Aspects of the Argument against the Inference of God in the Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta

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0. The Naiyāyika has tried to prove God (*iśvara*) through various kinds of inference, of which the most famous one based on the *vyāpti* between being-an-effect and having-an-agent, for instance, 'The earth and the like have an agent, because they are effects, like a pot (*kṣityādi sakartṛkam, kāryatvāt, ghaṭavat*)', has been criticized by the other schools like Buddhist and the Mimāṃsaka. The Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta school is also one of the objectors to the Naiyāyika way of inferring God¹⁾. Although the argument on this point by Rāmānuja (d.1137) is comparatively well known through several translations and studies of his *Śrībhāṣya*, so far the study of the argument of Veṅkaṭanātha, popularly known as Vedānta Deśika (1268-1369), who is regarded as one of the most distinguished logicians of this school, has been superficial²⁾. The purpose of this paper is to show the difference between the argument of Deśika and that of Rāmānuja by examining one question found in Deśika's works.

1. The question we will deal with is whether there is the contradiction in the *Brahmasūtra* between the *racanānūpapatti*-topic³⁾, in which the Sāṃkhya theory is refuted, and the *śāstrayonitva*-topic⁴⁾, in which the Naiyāyika inference is refuted. The following quotation is from the portion of the *Adhikaraṇasārāvali* in which the former topic is summarized:

'It is stated here that a non-sentient thing is dependent upon an agent in creating its own compatible [effect]; in the beginning of the [very] Śāstra [i.e., in the *śāstrayonitva*-topic], the inference of the creator was denied. What, then, is the intention of the author of the *Sūtra*?'⁵⁾.

The same question is found in the *Nyāyasiddhāṅjana* and the *Tattvamū-*

ktākalāpa after detailed argument against the Naiyāyika inference⁶⁾.

To make the point of the question clear we have to inquire, to some extent, into the *racanānupapatti*-topic. The aim of this topic is to deny the Sāṃkhya theory that the *Pradhāna* as independent of any sentient being forms the cause of the universe. In the *Śrībhāṣya*, Rāmānuja shows the impossibility of this theory in a syllogism and adds some explanations:

‘The *Pradhāna* accepted by you [the Sāṃkhya] is not capable of constructing the wonderful world. Because while being non-sentient, it is not controlled by one who understands its nature. Whatever is of this nature is of such a character, like mere wood and the like in bringing about a chariot, a palace etc. That is to say, it is experienced that a non-sentient thing like wood is not capable of bringing about an effect if not controlled by a sentient being and that it begins to bring about an effect if controlled by one who understands it. It follows from this that the *Pradhāna*, which [according to you] is not controlled by any intelligent being, cannot form the cause’⁷⁾.

This inference is based on the *vyāpti* that ‘whatever is not controlled by a sentient being does not produce an effect’. The problem is that the *vyāpti* can be put in another way: ‘whatever is an effect has a sentient controller’. Is this not the very *vyāpti* that is used by the Naiyāyika in his inference of God? That is the point of the above question⁸⁾.

Although Deśika did deny the contradiction between the topics, we can be fairly certain that he did not regard the question as pointless; for in the *Adhikaranasārāvali*, his answer begins with ‘*prccheyam nātutucchā śṛṇu tad avahitaḥ*’⁹⁾.

2. Let us now hear his answer attentively. To begin with, the *Adhikaranasārāvali* gives the following simple answer: ‘[The author of the *Sūtra*] thought that the maker of all [i.e., God] can be neither inferred nor denied because no invariable relation is found regarding both [existence and non-existence] of Him’¹⁰⁾. The answer given in the *Tattvamuktākalāpa* is detailed enough to make us understand the purpose of this inference:

‘That [inference in the *racanānupapatti*-topic] is presented as *reductio ad absurdum*

against [the Sāṃkhya] who depends upon inference even for negating the intelligent being [i.e., God]. Indeed, the intention of the author of the *Sūtra* is that inference is not capable of either proving Him or denying Him'¹¹.

Thus, according to Deśika, the inference in the *racanānupapatti*-topic is shown as *reductio ad absurdum* or *tarka* against the Sāṃkhya and its aim is just to reject the Sāṃkhya inference of the *Pradhāna* as independent of any sentient being.

But the problem still remains: that is, the *vyāpti* used in the inference is logically same as that of the Naiyāyika inference; even *tarka* needs *vyāpti*¹². In refuting the Naiyāyika inference of God, however, Deśika clearly denied the very *vyāpti* between being-an-effect and having-an-agent. It is stated in the *Tattvamuktākālāpa* that an agent is not a universal cause like time¹³. Furthermore in the *Nyāyasiddhāñjana* he says as follows:

'If it is argued that [a sentient] is proved to be a universal cause owing to the rule that a non-sentient entity begins to act only when controlled by a sentient being, our answer is: No, because there is not such a rule; for instance, we find an iron moved by a magnet'¹⁴.

The example given here is nothing but the famous example used in the Sāṃkhya¹⁵.

To solve this problem, it is useful to quote the answer to the above question given in the *Nyāyasiddhāñjana*. It runs:

'In fact, the intention here [in the *racanānupapatti*-topic] is against [the Sāṃkhya] who teaches that the so-called *Prakṛti*, not controlled by a sentient being, is the material cause, to illustrate contradiction and other [defects] regarding its specific feature. In our opinion, however, they are but *tarkas* based on possibility; only the Scripture supported by them is the means of valid knowledge'¹⁶.

There is a suggestion here (if I interpret the author correctly) that the *tarka* is not the means to know that the *Pradhāna* depends upon a sentient being; the real means to understand the fact is the Scripture. The following passage from the *Adhikaraṇasārāvali* will support my supposition: '*kāryam kiṃcit kuvindaprabhṛtīviracitaṃ dṛśyate 'nyac ca sarvaṃ kartrāyattaṃ śrutam*'¹⁷. Here the word '*śrutam*' is to be noted. It is true that ulti-

mately all the effects depend upon a sentient agent, namely, God; but this fact is known from the Scripture only, not through inference as is asserted by the Naiyāyika. From this viewpoint, one may say that the inference in the *racanānupapatti*-topic, according to Deśika, just shows what is known from the Scriptures along with a well-known example.

3. Although Deśika thus notices some problem as to the contradiction between these two topics of the *Brahmasūtra* and then feels compelled to explain the difference in import between the two, Rāmānuja seems to be unconcerned with the problem. Actually in the above-cited passage, Rāmānuja is not hesitant at all to present the syllogism in order to show that the *Pradhāna* is also under the control of a sentient being.

We now come to the point where it is necessary to deal more carefully with the argument advanced by Rāmānuja himself against the Naiyāyika inference. If one keeps Deśika's powerful argument against this inference in mind and read the argument in the *siddhānta*-portion of the *Śrībhāṣya* I.i.3, he does not fail to notice that the latter is surprisingly simpler in its approach. In fact, Rāmānuja's argument does not seem to take serious notice of the logical implications of the question. What is to be noted by us now is that he is not concerned with the validity of the *vyāpti* on which the Naiyāyika inference depends. He criticizes the *vyāpti* between being-an-effect and having-a-single-agent but he points out no defect of the *vyāpti* between being-an-effect and having-an-agent in general. Or rather, he seems to take it for granted when he says 'If the *sādhya* is just having-an-intelligent-agent, there is the fallacy of what proves a matter already proved'¹⁸⁾. His interest is in whether this agent can be omniscient or whether he has a body or not.

We can see from this why Rāmānuja did not find any difficulty and posed the inference in the *racanānupapatti*-topic. Inasmuch as he accepts the Naiyāyika *vyāpti*, the inference has no trouble. But the situation is different for Deśika: he completely denies the Naiyāyika *vyāpti* itself. He, therefore, has to say a word in respect to the inference of the *racanānupapatti*-topic. And that is, I believe, the most noticeable difference

between Rāmānuja and Vedānta Deśika in this matter.

Abbreviations:

- ASĀ *Adhikaraṇasārāvali: Śrīmad Vedānta Deśika's Adhikaraṇa Saravali with Two Commentaries*, UVG, 1974.
BrSū *Brahmasūtra*. (the number of the *adhikaraṇa* or topic is shown after §.)
NySi *Nyāyasiddhāṅjana: Nyaya Siddhanjana by Śrīmad Vedānta Deśika with Two Old Commentaries*, UVG, 1976.
SAS *Sarvārthasiddhi*. See TMK.
ŚrīBh *Śrībhāṣya: Brahmasūtra-Srībhāṣya with Śrutaprakāśika*, 2 vols., Madras, 1988 (rpt. of the 1967 edition of UVG).
TMK *Tattvamuktākālāpa: Śrīmad Vedānta Deśika's Tattva Mukta Kalāpa and Sarvārtha Siddhi with Sanskrit Commentaries*, UVG, 1973.
UVG *Ubhaya Vedānta Granthamālā* Ser., ed. Abhinava Deśika Uttamur T. Viraraghavacharya, Madras.

- 1) There is little agreement as to Yāmuna's position in the *Īśvarasiddhi* (See, for example, M. Narasimhachary, *Contribution of Yāmuna to Viśiṣṭādvaita*, Madras, 1971, pp. 219-21; Roque Mesquita, 'Recent Research on Yāmuna', *WZKS* 18(1974): 183-208, esp. 188f. and Sadanori Ishitobi, 'Yāmuna to Shūsai-shin-ronshō,' *Shūkyōkenkyū* 59(1986): 811f.); so far as the *Āgamaprāmānya* is concerned, the author does not support the Naiyāyika inference. As to Nāthamuni, Deśika reports a fragment of his *Nyāyatattva*: 'nanu vāyur bhūreṇūnām saṅghātaṁ karoti...ucyate: kartṛkaraṇakarmāṇi trīṇi kāraṇāni kriyāviśiṣṭāni; teṣām anyatamābhāve kriyā na yujyate' [NySi 356, 1-2]. It may indicate that Nāthamuni supports the Naiyāyika *vyāpti* between *kāryatva* and *sakartṛkatva*, but this does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that he asserts the inference of God, as will be shown in this paper. Deśika (to be exact, the opponent in NySi) also remarks that *īśvarānumānānumati* is found in the above passage [NySi 355, 2].
- 2) In such a situation. V. Varadachari's 'Udayana and Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas' (*Prajñā Bhārati* 1-3, 1981: 40-56, esp. 51-52) is invaluable in pointing out that the opponent in Deśika's argument is mainly Udayana.
- 3) BrSū II. ii. 1-9 (§ 1).
- 4) BrSū I. i. 3 (§ 3).
- 5) ASĀ v. 180 a-b (v. 5 ad BrSū II. ii. § 1): *nanv atrācetanānām svasamucitavidhau kartrādhinatvam uktam, śāstrārambhe vidhātur vyanudad anumitim; kiṁparaḥ sūtrakāraḥ?*
- 6) TMK III. 24 a-b: *prājñādhiṣṭhānaśūnyaṁ na tu pariṇamitum śaktam avyaktatattvam, vāsyādaḥ vyāptisiddher iti yad abhikṛtaṁ sāmṁkhyasiddhāntabhaṅge*; NySi

355, 5f.: *nanu tarhi "racanānupapattē ca" ityādisūtram tadbhāṣyādikaṃ ca katham saṅghaṭeta.*

- 7) ŚrīBh II. ii. 1 (279, 9-13): *na bhavaduktaṃ pradhānaṃ vicitraracanāsamartham; acetanatve sati tatsvabhāvābhijñānadhiṣṭhitatvāt; yad evaṃ tat tathā rathaprāsādā-dinirmāṇe kevaladārvādikaṃ/dārvāder acetanasya tajjñānadhiṣṭhitasya kāryārambhānupapatter darśanāt tajjñānadhiṣṭhitasya kāryārambhapravyrtter darśanāc ca na prājñānadhiṣṭhitam pradhānaṃ kāraṇam ity uktam bhavati.*
- 8) One may notice that Śaṅkara's commentary on BrSū II. ii. 1 (which is not far from Rāmānuja's interpretation) is cited as an example of the 'physico-theological' proof of God in Paul Deussen, *The System of Vedānta*, trans. Charles Johnston (rpt. Delhi, 1987), pp. 125f.
- 9) ASĀ v. 180c.
- 10) ASĀ v. 180c-d: *sarvakṛṇ nānumātum nāpahnotum nāpahnotum ca śakyar tadubhayanīyamādarśanād ity amamsta.*
- 11) TMK III. 24 c-d: so 'pi prājñavyudāse 'py anumitiśaraṇān praty upāttaḥ pra-saṅgaḥ, neṣṭe tatsiddhyasiddhyor anumitir iti khalv āśayaḥ sūtrakartuḥ. Cf. SAS ad loc.: *prājñānadhiṣṭhitatvam anumātum na śakyam iti sāmṅhyādhikaraṇatātparyam; śāstrayonitvādhikaraṇasya tv adhiṣṭhitatvam nānumātum śakyam.*
- 12) As regards the constituents of *tarka*, Deśika follows the *Tārkikarakṣā* of Varadarāja, v. 72; the first member is '*prasaṅgajakasya prasaṅjanīyena vyāptih*' [Nyāyapariśuddhi, UVG ed., 1978, p. 222, ll. 2f.]. Cf. SAS ad IV. 60 and S.M. Srinivasa Chari, *Fundamentals of Viśiṣṭādvata: A Study based on Vedānta Deśika's Tattvamuktā-kalāpa*, Delhi etc.: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988, pp. 93-94.
- 13) TMK III. 21: *kāryam syāt kartrabhāve 'py avadhibhir itaraiḥ kālavat sa hy asiddhiḥ.*
- 14) NySi 345, 2-346, 1: *acetanaṃ cetanādhiṣṭhita eva pravartata iti niyamāt kāraṇamātratvam siddham iti cen na, niyamāsiddheḥ; dr̥śyate hy ayaskāntādibhir apy ayahprabhṛteḥ pravartanam.*
- 15) Cf. BrSū II. ii. 5: *puruṣāśmavad iti cet...*
- 16) NySi 356, 4-6: *tatra hi cetanānadhiṣṭhitaprakṛtyādyupādānatvamātrapratipād-akān prati viśeṣavirodhādipradarśane tātparyam; svapakṣe tu teṣāṃ sambhāvanāt-arkatvam eva, tadanugṛhītas tv āgama eva pramāṇam.*
- 17) ASĀ 179 (v. 4 ad II. i. § 1).
- 18) ŚrīBh I. i. 3; 129, 2: *buddhimatkarṭṛkatvamātre sādhye siddhasādhanaatā.* Cf. M. Narasimhachary's ed. of the *Āgamaprāmāṇya* (Gaekwad's Oriental Ser. 160, Baroda, 1976), p. 30, fn.*.

⟨Key Words⟩ Vedānta Deśika, Rāmānuja, *īśvarānumāna*.

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