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What was Śaṅkara's śāstrārambha?*

(published in: *Śāstrārambha. Inquiries into the Preamble in Sanskrit*. Ed. Walter Slaje. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. 2008. (Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, 62.) Pp. 121-130)

Śaṅkara, in his Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya, refers a few times to the beginning of his Śāstra, using the expressions *śāstrārambha* and *śāstrapramukha*. There has been controversy about the meaning of these expressions. This controversy concerns the question, “Which was the beginning of Śaṅkara's Śāstra?” But another question looms behind it, viz., “Which was Śaṅkara's Śāstra?”

Recall that Śaṅkara presents his philosophy as a form of Mīmāṃsā. He calls it Vedāntamīmāṃsā (never Uttaramīmāṃsā). Śaṅkara was, of course, acquainted with the other kind of Mīmāṃsā, i.e. ritual Mīmāṃsā, which is sometimes called Pūrvamīmāṃsā (though not by Śaṅkara). This raises the question whether he looked upon the two Mīmāṃsās as being together one Śāstra or two. Śaṅkara's position on this issue is not immediately clear from his writings. Scholars have therefore tried to draw conclusions from the few passages that refer to the beginning of his Śāstra. If Śaṅkara, when using the expression “beginning of the Śāstra”, turns out to refer to texts of ritual Mīmāṃsā, the conclusion will be justified that the two Mīmāṃsās together, in Śaṅkara's opinion, were but one Śāstra.

Śaṅkara uses the expression *śāstrapramukha* in the following passage, which is part of his comments on Brahmasūtra 3.3. 53 (*eka ātmanaḥ śarīre bhāvāt*):[□]

*nanu śāstrapramukha eva prathame pāde śāstraphalopabhogayogyasya
 dehavyatiriktasyātmano 'stītvam uktam/ satyam uktam bhāṣyakṛtā/ na tu tatrātmāstitve
 sūtram asti/ iha tu svayam eva sūtrakṛtā tadastītvam ākṣepapurāḥsaram pratiṣṭhāpitam/
 ita eva cākṛṣyācāryeṇa śabarāsvāminā [122] pramāṇalakṣaṇe varṇitam/ ata eva ca
 bhagavatopavarṣeṇa prathame tantre ātmāstitvābhīdhānaprasaktau śārīrake vakṣyāma
 ity uddhāraḥ kṛtaḥ/*

[Objection:] Has the existence of a self that is different from the body and capable of enjoying the fruit of the Śāstra not [already] been stated at the very beginning of the Śāstra, in the first Pāda?

[Answer:] That is true; it has been stated by the author of the Bhāṣya. But there (i.e., at

* This article is essentially an extract of the portions dealing with *śāstrārambha* and *śāstrapramukha* in a longer article, “Vedānta as Mīmāṃsā” (2006), published in a volume of the proceedings of the 12th World Sanskrit Conference, Helsinki 2003.

¹ BSūBhā on sūtra 3.3.53 (ed. J. L. Shastri p. 764 l. 9 - p. 765 l. 1); cp. Parpola, 1981: 153.

the beginning of the Śāstra) there is no sūtra about the existence of a self. Here (i.e., in Brahmasūtra 3.3.53), on the other hand, the existence of the [self] has been established, after an initial objection, by the author of the Sūtra himself. And having taken it from here itself, Ācārya Śabaravāmin has described [the existence of the self] in [the section] dealing with the means of valid cognition. Therefore also the revered Upavarṣa in the first Tantra, when he had to discuss the existence of the self, contented himself with saying: ‘We shall explain this in the Śārīraka’.

Hermann Jacobi (1911: 18 [576]) concluded from this passage that that “at Śabaravāmin's time the Pūrva and Uttara Mīmāṃsā still formed *one* philosophical system, while after Kumārila and Śāṅkara they were practically two mutually exclusive philosophies”. Is this conclusion justified? It depends on the precise meaning of several terms used in this passage. What, to begin with, is meant by the expression “at the very beginning of the Śāstra, in the first Pāda” (*śāstrapramukha eva prathame pāde*). Is it the same as “in the first Tantra” (*prathame tantrē*), later on in the passage? Since “the first Tantra” is explicitly contrasted with and therefore differentiated from “the Śārīraka” — the Śārīraka being no doubt Upavarṣa's planned (or executed) commentary on the Brahmasūtra —, it seems safe to conclude that “the first Tantra” is the Mīmāṃsāsūtra (or Upavarṣa's commentary on it).² Many interpreters identify “the very beginning of the Śāstra” with [123] Mīmāṃsāsūtra 1.1.5.³ But is this correct? Why should our short passage refer to one and the same discussion in three different ways: (i) “at the very beginning of the Śāstra, in the first Pāda”, (ii) “in [the section] dealing with the means of valid cognition” and (iii) “in the first Tantra”?

We have to find out what Śāṅkara meant by “the beginning of the Śāstra”. Related to this is the question whether Śāṅkara looked upon Mīmāṃsāsūtra and Brahmasūtra as together constituting one Śāstra, or as two different Śāstras. Jacobi, followed by Parpola (1981), invoke this passage to prove that the two together were originally one Śāstra, but their proof may be, at least in part, circular: The two disciplines were originally one because Śāṅkara refers to the Mīmāṃsāsūtra as “the beginning of the Śāstra”, and “the beginning of the Śāstra” must refer to the Mīmāṃsāsūtra because the two disciplines were originally one. How do we get out of this circular argument?

There is another passage in Śāṅkara's Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya which may throw light on his understanding of his own Śāstra. It occurs under sūtra 1.1.4 and contains the expression *śāstrārambha*:⁴

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² Cf. Kane, HistDh 5(2), p. 1160: “Śāṅkarācārya refers to the extant Pūrvamīmāṃsā as Dvādaśalakṣaṇī in his bhāṣya on Vedāntasūtra III.3.26, as ‘Prathamatantra’ in bhāṣya on V.S. III.3.25, III.3.53 and III.4.27, as Prathama-kāṇḍa in bhāṣya on V.S. III.3.1, III.3.33, III.3.44, III.3.50, as Pramāṇalakṣaṇa in bhāṣya on V.S. [2.1.1 and] III.4.42.” Similarly Kane, 1960: 120.

³ E.g. Deussen, 1887: 624; Thibaut, 1890/1896: II: 268; Gambhirananda, 1972: 740; Hiriyanna, 1925: 231; Kane, 1960: 120; Kane, HistDh 5(2), p. 1160; Parpola, 1981: 153; Ramachandrudu, 1989: 234-235; Bouy, 2000: 23 n. 92; Govindānanda and Ānandagiri on Brahmasūtra 3.3.53.

⁴ BSūBhā on sūtra 1.1.4 (ed. J.L. Shastri p. 98 l. 3-7).

evam ca sati "athāto brahmajijñāsā" iti tadviṣayaḥ pṛthakśāstrāmbha upapadyate/ pratipattividhiparatve hi "athāto dharmajijñāsā" ity evārdhatvān na pṛthakśāstram ārabhyeta/ ārabhyamāṇam caivam ārabhyate: "athātaḥ pariśiṣṭadharmajijñāsā" iti, "athātaḥ kratvarthapurūṣārthayor jijñāsā" itivat/ brahmātmaikyāvagatis tv apratijñātetī tadartho yuktaḥ śāstrārambhaḥ "athāto brahmajijñāsā" iti/

Such being the case, it is proper to begin a separate Śāstra with the words "Then therefore the enquiry into Brahma" (Brahmasūtra 1.1.1) because it deals with that. For in case [this Śāstra] were to deal with injunctions that one has to know [Brahma], no separate Śāstra could be begun, because [the Śāstra of injunctions (viz. the Mīmāṃsāsūtra)] has already begun with the words "Then therefore the enquiry into Dharma" (Mīmāṃsāsūtra 1.1.1). Something that has already begun would begin like this "Then therefore the enquiry into the remaining Dharma", just like "Then therefore the enquiry into the purpose of the sacrifice and into the purpose [124] of man" (which is a sūtra (4.1.1) that introduces a chapter of the Mīmāṃsāsūtra). But because knowledge of the identity of Brahma and *ātman* has not been stated (in the Mīmāṃsā), the beginning of a [new] Śāstra in the form "Then therefore the enquiry into Brahma" in order to convey that [knowledge] is appropriate.

As the translation shows, this passage lends itself easily to an interpretation in which the Brahmasūtra belongs to a separate Śāstra (*pṛthakśāstra*), different from ritual Mīmāṃsā.

There is more. According to Śāṅkara in his comments on Brahmasūtra 3.3.53 which we studied above, "the existence of a self that is different from the body and capable of enjoying the fruit of the Śāstra has [already] been stated at the very beginning of the Śāstra, in the first Pāda". The very first Pāda of Śābara's Bhāṣya on the Mīmāṃsāsūtra does indeed contain a long passage dealing with the existence of the self (edited in Frauwallner, 1968: p. 50 l. 5 - p. 60 l. 23; translated pp. 51-61). This self is, as a matter of fact, stated to be different from the body, but the passage says nothing about its being "capable of enjoying the fruit of the Śāstra". The first Pāda of Śāṅkara's Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya, on the other hand, repeatedly deals with these issues. As a short example we can take the following statement from Śāṅkara's comments on Brahmasūtra 1.1.4:⁵

"aśarīram vāva santaṃ na priyāpriye sprśataḥ" iti priyāpriyasparśanapratiṣedhāc codanālākṣaṇadharmakāryatvaṃ mokṣākhyasyaśarīratvasya pratiśidhyata iti gamyate
From the denial of being affected by joy and sorrow expressed in the statement "Joy and sorrow do not affect the one without body" (Chāndogya Upaniṣad 8.12.1) we understand that the state of being without body, called liberation, is denied to be the effect of Dharma characterised as injunction.

The "one without body" is the self. The present passage tells us that this self, which is without body, is capable of enjoying the fruit of the Śāstra, viz. liberation.

As an example of a short passage dealing with the existence of the self we can quote from Śāṅkara's comments on Brahmasūtra 1.1.1:⁶

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⁵ BSūBhā on sūtra 1.1.4 (ed. J.L. Shastri p. 72 l. 1-3).

⁶ BSūBhā on sūtra 1.1.1 (ed. J.L. Shastri p. 43 l. 1-2).

*sarvo hy ātmāstitvaṃ pratyeti, na nāham asmīti/ yadi hi nātmāstitvaprāsiddhiḥ syāt
sarvo loko nāham asmīti pratīyāt/*

For everyone is conscious of the existence of (his) self, and never thinks 'I am not'. If the existence of the self were not known, every one would think 'I am not'. (tr. Thibaut, 1890/1896: I: 14)

There are therefore good reasons to interpret the passage from Śāṅkara's Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya on sūtra 3.3.53 cited above in the following manner:

[Objection:] Has the existence of a self that is different from the body and capable of enjoying the fruits of the Śāstra not [already] been stated at the very beginning of the [present] Śāstra, in the first Pāda [of the Brahmasūtra and its Bhāṣya]?

[Answer:] That is true; it has been stated by the author of the [Brahmasūtra-]Bhāṣya (i.e., by Śāṅkara himself).⁷ But there (i.e., at the beginning of the Brahmasūtra) there is no sūtra about the existence of a self. Here (i.e., in Brahmasūtra 3.3.53), on the other hand, the existence of the [self] has been established, after an initial objection, by the author of the Sūtra himself. And having taken it from here itself, Ācārya Śābarasvāmin has described [the existence of the self] in [the section of the Mīmāṃsā Bhāṣya] dealing with the means of valid cognition. Therefore also the revered Upavaṛṣa in the first Tantra (i.e. in his commentary on the Mīmāṃsāsūtra), when he had to discuss the existence of the self, contented himself with saying: 'We shall explain this in the Śārīraka'.

This way of understanding Śāṅkara's reference to the first Pāda agrees with the way in which he refers to the first, second and third Adhyāyas. Wherever in his Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya he refers to Adhyāyas, they are Adhyāyas of his Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya (or of the Brahma-[126]sūtra), numbered according to the position they have in his own work. Śāṅkara refers to the "first Adhyāya" at the very beginning of the second Adhyāya of his Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya; here there can be no doubt that it concerns the first Adhyāya of the Brahmasūtra (Bhāṣya), not of ritual Mīmāṃsā. Similarly, the "second Adhyāya" referred to at the very beginning of the third Adhyāya and under Brahmasūtra 2.1.1 clearly refers to Śāṅkara's own second chapter (or to that chapter of the Brahmasūtra). The same applies to the "third Adhyāya" referred to at the beginning of chapter four and under Brahmasūtra 3.1.1.⁸

A few words remain to be said about Śābara. The above passage shows that, in Śāṅkara's opinion, Śābara took a topic, or a passage, which belonged under Brahmasūtra 3.3.53 and

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⁷ The use of the third person to refer to one's own work finds a parallel, e.g., in Maṇḍana Miśra's Brahmasiddhi (e.g. p. 75 l. 4: *vakṣyati*; p. 23 l. 17: *āha*), and is particularly common where an author has himself composed a commentary on his own work. Compare in this context Medhātithi's remark under Manu 1.4 (I p. 7 l. 28-29): *prāyeṇa granthakārāḥ svamataṃ parāpadeśeṇa bruvate: 'atrāha' 'atra pariharanti' iti* "it is a well known fact that in most cases the authors of Treatises state their own views as if emanating from other persons, making use of such expression as 'in this connection *he says*' or '*they meet this argument thus*', and so forth" (tr. Jha, III p. 20, modified). Nowhere else in his Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya does Śāṅkara mention an 'author of the Bhāṣya' (*bhāṣyakṛt*; see Mahadevan, 1971&1973: II: 723).

⁸ The fact that Bhāskara on sūtra 1.1.1 (ed. Dvivedin p. 6 l. 19-20) uses "in the first Pāda" where Śāṅkara says "in the first Tantra" (*ata evopavaṛṣācāryeṇoktaṃ prathamapāde ātmavādaṃ tu śārīrake vakṣyāma iti*) suggests that he already misinterpreted Śāṅkara.

placed it in his Mīmāṃsā Bhāṣya. The passage does not say what exactly he took, nor does it state that he took it from his own commentary on the Brahmasūtra.

Śaṅkara testimony loses most of its value in the light of Erich Frauwallner's (1968) analysis of Śabara's Bhāṣya on Mīmāṃsāsūtra 1.1.1-5. It is this portion of Śabara's Bhāṣya that contains a discussion of the self in a section dealing with the means of valid cognition, as noted by Śaṅkara. However, both the discussion of the self and the section on means of valid cognition in which it finds itself belong to the so-called Vṛttikāra-grantha. That is to say, they belong to a portion which Śabara's explicitly cites from another author, whom he calls the Vṛttikāra. No one, not even Śaṅkara, claims that the Vṛttikāra-grantha as a whole was taken from a commentary on Brahmasūtra 3.3.53; the fact that the Vṛttikāra-grantha comments several Mīmāṃsāsūtras excludes this as a possibility. Within the Vṛttikāra-grantha the section on the existence of the self is an insertion (Frauwallner, 1968: 109-110). This implies that if someone has taken this section from a commentary on Brahmasūtra 3.3.53, it was not Śabara, but the Vṛttikāra. It is therefore excluded that Śaṅkara still knew a commentary by Śabara on the Brahmasūtra which presumably contained the passage which is now part of the Vṛttikāra-grantha. Stated differently, it is open to question whether Śaṅkara knew more about Śabara than we do.

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This may not be all that surprising. Even Kumāṛila, who commented upon Śabara's Bhāṣya itself and is commonly regarded as having lived before Śaṅkara (Pande, 1994: 46-47), did no longer know the extent of the Vṛttikāra-grantha (Jacobi, 1911: 15 (573) f.).⁹ Śaṅkara's incorrect attribution of the discussion of the self to Śabara is therefore understandable. His claim to know where this passage came from, on the other hand, is no more reliable than this incorrect attribution.

Since Frauwallner's analysis may not be generally known, I cite here the most relevant passage (1968: 109-110):

Der ganze Vṛttikāragranthaḥ ist, im grossen gesehen, folgendermassen aufgebaut. Nach der Besprechung der Erkenntnismittel ergreift ein Gegner das Wort und bringt eine Reihe von Gründen gegen die Glaubwürdigkeit des Veda vor. Die späteren Kommentatoren nennen diesen Abschnitt Citrākṣepavādaḥ, weil der Gegner von der vedischen Vorschrift "*citrayā yajeta paśukāmaḥ*" ausgeht. Die Antwort lautet zunächst im Anschluss an das Sūtram 5, dass der Veda glaubwürdig ist wegen der Naturgegebenheit der Verknüpfung von Wort und Gegenstand. Das wird weit ausholend besprochen: Wesen des Wortes, Gegenstand des Wortes, Wesen der Verknüpfung und ihre Naturgegebenheit. Dann wird nochmal auf die Angriffe des Gegners im Citrākṣepaḥ zurückgegriffen und sie werden der Reihe nach widerlegt. Damit ist die ganze Auseinandersetzung abgeschlossen.

In die abschliessende Zurückweisung des Citrākṣepaḥ ist nun eine lange Erörterung über das Vorhandensein einer Seele eingefügt. Dass es sich dabei um einen sekundären Einschub handelt, zeigt schon das grobe Missverhältnis im Umfang dieses Einschubs gegenüber dem ganzen Abschnitt. Die ganze übrige Widerlegung des

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⁹ Yoshimizu (2006) shows that Kumāṛila subsequently changed his mind about the extent of the Vṛttikāra-grantha.

Citrākṣepaḥ umfasst nur 16 Zeilen, der Einschub 133 Zeilen. Ebenso krass ist die Äusserlichkeit der Einfügung. Auf diese lange Abschweifung folgt plötzlich ganz unvermittelt noch eine kurze Erwiderung auf einen der Einwände im Citrākṣepaḥ, so dass der Leser zunächst erstaunt fragt, wovon denn eigentlich die Rede ist.

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This analysis clearly shows that the portion on the soul is an insertion into the Vṛttikāragrantha, and not into Śabara's commentary. Śaṅkara obviously had it wrong.¹⁰

There is less reason to be sceptical with regard to Śaṅkara's statement about Upavaṛṣa. There is no reason to doubt that Śaṅkara knew a commentary by Upavaṛṣa on the Mīmāṃsāsūtra in which its author stated: "We shall explain [the existence of the self] in the Śārīraka". What does this prove?

It seems plausible to conclude from this that Upavaṛṣa commented, or intended to comment, on both the Mīmāṃsāsūtra and the Brahmasūtra. Does this mean that he "seems to have treated the two sets of aphorisms as one connected work" (Nakamura, 1983: 398 n. 4, referring to Belvalkar)? This is far from certain. We know that another author, Maṇḍana Mīśra, wrote treatises both on Mīmāṃsā and on Vedānta around the time of Śaṅkara, and yet it cannot be maintained that he treated the two sets of aphorisms as one connected work. Not much later Vācaspati Mīśra commented upon works belonging to a variety of schools of thought. The fact, therefore, that Upavaṛṣa commented (or wanted to comment) upon the classical texts of two schools of thought does not, in and by itself, prove that he looked upon these as fundamentally the same, or upon their classical texts as really being parts of one single text. Indeed, the very circumstance that he speaks in this connection of "the Śārīraka" suggests that he did not look upon that work as simply a later part of the same commentary. And the fact that Śaṅkara speaks about Upavaṛṣa's 'first Tantra' without further specification while referring to his commentary on the Mīmāṃsāsūtra may simply suggest that Śaṅkara did not know Upavaṛṣa's commentary on the Brahmasūtra.

The analysis of Śaṅkara's statements does not, therefore, provide us with reliable evidence that would allow to conclude that until Śaṅkara, and more particularly at the time of Upavaṛṣa and Śabara, the Mīmāṃsāsūtra and the Brahmasūtra were looked upon as parts of one single work. Even less do these statements prove that the two systems of thought that find expression in those texts were believed to be in reality just one system of thought. Śaṅkara's *śāstrārambha* [129] was the beginning of the Brahmasūtra with commentary, and his Śāstra was the Vedāntamīmāṃsā, not some hypothetical Mīmāṃsā that covered both Pūrva- and Uttara-Mīmāṃsā.

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¹⁰ Regarding Śaṅkara's date, see Slaje, 2006 fn. 1 (just before 700 C.E.). Slaje (fn. 61) also gives a survey of opinions as to Śabara's date, which does not however take into consideration that Śabara was not yet known to Bhartṛhari (Bronkhorst, 1989), so that it is highly unlikely that Śabara lived before the fifth century C.E.

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Abbreviations:

BSūBhā	Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkara
Kane, HistDh	Pandurang Vaman Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra, second edition, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 5 vols., 1968-1977