

Abstract:

Patañjali's *dharmamegha*: the revision of a superlative metaphor

Scholars of classical yoga have long debated the meaning of the term *dharmamegha* in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*,¹ and the detail of the debate has been focused on what 'dharma' means. In this paper I suggest that we may approach the doctrinal denotation of this term in a more fruitful way by considering what *megha* means. It is only by elucidating the metaphoric function of *megha* in *dharmamegha* that we can arrive at a better understanding of the meaning of *dharma* in this compound.

The *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* concludes with an account of the pinnacle of yoga practice: a state of *samādhi* called *dharmamegha*, cloud of dharma. This term is also important in early Buddhist yogācāra, and more broadly in Mahāyāna soteriology, where it conventionally represents the apex of attainment and the superlative statehood of a bodhisattva. Patañjali appears to adopt this metaphor from a Mahāyāna context and to revise its meaning. I explore several arguments for the stark contrast between the ways in which the two *yogaśāstras* of the 4th century CE, the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* and the *Yogācārabhūmiśāstra*,² employ the superlative metaphor of *dharmamegha*. I consider whether Patañjali's *dharmamegha* is 1. a dead metaphor, 2. a paralogical revision for polemical effect, 3. logically concordant with Buddhist soteriology, or 4. a product of literary style. I use conceptual metaphor theory to analyse how metaphors work.

In my concluding assessment, Patañjali's strikingly empty metaphor of *dharmamegha* is largely a result of literary style and polemical revision due to doctrinal necessity. It is not a result of deliberate harmonization with Mahāyāna soteriology or the ambiguity of dead metaphor.

¹ Following Maas, the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* denotes the *Yogasūtra* and *Yogasūtrabhāṣya* as a unitary text composed c.325-425 CE (Maas 2013).

² For the argument that the *Yogācārabhūmiśāstra* can be considered a classical *yogaśāstra*, see O'Brien-Kop forthcoming doctoral dissertation.