What is the ground for the application of the term "ākāśa"?
—Jñānaśrībhadra’s reference to Bhartrhari—

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1. In his commentary on the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, Jñānaśrībhadra (eleventh century) quotes many verses from the *Vākavapadiya* (VP) of the grammarian Bhartrhari (ca. CE 450-510) to interpret sūtra passages. In addition to these verse quotations, the late Dr. H. Nakamura showed that there was another explicit reference to Bhartrhari. He quotes passage below:

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de bzhin du nam mkha'i yang nam mkha'i kho na ste / bro ba la sogs pa du ma dang sbyor bas
yul tha dad par brtags pa ste / mang po'i gnas pas na nam mkha' kho na'o zhes bha-dra-ha-
ris smras pa'o // (LAVp 138a8) 3)
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This passage appears in the context dealing with grounds for application of words (*sabdapi-pravṛttinimittā*). The *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* speaks of four characteristics of vāg vik-alpa (vikalpa as speech) and the first one is called laksana-vāg (speech as a definition), or speech arising from clinging to a certain form of our own vikalpa as its ground. To explain various kinds of ground, Jñānaśrībhadra introduces grammatical speculations to his discussion. The above passage is related to the knotty problem concerning with the ground for the application of the term "ākāśa" (ether).

2. It is generally regarded that Praśastapāda (sixth century) was the first to claim that the usual model for the application of words does not fit the case of "ākāśa" and so on. He says:

> In the absence of lower generic properties— [the absence is] due to the uniqueness of ether, time, and space —the three names, ākāśa, kāla and diś are technical (pāribhāṣikī).

As a commentator Udayana (eleventh century) explicitly explains in his *Kīranavali*, these three names refer their objects without any basis, because there is no "lower generic properties," namely, "ākāśatva, etc." According to the Vaiśeṣika thought, ākāśa is one single entity. Thus, ākāśa is excluded from having a generic property (ākāśatva), because, in their thought, a generic property must be "eternal, unitary,
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and present in many individuals.” 7) As ākāsa is the only one and cannot be plural, ākāsatva cannot fulfill the third criterion. Therefore, ākāsatva is not regarded as a generic property, unlike the case of gotva (cowness) being the ground for the term “go,” which is inherent in many individuals (cows). Although Udayana says that ākāsatva may denotes the nature of ākāsa, 8) the Vaiśeṣikas fundamentally do not accept ākāsatva as the ground for the term “ākāsa.”

3. Our passage in question also concerns this problem of ākāsatva/nam mkha’ kho na. Jñānaśribhadra proposes a solution to the problem from a Buddhistic point of view. The sentence preceding to the passage above reads:

Some say that with reference to the moon and sun, the moonness (candratva/ṇa la ba na) of the moon is ‘to open kumuda flower’ and ‘to refresh’; the sunness (sūryatva/ṇi ma kho na) of the sun is ‘to open padma flower’ and ‘to shine.’ (LAVp 138a5-7)

Jñānaśribhadra here introduces a view accepting sūryatva and candratva — which are rejected in the Vaiśeṣika thought — on the basis of the functions of the sun and the moon. 9) For Jñānaśribhadra, a generic properties (jāti), or universal (sāmānyā) — being a ground for the application of a word — is not a real entity but “a certain form of our own vikalpa” as stated in the Laṅkāvatārasūtra. It does not matter whether it is inherent in single or plural instances. Therefore, regardless of the singleness of the moon, the moonness is accepted as a kind of practical presupposition on the basis of its functions: ‘to open kumuda flower’ and ‘to refresh.’

To support this idea, Jñānaśribhadra then quotes the following sentence from a grammatical treatise and continues:

[It is said that] “or rather, all bhāvas exist on account of their own bhāvas; expressing their bhāvas [the affixes] tva or taL are [introduced].” [Thus] the cowness of the cow is ‘to eat grass’ and ‘to pull carriages.’ (LAVp 138a7)

As indicated at another citation of the same sentence, 10) the first sentence is quoted from a treatise called vārttika / ’grel pa, and it corresponds to Kātyāyāna’s Vārttika 6 ad P 5.1.119.

According to Patañjali’s Mahābhāṣya and the later grammarians’ interpretation, the first “bhāva” means a word (śabda) and the second and the third means its object (artha) or its ground for the application (pravṛttimimitta). To put it simply, this Vārttika states that every word has its own ground, that is bhāva, and the affixes

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tva or taL (-tva, -tā) — these affixes form so-called abstract nouns — are introduced
to express it. 12)

Jñānaśrībhadra regards this Vārttika as support for the abovementioned Buddhist
practical view of application. This interpretation is rather unusual, if not misuder-
standing. But, he is probably based on the grammarians’ theory of bhāva, because
bhāva indeed means actions expressed by verbal roots in the grammarians’ tra-
dition. 13) So he interprets the Vārttika as expressing that all words are used on
account of actions (bhāva), or functions of their objects. Thus, as we have seen,
he considers that cowness (gotva) is not a generic property advocated by the Vaiś-
sēkikas, but the actions of cows, such as eating grass and pulling carriages.

4. Now, we shall return to the problem of ākāṣatva. After making the above ob-
servations, Jñānaśrībhadra refers to Bhartrhari as cited in the first section. It can
be translated as follows:

In the same way, “there exists ākāṣatva even for ākāśa. By connecting with various things such
as carriage, 14) etc., many parts are postulated [on ākāśa]. Since it is present in many [partial
ākāsas], ākāṣatva [is acceptable].” This is asserted by Bhartrhari. (LVp 138a8)

As Nakamura has already pointed out, this sentence shares the same topic with VP
3.1.15:

When parts are postulated [on ākāśa] according to the difference of property connected to it, a
universal [inherent] in these parts is recognized even for ākāśa. 15)

Although Bhartrhari does not use the term ākāṣatva in this verse, it is clear that he
accepts ākāṣatva when many parts are postulated on ākāśa. He considers that if
parts are postulated on ākāśa, ākāṣatva is regarded as a property which is present
in many individual ākāsas, such as rathākāśa and ghaṭākāśa. Thus, the difficulty
of ākāṣatva claimed by the Vaiśeṣikas is evaded in his thought. A commentator
Helārāja (Prakirnaprakāśa on VP 3.1.7-8) also states:

For example, according to the differences of those which are connected, differences are postulated
on ākāśa. Thus, when there is plurality [caused by these differences], ākāṣatva is recognized. 16)

We should pay attention to the that Bhartrhari does not seem to lay stress on any
function of ākāśa. It is probably Jñānaśrībhadra’s interpretation to regard Bhartr-
hari’s statement as support for the above mentioned Buddhist point of view. Be that
as it many, his statement is here indeed utilized by Jñānaśrībhadra to avoid the dif-

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ficulty of nominal expression for that which has only one instance. He seems to think that Bhartrhari, with regard to generic properties, shares the same idea with Buddhists.

5. The succeeding sentence to the above passage is also worthy of our notice. Jñānaśrībhādra, immediately after the reference to Bhartrhari, says that “slop dpon chos skyong / ācārya Dharmapāla” has the same kind of idea:

Ācārya Dharmapāla also proves: “ākāśa has many appearances, since words which have various grounds are applied. Therefore ākāśatva is postulated.” (LAVp 138a8-b1)

Altough it is hard to understand this sentence exactly with the limited information presented here, we can at least say that Jñānaśrībhādra here reconfirms Bhartrhari’s statement above with the authority of Dharmapāla (ca. CE 530-561).

The fact that Jñānaśrībhādra refers to Bhartrhari and Dharmapāla at the same time reminds us of a tradition which has it that Dharmapāla wrote a commentary on Bhartrhari’s VP 3. The sentence above may show the connection between the two.

Or rather, the above sentence ascribed to Dharmapāla may be a reference to his commentary on the latter half of Āryadeva’s Catuḥśataka (『大乗広百論評論』), which is only available in Chinese translation. In the first chapter of the commentary, in which he argues to reject eternal entities accepted by other schools, he says:

又虛空等差別名言。唯依諸分和合而立。分別假立有方分故。如唯依彼色等和合。立宮殿等種種名言。此意顯示。虛空等聲唯依世俗境界而立。(Taisho. No.1571: vol.30, p.189a)

Then, specific terms such as “ākāśa,” etc., are possible, only when depending on the connection of its parts [with other things], since there are parts which are postulated by vikalpa. It is just like the case of terms such as “palace,” etc., which are possible only when depending on the connection with colors/forms, etc. To put it clearly, the term “ākāśa,” etc., are possible only when depending on our secular world.

It is pity that both statements ascribed to Dharmapāla are now lost in Sankrit and difficult to understand exactly. But it is highly probable that both are dealing with the same issue.

6. In conclusion, the result of our brief observation can be summarized as follows:

(1) Jñānaśrībhādra provisionally accepts ākāśatva as the ground for the application of the term “ākāśa.” For Buddhists like Jñānaśrībhādra, any generic property is ultimately not regarded as a real entity. Thus, he does not care whether it may be
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inherent in single or plural instances. Every ground for every term is accepted only as a kind of practical presupposition on the basis of functions of that which is referred by the term. (2) To support this idea, Jñānaśrībhadrā refers to two grammarians, Kātyāyana and Bhartṛhari on a par with a famous Buddhist scholar Dharmapāla.


[Notes] 1) See (Unebe 2000). 2) See Nakamura (1955: 126-7, fr. 16). He identifies the passage below with Vākyapadiya 3.1.15. Although his identification is acceptable with regard to their purport as we will discuss below, this passage is not presented in verse form. 3) Cf. Nakamura’s translation (1955: 126-7) 4) tatra mahāmata lakṣaṇavāk svavikalparūpanimittābhinivesāt pravartate / (Lankāvatārasūtra, Nanjio ed. p.86). 5) Praśastapādabhāṣya (Kiranāvali, GOS 154, Jetly ed.: Kir), p.70. See Ganeri (1996) for a close study on pāṇībhaṣṭikī terms in the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika tradition. 6), 7), 8) Kir, p.70. 9) This idea traced back in the Vaiśeṣikasūtra 9.11 10) The above mentioned functions are well-known as kavisaṃaya (poetic consensus) among Sanskrit poets. For example, see Abhijñānaśākuntalam 5-29ab. 11) There is a parallel passage in LAVp 195a4-8. 12) See (Un-ebe 1999: 9-12).

13) See, for example, a Dictionary of the Sanskrit Grammar (Abhyankar ed.). s. v. bhāva. 14) According to the reading the parallel passage (LAVp 195a7), I adopt “śring ṛtṝa/ṛatha” in place of “bro ba/ṛasa.” It is hardly conceivable that ṛasa (taste) can connect to ākāśa. I suspect that “bro ba” (ṛasa) is mistaken rendering of “ṛatha.” Even for the Vaiśeṣikas, ākāśa can be regarded as many by connectiong other things. See, for example, Śivādiya’s Saptapadārthī 14 15) VP III-1, Iyer ed., p. 29. 16) VP III-1, p.20. 17) See Staal (1972: 16-17) for this tradition.

(key Words) Ārya-Lankāvatāra-vṛtti (‘Phags pa Lang-kar gshegs pa’i ’grel pa), Jñānaśrībhadrā (Ye shes dpal bzang po), Vākyapadiya, Bhartṛhari, ākāśatva

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