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SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

AN UNTENABLE REMARK OF DR. RANADE ABOUT THE NON-MENTION OF THE TANMĀTRAS IN THE GĪTĀ AND ITS PRIORITY TO THE SĀMKHYAKĀRIKĀ

In his well-known work “The Bhagavad-gītā: philosophy of God-realization” Dr. R. D. Ranade remarks: “We have to make an important statement here about the tanmātras in proof of the priority of the Bhagavad-gītā to the systematized Sāmkhya philosophy. That the tanmātras are not mentioned by the Bhagavad-gītā might evidently be taken to be an argument for its priority. That these are developed in Sāmkhya philosophy later is out of question.” (pp. 25-26).

In this passage Dr. Ranade seems to formulate three assertions, namely (1) the tanmātras are not mentioned in the Gītā; (2) this non-mention proves that the Gītā is prior to the systematized Sāmkhya philosophy; and (3) the tanmātras are developed in the Sāmkhya philosophy in a later period (i.e. long after the composition of the Gītā).

According to us, these assertions are fully baseless and they show lamentable weakness of modern critical research as the following arguments would show.

(A) It is quite wrong to hold that the Gītā does not mention the tanmātras. The Gītā statement पर वेदित्यवोधे कृपा (13-5) must be taken as referring to the tanmātras. The word indriyagocarāḥ (object of the senses) cannot mean
short communications

here the bhūtas, for the bhūtas are separately mentioned in the first foot of this stanza by using the word mahābhūta. The commentators also take this expression as referring to the tanmātras.1

Similarly the verse 7.4 enumerating the eight prakṛtis must be taken as referring to the tanmātras (though the very word has not been used). While commenting on this verse the commentators often speak of the tanmātras.2

In should be noted in this connection that the mere absence of the use of the word tanmātra cannot be taken as a sign for proving non-acceptance of the tanmātra doctrine by the Gītā. We are to observe whether the entity tanmātra (which is the product of ahamkāra and is the material cause of the bhūtas) has been referred to directly or indirectly.

(B) Even if the Gītā does not mention the tanmātras, this non-mention cannot be taken as proving the priority of the Gītā to the Sāṃkhya-kārikā, for the tanmātras are mentioned in such works as are prior to or contemporary with the Gītā and the author of the Gītā cannot be supposed to be ignorant of those works which must have been deemed by him as highly authoritative. If any doctrine is regarded by a teacher as valid, its non-mention (and not refutation) in any of his compositions does not prove that the teacher has shunned the doctrine as invalid.

1. शिष्यवर्णराज अवमख्यात्रत्वतां (Srīdhara). As Saṅkara says that this stanza speaks of twenty-four Sāṃkhya tattvas, he must have taken this expression as referring to the tanmātras (पञ्जव वर्णविद्वतार्थानव: श्लोकायि विचारां, तात्त्वातिकां संस्कार: वांवर्णविद्वतात्त्वातिकां आवृत्तिरेत). Giri comments: "उक्ते पञ्जव वर्णविद्वतात्त्वातिकां तत्त्वातिक्षमसतस्वार्थानमहत-सात्त्विकी" 2. पञ्जवदशंख्यात्तत्त्वतः स्तुतिः "भववन प्रकृतिरक्षता" इति वचनाः। तथा वामादेवीकी सत्सारापेयोववत: (Saṅkara’s bhāṣya on Gītā 7.4).

As for example the statement प्रविष्टे च न प्रविष्टीमाषा च in the Praśna-Up. (4.8) must be taken as clearly referring to the tanmātras. The expression पञ्जवशःशान्ति: in the Svetāsvatara-Up. (1.4) contains a reference to the tanmātras as they fall under prakṛtyaṣṭaka (vide the commentaries on this Up.). The word तन्मात्रां in Kauśitaki-Up. 3.8 also refers to them. The expression पञ्जव तन्मात्रां is found in the Maitrāyanī-Up. (3.2). Even the Rgveda, according to Sāyana, speaks of the tanmātras; vide his comment on the expression संसारवर्णम: in 1.164.36 (सप्त महैनकारो पञ्जव तन्मात्रां विविध्वेद विस्तारविश्वास्तव तत्त्वाति) [We may not accept Sāyana’s exposition as valid, but it should be accepted that Sāyana did not take it illogical to hold that the Rgveda-samhitā propounds the theory of the tanmātras].

(C) The aforesaid examples are quite enough to show that the author of the Gītā was aware of the doctrine of the tanmātras. It is needless to say that the aforesaid works were regarded by the author of the Gītā as highly authoritative. Inspite of all that have been stated above, if it is proved that the Gītā does not contain any reference to the tanmātras, then we have no other alternative but to suppose that since the tanmātras did not fall under the province of the teachings of the Gītā, they were not mentioned in it. Thus it becomes fairly clear that the non-mention of the tanmātras in the Gītā proves nothing.3 A considerable number of important yoga-practices have not been stated

3. If we take the Anugītā and the chapters on Sāṃkhya-yoga in the “Sānti-parvan” (in the Mbh.) as by the same author, who composed the Gītā, the supposed non-mention of the tanmātras in the Gītā becomes meaningless, for these sections contain clear mention of the tanmātras.
in the Gitā (e.g. the means of subjugating sleep). Does this non-mention suggest that these yoga-practices were not known to the Gitā or that they were not regarded by the Gitā as valid means or that they were invented after the composition of the Gitā?

(D) The significance of the expression 'systematized Sāmkhya philosophy' (used by Dr. Ranade) is not quite clear. According to the Sāmkhya tradition the work by Pañcaśikha is the first text that represented the systematized Sāmkhya philosophy. After him, the sage Vārṣaganya, Devala and others are said to have composed works that represented the Sāmkhya views in a systematized way. The literary history of India does not lend any support to the view that the Gitā is prior to the works by Pañcaśikha, Vārṣaganya and Devala. That the works of these teachers dealt with the tanmātras is beyond doubt.4

If 'systematized Sāmkhya philosophy' means the work known as the Sāmkhyakārikā (I do not think that here Dr. Ranade takes the Sāmkhya-sūtra and the Tattvasamāsāsūtra as the works on systematized Sāmkhya philosophy) the remarks of Dr. Ranade serve no purpose. Do we get anything philosophically valuable if the Sāmkhyakārikā is proved to have been composed after the Gitā (though the dates of these two works have not been determined by modern scholars as yet) if we bear in mind that the pre-Kārikā treatises on Sāmkhya (most of which were prior to the Gitā) dealt with the tanmātras? Thus it is quite clear that there is no ground in holding that the tanmātras are developed in the Sāmkhya philosophy later.

(E) Dr. Ranade seems to suggest that since the Sāmkhyakārikā speaks of the doctrine of the tanmātras which is wrong and since the Gitā does not mention the wrong doctrine of tanmātra, the Gitā must be older than the Sāmkhyakārikā, for the authors of later works are not supposed to be as authoritative (āpta) as the authors of the older treatises on 'adhyātmavidyā'. It is needless to say that in the case in question this way of argument is wholly irrelevant.

(F) In conclusion I want to draw the attention of my readers to an important point (not historical or literary) in this connection. Does Dr. Ranade mean to assert that before the composition of the Gitā there was none in India who directly perceived the tanmātras and as such the doctrine of the tanmātras was not known to the author of the Gitā? The tanmātras are perceived through a particular form of the samprajñāta samādhi. Was this samādhi not practised by yogins at the time of the Gitā? Will Dr. Ranade go to the length of saying that this samādhi was invented after the composition of the Gitā? It should be known that the acquisition of some of the supernormal powers depends upon the realization of the tanmātras and these powers are mentioned not only in the Gitā but in the pre-Gitā works also.

4. एकपुष्पमार्गिणि is an aphoristic statement of Devala, quoted in the Aparārka comm. on Yājñavalkya Smṛti 3.10.9. That Vārṣaganya also dealt with the tanmātras is clearly proved from the following passage of the Yuktidīpikā: “एकपुष्पमार्गिणि मार्गिण्यं । एकोतिरारणीति वार्षिकम्!” (on Kā. 22).