATILLEKE 1963: *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, London: Allen & Unwin 1963, pp. 69, 376.

7. Cf. C.A.F. RHYS DAVIDS 1922: *Kindred Sayings II*, London: PTS, p. xiii.

8. Cf. G.C. PANDE 1974: *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, p. 222.

9. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 229, 246f.

Fortunately there exists a large body of Śrāvakayāna canonical texts, albeit preserved as intact Āgama collections only in Chinese, containing many parallels to Pāli *suttas*. Thus also the *Rāsiyasutta* has a parallel to be found in the *Samyuktāgama* of the Chinese *Tripīṭaka*.¹⁰ The *Dasaka-Nipāta* section on the *kāmabhogī*, too, has its corresponding Chinese versions found in the *Madhyamāgama*¹¹ and in the separate *Fuyin jing*, in the Discourse on Succumbing to *kāma*.¹² In the following, looking into the SĀ and MĀ parallels of our Pāli *suttas* might perhaps provide a clue as to how the above-mentioned hermeneutical problem could be disposed of.

Like SN 42, 12, the corresponding SĀ section could be regarded as a commentary on the Buddha's 'first sermon'. For *rāsiya* the Chinese has *wangding* (王頂) which might rather stand for *rājya*. The Buddha explains to Wangding the two extremes because of which one strays from the Middle Way. He enumerates altogether three types of persons engrossed in sense-pleasures and three types of those given to torturing themselves. Since for the present discussion the latter three types are not relevant, I shall only deal with the former, as with SN where exclusively the various types of *kāmabhogīs* have been listed.

a) The first *kāmabhogin* (受欲者) [seeks wealth] unlawfully and with violence, but he does not enjoy [his wealth]. Moreover, he neither cares for his parents nor shares [his wealth] with his brothers, his wife and children, housemaids, relatives, friends and acquaintances. Furthermore, he does not support *śramaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas* and thus does no meritorious deeds in order to be born in a heavenly world.

b) The second *kāmabhogin* seeks wealth both lawfully and unlawfully and [partly] with violence and also enjoys it. He cares for his parents and shares [his wealth] with his brothers..., but he does not support ascetics and brahmins so as to be born in a *devaloka*.

c) The third *kāmabhogin* seeks wealth lawfully and without violence; he enjoys it and also shares it with his parents... and by supporting religious persons he will eventually be born in a heaven.

10. Cf. Taishō No. 99, p. 228c15-229c2 (abbreviated to SĀ); substantially the same version – differing though in style – is found at *ibid.*, No. 100, p. 421c24-422c17.

11. Cf. Taishō No. 26, p. 615a5-616a4; abbreviated to MĀ.

12. Cf. Taishō No. 65 – 伏姪經. Thematically this discourse, whose translation is about a hundred years older than that of MĀ, is a close parallel to the Āgama version from which it differs in diction only.

After this comparatively short enumeration of only three types of *kāmabhogins*, according to SĀ, the Buddha does not judge their respective conduct by using the words ‘blameworthy’ and ‘praiseworthy’, but he characterises the three types as being a) inferior (卑下, *adhara*), b) middling (中人, *madhya*) and c) the superior person (勝人, *pudgalaviśeṣa*). Similarly three types of those who torture themselves are described and subsequently characterised as being ‘inferior, middling and the superior person’. Then, in some detail, the causes – viz. greed, hatred and delusion – are set forth due to which man fails to follow the Middle Way and consequently is plunged into suffering and lamentation. If, on the other hand, one overcomes *lobha*, *dveṣa* and *moha* and lives a life of non-violence, this will result in permanent happiness, and in this very life one will realise Nirvāṇa before long. Finally the means to put an end to the mental defilements is briefly mentioned, viz. the Eightfold Path.

Without making a detailed comparative study of SN 42, 12 and its SĀ counterpart, it is sufficiently clear that SĀ does not contain any passage that corresponds to the description of the second type of a *kāmabhogī* in SN posing, as shown, a hermeneutical difficulty. A comparison between the two versions suggests that with this particular example – a generalisation, all the same, is absolutely unwarrantable – the original Āgama text might have represented an older version than that of the Pāli canon. The Pāli text much more clearly betrays the hands of later redactors¹³ than the Chinese Āgama version: It lacks the traditional opening of a *sutta*, whereas SĀ gives the Buddha’s sojourn, viz. on the bank of Pond Gaggarā in Campā District. SN 42, 12 opens rather abruptly and ends with considerably abridged stock phrases. SĀ has the full wording of a traditional *sūtra*-ending including the statement that Wangding, on having been enlightened by the Buddha, realises the Truth as a *srotāpanna*. On the other hand, the Chinese text is much more straightforward than the Pāli version without the latter’s lengthy description of the various types of *kāmabhogīs* and *tapassīs*, even though both versions are parallels beyond any doubt. So the conclusion can be drawn that the smack of Materialist thought in SN 42,12 is certainly due to later editorial interpolation.

As mentioned, AN X, 91, dealing with ten types of *kāmabhogīs* tallying with their description in SN, has its corresponding MĀ version

13. Cf. Mrs RHYS DAVIDS’ further remarks at loc. cit. – see above n. 7.

in Chinese. So, unlike the SĀ text treating only three types of *kāmabhogins*, the MĀ version also deals with ten types, and the question remains to be answered as to whether the MĀ text substantially tallies with AN X, 91 or only numerically.

According to MĀ:

a) the first type of a *kāmabhogin* (行欲人) seeks wealth unlawfully and by means of what is not the Way (*yan nāsti mārgaḥ*, 無道), but neither enjoys it nor shares it with his parents, wife and children... He does not support religious persons so as to be born among the Dīrghāyuka gods thanks to his meritorious deeds.

b) The second type enjoys and shares what he has obtained unlawfully, but he does not support religious persons.

c) The third type enjoys and shares what he has obtained unlawfully and also supports religious persons.

d) The fourth type seeks wealth both lawfully and unlawfully, neither enjoys nor shares it and does not support *śramaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas*.

e) The fifth type enjoys and shares what he has obtained both lawfully and unlawfully, but he does not support.

f) The sixth type, in addition to what the fifth type does, supports religious persons.

g) The seventh type seeks wealth lawfully and by means of what is the Way, but he neither enjoys nor shares and does no meritorious deeds in order to be born in a heaven.

h) The eighth type enjoys and shares what he has obtained lawfully, but he does not support.

i) The ninth type, in addition to what the eighth type does, supports religious persons, but he is strongly attached to his wealth, is not aware of the great misfortune inherent in that kind of attachment and thus is 'blind to his own salvation'.

j) The tenth type, in addition to all the karmically wholesome actions done by the ninth type, is aware of the danger inherent in attachment to possessions and thus is 'not blind to his own salvation'.

Thereafter, the Buddha characterises the first type as being vile (最下, *nihīna*), the sixth type as being surpassing (最上, *adhika*) and the tenth type as being foremost (最勝, *agra*), the very first, the greatest, the best, the uppermost and most excellent.

In many details the MĀ text agrees with AN X, 91, for instance with regard to the opening of the *sūtra* or the simile of the various qualities of milk products employed to illustrate the characterisation of the

various types of *kāmabhogins*. On the other hand, while the AN version lacks the traditional *sutta*-ending, MĀ gives both a résumé of the whole discourse in the form of verses and the stock phrases concluding it. What is significantly different with the MĀ text is that not all the ten types of enjoyers of sense-pleasures are judged, but only three of them in terms resembling those used in SĀ, viz. the first, the sixth and the tenth as being, respectively, the worst, middling and the best type.

This brief survey of the MĀ parallel to AN X, 91 confirms the conclusion drawn above that the trace of Materialist thought found in the given places of SN and AN is a peculiarity of the Pāli tradition and does not occur as a hermeneutical problem in the Chinese Āgamas.

Addendum

See above n. 2, given with reference to the statement that to the best of my knowledge no Pāli scholar and no translator has pointed out that in the above-mentioned places we have a hermeneutical problem. The same statement was made earlier in my review of SCHÄFER's book (see n. 2, e) in which I briefly mentioned the said problem. After reading this review which appeared in *The Journal of Religious Studies* XXIX.2 (Patiala 1988), p. 153-157, SCHÄFER informed me that he, in fact, had been aware of the problematic passage in the given places – and together with him also HECKER (see n. 2, a) – and that he had commented on them in the original press-copy of his voluminous book. For practical purposes it has been necessary, however, to avoid an inordinate size of the book so that a substantial part of it – including the author's comments on the issue — had to be cut and left unpublished. SCHÄFER is preparing a revised edition of his work to be augmented by a footnote from which it can be inferred that he does not see a hermeneutical problem in the places under discussion: in case of wealth, procured unlawfully, with violence and neither shared with others nor used for merit-making, it would still be better (and therefore in a way 'praiseworthy') to enjoy it oneself and thus – to some extent having obtained satisfaction – hopefully become more sociable than to let *bhoga* fall into disuse and rot away. I am much obliged to Dr F. Schäfer for having shared his understanding of the passages discussed above.