

A Reference to Maga in the Tibetan Translation of the *Tarkajvālā*

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For a study of theories and practices of the Brahmanical, as well as the non-Brahmanical, religious schools in India around the fifth century, the *Madhya-maka-hṛdaya-kārikā* (hereinafter referred to as *MHK*) of Bhavya or Bhāvaviveka (490-570ca.) and his auto-commentary *Tarkajvālā* (*TJ*) provide much valuable information. In the ninth chapter: *Mīmāṃsā-tattva-nirṇaya-avatāra*, of these two works, which discusses the doctrinal differences between the Mīmāṃsakas and the Buddhists, we come across a noteworthy reference to the book of Maga (maga-śāstra).

“And this Veda is conjectured to be a work of a wicked person. Because it teaches such unmoral deeds as harming of living things and drinking of wine. Like the book of Maga.”

/anumeyaś ca vedo 'yam asat-puruṣa-kartṛkaḥ/
/skye bu mi bzañ bas byas par/ /rig byed ḥdi ni gshal bya ste/
/bhūta-hinsā-surāpāna-kriyōkter maga-śāstravat/ (*MHK* IX, 31)¹⁾
/ḥbyuñ po ḥtshe dañ chañ ḥthuñ brdsun/ /smra phyir ma gaḥi bstan bcos bshin/

This verse in *MHK* is commented in *TJ*, which is only available in the Tibetan translation, as follows:²⁾

“Maga and so on are the followers of a perverted belief (vrata), i.e. Persians and others who live in the land of barbarians (mleccha). Their teachings (siddhānta) are known to be like these:

1) This Sanskrit verse in *MHK* is offered by Prof. V. V. Gokhale of Poona. It is a copy, made by his own handwriting, from what Rev. Sāṃkṛtyāyana copied at Sha-lu monastery in Tibet. The present writer remains thankful to Prof. Gokhale's kind guidance and his generous permission for the use and publication of this material.

The Tibetan translation “brdsun” suggests “mithyā” or “mṛṣā” for “kriyā.”

(15) A Reference to Maga in the Tibetan Translation (S. Kawasaki)

As they do harm to the earth, killing of ants and others does not go against morality.

By killing bulls and piling their horns, one can hope to reach heaven. In the same way, by burning the heart of beasts and with the smoke out of it, one will be born in the highest dwelling place in the utmost heaven, and so on.

In the same way, as all women are similar to mill-stone, flower, fruit, cooked food, descending steps for a bathing place, roads, and others, it is not right to say that one's mother, sisters, daughters, and so forth are unproper as one's object of sexual intercourse.

The doctrines of Maga with the assertions above-mentioned have many points fairly common to the teachings of the Vedas. It is because the following assertions are made by the proponents of the Vedas: Such deeds as harming of others (*hinsā*) taught in the Vedas, although they are denounced in other books, do not constitute a sin as we can learn from those born in other lands. : 'Honey should be collected.' 'A bull should be slain, too.' Or in the same way, 'A man, horse, bull or sheep should be consecrated in the fire to death.' Or again, 'They should be choked to death in a state of unconsciousness.' Or, 'In the

- 2) The Tibetan text: sDe dge bstan ḥgyur, dBu ma (dsa) 281b1—; sNar than bstan ḥgyur, dBu ma (dsa) 304b5—; Peking bstan ḥgyur, dBu ma (dsa) 318a4—. The present text is based on the sDe dge edition.

(D281b1)/ ma ga la sogs pa phyin ci log gi brtul shugs can/ par sig la sogs kla kloḥi gnas na gnas pa de dag gi grub paḥi mthaḥ ni ḥdi ltar grags te/ sa la gnod pa byed pa yin paḥi phyir/ grog ma la sogs pa bsad pa ni chos ma yin pa ma yin no// ba lañ bsad na rva brtsegs pa la brten nas mtho ris su ḥgro bar ḥgyur ro// de bshin du phyugs gyi sñiñ bsregs pas bdugs na gnas mthon po goñ maḥi nam mkhar skye bar ḥgyur ro shes bya ba lta bu dañ/ (D281b3)/ de bshin du bud med thams cad ni gtun dañ/ me tog dañ ḥbras bu sogs pa dañ g'yos zin paḥi zas dañ/ khros bya baḥi ḥbab stegs dañ/ lam shes bya ba la dañ ḥdra ba yin pas ma dañ/ sriñ mo dañ/ bu mo la sogs pa la bgrod par bya ba ma yin no shes zer ba ni legs pa ma yin no shes smra bar byed paḥi ma gaḥi grub paḥi mthaḥ de dañ rig byed la khyad par ci shig yod de/ gañ gi phyir rig byed pas smras pa/ rig byed ḥtshe ba gañ bstan pa// bstan bcos gshan du smad gyur kyañ// des ni sdig byas mi ḥgyur bar// gshan du skye ba dag gis bstan to shes bya ba la sogs pa dañ// sbrañ rtsis bsdu bar byaḥo shes bya ba dañ/ ba lañ yañ gsad par byaḥo shes bya ba dañ// de bshin du me la skyes bu dañ/ rta dañ/ ba lañ dañ/ ra rnam bsreg ciñ gsad par byaḥo// yañ na ḥdi dag

center of the fire surrounding them, they should be suffered by heat.' Or, 'In the Aśvamedha, every horse should be tormented with five hundred piercing needles and should be dedicated in the fire.'

These are the assertions (in the Vedas, similar to those of Maga). There an incestuous marriage is also spoken out. It is taught in the sacrificial rite (yajña) of the bull-observances (go-vrata): 'A Brahmin shall perform a sacrificial rite of a bull (go-sava) and keep himself in the bull-observances for one year (saṃvatsara-govratin). He should drink water like a bull, take herb like a bull, have a sexual relation with his mother, with his aunts, with his own offsprings like a bull. Taking pleasure out of whomever and whatever are available, then by so doing he will reign over everything in the world. (upa mātaram iyād upa svasāram upa sagotrām upāvahāya udakam ācāmed upāvahāya tṛṇāny āchindyād/ yatra yatra enam viṣṭhā vindet tat tad vitiṣṭheta anuḍuho ha lokam jayati Cf. *Jaiminiya-Brahmana* ii, 113).……

(D283b6) The Vedas are not a proper means for knowing the Dharma. As they teach with the assertions acknowledging and encouraging such deeds as harming (hinsā), unchastity (abrahamacaryā), drinking wine (surāpāna) and so on, they are like the sayings of the huntsmen and the Persians who speak often of harming living beings. ……

dbugs bsrubs la bsad par bya ste// sems pa med par byaḥo/ (D281b6)/ yañ na mes bskor baḥi dkyil du tsha bas gduñ bar byaḥo shes bya ba dañ// yañ na rta dag gi mchod sbyin la rta re re la khab lña brgya lña brgya btsugs la śin tu zug gzer dañ ldan par byas nas sbyin sreg byaḥo shes rjes su gnañ ba yod pa dañ/ bgrod par bya ba ma yin pa la bgrod par bya ba yañ rjes su gnañ ño shes ba lañ gi brtul shugs can gyi mchod sbyin las bstan te// bram zes ba lañ gi mchod sbyin byas nas lo gcig gi bar du ba lañ gi brtul shugs la gnas par bya ste/ ba lañ bshin du chu btuñ (D282a1) shiñ rtsva yañ gcad par bya la/ ma la yañ bshon par bya/ maḥi spun zla la yañ bshon par bya/ rañ gi rigs la yañ bshon par bya ste/ gañ dañ gañ du shugs śiñ ḥdug pa der rñed pa de dañ de la spyad ciñ ba lañ bshin du spyad na ḥjig rten thams cad las rgyal bar ḥgyur ro shes bya ba dañ/……(D283b6)/ rig byed ni chos rtogs pa la tshad mar gyur pa ma yin te/ ḥtshe ba dañ/ tshañs par spyod pa ma yin pa dañ/ chañ ḥthuñ ba la sogs pa gsal bar byed pa dañ/ rjes su mthun paḥi tshig brjod paḥi phyir rñon pa dañ/ par sig la sogs pa ḥtshe ba yoñs su smra baḥi tshig bshin no/

(17) A Reference to Maga in the Tibetan Translation (S. Kawasaki)

(D283b7-284a1) The Vedas are not a proper means for knowing the Dharma. As they teach the illicit sexual relation (agamyā-gamana), they are like the books of the Nāstikas and of the Persians.”

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The teachings of Maga as described in *TJ* agree with what we already know about Maga in the following points :

1) Killing of ants

In his description of the Persian manners and customs, Herodotus (ca. 484-430 B. C.) writes about the attitudes of their priesthood toward ants and other small creatures. “The Magi, on the contrary, kill animals of all kinds with their own hands, excepting dogs and men. They even seem to take a delight in the employment, and kill, as readily as they do other animals, *ants* and snakes, and such like flying or creeping.”³⁾

2) Drinking of wine (surāpāna)

Again, Herodotus mentions the Persian attitude toward wine as follows: “They are very fond of wine, and drink it in large quantities.”⁴⁾

3) Animal sacrifice, especially bull-slaying

The above-mentioned sentence from Herodotus’ *History* tells us also about Maga’s practice of animal sacrifice. The sacrifice of bull (taurobolium) is generally accepted as the central act of worship in Mithraism, and is represented in relief in every Mithraic sanctuary.⁵⁾ In a Zoroastrian literature, *Yasna* xxxii, 10, we hear of the teacher of evil who ‘declares the ox and the sun are the worst thing to behold with the eyes,’ which may perhaps refer to the nocturnal sacrifice of bull by Mithraists. Zoroaster, in his reform, accused the priesthood of the old cult of handing the ox over to ‘fury’ or ‘violence.’ In *Yasna* xxix, 1, the soul of the ox itself cries out saying ‘violence, fury, cruelty, fri-

……(D283b7)/ rig byed ni chos rtogs pa la tshad mar gyur pa ma yin te/ gañ gi phyir bgrod par bya ba ma yin pa la yañ bgrod par bya bar ñe bar ston pañi phyir med pa pa (D284a1) dañ/ par sig gi bstan bcos bshin no/

3) *Herodoti Historiae* I, 140; George Rawlinson tr.: *History of Herodotus*, 2 vols., 3rd ed. (London, 1875), vol. I, p. 265.

4) *Ibid.* I, 133; Rawlinson tr., vol. I, p. 259.

5) Franz Cumont : *Les Mystères de Mithra*, (Paris, 1913).

ghtfulness, and might hem me in.⁶⁾

4) Incestuous marriage (agamyā-gamana)

This is one thing the mal-impression of which the modern successor of Zoroastrianism, the Indian Parsis, endeavour to eradicate out of their sacred literature. It cannot be denied, however, there are frequent references to the so-called illicit love, Khvêtûk-das, in it.⁷⁾

Bhavya is not the first Buddhist writer who gives a description of this custom among the ancient Persians. The *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* of Vasubandhu, whose date of activity has been a topic of heating controversy (4th or 5th century), has a reference to the Persian (pārasīka) custom of mercy-killing for the aged parents⁸⁾ and also to their custom of sexual life with mother and so on (moha-jo yathā pārasīkānām matrādi-gamanam).⁹⁾ Vasubandhu's following quotation: "ye ca āhur/ udūkhala-puṣpa-pakvānna-tīrtha-mārga-prakhyo mātrgrāma iti" is actually the same with what we have in *TJ*.¹⁰⁾ The *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣa-śāstra* (*Taisho* vol. 27, 606a), of which neither the Sanskrit original nor the Tibetan translation is available, and the date of composition of which precedes to that of Vasubandhu's work, has the following Chinese translation on this context: "Again in the west hence, there live Mlecchas called Maga 目迦 who have this kind of opinion and this kind of view: 'It is not sinful to attain one's desire at one's mother, daughters, sisters and sons' wives. What is the reason? Whoever women are they, are all like ripen fruit, or food, road, bridge, ship, steps, mill-stone and so forth. Just as these things are shared by people in public, a woman is an object of love and enjoyment

6) R. C. Zaehner: *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism* (London, 1961), pp. 84-87.

7) *Yasna* xii, 9; xiii, 28; E. W. West: "The Meaning of khvêtûk-das," *SBE* vol. XVIII (London, 1882), pp. 389-430.

8) pārasīkānām ca/ te hy evam āhuḥ/ "mātā-pitarau jīrṇau glānau vā hantavyāv" iti (ad *Abhidharma-kośa* VI, 68); P. Pradhan ed.: *Abhidharma koshabhāṣya of Vasubandhu* (Patna, 1967), p. 240.

9) *Ibid.* p. 241.

10) See the author's tr. of *TJ. Supra* p. 2. Paramārtha's translation of the *Abhidharmakośa* mentioned a Tīrthika P'in-na-k'o 頻那柯 as the proponent. (*Taisho* vol. 29, 241b)

in common.' 又此西方有蔑戾車名日日目迦。起如是見。立如是論。母女姊妹及兒妻等。於彼行欲悉無有罪。所以者何。一切母邑。皆如熟果已辨飲食道路橋船階梯白等。法爾有情共所受用。

The *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* tells us about a Vedic ritual, *go-sava*, saying, “gosave ca yajñe/ yathoktaṃ ‘brāhmaṇo gosavena iṣṭyā saṃvatsara-govratī bhavati/ upahā udakaṃ cūṣati tṛṇāni cchinatti upaiti mātaram upa svasāram upa sagotrām’ iti.”¹¹⁾ As we learn from La Vallée Poussin’s footnote to his French translation of the *Abhidharmakośa*, this Vedic quotation is from the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* ii, 113.¹²⁾ Like *TJ*, the Tibetan translation of the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* has this quotation in full with “yatra yatraīnam viṣṭhā vindet tat tad vitiṣṭheta anuḍho ha lokaṃ jayati,” a sentence lacking either in Dr. Pradhan’s Sanskrit text or in the Chinese translation of the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*. We do not know how was the corresponding paragraph in the original text, now lost, of the *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā-śāstra*. It is very probable, anyway, that Bhavya should have acquired his knowledge on Maga from a certain Abhidharma work.

It is evident and valuable that the Buddhist knowledge of Maga, like that of Herodotus, includes much of the survival of old cults and primitive conceptions such as Zoroaster endeavoured to eradicate. It has been long known that there was, before the arrival of the Parsis on the Indian west coast, a colony of the old Iranian stock called Śākadvīpīya-brāhmaṇa or Maga-brāhmaṇa on the bank of the Candrabhāgā in Punjab, who preserved their old worship of Mithra or Mihira and sun-worship.¹³⁾ It is not utterly impossible that the

11) Pradhan ed. p. 241. The same quotation is found in P. S. Jaini ed.: *Abhidharma-tīpa* (Patna, 1959), p. 154.

12) L. de la Vallée Poussin tr.: *L’Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu* (Bruxelles, 1971), Tome III, p. 147. Here Poussin tells us that “saṃvatsaram paśu-vrato……” is found in the *Āpastamba Śrautasūtra* xxii, 13. The *Prāyāścitta-Prakaraṇa* (p. 132) quotes the *Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa* to describe a go-vrata. See P. V. Kane: *History of Dharmasāstra*, vol. IV (Poona, 1953), p. 134.

13) V. Raghavan: “Worship of the Sun,” in *Sankara and Shanmata* (no date); R. G. Bhandarkar: *Vaiṣṇavism and Minor Religious Systems* (Varanasi, 1965); K. S. Hodivala: *Parsis of Ancient India* (Bombay, 1920); H. von Stietencron: *Indische Sonnenpriester: Sāmba und die Śākadvīpīya-Brahmaṇa* (Wiesbaden, 1966).

Buddhists might have been supplied with the information about the Maga religion from such a group of people living in India. So far, however, we cannot find any reference to Maga's sun-worship either in *TJ*, or in the Abhidharma works.

There is another question : whether there was "the book of Maga (maga-śāstra)" as is mentioned in *TJ*. In the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣyā*, there is no reference to the existence of such a book, while the *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā* has a sentence which is in a way possible to be rendered as follows : "Maga who have this kind of opinion and this kind of *book* (起如是見. 立如是論)." For lack of the Sanskrit original and the Tibetan translation of the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, we have no further way of finding what was the Maga-śāstra.¹⁴⁾

Remarkable it is that Bhavya noticed of many similarities in the teachings of Maga in old Persia and the Vedic religion, between the two most easterly branches of the Aryan race!

14) In Kamalaśīla's commentary on the *Tattvasaṅgraha*, there is a reference to *gosava* in connection with incestuous marriage (agamyā-gamana): "vedasyāiva kriḍāśīla-piśācādi-praṇītatvaṃ sambhavayitum/ yena gosavādisv agamyagamanādayo 'samācārāḥ samprakāśitā ity etad darśayann āha-kamēty-ādi/ kāma-mithyā-samācāra-prāṇi-hiṃsādi-lak aṇāḥ/ / asabhyās tu kriyā yena vacasā samprakāśitāḥ/ *Tattvasaṅgraha-Pañjika* (GOS., Baroda. 1926) ad *TS* v. 3620, p. 928.