

Lokāyata and lokāyatika in the Milindapañha

Ramkrishna Bhattacharya

Pavlov Institute, Kolkata, India

carvaka_rkb@yahoo.com, ramkrishna.bhattacharya@gmail.com

Abstract: *Lokāyata* is generally known as a synonym of the *Cārvāka* materialist system which made its appearance in or a little before the eighth century. Yet in earlier Buddhist Pali and Sanskrit literature *lokāyata* stands for anything but materialism. It is regarded by both commentators of the canonical works and the Pali lexicographers as a synonym for “the science of disputation”. A close study of the *The Questions of Milinda*, a paracanonical work in Pali, also reveals that *lokāyata* and *lokāyatika* have been used to suggest both the subject, *disputatio*, and those who studied/practised it. Such meanings as “nature lore”, “worldly wise” and the like are all inappropriate in the given context.

Keywords: *lokāyata*, *lokāyatika*, *vitandā*.

Lokāyata e lokāyatika no Milindapañha

Resumo: O termo *Lokāyata* é geralmente considerado como sinônimo do sistema materialista *Cārvāka* que surgiu no século oitavo ou um pouco antes. No entanto, na literatura budista pali e sânscrita anterior, *lokāyata* nunca representa o materialismo. É considerada tanto pelos comentadores das obras canônicas quanto pelos lexicógrafos do pali como sinônimo de “ciência da disputa”. Um estudo mais atento das *Questões de Milinda*, uma obra paracanônica em pali, também revela que *lokāyata* e *lokāyatika* foram utilizadas para sugerir tanto o assunto, *disputatio*, quanto aqueles que o estudavam ou praticavam. Significados como “conhecimento da natureza”, “sabedoria mundana” e outros semelhantes são todos inapropriados nesse contexto.

Palavras chave: *lokāyata*, *lokāyatika*, *vitandā*.

Lokāyata is generally known as a synonym of the *Cārvāka* materialist system which made his appearance in or a little before the eighth century. Yet in earlier Buddhist Pali and Sanskrit literature *lokāyata* stands for anything but materialism. The first meaning of *lokāyata* given in the *Pali Text Society Dictionary* is as follows: “what pertains to the ordinary view (of the world), common or popular philosophy, or as Rhys Davids (*Dial.* I.171) puts it: ‘name of a branch of Brahman learning, probably *Nature-lore*’” (Davids & Stede, 1975, p. 587). When we come to the first-century Buddhist paracanonical work, *Milindapañha* (*MP*), *The Questions of Milinda* (the Greek king Menander), this meaning is so inappropriate in the given context that it is not even worth considering. Rhys Davids and Stede in the same dictionary, therefore, offer a second meaning for the *Milindapañha*: “later worked into a quasi system of ‘casuistry, sophistry’” (*ibid.*).

Before going into the details of the *lokāyata*, some attention is to be paid to the enumeration of the subjects Milinda was made to learn:

Sāṅkhyayogā nāya-vesesikāgaṇitaṃ gandhabbaṃ tikicchā catubbedā purāṇā itihāsā jotisaṃ māyā hetu mantaṇā yuddhaṃ chando sāmuddi vacanenaekūnavīsati. (*Milindapañho*, 1880, text, p. 4)

Many were the arts and sciences he knew – holy tradition and secular law, the Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, and Vaiseshika systems of philosophy; arithmetic; music; medicine; the four Vedas, the Purānas, and the Itihāsas; astronomy, magic, causation, and spells; the art of war; poetry; conveyancing – in a word the whole nineteen. (*Milindapañha*, translation 1.[3].9; Davids, 1890, p. 6; original spelling retained)

The Pali and Buddhist Sanskrit word for causation is *hetu*, literally “cause”. Trenckner wrote “logic (?)” (quoted in Davids, 1890, p. 6, note 1). There is no reference to *Lokāyata* here, only *hetu*, most probably the shortened form of *hetuvidyā*, “the science of causation”. In the *Lalitavistara* it is indeed called so (*hetuvidyā*), one of the ninety-six subjects studied by Bodhisattva (*Lalitavistara*, 2001, Ch. 12, p. 179; translated as ‘logic’, p. 147). It is to be noted, however, that *lokāyata* as a subject of study, whether in the sense of materialism (or the Cārvāka system in particular), is conspicuous in its absence here.

In the first occurrence of the word *lokāyata* in the *MP* we are told:

(i) *so rājā bhassappavādako lokāyatavitaṇḍajana sallāpappavattana kotuhalo* (*Milindapañho*, 1880, text, p. 4)

[T]he king [Milinda], who was fond of wordy disputation, and eager for discussion with casuists, sophists, and gentry of that sort [...] (*Milindapañha*, trans. I. [4].10; Davids, 1890, p. 7)

The compound, *lokāyata-vitaṇḍa-janasallāpa* is rather problematic, for *lokāyata* is generally explained as *vitaṇḍa(vāda)-sattha* (Sanskrit *vitaṇḍāsāstra*), the science of disputation itself. The two words, *lokāyata* and *vitaṇḍā*, are for all intents and purposes synonymous (for several instances, see Bhattacharya 2009/2011, pp. 186-191). A *lokāyatika* has been explained as “one versed in the science of *Vitaṇḍā*, *Lokāyata*”, *lokāyatiko ti vitaṇḍasatthe lokāyate kata-paridayo* (commentary on *Samyukta Nikāya* IV.287, quoted by Jayatilleke, 1980, p. 50). Here too the juxtaposition of *vitaṇḍasattha* and *lokāyata* suggests mere pleonasm, *not two different disciplines*. Why then refer to them separately? Neither the editor nor the commentator or translators of the *Milindapañha* offer any explanation. Rhys Davids, in the note to his translation of the *Milindapañha*, does nothing more than explain them as “Lokāyātas and Vitandas” and refer to several passages in the *Tiṭṭaka*, their commentaries, and some Jain and Brahmanical sources known at his time. The two words, sophistry and casuistry, are used as synonyms for *lokāyata* in the Pali Text Society Dictionary. But in this instance both are employed to suggest *respectively* *lokāyata* and *vitaṇḍā*. *Vitaṇḍā* in the Pali Text Society Dictionary is defined as follows:

(f). [cp. Epic Sk. [Sanskrit] *vitaṇḍā*, e.g. Mbh 2, 1310; 7, 3022] tricky disputation, frivolous or captious discussion; in cpds. [compounds] **vitaṇḍa**^o: °*vāda* sophistry SmA 447; DA 1.247; °*vādin* a sophist, arguer DhsA 3 (so read for *vidaddha*); VbhA 9, 51, 319, 459. See **lokāyata**. (Davids & Stede, 1975, p. 620)

Apparently *lokāyata* and *vitaṇḍā(sattha)* are treated as referring to the same subject of study. Then why juxtapose them as if they refer to two different disciplines? The only explanation I can offer is that it is a case of tautology. Two synonymous words are set side by side with the sole view to emphasizing the nature of the persons Milinda liked to keep company with .

In another passage in the *Milindapañha* we read of Nāgasena:

(ii) *Padako veyyākaraṇo lokāyatamahāpurisalakkhaṇesu anavayo cāhosi*. (*Milindapañho*, 1880, text, p. 10)

He became a philologist and grammarian and skilled alike in casuistry and in the knowledge of the bodily marks that foreshadow the greatness of a man (*Milindapañha*, trans. I.[10].22; Davids, 1890, p. 17).

This juxtaposition of *lokāyata* and *mahāpurisa-lakkhaṇa* (marks of a superman) is often met with in the *Nikāyas*. For instance (Tan, 2007, p. 27):

Ambatṭha Māṇava	<i>lok'āyatamahāpurisalakkhaṇa</i>	DN 3.3/1:88
Soṇadaṇḍa Brāhmaṇa	<i>lok'āyatamahāpurisalakkhaṇa</i>	DN 4.5/1:114, 13/1:120,15/1:121, 20a/1:123
Kūṭadanta Brāhmaṇa	<i>lokāyatamahāpurisalakkhaṇa</i>	DN 5.6/1:130
Purohita Brāhmaṇa	<i>lokāyatamahāpurisalakkhaṇa</i>	DN 5.14/1:138, 17b/1:141

Assalāyana Māṇava	<i>lokāyatamahāpurisalakkhaṇa</i>	MN 93.3/2:147
Āsava Sutta	<i>lokāyatamahāpurisalakkhaṇa</i>	AN 6.58/1:163
Dāru Kammika Sutta	<i>lokāyatamahāpurisalakkhaṇa</i>	AN 6.59/1:166
Doṇa Brāhmaṇa	<i>lokāyatamahāpurisalakkhaṇa</i>	AN 5.192/3:223
Sela Sutta	<i>lokāyatamahāpurisalakkhaṇa</i>	SN 3.7/p105

In this instance both are subjects of study of the Brahmanas as well as the Kṣatriya or Ruler/Warrior caste. How far the courses of study mentioned in these Buddhist and Jain works reflect actual conditions is difficult to decide. In all probability, they are mere enumerations of all the arts and crafts (*kalās*) and the subjects of learning (*vidyās*) cultivated by the teachers and learners of different times, not by the members of any particular caste (*varṇa*), but by all. The Vedas were of course the precinct of the Brahmanas alone. It is clearly stated so in the *Milindapañha*: “[T]he business of the Brahmins and their sons is concerned with the Rig-veda, etc.”, *brāhmaṇa mānavakānām Irubbedam...* (*Milindapañho*, 1880, text, p. 178; *Milindapañha*, trans. IV,3,26; Davids, 1890, p. 247).¹

The third and the last instance is not mentioned in the Indexes of the *Milindapañha* and seems to have escaped the notice of earlier scholars, although Rhys Davids in his translation of the *Brahmajāla-sutta* (*Dīghnikāya*) refers to this passage in the *Milindapañha* (Davids, 1899, vol. 2, p. 22, note 4), asserting that the meaning, materialism, “is impossible in the context”. Or perhaps the long list of subjects to be studied by the Brahmanas (comparable to the one given in the *Lalitavistara*, 1877, chap. 12, p. 179 (text); *Lalitavistara*, 2001, p. 147 (trans.), comprising no fewer than ninety-six subjects!) does not seem to merit any attention. The curriculum covers almost every subject under the sun; it is quite impossible for a student to master all of them in his life-time. The Brahmanas and their sons are expected to learn, we are told, besides the three Vedas and their six ancillary texts (*Vedāṅgas*), etc.:

(iii) [...] jotisaṃ lokāyatikaṃ sākkaṃ mīgacakkaṃ [...] (*Milindapañho*, 1880, text, p. 178)

[...] arithmetic, casuistry, the interpretation of the omens to be drawn from dogs, and deer, [...] (*Milindapañha*, trans. IV,3,26; Davids, 1890, pp. 147-48)

The only point of interest is that, instead of *lokāyatam*, as in (ii), the *name of the subject* is here called *lokāyatikaṃ*. The Pali Text Society Dictionary does not record this meaning. It refers to ‘Miln 178’ in relation to the only meaning given, namely, “one who holds the view of lokāyata or popular philosophy” (Davids & Stede, 1975, p. 587). This is *not* the sense in which the word has been employed in (iii). *Lokāyatika* is used here in the sense of *lokāyatika-vāda*, not °*vādin*. Jayatilleke’s gloss on *lokāyatika* as “one who studies *lokāyata* or one who belongs to a *lokāyata* school” (Jayatilleke, 1980, p. 507), too does not correspond to the sense of the word in (iii).

Let us go back to the ‘Lokāyatas’ and ‘Vitaṇḍas’ of Rhys Davids (1890, p. 7, note 1). In the Index of Proper Names, Rhys Davids explains both as ‘a sect so called’ (identical?), both referring to (i). A look at the text and the context in which the words occur makes it clear that, when followed by *-jana*, the terms mean *some persons*, or rather groups of persons, who had not only studied and specialized in the subject but also made it the sole vocation of their life. Such a person has been called *lokāyata-pāṭhaka*, ‘reader of Lokāyata’, in the commentary on *Aṅguttara Nikāya* IV.200 (quoted by Jayatilleke, 1980, p. 50). They would pick up arguments on meta-physical questions (as in the *Lokāyatika Sutta*) as well as on the merits of the teachings of other masters besides the Buddha (as in the *Lokāyatika Brāhmaṇa Sutta*). Hence they came to be known as *lokāyata* (also its derivative, *lokāyatika*, as in the *Lokāyatika Sutta*, *Lokāyatika Brāhmaṇa Sutta* and other sources). If the commentators of the Pali canonical texts are to be

¹ I fail to understand why Rhys Davids said that ‘casuistry [is] no branch of education’ (Davids, 1890, Index of Subjects, p. 311) when it is clearly mentioned to be so in this passage and elsewhere. For Jain sources enumerating their syllabus and educational method, see Dasgupta, 1999, *passim*.

believed, these people also indulged in disputing for disputation's sake, such as, proving that the crow is white, the crane is black, and similar inane matters (Rhys Davids, in Chattopadhyaya & Gangopadhyaya, 1990, pp. 371-372).

In short, then, the word, *lokāyatika* is used in the *Milindapañha* to mean both a subject of study and a person who indulges in it, its dedicated and practicing adherent.

Acknowledgements: Amitava Bhattacharyya, Sourav Basak, and Sunish Kumar Deb.

Bibliographic references

- CHATTOPADHYAYA, Debiprasad; GANGOPADHYAYA, Mrinal Kanti (eds.). *Cārvāka / Lokāyata*. New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1990.
- BHATTACHARYA, Ramakrishna. *Studies on the Cārvāka/Lokāyata*. Firenze: Società Editrice Fiorentina, 2009 (also London: Anthem Press, 2011).
- DASGUPTA, Debendra Chandra. *Jain system of education*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidaass, 1999 (first published 1942).
- DAVIDS, Thomas William Rhys (trans.). *The questions of king Milinda* (Sacred Book of the East, 35). Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1969 (first published 1890).
- . *Dialogues of the Buddha* (Sacred books of the Buddhists, vol. 2). London: Oxford University Press, 1899.
- DAVIDS, Thomas William Rhys; STEDE, William (eds.). *Pali-English Dictionary*. New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1975 (first published 1921-25).
- JAYATILLEKE, Kulatissa Nanda. *Early Buddhist theory of knowledge*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980 (first published 1963).
- LALITAVISTARA. Ed. Rajendralala Mitra. Calcutta: The Asiatic Society; Bibliotheca Indica, 1877.
- LALITAVISTARA. Trans. Bijoya Goswami. Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2001.
- MILINDAPAÑHO. Ed. Vilhelm Trenckner. London: The Pali Text Society, 1986 (first published 1880).
- TAN, Piya. Lok'āyatikā Brāhmaṇā Sutta. The Discourse on Lok'āyata Brahmins. 2007. Available at <<http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/35.2-Lokayatika-Brahmana-S-a9.38-piya.pdf>>, accessed in 10 May 2015.