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*Les études sur les langues indiennes  
Leur contribution à l'histoire des idées linguistiques  
et à la linguistique contemporaine*

*Textes réunis par Émilie Aussant et Jean-Luc Chevillard*



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## Deviant voices in the history of Pāṇinian grammar

The philologist who occupies himself with Indian texts has to work with texts that have survived until today. This is a truism, but one whose implications are not always fully realised. Texts in the Indian subcontinent that were composed more than just a few centuries ago and were not chiseled into stone or engraved on copper have only survived if they were regularly copied. Manuscripts that are more than five centuries old are exceptional in India, and most do not live as long as that. I do not know the average life expectancy of a manuscript in India; I am sure that it varies a lot from region to region depending on climatic and other conditions. I am however certain that for texts that were composed more than a thousand years ago we depend, with rare exceptions, on manuscripts that were copied from earlier manuscripts.

The implication of this well-known state of affairs is that texts that are no longer copied from a certain date onward do not leave surviving copies. The question whether these texts were or were not widely read in their time is irrelevant. All that counts is the interest for the text during subsequent centuries. Texts that were once important and widely studied may yet have disappeared for the simple reason that later generations were not interested in copying them. It follows that we, modern researchers, only get to see texts that have passed through the filter of history. This filter of history has nothing to do with an active suppression or indexation of texts. Texts did not need to be prohibited in order to disappear. They disappeared all of their own, because no one bothered to copy them.

To get a clear picture of what I am talking about, consider Buddhism. This religion was once extremely important in India, and many aspects of Indian culture have been deeply influenced by it. And yet, if we had no other sources about Buddhism at our disposal than the ones that have survived in Hindu India, our knowledge about its role in the subcontinent would be minimal. Most of what we know about Indian Buddhism we owe to its survival in the margins of the subcontinent and especially outside it. If

Buddhism had not survived outside India, our ignorance about its position in Indian history would be enormous.

Ājīvikism is an example of a religion that, like Buddhism, disappeared in India but which, unlike Buddhism, did *not* survive outside the subcontinent.<sup>1</sup> The inscriptional evidence suggests that Ājīvikism was not less important than Buddhism at the time of the Mauryas. It survived in South India until the fourteenth or fifteenth century, almost two millenia after its creation. During this long period it may have exerted an influence on other currents of thought.<sup>2</sup> And yet not a single Ājīvika text has survived. We know about the existence of this religion through inscriptions, and about its teachings through the criticism which others directed at it.<sup>3</sup> The fact that there were no Ājīvikas for the last five centuries or so may, all by itself, be responsible for the present absence of texts belonging to that school.

Buddhism and Ājīvikism are examples of religions that could not look after their literary traditions in the subcontinent. A philosophical school that disappeared without leaving anything beyond the critical remarks of its opponents is the school of the Cārvākas.<sup>4</sup> This school once had a Sūtra text and several commentaries, but only fragments remain in the works of its opponents. All of these examples illustrate that literary traditions that are not looked after — i.e., whose texts are not copied and recopied all the time — simply disappear. We know about Cārvākas and Ājīvikas from the literary traditions that *have* survived. This they owe to the circumstance that those surviving traditions considered the two threatening enough to feel obliged to criticize and reject them. In doing so they kept memories alive that might otherwise have been lost altogether.

The situation is more delicate in traditions that *have* survived until today, but which have undergone certain modifications in the process. Subsequent thinkers of a philosophical school, for example, are not always willing to enter into a debate with their predecessors on points where they disagree. Outside critics are not hampered in this manner. This leads to the remarkable situation that, in order to learn about the early history of a particular philosophical school, we may depend as much, sometimes more, on its outside critics than on its representatives whose works have survived. Sāṃkhya is a good example. We know from a variety of non-Sāṃkhya thinkers — among them Bharṭṛhari, Dharmapāla, Mallavādin, but also the much later (10<sup>th</sup> century) Rāmakaṇṭha — that Sāṃkhya had held the view

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<sup>1</sup> Basham, 1951.

<sup>2</sup> Bronkhorst, 2007b.

<sup>3</sup> See Bronkhorst, 2003; 2007a: 38.

<sup>4</sup> Bronkhorst, 2007a: p. 150.

that substances are nothing but collections of qualities.<sup>5</sup> Nothing of the kind appears in the surviving Sāṃkhya texts. Indeed, there is reason to think that the major change that took place within Sāṃkhya and that resulted in the abandonment of this earlier position was not brought about by a clash of different views, but by a transition inspired by an external challenge. The earlier view was henceforth simply given up by the adherents of the school. Only external critics went on criticizing points of view which the thinkers of the school itself had silently abandoned. These modified views do not only concern substances as collections of qualities, but also the nature of *pradhāna*, one of the key notions of Sāṃkhya. About this earlier conception of *pradhāna* we read, once again, nothing in the surviving school texts. What we know about it we learn from Śaṅkara and other non-Sāṃkhya thinkers.<sup>6</sup>

What we can learn from these and other examples can be expressed in a simple phrase: *the winner takes all*. The texts that have survived are the ones that belong to the currents of thought that have been victorious in the long run, for whatever reason. If, as philologists, we decide to limit our attention to the texts that have survived, we take the side of the victors, perhaps unwittingly. Worse, by doing so we run the risk of taking the side of the victorious tradition, which includes projecting back *its* vision of the past. Everyone is of course free to join any tradition that appeals to him or her, but one can have serious doubts whether joining and continuing traditions that happen to have survived is the task of historically oriented academics and university departments.

If we do not wish to fall in the trap to become, in Indian studies, second rate imitation pandits, if we wish to gain a truly historical understanding of, say, the history of Indian thought, we have to think twice before we decide to limit our attention to texts that have survived. In that case we have to do what is possible to obtain information about those whose texts have *not* survived. In many cases that will no doubt be impossible. There may have been currents of thought and practice whose very names have been forgotten. In such cases the modern philologist is helpless. There are other cases where evidence has been preserved, usually in the works of critics. This evidence will always be lacunary and difficult to interpret. This can however be no excuse for ignoring it. Quite on the contrary, it is in many cases our only hope to study our texts historically, i.e., to study the past rather than the selection of texts which more recent tradition imposes upon us.

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<sup>5</sup> Bronkhorst, 1994; Watson, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Bronkhorst, 2007.

This long introduction was necessary for what follows. The history of Pāṇinian grammar is all too often presented as a very orderly affair. Pāṇini wrote his grammar. Kātyāyana and Patañjali discussed it in their commentaries and tried to improve upon it in certain details. For subsequent commentaries nothing much remained to be done beyond elaborating and refining Patañjali's observations.

This is the vision of its past which the orthodox Pāṇinian tradition as it exists today presents and favours. My claim is that it is a simplification of a historical development that was more complex than that. This vision leaves out inconvenient elements, not primarily with the intention to distort historical reality, but more through lack of interest in developments that were considered "incorrect". Lack of interest, as we have seen, leads to loss of texts, so that in the end only minor references in other works allow us to reconstruct what really happened.

Note, to begin with, that I am concerned in this lecture with Pāṇinian grammar. There may have been grammarians who disagreed with Pāṇini and wrote their own grammars, but I am not concerned with them. I wish to talk of those who looked upon Pāṇini's text as point of departure. These grammarians, who belonged all of them to the Pāṇinian tradition, were yet divided into different groups that did not always see eye to eye. The fundamental discord concerned Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya. The tradition which we now consider orthodox accorded full authority to Patañjali, more even than to Pāṇini. This is for the first time stated in so many words by Kaiyaṭa, more than a millennium after Patañjali. Half a millennium before Kaiyaṭa, and more than half a millennium after Patañjali, Bhartṛhari (or rather, the author of the Vṛtti, who may have been different from him) made a reference to a problem connected with the preservation of the Mahābhāṣya or its interpretation. Bhartṛhari may have been the first to write a commentary on the Mahābhāṣya. He certainly stands somewhere near the beginning of the apotheosis of the Mahābhāṣya that characterises henceforth orthodoxy.

This, then, was the development within the Pāṇinian tradition that would come to prevail. This victory was not however clear from the beginning. It did come, and from that moment onward no one in the Pāṇinian tradition was interested in the works of the heretics any longer. And works that inspire no interest get lost, as we have seen. There may be only one early work belonging to this alternative tradition that has survived: the Paribhāṣāvṛtti or Paribhāṣāsūcana attributed to Vyāḍi, most recently edited by Dominik Wujastyk (1993). The reason it has survived may well be that its differences from the orthodox tradition are minimal and do not attract attention. Only a detailed analysis of the surviving texts can bring to

light positions and ideas belonging to the non-orthodox Pāṇinian grammarians: their works are lost.

I have tried to collect some of these non-orthodox positions in a few publications, basing myself initially on relatively early sources: Candra's grammar, the Kāśikā and, of course, Bhartṛhari's commentary on the Mahābhāṣya.<sup>7</sup> This led me to the inevitable conclusion that these non-orthodox positions had been elaborated before the earliest of these three sources, Candra. In those publications the question could not be raised whether everything changed from one day to the next with the appearance of Candra's grammar and Bhartṛhari's commentary on the Mahābhāṣya. A priori that does not seem likely, for why should grammarians who do not recognise the Mahābhāṣya as authoritative change their minds suddenly? For lack of sources the question remained hypothetical.

Recently I have been able to make some progress in this matter. Jayanta Bhaṭṭa's Nyāyamañjarī contains a few passages that criticise a grammarian. They are elucidated by Cakradhara's Nyāyamañjarī-granthibhaṅga, which provides much precise information and informs us that the grammarian was called Udbhaṭa. Cakradhara's most important passage is unfortunately corrupt, but there can be no doubt that Udbhaṭa allowed himself great liberty in interpreting Pāṇini's sūtras so as to accommodate the formation of certain difficult words. He uses such tricks as dividing a rule in two (*yogavibhāga*), of changing the wording of a sūtra, and of deciding that a recalcitrant word is an indeclinable (*nipāta*). Cakradhara disagrees with these interpretations and presents the correct orthodox explanation of those same words.<sup>8</sup>

Udbhaṭa obviously belongs to the non-orthodox grammarians within the Pāṇinian tradition, who felt not bound by Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya. However, Udbhaṭa is much more recent than Candra and Bhartṛhari. E. A. Solomon (1978) situates him in "the final quarter of the eighth century and the first quarter of the ninth century" or somewhat later, i.e., around the year 800 CE. This would imply that the deviant tradition of Pāṇinian grammar had not stopped at the time of Candra and Bhartṛhari, i.e. before the middle of the first millennium. On the contrary, this case suggests that it had continued until at least the ninth century. From, say, the fifth to the ninth century, it appears, at least two Pāṇinian traditions existed side by side, the one orthodox, the other non-orthodox. The term "orthodox" here means that the grammarians concerned looked upon Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya as their guiding light. The non-orthodox grammarians may have studied the

<sup>7</sup> Bronkhorst, 1983; 2002; 2002a; 2004; 2009; 2009a.

<sup>8</sup> Bronkhorst, 2008.

Mahābhāṣya, but they felt free to deviate from it wherever they considered that necessary or advantageous. They even felt free to modify Pāṇini's sūtras, like Patañjali long before them. In a certain way they continued along the lines of Patañjali, unlike the orthodox grammarians, who were extremely hesitant to look upon themselves as being on a par with that scholar.

The paper read by Jan Houben at the ICHoLS conference in Potsdam suggests that lack of respect for Patañjali survived not only Bharṭhari, but Kaiyaṭa as well. The Prakriyā-Sarvasva of Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa belongs to the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century, yet does not refer to Patañjali and shows a pronounced willingness to interpret Pāṇini freely. Though not being an extremist like Udbhata, it would seem that Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa remained unaffected by the domination of Patañjali, and this at a very recent period. One would be keen to know what influences Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa acknowledges, and the results of Houben's investigations are eagerly awaited.<sup>9</sup>

It is a pity that we know so little about the non-orthodox grammarians. Only a few of their texts have survived, no doubt because subsequent generations lost interest. No one copied their works, with the final result that modern scholars have long been able to think that the history of Pāṇinian grammar was satisfactorily described by the caricatural picture which I presented to you earlier. In reality the development was more complex. We can only hope that future research will keep this in mind.

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<sup>9</sup> See also Houben, 2008a; 2012.



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