Bhartṛhari on Śakti: the Vaiśeṣika Categories as Śaktis

Hideyo OGAWA

0. According to Bhartṛhari, the phenomenal world is a manifold appearance of śaktis which Śabdabrahman, the seed of all (sarvabija), is assumed to have and which in themselves are not susceptible of modification (aparināmini). In his Vākyapadiya [VP] Bhartṛhari describes śaktis in the framework where the Vaiśeṣika categories (padārtha) are taken up and equated with them. The aim of this paper is to present, by examining VP III, sādhana, kk. 9(—)15 where such a framework is observed, a few aspects of the śakti Bhartṛhari conceives of. The ontological status of the śakti in relation to the ultimately real, that is, its unreality (asatyatā) the equivalents for which are avicārit-aramañiyatā (‘the state of being beloved without having been well-considered’) and bheda-bhedavicārānarthatā (‘the incapability of predicating the difference and non-difference’), shall be kept aside in this paper.

1. As shall be seen later, a set of kārikās in question begins with the assertion that for Saṃsargavādins an entity (bhāva) is a śakti or has a śakti. Helārāja identifies the Saṃsargavādins as Vaiśeṣikas. Before coming on to the main task, it is desirable to clarify the point of how it is to be understood that Bhartṛhari seems to describe a Vaiśeṣika view on śakti. It is well-known that none of the ancient Vaiśeṣika sources except *Daśapadārthī recognizes the śakti in its system. It is less than likely that Bhartṛhari there is really describing a Vaiśeṣika view on śakti existing in his time. In order to determine how Bhartṛhari deals with the Vaiśeṣika system in relation to śakti, first let us consider the following kārikās in VP III, jāti, kk. 22—24.

[1] sarvaśaktyātmabhūtatvam ekasyaiveti nirñayatvam
bhāvanam ātmabhedaśya kalpana syād anarthikā I/22I

“The final and ultimate truth (nirñaya) is that [Brahman which is] the One is identical with
all saktis [it has]. [Such being the case,] it would be purposeless to assume that entities are in
essence different from one another.”

*tasmād dravyādayah sarvāḥ saktāyo bhinnalakṣaṇāḥ*

*samsrṣṭāḥ puruṣārthaṣya sādhikā na tu kevalāḥ/*?

“Therefore, [categories] such as substance (dravya) are all saktis [of the One], which are
known through its different [functions]. They, united and not separately, help man to reach
his goal.”

*yathaiva cendriyādinām ātmabhūtā samagrataī/
tathā sambhandhisambandhasamsarge ’pi pratiyate //24//

“Just as, [when cognition is produced,] an aggregate (samagrata) which an organ (indriya)
and so on constitute is understood to be identical with its constituents; in the same way, in the
case of a conglomeration (samsarga) of what are related (sambandha) [i.e., saktis] with a
relatum (sambandhin) [i.e., Brahman] also, [it is understood to be identical with its con-
stituents].” 11

From Bhartrhari’s monistic standpoint, the One, *Brahman*, has all the saktis the ma-
ifoldness of which is inferred from that of its effects (*bhinnalakṣaṇa*, lit. ‘what is known
through its different [activities to produce its effects]’). The manifoldness of its effects ul-
timately leads to that of verbal behavior (vyavahāra vaicitrya), since the reality, unlim-
ited by anything, is beyond verbalization and hence the multiplicity of the phenom-
enal world can be accounted for by its saktis as its limiting factors (upādhi). Bhartrhari
draws this sakti—view of his own into the Vaiśeṣika category theory, saying that all
categories postulated by Vaiśeṣikas, dravya, guṇa, karman, sāmāṇya, višeṣa and
samavāya, are nothing but the substitutes of saktis the One has. One can thus get a
glimpse of his perspectivism here also. Interesting is that Bhartrhari intends to reduce
the Vaiśeṣika categories to the One. He applies the logic that an aggregate (samagra-
ta) of saktis realized as those categories is not a separate entity from the saktis and the
latter are not different from the One, and thereby tacitly accepts that the Vaiśeṣika
system of thought is also conducive to the attainment of human goals (puruṣārtha). Al-
though the categorial status of sakti has been subject to some debate within the Vaiśe-
ṣika itself, to be concerned with its categorial independency is one thing and to ident-
ify it with an entity as postulated in that system is another. It is clear, therefore, that

—1009—
Bhartrhari on Śakti: the Vaiśeṣika Categories as Śaktis (H. Ogawa)

2. Now let us turn to our main point. In the preceding kārikās (in VP III, sādhana, kk. 1—8), Bhartrhari has explained that sādhana as the accomplisher of an action is the sāmarthya (= śakti), in the view that sāmarthya has an independent existence of a substance as its possessor (dravyavyatiriktaśakti). The basic argument for equating śaktis with the Vaiśeṣika categories is, as opposed to that, that a śakti is not different from a substance (dravyāvyatiriktaśakti). Bhartrhari opens the equation by saying as follows:

\[2\] śaktayāḥ śaktimantas ca sarve samsargavādinām/
bhāvās teṣv asvasābdeṣu sādhanaṁ nirūpyate//9//

"According to the Samsargavādins, every entity (bhāva) is a śakti and has a śakti. Their property of being a sādhana, which is referred to when they have [for their signifiers] the items denoting what is different from themselves, is [now] examined."

Two points are made: 1) When entities (bhāva) produce their own effects, they themselves (svarūpa) and their cooperators (sahakārin) are respectively regarded as śaktis. Cooperators are śaktis and a cause (kārana) is their possessor (śaktimat); similarly, for cooperators also, the cause is the śakti and they themselves are its possessors. Therefore, every entity (bhāva) is a śakti and has a śakti; separately from them, Hēlārāja adds, there is nothing called śakti that is beyond perception and that is other than six categories: dravya, guṇa, karman, sāmānya, viśeṣa, and samavāya.

2) A further point, which will be explained in detail in the kārikā 13, is that the property of being a sādhana, that is, the śakti, is not expressed as it is by its own word. It is expressed as it is by a nominal ending (vibhakti) and certain other linguistic elements. This is because the śakti which is of a dependent nature (paratantra) looses its property of dependence when it is substantialized (dravyāyamāna) and denoted by a nominal such as śakti. Recall that Patañjali looks upon it as guṇa (MBh on P3.2.115: guṇah sādhanam). And, in connection with this, it is to be noted that all characteristics that Bhartrhari in VP III, guṇa, k. 1 describes as taken on by a guṇa should be attributed to the śakti also; thus, it is sāṃsārgin (‘what is connected with something’), bhedaka.
Bhartrhari on Śakti: the Vaiśeṣika Categories as Śaktis (H. Ogawa)

('a differentiator') and paratantra ('something dependent').

Next Bhartrhari continues to adduce instances in the following kārikās (VP III, sadhana, kk. 10—12ab) in order to answer the question: What entity (bhāva) of what is the sakti for what (ko bhāvaḥ kasya kva saktih)? It will be made clear what is meant by the word bhāva when Bhartrhari says that every entity is a sakti and a sakti possessor.

[3] *gHatasya dṛṣṭiKarmanvate mahattvadini sādhanam/ rūpasya dṛṣṭiKarmanvate rūpatvadini sādhanam//10//

"[For example,] in the case where a pot is a karman in correlation to the action of seeing, the 'largeness' and others are the sadhana. [And] in the case where a color is a karman in a correlation to the action of seeing, the colorness (rupatva) and others are the sadhana."

1) The situation in which ghaṭam paśyati ('He sees a pot') is uttered and the Vaiśeṣikasūtra VI. 1.6: mahat anekadravyavattvād rūpāc copalabdhiḥ are taken into consideration by Helarāja. According to the Vaiśeṣikas, in consequence of the property of both anekadravyavattva and rūpa ('color'), there arises the perception with reference to a large (mahat) substance. In the case of the perception of a pot, therefore, the property of anekadravyavattva and the color (rupa), which belong to the substance pot that has become the karman in correlation to the action of seeing (darsanakriya), are deemed saktis insofar as they inhere in the pot itself. The 'largeness' (mahattva) spoken of here as sadhana, which is a parimāṇaviśeṣa and hence a kind of guna, is regarded as indirect cause of that perception in that it conditions the domain of that perception.

2) Concerning the second line of the present kārikā, the utterance rūpam paśyati ('He sees a color') and the Vaiśeṣikasūtra IV. 1.8: anekadravyasamavāyād rūpaviśeṣāc ca rūpopalabdhiḥ are taken into account. The same sūtra is given in the Nyāyasūtra (III. 1.38). Although Helarāja introduces the interpretation of rūpaviśeṣa as udbhūtatva ('manifested-ness'), which accords that of the Nyāyabhāṣya, the word rūpaviśeṣa is to be taken as standing for the limited universal (sāmānyaviśeṣa), which is in conformity with what is meant by the word rūpatva here in this kārikā. In the case of the utterance rūpam paśyati, the universal 'colorness' (rupatva) which inheres in the color itself and the inherence (samavāya) of the color in a substance formed of more than
one substance are considered to be śaktis in correlation to the action of seeing the color.

As in the case of rūpam paśyati, in the case of rasam rasayati ('He takes a taste'), gandham jighrati ('He takes a smell'), sparśam sprśati ('He feels a touch') and śabdam śṛṇoti ('He hears a sound'), too, limited universals (sāmānyavīśeṣa) such as 'tasteness' or the property of being a taste (rasatva), inhering in their respective loci like taste are considered to be śaktis in correlation to actions such as taking a taste. A taste and others are those the understanding of which is invariably brought about through their respective limited universals (niyatagrahanāḥ); that is, they are invariably understood only by the force of their own 'species' or universals (jāti). And they are not those the understanding of which is brought about in no fixed way (aniyatagrahanāḥ), as is that of a substance. The very loci per se that hold properties like 'tasteness' (rasatva) and others, śaktis to bring about the understanding of their respective loci, become śaktis to bring about the understanding of the properties themselves, since they delimit the properties. In like manner, it is also to be known that a substance that is the locus of a taste is also the sakti to bring about the perception of it.

From the self-internal organ-external sense organ-object connection (ātmendriyamanorthasannikarṣa) is produced the knowledge of the color and other [qualities]; therefore the contact (samyoga) is a śakti. Moreover, from the Vaiśeṣikasūtra IV.1.12:
samkhya-parimaññi prthakvant samyogavibhāgau karma ca rūpdravya-samavāyāc cākṣuṣāni, it may be said that samavāya is also a sakti. Thus the relation (sambandha) in general is also a sakti, which is affirmed in VP III, sambandha, k. 5 (śaktinām api śā [=sambandhāh] saktih).

In this way, Bhartrhari shows that mahattva (guna), rupatva (sāmānyaviśeṣa), rasa (guna), dravya and sambandha (sanyoga and samavāya), being bhāva, can be identified with saktis. What should be drawn from the identification of saktis with the Vaiśeṣika categories is now described in the following kārikā.


"[Or rather,] when a certain thing x renders service to a certain thing y, the thing x is the sādhana for the thing y."

The pervasion (vyāpti) between anugrāhitva (upakārakatva) and sādhanatva (saktitva) is shown here, in the formulation of which Bhartrhari’s own view is clearly reflected. According to him, whatever renders service to others and hence is dependent upon others follows the definition of the sakti (Helaraja: paropakāri paratantram sarvam śaktihat-sañgam anupatati). Interestingly Bhartrhari applies this pervasion to an action (kriyā) in VP III, kk. 16—17, stating that an action is also a sādhana. If we take it into account, it follows that all the Vaiśeṣika categories are covered by Bhartrhari, since the Vaiśeṣika notion of karman is included in Vaiyākaraṇas’ notion of an action.

In the following kārikās, Bhartrhari elaborates on some essential features of the sakti as extracted from the equation of the Vaiśeṣika categories with saktis.


"When [the sakti] is denoted by its own word, however, that property [i.e., the property of being subordinate to an action,] is not denoted by it. The [function of] rendering service [to an action] is understood exactly from a vibhakti and others."

nimitabhāvo bhāvānām upakārārtham āśritah/ natir āvarjanety evam siddhaḥ sādhanaṃ isyate //14//

"The property of being a cause (nimitabhāva) which belongs to entities is resorted to so that they may render service (upakāra) to actions. [That property], denoted by such words as
Bhartrhari on Sakti: the Vaiśeṣika Categories as Saktis (H. Ogawa) (21)

nati ('a bent for rendering service to actions'), āvarjanā ('an inclination to render service to actions'), is admitted to be a sādhana, when it is [known to have been] realized."

sa tebhyo vyatirikto vā teṣām ātmaiva vā tathā!
vyatirekam upāśriya sādhana-vena kalpyate //15//

“No matter whether it [i.e., the property of being a cause (nimittabhāva) or the sakti] be distinct from those [entities] or they themselves be such [a property], it is assumed to be a sādhana on the basis of the distinction [between upakārya ('service-receiver') and upakāraka ('service-renderer'), in other words, the one between entities].”

1) As has been stated, as inghatah karma ('The pot is an object [in relation to a certain action]'), by words such as ‘karman’ and ‘sādhana’ a substance in which the function of rendering service to an action (kriyopakāra) is observed is denoted as something principal. From these words, however, the property of being a sādhana which is characterized by the rendering of service to an action is not understood as springing up (samudbhūta). Therefore, when a certain entity is denoted by the word sādhana, it is in the state of being potentially capable of bringing about an action (yogatāmātra).

2) The question of what property (dharma) is characterized by the upakāra and becomes sādhana (= sakti) is answered. It is, says Bhartrhari, the property of being a cause (nimittabhāva, hetubhāva). This property is nothing but the sakti (Helaraja: hetubhāvah śaktyparaparyayah). However, it is when such a property is known as having been actually realized (siddhaḥ = nispannatayā pratiyamānāḥ) that it is regarded as the sakti; it is not called sakti on the basis of the mere possibility of its belonging to a certain entity (sambhavamātreṇa).

3) According to Bhartrhari, whether the theory be accepted that a sakti is not distinct from an entity or saktīs be distinct from entities, one cannot have the notion of the sakti without the distinction (vyatireka) between upakārya and upakāraka which requires that there be different entities. For one arrives at a sakti only when there are different entities and some service is rendered from one thing to another.

3. Thus the features of the sakti which has been made clear through Bhartrhari’s above-mentioned identification of saktīs with Vaiśeṣika categories and his remarks on it are as follows:
1) In order for a certain entity to be treated as a śakti, there has to be the service-rendering (upakāra) and hence there must be the distinction between upakārya and upakāraka, in other words, the difference between entities. Whatever renders service to others is a śakti.

2) There is no fixed śakti. Related things (samsargin) mutually have the property of being the śakti since one thing cannot render service to another if there is no connection between them at all. On the assumption that a certain relation subsists between two different entities, if one entity is assumed to render service to another, the former in the state of rendering service is a śakti and the latter in the state of being rendered service (upakārya) its holder (śaktimat).

3) Śaktis are not expressed as they are by their own words.

1) Concerning the phrase sambandhisambandhasamsarge'pi, Helarāja suggests a variant reading and gives a different interpretation, which need not be discussed here.

2) Helarāja gives the following interpretation of the word anekadravyavattava: “The word anekadravya refers to the thing x which has for its samavāyikāraṇa more than one substance, such as a dyad (dvyaṅuka) and others. [And] the word anekadravyavat refers to the thing y which has the thing x, that is, that which is formed of the thing x. The word anekadravyavattva refers to the property (bhāva) of the thing y.”

3) See VP III, diś, k. bed also.

(Key Words) Bhartrhari, śakti, Vaiṣeṣika, upakāra, padārtha

(Associate Professor, Hiroshima University)