A NOTE ON DHAMMAPADA 97

To the volume dedicated to L. Sternbach (Indologica Taurinensia 7, 1980), K. R. Norman contributed an article, entitled ‘Dhammapada 97: a misunderstood paradox.’ In this article he examined carefully all the adjectives which occur in this Dhammapada verse, and brought to light a punning skill (śleṣa) involved there. Though it is true that some scholars prior to him were aware of the puns used there as Norman himself says in the aforementioned article, and as a matter of fact, the poetical device called virodhābhāṣa intended there by the author was noted by W. Rau already in 1963, Norman is the first who advocated this new interpretation clearly, and rectified the misinterpretation of the verse in the past. The originality of this interpretation, thus, consists in attributing two opposite meanings to these adjectives, and explaining the skill of the poet. To the best of his knowledge, the present writer can not think of any scholar in Japan, who ever questioned the nature of this enigmatical verse and brought the problem involved there to light, despite the presence of eminent scholars who have worked on, and translated into Japanese, the Dhammapada, such as U. Wogihara, N. Tsuji, S. Watanabe, H. Nakamura, K. Mizuno, E. Mayeda and others.

Yet, to our surprise, we find that verse 97 of the Dhammapada was once discussed among the authors of Abhidharma literature, and interpreted by them in almost the same way as Norman did. To be more precise, what Norman proposed in the above mentioned article is, in fact, verified by some passages in the Abhidharma-samuccaya-bhāṣya and its Chinese translation. The aim of the present paper, then, is to demonstrate what the Bhāṣya-kāra says about the verse in question, and to ascertain how Norman’s proposition is supported by the exegesis among Abhidharma scholars. However, prior to entering upon the discussion, it is necessary to introduce the Dhammapada verse in question with its usual translation, and to give an outline of Norman’s interpretation.

Dhammapada 97 reads as follows,

assaddho akataṅñū ca sandhīcchedo ca yo naro
hatāvakāśo vanīśo sa ve uttamaṃporiso

The usual translation of Dhammapada 97, which is here represented by S. Radhakrishnan’s version, runs as follows,
The man who is free from credulity, who knows the uncreated, who has severed all ties, who has put an end to all occasions (for the performance of good or bad actions), who has renounced all desires, he, indeed, is exalted among men. 

In addition to this usual interpretation, Norman proposed a new one, differentiating the meaning of the five adjectives in the verse, assaddha, akataān̄u, sandhiccheda, hatāvakāsa, and vantāsa into two opposite meanings, bad and good.

Thus, taken in the first, that is, in the bad sense, assaddha means “without faith,” akataān̄u “ungrateful,” sandhiccheda “housebreaker,” hatāvakāsa “one who has destroyed his opportunity,” and finally vantāsa “eating what has been abandoned by someone else.”

Next, in the second, that is, in its opposite good meaning, assaddha means “without desire,” akataān̄u “knowing the uncreated (i.e., knowing nibbāna), sandhiccheda “cutting off, destroying rebirth,” hatāvakāsa “one who has got rid of occasions (for quarrels, or rebirth),” and finally vantāsa “one who has abandoned desire.”

Next, let us see how the author of the Abhidharma-samuccaya-bhāṣya interprets the verse in question. By way of introducing the points of discussion, the text (p. 155, lines 23 ff.) reads as follows,

aśraddhaś cākṛtajñāś cery asyāṃ gāthāyāṃ hīnārthābhīdhāyīny akṣarāny uttamārthe pariṣṭiṇāṃ

In this verse, the syllables (which compose the words) aśraddha and akṛtajña, which are (prima facie) indicative of bad sense (hīnārtha), are transformed into (pariṣṭiṇā) a good sense (uttamārtha).

Here we notice that, as is the case with Norman, the Bhāṣyakāra was aware of a double meaning implied in our verse. We shall, then, proceed to see in detail how he understood the verse in a bad sense (hīnātha), as well as in a good sense (uttamārtha).

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First, let us investigate how the Bhāṣyakāra interprets our verse in the bad sense.

After introducing Dhammapada 97, the text continues to read as follows,