On Avihitā Bhakti

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1. Introduction

In Chapter V of his Muktāphala (MPh), Vopadeva (ca. 13thCE), a Vaiṣṇava scholar from Maharashtra, broadly classified bhakti into two kinds, namely “prescribed bhakti” (vihitā bhakti) and “unprescribed bhakti” (avihitā bhakti). Hemādri (ca. 13thCE), Vopadeva’s patron, provided a detailed explanation of these two in the Kaivalyadīpikā (KD), his commentary on MPh. I have previously discussed the general definition of bhakti as well as the definition of prescribed bhakti found in Chapter V of the MPh and in the KD.1) I also have shown that with regard to prescribed bhakti, “prescribed” (vihitā) means “taught in the Vedic scriptures” (vedoktā), and that what is prescribed is not bhakti itself, but the means for the accomplishment of bhakti.2) However, I have not yet had the opportunity to discuss unprescribed bhakti, and therefore in this paper I would like to take up a number of issues related to unprescribed bhakti as they appear in the MPh and KD. These issues are as follows: First, what does it mean for bhakti to be “unprescribed” (avihitā)? Second, what is the logic of salvation by unprescribed bhakti? Third and finally, what are the subcategories of unprescribed bhakti? I will clarify these various issues by analyzing MPh and KD.

2. “Unprescribed bhakti” found in the Muktāphala

Before examining unprescribed bhakti, I would like to first briefly review how bhakti in general is defined in the MPh and the KD. Vopadeva referred to Bhāgavatapurāṇa (BhP) 7.1.31cd as the general definition of bhakti: “Therefore, by any means (upāya) one should concentrate the mind (manas) on Kṛṣṇa” (tasmāt kenāpy upāyena manas kṛṣṇe niveśayet). According to Hemādri’s explanation, this definition can be understood as follows: Bhakti is “to fix the mind on Kṛṣṇa, who is Brahman conditioned by pure quality (sattva), by means of that [bhakti], whether prescribed or unprescribed.”3)
I shall now turn to a discussion of “unprescribed bhakti,” which is the subject of this paper. I will begin by taking up the third issue raised in the introduction, namely the classification of “unprescribed bhakti.” According to Vopadeva, relying on BhP 7.1.29 four types of “unprescribed bhakti” have been formulated: (1) that which arises from lust (kāmajā), (2) that which arises from hatred (dveṣajā), (3) that which arises from fear (bhayajā), and (4) that which arises from affection (snehajā). In BhP 7.1.29 it is said that one should concentrate one’s mind on the supreme deity based on lust, hatred, fear, or affection. This corresponds to the general definition of bhakti as “to concentrate (to fix) the mind on Lord Kṛṣṇa by any means, whether prescribed or unprescribed.” Therefore, Vopadeva’s line of thought might be reconstructed as follows: Vopadeva considered lust and so forth to be “unprescribed,” and furthermore interpreted “arising from them” to mean “by means of them.” He then defined the concentration of the mind on the supreme deity based on these four as “unprescribed bhakti.” Thus, with regard to the third issue raised in the introduction, namely the subcategories of unprescribed bhakti, we can conclude that there are the above four. However, Vopadeva himself gave no explanation of the other two issues raised, namely what it means for bhakti to be “unprescribed” and what is the logic of salvation by unprescribed bhakti.

3. What does it mean to be “unprescribed”? 

I will now discuss the KD’s position regarding the first issue introduced above, that is to say, what it means to be “unprescribed.” Hemādri explained the reason why lust and so forth are to be considered unprescribed mainly from the viewpoint of the notion of injunction (vidhi). He argued that, as lust and so forth are already appeared (prāpta), they are not fit matter for injunctions. Hence, the bhakti that arises from them is likewise not to be prescribed. In this context, Hemādri relied on a definition of injunctions as a “pure injunction” (*śuddhavidhi), or “injunction for something new” (apūrvavidhi). This is one of the three classes of injunctions enumerated in the Tantravārttika by Kumārila Bhaṭṭa (ca. 600–650CE), a great scholar of the Mīmāṃsā school. Based on the definition of apūrvavidhi, this type of injunction relates to something that does not yet appear (aprāpta). However, lust and so forth are naturally established and consequently their appearance is already the case, not something that is yet to appear. Therefore, they are not among the objects proper to this kind of injunction and hence cannot be prescribed.
Hemādri also anticipated the objection that the injunction is to be inferred (vidhikalpanā) from exegesis (arthavāda) and denied its validity. Hemādri’s (imaginary) opponent argues that even without their being any explicit injunction calling for lust and so forth, one can infer such an injunction based on the force of the exegesis (i.e., the statement of fact) found in BhP 7.1.29, which states that “many people have attained his (Kṛṣṇa’s) state.” Hemādri, however, rejected this position as follows: Even if the injunction is inferred based on exegesis in this manner, its object still would have to be something that has not yet appeared. On the other hand, lust and so forth are established in one’s own nature, they are already apparent and hence cannot be the object of the injunction. Therefore, it is not possible to infer an injunction for lust and so forth from exegesis.7)

Furthermore, Hemādri argued that since the relationship between the result (bhakti) and the means (lust and so forth) is already known, lust and so forth are not objects of the injunction for the non-apparent. The cowherd women (gopī) are devoted to Kṛṣṇa not because they understand him to be the supreme deity, are commanded to love Him and consequently love Him obligatorily. Rather, they are devoted to Him as their lover (jāra), that is to say, they simply loved Him and thus bhakti toward Him was naturally established. Then, since Kṛṣṇa happened to be the supreme deity, liberation just happened to occur to those who were devoted to him. Thus, the cowherd women and others who are devoted to Kṛṣṇa in like fashion already know the relationship between bhakti as the result and lust and so forth as the means. In other words, it is obvious and already apparent to them that bhakti is naturally established by lust and so forth, and thus lust and so forth are not prescribed to them.8)

In sum, the reason why Hemādri argued that bhakti is not prescribed with respect to unprescribed bhakti is that although the injunction targets things that have not yet appeared, lust and so forth, which are the means of bhakti, are naturally established, already appeared, and therefore cannot be the objects of the injunction. The fact that bhakti is not prescribed by definition implies that its means cannot be prescribed, either. In the case of the cowherd women and others, though they had neither an understanding that Kṛṣṇa was the supreme deity nor the intention to attain liberation, it is obvious and already apparent that bhakti is naturally established through lust and so forth for Kṛṣṇa, who they simply considered as their lover. Therefore, lust and so forth are not the objects of injunction. However, even in this case, we can think that originally bhakti toward Kṛṣṇa arose because of the natural
establishment of lust and so forth for him.

In addition, Hemādri also anticipated and countered the objection that bhakti in general is prescribed because the optative verb ending “should” is found in the general definition of bhakti, and hence it would be contrary to its very definition to say that bhakti is not prescribed. Here, Hemādri argued that the optative verb ending “should focus” (niveśayet) is not intended to be a literal command. Thus, since bhakti in general cannot be prescribed, bhakti not being prescribed does not constitute a contradiction with the definition.

4. The logic of salvation by unprescribed bhakti

I will now discuss the issue of what the logic of salvation by unprescribed bhakti is. On BhP 7.1.29, which explain that the supreme deity is the basis for the fact that many people have attained His state, or liberation, through the four kinds of unprescribed bhakti, Hemādri argued as follows: Since the supreme deity who is the object of bhakti is both merciful and omnipotent, depending on the bhaktas’ fixation of their minds on Him in whatever way, that is, their offering of bhakti to him by whatever means, He will bestow on them fruition, that is, liberation. Briefly, this means that the supreme deity is so merciful and omnipotent that when bhaktas offer bhakti to Him, He responds and provides salvation to them. The logic of salvation itself seems to be common to bhakti in general.

What, then, are the differences in the logic of salvation between prescribed and unprescribed bhakti, or in other words, what are the characteristics of the logic of salvation for unprescribed bhakti? In this latter case, it is thought that for bhaktas bhakti is established simply by the spontaneous arousal of feelings such as lust toward the supreme deity without them knowing who He is, and that the supreme deity provides salvation to them as a result. In the case of prescribed bhakti, on the other hand, since bhakti is established through the performance of ritual acts as prescribed in the Vedic scriptures and the acquisition of knowledge of ātman, bhaktas are required to make conscious efforts in performing these acts. Furthermore, while the prescribed bhaktis are classified into 14 types, their fruit is said to be the unitary one of taking the same form as the supreme deity, and the stages from the lowest to the highest bhakti of the 14 types are also spelled out. Thus, in the case of prescribed bhakti, bhaktas are required to make the effort to ascend these stages. In contrast to prescribed bhakti, it is understood that unprescribed bhakti is characterized by the fact that there are no stages and no need for conscious effort, since
bhakti is established only by spontaneous occurrences such as lust. In addition, it is indicated that pure bhakti, which is the highest stage of prescribed bhakti, is the act of performing rituals and other acts but without desiring their fruits. It consequently requires more conscious effort than unprescribed bhakti, in that one performs ritual acts even if one does not desire their results.

Moreover, we can say that it is also a characteristic of the logic of salvation in unprescribed bhakti that the supreme deity’s existence and nature is more important than in the case of prescribed bhakti. In the case of prescribed bhakti, there is only one final result, but at the same time the individual results of the prescribed means of ritual action and knowledge are also fixed in correspondence to these means at each stage of bhaktis. Furthermore, there is a system of gradual progression through the stages toward the attainment of the final, single result. In the case of unprescribed bhakti, on the other hand, it is understood that bhakti naturally arises from the means of bhakti, such as lust, but the relationship between the means of bhaktis and their results is not systematically established. The proof that the result of liberation arises through unprescribed bhakti consists merely in the fact that many people have actually been liberated through it. This relationship between means and salvation itself depends solely on the mercy and omnipotence of the supreme deity, and hence His existence and specific nature are to be considered to be of greater significance than in the case of prescribed bhakti.

5. Conclusion

I will conclude by summarizing my findings regarding the three issues raised in the introduction with regard to Hemādri’s KD, namely, what does it mean for bhakti to be “unprescribed”: what is the logic of salvation by unprescribed bhakti: and what are the subcategories of unprescribed bhakti? Regarding the first issue, bhakti is said to be “unprescribed” in the sense that the means of bhakti, such as lust, are not objects of an injunction as they arise naturally. As to the second issue, by offering bhakti to the supreme deity, without any conscious effort or awareness of who He is, and through naturally aroused lust and so forth, one can obtain salvation solely by the grace of the supreme deity. Finally, in regard to the third issue, there are 4 subcategories of bhakti: bhakti arising from lust, arising from hatred, arising from fear, and arising from affection. However, unlike the 14 types of prescribed bhaktis, which are systematically ranked from the lowest to the
highest, each of the 4 kinds of unprescribed bhakti is capable of producing the result of liberation on its own.

Notes
1) See Manabe 2022.
2) See Manabe 2022, 35–37.
4) MPH 89,12–14. In this paper, the page numbers of the MPH and the KD are given depending on MPHc/KDG. I revise the text based on several manuscripts. The manuscripts are, for MPH, A, D1, E, and, for KD, A, D1, D2, E, T. 5) Cf. TV 212,13f. (on Jaininīyaśatra 1.2.34): vidhir aytantam aprāpте niyamanāḥ pāksike sāti / tatra cānyatra ca prāpte prisaṃkhhyeti kīrtyatē // See Kataoka 2011, 524–526, fn. 780. In the Mīmāṃsāśāstra (MP), the compendium of the Mīmāṃsā school (Bhāṭṭa school) composed by the later scholar Kṛṣṇaṭīrīya (ca. 1700–1760CE), the three injunctions are called apūrvavīddhi, niyavīddhi, and parisaṃkhhyāvīddhi. MP 53,8–541: punar api vīdhi trividhāḥ - apūrvavīddhi niyamavīddhiḥ parisaṃkhhyāvīddhiḥ ca. 6) KD 90,2–3: avihitattvaṁ tv asayaḥ (A, D1, E) tasyāḥ KDG, KDp, T) kāmādeḥ, svabhāvasiddhatvavān vighatām asaṣṭayatvāt. aprāpto hy artho vidhihogocarāḥ. "vidhir aytantam aprāpте" (A, D1, E, T) aprāpṭav KDG, KDp) ity uktatvāt. 7) KD 90,5–7: nāpi bahavas tadgatiṁ gatā ity arthavādasāmarthyāḥ (A, D1) arthavādasāmarthyāṇaḥ E, arthavādasāmarthyāḥ KDG, KDp, arthaḥ vādasāmarthyāḥ T) atraiva vidhikalaneti vācyam. arthavādikavidhikalanasyāpy (D1, E) arthāvādikālpanasyāpy A, arthāvādikālpanasyāpy KDG, KDp, T) aprāpṭarthāvīṣayatvāt (A, D1, E) aprāpṭvāśayatvāt KDG, KDp, aprāpṭarthāvīṣayatvāt T). 8) KD 90,7–12. 9) KD 90,4–5. 10) KD 98,21. 11) KD 98,22–90,1: ṭīsvaro hi kṛpaśāltvāt (A, D1, D2, E) kṛpaśāltvāt KDG, KDp, T) prabhutvāc cā katham api (A, D1, D2, E, T) om. KDG, KDp) svaṁīṣham (A, D1, E) svanidhyam D2, eśv anivīṣtam KDG, KDp, svaṁīṣham T) antaḥkaraṇam apekṣya (A, D1, E) apaksya D2, apekṣya KDG, KDp, T) bhaktānān phalāṃ prasāte. na tāpāvāpiśeṣenaiveti. gacchantsity akṛtvā gatā iti bhūtauva-

Abbreviations

A Manuscripts of The Nepal-German Manuscript Cataloguing Project (NGMCP), Reel No. A 92–26, Acc No. NAK 4–2349, National Archives of Nepal.

Dilī: Chaukambha Sanskrit Pratishthan, 2011.

$D_1$ Manuscripts of Dharmartha Trust at Raghnath Temple, Jammu, J & K, “Muktaphal Tika Kaivalya Deepika – Vopadeva and Hemadri, Dev_273_Gha_Alm_2_Shlf_3_Devanagari – Kavya.”

$D_2$ Manuscripts of Dharmartha Trust at Raghnath Temple, Jammu, J & K, “Muktaphala Tika Kaivalya Deepika – Vopadeva and Hemadri, Dev_277_Gha_Alm_2_Shlf_2_Devanagari – Kavya.”

$E$ Manuscripts of NGMCP, Reel No. E 556–11, National Archives of Nepal.

$KDG$ See MPhG.

$KDP$ See MPhP.


Bibliography


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