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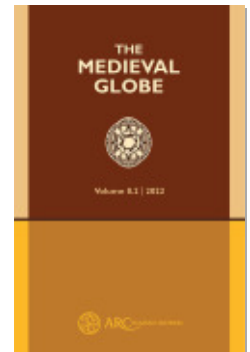
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On the Practice of Autocommentary in Sanskrit Sources

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# ON THE PRACTICE OF AUTOCOMMENTARY IN SANSKRIT SOURCES

ISABELLE RATIÉ\*

COMMENTARIES HAVE PLAYED a crucial role in the development of South Asia's religious and intellectual history.<sup>1</sup> Although many are lost, they have come down to us in impressive numbers; they are sometimes said to constitute up to three-quarters of the Sanskrit written tradition.<sup>2</sup> They explain texts of an astounding variety, including scriptures, poetry, and treatises bearing on a wide array of topics, from grammar to veterinary science, and many a commentary (or subcommentary) had a more considerable impact than independent works. These facts are certainly to be understood in relation to the presupposition, prevalent among Sanskrit writers, that an assertion unsanctioned by antiquity is suspicious; and to their efforts to present innovations as mere expressions of an eternal truth handed down by an immemorial tradition.<sup>3</sup> Even authors of independent works often presented themselves as mere exegetes of more ancient formulations, and many commentators tended to disguise their own novel ideas as mere clarifications of the text on which they were commenting. This "novelty-smuggling strategy"<sup>4</sup> was often implemented by distinguishing an obvious but superficial meaning from a hidden, more profound one that they claimed to uncover, and by inventing various hermeneutical devices so as to force into the texts that they were

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\* Many thanks are due to the anonymous reviewers of this article for their insightful remarks, and to Whitney Cox, who shared an unpublished paper on the history of Sanskrit autocomentaries. Discussing it with its generous, open-minded, and learned author was a lovely experience, and if our perspectives and aims often differ, the present essay (which I wrote while keeping in mind Cox's important hypothesis, cited below) is but a continuation of our conversation.

1 Studies of commentarial practices in Sanskrit sources include Alsdorf, "Nikṣepa"; Bronkhorst, "Vārttika"; Balbir, "Jaina Exegetical Terminology"; Brückner, "Bewahren und Erneuern"; von Stietencron, "Typisierung und Sitz im Leben"; Dundas, "Somnolent *sūtras*"; Chenet, "Le commentaire en Inde"; Grimal, "Pour décrire un commentaire traditionnel"; Slaje, "Der Sanskrit-Kommentar"; von Hinüber, "Buddhistische Kommentare"; Tubb and Boose, "Scholastic Sanskrit"; Preisendanz, "Text, Commentary, Annotation"; Ganeri, "Sanskrit Philosophical Commentary"; Jyväsjärvi, "Retrieving the Hidden Meaning"; McCrea, "Poetry in Chains"; Pollock, "What was Philology?"; Ratié, "For an Indian Philology"; and Lubin, "Brāhmaṇa."

2 The estimate, often repeated in secondary literature, apparently originates from a 1999 oral presentation by Ashok Aklujkar: see von Hinüber, "Buddhistische Kommentare," 99.

3 See, for example, Biardeau, "Philosophies de l'Inde," 83–107; Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 349–68; Pollock, "The Theory of Practice" and "Mīmāṃsā." This presupposition, while dominant, was not unanimous: see McCrea, "Standards and Practices," and Cuneo, "'This Is Not a Quote,'" on the different attitude of some poeticians. Resistance to this conservative paradigm is also found in philosophico-religious literature: the tenth-century Śaiva Utpaladeva, for instance, claims to have invented a "new" soteriological path (see the section below headed "Appropriating, Defying, and Creating Tradition"; cf. the passing remark in Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 363).

4 The expression is borrowed from Cuneo, "'This Is Not a Quote,'" 225.

supposed to explain some ideas that were blatantly alien to them.<sup>5</sup> Numerous Sanskrit words designate these commentarial works, but much research remains to be done before we can understand the fluctuating history of these terms<sup>6</sup> and their changing meanings according to the tradition in which they were used.

The present essay is not concerned with this complex history of Indian commentaries and their names, but only with the intriguing phenomenon of “self-commentaries” or “auto(-)commentaries.” Both terms, while conspicuously absent from the English dictionaries that I could consult, are widely used nowadays in secondary literature, the former being favoured in research on Western works whereas the latter is common in South Asian studies.<sup>7</sup> In Sanskrit, such texts are usually designated by prefixing *sva-* (“self-”/“auto-”) or *svopajña-* (“self-invented”) to one of the numerous terms used to denote commentaries.<sup>8</sup> The practice of composing commentaries to explain one’s own works was widespread among Sanskrit-writing authors; yet it remains hardly studied to date.<sup>9</sup> In a cultural world where novelty was deeply mistrusted, the success of the commentarial genre as a whole is by no means surprising, as it enabled to cultivate the truth contained in older texts—and to bestow the latter’s authority upon new ideas; but why set out to comment on one’s own words? And why write two—sometimes even three—distinct texts, rather than one single, self-explanatory work?

### **Autocommentaries on Poetry (*kāvya*) and Normative Treatises (*śāstra*)**

Sanskrit autocommentaries are appended to texts that belong to two main genres: *kāvya*, that is, belles-lettres or poetry (understood in a very broad sense as texts that primarily pursue aesthetic goals and include drama and prose narrative works) and *śāstra*, normative or didactic treatises. The European “Renaissance” associated with late-medieval Italian humanists also witnessed a burst of autocommentarial creativity (albeit to a lesser extent and for a shorter period) and, in the latter case, autocommentaries seem to have occurred mostly on the side of belles-lettres.<sup>10</sup> Dante Alighieri, Giovanni Boccaccio, Lorenzo de’ Medici and others were primarily concerned with writing about their own poetry. In India, some autocommentaries were also composed

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**5** One such very common trick consists in interpreting the presence of the connecting particles *ca* (“and”) or *api* (“as well as”) as implying additional items that are not explicitly mentioned (*kañṭhokta*) in the text: see, for example, *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha*, 10, on *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* 1.1.5.

**6** See Slaje, “Der Sanskrit-Kommentar,” 71.

**7** I therefore tend to use “autocommentary” here, confessedly out of habit rather than as a rationally motivated choice; according to Roush, *Hermes’ Lyre*, 8, the term *autocommento* was coined in the nineteenth century by Italian poet Giosuè Carducci.

**8** See below in the section headed “Appropriating, Defying, and Creating Tradition.”

**9** To my knowledge, the only article entirely devoted to it is Cox, “A Fragmented History,” which remains unpublished.

**10** On European autocommentaries, and for further bibliographical references, see Roush, *Hermes’ Lyre*, and Venturi, ed., *Self-Commentary*.

by poets,<sup>11</sup> but they are scant and late in comparison with the vast number of *śāstras* that have been transmitted with a commentary purported to be by their very author; most autocommentaries on poems were composed in the sixteenth century or later,<sup>12</sup> and however murky the history of Sanskrit autocommentaries, it seems at least clear that they postdate by a considerable margin the appearance of autocommentaries attached to treatises. Many autocommentaries on *śāstras* were composed during the first millennium CE (although as explained below, the authorship of the earlier ones is often problematic) and many are Buddhist,<sup>13</sup> but the practice of explaining one's own

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**11** They have received very little scholarly attention to date. Bronner, *Extreme Poetry*, 156–57, briefly discusses the phenomenon (see also 299n3, and Appendix 1), citing among others Cidambarakavi's seventeenth-century *Pañcakalyāṇacampū* or Haradatta Sūri's eighteenth-century *Rāghavanaiśadhiya*. Dundas, *History, Scripture*, chapter 2, contains an insightful analysis of Devavimāla Gaṇin's commentary on his seventeenth-century *Hīrasabhāgya*. See also Rāmacandra's sixteenth-century commentary on his *Rasikarāñjana*. The commentary on Rāmapāṇivāda's eighteenth-century *Viṣṇuvilāsa*, "apparently written by Rāmapāṇivāda himself" (according to Lienhard, *A History*, 211) was shown not to be an autocommentary by P.K. Narayana Pillai in his introduction to the 1951 edition of the text, 20–22. Prologues to Indian dramas (where poets often have much to say about their own work and its reception) are not taken into account here because they lack many features that are characteristic of standard commentaries and are found in the texts seen by South Asian authors themselves as belonging to the category of autocommentaries.

**12** Śāstrī, *A Descriptive Catalogue*, 1, presents the commentary on Sandhyākaranandin's eleventh-/twelfth-century *Rāmacarita* as "probably by the author himself," and Bronner, *Extreme Poetry*, 269, as "possibly by the author himself." Majumdar, Basak and Banerji have argued against this authorship (Introduction to the *Rāmacarita*, vi) on the grounds that "the commentator has often explained a word in more ways than one" (an argument of little weight, as many autocommentaries offer several interpretations: see below in the section headed "Are Autocommentators Worried about Not Being Understood?") and by pointing out the commentary's mention of "a variant reading" (*pāṭhāntara*) under 1.22. The latter point is considered decisive in Brocquet, *La Geste*, 19–20. One could object that other so-called "variant readings" are discussed in works explicitly identified as autocommentaries by their authors (see section below, just referenced); yet, as far as I can see, Haraprasād Śāstrī offers no argument whatsoever *in favour* of an attribution to the poem's author either in *A Descriptive Catalogue*, or in the Calcutta edition of the text.

**13** Such Buddhist works include the alleged autocommentaries on the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, *Śūnyatāsaptati* and *Pratītyasamutpādaḥṛdayakārikā* by Nāgārjuna (ca. 200 CE; on issues pertaining to their authorship see, for example, Seyfort Ruegg, *The Literature*, 21n45; Lindtner, "Adversaria Buddhica," 172 and *Nagarjuniana*, 31 and 70n105); the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (see below, n. 32) and *Viṃśikāvṛtti* by Vasubandhu (ca. 350–430); the *Ālambanaparīkṣāvṛtti* and *Pramāṇasamuccayāvṛtti* by Dignāga (ca. 480–540, see below, nn. 27–28); Bhāviveka's sixth-century *Tarkajvālā* on the *Madhyamakahrdayakārikā* (see below, nn. 25–28); Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttikasvavṛtti* and *Sambandhaparīkṣāvṛtti* (ca. 600); Candrakīrti's seventh-century *Madhyamakāvātārabhāṣya*; Śāntarakṣita's eighth-century *Madhyamakālaṅkāravṛtti*. On Śāṅkaranandana's mostly unpublished tenth-century autocommentaries, see Krasser, *Śāṅkaranandanas' Īśvarāpākarāṇasaṅkṣepa*; and Eltschinger, "Latest News."

texts is also found in Brahmanical and para-Brahmanical,<sup>14</sup> Jain,<sup>15</sup> and Śaiva sources,<sup>16</sup> as well as in fields, such as poetics, that extend across religious divides.<sup>17</sup>

## Hypotheses on the Practice's Origin(s)

The origins of this practice in India are obscure. Since, however, the earliest preserved Sanskrit autocomentaries on *śāstras* appear to be Buddhist, it is very tempting to consider, with Whitney Cox, that the format originated in Buddhist monastic circles

**14** The *Yogabhāṣya* (fourth–fifth century CE) comments on the *Yogasūtra* authored or compiled by Patañjali and is often ascribed in later sources and secondary literature to an author named Vyāsa; but Bronkhorst, “Patañjali,” and Maas, “A Concise Historiography,” have argued that it is in fact Patañjali’s own commentary, as many medieval authors believed. The authorship of the oldest commentary on Bhartṛhari’s fifth-century *Vākyapadīya* has also been debated in recent times (see below, n. 19), although again, medieval authors had no doubt that it was an autocomentary. One could also mention, for instance, the prose parts (explicitly described as [auto]commentaries) on the verses by medieval commentators: see Acharya, *Vācaspatimiśra’s Tattvasamīkṣā*, 48ff, in the *Brahmasiddhi*, *Sphoṭasiddhi* and *Vidhiviveka* by Maṇḍanamiśra (ca. 660–720); the prose parts in Sureśvara’s eight-century *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi* (ascribed to Sureśvara himself by later commentators, see Hirianna’s Introduction to the *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi*, xxxi); the *Vākyārthamāṭṛkāvṛtti* by Śālikanātha (ca. 900); Bhāsarvajña’s tenth-century *Nyāyabhūṣaṇa* on his *Nyāyasāra*; or Udayana’s eleventh-century prose commentary on his *Nyāyakusumāñjali*.

**15** Śvetāmbara Jains ascribe to Umāsvāti (ca. 400?), the author of the *Tattvārthadhigamasūtra*, the *Bhāṣya* that explains these aphorisms; but the attribution, defended by some modern scholars (see, for example, Ohira, *A Study*) seems problematic (see Bronkhorst, “On the Chronology,” 163–71). Other relatively early Jain autocomentaries include the *Viśeṣāvaśyakabhāṣyavṛtti* by Jinabhadra (ca. 600), Akalaṅka’s eight-century *Laghīyastrayavṛtti* and *Siddhiviniścayavṛtti*, Haribhadra’s eighth-century *Yogaśataka-vṛtti* or *-ṭīkā* and *Anekāntajayapatākāvṛtti*, Vidyānanda’s tenth-century *Āptaparīkṣālaṅkṛti*, Hemacandra’s twelfth-century commentaries on his *Yogaśāstra*, *Śabdānuśāsana*, *Pramāṇamīmāṃsā*, *Deśināmamālā* and *Kāvyaṅuśāsana* (see sections below headed “Appropriating, Defying, and Creating Tradition” and “Addressing Different Categories of Readers”), or Hemacandra Maladhārin’s commentaries on his twelfth-century *Bhāvabhāvanā* and *Upadeśamālā*.

**16** On the debate over the autocomentarial status of the *Vṛtti* on the ninth-century *Spandakārikā*, see the section below headed “The Authority of Alleged Autocomentaries.” Undisputed Śaiva autocomentaries include Utpaladeva’s two commentaries (a *Vṛtti* and a *Vivṛti* or *Ṭīkā*) on his tenth-century *Īśvarapratyabhijñā* (see sections below headed “Appropriating, Defying, and Creating Tradition” and “Addressing Different Categories of Readers”) as well as *Vṛttis* on his *Sambandhasiddhi* and *Īśvarasiddhi* (he may also have written a lost *Vṛtti* on his *Ajaḍapramāṭṛsiddhi*); Kṣemarāja’s eleventh-century *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayavṛtti*; the *Mahārthamañjarīparimala* by Maheśvarānanda (ca. 1275–1325); or Bhāskarakaṅṭha’s *Ṭīkā* on his eighteenth-century *Cittānubodhasāstra*. The autocomentary on Somānanda’s tenth-century *Śivadṛṣṭi*, sometimes mentioned in secondary literature, is likely never to have existed (see Nemeč, *The Ubiquitous Śiva*, 14n25). Sanderson, “The Śaiva Exegesis,” 299–300, convincingly argues that the Sanskrit commentary on the Old Kashmiri *Mahānayaṅprakāśa*/*Mahārthaparakāśa* is not an autocomentary, as was thus far assumed.

**17** See Cox, “A Fragmented History,” which mentions two influential ninth-century autocomentaries, Vāmana’s *Kāvyaṅkāravṛtti* and Ānandavardhana’s *Dhvanyālokaṅvṛtti* (on which see below, n. 33), followed by several works that were composed from the ninth to the eleventh centuries using the twofold structure of verses and prose autocomentary: Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka’s *Hṛdayadarpaṇa*, Kuntaka’s *Vakroktijivita*, Mahima Bhaṭṭa’s *Vyaktiviveka*, and Kṣemendra’s *Aucityavicāracarā*. The practice was also adopted by authors of lexica (see, for example, Maṅka’s twelfth-century *Ṭīkā* on his own *Kośa*), etc.

and was adopted at a later stage by non-Buddhist authors who had thus far taught the meaning of their own works orally;<sup>18</sup> although the hypothesis seems bound to remain somewhat speculative given the great amount of lost Sanskrit treatises and the considerable problems of authorship regarding many early instances of alleged autocommentaries. Cox rightly points out the debated authorship of the fifth-century Brahmanical *Vākyapadiyavṛtti*;<sup>19</sup> however, not to mention that other texts (notably the *Yogabhāṣya*)<sup>20</sup> may also have been early non-Buddhist autocommentaries, from an emic point of view at least, the hypothesis needs to be nuanced: whoever really composed the *Vākyapadiyavṛtti* or *Yogabhāṣya*, those who adopted the practice of autocommentary from the eighth or ninth century onwards had no doubt that these works were genuine autocommentaries,<sup>21</sup> so that they at least probably did not consider that they were borrowing a Buddhist literary device. In any case, Jonardon Ganeri's assertion that Buddhist authors only "play" with the "basic" genre exemplified in Brahmanical works and "adapt it to their own purposes"<sup>22</sup> seems problematic in that the Brahmanical examples adduced<sup>23</sup> are all much later than known Buddhist ones.

It also seems highly plausible that, on both Buddhist and Brahmanical sides, the first autocommentaries were composed in a teaching environment, as they usually explain an aphoristic root-text (*sūtra*—a "thread") often versified and easy to memorize, but difficult to understand due to its extreme brevity, and therefore in need of further explanations (often provided in prose). This twofold structure had the great pedagogical advantage, highlighted by several authors of autocommentaries,<sup>24</sup> of enabling the exposition "both in a nutshell and at length" (*śaiṅṣepavistara*) that is said to befit proper teaching.

It also seems obvious that, in a teaching environment, orality was a major mode of transmission, and at least some of the earlier so-called autocommentaries may in fact have been originally constituted of notes taken by students while the teacher was explaining the meaning of his own work. Thus Helmut Krasser has argued that some famous Buddhist autocommentaries, such as Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccayavṛtti* or Bhāviveka's *Tarkajvālā*<sup>25</sup> (the authorship of which is debated),<sup>26</sup> are indeed autocom-

**18** See Cox, "A Fragmented History."

**19** On this debate see in particular Biardeau, *Bhartṛhari*; Subramania Iyer, *Bhartṛhari*, 16–35; Aklujkar, "The Authorship" and "Once again"; Bronkhorst, "Études"; Houben, "Bhartṛhari's *Vākyapadiya* and the ancient *Vṛtti*" 1, 2 and 3.

**20** See above, n. 14.

**21** On medieval opinions regarding the *Yogabhāṣya*, see Bronkhorst, "Patañjali," and Maas, "A Concise Historiography"; regarding the *Vākyapadiyavṛtti*, see, for example, Subramania Iyer, *Bhartṛhari*, 21ff.

**22** Ganeri, "Sanskrit Philosophical Commentary," 199.

**23** Namely Bhāsarvajña's, Udayana's and Annambhaṭṭa's.

**24** See, for example, Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra's *Nātyadarpaṇa*, 26, or Maheśvarānanda's *Mahārthamañjarī*, 2.

**25** This title, commonly used in secondary literature to designate the commentary, seems to have originally belonged to the root-text: Krasser, "How to Teach," 50n1; van der Kuijp, "Further notes," 306.

**26** See Lindtner, "Adversaria Buddhica"; Seyfort Ruegg, "On the Authorship"; Eckel, *Bhāviveka*,

mentaries, but stemming from the author's "mouth" rather than "pen."<sup>27</sup> This could explain, for instance, discrepancies between the preserved Tibetan translations that cannot be accounted for simply by assuming corruptions in the transmission of a single Ur-text.<sup>28</sup> On the Brahmanical side as well, some early commentaries traditionally purported to be autocommentaries have been suspected of being the work of a direct disciple, in particular the *Vākyapadiyavṛtti*.<sup>29</sup>

### Self-Effacing Self-Commentators, The Split of the Authorial Self, and the Resulting Headaches for Historians Concerned with Authorship

The task of historians who set out to ascertain whether a given text is indeed, as tradition claims, an autocommentary, has been considerably complicated by a feature of Sanskrit autocommentaries that is akin to the phenomenon described as a split of the authorial self<sup>30</sup> by scholars studying Western autocommentaries—namely, the propensity of autocommentators to create distinct authorial personae: the interpreted writer versus the interpreting reader. Although some Indian authors (particularly later ones) explicitly present their work as autocommentaries, many, while engaged in explaining their own root-text, only refer to themselves in the third person, with recurring expressions such as "he says" (*āha*)<sup>31</sup> or even "the master says" (*ācārya āha*),<sup>32</sup> as if they were someone else. Furthermore, the author of the aphoristic root-text (*sūtrakāra*) and the author of the commentary (*vṛttikāra*, etc.) are often treated as if they were altogether different individuals by subcommentators, even when the latter are demonstrably aware that a single author composed both the root-text and commentary.

This practice has led to much confusion and prompted some historians to wrongly accuse medieval commentators of providing inconsistent testimonies.<sup>33</sup> It has also

21–23; Krasser, "How to Teach," 60ff.

27 Krasser, "How to Teach," 63.

28 See Krasser, "How to Teach" and "Dignāga on Air," 158–75. This view is adopted, for example, in van der Kuip, "Further Notes," 323.

29 See Houben, "On the Syntactic and Stylistic Evidence."

30 Venturi's Introduction to *Self-Commentary*, 20.

31 On this ubiquitous formulation see, for example, Mookerjee, "A Dissertation," 181; Bronkhorst, "Two Literary Conventions," 224–25; Tubb and Boose, *Scholastic Sanskrit*, 229.

32 This has been noticed in particular with respect to *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, introduction to 1.3 (Qvarnström, *Hindu Philosophy*, 21n1; Bronkhorst, "Two Literary Conventions," 225), but as pointed out in Seyfort Ruegg, "On the Authorship," 64, in this case the expression is used because the author is portraying an interlocutor raising a question that he addresses to the "master." It sometimes occurs outside such a context, however, in works that have been doubted to be autocommentaries (e.g., the *Tarkajvālā* and *Vākyapadiyavṛtti*) but also in texts whose autocommentarial status is not doubtful, such as Haribhadra's *Anekāntajayapatākāvṛtti*, 1:2 (cf. the almost identical passage in his *Yogaśatakāvṛtti*, 1) or Hemaandra's *Pramāṇamīmāṃsā*, 1.

33 Thus Ānandavardhana's single authorship of the verses and *Vṛtti* constituting the treatise known today as the *Dhvanyāloka* has been doubted since Bühler's 1877 "Detailed Report," 65, mostly because of Abhinavagupta's repeated use of phrases such as "the author of the verses" and "the author of the *Vṛtti*" (cf. Kane, *History*, 162–99). Mookerjee, "A Dissertation," and Krishnamoorthy,



forced them to use a wide array of criteria when trying to determine whether a commentary was written by the author of a root-text, including the syntactic interdependence of the root-text and commentary, the consistency of their respective contents, the absence of mention of variant readings or of a benedictory (*maṅgala*) initial verse in the commentary; and unfortunately, these criteria have often turned out to be of limited use. Thus some standard commentaries may create, on purpose, the impression of a syntactic interdependence of the root-text and explanation.<sup>34</sup> Yet consistency in contents is not always easy to assess; and the mention of a plurality of interpretations cannot be considered proof that a commentary is not authorial, as autocomentaries often highlight several meanings.<sup>35</sup> As for the absence of benedictory verses, it is rarely conclusive (their use has fluctuated over time and across genres,<sup>36</sup> and some autocomentaries have one);<sup>37</sup> while the absence of mention of any variant reading does not prove that a commentary is authorial, and yet its presence does not necessarily rule it out either, as some authors appear to have considered alternative phrasings for their own text (and the same expression, *pāṭhāntara*, probably designated at times not only a variant reading in the philological sense of the term, but also a suggested alternative phrasing).<sup>38</sup>

But why is it that, as Madhusudan Kaul once put it, autocomentators (as well as their subcommentators) write “in such a way that the reader is often misled into thinking that the author of the text is different from that of the gloss”?<sup>39</sup> Ashok Aklujkar has suggested that authors designate themselves as “the master” when referring to a specific passage in the work that they are commenting on, and when “attempting to spare the readers the trouble of going through the commentandum text as well as the commentary text,” which is “an understandable need in the age of circulation of a text in manuscripts, in which pagination and text divisions could not remain the same.”<sup>40</sup> This explanation does not seem satisfactory, however, as in many cases such references do not regard a distant passage that the reader would need to locate. One certainly ought to

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*Dhvanyāloka*, have convincingly shown, however, that there is no good reason to question this authorship (cf., for example, McCrea, *The Teleology*, 100n4), and that nowhere does Abhinavagupta express any doubt about it, despite his distinguishing Ānandavardhana’s goals as the author of the verses and as the author of their commentary. The remark in Ingalls’ “Introduction,” 26, that arguments on both sides are “inconclusive” because “Abhinavagupta is so inconsistent” therefore seems unwarranted.

**34** See Bronkhorst, “Two Literary Conventions.”

**35** See section below headed “Appropriating, Defying, and Creating Tradition.”

**36** See Minkowski, “Why Should We Read,” 4–10.

**37** One of Utpaladeva’s autocomentaries on his *Īśvarapratyabhijñā* treatise, the *Vṛtti*, has no benedictory verse of its own, but the other autocomentary (the *Vivṛti*) does; Abhinavagupta explains this by pointing out that the *Vṛtti* was composed at the same time as the verses, whereas the *Vivṛti* was composed later (*Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtivismarśinī*, 1:2–3; see Torella’s Introduction to *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā*, xli).

**38** See section below.

**39** Introduction to *Siddhitrāyī*, 10.

**40** Aklujkar, “Authorship,” 221.

consider among other factors the fact—also obvious in Western traditions<sup>41</sup>—that self-commentaries, being composed while taking as their model the structure of standard commentaries, tend to replicate the latter’s distance between author and commentator; and as far as South Asian literature is concerned, another important factor is probably that authors, whether writing autocommentaries or not, are usually expected to talk about themselves in the third person rather than the first. This is famously pointed out by Medhātithi as he defends the view that the *Manusmṛti* is Manu’s work, even though Manu is mentioned there in the third person.

In general, authors express their own thought as if it were someone else’s [by writing, for example,] “with respect to this *he* says [the following],” [or] “*they* refute this [as follows],” rather than [presenting it] thus: ‘*I*, being questioned by them, [reply as follows].’<sup>42</sup>

The rationale for this may have been, as pointed out by P. V. Kane, “to avoid looking too egotistic”<sup>43</sup>—or rather, to suggest greater authority by implying that the author is above all egoistical concerns. In any case, the rule is often (although by no means always) complied with, and the use of the third person in autocommentaries has been interpreted as a mere variation of this practice;<sup>44</sup> self-commenting, it seems, had to appear as a selfless activity.

But how should we explain that subcommentators, too, tend to distinguish several authorial personae, even when they are aware that a single author composed both works? Cox has suggested that Abhinavagupta’s distinction between the author of the *Dhvanyāloka*’s verses and that of their *Vṛtti* betrays a lack of habituation to the autocommentary, which was relatively novel in the field of poetics: according to him, it shows that “the protocols of reading hadn’t yet adjusted themselves to the autocommentary format”<sup>45</sup> It seems doubtful, however, whether Abhinavagupta lacked familiarity with the latter: he displays elsewhere a remarkably precise knowledge of Buddhist works—many of which include autocommentaries composed several centuries before his time—as well as of Bhartṛhari’s *Vākyapadīya* and Patañjali’s *Yogaśāstra*, two works that he explicitly takes to include autocommentaries. He also composed two lengthy commentaries on Utpaladeva’s *Īśvarapratyabhijñā* (which comprises two autocommentaries) while distinguishing the authorial voices just as he does in the case of Ānandavardhana’s work. This distinction is clearly a fossilized remnant of the exegetical tradition of standard commentaries by subcommentators; but there must have been reasons for conspicuously maintaining its use when explaining authorial commentaries.

As pointed out by Satkari Mookerjee and Keralapura Krishnamoorthy, foremost among these reasons was certainly the need to express a difference in the texts’ respective *functions*,<sup>46</sup> any commentary being theoretically limited to explaining the root-text

41 See, for example, Roush, *Hermes’ Lyre*, 5.

42 *Manubhāṣya*, 1:7: *prāyeṇa granthakārāḥ svamataṃ parāpadeśena bruvate, atrāha, atra pariharantīti naivam ahaṃ taiḥ pṛṣṭa iti*. See Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, 90.

43 Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, 90.

44 See, for example, Krishnamoorthy, *Dhvanyāloka*, 52, and Bronkhorst, “What Was Śaṅkara’s *śāstrārāmbha*?” 125n7.

45 Cox, “A Fragmented History.”

46 Mookerjee, “A Dissertation,” 180; Krishnamoorthy, *Dhvanyāloka*, 55.

without straying from the latter's boundaries (a fault called *utsūtravyākhyāna*), so that its author, even if he also happened to be the author of the root-text, was expected to perform this specific task, and therefore had to be distinguished in this capacity from the author of the root-text. It has been rightly objected that autocommentators often take great liberties with their own root-texts, as do their subcommentators;<sup>47</sup> and it is true that there is often a glaring gap between the exegetical etiquette and the reality of commentarial practices. Yet Mookerjee and Krishnamoorthy make the important point that this is at least an ideal which authors of Sanskrit works claim to be important. Autocommentators and their subcommentators seem to insist on different authorial personae precisely because they are distinguishing the specific tasks that each of them has to perform, as is made clear by Abhinavagupta. Thus, on the one hand, he specifies in various instances that Utpaladeva is the single author of the *Īśvarapratyabhijñā* work as a whole (*granthakāra*): that is, of the verses and the two commentaries respectively called *Vṛtti* and *Vivṛti* or *Ṭikā*;<sup>48</sup> on the other hand, he often distinguishes the author of the verses (*kārikākāra*), that of the *Vṛtti* (*vṛttikāra*) and that of the *Vivṛti* or *Ṭikā* (*vivṛti-/ṭikā-kāra*), as if they were three distinct individuals, depending on the respective functions of these texts, as in the following passage:

And the author of the *Vṛtti* has not taken the trouble of [getting into] such a [detailed] explanation [as the one just given here] because [he was only concerned with] explaining the [verses'] overall meaning; this is stated [in the *Vivṛti*, according to which the *Vṛtti*'s] 'function (*vyāpāra*) is merely to explain the [aspect of] the verses' teaching that is concealed.' And this has not been touched upon by the author of the *Ṭikā* either, [since] he intended to explain the sole *Vṛtti*.<sup>49</sup>

Abhinavagupta even describes this paradoxical status of the author becoming multiple without ceasing to be one by saying that he assumes the different theatrical roles (*bhūmikā*)<sup>50</sup> of the *kārikākāra*, *vṛttikāra* and *ṭikākāra*—those being, as Raffaele Torella has put it, “almost three different persons, capable of dialoguing and disputing with each other, and yet remaining within the higher unity of the *granthakāra*.”<sup>51</sup>

### The Authority of Alleged Autocommentaries— and Some Ways of Undermining It

Before examining the reasons why some South Asian writers thus chose to compose commentaries on their own works, it is worth considering a little longer the issue of the actual authorship of some texts traditionally regarded as autocommentaries; for

47 See Kane, *History*, 174; Seyfort Ruegg, “On the Authorship,” 60–61.

48 See, for example, *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtivismarsinī*, 1:2, 3, 14, etc.

49 *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarsinī*, 1:22–23: *iyati ca vyākhyāne vṛttikṛtā bhāro na kṛtas tātparyavyākhyānāt, yad uktam saṃvṛtasautranirdeśavivṛtimātravyāpārāyām iti. ṭikākāreṇāpi vṛttimātraṃ vyākhyātum udyatena nedaṃ sprṣtam*. See Pandey, *Abhinavagupta*, 133–34; Krishnamoorthy, *Dhvanyāloka*, 54; Ratié, *Utpaladeva*, 7–8.

50 *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtivismarsinī*, 1:2.

51 Torella, Introduction to *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā*, xlii.

with respect to most of the works mentioned above, the question has not only been raised by historians in recent times, but in fact such debates were not unknown in the Middle Ages. Thus the relationship between the ninth-century series of aphoristic verses known as the *Spandakārikā* and its prose commentary (*Vṛtti*) was a matter of dispute at the turn of the second millenium. Kṣemarāja (ca. 1000–1050) ascribed the verses to Vasugupta<sup>52</sup> (to whom the *Śivasūtras* were allegedly revealed)<sup>53</sup> and only attributed the commentary to Vasugupta's pupil, Kallaṭa, against a thus-far prevalent opinion: Bhāskara<sup>54</sup> (ca. 925–975), Utpalavaiṣṇava/Bhāgavatopala<sup>55</sup> (ca. 950–1000), and Rāma<sup>56</sup> (ca. 950–1000) all held the *Spandakārikā* and its *Vṛtti* to be Kallaṭa's work. Both Kṣemarāja and Bhāgavatopala seem to have gone so far as to insert an additional verse within the *Spandakārikā* to support their respective positions in the dispute,<sup>57</sup> and a verse at the end of the *Vṛtti* that could be read as ascribing the verses to Vasugupta has long been suspected of being a later addition as well.<sup>58</sup> A majority of modern scholars hold that Kallaṭa was indeed the author of both texts, because several early commentators are of this opinion; but also, as pointed out by Alexis Sanderson, because nothing in the commentary indicates a different authorship and because the commentary "lacks its own initial benedictory verse."<sup>59</sup> Whether one accepts these arguments as sufficient or not, the medieval dispute over the autocommentarial status of the *Vṛtti* and the forgery of verses that it occasioned show how greatly this status mattered: it evidently endowed the commentary with exceptional authority. I have yet to find in a Sanskrit autocommentary a statement comparable to Lorenzo de' Medici's famous remark that no one is

52 *Śivasūtravimarśinī*, 3.

53 On the varying accounts of this revelation see, for example, Chatterji, *Kashmir Shaivism*, 26–29, and Sanderson, "The Śaiva Exegesis," 403–4.

54 *Śivasūtravārttika*, 2–3, vv. 4–5.

55 *Spandapradīpikā*, 83.

56 In *Spandavivṛti*, 165, he identifies "the master" to which the last verse is dedicated as Vasugupta, thus indicating that he believes the verses to be by his disciple Kallaṭa, as pointed out in Dyczkowski, *The Stanzas*, 22.

57 Gnoli, *Testi*, 14, adopts Kṣemarāja's view without discussing these verses. Rastogi, *The Krama Tantricism*, 114, notes that "amusingly," each verse is only found in the text read by the exegete defending the authorship proclaimed in the verse (a point already highlighted in Pandey, *Abhinavagupta*, 155), but stops short of accusing Kṣemarāja and Bhāgavatopala of being responsible for the insertions. Pandey sides with Kṣemarāja on the dubious grounds that the later *Mahārthamañjarī* (demonstrably influenced by Kṣemarāja) quotes the verse only found in his recension. Pandit, *History*, 21, and Dyczkowski, *The Stanzas*, 22, make the reasonable assumption that both verses are later additions. Sanderson, "The Śaiva Exegesis," 405–7, remains silent on this issue while discussing the authorship of the *Spandakārikā*. Bansat-Boudon, "Enjeux," 224–29, discusses the adjunctions without any reference to prior secondary literature on the topic.

58 Chatterji, *Kashmir Shaivism*, 27–28n2; Sanderson, "The Śaiva Exegesis," 406–7.

59 Sanderson, "The Śaiva Exegesis," 406. According to Bansat-Boudon, "Enjeux," 178n1, Sanderson, "The Śaiva Exegesis," 418 presents Kallaṭa as the author not only of the *Spandakārikā* and their *Vṛtti* but also of the *Śivasūtra*. This, however, is a misunderstanding on Bansat-Boudon's part (Sanderson merely remarks on that page that the date of Kallaṭa, and hence that of the *Śivasūtra* said to have been revealed to his master, can only be ascertained from a quotation by Utpaladeva).

better suited to understand and explain a text than its author himself.<sup>60</sup> But Kṣemarāja was probably acutely aware that most readers tend to presume as much, as it can be no coincidence that, while being the only Kashmirian author to have explicitly denied the authorial status of the *Spandaṅṛtti*,<sup>61</sup> he also happened to be fiercely critical of some of its explanations.<sup>62</sup>

Yet undermining the authority of an autocommentary by denying its alleged authorship was not the only strategy adopted by those who disagreed with such texts: the Buddhist Saṅghabhadra, while accepting on the whole Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośakārikā*, wrote two works to criticize the commentary (*Bhāṣya*) on it ascribed to Vasubandhu himself.<sup>63</sup> The verses and their alleged autocommentary contain numerous striking doctrinal differences, as the former sum up the doctrine of the Kashmirian Vaibhāṣika Buddhists, while the latter defends many views unacceptable to Vaibhāṣika orthodoxy;<sup>64</sup> yet Saṅghabhadra, who undertakes to purge the commentary from its doctrinal deviations, nowhere insinuates that the *Bhāṣya* might not be by Vasubandhu himself.<sup>65</sup> As pointed out by Ganeri, he rather creates what amounts to "a rival *Bhāṣya*."<sup>66</sup> Saṅghabhadra and Vasubandhu appear to have been contemporaries, so that denying the latter's authorship was probably not an option for the former; still, this is indeed "a rather dramatic example of the point that the author has no special authority over the commentator in reading meaning from the text"<sup>67</sup>—or rather, that some doctrinal features were of such importance to medieval South Asian commentators that they were prepared to deny at times this otherwise unchallenged "special authority."

**60** See, for example, Roush, *Hermes' Lyre*, 72; Venturi's Introduction to *Self-Commentary*, 1.

**61** According to Rastogi, *The Krama Tantricism*, 114, and Dyczkowski, *The Stanzas*, 23, Kṣemarāja's master, Abhinavagupta, was also of the opinion that the author of the *Spandakārikā* was Vasugupta. It is debatable, however, whether any of the quotations from the *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtivismarśinī* adduced so far to establish this point is conclusive. In particular, the one from 2:199, where (according to Dyczkowski, *The Stanzas*, 320n28), Abhinavagupta introduces quotes from the *Spandakārikā* "with the remark that 'this is what the author of the *sūtras* said'" must be rejected, since the *sūtrakāra* mentioned here is Utpaladeva, not Vasugupta (Abhinavagupta's point is that in *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā* 1.5.14, Utpaladeva sums up what is already said in various other sources, including the *Spandakārikā*).

**62** The latter point is emphasized in Pandit, *History*, 21; Dyczkowski, *The Stanzas*, 22; Bansat-Boudon, "Enjeux," 228.

**63** See in particular Cox, *Disputed Dharmas*.

**64** This has led Bronkhorst, "Two Literary Conventions," 222–25, to question the *Bhāṣya*'s authorship, although none of the arguments adduced seems decisive.

**65** In the extant Chinese version of the *\*Nyāyānusāra*, Vasubandhu is even called *chin-chu*, "sūtra master," which, according to Cox, *Disputed Dharmas*, 56, must translate *sūtrakāra* given the quotation of this text found in Sthiramati's Sanskrit commentary. This appears to be an explicit acknowledgement of Vasubandhu's double authorship (unless, as Cox wondered in *Disputed Dharmas*, 56, the term was "used with sarcasm, suggesting Vasubandhu's lack of familiarity with Buddhist scripture"; but the latter option seems less likely).

**66** Ganeri, "Sanskrit Philosophical Commentary," 200.

**67** Ganeri, "Sanskrit Philosophical Commentary," 200

## Are Autocommentators Worried about Not Being Understood— or of Being So Too Easily?

Now, why did South Asian authors set out to comment on their own works? The first answer that comes to mind is that they were simply eager to be better understood. As noted above, the twofold structure of aphorisms and their explanation was seen as a powerful mnemotechnic and pedagogical tool, and the rare instances when authors themselves justify commenting on their own works usually mention teaching as at least one reason for undertaking such a task. Śālikanātha specifies having undertaken his explanation out of compassion, as a favour to those who do not fully understand the meaning encapsulated in his stanzas.<sup>68</sup> Maheśvarānanda, for his part, first indicates as a motive his desire to enjoy again his own work or—the words seem to have both meanings here—to enjoy again the understanding of the/his own self (*ātman*),<sup>69</sup> but he then adds that it was done “for the sake of the delight that it will bring to the minds of those in need of instruction,”<sup>70</sup> and finally presents it as an offering to the god Śiva.

If the reasons why the autocommentary format spread from didactic treatises to poetry remain unclear, according to Yigal Bronner this phenomenon must be understood in relation to the development of the “extreme poetry” of *śleṣakāvya* (which tells different stories simultaneously: that is, with the same verses read differently), as a tool developed to help the reader overcome the considerable difficulties of double meaning (*śleṣa*); and it betrays these poets’ “growing anxiety[...]about being fully understood. Poets are often concerned about getting their message through, but *śleṣa* writers, it seems, were twice as worried.”<sup>71</sup> Yet one often wonders, while reading South Asian autocommentaries, if such texts were not rather meant to quell, at least in part, a rather different (albeit perhaps not incompatible) fear—that of being too transparent, too simple, too easy to grasp. Admittedly, some authors advertise their autocommentaries as par-

68 *Vākyārthamātrkāvr̥tti*, 376: *gambhīravitatam arthaṃ vācā saṃkṣiptayā nibaddham api | na vindanti ye samagraṃ kṛpayā tadanugrahaḥ kriyate*. || Although the brief text [of the stanzas] encapsulates a profound and far-reaching point, [some] do not fully grasp it; [this commentary] is made [as] a favour to them, out of compassion.”

69 *Mahārthamañjarīparimala*, 2: *svakriyāyā api vyākhyāṃ svayam eva prayuñjmahe | upary apy āt masamrambhasambhogāmreḍanotsukāḥ\** || [\**kāḥ* my correction; *kaḥ* in the edition]. Cox, *Modes of Philology*, 120, detects “a passing note of apologia” here, and translates: “Though it is my own work, I myself now undertake the commentary upon it, eager to repeat yet again the consummation of my own undertaking.” *Ātmasamrambha* can indeed mean one’s own activity; but *samrambha*, which can be used as a synonym for *vimarśa* (the dynamic aspect of consciousness in nondual Śaivism and a fundamental notion in Maheśvarānanda’s work) also designates the conscious act through which one grasps/understands something; cf. the end of the commentary, where just as here, the author is said to have explained his own work both “out of an eagerness to grasp the/his self, and also because he was urged [to do so] by disciples” (*svavimarśakutūhalāt | śiṣyānām api nirbandhāt*, from *Mahārthamañjarīparimala*, 199; for a somewhat different interpretation of the latter passage see Cox, *Modes of Philology*, 117). As for the “self” mentioned here, it can be understood both as Maheśvarānanda’s and as the ultimate reality of the universe (the principle of personal identity being equated in his tradition with the single universal consciousness manifesting the universe).

70 *Mahārthamañjarīparimala*: *vineyajanaचित्तात्मकक्रियार्थम्* (transl. Cox, *Modes of Philology*, 120).

71 Bronner, *Extreme Poetry*, 157.

ticularly easy and straightforward;<sup>72</sup> but in fact, in *śāstra* as well as *kāvya*, autocommentaries often create a sense of depth in the text on which they comment by highlighting hidden meanings beyond the straightforward ones, and they tend to cultivate equivocity instead of dispelling ambiguities.<sup>73</sup> Utpaladeva often offers two or three different interpretations (some of which could be considered rather far-fetched) for a single word of his;<sup>74</sup> and as pointed out by Cox, Maheśvarānanda similarly explains his own verses “through a series of vertiginous commentarial operations, pointedly ignoring the verses’ patent meaning.”<sup>75</sup>

It is also possible that some autocommentaries, among which are Bhāsarvajña’s *Nyāyabhūṣaṇa* or Utpaladeva’s *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛti*, almost disappeared while their root-texts were successfully transmitted because they were deemed too difficult, or rendered the root-text itself too difficult<sup>76</sup>—in India too, autocommentaries were sometimes, in Sherry Roush’s words, “maddeningly unhelpful”<sup>77</sup> in that they highlighted the work’s complexities instead of solving problems, and opened interpretive possibilities rather than restricting them. This was also true in diglossic contexts, often associated with autocommentaries:<sup>78</sup> as shown by Cox, Maheśvarānanda, far from providing “a single authoritative interpretation” in his Sanskrit commentary on his own Prakrit verses, developed an “auto-philology” concerned with unpacking the multiple meanings that were allowed according to him by the “indeterminacy” of Prakrit.<sup>79</sup>

Besides, autocommentators themselves sometimes admitted that their goal was not only to explain their work but also to add “new” elements to them;<sup>80</sup> and authorial com-

**72** Devavimāla, who entitled his autocommentary on the *Hīrasaubhāgya* “Easy Understanding” (*Sukhāvabodha*), says at the beginning of the work: *svopajñāhīrasaubhāgyakāvyaśyāvyaśāśālinīm | kurve vṛttim vidagdhānām jhagityarthavibodhikām ||* “I am composing on the poem *Hīrasaubhāgya*—which is of my own invention (*svopajñā*)—a commentary that is free of prolixity and will enable learned [people] to swiftly understand [the poem’s] meaning.”

**73** This phenomenon renders the presence of alternative explanations a particularly fragile criterion when assessing whether a text is an autocommentary or not: the argument has been invoked, for example, with respect to the *Vākypadiyavṛtti*, see Bronkhorst, “Études,” 112ff.

**74** See, for example, Ratié, “Some Hitherto Unknown Fragments,” on the three interpretations in his *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛti* of the word “there” (*tatra*) used in *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛti* 1.7.11.

**75** Cox, *Modes of Philology*, 129.

**76** On the former see Preisendanz, “Text, Commentary, Annotation,” 613; on the latter, Ratié, *Utpaladeva*, chapter 1.

**77** Roush, *Hermes’ Lyre*, 10.

**78** Cf., for example, Hemacandra’s *Deśināmamālā*, devoted to Prakrit “regional” terms (on this notion see, for example, Ollett, *Language of the Snakes*, 156–57), and in which Prakrit verses are explained in a Sanskrit commentary. It is striking that “the legitimation of vernacular languages across Europe” is seen as one of the factors contributing to the development of the autocommentary genre there: see Venturi’s Introduction to *Self-Commentary*, 4

**79** Cox, *Modes of Philology*, 126–32.

**80** See, for example, Hemacandra’s *Kāvyaṅuśāsanaviveka*, 1: *vivaritum kvacid drbdham navaṃ samdarbhitum kvacit | kāvyānuśāsanasyāyam vivekaḥ pravitanayate ||* “[I] am composing this detailed analysis of [my] *Kāvyaṅuśāšana* so as to explain in some cases what has been strung together [in the latter]—and in [other] cases, in order to string together something new.”



mentaries sometimes seem to suggest changes in the very text of the work that they explain. Thus Phyllis Granoff has noted with some surprise that although Devavimāla Gaṇin, the author of a poem entitled *Hīrasaubhāgya*, explicitly claims authorship of its commentary, the latter “occasionally mentions variant readings, which seems odd for an autocommentary.”<sup>81</sup> It is indeed odd, all the more since the mention of variant readings is often invoked today as proof that an allegedly authorial commentary was in fact written later by someone else.<sup>82</sup> It might cease to be odd, however, if we consider that expressions such as *pāṭhāntara*, usually translated as “variant reading,” seem to have been used by commentators to designate not only alternative readings that they had actually encountered in manuscripts, but also alternative or “more pleasing” (*ramyatara*) turns of phrase that they offered as improvements on the commented text when they saw it as lacking grammatical, social, or aesthetic propriety.<sup>83</sup> It is quite possible<sup>84</sup> that Devavimāla, while commenting on his own poem, envisaged a number of potential improvements, while preserving and explaining the original version, as standard commentators often do.<sup>85</sup>

### Appropriating, Defying, and Creating Tradition

Paul Dundas<sup>86</sup> has also pointed out that Devavimāla, in his autocommentary on the *Hīrasaubhāgya*, quotes other poets, and refers in particular to “around two hundred turns of phrase which he has borrowed from Śrīharṣa,” the twelfth-century author of the celebrated *Naiṣadhīyacarita*. These “openly recorded borrowings” draw a complex intertextual web meant to highlight the various appropriations (*haraṇa*)—deemed legitimate by treatises of poetics such as Rājaśekhara’s *Kāvyaṁīmāṁsā*—of famous

<sup>81</sup> Granoff, “Mountains of Eternity,” 38n17. See, for example, *Hīrasaubhāgyavyākhyā*, 757, which first explains *campakaḥ puṣpapaṭaḥ* in verse 15.16, before adding *campako’smin sapuṣpa iti pāṭhe* and proceeding to explain this other “reading.”

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, above, n. 12.

<sup>83</sup> On such “improvements” by commentators see, in particular, Goodall and Isaacson, *The Raghupāñcikā*, xxxi–xl; and Goodall, “Retracer la transmission.” Pollock, “Sanskrit Literary Culture,” 112, quotes a verse from the twelfth-century *Prthvīrājaviṅaya*, complaining about the tendency of commentators to emend poems.

<sup>84</sup> Devavimāla explains at the end of his work (v. 21 in the *granthapraśasti*) that his poem was entirely “revised” (*samaśodhyata*) by Dhanavijaya, disciple of Kalyāṇavijaya (and then implores his learned readers to make further corrections if additional mistakes are spotted); one could therefore also consider the possibility that the commentary was “revised” as well and that some additions were made in the process.

<sup>85</sup> The tenth-century commentator Vallabhadeva, for instance, while suggesting a number of improved “readings” in the poems of Kālidāsa, is usually careful to transmit the readings that he deems faulty or vulgar (*asabhya*, *Kumārasaṁbhavaṭikā*, 79 on 3.41); see, for example, Pollock, “What Was Philology,” 121, on “suggested revisions” without actual alterations of the text. This did not prevent such “improvements” from having a great influence on the transmission of texts, as some scribes revised the text they were copying against commentaries (see Goodall and Isaacson, *The Raghupāñcikā*, xxxii and n. 49).

<sup>86</sup> Dundas, *History, Scripture and Controversy*, 62–63.



poems of the past. As Phyllis Granoff puts it, while discussing Devavimala's depiction of the Jain holy mountain Śatruñjaya: "The commentary[...]explains the source of these images: it is always other poetry," and by systematically pointing out this indebtedness, it makes clear that "the poet responds not to nature but to the descriptions of nature provided by his predecessors."<sup>87</sup> This considerable attention devoted to intertextuality,<sup>88</sup> which no doubt was seen as enhancing the poet's prestige, is but one aspect of the strikingly ambivalent attitude of autocomentaries to tradition.

For autocomentaries attempted to connect the work on which they commented with existing traditions by systematically highlighting its intertextuality, as Devavimala does; but *śāstric* autocomentaries in particular were also certainly seen as *defying* tradition—at least insofar as instead of commenting on an older text, they explained a freshly composed one. They thereby gave the latter the prestigious, foundational status of *sūtras*, claiming to consecrate this oxymoronic reality: a new tradition. In this respect it is of interest that the Sanskrit compounds meaning "autocomentary," commonly prefixed by *sva* ("one's own"), were not understood as meaning "one's own commentary," but rather, "a commentary on one's own [work],"<sup>89</sup> the latter being often described (even though quite late)<sup>90</sup> as "self-invented" (*svopajñā*)—an expression usually employed disdainfully to distinguish mere individual opinions from views properly sanctioned by tradition and scripture.<sup>91</sup> In an interesting discussion staged at the beginning of Hemacandra's *Pramāṇamīmāṃsā* to justify its form (that of aphorisms accompanied by a commentary), what Hemacandra's interlocutor criticizes is precisely the fact that he has produced aphorisms of his own instead of commenting on traditional ones.

[—Objection:] But if these aphorisms on the Jaina doctrine are yours, then before you, what or whose were they? [—Answer:] You have [just] asked about far too little! You should also ask about this: what were the aphorisms of grammar, [prosody, Vaiśeṣika,] etc., and whose were they, before Pāṇini, Piṅgala, Akṣapāda and the [other renowned composers of aphorisms]? These sciences are in fact beginningless, [but we] talk about them as [if they were] ever new, and as belonging to this or that author, according to whether the intention [in a given work] was to [present them] in brief or at length;

**87** Granoff, "Mountains of Eternity," 38.

**88** It is in fact already found in some standard commentaries, although usually not to the same extent: see, for example, Pollock, "What Was Philology," 126–27, on the fourteenth-century commentator Aruṇagirinātha, for whom making sense of Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava* "meant above all embedding it in a set of intertexts."

**89** See, for example, Vāmana's *Kāvyaḷaṅkārasūtravṛtti*, 1, where the work is described as "a commentary on his own *Kāvyaḷaṅkāra* aphorisms" (*kāvyaḷaṅkārasūtrāṅgāṃ sveṣāṃ vṛttih*); Hemacandra's *Yogaśāstra*, 1:1: "a commentary on the specific meaning of my own *Yogaśāstra*" (*sva yogaśāstrārthaviśeṣanirṇayaḥ*); *Pramāṇamīmāṃsā*, second introductory verse: "a commentary on my own aphorisms on the Jaina doctrine" (*jainasiddhāntasūtrāṅgāṃ sveṣāṃ vṛttih*), etc.

**90** Monier-Williams, *Dictionary* (s.v.) traces the compound back to Hemacandra, without providing any precise reference. Later authors use it (e.g., Devavimala, see above, n. 72); it appears in many late colophons and is widely used in printed editions and secondary literature.

**91** See, for example, its repeated use in Jayaratha's *Tantrāloka*, as in the introduction to *Tantrāloka* 1.243: *etac ca na svopajñam api tu sarvatraivāgamaśūktam...* "And this is not a mere individual opinion (*svopajñā*); rather, it is stated absolutely everywhere in the scriptures...."

have you not heard [the maxim]: ‘The world never becomes different’? Or have a look at the *Tattvārthasūtra*, this jewel crowning all treatises, composed by the greatest of all authors! [—Objection:] If so, why have [you] not undertaken only a [single] work (*prakaraṇa*), such as Akalaṅka’s, Dharmakīrti’s and so on—why this pretension to be an author of aphorisms (*sūtrakāra*)? [—Answer]: Please do not talk like this: the present writer is [simply] of a different inclination, so since there is no public or royal decree going against his own free will, [your objection] amounts to naught!<sup>92</sup>

The opponent insists that the format unduly endows the writer with the prestige of a *sūtrakāra*, and Hemacandra’s reply is in some respects rather conservative, since he argues that nothing is new under the sun (thus presenting his own work as devoid of novelty) and grounds his endeavour in the Jain tradition by invoking the revered precedent of the *Tattvārthasūtra* (the *Bhāṣya* of which is believed by many Jains to be an autocommentary). Yet, not to mention that this enables him to place his own work at the same level as the venerable *sūtras* that he cites, he also firmly—and somewhat sarcastically—asserts his right to write as he pleases; and even his adversary’s laudatory mentions of single works (as opposed to aphorisms with their gloss, it seems) might also be Hemacandra’s way of making fun of his portrayed interlocutor: the two prestigious authors mentioned, Akalaṅka and Dharmakīrti, happen to have used the autocommentary format, their verses being explicitly depicted as *sūtras* in their respective traditions.<sup>93</sup>

This ambiguity with respect to tradition is also evident in Utpaladeva’s *Īśvarapratyabhijñā* treatise, which contains, besides aphoristic verses, two autocommentaries: a short gloss, *Vṛtti*, and a more detailed (and partly lost) *Vivṛti*.<sup>94</sup> In a lost part of the latter that is discussed at length in Abhinavagupta’s extant commentary, Utpaladeva had compared the three levels of his treatise (aphorisms, short gloss, and lengthy explanation) to the Veda’s threefold division into *Rc*, *Yajus*, and *Sāman*, and discussed in detail the identification of the three textual layers of his treatise with the different levels into which the universal Speech is said to unfold while progressively manifesting the phenomenal universe according to Bhartṛhari and various Śaiva sources.<sup>95</sup> He thus appropriated both Vedic and Tantric traditions, depicting his own *sūtras* as the most condensed and purest expression of reality, and likening his efforts to explain them in his short and detailed

**92** *Pramāṇamīmāṃsā*, 1: *nanu yadi bhavadīyānīmāni jainasiddhāntasūtrāṇi tarhi bhavataḥ pūrvam kāni kimīyāni vā tāny āsann iti? atyalpam idam anvayunḥkthāḥ. pāṇinipiṅgalakaṇāḍāksapādādībhyo ‘pi pūrvam kāni kimīyāni vā vyākaraṇādisūtrāṇīty etad api paryanuyunḥkṣva. anādaya evaitā vidyāḥ saṃkṣepavistaravivakṣayā navaṇavībhavanti tattatkarṭṛkāś cocyante. kiṃ nāśrauṣir na kadācid anīdṛśaṃ jagad iti? yadi vā prekṣasva vācakamukhyaviracitāni sakalāśāstracūḍāmaṇibhūtāni tattvārthasūtrāṇīti. yady evam akalaṅkadharmakīrtiyādivat prakaraṇam eva kiṃ nārabhyate, kim anayā sūtrakāratvāhopuruṣīkayā? maivaṃ vocaḥ, bhinnarucir hy ayaṃ janaḥ, tato nāsyā svecchāpratibandhe laukikaṃ rājakīyaṃ vā śāsanam astīti yat kiñcid etat.* For a somewhat different translation see Mookerjee, *Hemacandra’s Pramāṇamīmāṃsā*, 1–2.

**93** Karṇakagomin repeatedly designates the verses in the *Pramāṇavārttika*’s first chapter as *sūtras* and calls Dharmakīrti the *sūtrakāra* (see, for example, *Pramāṇavārttikasvavṛttiṭīkā*, 8); Abhayacandra calls *sūtras* the verses in Akalaṅka’s self-commented *Laghyastraya* (see 14, 20, etc.).

**94** On the latter and for further references see Ratié, *Utpaladeva*.

**95** *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtivismāśinī*, 1:14–16; the Sanskrit and its translation are given in Ratié, *Utpaladeva*, 8–18.

commentaries to the cosmic emanation through which the unitary, infinite consciousness of Śiva comes to manifest itself in the form of a differentiated world. Yet Utpaladeva also boldly insisted that his treatise constituted a “new” (*nava*, *abhinava*) soteriological path capable of leading its readers to liberation independently of the study of any scripture,<sup>96</sup> in effect creating a new tradition within nondual Śaivism.

### Addressing Different Categories of Readers— and Creating a Multitrack Soteriological Path

That Sanskrit autocomentaries were often meant to reach a category of readers different from that to which the commented work was addressed is particularly clear in cases where a given text was commented upon twice by its author. Thus Hemacandra chose a threefold format (namely, aphorisms with two autocomentaries: a *Vṛtti* or short explanation, and a *Viveka* or detailed analysis) for his treatise on poetics, the *Kāvyaṅuśāsana*, and it has been surmised that this choice was made while having in mind, as Rasklal Parikh has put it, “the needs of primary and advanced students,” the detailed autocomentary being designed for the latter.<sup>97</sup> More recently, Gary Tubb has also argued that “the most likely explanation” for the treatise’s tripartite structure is that while the *sūtras* were meant to be memorized, the *Vṛtti* was written for students “at an intermediate level,” and the *Viveka*, for an “advanced class” pursuing “higher reaches of scholarship while retaining the basic framework that they were already familiar with” from the study of the *Vṛtti*.<sup>98</sup> We should keep in mind, however, that Śālikanātha, for instance, claimed to have written an autocomentary so as to help the readers who were not capable of understanding the root-text on its own; in other words, his more detailed explanation was designed for a less advanced readership, not a more expert one.<sup>99</sup> Besides, Hemacandra’s adoption of this three-layered structure may have been influenced by Utpaladeva’s *Īśvarapratyabhijñā* treatise (on which Abhinavagupta, with whose works Hemacandra was familiar, has authored two commentaries); and whether he borrowed it from the Śaiva author or not, Utpaladeva, for his part, defined the respective readerships for the different levels of this work in a way that leaves no room for the presupposition that a more detailed commentary must address a more advanced readership.

Thus, traditional lists enumerating the various functions of Sanskrit commentaries,<sup>100</sup> such as the analysis of words and sentence structures, usually include as their last item “[stating] objections and refuting [them]” (*ākṣepapratīsamādhāna*): that is, showing how a text anticipates and successfully answers all possible objections based on rival theories. But Utpaladeva seems to have split those lists, reserving their last function for

<sup>96</sup> See Ratié, “Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta,” 438.

<sup>97</sup> Parikh, Introduction to *Kāvyaṅuśāsana*, cccxiii; cf. Athavale’s note 1 on the text.

<sup>98</sup> Tubb, “Hemacandra,” 63; cf. Tubb and Boose, *Scholastic Sanskrit*, 3.

<sup>99</sup> See above, n. 68.

<sup>100</sup> For a discussion of the available sources regarding these five- or sixfold lists and further references, see Ratié, *Utpaladeva*, 12–14.

his detailed *Vivṛti*<sup>101</sup> while ascribing the tasks pertaining to word-by-word explanation to his much shorter *Vṛtti*. In the lost introductory passage of his *Vivṛti*, he had also made clear that the three levels of his work were meant for different readers and, as Abhinavagupta explains, he argued there that only the *Vivṛti* “can be understood by everybody” (*sarvajana-pratipattiyogya*), because only its dialectical method of examining all possible objections and responses can purify the minds that, being polluted by the erroneous views of “other religions” (*tīrthāntara*), are incapable of grasping the truths contained in the aphorisms and *Vṛtti*. He argued, however, that those whose minds are not thus stained do not need the *Vivṛti* to understand the aphorisms and *Vṛtti*, the *sūtras* being even capable of bringing about liberation on their own in those already sufficiently advanced on the Śaiva nondualistic path. The multi-layered structure of Utpaladeva’s treatise therefore enabled him both to claim a universal readership for his treatise and to address his fellow Śaiva initiates as a privileged group of readers: he could compete with his Buddhist rivals by asserting that those fit to study his work (*adhikārin*), far from being restricted to male Brahmins, were simply “whoever is born,” regardless of their caste, religious background and so forth,<sup>102</sup> and yet preserve a kind of soteriological fast lane for those belonging to his own religious tradition, since only non-Śaivas needed to go through the lengthy *Vivṛti* in order to gain the liberating insight.

### **By Way of Conclusion: On the Self-Awareness of Self-Commenting Authors**

Studies on autocommentaries in Western traditions have pointed out that the genre appeared “at the time of heightened self-awareness that characterized the Trecento and Quattrocento” (that, is the fourteenth and fifteenth century in Italy); that writers had recourse to it so as “to construct or self-fashion a modern authorial identity”<sup>103</sup>; and that it has “received scant attention, partly because critics have taken an over-cautious approach to authorship after Roland Barthes famously proclaimed ‘the death of the author.’”<sup>104</sup> From this viewpoint, the case of Sanskrit autocommentaries seems strikingly different: whereas Barthes sees “the Author” as “a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages[...], it discovered the prestige of the individual,”<sup>105</sup> the works considered here were written in a culture where, as Marcel Mauss noticed long ago,<sup>106</sup> the individual self often stood accused of being a mental construct hiding a higher reality (whether the latter was understood as the presence of a transpersonal self, or as the actual lack of any enduring identity). And as seen above, not only are Sanskrit

**101** See *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtivismarśinī*, 1:16–17, quoted and discussed in Ratié, *Utpaladeva*, 9–11 and 14.

**102** See Ratié, *Le Soi et l’Autre*, 8n13.

**103** McLaughlin, “Alberti’s *Commentarium*,” 28; on this see, in particular, Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, and Ascoli, *Dante*.

**104** Venturi’s Introduction to *Self-Commentary*, 4.

**105** Barthes, *The Death of the Author*, 142–43.

**106** Mauss, “Une catégorie,” 273.

autocommentaries usually devoid of any biographical element that might help delineate the writer's individuality, they go to great lengths to dissolve the writer's self into impersonal turns of phrases and to break it down into a multiplicity of functional roles (the "author of the aphorisms," etc.).

Yet we should not assume that, in South Asia, self-commenting and self-awareness or self-fashioning were fundamentally unrelated, if only because (as pointed out by Sanderson) Mauss's evolutionistic view of India as a culture where the notion of the person was prevented from fully emerging by metaphysical criticisms of the self is problematic in many respects<sup>107</sup>—and also because the spectacular split of the authorial self described above certainly helped autocommentators fashion themselves as selfless transmitters of an impersonal truth. Besides, Utpaladeva and Hemacandra, who both went so far as including in some of their treatises two distinct self-exegetical layers, seem to have found a singular voice in their autocommentarial practice, and their authorial individuality emerges at times in the very midst of their conspicuous attempts to suppress it. Utpaladeva, while ostentatiously effacing himself behind a transpersonal Speech, also happened to highlight the novelty of his threefold treatise (and the differentiated soteriological path that it made possible) in a fashion that must have appeared quite extraordinary in tenth-century Kashmir. Hemacandra, while denying the novelty of his own work, asserted his right to compose it by virtue of his free will.

Moreover, the Śaivas at least explicitly linked their own understanding of the self and self-awareness with their autocommentarial practices. For nondual Śaivism sees as the true self (*ātman*) of every individual a single, all-encompassing consciousness identified as the god Śiva that manifests itself in the form of the infinitely manifold universe, playfully forgetting its own identity to enact the world's play, yet somehow remaining blissfully aware of it through an intuitive act of self-apprehension (*svavimarśa*)<sup>108</sup>—the very term that Maheśvarānanda uses to describe the first of his motivations for writing an autocommentary.<sup>109</sup> In the lost introduction of his *Vivṛti*, Utpaladeva, for his part, had described the three textual levels of his treatise—entirely devoted to showing that any individual should recognize his-/herself as Śiva—as the discursive unfolding of the ultimate consciousness's self-awareness, and his commentator Abhinavagupta felicitously depicts him as adopting the various theatrical "roles" of the *sūtra*-, *vṛtti*- and *vivṛti-kāras*: playfully becoming in turn the author of the verses, and those of the short and long commentaries, Utpaladeva prevents his readers from fully identifying him with any one of them, and suggests through the very format of his work that the paradoxical nature of the self is its fundamental plasticity, its ability to manifest itself in roles that do not exhaust its identity, and to appear as other, without ceasing to be itself.

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107 Sanderson, "Purity and Power," 190.

108 On the Śaiva nondualistic definition of identity and otherness see Ratié, *Le Soi et l'Autre*.

109 See above, n. 69.

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**Abstract** The practice of writing a commentary on one's own work has long been studied by historians focusing on the European Renaissance; but it was also very common in classical and medieval India. The article provides an overview of the phenomenon in Sanskrit sources while exploring hypotheses on its origins and goals.

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**Keywords** commentaries, autocommentary, self-commentary, hermeneutics, India, South Asia; Sanskrit, Hemacandra, Utpaladeva