

Available online at <http://www.ijims.com>
 ISSN - (Print): 2519 – 7908 ; ISSN - (Electronic): 2348 – 0343
 IF:4.335; Index Copernicus (IC) Value: 60.59; UGC Recognized -UGC Journal No.: 47192

A Critical Study On The Philosophical Discussion In Mahābhāṣya And Its Style Of Interpretation

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Abstract

It is built on the conviction that a student at the early stages of exploring Sanskrit literature can be benefited from the work of traditional commentaries. Reading the text with proper understanding of an authentic commentary is the right methodology of understanding a Sanskrit text. It can be observed that the commentaries play a central role in Sanskrit literature in both classical and medieval periods. Traditional Sanskrit commentaries help to explore the valuable treasure that is hidden in a text. They help to evaluate the text from every possible aspects like its grammar, syntax, its literary beauty and creativeness, its philosophical view, inner-meanings and other-aspects. The importance accorded to such a commentarial activity reveals that one of the most prized qualities of a work resides in its ability to enable the reader to understand patterns of interrelatedness within a complex set of ideas. Specially in Sanskrit grammatical texts it is generally found that the commentarial works have a two-step process in which the sūtras are first marked up as belonging to small thematically unified groupings (Prakarāṇa), and then contiguous groupings are made to stand in causal, evidential or explanatory relationship with one other (Saṅgati), a process governed by the commentator's overall aim, which typically combines a systematic ambition to display the text as having a certain content (Abhidheya) with a pedagogical goal to guide the audience's reading in such a way that their understanding improves. This commentarial pattern is creatively appropriated and adopted in a variety of ways. One is Sūtra-Bhāṣya style that is very popular and common in Sanskrit-Śāstrīya-Texts. For understanding the Sanskrit grammatical texts like Aṣṭādhyāyī, the importance of 'Mahābhāṣya' is admitted by all Sanskrit-Grammarians. Generally, A Bhāṣya means a type of commentary on a sūtra whose function is to unpack and weave together. It can be seen by a thorough critical analysis that every Bhāṣya engages to a lesser or greater extent in the "bottom-up" activity of explaining individual expressions in the text, thereby aiming to clarify the syntax of the text and to supply paraphrases of its lexical items, phrases and sentences. The Pātañjala-Mahābhāṣya or prauḍhamanormā etc. are the most famous example of it. The present paper will try to explore the unique style of interpretation adopted in the Mahābhāṣya and also try to represent briefly the different philosophical discussion done by Bhāṣyakāra Patañjali. It may help to get the actual idea of grammatical Bhāṣya-style and may reopen a scope for study or further research in this particular field.

Key words : Pāṇini, Vārttika, Bhāṣya, Sūtra, Kātyāyana, Patañjali, Mahā-bhāṣya

Introduction

In past times the original texts of any śāstrīya school were composed in sūtra format. these sūtras are very compact and brief in form as mentioned by the verses like, () and need explanations from various angles. Sometimes they are too hard to understand and sometimes latter people mis-interpret them. So a commentary must be needed to interpret the whole expression of a sūtra in an authentic way. So clarity is the main function of a proper commentary. There are various types of commentaries in different forms called like वृत्ति, वार्तिक, भाष्य, टीका, चूर्णी, टीप्पणम्, विवृति, विवरण, संग्रह etc. But they do not express same style of interpretations. In 'Kāvyamīmāṃsā' of Rajashekhara, He has tried to define the different forms of commentaries as follows –

"सूत्रणात् सूत्रम् । सूत्राणां सरलसारविवरणं वृत्तिः । सूत्रवृत्तिविवेचनं पद्धतिः । आक्षिप्यभाषणात् भाष्यम् । अन्तर्भाष्यं समीक्षा । अवान्तरार्थविच्छेदः चूर्णी । यथासम्भवं अर्थस्य टीकणं टीका । विषमपदभञ्जिका पञ्चिका । अर्थप्रकाशकारिका कारिका । उक्तानुक्तदुरुक्तानां चिन्ता वार्तिकम् ।"

Among the all types of commentaries Bhāṣyas have some special features. Bhāṣyas are generally written in explanatory form. The main styles followed by a Bhāṣyas is mentioned as –

"अतिसंक्षिप्तस्य विस्तरणम् । क्वचित् विक्षिप्तस्य एकीकरणम् । कुत्रापि उक्तस्य उपपादनम् । क्वचित् अपव्याख्याननिराकरणैः दृढीकरणम् ।"

It is said in brief –

"पदच्छेदः पदार्थोक्तिः विग्रहो वाक्ययोजना ।

आक्षेपस्य समाधानं व्याख्यानं पञ्चलक्षणम् ॥"

The Relation Between Kātyāyana And Patañjali And Their Attitudes Towards Pāṇini :

Goldstucker maintained that Patañjali was a critic of Kātyāyana, who criticized Pāṇini but also independently subjected Pāṇini's rules to scrutiny. Weber carried Goldstucker's position farther, saying that Patañjali's aim was to defend Pāṇini against Kātyāyana. Weber was followed by Burnell, who assumed that Patañjali, as a defender of Pāṇini against Kātyāyana, could not have been the author of the paraphrases of some Vārttikas. R.G. Bhandarkar and Kielhorn, but specially the latter, demonstrated that this was an improper view : both Kātyāyana and Patañjali had as their aim to discuss the rules and their validity and consistency. This view has been accepted by most later scholars. Belvalkar still said of Kātyāyana that – "..... his object was not to explain Pāṇini but to find fault in his grammar." More recently, Vidya Niwas Misra has again accepted the view that one of Kātyāyana's purpose was – ".....to doubt the validity of the rules of Pāṇini with reference to the language used in his time and area." Another view which has gained some currency is that Kātyāyana somehow belonged to a different school of Grammar than did Pāṇini or Patañjali. Belvalkar believed that, because Kātyāyana used terms such as 'svara' (vowel) in addition to pāṇinian terms such as 'ac' (vowel) and because a story in the Kathā-sarīt-sāgar (12th century) makes Kātyāyana a follower of an earlier school of Grammar, it is "probable that he belonged to a school of Grammar different from Pāṇini's."

Grammatical forms current at Pāṇini's time to become obsolete by Kātyāyana's time; words to develop different meanings; words and meanings to become obsolete. Bhandarkar noted that a considerable time had elapsed between Pāṇini and Kātyāyana and Patañjali. He assigned Pāṇini to the middle period of Sanskrit, towards the end of the Vedic period, Kātyāyana to the classical period. Other scholars have also noted that changes occurred in Sanskrit between the time of Pāṇini and Kātyāyana such that the latter introduced additional statements to account for the derivation of new forms.

About Patañjali :

Mahā-bhāṣyakāra Patañjali is known to all as a great grammarian, a great philosopher and also great physician of 2nd century BCE in India. He wrote the famous commentary on pāṇini's aphorisms, under the name of the 'Mahā-bhāṣya'. Another two works are also attributed to him – one is the great work on practical yoga named as 'Yoga sūtra' and the other is the commentary on Carakaśmhitā, that was a work on ĀyurvedaŚāstra.

Bhandarkar has said that Patañjali, probably, wrote his commentary Mahā-bhāṣya between 144 BC and 142 BC. Acharya Yudhisthira Mimamsaka in his book 'व्याकरणशास्त्र का इतिहास' stretches the time of Patañjali during as early as 2000 BC. He has established his own view with different proves and has refuted the theories presented with the modern approach by West.

Goldstucker and Weber tried to show that patañjali was an easterner. Goldstucker has shown two arguments. First, patañjali calls himself 'gonardīya' and 'gonarda' that was an eastern area according to the kāśikā. Secondly, kaiyaṭa refers to patañjali as 'ācāryadeśīya', which must mean 'who belongs to the country of the ācārya', refers to whom comes from the same area as the teacher kātyāyana, who is an easterner. But it is doubtful that 'Gonardīya' refers to patañjali in Mahā-bhāṣya. In addition 'ācāryadeśīya' simply refers to a participant in the dialogue who holds a particular position. Weber used a statement from the Mahā-bhāṣya on 1.1.57 to show that patañjali was an easterner. He used the citation- "pūrvaṃ mathurāyāḥ pāṭaliputram".

Again R.G.Bhandarkar reached a different conclusion on the basis of another passage. He concluded that patañjali came from an area north by north-west of Ayodhya. He used the citations like – "yo'yam adhvā gata ā pāṭaliputrāt tasya yad avaram sāketāt." And

"yo'yam adhvā pāṭaliputrād gantavyas tasya yat param sāketāt".

But these opinions are quite doubtful.

About Mahā-bhāṣya And The Subjects Discussed In It :

The Mahā-bhāṣya of Patañjali is verily an encyclopedic work in the field of Sanskrit grammatical literature. Patañjali has subdivided his work into 85 sections which are called ahnikas. The number of Pāṇini's sūtras, on which he has written his gloss : is only 1228 out of 3972. He has commented upon five thousand and odd vārtikas, and has given about a hundred maxims of interpretation known as Paribhāṣās and well-nigh three hundred illustrative maxims or 'Laukikanyāyas'. The number of topics discussed by him is about one thousand. His long scholarly comments on sūtras like, "समर्थः पदविधिः",

"अर्थवदधातुरप्रत्यय...", "सरूपाणामेकशेष एकविभक्तौ", "अनेकमन्यपदार्थ" And others are brilliant contributions

on the subject of the relation between word and sense. His discussion on general topics such as 'Vipratishedha' (conflict of sūtras), ' vibhāṣā ' (option), ' sthānivadabhāva ' etc. reflects his sharp intellect and his explanations of such grammatical terms as ' dhātu ', ' gati ', ' karmaprabacaniya ', ' aṅga ', and the like , form independent topics by themselves. The work is flooded with quotations and the remarks often are fully exemplified.

Methods and ideas found in the Mahā-bhāṣya :-

The Mahā-bhāṣya is composed in the form of dialogues in which take part a student (Śiṣya) who questions the purpose (prayajana) of rules and their formulations and an unaccomplished teacher (ācāryadeŚīya) who suggests solutions which are not fully acceptable and then a teacher (ācārya) who states what is the finally acceptable view (siddhānta). Commentators also refer to an ekadeśīn 'one who knows only part (ekadeśa) of the final answer' and a ' siddhāntin' one who establishes the final view. In keeping with the purpose of the Mahā-bhāṣya not all of pāṇini's rules are subjected to independent discussion. The argumentation involved in these discussion includes the citation of examples (udāharana) and counter-examples (prātyudāharana) for rules and also illustrations (drṣṭānta) showing how things proceed in grammar in same ways parallel to real life. R.S. Bhaṭṭācārya has discussed the purpose of the examples cited: essentially to indicate the impart of rules and the terms contained in them. Although a 'siddhānta' is finally accepted view, it is not always easy to determine what is this 'siddhānta' in Kātyāyana or patañjali's opinion. Patañjali commonly presents arguments to support or reject several views. One is left to infer what is the true siddhānta. In doing this, grammatical commentators often make use of a principle of brevity (lāghava). That solution or siddhānta of competing solutions is acceptable which avoids prolixity (Gaurava). For example, if two solutions which provide indentically correct results are under consideration and one of them involves splitting a rule into two rules (yoga - vibhāga), then one which does not require this is preferred. In addition, 'prolixity involved in understanding a rule' that means 'pratipatti-gaurava' is a voided. If given two competing solutions, one requires more assumptions and metarules for the proper interpretation of a rule than the other, the latter is preferred.

Techniques Of Interpretation In Mahā-bhāṣya :

In the course of their discussion, Kātyāyana and Patañjali make use not only of metarules which were not directly stated by Pāṇini, but also of general techniques of interpretation. Some of these techniques and principles have been the objects of more recent discussions also. Kātyāyana and Patañjali frequently argue that a certain item will not be derived "because it is not used to denote the meaning to be conveyed" (anabhidhānāt). The interpretation of the rule 3.2.1 (Karmanyan) by Patañjali is a beautiful example of this technique.

There is a large number of passages in the Mahā-bhāṣya, where etymologies are given. Swaminathan has discussed those etymologies given there and also their relation to the etymologies which appear in Yāska's Nirukta (section III. 3.2.1). Patañjali gave much importance to the 'Lokaprasiddhis' or 'Lokanyāyas'. He always continues his discussions on a particular topic with the examples of 'Lokaprasiddhis'. In Śāvarbhāṣya, it is said –

"लोके येषु अर्थेषु प्रसिद्धानि पदानि सन्ति, तानि सति सम्भवे तदर्थानि एव सूत्रेषु अवगन्तव्यानि ।"

About Philosophical Import :

The Mahā-bhāṣya contains discussions of subjects on the threshold of grammar and philosophy. Many of them concentrated in the introductory section (Paspāṣa). These discussions have been the objects of a number of studies. A basic premise of grammar is, according to Pāṇinīyas, that the relation (sambandha) between linguistic items (śabda) and their meaning (artha) is fixed and permanent (nitya), not the invention of someone. A question discussed at the beginning of the Mahā-bhāṣya is this. What is it precisely that one calls śabda ? Two answers are given. A śabda is that which, when articulated, serves to convey an understanding of a meaning. Alternatively, one can understand a śabda to be merely sound. That is, any item can be viewed either qua signifier or qua sound complex.

A related question taken up in the Mahā-bhāṣya is whether these śabdās are perennial, eternal (nitya) or susceptible of production (kārya). Moreover, a distinction is made between absolute eternality called 'kūṭastha-nityatā' and the perennity of linguistic items as used through generations of speakers, called 'pravāha-nityatā'.

Concerning what items signify (artha), one important question discussed : does a noun such as 'Go' (cow, bullock) designate an individual thing (dravya) or a type ? The meaning of the term 'ākṛti' has itself been the subject of some discussion. Commentators of Mahā-bhāṣya consider that this term was used in two values by Patañjali : as an equivalent of 'Jāti' means 'generic property' and 'Avayava-Saṁniveśa-Viśeṣa' means to denote a form, a particular arrangement of parts. Some scholars have considered 'ākṛti' synonymous with 'jāti', but others have consistently distinguished between 'ākṛti' and 'jāti'. These are some of the most important and valuable issues or questions discussed by Patañjali. Like this many other philosophical views are found in the whole Mahā-bhāṣya text related to śabda, artha and the other grammatical features. The latter philosophers of grammatical school like Bhartṛhari were deeply impressed by Mahā-bhāṣya and discussed those subjects more elaborately from their own point of view.

Conclusion

These all are small examples and a very little discussion is done on Mahā-bhāṣya in this present paper, but it is a deep ocean of intellectual thoughts. Still from this little also we can find that the style followed by Patañjali in his Mahā-bhāṣya is a traditional style of interpretation commonly found in Bhāṣyas. But this 'vyākhyāna-paddhati' is still unique. It is considered more special and more precious than others because the Mahā-bhāṣya has covered in itself all the philosophical views in very descriptive way those were hidden in Pāṇini's sūtras. Though many valuable works are there on the various aspects of Mahā-bhāṣya done by traditional great scholars and modern researchers, still there are very much to do. There should be much more research on every single aspects of Mahā-bhāṣya and more and more re-evaluation should be made on Mahā-bhāṣya comparing the views of different grammatical schools who in later period discussed the grammatical aspects in the light of Mahā-bhāṣya but by adding their own intellectual comments which again differ in many times. Thus there are a lot of scope of discovering new views and thoughts those are still hidden in the deep of scholarly words in Mahā-bhāṣya waiting for an intellectual mind.

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