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ASURI—A SAMKHYA YOGIN

Having come to realise the defects of ritualistic actions, this great exponent of Sāṃkhya—took to the Jñāna-mārga, wrote no books and remained a legend.

IT is well-known that Āsuri was the only disciple of Kapila, the earliest expounder of Sāṃkhya. This is stated not only in the works on Sāṃkhya-yoga but also in the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas (vide Bhāgavata 1-3-10). In referring to Āsuri the Māṭhara and Jayamaṅgalā commentaries of the Sāṃkhyakārikā have used the expression 'Āsurisagotra' which shows that the word Āsuri is the name of the *gotra* of this teacher. The personal name of this teacher has not been mentioned by any of the later teachers.

The author of the Māṭharavṛtti (on Sāṃkhyakārikā 1) and of the Jayamaṅgalā (on Sāṃ. Kā. 70) inform us that in the first part of his life Āsuri was a great householder and he followed the path of Vedic *karmakāṇḍa* devoutly. The information supplied by these commentators must be taken as valid, for we find as many as nine views of Āsuri about the Vedic rituals in the Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa of the Śukla-yajurveda. The Kalpasūtra Āsuriya (a work on Vedic rituals) named after its author Āsuri evidently shows that Āsuri was a staunch follower of the Vedic *karmakāṇḍa*.

The commentators of the Sāṃkhyakārikā inform us that being influenced by the teachings of the sage Kapila, Āsuri left the path of *karman* and accepted the path of *jñāna*. This is corroborated by some of the passages in the Śāntiparvan of the Mahābhārata. It appears that on account of performing Vedic sacrifices Āsuri's heart was purified and Kapila considered him the most competent person to be taught the doctrines of Sāṃkhya. Āsuri seems to have embraced the path of *jñāna* as he came to realize the defects of *karmans* and the non-eternity of the results of sacrificial acts.

The exalted character of Āsuri may be known from the fact that Kapila instructed to the enquiring Āsuri with the help

of a *nirmāṇacitta* as has been expressly stated by Pañcaśikha (अदिविद्वान निर्माणचित्तमधिष्ठाय कारुण्याद् भगवान् परमपिरासुर्ये..) quoted in the Vyāsabhāṣya on YS. 1.25). The creation of the *nirmāṇacitta* shows that Āsuri was not taught through the worldly process of teaching.

The following two verses of the Mahābhārata depict the spiritual activities of Āsuri: Śānti—p. 2 of 18.13 says that Āsuri approached his preceptor Kapila with a view to knowing the nature of the Self and he came to comprehend the distinction between the body and the Self and consequently acquired divine vision. Similarly Śānti—p. 2 of 18.14 says that in the assembly of sages Āsuri made an exposition of the immutable and indestructible Brahman which sometimes assumes diverse forms.

In the Kumbhakona edition of the Mahābhārata there are three chapters in the Śānti-parvan (Chaps. 326-328) in the dialogue of Kapila and Āsuri. These Chapters (partly in prose) deal with all the essential Sāṃkhya doctrines precisely.

It is a matter of great regret that we do not hear from any source about any literary composition of Āsuri. No teacher of the philosophical systems based on the Vedic tradition quotes any actual sentence or view of Āsuri. Guṇaratna, a Jaina scholar, in his Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya quotes a couplet and ascribes it to Āsuri. There is ample doubt about this ascription. It appears that Āsuri did not compose any formal treatise; he simply taught Pañcaśikha, who actually composed a treatise, from which a few sentences have been quoted by later teachers.

R. S. BHATTACHARYA