

**PATANJALI'S 'PRAJNA' AND BHARTṚHARI'S
PRATIBHA : A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

In this paper I intend to undertake a comparative study of Patañjali's concept of *Prajñā* and Bhartṛhari's concept of *Pratibhā* and bring out some of their implications.

The word *prājñā* occurs in 3 *sūtras*¹ in the 1st *pāda*, in one *sūtra*² in the 2nd *pāda*, in one *sūtra*³ in the 3rd *pāda* and in no *sūtra* in the 4th *pāda* of the *Yogasūtras*. This means that Patañjali has used the word *prājñā* in only five *sūtras* in the entire work of about 195 *sūtras*. If one were to deduce the importance of *prājñā* from the number of times the word is used in the *sūtras* then of course the answer is obvious. But the answer is also not correct because the entire system of *Rājayoga* hinges on the concept of *prājñā*.

For an aspirant of yoga (*sādhaka*) *prājñā* is the last link in the path to *kaivalya*. Though one talks of *saṁprajñāta samādhi* as the stepping stone to *asaṁprajñāta samādhi*,⁴ in truth, it is the last stage of *saṁprajñāta* which culminates in the highest stage of *prājñā* that truly leads to *asaṁprajñāta*. This raises the question of *saṁprajñāta samādhi* and its different stages which culminate in *prājñā*.

The first mention of the various types of *saṁprajñāta* is found early in the *Samādhīpāda*.⁵ Here the four types of *saṁprajñāta* are distinguished as (a) that accompanied by deliberation (*savitarka*); (b) that accompanied by reflection (*savicāra*);

(c) that accompanied by bliss (*sānanda*); (d) that accompanied by the 'sense-of-I' (*sāsmīta*). Further on, in the same *pāda*, Patañjali gives a detailed analysis of the four stages.⁶ From these *sūtras* it appears as if, the later kind of *saṁprajñāta* comes only after the earlier stage, which is supported by the *Vyāsabhāṣya* on the *sūtras* dealing with *sāsmīta-saṁprajñāta*.⁷ And thus the *prajñā* which leads to liberation should logically come in the fourth stage. But this is not clearly supported by the later *sūtras* in the *Samādhipāda* itself. This seems to have troubled the later commentators as well and is clearly seen when *Vijñānabhikṣu* includes the *sānanda-saṁprajñāta* under the *savicāra* stage and quotes the *Mokṣadharmā* text in support of his statement.⁸

In the *sūtra* 47 of the *Samādhipāda* Patañjali states that there is purity of the highest order in the *nirvicāra* state.⁹ This only means that in the perfection of *nirvicāra samādhi prajñā* comes into being. Therefore, the other two, *sānanda* and *sāsmīta*, can only be variations of the same state—the one emphasising the feeling of bliss and the other the sense of 'I'. The stage, then, when true *prajñā* comes into being, can be the *nirvicāra* stage.

In the *sūtra* 20¹⁰ of the first *pāda*, *prajñā* occurs for the first time, wherein it is stated that *asaṁprajñāta samādhi* is preceded by *śraddhā vīrya, smṛti, samādhi* and *prajñā*. Vyāsa explains *prajñā* here as 'that which reveals the object as it truly is' and also that it gives rise to superior detachment and *asaṁprajñāta samādhi*.¹¹ What is stressed here is not the nature of *prajñā* but the power which it confers, which is the power to see the object as it truly is and gives rise to superior detachment which will lead to *kaivalya*. That the object, as known in the ordinary commonsense way, is not the true object as it is, has been the conclusion of almost all philosophers. Thus, a higher philosophical insight is what makes one understand the object as it is in truth and this insight is *prajñā*.

Prajñā, then, is a divine vision which comes into being in the last retined stage of *nirvicāra*; it is a clear flash of insight and does not follow the usual process of experience,¹⁵ and deals with an object which is different from that arising from the scriptures and inference.

If *prajñā* reveals the truth, as it truly is, (*ṛtambharā prajñā*) then theoretically when *saṃyama*¹⁶ is practised together with it on one object, there should be *prajñā* with regard to that object.¹⁷ In other words, one could say that *prajñā* arises in all the different *saṃprajñāta* *yogas* but it is only the *prajñā* in the *nirvicāra* stage that reveals the ultimate truth regarding *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*. Therefore, the doubt as to whether *ṛtambharā* can be applied to *prajñā* in the other *saṃjja samādhis* can be answered by saying that, since only the 'generic class of *ṛtambharā* is meant here the others are also included in *ṛtambharā*. But keeping in mind that *ṛtambharā prajñā* gives rise to superior detachment (*parāvairāgya*), which is *vairāgya* even towards *prajñā* itself, and thus paves the way for *kaivalya*, and also that there is *avidyā* present in the earlier 3 stages (*śavitarka*, *nirvī-tārka* and *śavīcāra*) one understands that the *prajñā* that comes about in the last stage of *nirvicāra samādhi* is what is really meant by *ṛtambharā prajñā*. This alone gives rise to *mokṣa* or *kaivalya* later.

Thus *prajñā* is all comprehensive and it can mean the following :

- a) It conveys the truth of the immediate object of attention.
- b) It conveys the ultimate truth (finally) i.e. *kaivalya*.
- c) It reveals *ṛta* or the cosmic order of truth.

In the second *pāda* another division of *prajñā* as of seven kinds has been mentioned. These seven kinds are only divisions

of *prajñā* itself, though one could also interpret it as seven kinds of *prajñā* of the yogi. Though *prajñā* arises at every stage of *samādhi* it has to be purified by constant practice before leading to *kaivalya* through *asañprajñāta* and these various stages are given as seven by Patañjali. Vyāsa attempts a classification of these seven as (a) based on effort, (b) freedom from mind (or effort).¹⁶ The mind plays a large part in the first four stages where, through a conscious effort, discernment of the difference between the *sattva-intellect* and *Puruṣa* is realized and also the means of attaining this is understood.¹⁷ The next three stages are free of mind activity which comes about on the realization that there is nothing more to be served by the intellect, Therefore, its activities will cease and finally *Puruṣa* will be revealed in its purity.¹⁸ So, there is no contradiction between the seven-fold division of *prajñā* and the earlier description based on *nirvicāra samādhi*. The only point to remember regarding *ṛtañbharā prajñā* is that, but for it, there can be no 'superior detachment' giving rise to *kaivalya* and, therefore, the whole system of Patañjali hinges on this important concept.

If we now turn to the concept of *pratibhā* in Patañjali's *Yogasūtras*, we find that it occurs for the first time in the *Vibhūtipāda, sūtra* 33.¹⁹ Even here it is mainly used to describe the knowledge (*jñāna*) which arises from *pratibhā*. The *sūtra* mentions that 'Due to *prātibhajñāna* the yogi knows all'. Vyāsa states this is prior to the dawn of *viveka* or discriminate-discernment between the 'sattva intellect' and *Puruṣa*.²⁰ Thus, *pratibhā* is not the highest state of *prajñā* which gives rise to *kaivalya* later. When one studies this *sūtra* 33 along with the *sūtras* III. 35 and III, 36,²¹ it seems that Patañjali is describing *pratibhā-jñāna* as a stage when *viveka* has just dawned. In III. 33 *pratibhā* is just prior to the dawn of *viveka* according to Vyāsa, but in *sūtra* 36 we see that *pratibhā* is already a state

when *viveka* has dawned. *Sūtra* 35 describes the rise of *prajñā* and *sūtra* 36 mentions that 'from that arise *pratibhā*, *śravaṇa*, *vedanā*, *ādarśa*, *āsvāda* and *vārtā*. In the very next *sūtra* (III. 37) we are told that these various powers (*pravibhā*, *śravaṇa* etc.) belong to the lower stage. Thus, 'All these powers are obstructions in *samādhi* whereas they are *siddhis* in the active state of mind'.²² Thus, one is at a loss to understand from these three *sūtras* coming together, whether *pratibhā* is superior to *prajñā*, which gives rise to it or inferior to *prajñā* which will ultimately lead to *kaivalya*. Is one to conclude that Patañjali himself was not sure about the relative merits of *prajñā* and *pratibhā*? That obviously cannot be the right answer. If one takes a clue from the *sūtras* dealing with *Īśvara* in the *Samādhīpāda*, one finds that *Īśvara* is first introduced in I. 23,²³ and then is described in the following *sūtras* I. 24-27. Similarly, Patañjali introduces *pratibhā* in III. 33 and then goes on to describe that 'it is a state as soon as *prajñā* dawns'. What Patañjali perhaps means is that *pratibhā* is a divine state co-existent with *viveka* or *prajñā*, arising at the moment when realization of the difference between *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* (intellect) arises as a flash of understanding. Since *pratibhā* cannot exist without *prajñā* which gives rise to it, *prajñā* must be a higher state. Moreover, *prajñā* will finally achieve *kaivalya* which is described in great detail in *sūtras* I. 50 and 51.²⁴ The fact that *pratibhā* only occurs in the *Vibhūtipāda* and not in the *Samādhi* or *Kaivalyapāda* also proves the fact that it is only a *siddhi* which, though a power in the active state, is an obstruction in the path towards *kaivalya*.

Further on, in *sūtra* III. 54 *pratibhā* is supposed to yield knowledge of all. In III. 54 he mentions that 'knowledge arising from *viveka* is a deliverer, it has all things as its sphere of action (all comprehensive), it has all times as its object, and

it is without a sense of sequence (*akarmā*)²¹. Though Patañjali does not use the word *tāraka* for *prātibhājñāna* here the description of both as a state when everything is known makes it clear that they are synonyms.

Tāraka is something that relieves. What this knowledge relieves one from is rebirth, as the commentators mention. But it is not by itself that it relieves = it ushers in or indicates that the stage is set for the last stage of *prajñā* to dawn. It is like the dawn which ushers in the day. So, now we have an idea of what *prātibhājñāna* stands for - (1) it is a state when the *yogī* knows everything; (2) it is born immediately after discrimination-discrimination is achieved or is an immediate by-product of *viveka* which is co-existent with it; (3) it is a state when the *yogī* knows all things and all times and has no sense of sequence. It is here that *prātibhājñāna* comes close to the *pratibhā* of the *Vākya-padīya*.

In the *Vākya-padīya*, Bhartṛhari uses the expression *pratibhā* in a comprehensive manner equating it to instinctive nature at one end of the scale and to the special insight or divine knowledge of *ṛṣis* and sages at the other end.²² In all, Bhartṛhari has mentioned six kinds of *pratibhā*. What is common to all of them is a flash of understanding and the difficulty in analysing this process of understanding. The standard example he gives is the understanding of the meaning of the whole sentence from understanding the meaning of the words of a sentence.²³ Since one knows that this flash of understanding arises and since it is not easy to explain how it arises, Bhartṛhari mentions that it is due to *pratibhā*. Similarly, the instinctive activity of birds and animals, as also the spontaneous response to any situation by all living creatures is due to *pratibhā*.

Bhartṛhari, thus, uses the word *pratibhā* to mean many things such as instinct, intuition, conscience, spontaneous activity without deliberation, an intelligence and understanding due to the continued study of the scriptures, a yogic power which arises because of practice of *yoga*, the power which is due to *adṛṣṭa* and *pratibhā* which results due to the grace of a special person.

Though Bhartṛhari, uses *pratibhā* in many senses he traces the source of *pratibhā* in most cases to *śābdībhāvanā* or the 'latent impressions' of the use of words uttered by others and the scriptures. Under yogic vision or *pratibhā* that is due to *yoga*, Bhartṛhari cites only the capacity to read other people's minds as an example. In the *Yogasūtras* this *siddhi* comes by practising *saṁyama* on 'ideas'.³⁰ Various other divine powers and the capacity to know 'all' through *pratibhā*, which is described in the *Yogasūtras*, also finds an echo in Bhartṛhari when he credits the *pratibhā* of *ṛṣis* and *śiṣṭas* to be able to visualise things ordinarily beyond our senses.³¹ These *ṛṣis* have acquired this *pratibhā* through leading a pure life, strictly following the instructions (*āgama*), and it is due to the burning of their impurities that they have acquired a divine vision.³² The method by which they acquire this vision or *pratibhā* is constant practice of a pure life and thus is not different from yogic method of getting rid of the *kleśas* through a pure life in the ultimate pursuit of *kaivalya*. Thus, there is a close resemblance in the method of attaining *pratibhā* in both the *Yogasūtras* and the *Vākyapadīya*.

It is in this connection that the attainment of *Brahman* or *śabda-tattva* by the method of *śabdapūrvayoga*³³ is significant. This is also connected with the manifestation of *pratibhā*. Just how all these can be related in Bhartṛhari's system is as follows:

In the *Brahmakāṇḍa* of the *Vākyapadīya* one of the descriptions of *mokṣa* is 'the attainment of *Brahman*', transcending

the limitations of 'I' and 'mine'.³⁴ Though the understanding and use of correct words will result in *dharma*³⁵ this, according to Bhartṛhari, is only the first step in the ascent of becoming one with *Brahman* i. e. union with the 'inner, eternal, undifferentiated non-sequential word'.³⁶ This greater goal is attained by yogic process called *śabdapūrvayoga*. When one practises this 'yoga of the word' or when one practises *saṁyama*³⁷ on the 'word', the *siddhi* one acquires is the state of omniscience, where everything is known 'without any sequence'. The different stages an aspirant goes through before becoming one with *śabda-brahman* is described by Sri K. A. Subramania Iyer in his book *Bhartṛhari*.³⁸ The first step is to understand and use the correct word which will lead to *dharma*. In the second stage one goes beyond the senses and the mind and then the aspirant reaches *pratibhā* or, in other words, *pratibhā* comes to him which is the source of all 'differentiation'. This stage is also called *prakṛti* and *paśyanti*. The last stage is *parā-prakṛti* which is the ultimate source of the 'phenomenal world'. This ultimate result can only come through the practice of *śabdāpūrvayogā*. Sometimes this *parāprakṛti* is also identified with *pratibhā*.

From this discussion on *pratibhā* in the *Vākyapadīya* it is possible to see its very close resemblance to the *prātibhajñāna* discussed earlier under *prajñā* in the *Yogasūtras*. Just as *prātibhajñāna* in the *Yogasūtras* stresses the non-sequential nature of knowledge, *pratibhā* in the *Vākyapadīya* also is a stage of 'non-sequential' knowledge of the one, indivisible word, which can also stand for *sphota*. Thus, it seems that *pratibhā* resembles that stage in *prajñā* when it is a *siddhi*, which entails knowledge of all things and all times and is without any sequence. Moreover, as a *siddhi*, *prajñā* has to be transcended in order to achieve *Kaivalya*. Thus, one could conclude that the *pratibhā* of Bhartṛhari can make known the

'non-sequential śabdatattva' which is at best only a *siddhi* whereas Patañjali's *prajñā* gives rise to *Kaivalya* which is a state which is beyond the *siddhis*.

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NOTES

1. YS, I. 20, 48, 49.
2. YS, II. 27.
3. YS, III. 5.
4. YV, on Vy. Bh no YS, I. 1.
5. YS, I. 17.
6. YS, I. 41-44.
7. *Caturthastadvikalomśitāmātra prathamaścatuṣṭayānugataḥ samādhiḥ savitarkaḥ.*
8. Rukmani, *YV of Vijñānabhikṣu*, Vol. I, Delhi 1981, p. 110, n. 1.
9. *Nirvicāra vaiśāradye' dhyātmāprasādaḥ* – YS, I. 47.
10. *Sraddhāvīryasmṛtīsamādhīprajñāpūrvaka itareṣām*—YS, I. 20
11. *Samādhītacittasya prajñāvivekaḥ upāvaratate yena yathārtham vastu jānāti tadabhyāsāttadviśayācca vairāgyadasaṃprajñātaḥ samādhīrbhavati.* VY Bh. under YS, I. 20.
12. *Kramānanurodhī sphutaḥ prajñālokaḥ*—Vy, Bh. on YS, I. 47.
13. YS, I. 49.
14. *Dhāranā, dhyāna* and *samādhī* on one object is *saṃyama*—YS, III. 4.
15. Rukmani, *ibid*, p. 245.
16. Vy, Bh. on YS, II. 27.
17. *Eṣā catuṣṭayī kāryā vimuktiḥ prajñāyāḥ*, *ibid*.
18. Vy. Bh. on YS, II. 27.
19. *Pratibhādvā sarvam*, YS, III. 33.
20. *Tadvivekajasya jñānasya pūrvārūpam.* Vy. Bh. on YS, III. 33.

21. *Sattvapuruṣayoratyantā saṁkī rṇayoh pratyayāviśeṣo bhogaḥ parārthā tsvārthasaṁyamātpuruṣajñānam*—YS, III. 35.
22. *Tataḥ pratibhāśravanavedanā darśāsvādavartā jāyante*, YS, III. 36.
22. *Te samādhayupasargā vyutthāne siddhayaḥ*, YS, III. 37.
23. *Īśvarapraṇṭdhānādvā* — YS, I. 23,
24. *Tajjaḥ saṁskāro' nyasaṁskārapratibandhi* — *tasyāpi nirodhe sarvanirodhānmirbījaḥ samādhīh*. YS, I. 50, 51
25. *Tārakam sarvavisayam sarvathāvisayamākramam ceti vivekajam jñānam* — YS, III. 54.
26. *Saṁsāra sāgarātārayatīti tārokam* — TV, on Vy, Bh. on YS, III. 54 *Ataḥ sarvatra doṣasūksatkāreṇoktavairāgyadvārā saṁsāratāraka bhavatītyarthaḥ* — YV on Vy. Bh. on YS, III 54.
27. Iyer Subramania K. A., *Bhartṛhari*, Poona 1969, pp. 87 ff.
28. *Vāk*, II. 143.
29. *Ibid*, II. 149, 118, 147.
30. YS, III. 19.
31. *Vṛtti* on *Vāk*, II. 152.
32. *Vāk*, I. 30, 37–38 and *Vṛtiti* on *Vāk*, I. 38, Iyer Subramania K. A.; *ibid*, pp. 92 ff.
33. Iyer Subramania; *ibid*, pp. 142 ff.
34. *Vṛtti* on *Vāk*, I. 5,
35. *Vṛtti* on *Vāk*, I. 1.
36. *Vāk*, I. 20.
37. YS, III. 4.
38. Iyer Subramania K. A., *Ibid*, pp. 142 ff.

Abbreviations

1. TV — *Tattvavaiśāradi* of Vācaspati Miśra.
2. Vāk. — *Vākyapadīa* of Bhartṛhari.
3. Vy. Bh. — *Vyāsabhāṣya* of the *Yogasūtras* of Patañjali.
4. Ys. — *Yogasūtras* of Patañjali.
5. YV. — *Yogavārttika* of Vijñānabhikṣu.