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A Critical Evaluation Of Halāyudha And His Brāhmaṇa Sarvasva

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Abstract

In this paper, it provides a scholarly examination of a prominent 12th century Sanskrit scholar known as Halāyudha and his seminal work the Brāhmaṇa-Sarvasva. It discusses the biographical context of Halāyudha, and content of Brāhmaṇa-Sarvasva, also the significance in Vedic scholarship and underscores influence on Indian intellectual traditions.

Key words:

Halāyudha, Gṛihya-sūtras, rituals, Vedic mantras.

Introduction

None of the Vedic commentators preceding Sāyaṇācārya is known to have ever attempted at exegetic work, equalling those of Sāyaṇācārya, either in variety or in magnitude. Sometimes, their works follow an earlier tradition of interpretation. All of these works have an immense value to the students of Vedic languages. Vedic commentators may be divided broadly into two groups: One commenting on a particular Veda-Saṁhitās and other explaining selected mantras occurring in the different Vedic text for a part explaining a particular text. Skandhasvāmin, Mādhava, Uvaṭa etc belong to the first group and Haradatta, Guṇaviṣṇu and Halāyudha to the second. It is an attempt to assess the value of Halāyudha's contribution in the domain of Vedic studies.

Integral to Vedic literature, the Brāhmaṇas serve as expository sections to the Saṁhitās and without those of the works that will be very crucial to understand human rituals.

Halāyudha's Brāhmaṇa-Sarvasva stands out as a framework in a simple manner after synthesizing various Brāhmaṇa traditions.

Overview of the Brāhmaṇa-Sarvasva :

Mahāmati Halayudha, the luminous star in the galaxy of talents that adorned the court of King Lakṣhmanaseṇa of Bengal during the 12th century A.C. He wrote a large number of works, including Brāhmaṇa Sarvasva written in Sanskrit. In this text he had explained most of the Vedic mantras as prescribed for recitation in the various Gṛihya Rites. He also discussed the ritual and philosophical interpretations of various mantras into Vedas as practiced by the ancient Hindus. He explained the religious, principal, and philosophical concept underlying the Brāhminical texts, their meaning, and their utility.

In his works he discussed, explained and also referred the opinions of earlier scholars like Manu, Yājñavalkya, Śātātapa Devala, Yama, Vyāsa and other authorities from Smṛiti and Dharmaśāstras. So, his work Brāhmaṇa Sarvasva got occupied a special recognition among present scholars.

Biographical context of Halāyudha

At the beginning of Brāhmaṇasarvasva, after Mangalāchāvaṇa Halāyudha introduced himself. From that information we came to know that he belonged to a Vaidika Brāhmaṇa family of Gauḍa. His father was Dhanañjaya and mother was Dhātṛī. Their financial

conditions were prosperous. His father was attached with religious practices and mother has various qualities. Being impressed by Halāyudha's scholarly practices, King Lakṣhmaṇasena invited him to his court and honored him. From the verse of preface, it is known that even in noticeably young age he received the title of royal paṇḍit. From this he reached various titles such as "Mahāmahopādhyāya" and the position of chief religious' authority in the kingdom.

As mentioned Dharmatā, his wife was devoted to religious observance and the performance of stated traditions.

Apart from Brāhmaṇa, Sarvasva he composed other texts Vaishnava sarvasva, siba-sarvasva and Paṇḍita sarvasva. Not only the religious practices but also his knowledge of Mīmāṃsā philosophy of Jaimini depicted in Mīmāṃsā-sarvasva. He always emphasise the explanation of Vedic mantras, especially Gayatri Mantra in his first work, Brāhmaṇa-Sarvasva.

Overview of the Brāhmaṇa-Sarvasva:

The Brāhmaṇa Sarvasva contains exposition of Vedic Mantras which are used in connection with the domestic ceremonies performed by the followers of the Kāṇva recension of the Vājasaneyi yajurveda. For the Gṛhya rites the vajasaneyas used paraskavagrhyasūtra. the Saṁskāra Vaijñāvās, etc. Padaparva Gṛhyasūtra. The bulk of the mantras, which are treated in the text was explained by Halāyudha in Brāhmaṇa Sarvasva.

Halāyudha purposely dealt with a number of particularized mantras, rather than the collection (included more often) identical lines taken from Saṁhitās but the prose portion from Pāraskara-Gṛhyasūtra also only. Along with the mantra exposition he elaborately explained the procedures followed in different sacraments and Vedic rituals. In this connection he had cited from different Dharmaśāstras like, Purāṇas and Brāhmaṇas in such a way that sometime when a scholar will go through the text it may be appeared as a Smṛti digest. But according to the author this work only had his attention to explain the commentary of Vedic Mantras. As for example he has left out the treatment of bali oblations as they require no application of Vedic Mantras.

Purpose of His work:

Halāyudha remarks in Brāhmaṇa Sarvasva show clearly that in 12th century A.C. two classes of Brāhmaṇas carrying on Vedic studies in two different ways.

In this connection we have presented a picture of the condition of Vedic studies obtaining four different sections of Brāhmaṇa community, Utkala, Pāścātya, Rādhiya and Vaidendra living in Bengal. Regarding the Vedic knowledge of Veda all these groups were not in the same, because one of them followed the common method of studying the Veda. Uttara and Paschatya used Vedic

mantras without knowledge of their meaning; on the other hand, rādhiya and Vaidendra paid more attention to the sacrificial application of the mantras and studied such a portion of the Vedic text. So, the purpose of Vedādhyaṇa was not served.

But the existence of a great scholar like Halāyudha is a clear testimony that in 12th century Bengal was not fully bereft of right type of Vedic scholar. A scholar's study can be in general but not fully bereft of right type of Vedic scholarship fall into a civil condition in many other parts of India. Moreover, Halāyudha indulged rather in despair to write a lucid commentary on the Sūtras were recited with the observance of daily rites.

Features of Halāyudha's explanation

As regards interpretation of Mantras, Halāyudha has, in some cases, a little ritualistic. Whenever necessary he elaborates the half-expressed ideas of Vedic seers by adding words of his own. He indicates the relation of the constituent parts of a verse by linking them in the proper order. He pointed out the peculiarities of the use of genders, verb-forms and case-ends in a Vedic text by Sāyaṇa. Most valuable in his commentary is Vākyārtha.

Ritualistic Interpretation:

A number of scholars noticed that the Veda is capable of several interpretations from three different standpoints—Ritualistic, naturalistic, and spiritualistic. Halāyudha has naturally interpreted the text from the point of view of their applicability to the practical rites. He may therefore be called a ritualistic interpreter of Vedic mantras.

Halāyudha followed uvata not only but has implicit faith on ritualistic purpose of Veda but also adapted the meaning of the mantras to the need of even the minor sacraments and daily rites. Halāyudha has utilized the Bhāṣya of Uvata and of Guṇaviṣṇu. But many mantras which were explained in Brāhmaṇa Saravana had not even touched by the two predecessors. Halāyudha claimed to have explained some mantras for the first time, not explained by anybody on the earth.

For the interpretation of such mantras Halāyudha seems to have depended upon his traditional knowledge of Veda. As for example while commenting on the

Aghamarṣaṇa Sūkta (RV, X, 190) Mīmāṃsā remarks

“अस्याधमर्षणमन्त्रस्य व्यख्यानमचरितुम हृहि प्रकाम्पो जायते..... अस्य पदपाठमात्रं च नास्ति ब्राह्मणा-निरुक्तादिकमप्यस्य नास्ति।”

The commentary indicates that Halāyudha has fully aware of the possible help that might be got from the Brāhmaṇa, finding that the 'Mīmāṃsā' in respect of ascertaining the true significance of a Vedic Mantra of Agni has given no clue to the meaning of the Aghamarṣaṇa hymn from any other Vedic sources, Halāyudha tapped at the door of Dharmaśāstra. He cites the Yājñavalkya-smṛti passage and then explains the hymn in the light of that.

Readings in the Brāhmaṇa-sarvasva:

The reading of Vedic Mantras adopted and explained by Halāyudha appears in some cases different from what are found in many other texts. In some cases, he not only quotes evidence from Aniruddha and Sūryasūri but also from Gautama and his commentator Haradatta. He even suggests that readings are varied from one another due to the recension of Vedas. If we go through the Brāhmaṇasarvasva it will be clear that Hālayudha had all possible evidence necessary for interpretation of Vedic mantras, especially the ritualistic type. Because the text dealt with the rituals.

Halāyudha's work is highly valuable, but it has been ruined in some places by incredibly poor copy errors and faulty interpretations. It is difficult to blame these incorrect readings on Halāyudha himself, as he has clearly an expert who was deeply knowledgeable about every part of Vedic literature. In my opinion, the defects had originated from scribal errors which have been copied by others without correction.

Halāyudha's Works:

Halāyudha's was a voluminous writer. He mentions in the Brāhmaṇa-sarvasva four other works of him with their names ending in sarvasva, viz., Mimāṃsa-sarvasva, Vaiṣṇava-sarvasva, Saiva-sarvasva and Pandita-sarvasva. There are some questions about the authorship of Mimamsa-sarvasva. But we can see quotation from Vaiṣṇava -sarvasva in Maheśakavi's Ācārachandrodaya. Saiva-sarvasva and Pandita-sarvasva are quoted in the Smṛiti-tattvas of Raghunandana.

Halāyudha's scholarly works were heavily used and cited centuries later by writers across different parts of India. As multiple scholars have noted, Halāyudha is dealt with at different times, there is sometimes confusion about who wrote what. For example, Saṁskara-gaṇapati may or may not belong to the same Halāyudha who wrote the Brāhmaṇa -sarvasva. Early or later writers such as Sridatta Upādhyaya of Mithila frequently mentioned Halāyudha in their works. But we know that the Halāyudha is the same person as Brāhmaṇa-sarvasva as a long passage on Halāyudha's Nibandha match some word for word. Later commentators repeated his work so much that they copied large section of it to support their explanations and are openly admitted that.

Conclusion:

Halāyudha's Brāhmaṇa-Sarvasva is nothing but a testament to the intellectual vitality of medieval India, encapsulating the essence of Brāhmaṇa wisdom through scholarly synthesis. As a grammarian and exegete, Halāyudha not only preserved Vedic heritage but also made it accessible, ensuring its relevance across centuries. This brief study underscores the work's multifaceted contributions, inviting

further exploration into its intersections with philosophy, linguistics, and ritual practices.

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