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A CONSERVATIVE APPROACH TO SANSKRIT ŚĀSTRAS: MADHUSŪDANA SARASVATĪ'S "*PRASTHĀNABHEDA*"

It is one of the most fascinating, and confusing, facts about the history of Hinduism that it displays both conservatism and adaptability to an almost mutually excluding degree.[1] As instruments for dealing with religious plurality these trends have been often described and the positions of some important authors about their application, that is the scope of the valid *dharma*, have been analyzed.[2] As a result the pre-history of the Indian concept of Hinduism can be formulated more precisely, and, as demonstrated by Halbfass,[3] the continuities and differences between the 'classical' positions of, for instance Śaṅkara, Kumārila or Jayanta, and the proponents of Neo-Hinduism, can be outlined.

One work that is often mentioned in this context is Madhusūdana Sarasvati's (16th century) *Prasthānabheda*, which addresses the issue of integrating various religious and philosophical systems within the framework of Vedism and would therefore hold as a forerunner for a modern conceptualization of Hinduism. Moreover this brief tract on the scriptural sources of knowledge (*prasthāna*),[4] has been one of the first texts known to Western Sanskritists to present a conspectus of the religious and philosophical literature of the "Great Tradition" within Hinduism. It has been utilized in the early phase of Indological research by Colerbrooke and Weber and continued to play a role in exploring the history of religious and philosophical Sanskrit Literature.[5] Although it would be difficult to estimate its influence on Classical Indology, the impact of the perspective it voices is indisputable.[6] Nevertheless the textual history of this work, its authorship and its context have been determined only insufficiently. Far from being a mere footnote on the study of this text, the pursuit of these questions yields a much clearer picture of the author's original intention.

An *editio princeps* of the *Prasthānabheda*, based on two mss. kept in London,[7] was produced by Weber in his *Indische Studien*,[8] and was followed by (at least) six reeditions,[9] of which the one in the appendix to the edition of the *Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha* in the *Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series* is perhaps the most wide-spread.[10]

P.C. Divanji had, already in 1933, briefly noted that the *Prasthānabheda* is not an independent work by Madhusūdana, but a redaction of a passage in the author's commentary on verse 7 of the *Śivamahimnastotra*;[11] nevertheless an analysis of the two versions, namely the independent *Prasthānabheda* (P) and the version within the *Madhusūdanī* (M)[12] will prove helpful, especially since some recent publications are utterly confused about this text.[13]

The *Prasthānabheda* starts, without a *maṅgala*-verse, with one sentence of introduction, upon which a listing and description of Vedic literature follows: *atha sarveṣāṃ śāstrāṇāṃ bhagavaty eva tātparyaṃ sākṣāt paramparayā veti samāsena teṣāṃ prasthānabhedo 'troddiśyate | tathāhi ṛgvedo yajurvedaḥ . . .* "All Śāstras have their final purport[14] in the Lord, either directly or indirectly; thus their division into [religious or philosophical] systems (*prasthāna*) is now explained as follows. These are: Ṛgveda, Yajurveda . . ."

The introduction in M (to be discussed below) is different, but now from the listing of the Vedas onwards both texts run parallel with mostly minor discrepancies.[15] I would regard the following as major differences:

1. After mentioning the eighteen sources of knowledge M reads *tā etā aṣṭādaśa vidyās **trayī sāṃkhyam** ity anenopanyastāḥ | anyathā nyūnatāprasaṅgāt |* (p. 21) This is a reference to the first line of verse 7 of the *Mahimnastotra* (see below). In P this passage is missing, which is logical, since P is not presented as a commentary, but as an independent work.

2. A long quotation which enumerates Upapurāṇas is contained only in P (p. 18). On the other hand only M provides a complete list of *munis* (p. 27) as authors associated with the "science of the 64 *kalās*", whereas P simply states that they were composed by several *munis*.

3. Following upon the description of the Pāśupatas only M adds a note on other Śaivas: *evaṃ śaivamantraśātram api pāśupataśāstrāntargatam eva draṣṭavyam* (p. 28). Likewise it is said there that the *vaiṣṇavamantraśāstra* is contained in the Pāñcarātra. Then a restricting remark is added: *vāmāgamādiśāstraṃ tu vedabāhyam eva* (p. 28).

4. A further discrepancy occurs in the passage in which, according to the version in P, it is stated that "the aim of all authors of *prasthānas* is in the highest Lord who is to be propounded". (*sarveṣāṃ prasthānakartṛṇāṃ munīnāṃ . . . parameśvara eva pratipādye tātparyam*, p. 23) The word *pratipādye* does not make much sense,

since the remark is near the end of the text. It is probably no more than a clumsy attempt to edit out the sectarian remark in M: *...parameśvara eva **vedānta**pratipādye* (p. 29).

5. Finally there is one passage in P that makes only sense in the context of M, since it refers to a word in *Mahimnastotra* 7: *evam aṣṭādaśa vidyās trayīśabdenoktāḥ anyathā nyūnatāprasaṅgāt* (P, p. 22; M, p. 28).

This leads to the following conclusions: P is an attempt to extract the description of the *prasthānabheda* from M and efface the references to the *Mahimnastotra* that would not be understood without the original context; this redaction succeeded in 1, but failed in 5. Whether the revision was done by the author himself cannot be determined with any certainty, but the failure to remove one of the these references (no. 5) points to a less proficient redactor. The comparison thus fully confirms Divanji's conclusions about the nature of the text. A further, more external, hint is the formula of introduction in both editions of P, "Now follows the division of *prasthānas* in the work of Madhusūdana [i.e. the Mahimnastotraṭīkā]" *atha madhusūdanakṛtau prasthānabhedaḥ*, which makes sense only as a remark by a redactor who wished to indicate the original author. With the words he also indicated the passage that he was going to report, since in M the passage under question starts: *prasthānabhedam eva darśayati* (p. 21).

However, this means that the intention of the redactor, i.e. to outline a division of "systems", was not identical with that of the original author, who wished to adjust different descriptional patterns with the *prasthānas* mentioned in *Mahimnastotra* 7, upon which he was commenting. In other words the *Prasthānabheda* was not primarily intended for the purpose for which it came to be used, that is, as an independent systematic survey of orthodox literature. The passage under discussion is rather an attempt to demonstrate, within the multitude of religions that we call Hinduism, the supremacy of the Advaita Vedānta.[16] This, like Madhusūdana's attempt to devaluate the Śaiva monotheism of the *Mahimnastotra* by giving a double interpretation of each verse, one referring to Śiva and one to Viṣṇu,[17] is a forced interpretation of the Verse 7 of the Stotra, which runs as follows:[18]

trayī sāṃkhyaṃ yogaḥ paśupatimataṃ vaiṣṇavam iti
prabhinne prasthāne param idam adaḥ pathyam iti ca |
rucīnāṃ vaicitryād ṛjukuṭilanānāpathajuṣāṃ
nṛṇām eko gamyas tvam asi payasām arṇava iva ||

Since the way of religion is diverse, including the Triad of Vedas, the Sāṃkhya, the Yoga, the doctrine of Paśupati, Vaiṣṇavism, and one person considers this one best and another person that one suitable – because of the variety of preferences, you

are, for men who favour different paths, straight or winding, the single goal, as the ocean is of waters.

It is obvious from other passages that the Stotra is addressed to Śiva,[19] but without as much sectarian detail as would allow us to determine the peculiar type of Śaivism, to which the author belonged. The only hint is the word *paśupatimata* in verse 7, which could either mean the "doctrine of Paśupati" in the sense of Pāśupata-Śaivism, or merely be a poetical synonym for an unspecified "doctrine of Śiva". There is, however, external evidence to suggest that the wording was carefully chosen: The earliest written record of this Stotra is found on the walls of the Amareśvara temple at Māndhātā and dates either to 1063 or one century later.[20] In this inscription the scribe Gāndhadhvaja, whose ability to compose simple Sanskrit was apparently very limited,[21] mentions the "Pāśupata teacher" Bhāvavālmīka and his student Bhāvasamudra. It is therefore plausible that the *Mahimnastotra* stems from, or was transmitted in, a Pāśupata background. The division of the *prasthānas* itself can be traced to *Mahābhārata* 12.337.59: *sāmkhyam yogam pañcarātram vedāḥ pāśupatam tathā | jñānāny etāni rājarṣe viddhi nānāmatāni vai ||*[22]

Madhusūdana, in his comment on the verse, stresses the difference between a direct and [many] indirect ways to the one goal. According to him people resort to indirect ways only because of their inability to distinguish the direct (i.e. Advaita Vedānta) from the indirect. The problem, or chance, for an interpreter is that the direct way is not identified in the text itself; Madhusūdana's peculiar problem is that Advaita Vedānta is not even mentioned. It is, I think, mainly for this reason that he has produced a detailed explanation of the "Vedas", for without complicated circumlocutions it would have been quite difficult for him to work out the position of the Vedānta. He starts by saying that the five *prasthānas* mentioned in the verse, include all Śāstras and that the "three" (*trayī*) Vedas subsume the eighteen *vidyās*, i.e. 4 Vedas proper, 6 Vedāṅgas, 4 Upāṅgas (Purāṇa, Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā Dharmaśāstra) and 4 Upavedas (Āyurveda, Dhanurveda, Gāndharvaveda, Arthaśāstra). Within this framework, he says, the Upapurāṇas are comprised in the section Purāṇas, Vaiśeṣika in Nyāya, and Vedānta in Mīmāṃsā. A more heterogenous group is said to be contained in the Dharmaśāstras, namely Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa, Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Pāśupata and Vaiṣṇava. Madhusūdana thus deliberately distorts the list in the verse by including the remaining items, i.e. Yoga, Sāṃkhya, Pāśupata and Vaiṣṇava in *trayī*. He thus succeeds in creating one single category "vedic", under which all other valid *prasthānas* are subsumed.[23]

What follows in his commentary is a fairly detailed treatment of the *trayī*, namely the Veda, Vedāṅgas, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta and a rather brief treatment of the last four items mentioned in the verse. Within this description the Vedānta is implicitly presented as the culmination of Vedism.[24] Under the heading *paśupatimata* he briefly mentions the *Pāśupatasūtras*, and declares that the *śaivaṃ mantraśāstram* is included in this category. This term could refer to the division of "Śaivism" into *atimārga*, i.e. the Pāśupatas, and *mantramārga*, which includes the various branches of Tantric Śaivism. The same division is, perhaps mechanically, applied to Vaiṣṇavism: it is identified as Pāñcarātra, while the *vaiṣṇavamantraśāstra* is said to be included therein. But Madhusūdana adds that the Vāma scriptures are not included in any of the preceeding categories, since they are – like the Buddhist, which are excluded in the beginning of the text – non-vedic (*vedabāhya*). In other words Madhusūdana draws a picture of a religion that is not so different from, what we would call, Hinduism, with the only difference that we would also regard the non-vedic (*vedabāhya*) forms of Śaivism, i.e. Vāma, etc., as part of Hinduism.

Nevertheless this view is historically inaccurate, since the boundary that is introduced into Śaivism between extreme (Vāma, Kaula, etc.) and agreeable forms (Dakṣiṇa) is an outside perspective on Śaivism. The persistence of it has obfuscated the fact that, especially in the early phases of its development, Tantric Śaivism was perceived by its adherents and by its Vedic opponents as a single, from the Vedic perspective, heretic religion that is defined by its unique revelation, the Āgamic canon.

Madhusūdana's concept of acceptable and valid Śāstras is therefore more inclusivistic than the view that Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism, Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Buddhism and Jainism are all unvedic,[25] but with his rejection of Buddhism and the religion of foreigners it is equidistant to the modern idea of an all-inclusive Hinduism as a world-wide meta-religion.

One other point is worth noting: In the *Prasthānabheda* we have a description of an ideal Vedic religion with only passing reference to religious realities of 16th century Bengal,[26] while the terminology used for the division of religions/sects (i.e. *trayī, yoga, sāṃkhya, pāśupata, pāñcarātra*), is, it must be emphasized, used in a text that predates the tenth century, which in turn has quoted it from a much older text. The *Prasthānabheda* is thus a vivid example of the mechanisms of adaptation and conservatism within Hinduism: the erstwhile heretic Tantric Śivaism and Viṣṇuism are adopted as Vedic, while the integrity of the eternal Veda is preserved by merging those "modern" developments into ancient, theologically speaking perhaps timeless, categories.

NOTES

[1] I am very grateful to Peter Wyzlic for drawing my attention to this work and to Philipp Maas for his comments on this article.

[2] See Gerhard Oberhammer [ed.] Inklusivismus. Eine indische Denkform, Publications of the De Nobili Research Library Occasional Papers 2, Wien 1983; furthermore the following two articles by Halbfass: "The Idea of the Veda and the Identity of Hinduism" and "Vedic Orthodoxy and the Plurality of Religious Traditions", both published in: Wilhelm Halbfass: Tradition and Reflection. Explorations in Indian Thought, Albany: State University of New York Press 1991, pp. 1–22 and pp. 51–85; and finally: Albrecht Wezler, Zur Proklamation religiös-weltanschaulicher Toleranz bei dem indischen Philosophen Jayantabhaṭṭa, in: Saeculum. Jahrbuch für Universalgeschichte 27, 1976, 329–347.

[3] "[...] the contrast between the traditional inclusivistic or perspectivistic patterns and the universalistic openness claimed by Neo-Hinduism is obvious. The traditional "inclusivism" is usually coupled with or even coincides with a more or less explicit exclusivism; at any rate, it is not without formalistic and restrictive ingredients. Modern Hinduism relates its explication and justification of religious plurality to an open, universalized concept of *adhikāra*". Halbfass, op. cit., p. 53.

[4] The word *prasthāna* is used in the sense of *vidyāsthāna*, for which see *Yajñavalkyasmṛti* 1.3. See footnote 6 for the edition used.

[5] Paul Deussen used the text for an introduction to Indian philosophy, see: Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Religionen, Erster Band, Erste Abteilung, Leipzig: Brockhaus ³1915, pp. 44–64.

[6] A comparable treatment of the *vidyāsthānas* is by Mitramiśra (1st half of the 17th century) in his commentary *Vīramitrodaya* on *Yajñavalkyasmṛti* 1.3 (The Yājñavalkya-Smṛti with Viramitrodaya the Commentary of Mitra Misra [...], ed. by Narayana Śastri Khiste, Benares: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series 1930, p. 14).

[7] Nos. 2455 and 2456 in the India Office Library.

[8] It is called "Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's encyclopädische Uebersicht der orthodoxen brahmanischen Litteratur", in: Indische Studien. Zeitschrift für die Kunde des indischen Alterthums, ed. Albrecht Weber, Erster Band, Berlin 1850, pp. 1–24. This edition is quoted here.

[9] Noted in: Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies. Bibliography. Compiled by Karl H. Potter, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1983, p. 370.

[10] ĀSS 51, Poona 1950. It is based probably on three manuscripts, but the text has been constituted with less care than that of Weber.

[11] "This work [i.e. the *Prasthānabheda*] in the form in which it is printed in the Vāṇi Vilās press does not seem from its colophon to have been composed by any Madhusūdana Saraswatī but some later students seem to have made it out of the commentary on Verse 7 of the Mahimnastotra-ṭīkā with slight modifications here and there in order to give it the appearance of an independent work". Siddhāntabindu of Madhusūdana with the Commentary of Purushottama, Ed. Prahlad Chandrashekhar Divanji, Baroda: Oriental Institute 1933, p. viii.

[12] The only edition I have access to is: Śivamahimnastotram of Puṣpadantācārya with the Commentaries of [sic] Madhusūdanī by Madhusūdanasarasvatī [...], ed. Karuṇapati Tripaṭhi, Varanasi [Sampurnanand Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya] 1984.

[13] K. Maheswaran Nair (Advaitasiddhi. A Critical Study, Delhi 1990, p. 8) did not understand why Divanji coupled the two texts, while V. Sisupala Panicker (Vedāntakalpalatikā – A Study, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications 1995, p. 8f) produces only a clumsy reformulation of the relevant passage in the preceeding volume that is on the verge of plagiarism. Only Sanjukta Gupta (Studies in the Philosophy of Madhusūdana Saraswatī, Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar 1966, p. xi) has taken

note of Divanji's findings: "As regards Prasthāna-bheda it would not be proper to consider this book as a separate work. For, the subject matter of this book is followed verbatim in the Mahimnaḥ-stotra-ṭīkā. In fact the entire book is found in toto in the commentary on the seventh verse of Mahimnaḥstotra. Here we find a list of different branches of knowledge". One recent publication may also be mentioned here, namely Dinanatha Tripaṭhi's *Madhusūdanacaritam* (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi 1994), although it provides no new information on the *Prasthānabheda*. It is a biography, or rather hagiography, of Madhusūdana, without any indication of historical sources, but astonishing details on his life.

[14] For *tātparya* in a Vedāntic context and the six *tātparyaliṅgas*, which our author mentions later (*Prasthānabheda* p. 15), see *Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha*, ed. V.S. Abhyankar, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute 1978, p. 158 and 406.

[15] These are variants which alone would not allow us to distinguish recensions. With the thin manuscript evidence at hand no separation of the two versions in micro-readings is possible.

[16] Already Weber calls him "ein *sehr* [Weber's emphasis] eifriger Anhänger der Vedāntalehre", op. cit., p. 1.

[17] Even verse 28, which lists names like *bhava, śarva, rudra, paśupati* poses no problem for him, since these can be derived etymologically, i.e. stripped of their conventional meaning "Śiva", and are furthermore used in Sahasranāmastotras (*bhavādīnāṃ ca harināmatvaṃ yogavṛttyā sambhavaty eva sahasranāmastutipaṭhitatvāc ceti, Madhusūdanī*, p. 105).

[18] Text and translation is quoted from W. Norman Brown, The Mahimnastava or Praise of Shiva's Greatness, Poona: American Institute of Indian Studies 1965.

[19] See Brown, op. cit., p. 4.

[20] For the following, see Brown, op. cit., p. 21, and *Epigraphica Indica*, vol. 25 [1939], pp. 183–185.

[21] He writes *-stutiṃ ātmasyārthe svayaṃ likhitam*, which the editor N. P. Chakravarti politely corrects to *ātmaśreyārthe*.

[22] The Mahābhārata, ed. Vishnu S. Sukhtankar and S. K. Belvalkar, Śāntiparvan, Fascicule 22 Mokṣadharma, Poona 1951.

[23] From his explicit rejection of conceivable Buddhist *prasthānas*, with the argument that they are not conducive to the *puruṣārthas*, we can see that the basic categories are: vedic/valid and non-vedic/invalid.

[24] He divides the Veda into *vidhi, arthavāda* and a third (*tadubhayavilakṣaṇa*) category, which comprises the Vedānta. There he states that the Vedānta is in itself a *pramāṇa* that, through the purity of mind [attainable through it], reduces all *vidhis* to a mere appendix (*svataḥpramāṇabhūtaṃ sarvān api vidhīn antaḥkaraṇaśuddhidvārā svaśeṣatām āpādayad …*), *Prasthānabheda*, p. 15f.

[25] Compare Kumārila's list of heterodox formations in his *Tantravārttika* [ed. Gaṅgadhara Śāstri, Benares Sanskrit Series 72, Benares 1902, p. 114]: *… sāṃkhyayogapāñcarātrapāśupataśākyanirgrantha …* A collection of arguments for and against Tantric Viṣṇuism and indirectly also Tantric Śaivism is also contained in the *Āgamaprāmāṇya*.

[26] We would of course interpret the "Vāma" as referring to varieties of the Kālī cult.

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