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INTRODUCTION: WORKING PAPERS ON SANSKRIT KNOWLEDGE-SYSTEMS ON THE EVE OF COLONIALISM

The essays that follow are working papers in the collaborative project
Sanskrit Knowledge-Systems on the Eve of Colonialism (SKSEC), which
investigates the substance and social context of Sanskrit science and
scholarship from about 1550 to 1750.[1] These two centuries witnessed
a flowering of intellectual life characterized by, among other features,
an increase in the production of texts across disciplines, the rise of a
new (or newly reinvigorated) interdisciplinarity, and the introduction
of important new discursive practices and conceptual categories. This
dynamism lasted until the consolidation of colonial power, whereupon
a decline set in that ended the age-old power of Sanskrit learning
to shape Indian intellectual history. Whether there was always and
everywhere a causal relationship between the rise of colonial power
and the decline of Sanskrit science and scholarship remains to be
determined; in the domain of literary culture more narrowly conceived,
this deterioration seems to have had a different history and to have been
conditioned by set of political and cultural factors entirely unconnected
with colonialism.[2] That in most disciplines Sanskrit knowledge proved
completely powerless in the face of its colonial counterpart is hardly
open to dispute. Yet simply to state the fact is not to explain it, and
explanation without understanding the nature of this knowledge is
reckless.

There are three main objectives of the SKSEC project (whose initial
phase, supported by funding from the National Endowment for the
Humanities and the National Science Foundation, runs from 2001–
2004). First, we are attempting to inventory as completely as possible
scholarly production during these two centuries in eight disciplines
(*vyākaraṇa, mīmāṃsā, nyāya, dharmaśāstra, alaṅkāraśāstra, āyurveda,
jyotiṣ, prayoga*), and to create a comprehensive digital archive of texts.
Some two hundred and fifty works have been photographed to date, a
figure that represents about one-sixth of the goal set for the first phase.
This archive will eventually be accessible to scholars worldwide; where
permitted by lender guidelines, selected manuscripts will also be made
available on the project website. Second, we are collecting social-

historical data on the intellectuals essential for the reconstruction of personal and group histories, educational lineages, patronage linkages, and institutional and political affiliations. These are being entered into a bio-biographical database, which has been designed specifically for SKSEC, and which, it is hoped, may serve larger ends for Indological research once our project is completed. This database will also be open for consultation on our website by the scholarly community, beginning in 2003. Third, we intend to study representative works in the context of their specific disciplinary histories, but also, to the degree possible, according to a uniform analytical matrix. This matrix comprises an assessment of, among other things:

- key problematics
- principal disciplinary positions (*pakṣa*)
- major representatives of these positions
- tenets (*siddhānta*) of the author or school in question
- lines of affiliation within each field (e.g., *prācīnānuyāyin*, "adherent of the old school," and other comparable categories that come increasingly to be used during the period)
- dominant modes of argument, evidence, and method

For the project's first stage, archive, database, and analysis will be limited in three ways. In addition to restricting the number of knowledge-systems to the eight listed (some chosen for their centrality to the structure of Sanskrit knowledge, others for the peculiar vitality they evince for the period in question), we have set certain temporal and spatial boundaries. First, the time frame 1550–1750 constitutes a provisional hypothesis enabling us to begin work, rather than a settled judgment of historical truth, something that can only be reached at the conclusion of the project. The endpoint is largely unproblematic: It is set by the consolidation of English colonial domination (Thanjavur was taken by Wellesley in 1799, Varanasi was ceded to the British in 1803, and the Peshwas of Maharashtra were defeated in the course of the following decade), after which point the rules of the Indian knowledge game were unrecognizably transformed. The starting point is somewhat more arbitrary, however. It has been apparent to us from the first that different knowledge-systems developed according to somewhat different rhythms; the history of *nyāya*, for example, which experienced a powerful renewal in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, differs markedly from that of *mīmāṃsā*, where such reinvigoration occurred only two centuries later. In many ways, however, the work of Raghunātha Śiromaṇi in the north and Appayya Dīkṣita in the south (both fl. c. 1550) mark moments of significant historical rupture, which may therefore be taken as a tentative

starting point for research (in actual fact, however, our archival collecting will extend several or more decades prior to this point depending on the *śāstra* in question). Second, while the spatial limitations are more flexible than the temporal, we are aiming to develop a finer-grained picture of four regional complexes (Delhi/Varanasi, Thanjavur/Madurai, Mithila/Navadvip, and Maharasthra). Our hope is to get a clearer sense of the varying conditions of intellectual production – courtly Thanjavur under the Marathas differed markedly from Varanasi with its apparently freelance intellectuals – and to come to understand something of how regional disciplinary specializations, such as the cultivation of *nyāya* in Bengal or *vyākaraṇa* in Maharashtra, came about and were sustained.[3]

The four working papers collected here raise each in its own way the kinds of core questions in the intellectual history of early-modern India that the project as whole seeks to explore in detail. Not least significant is the way they illustrate the dynamism in intellectual life mentioned earlier, though the vector of dynamism, so to speak, is not uniform. In *alaṅkāraśāstra*, the work of Appayya Dīkṣita exhibits a new method informed by a new historicity that aims toward a renewal of the past. In *mīmāṃsā*, the writings of the seventeenth-century scholar Khaṇḍadeva show new departures in central issues of the knowledge-system and a new, strategically deployed, discursive practice. In *jyotiṣ*, we find in early sixteenth-century thinkers an unprecedented empiricism and intellectual ecumenicism coupled with a reaffirmation of the archaic. A more general review of the sociology of Sanskrit knowledge, lastly, suggests that certain fundamental orientations toward temporality emerging out of the ritual sphere may have continued to shape the thinking of even the most daring of early-modern intellectuals.

As Yigal Bronner observes in his paper on Appayya's *Citramīmāṃsā, alaṅkāraśāstra* as such constitutes something of an anomaly among the Sanskrit knowledge-systems. Not only is it not founded on a core text, but its focus constantly changed over time, partly in response to new literary practices but more often as a consequence of radically new (and self-consciously new) conceptual breakthroughs, arguably promoted by the very absence of a charter text. What is equally important, far from exerting a monopoly over the knowledge-form, as was the case in many other *śāstras, alaṅkāraśāstra* stimulated the production of vernacular poetics everywhere: Consider, for example, the case of Brajbhāṣā, where the productivity of poetics, from Keśavdās in the late sixteenth century to Bikhārīdās in the early eighteenth, stands in striking contrast to the total absence of scholarship on vernacular grammar or logic-epistemology.

But if the knowledge-system itself is somewhat anomalous, Appayya's scholarship in the domain epitomizes the wider intellectual transformation under way, on at least three counts. First, like a number of other thinkers of the period, Appayya evinces a new interest in renewal, and of a peculiar sort; the work of the recent past (tenth-fourteenth centuries) was increasingly seen as deficient, while the deep past (seventh-eighth centuries) was re-authorized. As Bronner insightfully observes, the ancients (*prācīnas*, as they are now consistently named), Bhāmaha, Daṇḍin, and so on, are collectively transformed into something approximating the foundational text the system never possessed and elevated above criticism. This sort of revitalized interest in textual foundations seems to be a hallmark of the early-modern knowledge-systems: thus, *mīmāṃsā*, after centuries of ever more deeply nested subcommentary, returned to direct commentary on the *Jaiminisūtra*, typified by Khaṇḍadeva's mid-seventeenth-century *Mīmāṃsākaustubha* or Vāsudeva Dīkṣita's early eighteenth-century *Adhvaramīmāṃsākutūhalavṛtti*; and in *nyāya*, already from the fifteenth century the *sūtra* text had re-emerged as the focus of attention of scholars for the first time in a millennium.[4] Second, although the basic structure of the idea-system was not changed in Appayya's work, there is indubitable originality: in discursive style, in genre (here and elsewhere in his oeuvre, such as the remarkable *Pūrvottaramīmāṃsāvādanakṣatramālā*, we encounter something approaching the scholarly essay), and, most important, in method. Appayya shifts the focus from technical analysis directed to framing ever more adequate definitions of tropes to new conceptualization, where definition becomes the outcome of analysis rather than its starting-point, and where, more specifically, tropes are taken no longer as propositions but as verbal actions. Third, as we find to be the case for other disciplines, Appayya's newness in *alaṅkārśāstra* was limited. For one thing, his problematic, questions, and agenda as a whole remained exactly what they had been for scholars many centuries past. For another, contemporary innovations in poetry and poetics – the vernacularization of the literary sphere, of which he could not have failed to be aware, and the rise of new categories such as *bhaktirasa* in Bengal – remained completely outside Appayya's purview. He was an "innovative traditionalist," as Bronner memorably phrases it, for whom the new was "intimately connected to reestablishing the old" – an intellectual objective very widely shared in this epoch, but about whose intellectual-historical, or social-historical, logic we currently understand next to nothing.

Unlike *alaṅkāraśāstra* (whose relatively meager output must have something to do with the growing obsolescence of Sanskrit literature itself), *mīmāṃsā* witnessed an explosion of activity during this period. Varanasi was crowded with masters of a stature the discipline had not seen since Someśvara some four or five centuries earlier, men like Khaṇḍadeva, Āpadeva (the grandson of the great Marathi religious reformer Eknāth), and the various members of the distinguished Bhaṭṭa family (Śaṅkara, Dinakara, Kamalākara, Gāgā, Śambhu, and others). And the south was hardly less well endowed, with Appayya himself at the beginning of our period, and, at its end, the remarkable Vāsudeva Dīkṣita (fl. Thanjavur c. 1700, author also of the *Bālamanoramā* commentary on the *Siddhāntakaumudī*). Works like Pārthasārathi Miśra's *Śāstradīpikā* (c. 1000) were reread seriously for the first time in centuries, once again the revival being marked by Appayya, who wrote a still-unpublished commentary on the text. This new vitality is everywhere evident, but it has hardly been recognized in the scholarship, let alone explained.

Moreover, if the oeuvre of Khaṇḍadeva – as anyone must sense who has read at all widely in the field – represents the highwater mark in the field, how supremely difficult a task it is to grasp precisely the points of his originality. Rare was the Sanskrit intellectual of the time who, like his contemporary Descartes half a world away, was prepared openly to proclaim and explain the need "to start anew from first principles." And even when we encounter one of these, like the *mīmāṃsaka* Dinakara (the father of the celebrated Gāgā Bhaṭṭa), who asserted that he would "prove by other means, clarify, or even uproot the thought of the antiquated authorities," actual innovation is hardly conspicuous. Enormous learning and labor are required to demonstrate true novelty for any particular point of controversy.[5] Lawrence McCrea offers just this kind of demonstration for Khaṇḍadeva's analysis of a seemingly narrow but actually consequential point in language philosophy (concerning *matvarthalakṣaṇā*, or the implied presence of a suffix signifying possession, required to ensure a syntactic relationship between two substantives), over which the scholar broke decisively with a long tradition of understanding. Far more readily apparent than newness of content is newness of form, which is marked by the importation of the highly distinctive idiolect of *navyanyāya*. This is a significant new feature of Khaṇḍadeva's work, and indeed, of much of the scholarship of our period, though to date no good account has been offered either of its discursive functions or of the history of its conquest of knowledge-systems beyond *nyāya* (the oeuvre of Dinakara, for example, in the generation preceding Khaṇḍadeva is almost completely untouched by the

idiom). McCrea makes a strong case for believing that Khaṇḍadeva was unlikely simply to have been appropriating "trendy jargon." The use of *navyanyāya* phraseology was in part a consequence of "interscholastic" debate, a discursive process specific to particular problems and "locally conditioned": debating the opponent in the very same language he uses – fighting *avacchedakas* with *avacchedakas* – which may indicate a new interest on the part of *naiyāyikas* in certain *mīmāṃsā* questions. But another of these local conditions may well have been newness of thought, and so the style appears even in *intra*scholastic debate. McCrea is surely right to see that the co-presence of an "open declaration of a new doctrine" – as in Khaṇḍadeva's innovative reassessment of the issue of *matvarthalakṣaṇā* – and a new mode of enunciating it can hardly have been accidental.

That the various knowledge-systems have somewhat different developmental histories, and that the pace and extent of innovation across them could be radically different as well, are points made abundantly clear in Christopher Minkowski's splendid synthetic account of the astral sciences in the first half of the sixteenth century, and their place in Sanskrit intellectual history more largely conceived. The ability to grasp this intellectual history so securely in the area of *jyotiṣ* is owing in large part to the extraordinary pioneering work of David Pingree, far more sophisticated in both its social and its intellectual history than is available for any other early-modern *śāstra*. It is not unlikely that the inventory of works and persons how being prepared for other knowledge-systems, which aims at something comparable to what Pingree has produced in the *Census of the Exact Sciences in Sanskrit*, may prompt revisions in our initial hypotheses regarding their development of the sort the *Census* had made possible for astronomy.[6] With respect to their intellectual substance, the astral sciences seem at once representative of certain broader trends in early-modern intellectual history given the innovative traditionalism they share with Appayya and so many other thinkers in adjacent fields, and, again, anomalous, given their remarkable ecumenicism. Thus, on the one hand, in what represents something of a revival of the science in the first half of the sixteenth century, we find new systems for calculating the positions of planets coupled with new empirical and observational practices – and at the same time, a new concern (as in the so-called Pārthapura school) with finding accommodation with archaic puranic cosmology; or a new interest (as in the Kerala astronomer Nīlakaṇṭha) in providing innovative observation and reasoning with philosophical grounding, even if this means adducing texts from nearly a millennium earlier,

such as Kumārila's *Tantravārtika*. (That the arrival of the new should be coupled with the reassertion of the old is of course hardly unique to this world; think of the reception of Copernicus, among whose followers attempts were made to reconcile his work with geocentric scripture.[7]) On the other hand, however, we encounter what, in light of the attitudes of other knowledge-systems, is an apparently relaxed and quite exceptional interaction with Persian and Arabic science, to which some of this new astronomical knowledge is undoubtedly to be traced. (Minkowski perceptively notes the antiquity of *jyotis's* ecumenical openness, demonstrated by works like the *Yavanajātaka* of 150 C.E.) Consider the contrary position of *mīmāmsā* on such intercourse. More than ever before in the discipline, scholars in the seventeenth century who wrote on *mīmāmsā* also wrote on *dharmaśāstra*, and hence also on *jyotis*, which was necessary for the calculation of the timing of religious rites. A preeminent example of a master in this triple field, in fact of the new interdiciplinarity mentioned earlier, is Kamalākara Bhaṭṭa (fl. 1650 Varanasi). Now, during this epoch *mīmāmsakas* along with others (including Appayya's grandson Veṅkatādhvarin in his *Viśvaguṇādarśacampū*) began to argue against the scientific status not just of Persian but even of the languages of Place (*deśabhāṣās*), in a way not seen since the attacks against the Buddhists and Jains mounted by Kumārila, for whom linguistic corruption (*asādhuśabda*) sufficed to render a discourse non-science (*śāstratvam na pratīyate*). As Khaṇḍadeva put it in his *Kaustubha*;

There does indeed exist a prohibition of a general moral scope [that is, *puruṣārtha*, rather than a prohibition restricted to ritual, *kratvartha*] applying to words of Barbara and other languages, since there is a prohibition against even learning them: 'One should not learn a *mleccha* language.' And in that scriptural statement there are no grounds ... for setting aside the conventional meaning of the word *mleccha* [that is, "Parsiki," Persian, and "Romaka," French (?)] [and interpreting the word as referring to ungrammatical Sanskrit, as Khaṇḍadeva is required to do in the rule *na mlecchitavai.*] Thus the prohibition on Barbara and other languages is purely of a general moral sort.[8]

Development in scientific knowledge was thus uneven not only across disciplines but also, sometimes, within disciplines, and for complex sociological no less than epistemological reasons.

A serious sociology of the knowledge-systems must concern itself with more than networks of conversation partners. It needs to grasp more fundamental understandings, the sources of truth, for example, or the meaning of tradition, that helped to shape the way science and scholarship were conducted. Jan Houben opens up this important topic with analysis of the possible implications of ritualism for history, or

rather its lack, in Indian intellectual life. The highly etiolated dimension
of historical referentially, indeed of social temporality as such, in shastric
discourse, is a problem that has long preoccupied students of the field,
and a variety of factors has been offered to explain it. Houben suggests
another, the nature, especially the cyclicity, of Vedic ritual, an important
issue that to date has not received the kind of theorization it merits.
That time is elided in the course of sacrificial action, and that many
participants in the community of shastric discourse were participants
in such action, may be taken as given. What remains less uncertain is
the transportability of ritual *mentalité* across spheres of social action.
But in principle it is possible to argue that, as in seventeenth-century
London, where a scientific fact came to be authorized as one according
to the peculiar kinds of regimes of trust and truth appropriate to the
social world of the gentleman, so in seventeenth-century Varanasi the
social world of the Brahman intellectual, and preeminently the social
practice of sacrifice, may have constituted a paradigmatic frame of
reference.[9] Be that as it may, what is beyond dispute is that the lack
of historicality in Sanskrit intellectual discourse – to the degree this
is in fact the case; I have suggested that here the seventeenth century
marks a radical departure – represents no failure of the "Indian mind";
virtually any Sanskrit inscription suffices to show the degree of temporal
precision that could be had when desired. It marks rather a choice, one
made to remove every spatiotemporal constraint from discussions of
problems viewed as transcending space and time.

Also beyond dispute is that this choice had nothing to do with
religious obscurantism. It is remarkable to reflect, in thinking about
topics for a future comparative history of early-modern intellectual
practices in India and Europe that is an important long-term aim of the
SKSEC project, on how *radically free* were the Sanskrit intellectuals.
No dogma enforced by institutional religious power, no censorship by
an absolutist state, no threats of excommunication for heretical belief,
no conflict with theological authority ever affected them. It was not
unfreedom that led to the enfeeblement of the Sanskrit intellectual
tradition, any more than it was failure to adopt new models of reality,
new modes of scientific practice, new forms of discursive precision, or
new ways of formulating old problems. As the following essays show,
all this was not only possible, it was actualized. The great tradition of
Sanskrit learning did not die from self-immobilization. But to explain
how it did die requires far more sophisticated hypothesizing based on
far more serious empirical work, and it is precisely this that the Sanskrit
Knowledge-Systems project hopes eventually to provide.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

NOTES

[1] The papers were originally presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, Washington, D.C., April 2002.
[2] Pollock, 2001.
[3] For further information about the project, please consult our website, dsal.uchicago.edu/sanskrit.
[4] The latter topic is the subject of ongoing research by Karin Preisendanz (Vienna).
[5] The verse itself (unmūlayan viśadayan sādhayan vā vidhāntaraiḥ / jīrṇāśayam . . .), from the Bhāṭṭadinakara 9.1 (avataraṇa), as well as Dinakara's major contributions to the exegesis of portions of the Pūrvamīmāṃsā system, are discussed in my forthcoming edition of the smṛtipāda of the Bhāṭṭadinakara.
[6] Pingree, 1970–1994.
[7] Compare for example Huff, 1993: 321ff.
[8] See Pollock, forthcoming.
[9] Shapin, 1994.

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