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TANTRA AND PRASAṄGA

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Tantra and Prasaṅga are two principles of Mīmāṃsā. Śabara on PMS 11.1.1 quotes a verse which defines them both:

*sādhāraṇaṃ bhavet tantraṃ parārthe tv aprayojakaḥ /
evam eva prasaṅgaḥ syād vidyamāne svake vidhau //*

Gaṅgānātha Jhā (p. 2080) translates this as follows:

That which is *common* is *Tantra*; it is not prompted by the needs of other things; so also is *Prasaṅga* (an extended *Tantra*), which has its own injunction present.

This translation is open to criticism. It connects the first two pādas of the verse and separates them off from the last two, whereas the masculine gender of *aprayojakaḥ* connects pāda *b* rather with *c* and *d* about Prasaṅga; only pāda *a* appears to be about Tantra. Yet this translation follows the intentions of Śabara who quotes the verse. This is clear from the fact that Śabara quotes only *c* and *d* under PMS 12.1.1, where he is going to deal with Prasaṅga in detail, introducing this with the words *prasaṅgaśabdārtho 'nyair uktaḥ* “the meaning of the word ‘Prasaṅga’ has by others been said to be ...”

It is also clear from the way Śabara explains the verse under PMS 11.1.1. Here he gives one example in connection with *ab*, another one for *cd*; and he makes a point of specifying the difference between *ab* and *cd*. Witness the following passage:

*sādhāraṇaṃ bhavet tantraṃ ity uktārtham / parārthe tv aprayojaka itī / yaḥ parārtham
utpannas tadartham eva cānuṣṭhīyamānaḥ parasyopakaroti, sa paras tasyāprayojakaḥ /
yathā paśvāmbho yāgārtham utpannas tadartham eva cānuṣṭhīyamāno
lohitaśakṛtkarmaṇor apy upakarotīti /
evam eva prasaṅgaḥ syāt / ayaṃ tu viśeṣaḥ / vidyamāne svake vidhāv itī / yady apy
asyānyo vidhir vidyate, paravidhānā tu kṛtārthatvān na kriyate / yathā prayājāḥ paśor
api codakena prāptāḥ paśupuroḍāśasyāpi / paśvarthā eva tu kṛtāḥ
paśupuroḍāśasyopakurvantīti na punas tadartham kriyante /*

‘*Sādhāraṇam bhavet tantram*’, *That which is common is ‘Tantra’*. — this has been already explained;¹ — ‘*Parārthe tv aprayojakaḥ*’, *‘It is not prompted by the needs of other things’*; — i.e. that which has been laid down for the sake of something else, and is [78] performed for the purposes of, and is helpful to, that thing, — is not prompted by any other thing; e.g. the *killing of the animal* is laid down for the sake of the *sacrifice*, and is performed for the purposes of the sacrifice, and it also helps in the acts of the ‘removal of blood and excreta’, though these latter are not the prompters of that *killing*.

‘*Evam eva prasaṅgaḥ syāt*’, *‘So also is Prasaṅga’*; but there is this difference that in the case of *Prasaṅga*, *its own injunction is present*; though there is another injunction of its own, yet, its purposes having been served by the injunction of the other thing (i.e. the common factor of the *Tantra*), it is not done over again (by virtue of its own separate injunction). For example, the *Prayājas* have their performance laid down by the injunction of the *Paśu-sacrifice* as also by the injunction of the ‘*Paśu-puroḍāśa*’; but when they are performed for the purposes of the *Paśu-sacrifice*, they help, by that same performance, the *Paśu-puroḍāśa* also — and are not performed again for the purposes of this latter (though there is a separate injunction to this effect).

(tr. Gaṅgānātha Jhā)

2. In order to get a clearer idea of the precise meanings of *Prasaṅga* and *Tantra*, we must look at the simple examples from common life which Śabara uses to illustrate their use. *Tantra* is illustrated by ‘a lamp placed amongst many Brahmins’ (*bahūnām brāhmaṇānām madhye kṛtaḥ pradīpaḥ*; on PMS 11.1.11), *Prasaṅga* by ‘a lamp placed in a house which also lightens the road outside’ (*pradīpasya prāsāde kṛtasya rājamārge ‘py ālokakaraṇam*; on PMS 12.1.1).

These illustrations bring out the main difference between *Tantra* and *Prasaṅga*. The lamp placed amongst many Brahmins is meant to give light to all of them; whereas the lamp in a house is not placed there in order to lighten the road. In the case of *Tantra* the multiple function is intentional; in the case of *Prasaṅga* the subordinate function is more or less accidental.

With this in mind we can look again at the verse cited by Śabara. Pādas *bc* can be translated:

Prasaṅga, on the other hand, is just like [*Tantra*] (*evam eva*), while not aiming at the other object.

Interpreted in this way, the lines agree perfectly with our understanding of *Prasaṅga*. The light in the house is just like the light amongst the Brahmins in that it lightens its different objects,

¹ Before quoting the verse, Śabara had already defined and illustrated *Tantra* as follows: *tatra yat sakṛt kṛtam bahūnām upakaroti tat tantram ity ucyate / yathā bahūnām brāhmaṇānām madhye kṛtaḥ pradīpaḥ /*

viz. the inside of the house as well as the road outside. The essential difference is that the light in the house ‘does not aim at the other object’, i.e. it is not meant to lighten the road. Note that in Śabara’s interpretation of the verse both Tantra and Prasaṅga do not aim at other objects. The essential difference for him consists in the fact that Prasaṅga has an own injunction.

[79]

3. It is not unlikely that the verse quoted by Śabara is derived from the work on Mīmāṃsā by Bhavadāsa, the only early work of this discipline known to have contained, or consisted of, verses. Bhavadāsa’s work is lost, but there is evidence that Bhartṛhari knew and used it, while it appears that Bhartṛhari was not acquainted with Śabara’s Bhāṣya.² Bhartṛhari knew and used the terms ‘Tantra’ and ‘Prasaṅga’. Let us see if and in how far this helps us to understand the verse under consideration.

Bhartṛhari defines Prasaṅga at the end of the first *Āhnika* of his commentary on the *Mahābhāṣya* (Ms 14b4-5, AL 45.4-5, Sw 54.2-3)

yady arthāprayojako ‘nyadvāreṇārthaṃ pratipadyate sa prasaṅga ity ucyate /

If [something], while not aiming at an object, attains [that] object through something else, that is called ‘Prasaṅga’.

This definition fits the illustration of the lamp in the house which lightens the road, as can easily be seen. It takes as the essential characteristic of Prasaṅga that it does not aim at the object concerned. This fits the verse quoted by Śabara, if only, unlike Śabara, we connect pādas *b* and *c*, as also required by grammar. This in its turn proves that this reading of Bhartṛhari’s text must be accepted as correct, with Swaminathan, and against Abhyankar and Limaye. What follows is, as usual, corrupt and hard to read, but the following reconstruction makes reasonably good sense (Ms 14b5-6, AL 45.5-7, Sw 54.3-5):

yathā bhojanārthī yaḥ prayojako ‘dhiśrayaṇasya ca vighasāsivadaprayojakaḥ / yo hi niṣṭhite ‘py anne punaḥ pācayet sa evaṃbhūto yadā tadarthaṃ bahvanam prasādhitam /

For example, someone wishing to eat aims [at that, but] does not [primarily] aim at [such constituent activities of cooking as] ‘putting on the fire’, as little as someone who eats the remains of food (*vighasāsīn*)³ [aims at these activities]. For [only someone] who has [food] cooked again even when food is ready, is such (i.e. aiming at ‘putting on the fire’ etc.), when for his sake much food is [again] prepared.

² See Bronkhorst, 1989.

³ For this type of asceticism, see Wezler, 1978.

Bhartṛhari then returns to the example which he had discussed earlier, viz., that the single act of pouring water on the roots of mango trees can serve the double purpose of watering the trees and satisfying the manes. The role of Prasaṅga here is explained as follows (Ms 14b7-8, AL 45.8-10, Sw 54.7-8):

*evam āmrāḥ pṛthak sekasya prayojakāḥ pitaro 'prayojakāḥ / tatra prayuktam
udakadānaṃ prasaṅgenānubhavantīti /*
[80]

The mango trees, similarly, instigate (*prayojaka*) the watering separately; the manes do not instigate (*aprayojaka*) [anything]. They experience the pouring of water in this case, instigated [by the mango trees], by virtue of Prasaṅga.

One thing is completely beyond doubt. Bhartṛhari considered *aprayojaka* 'not aiming, not instigating' the essential characteristic of Prasaṅga. It is therefore more than likely that he knew the verse quoted by Śabara, and, what is more, interpreted it correctly.

4. It is not clear why Śabara misinterpreted the verse the way he did. The immediate effect was that for him Tantra and Prasaṅga became identical but for the specification *vidyamāne svake vidhau* 'when there is an own injunction'. However, in another passage where the difference between Tantra and Prasaṅga is discussed, on PMS 12.1.3, he does not refer to this specification. One gets the impression that Śabara himself was not very clear about the precise meanings he wanted to assign to the two terms. We shall not pursue this question further at present.

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Abbreviations

- AL Abhyankar and Limaye's edition of Bhartṛhari's *Mahābhāṣya Dīpikā*
 Ms Manuscript of Bhartṛhari's *Mahābhāṣya Dīpikā*
 PMS *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā Sūtra*
 Sw Swaminathan's edition of Bhartṛhari's *Mahābhāṣya Dīpikā*