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ON THE SIZE AND MOBILITY OF THE *ĀTMAN* IN THE EARLY VAIŚEṢIKA

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1

A number of changes occurred in the teachings of the Vaiśeṣika school between the time of the *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* (VS) and Praśastapāda's *Padārthadharmasamgraha* (PDh), such as the teaching on the number of attributes (*guṇa*). The largest difference, however, concerned the school's conception of the size and mobility of the soul (*ātman*).

As it has been pointed out, the VS recognized the mobility of the soul (*ātma-karman*), and held that the soul, since it moves in space, must be of definite size.¹ Furthermore, it is inferred that the soul is as large as the body, since if it were smaller it would have to move in conjunction with the internal organ (*manas*) at the time of perception, depriving the internal organ of its reason for existence.² The PDh, on the other hand, clearly describes the soul as being immobile and infinitely large.³

In the present paper, I will first attempt to trace (mainly through the Buddhist texts) the time by which the Vaiśeṣika school had changed its views on the size and mobility of the soul. In discussing this question, the passage VS 7.1.28-29 is of primary importance. On the basis of this investigation, I will then argue that transmigration and final emancipation (*mokṣa*) are not newly introduced concepts in the history of the Vaiśeṣika school.

2

Although it is generally asserted by modern scholars that the VS originally recognized the soul as of definite size as mentioned above, VS 7.1.28-29 teaches the infinite largeness of ether and the soul.

1 Nozawa 1981, Wezler 1982: 654-655, Preisendanz 1989: 153, Bronkhorst 1993: 87ff. Cf. also Frauwallner 1956: 61-62, 73, 95-105.

2 Cf. Preisendanz 1989: 153-154.

3 PDh(N): 21-22, 70, PDh(K): 24, 98. See also *DPA, T54, 1263a²⁰⁻²¹, 1264a¹¹⁻¹² (cf. Ui 1917: 95, 102).

The sūtras in question are as follows:

28: *vibhavād mahān ākāśah.*

29: *tathā cātmā.*

These sūtras are usually rendered as follows: “Ether (*ākāśa*) is infinitely large because of its all-pervasion, and so is the soul (*ātman*) [infinitely large because of its all-pervasion].”⁴ Although this is not a definitive interpretation,⁵ I will follow it in the present paper, because the three principal commentaries on the VS basically support this interpretation, and because there is no conclusive evidence to support another interpretation than it.

If VS 7.1.29 expresses the infinite largeness of the soul, it is contradictory to other sūtras that recognize the mobility of the soul⁶ – the infinite largeness and the mobility are mutually exclusive concepts, as stated in Śāṅkara’s *Bhāṣya* on the *Brahmasūtra*:⁷ that which is all-pervading cannot move in space. For this reason, Nozawa infers that VS 7.1.28-29 is a later addition.⁸

4 E. Röer, “Die Lehrsprüche der Vaiśeṣika-Philosophie von Kaṇāda” ZDMG 22 (1868), p. 398. A.E. Gough, *The Vaiśeṣika Aphorisms of Kaṇāda*, Benares 1873, p. 206. N. Sinha, *The Vaiśeṣika Sūtras of Kaṇāda*, SBH 6, Allahabad 1911, p.229. Cf. also V.S. Gajendragadkar, *Kaṇāda’s Doctrine of the Padārthas*, Delhi 1988, pp.338-339.

5 Another interpretation might be possible, since it is not certain that the word *vibhava* in VS 7.1.28 really means ‘all-pervasion’ (i.e., ‘the reaching to all existences in the world’). The word *vibhava* usually denotes wealth, power, or capacity. Böhtlingk-Roth’s dictionary as well as Monier-Williams’ dictionary also present only VS 7.1.28 for the use of *vibhava* in the sense ‘all-pervasion.’ Even the three principal commentaries on the VS do not, in their paraphrase of these sūtras, render *vibhava* as *vibhutva* (all-pervasiveness), but instead interpret it to mean ‘(having) connections with (all) embodied substances.’ (Candrānanda’s *Vṛtti* on VS 7.1.28: *vibhavād mūrttadravyaiḥ samāgatāir agacchataḥ saṃyogāt*, *Vyākhyā* on VS 7.1.24-25: *vibhavo yugapat sarvamūrttadravyasaṃyogaḥ*, *Upaskāra* on VS 7.1.22: *vibhavaḥ sarvamūrttasamyo-gitvaṃ*.) Nor does *vibhava* signify ‘all-pervasion’ in the *Nyāyasūtra* (NS) 4.2.21 (*śabda-saṃyogavibhavāc ca sarvagatam*), which is similar to VS 7.1.28 in style and content. The word *vibhava* in NS 4.2.21 may purport ‘appearance’ (cf. also note 9). If the word *vibhava* in this sūtra meant ‘all-pervasion,’ sounds and connections would be all-pervading. Such a conclusion contradicts the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika’s *padārtha* theory, according to which sounds and connections do not pervade their substrata (cf. note 14).

Therefore, it is possible that VS 7.1.28-29 originally had another meaning. For example; “Ether is large because of pervasion, and so is the soul [large because of pervasion].” According to this translation, VS 7.1.29 might teach that the soul is large (not infinitely large) because it pervades a body.

6 VS 5.1.6, 5.2.18-19, 6.2.19.

7 Śāṅkara’s *Bhāṣya* on BS 2.3.19 (p. 531): *na hi vibhoś calanam avakalpata iti* ([*Jīva* is not all-pervading,] because movement is not fit for that which is all-pervading).

8 Nozawa (1981: 464-465) asserts that the whole of Chapter 7 is a later addition.

When, then, were the sūtras added to the original version of the VS? Let us look for the answer in non-Vaiśeṣika texts. The first clue is provided by NS 4.2.21:

śabdasaṃyogavibhavāc ca sarvagataṃ. (NS 4.2.21)

[Ether is] all-pervading, because sounds and connections [with embodied substances] appear [certainly in ether].⁹

The composition of this sūtra seems to have been influenced by VS 7.1.28 – it is quite unlikely that the similarity between VS 7.1.28 and NS 4.2.21 is a mere coincidence. However, if VS 7.1.28 is a later addition, we must also take into account the possibility that it is derived from NS 4.2.21. This being the case, we must search for more definite clues in other literature.

Such clues can be found in Āryadeva's **Śataka* and *Catuḥśataka*. In the ninth chapter of the **Śataka*, in which Āryadeva criticized the concept of eternity, his opponent makes a following remark:

定有虛空法。常亦遍亦無分。一切處一切時、信有故。 (T30, 179b)

There certainly exists the elemental existent named ether, which is eternal, all-pervading and does not consist of portions, because we can acknowledge its existence everywhere and at any time.¹⁰

In the paragraph of the **Śataka* that includes the above quotation, refuting the existence of ether, Āryadeva criticizes the eternity of the other substances: time (時), space/direction (方), and atoms (微塵).¹¹ Judging from the list of the substances, we know that his opponent belongs to the Vaiśeṣika school. Although the text does not literally correspond to VS 7.1.28, it suggests that Āryadeva knew of this sūtra, since it discusses the infinite largeness of the soul and the reason for it.

A text, however, which suggests more clearly that Āryadeva knew of VS 7.1.28-29 is found in his *Catuḥśataka* (CS):¹²

9 *Nyāya-Bhāṣya* on the sūtra: *yatra kvacid utpannāḥ śabdā vibhavanty ākāśe tadāśrayā bhavanti*, (Wherever sounds arise, they appear in ether, and depend on it.).

10 Ui 1917: 50, Tucci 1929: 74. It should be noted, however, that some of the passages marked as sūtras in the Chinese translation of the **Śataka* might not be the original sūtras composed by Āryadeva. See Lang 1988.

11 The soul is not discussed here. A commentator, Vasu, explains that the soul is not taken up in this passage because it has already been refuted in an earlier section (T30, 179b¹⁹⁻²⁰, cf. Tucci 1929: 73). He says nothing about the *manas*, however.

12 Sasaki 1984, Lang 1986: 99, Lang 1988: 137-138.

*caitanyañ ca manomātre mahāṃś cākāśavat pumān /
acaitanyam tatas tasya svarūpam iva dṛśyate // CŚ 10.13.*

[According to your theory], consciousness [arises] in a portion of the size of the internal organ (*manas*), and, on the other hand, the soul is large like ether. Therefore, it would seem as if unconsciousness were its (= soul's) own-nature.

If consciousness arises from the contact of the infinitely large soul with the atom-sized internal organ (*manas*), then almost all of the infinitely large soul would be thereby unconscious, making it seem as if unconsciousness were the nature of the soul. This is the way in which Candrakīrti, a commentator on the CŚ, interprets the verse. Among the things mentioned in the verse, the epistemological view that consciousness arises from the contact of the soul with the internal organ is undeniably that of the Nyaya-Vaiśeṣika.¹³ Furthermore, although none of the VS, the PDh, nor Candramati's **Daśapadārthī* (*DPA) describes consciousness as being limited to the size of the internal organ, the latter two texts state that the attributes peculiar to the soul, like consciousness, exist only in a part of the soul, which forms their substratum.¹⁴ It is therefore possible to regard this verse as a criticism on the soul theory of the Vaiśeṣika school, so that the passage *mahāṃś cākāśavat pumān* would be a reduced citation of VS 7.1.28-29.

This suggests that VS 7.1.28-29 had already been composed by the time of Āryadeva. In other words, the Vaiśeṣika school had by then already changed its view on the size of the soul from body-sized to infinite. If the VS was compiled about 50-150 A.D.,¹⁵ and the period of Āryadeva's literary activity was between 225 and 250 A.D.,¹⁶ we can say that the Vaiśeṣika school changed its teaching on the size of the soul at a considerably early stage in its history.¹⁷

13 Cf. VS 3.1.13, 3.2.1, 9.13; 15; 22. NS 2.1.22.

14 Junction/connection, disjunction, sound and the attributes peculiar to the soul do not pervade their substrata. PDh (N) 102, (K) 112: *saṃyogavibhāgaśabdātmaviśeṣaḡaṇānām pradeśavṛttitvam*. *DPA: T54, 1265a27-29 (cf. Ui 1917: 111). Cf. also NS 3.2.25: *jñānasamavetātmapradeśasannikarṣān manasaḡsmṛtyutpatter na yugapad utpattiḡ*

15 For the date of the VS, see, e.g., Ui 1917: 65. But Matilal (1977: 54) supposes that it was composed between 200 B.C. and the beginning of the Christian Era.

16 Lang 1986: 8.

17 The following description is also given by Vasu in his commentary on the **Śataka*: 汝經言、神通滿 (In your sūtra it is stated that the soul is all-pervading) (T30, 172c. cf. Tucci 1929: 31). See also T30, 172a¹³⁻¹⁴, 173b¹²⁻¹³ (Tucci 1929: 28, 36). However, Piṅgala, who may have lived in the fourth century and may be a contemporary of Vasu as well, gives a different statement: 我者或言在身內、或言遍一切處 (One states that the soul resides in a body, and the other states that it pervades everywhere) (T30, 19a⁷. cf. Walleser 1912: 89). This passage occurs in the paragraph which disproves that the

Did the Vaiśeṣika school, then, change its teaching on the soul's mobility at the same time? This is well within the bounds of possibility, but there is no decisive evidence on this question. Among Āryadeva's works, only CS 10.17 – in which he rejects the possibility of activity in an eternal and all-pervading soul – seems to refer to the issue.

kriyāvān chāsvato nāsti nāsti sarvagate kriyā / CS 10.17 ab

What is eternal does not possess activities (*kriyā*). Activities are not present in that which is all-pervading.

What is being criticized in this verse is generally understood to be the soul tenet of the Vaiśeṣika school, since the Sāṃkhya school does not acknowledge the soul (*puruṣa*) as possessing activities.¹⁸ A commentator, Candrakīrti, understands the word *kriyā* in this verse to include the meaning 'movement.'¹⁹ Relying on Candrakīrti's interpretation, it might be possible to say that the Vaiśeṣika school recognized the soul as possessing movement at the time of Āryadeva. There is, however, no assurance that Candrakīrti's understanding is as the same as Āryadeva's intention. We can, therefore, only say that this verse suggests the possibility that the Vaiśeṣika school viewed the soul as mobile at the time of Āryadeva.

As far as I have been able to discover, the oldest clear-cut description of the Vaiśeṣika school's view on the mobility or immobility of the soul occurs in Asaṅga's *Shun-chung-lun* (順中論), in which, in order to prove that the soul cannot go (away), he examines the soul theories of three schools. Referring to the Buddhist tenet first, he goes on to the second school.

汝法我常不動不搖。云何能去。若我能去、虛空亦去。而此虛空、實無去法。我者不能、從於此方而到彼方。無離無合。汝所立我、遍一切處、則無去處。自在乘執、遍一切故。以是義故、我則不去。

(T30, 49c)

According to your tenet, soul is eternal, immobile, and unshakable. How can [such a soul] go (away)? If the soul were able to go (away), ether could also go (away).

soul, sense organ (*indrya*) and object are connected with each other (i.e., Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika's view). According to this fact, there might be different opinions in regard to the size of the soul in the Vaiśeṣika and the Nyāya schools. See also T30, 13b²²-c¹³ (Walleiser 1912: 60).

18 Cf. Sāṅkhyakārikā 19-20.

19 D 166b³⁻⁶, P 187a¹⁻⁵. Candrakīrti gives "*lha(s) sbyin 'gro*" (Devadatta goes) (D 166b⁵, P 187a³) for its example.

Ether, however, actually does not possess a function of going (away). The soul cannot go from this way to that way, and does not possess either junction or disjunction. The soul that you set forth pervades everywhere, and thus there is no room to go (away). It is capable of taking [anything] as it wishes because of its all-pervasion. For this reason, the soul does not go (away).

Asaṅga does not state that the 'you' in this quotation is the Vaiśeṣika school. However, since the paragraph following that quoted above takes up the concept of *puruṣa* (丈夫) held by Kapila's disciples (i.e., the Sāṅkya school) (cf. T30, 49c^{22f}), and since the views of 'you' do not conflict with those of the Vaiśeṣika school, the opponent can be assumed to be the Vaiśeṣika. Here the soul as viewed by the Vaiśeṣika school is defined as being eternal, all-pervading and immobile. If the *Shun-chung-lun* is certainly Asaṅga's work and Asaṅga lived in the first half of the fifth century A.D.,²⁰ we can conclude that the Vaiśeṣika school had changed its opinion on the mobility of the soul before the middle of the fifth century A.D..²¹

Through these examinations, it is proved that the Vaiśeṣika school, which originally regarded the soul as definite-sized and mobile at the first stage of the VS,²² changed the view on its size by the time of Āryadeva and the view on its mobility by the time of Asaṅga at latest. However, this result does not necessarily mean that the view on its mobility was changed after the change in the view on its size. It is more natural to assume that these two views were simultaneously changed, according to Śaṅkara's remark²³ that it is impossible for that which is all-pervading to move. Nevertheless, we cannot exclude the possibility that even after changing its view on the soul's size, the Vaiśeṣika school had retained the mobility of the soul for a while; in theory it can be assumed that, when a body moves, the portion of the soul with which the body is connected also moves.²⁴ This situation might be possible as a transitional stage.

20 Asaṅga's date is generally inferred from the date of his younger brother, Vasubandhu. For Vasubandhu's date, see Hattori 1961: 87-91.

21 Dharmapāla (530-561 A.D.), another commentator on the CŚ, also seemed to regard the soul presented by the Vaiśeṣika as immobile (T30, 201b¹⁸).

22 Miyamoto (1991) asserts that the mobility of the soul does not conflict with its infinite largeness (pp. 235-236) and concludes that the VS regarded the soul as infinitely large and mobile from the time of its first compilation. Although it may be possible to assert so, some serious problems such as the interpretation of VS 5.2.19 must be solved to make his supposition decisive. I do not therefore adopt it in the present paper.

23 Cf. note 7.

24 Bronkhorst 1993: 91.

3

Next, I make it clear on the basis of the above investigation that transmigration and final emancipation (*mokṣa*) which are explained in VS 5.2.19-20 are old concepts in the Vaiśeṣika school.

The sūtras of VS 5.2.18-20 are as follows:

18: *kāyakarmanātmakarma vyākhyātam.*

The mobility of the soul is explained by [the explanation of] the mobility of a body.

19: *apasarṇam upasarṇam aśitapītasamyogaḥ kāryāntarasamyogāḥ cety adṛṣṭakāritāni.*

Retreating [from a body], approaching [another body], contact with what is eaten and drunk [by a mother], contacts with other effects (= the stages in growth of an embryo / a fetus), [these activities] are caused by *adṛṣṭa*.

20: *tadabhāve samyogābhāvo 'prādurbhāvaḥ sa mokṣaḥ.*

When it (= *adṛṣṭa*) does not exist, there is neither junction nor arising [of a new body]. This is *mokṣa*.

'Retreating' and 'approaching' in VS 5.2.19 respectively mean 'retreating' from the previous body and 'approaching' the new body in *samsāra*. Thus VS 5.2.19 refers to *samsāra*. On the other hand, VS 5.2.20 clearly defines *mokṣa*. *Samsāra* and *mokṣa* ordinarily form a pair, so that it is natural to think of VS 5.2.19 and VS 5.2.20 as being composed at the same time.

When, then, were these two sūtras composed? I suppose that they were composed by the time of Āryadeva, because VS 5.2.19 presupposes a mobile and definite-sized soul. According to the commentaries on the VS 5.2.19, that which retreats from a body and approaches another body is the internal organ (*manas*). But, as pointed out by Nozawa (1981: 460-462), it was originally the soul, since VS 5.2.18-20 originally formed a paragraph explaining the movement of the soul, not of the internal organ. That the soul retreats from a body and approaches another body means that it moves in space²⁵ away from bodies. Then the soul must have a definite size. If the soul were all-pervading, the words *vibhāga* (disjunction) and *samyoga* (junction) would have been used instead of *apasarṇa* and *upasarṇa*.²⁶ We can therefore infer that VS 5.2.19, which thus presupposes the mobile and definite-sized soul, was composed by the time of Āryadeva. At the same time, this conclusion

25 The word *-sarṇa* is used in the VS as a word that expresses movement in space; in VS 5.1.15: *sūcyabhisarṇa* (approach of a needle [to a magnet]), and in VS 5.2.8: *vṛkṣābhisarṇa* (ascent [of water] in a tree).

26 Cf. PDh (N) 280²², (K) 261¹⁴⁻¹⁵:*iṣṭaśārtrendriyaviṣayasukhādibhir yogo bhavati.*

shows that the concepts of transmigration in VS 5.2.19 and, in addition, of *mokṣa* in VS 5.2.20 trace back to the time before Āryadeva.

Wezler (1982: 663-674) argues that the concept of *mokṣa* did not exist in the 'original' VS. Further consideration is required to determine the accuracy of his assertion.²⁷ However, it is clear at least that these two concepts were present in the VS at a fairly early stage in its history.

There are some collateral evidences for this view. The compiler or the reviser of the *Carakasamhitā* (Car; circa the second or third century A.D.)²⁸ seems to have been aware of both VS 5.2.16-17 (definition of *yoga*) and VS 5.2.20 (definition of *mokṣa*).²⁹ Further evidences are provided by Āryadeva's and Piṅgala's (青目) works. As mentioned above, in the ninth chapter of the **Śataka*, Āryadeva (or a commentator, Vasu) denies the eternity of ether (虚空), time (時), space/direction (方), atoms (微塵) and *nirvāna* (涅槃) one by one (T30, 179b-180c).³⁰ Piṅgala, who lived in the third or fourth century A.D. at the latest, makes a similar statement in his commentary on the *Madhyamakakārikā*:

27 When we discuss the *mokṣa* theory in the VS, one of the most important points is the connection of the *mokṣa* theory with the *padārtha* theory, which is the basis of the Vaiśeṣika teachings. Wezler (1982) denies the connection. As to this point, I have pointed out that the sixth chapter of the VS is the key to the problem (cf. Adachi 1984).

28 Caraka is regarded as a contemporary of King Kaniṣka. See S. Lévi, "Notes sur les Indo-Scythes," *Journal Asiatique*, 8 (1896), pp. 480-482. Cf. also G. J. Meulenbeld, *The Mādhavanidāna and its Chief Commentary*, Chapters 1-10 (= O.R.T. 19), Leiden 1974, pp. 403-404.

29 The definition of *yoga*

VS 5.2.16-17

ātmendriyamano'rthasannikarṣāt sukhaduḥkhe. tadanārambha ātmasthe manasi saśarīrasya sukhaduḥkhābhāvaḥ. sa yogaḥ. (cf. Adachi 1984: 695).

Car, Śārirasthāna, 1.138-139

*ātmendriyamanorthānāṃ sannikarṣāt pravartate/
sukhaduḥkham anārambhād ātmasthe manasi sthire//
nivartate tadubhayaṃ vaśitvaṃ copajāyate/
saśarīrasya yogajñās taṃ yogam ṛṣayo viduḥ//*

The definition of *mokṣa*

VS 5.2.20

tadabhāve saṃyogābhāvo 'prādurbhāvaḥ sa mokṣaḥ.

Car, Śārirasthāna, 1.142

*mokṣo rajastamo 'bhāvāt balavatkarṃsamkṣayāt/
viyogaḥ sarvasaṃyogair apunarbhava ucyate//*

Cf. Comba 1987: 48, 60. However, we must consider the possibility that both the VS and the Car might quote from another text.

30 Cf. also note 11.

外道法中、虚空時方神微塵涅槃等。(T30, 6b-c)

In a non-Buddhist teaching, [it is said that] ether, time, space/direction, soul, atoms, *nirvāṇa* and so on [exist]. (cf. Walleser 1912: 23-24).

The word ‘a non-Buddhist’ (外／外道) in both texts are here believed to refer to the Vaiśeṣika school, on account of the lists of the things that are said to exist. If the statements of Āryadeva and Piṅgala³¹ accurately reflect the teachings of the contemporary Vaiśeṣika school, then they demonstrate the importance of the concept of *mokṣa* in the contemporary Vaiśeṣika teachings.

We can therefore conclude that the concept of *mokṣa* was already present in the original VS, or that it was introduced in a fairly early stage predating the time of Āryadeva.

4

I would like to conclude the present paper with a summary of my arguments, which are based on a review of several Buddhist texts.

1) The Vaiśeṣika school already regarded the soul as all-pervading by the time of Āryadeva (ca. the first half of the third century), and changed its view of the soul from mobile to immobile by, at the latest, the time of Asaṅga (ca. the first half of the fifth century).

2) The concepts of transmigration and final emancipation in the VS, which presuppose a mobile and definite-sized soul, can be traced back to the earliest stage of Vaiśeṣika history (i.e., prior to the time of Āryadeva).

31 Tanji supposes that the Chinese version of Piṅgala’s commentary is enlarged and revised by its translator, Kumārajīva (344–413/350–409 A.D.). See, Teruyoshi Tanji, “Mui to Shōmoku-chū (The *Akutobhayā* and Piṅgala’s Commentary on the *Madhyamakakārikā*),” *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū*, 31-1 (1982). According to this supposition, the quotation in question and the Piṅgala’s description which is quoted in note 17 above may be Kumārajīva’s statements. Then, these statements will reflect the Vaiśeṣika tenets in the second half of the fourth century.

Abbreviations and Texts

- BS *Brahmasūtra*, with *Śāṅkarabhāṣya*. ed. by J.L. Shastri, Motilal Banarsidass, 1980.
- Car *Carakasamhitā*, with *Āyurvedadīpikā*. Nirnaya Sāgar Press. (rep. Kashi S.S., 228, Varanasi 1984.)
- CS *Catuhśataka*. in: M. Haraprasad Shastri, "Catuhśatikā by Ārya Deva." *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 3-8, Calcutta 1914, pp. 449-514.
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- *DPA **Daśapadārthī*. in: T54.
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