

Who were the Cārvākas?*

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A great number of classical Sanskrit texts, most of them philosophical, refer to the Cārvākas or Lokāyatas (also Laukāyatikas, Lokāyatikas, Bārhaspatyas)² who must have constituted a school of thought which has left us almost no literary documents.³ They once possessed a Sūtra text and several commentaries thereon, for fragments have been preserved in the works of those who criticise them.⁴ In modern secondary literature the Cārvākas are usually referred to as “materialists”, which is somewhat unfortunate. It is true that the Sūtra text (sometime called *Bārhaspatya Sūtra*) accepts as only principles (*tattva*) the four elements earth, water, fire and air;⁵ yet the term “materialism” and its cognates evoke in the modern world associations which are not necessarily appropriate for this ancient school of thought. For Marxist historians in particular, materialism is the opposite of idealism; the former is knowledge, the latter faith.⁶ The latter kind of philosophers “worked in defence of obscurantism, irrationalism and scripture-mongering caste hatred”;

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² Franco & Preisendanz (1998: 179) note: “These terms seem to apply only to the followers, not to the school itself.” Pārthasārathi's explanation of Kumārila's expression *lokāyatīkṛtā* (see below) suggests that *lokāyata* can be used as an adjective. Kṛṣṇa Miśra's *Prabodhacandrodaya* has the line *sarvathā lokāyatam eva śāstram yatra pratyakṣam eva pramāṇam* (p. 76; Pédraglio, 1974: 154); here *lokāyata* appears to be a noun that applies to the school, even though an adjectival interpretation is not impossible.

³ Jayarāśi's *Tattvopaplavasimha* “is the only text of the Lokāyata or Cārvāka school which has come down to us”, yet “[i]t is clear that there are important philosophical differences between Jayarāśi's views and what usually goes under the name of Lokāyata philosophy”; Franco, 1987: 3-4.

⁴ For a very useful collection of fragments, see Bhattacharya, 2002.

⁵ *prthivy āpas tejo vāyur iti tattvāni*; Bhattacharya, 2002: 603.

⁶ Cf. Ruben, 1979 (*Wissen gegen Glauben*)

the former were “struggling in their own way against the same ideological forces, though under limitations historically inevitable for them”.⁷ Idealism promotes faith, and faith is an instrument needed to maintain a society based on class antagonism and class exploitation.⁸ Materialism does the opposite, and there is therefore a tendency among some of these historians to associate this philosophy with the less privileged layers of society.

Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya's study *Lokāyata* (1959), for example, states in its introduction (p. xvii):

What then was the original Lokayata? ... Etymologically it means “that which is prevalent among the people” ... But the earliest of the available clues are hopelessly fragmentary and are too often embedded in mythological imagination. Nevertheless, a careful examination of some of these may give us a dim view of a primordial complex of a this-worldly outlook related to a body of ritual practices and the whole theme being somehow or other “prevalent” among the masses.

This “humble beginning”, as he calls it, occupies much of Chattopadhyaya's book. One fears that the modern associations of the term materialism have pushed at least some research of the Cārvākas into a direction that may not be appropriate to it.⁹

There is another reason to be careful with the expression “materialism”. It is far from certain that the emphasis of the Cārvāka philosophy was on the central role of the material elements. Among its other positions that are often cited in the texts is the rejection of what is called “another world”, which in practice primarily means the rejection of rebirth and karmic retribution. The most often cited sūtra in this connection is: *paralokino 'bhāvāt paralokābhāvaḥ* “There is no other-world because of the absence of any other-worldly being (i.e., the transmigrating self).”¹⁰ It shows that the rejection of the self was an element in the rejection of “another world”. And the rejection of the self was based on the view that the normal characteristics of the self, most notably consciousness, derive directly from the elements, so that there is no need for a self.¹¹ Seen in this way we have to consider the possibility that the materialist construction served the ultimate aim of rejecting rebirth and karmic retribution, more than a love of materialism *per se*. This would put the Cārvākas in an altogether different perspective: their aim would in that case primarily be negative, and the point of view they were concerned to reject would not be idealism or some such position, but the belief in “another world”.

⁷ Chattopadhyaya, 1976: vii-viii.

⁸ Chattopadhyaya, 1976: 212.

⁹ According to the Bibliography of the *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, there even exists a recent book called *Charvaka Darshan: Ancient Indian Dalit Philosophy* (Rao, 1997)

¹⁰ Bhattacharya, 2002: 605, 612.

¹¹ *tebhyas caitanyam*; Bhattacharya, 2002: 604.

This change of emphasis finds support elsewhere. The Buddhists were concerned with the intellectual threat coming from the Cārvākas, not of course because they denied the soul, but because they denied “another world”. They reacted by writing against this position, sometimes in independent treatises called *Paralokasiddhi* “Proof of another world / rebirth”, or in sections of larger treatises.¹² Various Brahmanical authors, moreover, admit that their concern to prove the eternality of the soul has as ultimate aim to show that there is life after death.¹³

There is also an intriguing verse at the beginning of Kumāriḷa's *Ślokavārttika* which reads:¹⁴

For the most part Mīmāṃsā has, in this world, been turned into Lokāyata. This effort of mine is made to take it to the path of the *āstikas*.

Ganga Nath Jha (1900: 2) translates this verse differently, saying that Mīmāṃsā “has been made Atheis[t]ic”; Kumāriḷa's effort, according to him, is “to turn it to the theistic path”.¹⁵ This cannot however be correct. The Lokāyatas are here, too, those who deny “another world”, and the *āstikas* are those who accept it.¹⁶ This is confirmed by Pārthasārathi's comments on this verse:¹⁷

Mīmāṃsā, though not being Lokāyata, has been turned into Lokāyata by Bhartṛmitra and others by accepting the incorrect position according to which there is no fruit, desired or not desired, of obligatory and forbidden [deeds] etc.

Theism and atheism are clearly not envisaged here

¹² See Steinkellner, 1984; 1985; 1986; 1988; Franco, 1997.

¹³ Preisendanz (1994: II: 299 n. 79) mentions various authors (Vācaspati Miśra II, Keśava Miśra, Vardhamāna the author of the *Nyāyanibandhaprakāśa*, Bhāsarvajña, Jayanta Bhaṭṭa) for whom “[d]ie Tätigkeit im Hinblick auf weitere Existenz ... der letztendliche Zweck der ausserordentlichen Bemühungen [ist], die Ewigkeit der Seele zu beweisen”. Cp. Tucci, 1923-29: 55.

¹⁴ Kumāriḷa Bhaṭṭa, *Ślokavārttika, Pratijñā* v. 10: *prāyeṇaiva hi mīmāṃsā loke lokāyatīkṛtā / tām āstikapathe kartum ayaṃ yatnaḥ kṛto mayā //*

¹⁵ Similarly Tucci, 1923-29: 96 n. 3.

¹⁶ This usage is quite common, especially among the Jainas; Haribhadra's *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* v. 77, for example, refers collectively to the doctrines of Buddhists, Jainas, Sāṃkhyas, Jainas, Vaiśeṣikas and Mīmāṃsakas as *āstikavāda* “doctrines of the *āstikas*”. He then moves on to the Lokāyatas, who are *nāstikas*. Note further that the *Kāśikā* on P. 4.4.60 (astināstidiṣṭaṃ matiḥ), which accounts for the words *āstika* and *nāstika* in the senses “he who thinks ‘there is’” and “he who thinks ‘there is not’” respectively, adds (Kāś I p. 448): *na ca matisattāmātre pratyaya iṣyate, kiṃ tarhi, paraloko 'sti iti yasya matiḥ sa āstikaḥ / tadviparīto nāstikaḥ /*.

¹⁷ Pārthasārathi, *Nyāyaratnākara* p. 5: *mīmāṃsā hi bhartṛmitrādibhir alokāyataiva satī lokāyatīkṛtā nityaniṣiddhāyor iṣṭāniṣṭaṃ phalaṃ nāstītyādibahvapasiddhāntaparigraheṇeti*. Note that *lokāyata* is here used as an adjective.

Who, then, were these Cārvākas? Our texts rarely express themselves on this question, and concentrate all the more on the arguments for and against their positions. However, there are some exceptions, to which we now turn. One passage to be considered occurs in Śīlānka's *Sūtrakṛtāṅgavṛtti*, a commentary written towards the end of the ninth century¹⁸ on the Jaina canonical text *Sūyagaḍa* (*Sūyagaḍaṅga*; Skt. *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*). Śīlānka on Sūy 1.1.1.6 comments the words *ege samaṇamāhaṇā* (“Certain Śramaṇas and Brahmins”) as follows (p. 9):¹⁹

Certain Śramaṇas, viz. Buddhists etc., and Brahmins who are followers of the opinions of the Bārhaspatya.

The *Bārhaspatya* is the *Bārhaspatya Sūtra*, the classical text of the Cārvākas. Śīlānka indicates here that there are all kinds of Brahmins, some of whom are Cārvākas. The implicit suggestion is that the Cārvākas are all, or most of them, Brahmins.

If this suggestion looks at first surprising, a number of other factors support it. Jayarāśi, the author of the only surviving work (*Tattvopaplavasimha*) of the Lokāyata or Cārvāka school that has come down to us, calls himself in the concluding verses *bhaṭṭaśrījayarāśidevaguru* “guru Bhaṭṭa Śrī Jayarāśi Deva”.²⁰ Another teacher of the school is known as Bhaṭṭa Udbhaṭa. The honorific Bhaṭṭa indicates that these two were Brahmins,²¹ perhaps Brahmin householders.²² To this can be added that two other Cārvāka authors, Aviddhakarṇa and Bhāvivikta, and perhaps also Udbhaṭa, appear to have written Nyāya works as well.²³ Udbhaṭa, moreover, was a grammarian in the Pāṇinian tradition besides being a Cārvāka, and perhaps also an Ālaṅkārika.²⁴ All these teachers had therefore strong links to Brahmanical traditions.

Śīlānka's commentary has a further surprise in store. Under the immediately following verses of the *Sūyagaḍa* it discusses at length the positions of the Cārvākas. Most surprising is that under verse 11 it cites, in support of their position, a Vedic passage, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.4.12, which it calls “their scriptural authority” (*tadāgama*):²⁵

¹⁸ Winternitz, GIL II p. 318.

¹⁹ Śīlānka, *Sūtrakṛtāṅgavṛtti*, p. 9 (on Sūy 1.1.1.6: *ege samaṇamāhaṇā*): *eke śramaṇāḥ śākyādayo bārhaspatyamātānusāriṇāś ca brāhmaṇāḥ*.

²⁰ Jayarāśi, *Tattvopaplavasimha* p. 125; Franco, 1987: 7.

²¹ So Solomon, 1978: 992.

²² So Slaje, 2007.

²³ Franco, 1997: 142, with references to Steinkellner, 1961, and Potter, 1977: 281, 338-340; further Solomon, 1978: 990 f.

²⁴ Solomon, 1978: 992; Bronkhorst, 2008.

²⁵ Śīlānka, *Sūtrakṛtāṅgavṛtti*, p. 14 (on Sūy 1.1.1.11): *tathā hi tadāgamaḥ: vijñānaghana evaitebhyo bhūtebhyah samutthāya tāny evānu vinaśyati na pretya samjñāstīti*.

“For this is their scriptural authority: ‘A single mass of perception, having arisen out of these elements, disappears after them: there is no awareness after death’”.

Śīlānka was not the only, nor indeed the first one, to connect the Cārvākas with this particular Vedic passage.²⁶ The *Āvaśyakaniryukti* v. 600 speaks, in connection with the denial of the soul (*jīva*), of Vedic words that have been misunderstood (*veyapayāṇa ya atthaṃ na yānasī*, Skt. *vedapadānāṃ cārthaṃ na jānāsī*). Its commentator Haribhadra (eighth century) cites in this connection (p. 161-62) the same Upaniṣadic passage and discusses it. Before him, in the sixth or seventh century, Jinabhadra does so in his *Viśeṣāvaśyakabhāṣya*. He refers to this passage in his verse 2043, and cites it in full in his own commentary (p. 354). The commentator Koṭyārya, commenting one or two centuries later²⁷ on *Viśeṣāvaśyakabhāṣya* verses 2404-06, cites this passage to show that the Veda sometimes agrees that “the other world” does not exist.²⁸ Kumārila (seventh century) mentions in his *Ślokavārttika* someone “who concludes on the basis of the Veda that there is no self”.²⁹ His commentator Pārthasārathi Miśra (eleventh century) cites here the same Upaniṣadic passage.³⁰ Jayanta Bhaṭṭa, who like Śīlānka wrote towards the end of the ninth century, cites the passage in the context of a Lokāyatika opponent who thinks that one should stop wasting one's time talking about “another world”.³¹ Elsewhere in the same work Jayanta expresses his concern that this Upaniṣadic passage might support the Lokāyata position.³² At the end of the seventh Āhnika he returns once again to this Upaniṣadic passage, connecting it with the *pūrvapakṣa*, and then refers to other passages from the same Upaniṣad according to which the self does *not* perish, and comments that that is the *siddhānta*.³³ Malayagiri, in his *Āvaśyakaniryuktivivaraṇa* of the twelfth century,

²⁶ See Uno, 1999.

²⁷ Balbir, 1993: 78 f.

²⁸ Koṭyārya, p. 439: *vedo 'pi "vijñānaghana evaitebhyo bhūtebhyaḥ samutthāya tāny evānu vinaśyati" iti paralokanāstitvam anuvadati.*

²⁹ Kumārila, *Ślokavārttika*, *Ātmavāda* v. 140ab: *vedād evātmanāstitvaṃ yo nāma pratipadyate [...]* I resolve *ātmanāstitvam* as *ātma-nāstitvam*, “non-existence of the self”. Theoretically one might read *ātmanā astitvam* (or *ātmana[ḥ] astitvam*, with incorrect sandhi!); this is difficult to construe, but may lie behind Jha's translation (p. 407): “One who would seek to know the Soul by the help of the Veda alone”.

³⁰ Pārthasārathi, *Nyāyaratnākara* p. 513: *yo vedavādī śiṣyaḥ, yo vā "vijñānaghana evaitebhyo bhūtebhyaḥ samutthāya tāny evānu vinaśyati [na] pretya saṃjñāsti" iti bhūtacaitanyābhīdhānād vedavirodham ātmano manyate ...* The edition reads *taṃ pretya*, which must be a mistake.

³¹ Jayanta Bhaṭṭa, *Nyāyamañjarī*, ed. Varadacharya, vol. II p. 268: *ayam api cāgamo 'sty eva "vijñānaghana evaitebhyo bhūtebhyaḥ samutthāya tāny evānu vinaśyati na pretya saṃjñāsti" iti / tad ātmano nityasya paralokino 'bhāvāt kṛtam etābhiḥ apārthakapariśramakariṇībhiḥ paralokakathābhiḥ /*

³² Jayanta Bhaṭṭa, *Nyāyamañjarī*, ed. Varadacharya, vol. I p. 647: *nanu ca lokāyatādyāgame 'py evaṃ prāmāṇyaṃ prāpnoti "vijñānaghana evaitebhyo bhūtebhyaḥ samutthāya tāny evānu vinaśyati na pretya saṃjñāsti" iti vedamūladarśanāt.*

³³ Jayanta Bhaṭṭa, *Nyāyamañjarī*, ed. Varadacharya, vol. II p. 358: *yad vijñānaghanādivedavacanāṃ tat pūrvapakṣe sthitam, paurvāparyavimarśaśūnyahṛdayaiḥ so 'rtho*

and the author of the *Sarvadarśanasamgraha*³⁴ in the fourteenth, still connect the Cārvākas with this passage.³⁵

Recall at this point that according to Kumārila and Pārthasārathi the Mīmāṃsakas Bhartṛmitra and others had turned Mīmāṃsā into Lokāyata by accepting that there is no other world. This was presumably not very difficult. Śabara's Bhāṣya discusses the meaning of “heaven” (*svarga*) under sūtras 6.1.1-2 and comes to the conclusion that heaven is “happiness” (*prīti*), not “a thing characterised by happiness” (*prītiviśiṣṭa dravya*). The popular notion according to which heaven is a very agreeable place where one goes after death is discarded. Put differently, in Śabara's Mīmāṃsā the belief in “another world” is not at all obvious. Śabara's Mīmāṃsā ignores everything that concerns rebirth and liberation; even its conception of heaven is compatible with a denial of life after death. Bhartṛmitra's explicit denial was therefore hardly a very revolutionary move within Mīmāṃsa. We should not of course conclude from this that Cārvāka thought was identical with the Mīmāṃsā of Śabara, Bhartṛmitra or others, but nor should we lose sight of the fact that the two have points in common.

At this point some serious questions have to be addressed. Aren't the Cārvākas the greatest critics of the Vedic tradition? Aren't they characterised by “fierce opposition to the religious Weltanschauung which had sacrifices at its center”?³⁶ Aren't there verses attributed to them that ridicule the ritual and everything that is connected with the Veda? At the same time, we have seen that the Cārvākas presumably justified their positions with the help of at least one Vedic quotation. It is not necessary to recall that the Buddhists and Jainas would never dream of justifying their positions with the help of Vedic quotations; even Brahmanical philosophers other than Mīmāṃsakas and Vedāntins do not often do so. Why then do the Cārvākas, of all people, do so? And what does the partial similarity of Cārvāka thought and some forms of Mīmāṃsā signify?

grhītas tathā / maitreyyā paricoditas tu bhagavān yad yājñavalkyo 'bravīt, ātmā naiva vinaśyatīti tad idaṃ siddhāntasāraṃ vacaḥ //. The other passages, as Cakradhara points out, are *avināśī vā are ayam ātmā* (BĀrUp(K) 4.5.14), *aśīryo na hi śīryate* (BĀrUp(K) 4.5.15), etc.

³⁴ Sāyaṇamādhava, *Sarvadarśanasamgraha* p. 3 l. 25-27. Jayatilleke (1963: 69-70), too, concludes from this that “Materialist philosophy emerged within the Brāhmaṇical fold”.

³⁵ This is not the only Vedic passage that is connected with the Cārvākas. Sadānanda's *Vedāntasāra* (pp. 7-8) presents four different Cārvākas who invoke three passages from the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* and one from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* to justify their respective positions. The fact that subsequently a Buddhist is introduced who justifies *his* position with another passage from the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* shows that no historical conclusions should be drawn from this. Cf. Hillebrandt, 1916: 19 [347]; Tucci, 1923-29: 118-19.

³⁶ Franco, 1987: 8.

It is in this context important to recall Ramkrishna Bhattacharya's following judicious remarks (2002: 599):

A look at the Cārvāka fragments collected to date reveals the fact that most of them are found in works written between the eighth and twelfth centuries CE. Although Cārvāka studies really began after the publication of the *editio princeps* of [the Sarvadarśanasamgraha], it should be noted that this digest rarely *quotes* any Cārvāka aphorism that can be taken as genuine. It only purports to give, both in prose and verse, the essence of the Cārvāka philosophy, not in the words of any Cārvāka author, but as the learned fourteenth-century Vedāntin understood it. Nor does he mention the name of a single Cārvāka work, text or commentary (which he does profusely while dealing with other philosophical systems in the same work). So it may be admitted that all Cārvāka works had disappeared from India even before Sāyaṇa-mādhava's time.³⁷

This makes sense where the collection of fragments is concerned, but also in the reconstruction of the philosophy and, last but not least, in finding out what others thought of the Cārvākas. Authors after, say, the twelfth century had no direct knowledge of the Cārvākas and their ideas any more. They felt free to attribute to them all manner of positions which they disapproved of. An inspection of the Cārvāka fragments collected by Bhattacharya shows that criticism of the Veda and its associated practices are virtually confined to ślokas, most of which are only cited in the Sarvadarśanasamgraha, a text which is no longer acquainted with the school; other are cited in other late works, or they are simply not connected with the Cārvākas, so that we have no grounds for assuming that Cārvākas in particular are meant.³⁸ None of the thirty extracts from the commentaries in his collection says anything against Vedic texts and practices. Of the eighteen sūtras collected two, according to Bhattacharya, deal with *vedaprāmāṇyaniṣedhavāda*, the rejection of Vedic authority. However, both these sūtras (unlike most others) are ambiguous and do not

³⁷ The appropriateness of the title of a recent work (*Les matérialistes dans l'Inde ancienne*; Ballanfát, 1997), which doubts the authenticity of the early Cārvāka quotations, and bases itself almost exclusively on the *Sarvadarśanasamgraha*, is therefore questionable.

³⁸ This may in particular be true of Śl. 2 in Bhattacharya's collection, which reads: *agnihotraṃ trayo vedās tridaṇḍaṃ bhasmaguṇṭhanam / buddhipauruṣahīnānām jīviketi bṛhaspatiḥ //*. He translates: “Bṛhaspati says — The Agnihotra, the three Vedas, the ascetic's three staves, and smearing one's self with ashes, — (all these) are the livelihood of those destitute of knowledge and manliness.” This verse is cited in Cakradhara's *Nyāyamañjarīgranthibhaṅga* (ed. Shah p. 75), without any indication as to its origin. The name Bṛhaspati is no guarantee that Cārvākas are here meant: recall that the followers of Bṛhaspati are frequently referred to in the *Arthaśāstra* and elsewhere as thinkers who have certain views about politics and morality. The *Arthaśāstra* attributes to them the view that “Vedic lore is only a cloak for one conversant with the ways of the world”; see below.

need to concern the Veda at all.³⁹ What is more, they are only cited in Jayanta Bhaṭṭa's *Nyāyamañjarī*, in a context which gives no hint as to their correct interpretation.⁴⁰

It seems likely that the anti-Vedic element came to be attributed to the Cārvākas later on, probably at a time when they were no longer around to show how inappropriate this was.

This gives rise to the following interesting question. Do more recent sources also attribute this philosophy to non-Brahmins, to lower strata of society? Unfortunately the evidence concerning the social position of the Cārvākas is scarce, both for the earlier and for the more recent period. But there is at least one passage that fully confirms this expectation. Guṇaratna Sūri, the author of a commentary on Haribhadra's *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* called *Tarkarahasyadīpikā*, lived in the early fifteenth century. While introducing Haribhadra's chapter on the Lokāyatas he states:⁴¹

First the nature of the *nāstikas* will be explained. The *nāstikas* are skull-bearing Yogins covered with ashes, and some [others], from Brahmins to Śūdras.⁴² They do not accept the soul, virtue and vice, etc.

Guṇaratna does not dare to say, it seems, that the Cārvākas could not possibly be Brahmins. Perhaps the tradition connecting the two was still too strong in his days. But he includes lower strata of society, down to the lowest (*antyaja*), and we may read between the lines that the Brahmins who accepted this philosophy were no better than Śūdras. We may conclude that in Guṇaratna's time Cārvākas had become strawmen to whom one could attribute all that was reproachable and despicable.

It is hard to say with precision when this change of attitude towards the Cārvākas had taken place. It was already there in the second half of the eleventh century, at the time

³⁹ They are *dharmo na kāryaḥ* and *tad upadeśeṣu na pratyetyam* (or *tadupadeśeṣu na pratyetyam*); Bhattacharya's translations (“Religious act is not to be performed” and “Its (religion's) instructions are not to be relied upon”) preserve the ambiguity.

⁴⁰ Jayanta Bhaṭṭa, *Nyāyamañjarī*, ed. Varadacharya, vol. I p. 647-48: *nanu ca “yāvajjīvaṃ sukhaṃ jīvet” iti tatropadiśyate / evaṃ “na svabhāvasiddhatvena, atropadeśavaiphalyāt”, “dharmo na kāryaḥ”, “tadupadeśeṣu na pratyetyam” ity evaṃ vā yad upadiśyate tat prativihitam eva pūrvapakṣavacanamūlatvāt lokāyatadarśanasya / tathā ca tatra uttarabrāhmaṇaṃ bhavati “na vā are ahaṃ moḥaṃ bravīmi avināśī vā are 'yam ātmā mātrāsaṃsargas tv asya bhavati ” (BĀrUp(M) 4.5.14) iti /*

⁴¹ Guṇaratna Sūri, *Tarkarahasyadīpikā*, p. 450: *prathamam nāstikasvarūpam ucyate / kāpālikā bhasmoddhūlanaparā yogino brāhmaṇādyantyajāntāś ca kecana nāstikā bhavanti / te ca jīvapūnyapāpādikaṃ na manyante /*

⁴² Chattopadhyaya & Gangopadhyaya (1990: 266) translate: “The Nāstikas are a kind of people, including Brahmins and ending with the low-born, who carry human skulls, smear their bodies with ashes and practise yoga”. This translation does no justice to the word *ca* “and”.

of Kṛṣṇa Mīśra, the author of the allegorical drama called *Prabodhacandrodaya*.⁴³ The Cārvāka in this drama cites several of the anti-Vedic ślokaś⁴⁴ which also the *Sarvadarśanasamgraha* associates with him. (It is however noteworthy that the Cārvāka in this play is a court philosopher and friend of the king, whereas the other heterodox doctrines appear in the form of ridiculous monks: a Jaina monk, a Buddhist monk, and a Kāpālika.⁴⁵) Already before Kṛṣṇa Mīśra, Vācaspati Mīśra⁴⁶ did not hesitate to call the Cārvākas inferior to animals (because more stupid than these), but this may not tell us much about their position in society according to this author.

We have come to think that the Lokāyata position was primarily the denial of “another world”, without anti-Vedic overtones. We have even seen that Mīmāṃsā in one of its forms had been very close to this school of thought. All this has interesting implications. Most schools of Indian philosophy have the belief in rebirth and karmic retribution as a shared presupposition. This belief is common to practically all surviving schools, however much they may differ in other respects. This is noteworthy, for the oldest texts of Brahmanism, which together constitute the Veda, do not know this belief until their most recent parts. Some Brahmins adopted this belief in the late-Vedic period, with the result that it started finding expression in late-Vedic texts from the earliest Upaniṣads onward, but clearly not all Brahmins were convinced. Brahmanical orthodoxy as incorporated in the the Mīmāṃsā school of hermeneutics had not yet accepted this belief around the middle of the first millennium of the Common Era and later. We can be sure that many other Brahmins, too, took centuries to adopt this way of looking at the world. It also seems likely that this process, which for some may have taken a thousand years or longer, was sometimes marked by discussions between those who did and those who did not accept this doctrine. The Mīmāṃsā school of hermeneutics does not reject the doctrine in its classical text, the *Śābara Bhāṣya*; it ignores it. It does not therefore participate in the debate which we assume may have taken place at its time. All the other philosophical schools of which texts survive accept this doctrine as if there were no problem. It looks as if only those Brahmins who accepted this doctrine participated in the philosophical debate, the single exception

⁴³ Pédraglio, 1974: 3 sq.

⁴⁴ P. 77 sq.; Pédraglio, 1974: 156 sq.

⁴⁵ Pédraglio, 1974: 20. Note that Guṇaratna's description of certain Lokāyatas as skull-bearing (*kāpālika*) contradicts Kṛṣṇa Mīśra's distinction between the Cārvāka and the Kāpālika.

⁴⁶ Vācaspati Mīśra, *Bhāmatī*, p. 766 (on 3.3.54): *nāstikas tu paśor api paśur iṣṭāniṣṭasādhanam avidvān*. Cp. Jayanta Bhaṭṭa, *Nyāyamañjarī*, ed. Varadacharya, vol. I p. 317: *tatrānumānasvarūpaṃ cāśakyanihnavam eva, sarvalokaprasiddhatvāt/ abalābālagopālahālikapramukhā api / budhyante niyatād arthāt arthāntaram asaṃśayam //*. Cf. Bhattacharya, 1999a: 490.

being the Mīmāṃsakas, who kept silent. What happened to all those other followers of the Vedic tradition who were in no hurry to open up to those completely non-Vedic ideas? Where they excluded from the discussion?

It is here, I suggest, that the Cārvākas and like-minded people fit in. This suggestion implies, of course, that the Cārvākas were primarily Brahmins rather than representatives of the “lower classes”. These Brahmins resisted the encroachment of the new ideology of rebirth and karmic retribution with arguments of a materialistic nature. Rejecting the “other world” in the form of rebirth and karmic retribution, they had to abandon the belief in a Vedic heaven as well, because the same arguments cut both ways; however, this was no great sacrifice, for the “other-worldly” dimension of the heaven which is presumably brought about by the Vedic sacrifice was not strong. Since more and more Brahmin thinkers joined the other side in this debate (the side of rebirth and karmic retribution), the Cārvākas found themselves more and more isolated and in the end abandoned by all, including other Brahmins.

A review of earlier passages which criticise rebirth and karmic retribution does not add much to our conclusions so far. Criticism against this position is found in the Buddhist canon, even though not in connection with the expressions “Cārvāka” and “Lokāyata”; the latter of these two terms appears to be used in a different sense here.⁴⁷ But we find an emphatic confirmation of the truth of this doctrine in the first two of three “knowledges” which play a role in the enlightenment of the Buddha.⁴⁸ Denial of this doctrine is put in the mouth of a certain Ajita Keśakambalin in the Pāli canon, and is associated with other names in other versions of the canon.⁴⁹ Critics of the doctrine figure in one of the oldest texts of the (Śvetāśvara) Jaina canon.⁵⁰ Then there is the story of king Pāyāsi or Paesi, preserved by the Buddhists and the Jainas respectively;⁵¹ this king does not believe in existence after death.⁵² A number of more recent texts, too, are acquainted with deniers of rebirth and karmic retribution, without mentioning the *Lokāyata Sūtra* in this context. Among these may be mentioned the *Carakasamhitā*,⁵³ certain passages in the *Mahābhārata* and in the

⁴⁷ Rhys Davids, 1889; Franke, 1913: 19 n. 3; Bhattacharya, 1998; 2000; Franco & Preisendanz, 1998: 178-179.

⁴⁸ Barea, 1963: 75-91; Demiéville, 1927; Schopen, 1983.

⁴⁹ See MacQueen, 1984: 295 ff.; 1988: 152-153; Meisig, 1987: 124 ff.

⁵⁰ Sūy 1.1.1.6-8; 11-12 (ed. tr. Bollée, 1977: 14, 15, 60, 64); 2.1.15 (tr. Jacobi, 1895: 339-40)

⁵¹ See Leumann, 1885; Bollée, 2002

⁵² Bronkhorst, 2003

⁵³ *Carakasamhitā*, *Sūtrasthāna* 11.6-33; cf. Meindersma, 1990; Filliozat, 1993; Preisendanz, 1994: II: 307 ff.

Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa (1.108.12-20),⁵⁴ this last case is particularly interesting, because the heretical position is here attributed to a *lokāyatika* king called Vena. In Āryaśūra's *Jātakamālā* ch. 29 it is king Aṅgadinna of Videha who believes that there is no “other world”. In a passage from the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* the king of the Nāgas presents himself to the Buddha in the form of a Brahmin and states that there is no other world.⁵⁵ The *Nyāya Sūtra* provides arguments in support of former existences in sūtras 3.1.18-26.⁵⁶

These passages (to which others could be added) tell us very little about the social background of the critics of rebirth and karmic retribution: some say nothing whatsoever about their social identity, others attribute this critical attitude to a king, one to a king of the Nāgas who had adopted the appearance of a Brahmin. The repeated appearance of kings in these passages yet reminds us of the fact that kings played an important role in the cultural life of India, especially during the millennium or so from 500 BCE to 500 CE. Kings during this period had courts and capitals, and these courts and capitals attracted Brahmins, i.e., certain Brahmins. Urbanisation started (again, after the earlier Indus civilisation) around 500 BCE, flourished from 200 BCE onward, and continued until it started to decline under and after the Guptas from the middle of the first millennium onward.⁵⁷

The attitude of traditional Brahmins with regard to cities was negative, as is well-known from literature. The Vedic Brahmins did not like cities, and preferred to live in the countryside, where they could preserve their ritual purity. Various Dharma Sūtras and other texts confirm this. The *Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra*, for example, states: “A man who keeps himself well under control will attain final bliss even if he lives in a city with his body covered with the city dust and his eyes and face coated with it’ — now that is something impossible.”⁵⁸ The *Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra*, similarly, enjoins: “He should also avoid visiting cities.”⁵⁹ Several Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads, which may belong to a slightly later period, contain the following advice: “He shall avoid ... capital cities as he would the Kumbhīpāka hell.”⁶⁰ These Upaniṣads know various terms for towns of various sizes, such

⁵⁴ Bhattacharya, 1999; Hopkins, 1901: 86 ff.

⁵⁵ *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, ed. Vaidya p. 73 l. 1-3, ed. Nanjio p. 179: *atha khalu kṣṇapakṣiko nāgarājo brāhmaṇarūpeṇāgatya bhagavantam etad avocat: tena hi gautama paraloka eva na saṃvidyate.*

⁵⁶ See the relevant portions of Preisendanz, 1994 (where the sūtras are numbered 17-25).

⁵⁷ Cp. Thapar, 2002: 245 f., 456 f.

⁵⁸ *Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra* 2.6.33: *purareṇukunṭhitaśarīras tatparipūrṇanetravadanaś ca / nagare vasan suniyatātmā siddhim avāpsyatīti na tad asti //*; text and translation, Olivelle, 2000: 264-265.

⁵⁹ *Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra* 1.32.21: *nagarapraveśanāni ca varjayet //*; text and translation, Olivelle, 2000: 72-73.

⁶⁰ *Nāradaparivrājaka Upaniṣad* ch. 7, ed. Dikshitar p. 116, ed. Schrader p. 199-200; *Bṛhat-saṃnyāsa Upaniṣad* ed. Schrader p. 268: *tyajet ... rājadhānīm kumbhīpākam iva*; tr. Olivelle, 1992: 214, 253-254.

as *pattana*, *pura* and *nagara*,⁶¹ which shows that the cities were there, but the Brahmins addressed in these texts did not like them. These rural Brahmins, we may assume, concentrated on their traditional rites, and ignored, or tried to ignore, the new ideas that were gaining ground.

But there were also Brahmins in the cities, where they aspired to positions such as that of *purohita* or councillor to the king, or engaged in other activities. These were the Brahmins who wrote, and read, the *Arthaśāstra*, the *Kāmasūtra*, the courtly literature which has been preserved, and no doubt much else. Information about these urban Brahmins can be obtained from the *Arthaśāstra*. Kangle (1965: 144 f.) sums it up in the following words:

Special privileges are intended for [the Brahmin], particularly for a Śrotriya, that is, a Brahmin learned in the Vedas. It is recommended, for example, that land free from taxes and fines should be granted to a Śrotriya, just as such lands are to be granted to the priests and preceptors of the ruler (2.1.7). It is also laid down that the property of a Śrotriya, even when he dies without an heir, cannot escheat to the state like the property of other citizens (3.5.28). Brahmins in general are, it seems, to be exempted from payment at ferries and pickets (3.20.14). In many cases, punishment for offences is made dependent on the varṇa of the offender. In cases of abuse, defamation, assault etc., an ascending scale of fines is prescribed in accordance with the offender's varṇa (Chapters 3.18 and 3.19). ... Discrimination on the basis of varṇa is referred to in connection with the oath to be administered to witnesses (3.11.34-37), in the matter of inheritance by sons born of wives belonging to different varṇas (3.6.17-20) and so on. Again, the varṇas are to occupy different residential areas in the city, the Brahmins in the north, the Kṣatriyas in the east and so on (2.4.9-15). It is also laid down that in social matters seniority shall be fixed from the Brahmin downwards. And the Brahmin is declared to be free to refuse contributions to common festivals and yet entitled to take full part in them (3.10.43-44). There can be no doubt about the high status enjoyed by the Brahmin as such, or about the privileges and concessions reserved for him.

It is more than likely that the *Arthaśāstra* paints a far too attractive picture of the privileges of the Brahmins, but this is no doubt due to the fact that Brahmins were involved in trying to influence public life at and around the royal court; they had to convince the king that it was his task to instal and maintain “the law laid down in the Vedic lore which is beneficial, as it prescribes the respective duties of the four varṇas and the four āśramas”.⁶² They may

⁶¹ See e.g. *Nāradaparivṛājaka Upaniṣad* ed. Dikshitar p. 81, ed. Schrader p. 159: *ekarātram vased grāme pattane tu dinatrayam / pure dinadvayam bhikṣur nagare pañcarātrakam* // “A mendicant may spend one night in a village, two in a burg, three in a town, and five in a city.” tr. Olivelle, 1992: 187.

⁶² *Arthaśāstra* 1.3.4: *eṣa trayīdharmas caturṇām varṇānām āśramāṇām ca svadharmasthāpanād aupakārikaḥ*. Tr. Kangle, 1972: 7, modified.

or may not have obtained all the privileges they wanted, but the for us important fact is that they were there, at the courts and in the cities. These were urban Brahmins, who should not be confused with those other Brahmins who stayed as far as possible from urban centres, in the countryside where they stuck to their Vedic traditions.⁶³

In view of the above it seems justified to distinguish for this period two kinds of Brahmins who may have been rather different from each other: the rural ones and the urban ones. The rural ones could, more than the urban ones, continue their traditional life styles, and remain relatively aloof from developments in the urban world. The urban Brahmins, on the other hand, had to compete for the favours of the king, and stay *au courant* in various other ways.⁶⁴ They might be cynical with regard to their Brahmanical status, but they could not give it up, because it was their main claim to privilege.⁶⁵

A remark in the *Arthaśāstra*, a text characterised by straight talk, may illustrate this. It speaks about the Bārhaspatyas (different, it seems, from the Cārvākas who also came to be known by that name), and says the following about them:⁶⁶

‘The science of material welfare and the science of government and politics [are the only sciences],’ say the followers of Bṛhaspati. For the Vedic lore is only a cloak for one conversant with the ways of the world.

It is clear from the context that the Bārhaspatyas do not accept “the science of the three Vedas” (*trayī*). But far from making an issue of this, they are of the opinion that “the Vedic lore is only a cloak for one conversant with the ways of the world” (*saṃvaraṇamātram hi*

⁶³ It is in this context interesting to see that an insertion in the *Harivaṃśa* (327*, after 21.34, p. 148) speaks of an *nāstivādārthaśāstra* taught by Bṛhaspati in order to confuse Indra's enemies (Hillebrandt, 1916: 20 [348]).

⁶⁴ Cp. Tucci, 1923-29: 67: “Il brahmano dunque, modello d'ogni perfezione ideale, tanto più veniva apprezzato, quanto più vasto il suo sapere: era ben naturale quindi che, cresciuta la sua importanza, vivendo all'ombra delle corti e dei potenti, destinato spesso ai più alti uffici, esso dovesse essere esperto anche nelle arti utili alla vita o nel governo dei popoli o in tutte quelle cognizioni scientifiche che potessero servire ad un pratico sfruttamento: *purohita* e *mantrin* erano ugualmente brahmani, che guidavano e consigliavano i principi nel disbrigo delle pubbliche cose ...”

⁶⁵ Franco and Preisendanz (1998: 179) observe: “It is quite possible, though not yet provable, that Indian materialism developed in kingly and state administration circles as an alternative worldview counterbalancing that of the priestly class.” If our reflections are justified, the first part of Franco and Preisendanz's observation (“Indian materialism developed in kingly and state administration circles”) is correct, whereas the second part (“materialism ... as an alternative worldview counterbalancing that of the priestly class”) is not.

⁶⁶ *Arthaśāstra* 1.2.4-5: *vārttā daṇḍanītiś ceti bārhaspatyāḥ / saṃvaraṇamātram hi trayī lokayātrāvida iti* /. Tr. Kangle, 1972: 6, modified.

trayī lokayātrāvida[h]).⁶⁷ As far as I can see, this can mean only one thing. These Bārhaspatyas kept their convictions as to the real efficacy of the three Vedas to themselves, because they did not wish to lose the advantages which they derived from this knowledge. This implies, of course, that they were Brahmins, but cynical Brahmins. Not all Brahmins were Bārhaspatyas, to be sure, and not all were as cynical, we may presume. Yet this remark may give an impression of the attitude of at least some urban Brahmins.

These urban Brahmins had to face the brunt of the onslaught of the new ideas of rebirth and karmic retribution, for the kingly courts, and the cities, were natural focal points for different ideologies to confront each other. The life of these Brahmins may have left them little space for traditional rites, but they would not be able to ignore the confrontation with the new ideas about rebirth and karmic retribution. It is in the surroundings of the royal court, including the capital city, that we may have to look for Brahmins who took up the challenge and responded to it in a coordinated fashion. They, or some of them, fought back. They rejected the belief in rebirth, and the existence of “another world” in general. Sometimes they may have succeeded in convincing their king; in such cases their opponents might associate this for them heretical point of view with a king: Pāyāsi, Paesi, Vena, or someone else.

In the long run they did not however succeed, at least not in this particular respect. As Brahmins they succeeded in gaining the social dominance which came to characterise future centuries almost throughout the subcontinent. The battle against the doctrine of rebirth and karmic retribution, on the other hand, they lost. Later centuries would depict the early defenders of the Vedic tradition against this onslaught as being themselves critics of the Vedic tradition. The Cārvākas would turn in their graves if they knew.

⁶⁷ This interpretation is no doubt to be preferred to the one proposed by Tucci (1923-29: 68, 80), according to which Vedic lore is merely an obstacle for those who know the ways of the world (“La teologia è soltanto un ostacolo per chi conosce l'andamento del mondo”).

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Abbreviations:

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| ABORI | Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona |
| ANISt | Alt- und Neu-Indische Studien, Hamburg |
| JASB | Journal of the Asiatic Society (of Bengal), Calcutta |
| JIP | Journal of Indian Philosophy, Dordrecht |
| Kāś | Kāśikā by Vāmana & Jayāditya, ed. Aryendra Sharma, Khanderao Deshpande, D. G. Padhye, Osmania University, Hyderabad, 1969-70, 2 vols. |
| SSAI | Schriftenreihe des Südasien-Instituts der Universität Heidelberg, Wiesbaden, Stuttgart |
| Sūy | Sūyagaḍa = Sūtrakṛtāṅga |
| Winternitz, GIL | Moriz Winternitz, Geschichte der indischen Litteratur, 3 Bde., Leipzig 1908, 1913, 1920 |