Bhartrhari on Śakti: the Vaiśeṣika Categories as Śaktis

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0. According to Bhartrhari, 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 (aparināmiṇī). In his Vākyapadiya [VP] Bhartrhari 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, śādhana, kk. 9(—)15 where such a framework is observed, a few aspects of the śakti Bhartrhari conceives of. The ontological status of the śakti in relation to the ultimately real, that is, its unreality (asatyatā) the equivalents for which are avicāritaramanīyatā ('the state of being beloved without having been well-considered') and bhedābhedavārānārhatā ('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 Samsargavādins as Vaiśeṣikas. Before coming on to the main task, it is desirable to clarify the point of how it is to be understood that Bhartrhari 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 Bhartrhari there is really describing a Vaiśeṣika view on śakti existing in his time. In order to determine how Bhartrhari 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 nirṇayaḥ/
bhāvānām ātmabhedasya kalpanā syād anarthikā //22//

"The final and ultimate truth (nirṇaya) is that [Brahman which is] the One is identical with
From Bhartrhari’s monistic standpoint, the One, Brahman, has all the saktis the manifoldness 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 ultimately leads to that of verbal behavior (vyavahāra vaicitrya), since the reality, unlimited by anything, is beyond verbalization and hence the multiplicity of the phenomenal 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, viśeṣa 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 (samagrata) 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 (purusārthta). Although the categorial status of sakti has been subject to some debate within the Vaiśeṣika itself, to be concerned with its categorial independency is one thing and to identify it with an entity as postulated in that system is another. It is clear, therefore, that
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in VP III, sādhana, kk. 9(—)15 Bhartrhari never attributes to the Samsargavādins a view such that everything that is a śakti or has a śakti is an entity (bhāva). He is reformulating Vaiśeṣika-views in a śakti-terminology there, from his own view of the phenomenal world as Brahman’s apparent unfolding through its śaktis.

2. Now let us turn to our main point. In the preceding kārikās (in VP III, sādhana, kk. 1—8), Bhartrhari has explained that sādhanas as the accomplisher of an action is the sām-arthya (= 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 (dravyāvyatiriktaśaktī). Bhartrhari opens the equation by saying as follows:

[2] saktayāḥ saktimantas ca sarve samsargavādinām/
   bhāvāṃ teṣv asvāsabdeṣu sādhanatvam 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 (svārūpa) and their cooperators (sahākāra) are respectively regarded as śaktis. Cooperators are śaktis and a cause (kāraṇa) 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, Helārāja adds, there is nothing called śakti that is beyond perception and that is other than six categories: dravya, guṇa, karman, sāmāṇya, 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) loses its property of dependence when it is substantialized (dravyāyamāṇa) 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. I describes as taken on by a guṇa should be attributed to the śakti also; thus, it is samsargin (‘what is connected with something’), bhedaka

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(‘a differentiator’) and paratantra (‘something dependent’).

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

1) The situation in which ghaṭam paśyati (‘He sees a pot’) is uttered and the Vaiśeṣikaśūtra VI. 1.6: mahaty anekadravyavatvād rūpāc copalabdhiḥ are taken into consideration by Helarāja. According to the Vaiśeṣikas, in consequence of the property of both anekadravyavatva 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 anekadravyavatva and the color (rūpa), which belong to the substance pot that has become the karman in correlation to the action of seeing (darsanakriya), are deemed śaktis insofar as they inhere in the pot itself. The ‘largeness’ (mahattva) spoken of here as sādhana, 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 Vaiśeṣikaśūtra IV. 1.8: anekadravyasyasamavāyād 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’ (rūpatva) which inheres in the color itself and the inherence (samavāya) of the color in a substance formed of more than

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one substance are considered to be śaktis in correlation to the action of seeing the color.

[4] svaih sāmānyaviśeṣaiś ca śaktimanto rasādayah/

niyatagrahānā loke śaktayas tāś tathāśrayaiḥ //11//

“And, a taste and other [qualities] which are in the world understood in a fixed way through the limited universals of their own are holders of the śakti; and likewise, those [limited universals such as the ‘tasteness’] which are śaktis become [holders of the śakti when understood] through [their own] loci.”

As in the case of ṛūpm 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 śṛṅoṭi (‘He hears a sound’), too, limited universals (sāmānyaviśeṣa) 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 (niyatagrahaṇāḥ); 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 (aniyatagrahaṇāḥ), 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 śakti to bring about the perception of it.

[5] indriyārthamanahkarṭrasambandhaḥ sādhanaṁ kvacit/12ab/

“In some cases, the object-external sense organ-internal organ—agent relationship is the sādhana.

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:
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$samkhyāḥ parimāṇāni prthaktvam samyogavibhāgau karma ca rūpīdravyasamavāyāc cākṣusāṇi$, it may be said that samavāya is also a śakti. Thus the relation (sambandha) in general is also a śakti, which is affirmed in VP III, sambandha, k. 5 (śaktināṁ api sā [=sambandhaḥ] śaktih).

In this way, Bhartrhari shows that mahattva (guna), rūpatva (sāmānyavaiśeṣa), rasa (guna), dravya and sambandha (samyoga and samavāya), being bhāva, can be identified with śaktis. What should be drawn from the identification of śaktis 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 sā- dhana for the thing $y."$

The pervasion (vyāpti) between anugrāhitva (upakāratva) and sādhanatva (śaktitva) 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 śakti (Helaraja: paropakāri paratantram sarvam śaktilakṣaṇam 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 śakti as extracted from the equation of the Vaiśeṣika categories with śaktis.

[7] svasabdair abhidhāne tu sa dharmo nābhidhīyate/
vidhaktyādibhir evāśāv upakārah pratiyāte //13//

“When [the śakti] 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.”

nimittabhāvo bhāvānām upakārārthan āśritah/
natir āvarjanety evam siddhah sādhanam isyate //14//

“The property of being a cause (nimittabhāva) which belongs to entities is resorted to so that they may render service (upakāra) [to actions]. [That property], denoted by such words as
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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 upāsritya sādhanaatvena kalpyate //15//

“No matter whether it [i.e., the property of being a cause (nimittabhava) or the śakti] 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 in ghatah 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 (yogyatāmātra).

2) The question of what property (dharma) is characterized by the upakāra and becomes sādhana (= śakti) is answered. It is, says Bhartrhari, the property of being a cause (nimittabhava, hetubhava). This property is nothing but the śakti (Helaraja: hetubhāvah saktyaparaparyayah). However, it is when such a property is known as having been actually realized (siddhah = nispannatayā pratiyamānah) that it is regarded as the śakti; it is not called śakti 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 śakti is not distinct from an entity or śaktis be distinct from entities, one cannot have the notion of the śakti without the distinction (vyatireka) between upakārya and upakāraka which requires that there be different entities. For one arrives at a śakti only when there are different entities and some service is rendered from one thing to another.

3. Thus the features of the śakti which has been made clear through Bhartrhari’s above-mentioned identification of śaktis 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*, Helārāja suggests a variant reading and gives a different interpretation, which need not be discussed here.

2) Helārāja 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 (*dvyaṅka*) 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, dis, k. bcd also.

(Key Words) Bhartrhari, *śakti*, Vaiśeṣika, *upakāra*, *padārtha*

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