

行政院國家科學委員會專題研究計畫 期中進度報告

耆那教梵行之理念與實踐之研究(2/3)

計畫類別：個別型計畫

計畫編號：NSC92-2411-H-004-034-

執行期間：92年08月01日至93年07月31日

執行單位：國立政治大學宗教研究所

計畫主持人：黃柏棋

報告類型：精簡報告

處理方式：本計畫可公開查詢

中 華 民 國 93 年 8 月 9 日

期中精簡報告

Brahmacariya and Baṃbhacera: Buddhism and Jainism in interaction

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In discussing Jaina idea of *brahamcariya* (*baṃbhacera* in Prakrit) and *brahmacarīn* (*baṃbhacerī* in Prakrit), we have to bear in mind that Jainism and Buddhism are two most important Śramaṇic traditions in ancient India and the Buddha and Mahāvīra are considered to be contemporary. These two traditions share many common elements (Nakamura, 1983). Consequently, they also transform the meaning of *brahamcariya* and *brahmacarīn* from a Brahmanic concern to a Śramaṇic perspective.

Thus, before discussing Jaina idea of *brahamcariya*, it is helpful to take a look on early Buddhism. Reading from Pāli texts, we find that *brāhman* (neuter), either in the Ṛgvedic or Upaniṣadic sense (as sacred formulation or cosmic principle) is intentionally discarded by the Buddha when he employs the term **brahman**.

For example, in the Tevijja Sutta (*Dīgha Nikāya*, 1: 235-253), the Buddha was mocking two young brāhmaṇas, asking them whether they had seen **brahman** face to face and if not how could they claim the companionship with the **brahman** (*brahmasahavyatā*). The Buddha said:

Not anyone of these brāhmaṇas versed in the three Vedas has seen *brahmān* face to face, nor has any teacher of these brāhmaṇas versed in the three Vedas, or (any) one of the teacher's teachers of these brāhmaṇas versed in the three Vedas, nor even the ancestor seven generations back of anyone of their teachers of these brāhmaṇas versed in the three Vedas, nor could early seers of these brāhmaṇas versed in the three Vedas ... thus say: "We know

and see where, or whence or whither *brahmán* is." Indeed, what these brāhmaṇas versed in the three Vedas are saying is thus: "We expound the path to union with *brāhman* that we do not know or see; (but) this is the straight path, this is the direct way leading to salvation, when one acts thereof, becoming union with *brāhman*."¹

It is worth noting here that the brāhmaṇas and the Buddha, in using the same term **brahman** in two compounds most likely mean two different things. In the compound "*brahmasahavyatā*", meaning "companionship or union with **brahman**" as claimed by the brāhmaṇas, is most likely refers to the n. *brāhman*, the Upaniṣadic cosmic principle. On the other hand, the compound "*brahmāsakkhidiṭṭho*" brought up by the Buddha, meaning "seen **brahman** face to face" presumably designates m. *brahmán*, the creator of the universe. This may suggest that neuter *brāhman*, either in the Ṛgvedic or Upaniṣadic sense is deliberately disregarded by the Buddha when he makes use of the term **brahman**. Rhys Davids said:

And when we recollect that the highest teaching current before the Buddha, and still preserved in the pre-Buddhistic Upanishads, was precisely about the union with Brahmā [sic]; we may, without much danger or error, explain the position occupied in the series of dialogues by this [Tevijja Sutta] Suttanta by the supposition that it was deliberately inserted here as the Buddhist answer to the Upanishad theory. In this respect it is noteworthy that the neuter Brahman is quietly ignored ... The neuter Brahman is so far as I am aware, entirely unknown in the Nikāyas. (Rhys Davids: 1899: 298) ²

¹ *n'atthi koci tevijjānaṃ brāhmaṇānaṃ ekācariyo pi yena Brahmā sakkhi-diṭṭho, n'atthi koci tevijjānaṃ brāhmaṇānaṃ ekācariya-pācariyo pi yena Brahmā sakkhidiṭṭho, n'atthi koci tevijjānaṃ brāhmaṇānaṃ yāva sattamā ācariya-mahāyugaṃ yena Brahmā sakkhidiṭṭho. Ye pi kira tevijjānaṃ brāhmaṇānaṃ pubbakā isayo...te pi na evam āhaṃsu: "mayam etaṃ jānāma mayam etaṃ passāma yattha vā Brahmā yena vā Brahmā yaṃhiṃ vā Brahmā ti." Te vata tevijjā brahmaṇā evam āhaṃsu: yaṃhiṃ na jānāma yaṃhiṃ na passāma tassa saḥavyatāya maggaṃ dessema, ayam eva uju-maggo ayam añjasāyano niyyāniko niyyāti takkarassa Brahma-sahavyatāyāti. Dīgha Nikāya 1: 238-239.*

² Nakamura likewise argues that "the word brahman in compounds in the Pali scriptures does not denote the impersonal neuter world-principle, but only "highest, supreme, pure." (Nakamura, 1955: 77 n. 7) Cf. also Thomas: "This [upanishadic] neuter Brahma is never mentioned by the Buddhists, nor do they ever discuss the upanishadic doctrine of attaining to this Brahma or become identified with it." (Thomas, 1933: 87) On the other hand, Bhattacharya's exposition of Buddhist's notion of **brahman** really dismays the reader (Bhattacharya, 1973: 79-114). His clear Hindu polemic against Buddhism dominates both philological as well as intellectual inquires. In his mind, we have Upaniṣadic Buddhism or Buddhism of the *Bhagavadgītā*, but probably not Buddhism per se. It also looks as though he is deeply committed to the eternity of Indian thought. He does not entertain the idea that

If neuter *bráhma*n is simply ignored by the Buddha, then his employment of **brahman** in various compounds like *brahmacariya* must also mean something drastically different from the Vedic understanding. Since in Vedic *brahmacariya* compound, neuter *bráhma*n is the first member, the shift of the grammatical category of **brahman** will unfailingly remodel its implications.

Two new Pāli dictionaries, both Kumoi (1997, 662, a) and Mylius (1997, 268, b), list **brahma** as an adjective entry (see also, *Pali-English Dictionary*, 493: A III). Kumoi defines **brahma** as "noble, excellent, supreme". He uses the example from *Dīgha Nikāya*, 1: 115 & 131: "*samano khalu bho gotamo abhirūpo dassanīyo ... brahmvanṇīa brahmavaccasī*" and quotes *Sumaṅgalavilāsini*'s glosses on "*brahma-vanṇī- brahma-vaccasū*" (*Sumaṅgalavilāsini*, 1: 282) to support his argument: "*Brahma-vanṇī ti seṭṭha-vanṇī parisuddha-vanṇesu pi seṭṭhena suvaa-vanṇena va samannāgato ti attho.*" ("*brahma-vanṇī*" means "having the best appearance, endowed with the best golden color even among perfect colors", that is the meaning) and "*Brahma-vaccasī Mahābrahmuṇo sarīra-sadisena sarīrena samannāgato.*" ("*brahma-vaccasī*" means "endowed with a body similar to the body of *Mahābrahman*.")

If their definitions are dependable, then the understanding of compound *brahmacariya* may have been altered in the age of Buddha to a *karmadhāraya* construction, meaning: **brahma** conduct, that is, the "noble, excellent, supreme" deportment.

same word may convey meaning differently for different communities throughout history because of their distinctive concerns. Take his illustration of *brahmabhūta* (Bhattacharya, 1973: 79-83) as an example. While this *brahmabhūta* might mean "becoming *bráhma*n" for a Hindu who believes in Vedānta, it is most likely to mean something different for the Buddha or a Buddhist whose concern is outside *bráhma*n discourse. He simply denies the possibility of evolution of important intellectual concerns in Indian history. In a word, it seems that he does not want to recognize the fact that Buddhism could be different from Hinduism at all.

This interpretation finds support in Jainism. For example in *Ācārāṅga* (Prakrit: *Āyāraṅga*), we find the following passage referring to the way of life for the mendicant is pertinent to the subject here:

*Loga-vittaṃ ca ṇaṃ uvehāe, ce saṅge avijāṇao,
'se suppaḍibuddhaṃ sūvaṇīyaṃ' ti naccā
Purisā! parama-cakkhū vipparakkama eesu c'eva bambhaceraṃ! ti bemi.
(Ācārāṅga-Sūtra, 5, 2: 4)*

Indem er das Tun and Treiben der Welt überblickt, diese Fesseln des Unwissenden. In dem Bewusstsein "ich bin recht erwacht und wohl unterwiesen", o Mensch, richte den Blick auf das Höchste und schreite bei diesen Dingen zu *reinen Wandel* vor, so sage ich. (Translated by Schubring, 1926:92. Italics mine.)

Jacobi renders *bambhaceraṃ* as "real Brahmanhood" (Jacobi, 1884: 45) which is rather than ambiguous in terms of its connotation. Schubring's translation "reinen Wandel" (pure conduct) is more faithful to its context. This also confirms to our suggestion that *brahma* has become an adjective in Śramanic expression. To be sure, the above passage not only confirms the common orientation of Jainism and Buddhism in regard to the expression of *brahmacarya*, but also points to the sharing concern of ascetic life between these two religious traditions. We will give a brief account of their intellectual interface and polemics.

In Buddhism, We find that an *arahant* (*arahanta* in Prakrit) is the one who is rewarded with *brahmacariyapariyosāna* (perfection of *brahmacariya*). Therefore, an *arahant* is also a *brahmacārin*. Here, the most frequently occurring regular formula depicting the achievement of an *arahant* regarding his or her abiding position of practicing *brahmacariya* has direct bearing on this matter:

khīṇā jāti vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ nāparam itthattāyāti pajānātīti. (*Dīgha Nikāya* 1:84, 177, 203 etc., cf. various Chinese renderings: 死生已盡，梵行已立，所作已辦，不受後有。 *Taishō*, 1:17b; or 遊生已盡，梵行已立，所作已辦，不受後有。 *Taishō*, 1:450b; or 我生已盡，梵行已立，所作已辦，不復受身。 *Taishō*, 22:844c; or 我生已盡，梵行已立，所作已辦，不受後有。 *Taishō*, 24:389a)

One (who is enlightened) realizes: "Birth is exhausted, *brahmacariya* is fulfilled, what ought to be done is done, no more for the present state of becoming."

The scene depicted here is comparable to an ideal mendicant in Jainism quoted above. First, he is one who has realized that he is *suppaḍibuddhaṃ* (Sanskrit: *supratibuddhaṃ*, truly enlightened) and has been *sūvaṇṭiyaṃ* (Sanskrit: *sūpanītaṃ*, well-instructed or "deeply-absorbed in right knowledge etc.") according to Ratnachandra 1923-38, 1:279). He also realized that clinging to this world is the bondage of ignorance (*avijjā*) that is, the burden of *saṃsāra*. One has to renounce this world to find liberation (*mokṣa*). To practice *brahmacariya* in a real sense of the word, one has to become a mendicant. For both the Buddhist and the Jaina, one has to leave the worldly bondage and become a world-renouncer to find a true unsullied existence.

However, compared to Buddhism, we find that Jaina tradition is a religion with deep commitment to the hardships of life. The Jaina austerities are also recorded in the Buddhist Suttas. In the Cūḷadukkhakkhandha Sutta of *Majjhima Nikāya*, the Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta (Mahāvīra) is quoted as saying to his followers:

There is for you, O Nigaṇṭhas, *kamma* done in the past, annihilate it with this tough hardship. But in this when you are curbed in body, curbed in speech and curbed in mind, then there is no producing of evil *kamma* in the future. In this way by stopping past *kamma* with austerity and not producing new *kammās*, there is no outflow in the future. With no outflow in the future, *kamma* wanes. With the destruction of *kamma*, suffering is destroyed. With the destruction of suffering, feeling is destroyed. With the destruction of feeling, all suffering is going to be exhausted.³

³Atthi kho vo nigaṇṭhā pubbe kammaṃ kataṃ, taṃ imāya kaṭukāya dukkarakārikāya nijjaretha; yaṃ pan' ettha kāyena saṃvutā vācāya saṃvutā manasā saṃvutā taṃ āyatīṃ pāpassa kammaṃsa akaraṇaṃ, iti purāṇānaṃ kammānaṃ tapasā byantibhāvā navānaṃ kammānaṃ akaraṇā āyatīṃ anavassavo, āyatīṃ anavassavā kammakkhaya. kammakkhaya dukkhakkhaya, dukkhakkhaya vedanākkhaya. vedanākkhaya sabbhaṃ dukkhaṃ nijjiṇṇaṃ bhavissatīti. 1:93. See also, 2: 214. cf. Chinese Āgama : 諸尼捷等，汝若宿命，有不善業，因此苦行故，必當得盡，若今身妙行，護口意，妙行護因，緣此故，不復作惡不善之業。 *Taishō*. 1: 587 b.)

Jaina austerities have much to do with their attitude towards this world and their idea about the mechanism of bondage. In *Sūyagadaṃ*, we find that an ideal Jaina mendicant “is one who does not act or kill”; he is “restrained, rested, avoids and renounces evil karma, does not act, solitary and skillful. (*se bhikkhu akirie alūsae...saṃjaya-viraya-paḍihayapaccakkyā-pāvakamme ekire saṃvuḍe egaṇṭapaṇḍie*, 2, 4:11) One has to practice hardships to get rid of evil karma which is innate. Therefore, in order to make sure that previously accrued karma is purged and no further karmic connection is accumulated, we had better withdraw from this world and practice severe penance. The Jainas have to avoid actions which might involve any *himsā* (killing). Any actions, either unintentionally or intentionally lest they incur further bondage to this world. Johnson argues:

The central concern of Jaina practice...is to establish a means of conducting oneself which (ideally) entails no *himsā* and thus no further bondage. (An important secondary concern is, of course, to get rid of the karma one has already accumulated.) Given the above conditions, this is clearly a very difficult undertaking, requiring special ascetic restraints. (Johnson, 1995: 1)

Although the Jainas also have their own *kriyāvāda*, that is, believing in the consequences of actions and in connection with that, the ideal of *brahmacariya*, their perspective is different from the Buddhist. However, the Jaina classifies the Buddhist as *akiriyavādin* (promulgator of irresponsible action) because the Buddha does not believe in the existence of soul (*jīva*) as the cause of action. (*Sūyagada*, 1 12: 1-8, see Jacobi, 1895 : 315-317). Their practice of *brahmacariya* as described in first Śrutaskanda of *Ācārāṅga* is a tough ascetic life with various hardships to bear. These hardships, from the viewpoint of the middle path adopted by the Buddha, are difficult to afford comfort to a world renouncer. The Buddha disapproves of arduous self-mortification. For the Buddhist, the Jaina represents the extremity of *kiriyavādin* (Thomas, 1933: 116). Thus Ānanda labels Jaina practice as “the *brahmacariya* giving no comfort” (*anassāsikaṃ idam brahmacariyaṃ. Majjhima Nikāya*, 1: 519-520).

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