Some notes on the controversies between the “ācāryāḥ” and the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ” in the Nyāyamañjarī

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I. Introduction

Among modern scholars, it was Frauwallner who first noted the importance of the Nyāyamañjarī (NM) of Jayanta as a source of information for reconstructing the early stage of Nyāya Philosophy in which very few texts are preserved for us. What constitute a significant part of the “source of information” in this case are those controversies between the “ācāryāḥ” and the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ” on various topics that are reported in some passage of NM or other. Guided by Frauwallner’s pioneering work (Frauwallner [1936]), several scholars made a step forward in this task of reconstruction. For example, fragments of similar arguments were found in the Vyomavati or the Nyāyabhūṣaṇa, and this fact aroused discussions not only about the possibility of a common source for Jayanta and Vyomaśiva or Bhāsarvajña, but also about the chronological order between them. (See Gupta [1963], Schmithausen [1965], Wezler [1975], Slaje [1983], Yamakami [1999], etc.)

Moreover, the possibility was suggested (especially in Schmithausen [1965]) that some of these reports of controversy between the “ācāryāḥ” and the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ” might have historical implications with reference to the development of Nyāya’s and Vaiśeṣika’s realistic epistemology which seems to have been oriented and influenced by their conflicts with the Buddhist representationalistic or idealistic epistemology.

It is regrettable, however, that the majority of those studies have failed to attract proper and widespread attention, probably because they are written in German.

The present paper is only a small product of my ongoing attempt to re-examine the controversies between the “ācāryāḥ” and the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ” on the basis of critical study of the previous researches, hopefully to obtain a better view over the earlier history of Nyāya. One of the main points of the paper is the question whether
Some notes on the controversies between the “acāryāḥ” and the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ” in the Nyāyamanjari (H. Marui)

the “acāryāḥ” and the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ”, so to speak, as a respectful plural form, refer to an individual philosopher respectively or they denote two different groups or lines of Naiyāyikas. It also includes some marginal notes around the issue.

II. Does the plural form of “acāryāḥ” reflect the reality or not?

II. A. Cakradhara’s testimony and Prof. Wezler’s contribution

Before the commentary on NM, i.e. Nyāyamanjarigranthihbhaṅga by Cakradhara, was published in 1972, it was assumed without stating any reason that the “acāryāḥ” and the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ” referred to an individual person respectively.2 It was Prof. Wezler (Wezler [1975]) who was very quick to detect the relevant portion of NMGr to show that the assumption is questionable. The portion runs as follows:

NMGr, p.44.11-13: “atrācāryāṣ tāvad” iti/ vaksyamāṇavyākhyaṭatāpakeṣaya tāvacchā-daprayogaḥ/ iha ca sarvatrācāryaṣabdena uddyotakaravivṛtyikrto rucikāraprabhṛtayo vi-vaksitāḥ, vyākhyaṭrśabdena ca bhāṣyavivaraṇaṇakṛtaḥ pravaraṇaprabhṛtayo iti/

Namely, according to Cakradhara, “here (i.e. in NM) in every case” the word “acārya-” (“the teachers” according to this testimony of his) is meant to denote “the commentators on Uddyotakara (i.e., on his Nyāyavārttika) beginning with Rucikāra” and likewise the word “vyākhyaṭr-” (“the expounders”) is meant to refer to “the commentators on [Nyāya-]bhāṣya beginning with Pravara”.

It is regrettable, however, that this important paper of Prof. Wezler’s does not seem to have been properly utilized in subsequent Nyāya studies.

II.B. The use of singular “acāryah” for Aksapāda supports the plurality of the “acāryāḥ”

Strangely enough, no attention has ever been paid to the use of the singular “acāryah” in NM for meaning Aksapāda, the founder of Nyāyaśāstra, who should be given the highest respect by every Nyāya-philosopher. We find five instances of that use. It may be noteworthy that a past active participle always forms the predicate.

1) idam (=nyāyaśāstraṃ) praṇitavān acāryah (I, p.12.13)
2) tena prthag vākyārtham nopadistavān acāryah (II, p.137.12-13)
3) acāryah ceṣṭendriyārthāśrayatvam asya(=莎rīraṣya) laksanam uktavān (II, p.360.13)
4) ekaikalaksanapayakṛtahetvābhūṣapamecakaridesād eva sūtritavān acāryah (II, p.561.8)
Some notes on the controversies between the “ācāryāḥ” and the “vyākhyaṭārāḥ” in the Nyāyamanjari (H. Marui) (35)

5) ity atah satpaksim eva darsitavān ācāryāḥ (II, p.677.1)

It would be pertinent to add here that the noun “akṣapāda” always occurs in the singular.

akṣapādaḥ (I, p.167.8, p.235.4, p.614.4; II, p.461.9, p.631.11), akṣapādena (I, p.616.1); akṣapādaī (I, p.11.3); similarly, akṣapādamuneh (I, p.2.6).

The only exception is “akṣapādaṁapādebhyāḥ” (II, p.681.1), but the plural form in this case would be explicable in terms of a particular use of “pāda-” added in plural form to the name of a person as a token of respect.

Since even Akṣapāda is generally mentioned in NM by a singular noun, “ācāryaḥ” (the teacher) in particular, there seems to be no good reasons to suppose that the plural form “ācāryāḥ” is used in the same text to mention any other particular individual Naiyāyika out of respect.

Thus we have gained a strong evidence in NM to support Cakradhara’s testimony that the “ācāryāḥ” is a “real” plural form. Moreover, it may well be concluded that this also works as an indirect proof for the “real” plurality of the “vyākhyaṭārāḥ” as the opposing party of the plural “ācāryāḥ”.

III. On the materials of the “ācāryāḥ” or the “ācāryaḥ”

III. A. To exclude irrelevant instances

Even if it is established that the “ācāryāḥ” as the opponent party of the “vyākhyaṭārāḥ” are plural or a certain group of thinkers, we need other criteria for judging whether a given case is relevant or not, especially when a compound comes into question.

1. Irrelevant instances of “ācārya-” in a compound or plural “ācāryāḥ”

Most of such instances are easy to exclude from the list of materials of the “ācāryāḥ” at issue, judging from the context or some other factor.

a) The meaning of “a teacher in general” such as in the case of “a teacher’s command” : II, p.106.12 (ācāryacoditah), p.110.7 (ācāryājñāṁ), p.110.10 (ācāryājñāṁ), p.120.8 (ācāryakaraṇaścidhiḥ), p.132.3 (ācāryacoditah), p.132.4 (ācāryacodanā), p.464.7 (ācāryakaraṇaścidhi-).

Some notes on the controversies between the “ācāryāḥ” and the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ” in the Nyāyamanjari (H. Marui)

p.349.13 (cirantana- cārvākācāryavat).

c) The meaning of “teachers of various schools”: II, p.520.16: tīrthe tīrthe tac (=ātmajnānam as the cause of the attainment of mokṣa) cācāryaih tais tair uktam samjnābhedaih//.

2. Questionable instances of plural “ācāryāḥ” or “ācārya-” in a compound

a) It may be highly probable that the “ācāryāḥ” who argue on the interpretation of the Nyāyasūtra 1.1.23 that defines the samśaya are the very “ācāryāḥ” under consideration, but I treat those cases as still unsettled because the opponents are not designated as “vyākhyaṭāraḥ”, but simply as “pare” or “anye” and also because there seems to be no evident connection between the contents of their arguments and the views which are explicitly attributed to the “ācāryāḥ”: (1) tatra ācāryās tāvad evam vyācaksate/ (II, p.522.13); Also, tad etad ācārya-vyākhyaṇam arocayantah pare ’parathā vyācaksate/ (II, p.527.12) (2) II. p.528. 13-14: ... lakṣaṇam ācāryā varṇayanti/ (3) II, p.540.3: ... vyācakhyur ācāryā ity alam vistareṇa/.

Likewise, two compounds, “ācāryamatam” (II, p.537.9) and “ācāryadvayamatam” (II, p.538.5), both of which also occur in the same context, are to be closely examined in our future study. The “ācāryadvaya-” in the latter is especially problematic, because it seems to refer to both the “ācāryāḥ” (II, p.522.13) and the “pare” (II, p.527.12) who criticize the explanation of those “ācāryāḥ”.

b) Jayanta “reports” a very long controversy (I, pp.202.14-225.2) on the interpretation of the word “avyapadesyam” of Nyāyasūtra 1.1.4. Certainly a series of disputes between the “ācāryāḥ” and the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ” constitute the greater part of the controversy, but Jayanta also lets three other parties appear on the stage, namely the “vṛddhanaiyāyikāḥ” (p.203.1) (or “jarannaiyāyika-” on p.223.6) obviously represented by Vātsyāyana, the “anye” (p.221.6) and the “apare” (p.224.5). After presenting all the different views and arguments, Jayanta does not show his own opinion, but leaves the final judgement to judicious readers, putting the following verse at the end:

ity ācāryamatāniha darśitāni yathāgamanam/
yad ebhyah satyam ābhāti sabhyās tad avalambyatām// (p.225.1-2)

The “ācāryamatāni” seems to denote all the different views of different five
Some notes on the controversies between the “ācāryāḥ” and the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ” in the Nyāyamanjari (H. Marui) (37)

parties given in the whole passage, not just the view of the “ācāryāḥ”.

c) Another problematic instance: II, p.35.12: iti tad api parihṛtam ācāryaih “jātaṃ ca sambaddham cety ekah kālāḥ” iti/7)

d) The meaning of “earlier teachers” on I, p.446.8 (pūrva-ācāryaih) is not clear.

III.B. Methods of establishing the materials of the “ācāryāḥ” in question

1. The occurrence of the “ācāryāḥ” in NM as the rival disputants with the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ”

a) About the manner of analyzing a perceptual process: atracāryās tāvad ācakṣate sādhu coditam/ (I, p.175.1); Cf. vyākhyaṭāras tu bruvate nāyam īḍrso jnānānāṃ kramah (I, p.176.10)

b) About the meaning of the “avyapadesyam” in NS 1.1.4 (I, pp.204.1-205.9; pp.210.6-216.2; pp.218.10-221.5)

(1) vyavacchedyāntaram avyapadesyapadasya varṇayāṃ cakrur ācāryāḥ/ (p.204.1); Cf. tad etad vyākhyaṭāro nānumanyante/ (p.205.10)

(2) tad etad ācāryā na kṣamante/ (p.210.6); Cf. atra punah pravarāḥ prāhuḥ/ (I, p.216.3)

(3) tad etad ācāryāḥ pratisamādadhave/ (I, p.218.10); Cf. anye tu manyante (I, p.221.6)

(4) uktam ācāryaih ubhayaajñānānvayavacchedārtham iti/ (p.220.7)

c) About the manner of analyzing the process of understanding the meaning of a sentence: tatra ācāryās tāvad imāṃ kalpanāṃ adīdṛṣan/ (II, p.192.6); Cf. vyākhyaṭāras tu prakriyāntaram ācacakṣuḥ/ (II, p.194.15)

2. The epistemological principle representative of the “ācāryāḥ” and the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ”

a) Principle A of the “ācāryāḥ”8)

The difference of cognitions may result not only from the difference of objects, but also from the difference of means of cognition.

The “ācāryāḥ” state this principle in the dispute III.B1b with the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ” mentioned above.: tad etad ācāryāḥ pratisamādadhave — na viṣaya-bhedād eva pratibhāsabhedah, kim tūpāyabhedād bhavaty eva/ (I, p.218.10-11); upāyabhedād pratītibheda bhavati/ (I, p.217.6)

b) Principle B of the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ”9)

There can be no difference of cognitions without the difference of objects.

—1149—
Some notes on the controversies between the “ācāryāh” and the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ” in the Nyāyamanjari (H. MARUI)

When the “ācāryāh” criticize the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ” in the debate III.Blb(2), the former take it for granted that the latter follow this principle: api ca viṣayabhāsabhedo bhavātīti durāśayā śabdaviśisṭam arthaṁ nirvikalpāt savikalpasya viṣayam adhikam paśyati bhavān/ (‡T, p.215.7-9)

3. The application of the principle A as a mark of the “ācāryāh”

Even when a given argument is simply ascribed anonymously to “some” or “others”, we may reasonably attribute it to the “ācāryāh” if it accepts or presupposes the principle A. Thus we can add the following to the list of the materials of the “ācāryāh”.

a) atha matām — upāyabhedāt pratītibheda bhavati, dūrāvidūrādeśavyayavasthita-sthānāvādi- padārthapratiṣṭavat, samoṣṭāmaṃgaṃṣoṣkapāraṇaṇavīṣayabodhavadi vetai — tad asāṃpratam/ upāyabhede ’pi tadbhādāsiddeh/ (†T, p.217.6-8)

b) pratyakṣaṅgyayatām eva kecit (=vyākhyaṭāraḥ) kālasya manvate/ ..... na hi viṣayātītayam antareṇa pratībhāsātiṣayayo ‘vakalpate/ ..... ata eva pratyakṣaṅ kālaḥ/ .../ (†T, pp.361.6-364.6) ; anye (=ācāryāḥ) manyante — daṇḍī devadattaḥ, nilam utpalam iti vad viṣayātītarekāsyagrahaṇāt pratīyaṃtiṣayasya ca parokṣakālapakṣe ’pi tatkāranakasyopapattter anumeyā eva kālaḥ/ ..... / kṛtaś ca pratyakṣalakṣaṇe mahān kālaḥ — kim viṣayabhāḍ eva pratībhāsabhedah upāyabhāṭād api iti........./ (†T, pp.364.7ff)

c) yad api pratyakṣaṇsya śabdāṅgayayoś ca samāṅvīṣayatvate sati sadrśapratiti- janakatvam āśanīkītam, tatra kecid (=ācāryāḥ) ācākṣate — visayasāmyte ‘py upāyabhāṭāt pratītibheda bhavaty eva/ .../ anye (=vyākhyaṭāraḥ) tu manyante — nopāyabhāṭāt pratītibheda bhavati, api tu viṣayabhāḍ eva/ .../ (†T, p.92.1ff)

4. Use of parallels in other texts

We will see an exemplary case.10)

i) Jayanta attributes the assertion and argument X to “anye”: anye punar ācākṣate .../ tasmāt kartākarmavilākanāṃ samāśayaviparyayarantarhādabhāvidhāyini bodhāvadoṣasvabhāvā sāmagri pramāṇam iti yuktam/ (†T, pp.37.5-38.11)

ii) Bhāsarvajña (Nyāyabhūṣana, p.60.6-12) attributes substantially the same assertion and argument to Rucikāra as one of the commentators on Tamo’rī (=Udyotakara).

iii) According to Cakradhara (NMGr, p.44.12-13), the “ācāryāh” in NM are the
commentators on Uddyotakara beginning with Rucikāra.

iv) There is at least one case in NM in which the “anye” may be identified with the “acāryāh”. See III.B3b above.

v) Therefore, it may safely be said that this instance of “anye”, too, refers to the “acāryāh”.

IV. On the materials of the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ”

What we have done with the materials of the “acāryāh” would be also applied to those of the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ” with relevant modification.

IV.A. Irrelevant instances

From the context we could easily put the following out of our list. It seems that they bear the general meaning of “expounders” or “commentators”: vyākhyaṭrbhiḥ (I, p.324.12; II, p101.1, p.233.1), vyākhyaṭāraḥ (II, p.25.16, p.84.5, p.257.16), vyākhyaṭṛṇām (II, p.245.11); vyākhyaṭṛvacanam (II, p.245.12).

IV.B. A list of materials of the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ” (provisional)

1. The occurrence of the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ” in NM as the rival disputants with the “acāryāh”
   a) See III.B1a.  b) See III.B1b.  c) See III.B1c.

2. The application of the principle B as a mark of the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ”
   a) The following sentence belongs to the criticism of the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ” by the “acāryāh”. Therefore, “you (bhavān)” refers to the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ” (See III. B2b): api ca viṣayabhedena pratibhāsabhedo bhavatīti durāsayā śabdaviśiṣṭam arthaṁ nirvikalpāt savikalpasya viṣayam adhikam paśyati bhavān/ (I, p.215.7)
   b) Likewise, the structure of the controversy as well as the content of the argument of which the principle B forms a basis, clearly speaks for the identity of the “kecit” and the “anye” with the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ”.
      (1) See III.B3b.  (2) See III.B3c.
   c) The “pravaraḥ” seems to be identical with the “vyākhyaṭāraḥ”. The same is the case with the plural “pravaramatāṇusārin-”.
      (1) atra punaḥ pravaraḥ prāhuḥ—....../ na hi viṣayātiṣayam antarena pratibhā-sātiṣayo bhavītum arhati/ ....../ (I, pp.216.3-218.9)
      (2) kim ca pravaramatāṇusārinam iva bhavatāṁ viṣeṣyabuddhiṣu viṣeṣaṇa-
viśeṣye dvē vauṣṭunī ālāmbanam, api tu viśeṣyamātram, upāyabheda eva
pratityatiṣaya iti/(II, p.198.8-10)

3. The use of parallels: a case of internal evidence

The controversy on the perceptual process (I, pp.175.lff) discloses that the
“ācāryāh” employed the concept of lingaparāmarśa in explaining the inferential
process, whereas the “vyākhyātārah” rejected it. This provides an internal evidence
to show that the following passage informs us how the “vyākhyātārah” explained
the meaning of the upanaya: yesām api mate parāmarsajnānam nāsti, tair apy
upanayavacanam avaśyam evāparihāryam/ anumeyapratipattaye drṣṭante darṣita-
śaktir eva hetuḥ prabhavati, nānyatheti/....../(II, p.578.6-11).

V. By way of conclusion

The present study has provided a new evidence to support that the “ācāryāh” as
one of the main sources for Jayanta are a line of Nyāya scholars, not one individual
Ācārya.

On the other hand, a new problem presents itself. How can we explain the plural
form of the “pravarāh”? It occurs once in NM (see IV.B2c(l)), obviously expressing
the same meaning with the “vyākhyātārah”. The rejection of a single Ācārya leads
to the rejection of a single Vyākhyāṭṛ. Thus we have to accept the meaning of the
plural “pravarāh”, too.

It does not seem possible for us to take it as a common noun, meaning “most ex-
cellent people”; on the contrary there is a positive reason to interpret it as a proper
noun “Pravara”. Namely, in the same context occurs the compound “pravarapakṣa”
three times denoting the view of the “pravarāh” described in the preceding portion
(NM I, p.232.2, 7, 9). Moreover, the use of the plural “pravaramatānusārin-” (II,
p.198.8) also supports the interpretation of it as a proper noun.

At present I have no other solution than to suggest a conjectured reading “prā-
varāh āhuḥ” in place of the “pravarāh āhuḥ”. Thus we would obtain the same mean-
ing of “pravaramatānusārinḥ”.

(Abbreviations and selected bibliography) I=NM I=Nyāyamanjārī, Vol.1. Mysore

—1152—
Some notes on the controversies between the “ācāryāh” and the “vyākhyaṭārāh” in the Nyāyamanjari (H. Marui) (41


1) Because of the space limit I have to confine myself to minimum notes. As what has been or has not been done in the previous studies, I will leave detailed comments to my future extensive study.


3) This “Pravara” has still not been identified until now. Wezler [1975] p.141. Jayanta refers to Pravara several times. See V below.

4) As far as I know, the only proper references to his accomplishment are W. Halbfass’ brief comment in his On being and what there is, p.190 and Slaje [1983] p.235, n.451.

5) Note that the two cases of III.B3b-c below give both the parties anonymously.

6) Frauwallner [1936] seems to understand the doctrine of the “ācāryāh” (p.273.35) by it.


12) The “pravaramata-” and the “prāvaram matam” occur on NMGr, p.18.8 and p.67.12 respectively. For me it still remains unsettled why Wezler [1975] (p.137) reads this “prāvaram matam” as “prāvaramatam”, i.e. “the view of the followers of Pravara.”

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〈Key Words〉 Nyāyamanjari, ācāryāh, vyākhyaṭārāh, pravarāh

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