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KARMA VIPĀKA

Y. KRISHAN

The word *Vipāka*¹ means the ripening, maturing, effect, result, consequences of actions done in the present or former births and pursuing those who commit them through their subsequent existences. In brief it means *Karma phala*, fruits on maturing of actions.

There is wide unanimity in the definition of *Karma Vipāka* in the literature of different Indian religions.

Umāsvāmi (AD 135-219) in *Tattvārtha sūtra*² (a Jaina text) 8.21 defines it as *vipāko anubhavaḥ*: *Vipāka* is experiencing. His commentator Pūjyapāda (5th-7th Century AD) in *Sarvārthasiddhi* 8.21 explains: *prāgūpacitanānā prakāra karma vipāko anubhavaḥ*: Experience of previously accumulated *Karmas* of various types is *vipāka*.

The Buddhist *ācārya* Vasubandhu (4th Century AD) in *Abhidharma kośa*³ 2.56 defines *vipāka* thus: *vipākaḥ phalamantyaśeḥ pūrvasya adhipatam phalam*: Fruit is the end result of *vipāka*: *vipāka* controls the result.

The *Bodhisattavabhūmi*⁴ (4th Century AD) 2.5 of Asanga says: *Yadiṣṭāniṣṭamādīnavānuśansamyuktam phalamabhinirvartayanti tattesam vipākaḥ*: *Vipāka* means the result produced successively by desired (*iṣṭa*), disliked (*aniṣṭa*), ignoble (*ādīna*) and noble or praiseworthy (*anuśansamyuktam*) actions.

Buddhaghōṣa (5th Century AD) in the *Visuddhimagga*⁵ XIX.17 speaks of *Kammāntaraṇi C'eva vipakāntaraṇa*: Round of *Karmas* and round of results: from *Karma* came to pass results. Result has *Karma* for its source. *Visuddhimagga* XIX 18 says: *Kamma Vipāka vattanti vipāka kamma sambhavo*: *Vipāka* follows *Karma*: *vipāka* is born of *Karma*. The Brahmanical texts define *Karma vipāka* likewise. Īśvarakṛṣṇa (AD 200) in *Sāṃkhyakārikā* 46 defines *vipāka* as: *dharmeṇa gamanamūrdhvagamanamadhistad bhavatyā adharmeṇa*: Good deeds lead to birth in heaven and bad deeds to birth in hell.

The *Dasapadāratha śāstra*⁶ (AD 6th Century) of the Vaiśeṣikas gives a very simple definition: *hita-ahita vipāka*: Ripening of good and evil (which produces pleasure and pain).

Saṅkara⁷ (AD 788-820) in his *bhāṣya* on *Brahma sutra* III.2.38 defines *Vipāka* as: *Yatkālam hi yatsukham dukkham vā ātmanā bhuñjayrī tasmaiva loke phalatvam prasiddham*: When at a time a self experiences pleasure or pain, that is generally known among people as fruition.

Nyāyakandali,⁸ (AD 10th Century) a commentary on the *Praśastapāda bhāṣya* on *Vaiśeṣika sūtras* says: *tato dharmādharma tataśca samsārah*: *Karmas* are the womb (*yonī*) of various beings; they mature in various ways with the passage of time into fruits or results.

The doctrine of *Karma Vipāka* was developed by the Buddhists, Jains and Brahmins by relating the type of birth, human and non-human, length of life, happiness and suffering etc experienced as being the consequences of specific acts done by a being in his previous existences. While the destruction of *Karmas* (*Karmanirodha*) and detachment (*vairāgya*) lead to emancipation (*nirvāṇa*) and cessation of transmigration, performance of *Karmas* leads to repeated births in the five or six planes of existence; the duration of life in those planes of existence, the quality of life, such as ill or good health, wealth and poverty, pleasure and pain etc depend upon the maturing of the *Karmas*.

The Buddhist canonical texts (B.C. 3rd-2nd Century) give an exposition of *Karma vipāka*. In the *Majjhimanikāya* 3.35 and *Ānguttaranikāya* 3.46 it is stated by the Buddha that, after death, bad conduct (*duccaritam*) leads to hell or birth as an animal or a ghost and that good (*Kalyāṇam*) conduct leads to birth in heaven or as a human-being. The *Cūḷa kamma-vibhaṅga-sutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya* sets out the retributive rebirths of an individual after death with reference to the quality of his actions in a previous existence; thus a person guilty of violence and destruction of life, is reborn in purgatory or as a short-lived human being, a person guilty of assaults either goes to purgatory or becomes an ailing human being, a miser is born either in hell or as a poor human being etc. The *Vimānavatthu*⁹ commentary of Dhammapāla (AD 5th-6th Century) says: "By giving a seat (to a person) one gets a very high position, by bestowing food one secures health and wealth, by the gifts of clothes one acquires good complexion (*varṇa*) and property, the gift of conveyances procures for the giver special happiness and that of lights begets powers of vision, by giving a house one gets all sorts of property." Again the *Pañcatidīpanam*¹⁰ (AD 13-14th Century) says

that among the gods and men and demons, those who are malicious do not live long, but those who are free from malice, attain long life. Those who oppress others by confining and beating them, are subject to leprosy, madness etc. Those who misappropriate property of others and do not make gifts to anybody, cannot earn money even with great efforts. “Those who give stolen wealth to others at first become rich but are afterwards reduced to poverty. Those who acquire wealth by honest means but do not give it to anybody, get wealth with great effort. Those who do not steal wealth and are very charitable obtain wealth which cannot be destroyed by theft etc. Those who offer food daily are long lived, endowed with great beauty, strength, intelligence, health and happiness....Those who always abuse others and are liars are reborn as hunchbacked and dwarfs”.

Likewise those who commit violence, theft, adultery etc., are born in hell and pay for their misdeeds by sufferings in hell and in relatively higher forms of life, that is as plants, birds and animals. As soon as the effects of *Karmas* which cause birth in a particular plane of existence, are exhausted, the being is reborn in other planes, higher or lower, depending upon the quality of the residual *Karmas*: the human plane represents the norm from which a being falls or to which he rises or from which he goes above or to which he falls back.

The religious beliefs regarding *Karma vipāka* are supported by philosophical justification. The *Bodhisattvabhūmi*¹¹ I.7 says: *akuśalānām dharmānām apāyeṣu vipāka Kuśalasāsravānām sugatau vipacyate tadvipāka phalam*: Evil deeds (on fruition) bring about evil (calamity, injury, loss), whereas good actions lead to happy birth; this is the fruit of maturing of *Karmas*. Again the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* I.3 distinguishes between *vipāka* (fruition), *vipāka-hetu* (cause of fruition) and *hetu-phalam* (result of *vipāka*). The causes of *vipāka* are all types of actions, violence, non-violence, *dāna* (charity), truthfulness etc.; they produce results in the form of the length of the life span (*āyuh*), caste status (*varṇa*), wealth (*aiśvarya*) etc. These in turn are the results of fruition, *vipāka-phala*.

Sthiramati (AD 5th Century) in para 51 of his *Bhāṣya*¹² on *Vasubandhu's Trīṅśikā Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* 3 cites the view of other Buddhist schools about *Karma Vipāka* in these words: *Śubhānām kar-*

mañām sukkho anubhavaḥ phalavipākaḥ / Aśubhānām dukkhaḥ: Good deeds on maturing, lead to experience of happiness as their fruit; evil deeds lead to unhappiness, misery.

The Jaina canonical texts (B.C. 4th-AD 2nd Century) give a parallel exposition of *Karma vipāka*. The *Sūtra kṛtāṅga*¹³ 2.1.13 explains human inequalities, noble or lowly birth, beauty & ugliness, success and status in life etc. as due to a person's *Karma*.

Jaina texts (such as *Bhagavati Sūtra* 8.9.9) link specific states of existence with specific *Karmas*, those who indulge in violent deeds, kill creatures, eat flesh etc. are born in hell; deception, fraud, falsehood lead to the birth of the offender as animal and plant; kindness, compassion, humble character lead to birth as a human being; austerity, observance of vows etc lead to birth in heaven.

The *Vipāka Śrutam*¹⁴ sets out *dukkhavipāka* and *sukhavipāka* in ten stories each. The *dukkhavipāka* stories relate the intense sufferings an individual has to undergo in various existences (*bhavas*) for his misdeeds; the results of good deeds are illustrated in *sukhavipāka* stories: specific fruits (suffering and happiness) are related to specific previous misdeeds or good deeds of an individual.

The Jainas made an elaborate classification of *Karmas*: they are of eight types: *jñānāvarṇīya* (obscuring knowledge), *darśanāvarṇīya* (obscuring right faith), *mohanīya* (causing delusion), *vedanīya* (causing pain or pleasure), *āyuh* (*Karma* which determine the life span in planes of existence, heaven, hell etc, on rebirth), *nāma Karma* which determines individuality (species, body etc), *gotra*, the social status and *antarāya* (which is a hindrance to doing good *karma*).¹⁵

The Jainas also believed that the duration (*sthiti*) or the time for ripening and fruition and the period for which the *Karmas* remain dormant (*abādhākāla*) are different for different classes of acts. Thus the *jñānāvarṇīya karma* have a minimum time span of 48 mts (*muhūrta*) and a maximum of 30 *kodākodī sāgaropamas* (an extremely long period); the period of dormancy (*abādhākāla*) is 30000 years.

The Brahmanical or Hindu law¹⁶ givers (BC 500 to AD 300) deal with the fruition of *karmas* elaborately specifying (i) the various forms of existence in which a *jīva* or living being takes rebirth, such as human being, worm, insect, bird, animal, plant etc, (ii) the diseases with which he might be afflicted such as leprosy, consumption, epilepsy etc. and their duration, (iii) the deformities from

which he might suffer such as being born dumb, deaf, blind, etc., (iv) the status a being occupies in society such as that of a King, Brahmin etc.

The earlier¹⁷ *purāṇas*, (such as *Vāyu*, *Brahmāṇḍa*, *Matsya*, *Mārkaṇḍeya*, *Viṣṇu*, *Bhāgavat* AD 300-600) as pointed by Hazra, deal with *Karma Vipāka*. They deal with it in the same manner as the *Dharmaśāstras* viz. the souls are embodied in different forms of existence due to their deeds; they are born in heaven, hell or on this earth, as a result of their *Karmas*; they suffer various tortures in different hells for their sins done in previous lives; and thereafter they are born as insects, birds, animals, human beings and as gods depending upon the progressive exhaustion of their evil *Karmas* and ripening of their good *Karmas*.¹⁸

Samkara,¹⁹ in his commentary on *Brahmasūtra* III.1.8, states that the souls of those who perform sacrifices and the like, rise to the sphere of the moon and when they have done with the enjoyment (of the fruits of the works) again descend (to the earth). "Having dwelt there (heaven) they return again that way as they came". Those whose conduct has been good obtain good birth of a Brahmin etc. Those whose conduct has been evil obtain the birth of a dog etc".

The doctrine of *Karma vipāka* is a natural and apparently logical development of the basic law of *Karma*; it deals with the mechanism of operation of the law and specifies specific punishments and rewards for particular evil and good deeds. It is in the nature of a penal-cum-procedure code. But a critical examination of *Karma vipāka* reveals many unsatisfactory features which makes the operation of the law of *Karma* either arbitrary or mysterious; it unmasks the deceptive logic of the moral law of *Karma*. This would be amply evident from the many questions it leaves unanswered:

- (i) What is the time lag between the commission of a moral action, *Karma*, and the ripening of its results? In other words, how much time does a *Karma* take to ripen? Is the time lag uniform or does it vary in respect of different *Karmas*? Only the Jainas attempted to lay down the life span of each type of *Karma*. But the concept of time lag also introduces the paradox of evil doers flourishing and guilty men enjoying the ill-gotten

gains and good men and good doers and innocent men suffering in the world of experience and reality.

- (ii) Does each *Karma* fructify separately by itself or are the potential effects of various *Karmas* amalgamated into a composite *Karma* or *Karmas* producing one or more results? If the *Karmas* are amalgamated, do good (*Kuśala*, *puṇya sukṛta*) *Karmas* and (*akuśala pāpa*, *duṣkṛta*) *Karmas* combine or amalgamate only with *Karmas* of identical character or also with *Karmas* of opposite class or type?
- (iii) In case the *Karmas* combine or *amalgamate* to yield a resultant *Karma*, does it mean that good and evil *Karmas* can neutralise each other partially or wholly?
- (iv) What is the role of *puruṣāratha* human effort, in the fulfilment of *Karmas*? Do the *Karmas* remain unproductive if there is no effort?

These problems appeared to have exercised the minds of Indian thinkers, though they did not and could not provide adequate answers. They suffer from ambiguity and contradictions. Here also their unanimity ends.

Regarding the time within which the *Karmas* fructify, the *Majjhimanikāya* 1.373 says: The fruit of a deed is threefold, it may arise here and now, or later in a succession of lives.

About the interaction of different *Karmas*, in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*²⁰ 2.20 it is said that the ease and pain measured out as it were with a measure cannot be altered in the course of transmigration; there can neither be increase nor decrease thereof, neither excess nor deficiency. In other words, good and evil deeds bear their own results. The story of the death of Moggallāna as narrated in *Milindapañha*²¹ 4.4.1 and in Buddhaghōṣa's commentary²² on *Dhammapada* 137 emphasises that good and bad actions are independent and do not balance against one another.

The *Āṅguttaranikāya*²³ 3.10.99 on the other hand, strikes a different note in explaining the disparity in the results of *Karmas*. It discusses the cases of two individuals who have done the same deed but with entirely different consequences: one who does some slight deed of wickedness (*appamattakam*) goes to hell (*nirayam*); another individual who does the same slight deed of wickedness and expiates it in present life (*ttādi samyeva*, which is to be experienced in this very life) treating it as serious, is saved from hell.

The Buddha explains this apparent disparity—inequality before law—on the basis of an analogy: a certain quantity of salt added to a cup of water makes that water undrinkable; but the same quantity of salt added to the waters of a big river like the Gaṅgā will produce no effect on its drinkable quality. The Buddha goes on to cite the cases of two persons who may suffer vastly different punishments for an identical offence. He says: “We may have.....the case of one who is cast into prison for a halfpenny, for a penny, or for a hundred pence or.....we may have the case of one who is not cast into prison for a halfpenny, for a penny, or for a hundred pence”. The Buddha explains: “Whenever.....anyone is poor, needy, and indigent, he.....is cast into prison for a halfpenny, for a penny, or for a hundred pence”. “Whenever.....anyone is rich, wealthy and affluent, he is not cast into prison for a halfpenny, for a penny, or for a hundred pence”. The Buddha concludes “.....if any one were to say that a man must reap according to his deeds, in that case.....there is no religious life, nor is any opportunity afforded for the entire extinction of misery. But if.....the reward a man reaps accords with his deeds, in that case.....there is a religious life and opportunity is afforded for the entire extinction of misery”.

Again as regards the relative strength of *Kuśala* (good) and *akuśala* (evil) deeds, the Buddhists hold that the former are more powerful than the latter. *Milinda pañha* 3.7.7 says that *Kuśala* is the greater, demerit is a trifle. It is explained that a man who does a wrong feels remorse later and so demerit does not increase whereas merit increases gladness, joy etc and hence it increases merit. Again *Milinda* 4.8.24-29 explains that evil *Karma* has limited potentiality and therefore matures quickly whereas good *Karma* is vast (*vipula*) and matures in a long period of time: “Vice by its meanness dies quickly away. But virtue by reason of its grandeur, takes long time to die”. Consequently whereas, generally speaking, both good and evil deeds fructify in subsequent lives of an individual, evil deeds may fructify in this life itself.

The belief of Buddhists in the transference of merit, *puṇya pariṇamnā*, that is, the benefit of good deeds done by an individual can be donated to or transferred to another, was another factor which could seriously interfere with the *vipāka* process and distort the fruit to be realised for specific acts.

It would be evident from the foregoing evidence that there were inner contradictions as to the manner in which *Karma* fulfils itself; on the one hand, each deed works out its own fulfilment, and good and bad deeds cannot be balanced; on the other hand, the texts maintain that good or evil acts can be neutralised by the mass of evil or good deeds. More significantly the *Āṅguttaranikāya* makes a laboured effort to explain the disparity in the consequences faced by different individuals for the same deed. Again it is manifestly unfair that the gravity of an offence should be dependent upon the doer's capacity and resources. A poor man may be driven by sheer necessity to commit theft but it is evidently preposterous that he should go to hell for the offence whereas a rich man, who may have had no economic compulsions to commit theft, be let off lightly.

The fluid nature of the doctrine of *Karma Vipāka* in Buddhism becomes clear from its analysis of the time for fruition of *Karmas* and the nature of the energy, productive or destructive, generated by them.

Majjhima nikaya 1.373, we have noticed earlier, makes an indefinite statement: "The fruit of a deed is threefold, it may arise here and now, or later or in a succession of lives".

As Hariivarman in the *Satyasiddhiśāstra*²⁴ (AD 2nd-3rd Century) 100 elaborates: *Kiñcitkarma niyatavipākam, Kiñcidaniyata vipākam, kiñcidauttamam madhyamamadhamam dṛṣṭadharmavipākamupapdhya vipākam taduttara vipākam*: Certain action definitely matures, the maturing of others is uncertain or indeterminate; certain actions bear excellent fruit, other middling and low fruits; certain *Karmas* fruitify in this very world (in which they are done), certain in the next world and others in distant future.

The *Visuddhimagga*²⁵ XIX and the *Dhammamattasangaha*²⁶ (AD: 12th Century) V.8 distinguish respectively 12 and 16 different kinds of *Karmas* and their fruits. Of these, 8 types of *Karmas*²⁷ and their fruition have relevance for us. These are:

- (a) those which fructify with elapse of time;
- (b) productive or positive and destructive or negative *Karmas*.

The following *Karmas* belong to the first category:

- (i) *Karmas* which bear fruit in the present life;
- (ii) *Karmas* which bear fruit in rebirth or next life;
- (iii) *Karmas* which bear fruit at no fixed time;

(iv) Bygone *Karmas* or *Karma* which has been, *ahosi Kamman*.

This *Karma* does not bear fruit.

The texts do not specify the *Karmas* which will bear fruit in this life or in the life hereafter or at an unascertainable time in future.

The same *Karmas* are also classified according to their nature:

- (i) productive or reproductive *Karmas* (*Janaka Karma*);
- (ii) supportive or maintaining *Karma* (*utthanbhaka*). This *Karma* does not fructify by itself; it helps to make productive *Karmas* more effective;
- (iii) counteractive or unfavourable *Karma* (*upapīḍaka*). This *Karma* obstructs or nullifies or neutralises productive or destructive *Karmas*;
- (iv) destructive *Karma* (*upaghātaka*); it destroys or suppresses or inhibits the fruition of other *Karmas*.

Here again, the texts do not indicate the criteria for classifying the various *Karmas* as productive, supportive, destructive or counteractive. In fact as Sthiramati in para 159 of his *Bhāṣya* on *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* 19 observes: *na hi karma vidyamānapi kleṣeṣu prahñeṣu sahakārikāraṇābhāvāt punarbhavamabhinīrvartayitum samartham*: Even if the *Karma* is present, it is not able to lead to rebirth due to the absence of related or associated factors.

The doctrine of *Karma Vipāka* in Jainism also suffers from same impreciseness and confusion as in the sister philosophical and religious schools. The Jainas believe that the *Karmas* of the same kind such as *Jñānāvārṇīya* or *vedanīya* or *nāma* or *gotra Karma* combine with their own kind but not with another. This is what *Pūjyapāda* in the commentary *Sarvārthasiddhi* on *Tattvārthasūtra* 8.22 and 23 says: *prasamkhyātoanbhūvata* (22) *sa yathā nāma* (23): (A person) experiences the sum total (of his *Karmas*) and this adding up takes place in accordance with their classes or kinds.²⁸ This is consistent with their view that different kinds of *Karmas* are of different durations including the period in which they remain dormant. Further *Pūjyapāda* in his commentary on the *Sūtra* 9.36 says; *Karmas* fructify and are exhausted provided the place, time, environment etc are appropriate.

Again in Jainism good and evil *Karmas* are distinct and separate. As *Sthānāṅga sūtra* (an early canonical text) 11 & 12 says: *ege puñṇe ege pāve: puñya* (good action) is one, *pāpa* (evil action) is another. There is no off-setting of good and evil *Karmas*.

Again at the time of a new *Karma bandha* (bondage), the *Karma* particles binding the soul affect the duration (*sthiti*) and intensity (*anubhāga*) of the earlier *Karma* bonds.

An important factor that has had a powerful bearing on the *Karma-vipāka* in Jaina thought is *tapas*, austerities. The Jainas maintain that *Karmas* can be consciously and prematurely matured and thus shed (*nirjarā*) through physical mortification and mental repentance. Through *tapas*, the dormant *Karmas* are made to arise (*udaya*) and eventually fructify (*udīraṇā*). In the result the time and intensity of *Karma Vipāka* is indeterminate. Again some *Karmas* are *dhruvodaya*, whose fruition after elapse of time is certain and automatic, while others are *adhruvodaya*, whose time of fruition is uncertain.

The Brahmanical texts also confess that the time for the fruition of *Karmas* is uncertain and allude to neutralisation of evil *Karmas* by the dominant good *Karmas* and vice versa. The *Bhagavadgītā* (BC 500-200) XVIII 12 says that the fruit or result of good (*iṣṭa*), bad (*aniṣṭa*) and mixed (*miṣṭa*) *Karmas* is reaped in the life hereafter.

The *Yogaśāstra*²⁹ (BC 100-AD 300) classifies *Karmas* into two groups with reference to the time when they mature and the period of time after which they mature. Firstly those which bear fruit in this life-time: *dr̥ṣṭajñmavedanīya*—determinate, and those whose maturation takes place in life or lives hereafter at a point of time which cannot be determined or predicted beforehand, *adr̥ṣṭajñmavedanīya*—(indeterminate). To quote *Yogasūtra* ii. 12: “The latent deposit of *Karmas* (*Karmāśaya*) has its root in the hindrances (*Kleśas*)—*avidyā* (ignorance) *ahaṁkāra* (egoism), *rāga* (passion or attachment), *dveṣa* (aversion, dislike, ill will) and *abhiniveśa* (will to live), and may fructify and be felt in a birth seen (*dr̥ṣṭajñma-vedanīya*) or in a birth unseen (*adr̥ṣṭajñma-vedanīya*)”. Veda Vyāsa (AD 400) in his *bhāṣya* explains that *Karmāśayas* ripen or become *vipāka* in this life itself due to intense austerities (*tapas*), concentration (*dhyāna*) or devotion to the lord (*Īśvara*). Again *Karmāśayas* ripen quickly in respect of evil results if a person treats another person with contempt, when he is terrorised, sick and wretched or is undergoing penance (*tapas*). Secondly *Yogasūtra* iii. 22 refers to *upakrama* (advancing, quickly maturing) and *nirūpakrama* (non-advancing, slowly

maturing) *Karmas*. There is no actual identification of *Karmas* conforming to these classes.

Udyotakara (AD 7th Century) in *Nyāyavārttika* 3.2.61 describes *vipāka* as *pūrvakṛtam vipākakāla aniyamat ihāmurta jātyantre*, indeterminate regarding the time of fruition of previous actions in this existence, in the next life or world or in future births. The previous *Karmas* give fruit only when the time is appropriate and give fruit when the remaining related factors are present and there are no adverse factors.

Jayanta in *Nyāyamañjari* (AD 880) maintains that the time for the fruition of *vihiṭa* (prescribed) *Karmas* cannot be settled: they mature at different times: (i) some fructify immediately e.g. *yajñas* for rain, (ii) some fructify after the elapse of time e.g. *putreṣṭi yajña*, sacrifice for the birth of a son, and (iii) some fructify in heaven e.g. *jyotiṣṭoma*. According to Jayanta *niṣiddha* or prohibited *Karmas* fructify in the next world.

Manu (B.C. 200-AD 100) in his *Smṛti* XII 20-21 introduces the concept of balancing of good and evil, credit and debit. He says: "If he had done greater good than evil in life, he should enjoy the pleasures of paradise" and "If he had done greater evil than good in his life, he should suffer pangs of *yama*"—*yamayātanā*.

The *Yogasūtra bhāṣya* ii.13 says that the *Karmāśayas* (latent deposits of different *Karmas*, both *Kuśala*, meritorious, and *akuśala*, demeritorious) get amalgamated into the single impulse (*ekapraghaṭṭakena*) or rolled together into one lump (*sammūrchita*) and thereafter it fructifies. This single impulse manifests itself in two phases, in this life with the three fruits or results viz. type of birth (*jāti*), length of life (*āyuh*) and experience (*bhoga*, pleasure and pain) and in rebirth hereafter. The former which manifests itself within a determinate time is the dominant *Karma* impulse, whereas the *Karma* which ripens in an indeterminate time is called subordinate: the dominant *Karma* fruitifies immediately, the subordinate *Karmas* give result after some delay. Veda Vyāsa specifically avers that "A single mass (*samūhin*) made of merit destroys evil (mass)". Udyotakara maintains that the fruition of *Karmas* can be arrested through the intensity of maturing *Karmas*. Vācaspati Miṣra (AD 9th Century) states that a single mass made of merit (*śukla Karma*) is more powerful than dark (*Kṛṣṇa*) and dark-bright (*Kṛṣṇa śukla*)

latent deposits, hence destroys the latter. The subordinate *Karma* is exhausted through maturation over a period of time, or by being 'cast' into dominant *Karma*.

Samkara³⁰ in his *bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* III.2.38 while maintaining that the lord of all (*sarvādhyakṣaḥ*) causes the fruition of *Karmas* (*Karmānurūpamphalam*), yet has to take into account the difference of place and time (*deśa* and *kāla*).

The role of *Kāla* (Time) and of *puruṣāratha* (human effort) as set out in the *Mahābhārata* (*Mbh*) (BC 5th-AD 4th Century) reveals the doubts and reservations in the minds of Brahmanical scholars about the precise manner in which *Karmas* fructify. The relevant *parvas* XII & XIII are later additions to the original epic.

The *Mbh* XII 224.32.33.45 & 54 poses the question: a good man born in a good family is seen to suffer, while a bad man born in a low family is seen to lead a life of happiness. This is attributed to *Kāla* (Time) which brings about ups and downs in life. *Mbh*. XII 33.19 says that *Kāla* is the witness, that is proof, of the good and evil deeds of beings: *Karma sūtrātmakam vidhi sākṣīnām śubhaḥpāpayo*.

Mbh. XII 3.22 makes *Kāla* and not *Karma* as the causative force. "Just as an instrument is under the control of the blacksmith, likewise *Karmas* through the agency of *Kāla*, Time, endow universe with life". *Karmaṇā Kālayuktena tathen ceṣṭate jagat*.

The *Mahābhārata* also identifies *daiva* or destiny with previously accumulated *Karmas* and discusses the relative role of *daiva* and *puruṣāratha*. *Mbh*. XIII 6.7 says: "Just as seeds remain barren unless sown in a field, likewise destiny or fate or past *Karmas* cannot achieve anything without human effort". *Mbh* XIII 6.22 says: *Kṛtaḥ puruṣkārastu daivamavanuvartate na daivamkṛte Kiñcit kasyacid*: Human effort follows destiny or fate (*daiva*), that is, destiny is moulded by human effort. Without effort, *daiva* or destiny cannot give anything to anyone). *Mbh*. XIII 6.4.7 observes: *na ca phalati vikrama jīva loke na daivam*. *Vyāpanayati vimārgam nāsti daiva prabhutvam*: In this human world, those who do not make effort cannot succeed or prosper: *daiva* or destiny is not powerful that it can make a person give up the wrong path. In the same verse it is said: *nayati puruṣkāraḥ sarñcītastra tatra*: it is accumulated human effort that takes a human being here and there.

The *Vaiṣṇavadharmaṣarva* of the *Mbh* XIII 6.28, XIV 92 also emphasises that any actions done previously may be rendered ineffective by

- (i) intense human effort *Mbh* XIII 6.28;
- (ii) by *sandhyā* prayers *Mbh*. XIII;
- (iii) by *tapas* (austerities), *yajña karma* (sacrifices) and *dāna* charity (*Mbh*. XII 35.1 & XII 35.41);
- (iv) by *bhakti* (devotion) *Mbh* XIV 92). It is also averred *Mbh* XIII that an excellent good action or a serious evil deed can destroy quickly a minor evil or a minor good deed.

Caraka Samhita (AD 4th Century) III (*Vimānasthāna*) 333 avers: Weak *daiva* (destiny) is subdued by human effort (*puruṣkāra*); likewise human effort (*karma*) is subdued by powerful *daiva*.

It would be evident from the above that *Karma vipāka* is dependent upon *Kāla* and *puruṣāratha*; it is not automatic either in this life or in the life hereafter. Does it mean that in the absence of *puruṣāratha*, human effort, a person will not experience the results of his good & evil deeds of previous lives?

To sum up (a) The Buddhists held (i) that each *Karma* fructifies independently, (ii) that an identical *Karma* may yield different fruits to different individuals depending upon the respective stocks of *Karmas* and the intensity of repentance for any misdeed, (iii) that good deeds are more powerful and longer lasting than evil deeds but they take long time to mature whereas evil deeds fructify quickly, (iv) some *Karmas* have greater energy potential, being productive or destructive, while others are only supportive or counteractive, (v) good *Karmas* are transferable, (vi) the time of fruition of *Karmas* is really indeterminable as the *Karmas* which bear fruit in this life or next life were left unspecified.

(b) The Jaina view point is materially similar. They hold that only the basic or fundamental *Karma* types or their derivatives are amalgamated producing a resultant *Karma* of particular type or class though the scope for conversion of a derived *Karma* into another derived *Karma* of the same basic class is limited; that good and evil do not cancel or neutralise each other consistent with their belief in the inescapable and inexorable nature of *Karmas*. Jainism is also distinguished by the belief that *tapas* or bodily mortification can

prematurely and consciously exhaust the accumulated *Karmas* and thereby alter the normal operation of *Karma vipāka*.

(c) The Brahmanical texts postulate that (i) evil *Karmas* fructify quicker than good *Karmas*, (ii) the maturing of *Karmas* can be hastened through special practices, (iii) the good and evil *Karmas* are amalgamated and only the resultant *Karma*, depending upon the relative 'mass' of good and evil *Karma*, bears fruit. This implies mutual neutralisation and reinforcement of the potential of *Karmas*. (iv) The dominant *Karmas* are experienced in the life in which they are committed whereas the 'subordinate' *Karmas*, whose fructification is indeterminate, mature slowly. The dominant *Karmas* determine the type of birth and length of life and may also produce happiness or unhappiness. The subordinate *Karmas*, however, bring about states of happiness or unhappiness only. (v) *Karmas* ripen only when other related factors like time (*Kāla*), place etc are suitable or congenial. (vi) *Karmas* do not fructify by themselves; for making them bear fruit, *puruṣāratha*, human effort is required. In other words mere good *Karma* is not enough, human effort is essential for obtaining the fruit of one's past *Karmas*.

It would be abundantly clear that *Karma vipāka* was a very fluid, nay nebulous, concept. The doctrine of *Karma* at the macro level was a very lofty concept providing a most rational explanation of inequality and suffering in life and a most powerful *raison d'être* for ethical discipline. But at the micro level, the doctrine of *Karma vipāka* exposed its serious limitations: when and how do *Karmas* mature, do they mature severally or collectively and do good and evil *Karmas* react on one another? Is human effort an essential condition for maturing of past *Karmas*? Are *Karmas* matured prematurely through *tapas*? It reduced the doctrine of *Karma* from a law of moral causation to a theorem, an *ipse dixit*.

No wonder that the *Bhagavadgītā* IV.17 proclaimed: *gahanā karmaṇo gatiḥ*: the working of *Karma* is mysterious; Nyāyavaiśeṣikas called *Karma* as *adr̥ṣṭa*. *Veda Vyāsa* in *Yogabhāṣya* ii,13 says that *Karma* is mysterious and not easily discernible; Udyotakara *ibid* 3.261 admits that the operation of *Karmas* is incomprehensible and cannot be determined by human beings in advance. Vācaspati Miśra in *Tattvavaiśārādī* emphasises: "even a very clever man could not determine the order of results". *Milindapañha* 4.4.1 calls *Karma*

vipāka as *acintyā* unthinkable. Haribhadrasūri in *Śāstravārtāsamuccaya* 91 & 107 considers, *inter alia*, *adr̥ṣṭa* and *Karma* as synonyms.

The *Vasantarāja Śākunam* (AD 12th Century) 17 sums up succinctly: “Here there is no rule by which people’s previous *Karma* produces particular effects under the influence of place and time. What indeed is the relation between those two things which are not immediately connected”?

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¹ Monier Williams: *Sanskrit English Dictionary*.

² *Tattvārthasūtra* of Vācaka Umāsvāti (tr) K. K. Dixit, Ahmedabad 1974, and *Sarvārthasiddhi* or Pūjyapāda (ed. & tr) by Phool Chandra Jain, Bharatiya Jnanapeeth. An earlier *Sūtra* 2.45 uses the word *upabhoga* in the sense of experiencing the consequences of accumulated *Karmas*.

³ Rahula Sankritayana (ed) *Abhidharma Kośa* of *Vasubandhu*, Varanasi 1931.

⁴ N. Dutt (ed) *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, Patna 1966.

⁵ P. Maung Tin: *The Path of Purity*, P.T.S. 1931.

⁶ Quoted in H. Ui: *Vaiśeṣika Philosophy*, London 1917, p. 218 Note 21. It is preserved in Chinese.

⁷ K. L. Joshi (ed) *Brahmasūtra Samkara Bhāṣya*, Delhi 1981 Vol. II & G. Thibaut’s translation of *Vedāntasūtra*, *SBE* Vol. XXXVIII, Delhi 1962 (reprint).

⁸ *Prāśastapādabhāṣya* with commentary *Nyāyakandali* of Śrīdharabhaṭṭa, Varanasi 1963, p. 676.

⁹ Quoted by B. C. Law: *Heaven & Hell in Buddhist Perspective*, Delhi 1973 (reprint), p. 86.

¹⁰ Quoted by B. C. Law: *ibid*, pp. 19-21.

¹¹ N. Dutt: *ibid*, p. 72.

¹² Ramshankar Tripathi and Thubten Chogdup (ed & tr) *Trinśikā Vijñāp-timātratāsiddhi*, with the *Bhāṣya* of Sthirmati, Varanasi 1972.

¹³ H. Jacobi: *The Jaina Sūtras*, *SBE* Vol. XLV, London 1895.

¹⁴ Gyan Chand: *Vipāka sūtram (Śrutam)*, Ludhiana 1952.

¹⁵ Each of these types of *Karmas* is further subdivided. Again some *karmas* fructify in the process of transmigration (*vigrahagati*), some fructify in this life and others in various existences (*bhavas*).

¹⁶ *Vaśiṣṭha* (B.C. 500-300) XX 43-44; *Manu* (B.C. 200-AD 100) XI.48-53, XII 32-72; *Yājñavalkya* (AD 100-300) III 131, III 206-21; *Viṣṇu* XLIII 23-45; XLIV 1-45 and XLV 1-33.

¹⁷ R. C. Hazra: *Puranic Record on Hindu Rites and Customs*, Dacca 1940.

¹⁸ Regarding the *Purānas* dealing with the subject, see *Vāyu* 101.115-145, 175-192; *Brahmānda* Pt. III 4.2 145-191; *Mārkaṇḍeya* XI 22-25, XII, XIV 16-18 XIV 23-31, 37-95, XV; *Viṣṇupurāṇa* II 6-1-10, 32; *Bhāgavat* 3.30. 4,5, 20-27, 32; 3.31, 43, 3.32, 3-4; 5.26. 3 & 37; 7.13-23-241; *Agni* 352. Among the late *purānas* *Garuḍa* II.32.72-80, 125-126; *Brahmavaivarta* XXVI 11-31, XXIX 1-6; *Vāmana* 12.

¹⁹ G. Thibaut: *ibid*.

²⁰ See also Rhys Davids: *The Dialogues of the Buddha*, S.B.E., PTS 1899, Vol. I, Text II.54.

²¹ I. B. Horner: *Milinda Questions*, P.T.S. 1963, Vol. I, p. 268 fn 2. *Milindaपाणि* is dated to AD 1 Century. But Chapters IV to VII are late additions. See M. Winternitz: *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, Vol. II, Calcutta 1933, pp. 175-77.

²² H. C. Warren: *Buddhism in Translations*, New York 1963, pp. 221-226.

²³ See also Warren: *ibid*, pp. 218-221.

²⁴ N. Aiyaswami Sastri (ed & tr) *Satyasiddhi Śāstra*, Oriental Institute Baroda, 1975.

²⁵ H. C. Warren: *ibid*, p. 245-46; P. Maung Tin: *The Path of Purity*, P.T.S. 1931.

²⁶ S. Z. Aung: *Compendium of Philosophy*, P.T.S. 1910.

²⁷ Other classifications of *Karmas* are: (x) Weighy *Karma*, proximate *Karma*, chronic *Karma* & outstanding *Karma*; (y) Bad *Karma*, Good *Karma* in *Kāmaloka*. Good *Karma* in *Rūpaloka* and Good *Karma* in *Arūpaloka*. The latter are enumerated by *Dhammamattasāṅgaha*.

²⁸ As Sukhlalji in his commentary on the *Tattvārthasūtra* points out that an *anubhava* yields fruit in conformity to the nature of that very *Karma* in which it itself resides—not in conformity to the nature of any other *Karmas*. For example, the *anubhava* residing in *jñānavārnīya Karma* yields a more or less intense fruit in conformity to the nature of this *Karma* type, that it performs the task of concealing *jñāna*; on the other hand it does not yield fruit in conformity to the nature of other *Karma*—types like *darśanāvārnīya*, *vedanīya* etc.; the rule of *anubhāvabandha*, according to which fruit is yielded in conformity to the nature of the *Karma* concerned applied only to the derivate ones. It is possible to convert a derivate *Karma* type belonging to same basic *Karma* type by mental exertion. For example *matijñānāvārṇa* may be converted into a collateral derivate *śrutijñānāvārṇa*. Even among the derivative *Karma*-types, there are such as do not get converted into one another. For example *darśanamoha* does not get converted into *caritramoha* or vice-versa; similarly *nārakāyus* does not get converted into *tiryak-āyus* or any other type of *ayus*.

²⁹ J. H. Woods: *The Yoga System of Pātāñjali*, Delhi 1977 (reprint) with the *Yogabhāṣya* of Veda Vyāsa and explanation *Tattvavaiśārādī* of Vācaspati Miśra.

³⁰ G. Thibaut (tr) *Vedānta Sūtras* with *Samkarabhāṣya*, S.B.E. XLII, New Delhi 1965.