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VIDYĀDHARA.S IN INDIAN LEXICOGRAPHY ¹

Known in buddhist, hindu and jain traditions, *vidyādhara.s* form a part of pan-Indian literature and religion. Setting aside the *Bṛhatkathā* branch of narrative literature with its focus on *vidyādhara* life and activities, *vidyādhara.s* generally remain so much in the background of a scene, that it becomes rather difficult to get a clear impression of their character and attributes. If they get at all defined taxonomically, they are either held in respect as gods, or considered as humans with supranormal faculties. They owe these faculties to *vidyā*, a knowledge they derive their name from.

As dictionaries are usually used as a source to obtain more general, but reliable information, it is obvious to consult dictionaries to get data about *vidyādhara.s*. In my lecture I wish to collect the traces *vidyādhara.s* left in Indian lexicography. Firstly I will distinguish two main groups of lexicons, those that give only lists of words, and those that give explanations. Afterwards, I will present my examples according to these groups and mostly in chronological order. I will finish with summing up the data collected.

Although mentioned in pre-Christian times, we do not know whether the word “*vidyādhara*” was known to Yāska, Pāṇini or Patañjali. It is only with the Amarakośa that it was introduced into lexicography. Traditionally, Indian lexicons are defined as presenting either synonyms or homonyms. However, it serves my purpose better

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to distinguish two different ways in which the lexemes are presented. The first way adheres to lists. It defines classes by enumerating their members. In result we get either open lists like “words in the range of heaven” or closed lists like “the 16 *vidyādevī.s*”. The second way overcomes the narrow explicative range of mere lists by adding attributes to classes or their members.

With respect to *vidyādhara.s*, Amarasimha founds the tradition of giving lists of words. The *svarga-varga* of his *Nāmaliṅgānuśāsana*, the chapter about words for heaven and its inhabitants, defines ten classes of beings as *devayoni*, as “being of divine origin”:

“These are the ten beings of divine origin:
vidyādhara, apsaras, yakṣa, rakṣa, gandharva, kinnara,
piśāca, guhyaka, siddha, bhūta.”²

Amara is almost completely followed by the 10th cent. author Halāyudha, who varies only the sequence of the ten *devayoni.s*.³ Halāyudha in his turn is cited in the late 16th cent. by Puṇḍarika Viṭṭhala, who deviates with one mere *akṣara* from Halāyudha’s wording.⁴ A third member of the Amara tradition is Śrīdharasena, whose *Viśvalocana* was translated into Tibetan in 1261 CE. Vogel’s translation of the respective paragraph of the *svargavarga* shows that Śrīdharasena, too, differs only in sequence but not in contents.⁵

Mahāvvyutpatti, Paragraph 127, deals with sacrifice, religious practice, names of gods. The word *vidyādhara* is number 36 of this

2. *vidyādhārāpsaro-yakṣa-rakṣo-gandharva-kinnarāḥ / piśāco guhyakāḥ siddho bhūto 'mī deva-yonayaḥ* // (I.1.11) [AMARA, *Nāmaliṅgānuśāsana*] *Amarakośa*: with the comm. of Maheśvara / enlarg. by Raghunath Shastri Talekar; rev., enlarg. and impr. from Chintamani Shastri Thatte’s ed. of 1882 by Vamanacharya Jhalakikar, Bombay, 1896.

3. *yakṣa-rākṣasa-gandharva-siddha-kinnara-guhyakā- / vidyādhārāpsaro-bhūta-piśācā deva-yonayaḥ* // (I.87) [HALĀYUDHA, *Abhidhānatnamālā*] *Halayudha's Abhidhanaratnamala* / ed. by Th. Aufrecht, London, 1861.

4. *yakṣa-rākṣasa-gandharva-siddha-kinnara-guhyakāḥ / vidyādhārāpsaro-bhūta-piśācā deva-yonayaḥ* // (III.179f) [PUṆḌARĪKA VIṬṬHALA, *Śīghrabodhinīmālā*] *Die Śīghrabodhinīmālā des Puṇḍarāka Viṭṭhala* / hrsg. u. übers. von Ardo Schmitt-Rousselle, Bonn, 1985 (Indica et tibetica; 7).

5. *chu-skyes rig-'dzin mi-'am-ci / dri-za gsan-ba-pa za-za* // 1.2.4.11 // *gnod-sbyin srin-po 'byun-po dan / grub-po 'di-rnams lha-las bhyun* “*apsaras, vidyādharas,*

paragraph. In my opinion it belongs to a sequence of six words, viz. nos 34 to 39, that form two congruent parts of three words each:

siddhiḥ / mantrī_ / vidyādharaḥ /
*sādhyaṃ / sādhaḥ / uttara-sādhaḥ*⁶

All words refer to ritual practice, where they aim, generally speaking, at the appropriation of entities or faculties. I suggest that the first word of each triplet – *siddhiḥ* and *sādhyaṃ* – denote a result that is achieved by the referents of the two following words. In that case *siddhi* – success, perfection, supranormal faculty – is accomplished by a “knower of spells” (*mantrin*) and a “bearer of knowledge” (*vidyādhara*), respectively. Lacking context, the exact meaning of these words remains obscure. We can only guess whether a *vidyādhara* belongs to a mythological or fictional class of beings, either divine or human, or is a non-fictional scholar or cult practitioner.

Hemacandra’s *Anekārthasaṅgraha*, just like the Amara line of tradition, doesn’t make “*vidyādhara*” a lexeme itself, but mentions it as meaning of two other words:

1. “‘Citraratha’ - *vidyādhara*, *gandharva*, and the sun.”
2. “‘moving in the sky’ - bird, cloud, *vidyādhara*, wind.”⁷

vidyādhara.s called Citraratha are known in epic, purāṇic and narrative literature. The second line, however, clearly states that *vidyādhara.s* are able to fly. This faculty is repeated by Irugapa, who likewise understands *vidyādhara.s* – together with birds and planets, and possibly with gods and clouds – as *nabhaścara*, moving in the sky.⁸

kiṃnara, *gandharva*, *guhyaka*, *piśāca*, *yakṣa*, *rakṣa*, *bhūta* and *siddha*: these (are) the descendants of Gods.” (after CLAUS VOGEL, *Śrīdharasenaś Viśvalocana*, Göttingen, 1976, p. 324).

6. *Mahāvīyutpatti* / isdal I. P. Minaev, Delhi, 1992. (Bibliotheca Buddhica; 13)

7. *citraratho vidyādhare gandharva-sūryayoḥ* (IV.134); *nabhaścaraḥ khage ’bude / vidyādhare samīre ca* (IV.263) [HEMACANDRA, *Anekārthasaṅgraha*] *Der Anekarthasamgraha des Hemachandra* / hrsg. von Theodor Zachariae, Wien, 1883.

8. *nabhaścaraḥ surābhyoda-pakṣi-vidyādhara-grahāḥ* / (line 2366) [IRUGAPA, *Nānārtharatnamālā*] *Nānārtha-Ratnamālā of Irugapa Daṇḍādhinātha* / ed. by Bellikoth Ramachandra Sharma. Poona, 1954 (Sources of Indo-Aryan lexicography; 8).

Our second group of specimen furnishes more details about the words presented. A most interesting example delivers Kṣīrasvāmin. Commenting on Amara's *svargavarga*, he states that

“*vidyādhara.s* are Jīmūtavāhana etc., bearing *vidyā.s*, [viz.] swords, pills, ointments etc.”⁹

Kṣīrasvāmin links *vidyādhara.s*, a class of divine beings according to Amara, to a number of magical *vidyā.s* otherwise known as *siddhi.s*. *siddhi.s* like *khaḍgasiddhi* or *añjanasiddhi* more often are the property of human beings aspiring to god like status by means of magic. Kṣīrasvāmin refers to narrative literature when he points to Jīmūtavāhana, a *vidyādhara* protagonist of Harṣa's *Nāgānanda* and the *Vetālapañcaviṃśatikā*.

Another 11th cent. author, Bhoja, like Hemacandra and Irugapa, situates *vidyādhara.s* in ākāśa:

“sky – owns the property of sound, unperishing abode of stars, dwelling of *vidyādhara*, *apsara*, *siddha*, *yakṣa*, *rākṣasa*, *guhya*.”¹⁰

In his *Vaijayanti Yādavaprakāśa*, the guru of Rāmānuja, combines a list of *devayoni.s* with additional explanations about their respective characteristics. In the *yakṣādhyāya* of the *svargavarga*, nine of Amara's *devayoni.s* get depicted by attributes and epithets:

“*vidyādhara.s* – moving in heaven (*dyu*), moving in the sky (*kha*), truly young.”¹¹

Comparable to Kṣīrasvāmin, Puruṣottamadeva wrote his *Trikāṇḍaśeṣa* as a supplement to the *Amarakośa*. Like *Yādavaprakāśa*, he

9. *vidyādharaḥ jīmūtavāhanādayaḥ khaḍga-guṭikāñjanādi vidyā-dhāriṇaś ca* (after R.S. PANCHAMUKHI, *Gandharvas and Kinnaras in Indian iconography*, Dharwar, 1951, p. 20).

10. *ākāśaṃ śabda-guṇakaṃ nakṣatra-padam acyutam / vidyādharaṁapsaro-yakṣa-rakṣo-gandharva-mandiram //* (II.86) BHOJA, *Nāmamālikā of Bhoja* / ed. by Ekanath Dattatreya Kulkarni, Poona, 1955 (Sources of Indo-Aryan lexicography; 18).

11. *vidyādharaś tu dyucarāḥ khecarāḥ satya-yauvanāḥ* / (4ab) YĀDAVA-PRAKĀŚĀCĀRYA, *Vaijayantikośa* / ed. by Haragovinda Śāstrī. Varanasi, 1971 (Jaikrishnadas-Krishnadas prachya-vidya granthamala; 2).

describes *vidyādhara.s* as moving in the sky and constantly young. A new point in lexicography, although widely popular in Bṛhatkathā literature, is their capacity of changing shape at will (*kāmarūpin*).¹²

Maṅkha, who also flourished in the 12th cent., is the only author in our inventory to proof the existence of female *vidyādhara.s*:

“*vidyādhari* – a kind of gods, bearing knowledge (*vidyā*).”

I assume, their status of being gods applies to their male counterparts as well. The statement that they bear *vidyā* would have remained a tautology, had not Maṅkha continued by defining *vidyā* as synonymous with *śakti*:

“*vidyādhara* – bearing power” (*śakti*).¹³

My last specimen is furnished by Vāmanabhaṭṭa Bāṇa. Like the Vaijayanti, his Śabdaratnākara’s *dikpālādhyāya* first enumerates Amara’s ten *devayoni.s* as “*surayoni*” but then adds short descriptions of their respective characteristics. *vidyādhara.s* get the already well-known epithet of being “truly young”.¹⁴

To conclude, I may separate two lexicographic traditions dealing with the word *vidyādhara*. One is nourished by mythology and fiction, whereas the other one refers to religious practice. The first tradition heavily depends on Amarasiṃha, and reflects characteristics of *vidyādhara.s* that are known from epic, purāṇic and narrative literature. When Amara flourished, an almost full fledged typology of *vidyādhara.s* was at hand. However, he made their divine origin his only point, implying that they form a group of beings of indefinite

12. *vidyādharaḥ kāmarūpī khecaraḥ sthira-yauvanaḥ* (I.1.63ab) [PURUṢOTTAMA-MADEVA,] *The Trikāṇḍaśeṣa*, with Sārārtha Candrikā by C. A. Seelakkhandha Mahathera. Bombay, 1916.

13. *vidyādhari deva-bhede dvayor vidyāvati triṣu // vidyādharaḥ śakti-dharaḥ* (766c-767a) [MANKHA,] *The Maṅkhakośa* / ed. by Theodor Zachariae. Wien, Bombay, 1897 (Sources of Sanskrit lexicography; 3).

14. *vidyādharaṁpsaras-siddha-yakṣa-rākṣasa-guhyakāḥ / piśāca-bhūta-gandharva-kinnarāḥ sura-yonayaḥ* // (II.163-164) *guhyakāḥ syur deva-janāḥ putrā ye satya-yauvanāḥ / vidyādharaḥ te gandharvā gātavo deva-gāyanāḥ* // (II.175-176) VĀMANABHAṬṬA BĀṆA, Śabdaratnākara / ed. by B. R. Sharma. Darbhanga, 1965 (Mithilā Vidyāpiṭh Granthamālā; 16).

number. His successors mostly highlight two traits of *vidyādhara*s, namely (1) their ability to fly, and (2) their all prevailing youthfulness. Characteristics like (3) the ability to take shape at will and (4) their endowment with *vidyā*, whatever they mean by that, remain rather in the background. The only supranormal properties that exceed *khecaratva* and *kāmarūpatva* reveal tantric influences. Therefore, it does not astonish at all that Kṣīrasvāmin, who provides this tantric background, is a contemporary of the Kashmirian *Br̥hatkathā*. The sole representative of the second tradition is the Mahāvyutpatti. The buddhist dictionary puts “*vidyādhara*” in a context of cult and leaves aside any considerations of supranormality or taxonomy.