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RAVĀNA-BHĀŚYA

BY

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There is a tradition that a commentary called Rāvaṇa-Bhāṣya on Kaṇḍāda’s Vaiśeṣika sūtras was written by an ancient philosopher called Rāvaṇa and that this work preceded the famous commentary by Praśastapāda on the same sūtras, which has been preserved under the name Padārtha-dharmas-aṅgagraha and generally accepted as one of the most important basic works of the Vaiśeṣika system. The tradition about Rāvaṇa-Bhāṣya is supported by certain references which ought to carry considerable weight with all discerning critics.

In his commentary called Kīrāṇāvalī, on Praśastapāda’s Padārtha-dharmas-aṅgagraha, Udayanācārya (circa 984 A. D.) annotates the phrase Padārtha-dharmas-aṅgagraha as follows:

“पदार्थसूचनां इति ॥ पदार्थां विन्दुयायः । त एवं परस्पर विस्मेवार्थोत्सवादीन शुद्धिन्ते, शास्त्र नानास्थानं विस्तारुपेये एकत्र साध्वित्व कष्टते । इति श्राहः । स प्रश्चो वेदान्त । प्रकृतिज्ञोऽन्योऽस्मिन दशतितवाद । शाश्वत्व धार्मिकृतवादमानोऽस्मिन अक्षरवाद । भायव्य स्थितिर्लावः प्रकृतादीनां वैदेशिकावः ॥”

Benares Sanskrit Series, Kīrāṇāvalī, page, 5.
Padmanābhamiśra, who flourished in the latter part of the 16th century, has the following note in his Kīrāṇāvalī-Bhāṣākara, a commentary on Udayana’s Kīrāṇāvalī, with reference to the concluding part of the extract given above.

“प्रकृतिर्विशुद्धिसृवासिनैवसममकर्षितम् । सूचवाह ॥”

Padmanābhamiśra is an authority on the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika systems, who cannot be easily brushed aside. According to him and according to Udayana’s Kīrāṇāvalī as interpreted by him, Praśastapāda should be understood to have presupposed Rāvaṇa’s...
Bhāṣya which was too big and extensive to be controlled by ordinary readers, and should therefore be taken to have designed his own work as a comprehensive treatise of an epitomical type (saṅgraha), though Udayana, Śrīdhara and later exponents of the Vaiṣeṣika system would unhesitatingly apply the designation—Bhāṣya—to Praṣāstapāda's work as well, chiefly, perhaps, in view of Praṣāstapāda’s rank as a rṣi.

Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, in his Bhāṣya on 2-2-11 of the Brahma-sūtras, makes the following statements in the course of his exposition of Paramāṇu-Kāraṇa-vāda:—

“यदापि दे ब्रह्मके चतुर्युक्तारभें, तदापि समान द्वारक्रमकारणसाध्योऽगुणानासमन्यवर्भवति। अणुरहक्लणं तु द्वारक्रमादात्यनी अपि नैवार्यते, चतुर्युक्तस्य महावद्यीपसर्गमयोऽपि परमाणुवाति। यदापि बहुधा परमाणाद्वैहि वा द्वारक्रमावहि वा परमाणु: कार्यमयाति तदापि समाना योजना ॥”

With reference to the first sentence in the above extract, Ratnaprabha has the following note:—

“प्रकटिकारकातः ब्रह्माण्यं द्वारक्रमारे गौरवं द्वारक्रमे तथा हेतुः प्राचे मान सर्वत्राद्वर्यात्मकः इत्य वारण्यातीति महत्ये द्वारे स्वतः प्रत्येकायतीति चिरान्तद्वैराधिपतियें भाष्यिकाहः।”

In the course of his exposition of the Vaiṣeṣika doctrine, Śaṅkara relies upon Kaṇḍāda’s sūtras and Praṣāstapāda’s Bhāṣya. As the author of the Prakaṭārtha-vivaraṇa rightly points out, Śaṅkara seems to utilise also the theories of older Vaiṣeṣikas like Rāvaṇa. The first sentence in the above extract from Śaṅkara’s Bhāṣya would present an insuperable difficulty, if one should proceed to interpret it in the light of what Praṣāstapāda has said about the formation of dvyāṅaks, trṣyaṅkas and caturāṅkas from paramaṇas. According to Praṣāstapāda, Udayana, Śrīdhara and all the later Vaiṣeṣikas, two paramaṇas or atoms combine to form a binary product (dvyaṅka); three dvyāṅkas or apus combine to form a ternary product (trṣyaṅka); and four trṣyaṅkas or trūṭīs combine to form a quaternary product (caturāṅka). According to the Vaiṣeṣika authorities, it is only in this that the difference in the parimāṇa or size of a dvyaṅka and a trṣyaṅka may be accounted for, though the size in both of these cases is the result of the saṅkhya of the component parts. Śaṅkara, however, says that two dvyāṅkas form the component parts of a caturāṅka. This remark is not consistent with the atomic theory as set forth by Iraṣṭapāda and his followers. Vācaspatimisra, in his Bhāmati, seeks to forcibly dragoon Śaṅkara’s text into Praṣāstapāda’s mould, by suggesting an emendation to the effect that “यदापि दे ब्रह्मके” in the text of Śaṅkara quoted above ought to be read as “यदापि दे ब्रह्मके”.

The alternative explanation which Vācaspatimisra suggests in his Bhāmati on the text of Śaṅkara under consideration is in no sense less strained than the emendation referred to. Vācaspatimisra must have reconciled himself to the idea of doing so much violence to Śaṅkara’s text in this connection, either because he was not familiar with the views of earlier Vaiṣeṣikas like Rāvaṇa or because he deliberately sought to ignore those views perhaps for the reason that he considered them quite untenable. It is difficult to accept the former of these two alternatives, having due regard to the fact that Vācaspatimisra was a polymathic philosopher of encyclopaedic knowledge. What Ratnaprabha has said in explaining of the text of Śaṅkara under consideration has been verified by me and found correct, after consulting the manuscript of the Prakaṭārtha-vivaraṇa, which was acquired by me several years ago for the Govt. Oriental Manuscripts Library, Madras, through a peripatetic party working under me. It may be useful to note here that the author of the commentary called Prakaṭārtha-vivaraṇa on Śaṅkara’s Brahma-sūtra-Bhāṣya, generally maintains the view of Suresvara and Prakāśātman and differs from Maṇḍana and Vācaspatimisra, not hesitating to expose, wherever possible, the weak points in Vācaspati’s Bhāmati. The tradition regarding Rāvaṇa’s Bhāṣya on the Vaiṣeṣika sūtras, which the author of the Prakaṭārtha-vivaraṇa relies upon, must be fairly earlier than the 13th century A.D., when Anandagiri who used the Prakaṭārtha-vivaraṇa in one of his works, flourished.

1. The passage in the Prakaṭārtha runs as follows:—

प्रतिमाणायेकृततम्याररमणाय व्यावहारितस्त्वायेव जितस्तनैशिष्यकायुपयाहारायणमायायां—क्षेत्रो द्वारे। तताशि—रायवैधानि माठे द्वारे इति: ‘यदापि दे ब्रह्मके द्वारक्रमादात्यनी यत्र प्रत्येकायस्त बालम’ इति।

P. 278 of the Madras Manuscript of the Prakaṭārtha

1. Vide page xiv of the late Mr. Tripathi’s introduction to Anandagiri’s Tarāṣaṅgraha published as No. iii of the Gaekward’s Oriental Series.
assigned to a date not later than that of Ratnakara. These
evidences might well support the belief that Rāvana-Bhāṣya
on the Vaiśeṣika-sūtras might have been earlier than Praśasta-
pāda's Padartha-dharma-saṅgaha. It would be thus quite
reasonable to suggest that Praśastapāda did not proceed to write
a Bhāṣya in the usual style but wrote only an epitomical treatise,
perhaps because he felt the pre-existing Rāvana-Bhāṣya would
render another Vaiśeṣika-Bhāṣya superfluous. Though the fact
that there was a Vaiśeṣika-Bhāṣya ascribed to Rāvana can no
longer be doubted, still the name Kaṭandī occurring in the
Anargharāghava requires further confirmation before it could be
accepted as the original name which Rāvana-Bhāṣya bore.

In this connection, it may not be out of place to invite
attention to the manner in which Buddhist tradition connects
the name of Rāvana, the Lord of Laṅkā, with one of the oldest
texts of the Buddhists, called the Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra. The following
quotation is given in the footnote 35 to page 252 of Vol. ii of
Beal's Buddhist Records of the Western Countries:— "The second
treatise or sūtra in the fifth volume of the Mdo is entitled in
Sanskrit ' Aya-Laṅkāvatāra-mahāyāna-sūtra ', a venerable sūtra
of high principles on the visiting of Laṅkā. This was delivered
at the request of the Lord of Laṅkā by Śākya, when he was in the
city of Laṅkā on the top of the Malay mountain on the seashore,
together with many priests and Bodhisattvas." This association,
legendary as it may be, of Rāvana's name with Buddhism and
the similar association of the same name with the oldest Vaiśeṣi-
ka-Bhāṣya may be considered together with the way in which
Praśastapāda's Bhāṣya came to completely supersede the earlier
Rāvana-Bhāṣya. Such considerations may lend support to the
conjecture that the earlier Rāvana-Bhāṣya was perhaps dominat-
ed by atheistic and pro-Buddhist proclivities, such as might have
been quite in keeping with the text of the Vaiśeṣika sūtras, and
with the spirit of the tradition characterising the Vaiśeṣikas as
ardha-vaināśikas, while the work of Praśastapāda gave the
Vaiśeṣika system a theistic turn and presented its doctrines in
an anti-Buddhist Āśīka setting.

When I was at Lahore in November, 1928, in connection with the
Fifth All-India Oriental Conference, I happened to see in the Lalchand
Library there a manuscript of the Rg-Veda-pada-pāṭha attributed to
Rāvana. It is not yet present possible to connect the author of this Vedic
work with the author of the Vaiśeṣika-Bhāṣya attributed to Rāvana.