Some sporadic notes on the Brhaddesī

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1. Travana

The fourth chapter of the Brhaddesī (=BD.) describes Bhāshās according to Yāstika. There the first Bhāsa of the Šakka-rāga is called Travana (BD.2, 132, v.16; p. 138, v. 39). Similarly the ninth Bhāsa of the Pañcama-rāga is called Trāvani (p.134, v.28; p. 164, 100-101) and it is called desa-sambhava (v-101). In the Notes (vīrmāraṇa) the editors have observed that trāvana or travana is not known as a geographical name.

In Rājaśekhara's Kavyamīmāṃsā (first half of the tenth century), Travana occurs twice as the name of a country. In the list of the countries in the Western region of India is mentioned Travana along with Surāṣṭra, Daśeraka, Bhriguaccha, Kaccha, Anarta, Arbuda etc. (ch. 17, p. 233). Again in the seventh chapter while describing the regional characteristics of poetry-recitation it is said that the poets of Surāṣṭra, Travana and allied regions recite even Sanskrit poetry with a touch of Apabhraṃśa. Accordingly Travana was the name of a country in the west in the vicinity of Surāṣṭra, Kaccha, etc. It was possibly in Rajasthan.

2. Harṣapūri

The third Bhāsa of the Mālavakaiśika Rāga is called Harṣapūri (BD. 2, p. 150, v. 65). The editors say that Harṣapūra is not known as a geographical name (p. 311, note 25).

Harṣapura was known as a city and an administrative province in Gujarat during the Cālukya period. It is mentioned in a copperplate grant (dated 910-911 A.C.) of the period of the Rāṣtrakūta king. Kṛṣṇa-II. There the province is called harṣapura-arḍhāṣṭama-sata (i.e. Harṣapura-750). It is identified with Harsol in the Sabarkantha district of the present-day Gujarat. In the form harṣapūra the vowel is lengthened metri

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causa.


3. Sātavāhanikā

The second Bhāṣā of the Kakubha Rāga is called Sātavāhanikā (BD.2, p. 134, v.23; the ms. reading is sālavāhanika) or Sātavāhini (p.154, v.74; to be emended as sātavahani).

The name derives from the name of the royal poet Sātavāhana (Pk. sālavāhana, sālāhana), the famous literary figure and author of the Prakrit anthology Gahākosa or Gahāsattasaḷī, who ruled at Pratīṣṭhāna (modern Paithan in Maharashtra) during the first or second century of the Christian era.

In the Prakrit section of the Siddhahemamabhādānusāsana, Hemacandra, while connecting Pk. sālavāhana, sātāhana with Sk. sātavāhana, has given sālahani bhāṣā as an illustration of the occurrence of the form sālāhana. It is quite tempting to connect this with the Sātavāhanikā Bhāṣā of BD. In that case bhāṣā in Hemacandra’s illustration (which is most probably taken over from some earlier source) does not mean ‘language’, but a type of Grāmarāgas.

4. Ambāherī

The twelfth Bhāṣā of the Ṭakka Rāga is called Ambāheri (BD.2, p. 132, v.19; the ms. reading here is ambāhiri; p. 144, v.54). The editors have observed (p.310, note 20) that Ambāhera is not known to be a geographical name. They suggest the connection of that term with Ambara, modern Amer near Jaipur in Rajasthan.

Now it is obvious that some of the names of the Bhāṣās do not have any connection with a geographical place-name, e.g. Lalita, Kolāhali, Madhuri, Vesari etc.
The word *ammāhiraya* occurs in the sense of ‘lullaby’ in Apabhramśa poems of 9th and 10th century A.C.\(^2\). For example in the description of a cowherds settlement it is said:

कत्थाई डिंभठ परियंदिज्जड़ह, अम्माहिरय गेंड झुण्णज्जु।
(Svayambhu's *Paumacariya*, 24, 13,8)

‘In some places a lullaby song is being sung while rocking the child (in a cradle)’. In the same poet's Harivamsapurāṇa, Yaśodā is described in the following lines as rocking the child Kṛṣṇa in the cradle (*hallaru*, Guj. *hālārdū*) and sing a lullaby:

मेहरि अम्माहिरएण, परियंदि हल्कु। (5,1,9)

In Puspadanta's *Mahapurāṇa* child Rśabha is described in the following line as being rocked in a cradle while a sweet lullaby is being sung:

परियंदि अम्माहिरएण, सोंवंतउ कु-वि सुझहएण। (4,4,13)

There, some initial lines of the lullaby are also given. Accordingly, it is suggested that Ambāhirī as the name of Bhāṣā (which as a class being related to the Gramarāgas) may be the same as Ap. *ammāhiraya* ‘lullaby’. *ambāheri* is called *desyākhyā* in BD. That qualifier can be also interpreted as ‘the name of which is based on / derives from a regional dialect’.

Incidentally, Ap. *ammāhiraya* can be derived from *āmma* ‘mummy’ + *hīraya* ‘diamond’. In the lullabies that were sung the child would have been addressed or referred to as ‘O you mine - your mummy's diamond’. Hence a lullaby came to be called *ammāhiraya*.

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5. Vesara

BD. states that according to Durgasakti, Ragas themselves are known as Vesara. (BD.2, p. 108). According to the editors Rāga is another name of Vesara Giti.

Again BD. has cited Durgasakti to explain the term Vesara. According to the latter Vesara is an alternative form of Vagasara. Vagasara is so called because svaras move with speed (vegasara) (p. 108). But a little further on p. 116, it is said that Vesaras are so called because the speed of svaras is seen in them (i.e. it is an alternative form of vega-svara). Editors have noted that the usual meaning of Sk. vesara is ‘mule’, and that Monier Williams’ Sanskrit-English dictionary has given vegasara also with the same meaning. Now vegasara is attested considerably later than vesara (from the Kathasaritsagara and from Hemcandra’s Abhidhāna-cintāmani (which gives vesara, vegasara and āsvatara as synonyms). Most probably vegasara is a later creation to explain vesara etymologically. Sk. vegasara ‘moving speedily’ would become veasara in Prakrit and later vesara. So working backwards vegasara was formed. This attempt to provide vesara with artificial etymology to match with its meaning is evident from the BD. passages referred to above which once equate vesara with vegasara and second time with vegasvara. Vesara ‘mule’ is a hybrid animal. Whether it implies that Vesara Giti was called so because of a mixture of two types in its structure is for the musicologists to tell.

6. desī

In BD. 1, 2 the word desī qualifies dhvani (m.). In 1,16 it qualifies mārga (m.). In 5,346 it qualifies rāga (m.). Elsewhere it qualifies nṛtta (n.), śabda (m.), nāman (n.) etc.

Formally desī is feminine. At BD. 1,14 it is said:

गोयवते ययानुसरण स्वदेशे देशिमण्डलते।

(Here desī is modified as desī to suit the metre).
The title br̥haddesi means ‘the great work on desī rāgas’.

How to account for the feminine form desī in all these usages? It is of course derived from desā ‘region’. Adjectives formed from desā are desya, desīya. The form desī functioning as an adjective is evidently a changed form of desya. In several Sanskrit words in later usage we find that their final -ya changes to -ī, under the influence of Prakrit. Note the following instances (noted in MW.):

औचित्य, औचित्य, चातुर्य, चातुर्य, माधुर्य, माधुर्य, वैचित्र्य, वैचित्र्य, वैदर्श्य, वैदर्श्य, वैदर्श्य.

(See H. C. Bhayani, ‘Etymalogical Notes’, Berlines Indologisehe Studies, 8, 1995, p.9)

These forms are attested from comparatively late Sanskrit texts. So also the word desī. The explanation of the term vesara as vegasara or vegasvara, the place-name base of the bhāṣas travāna and harṣapūrīya, the use of the form desī indicate linguistically rather a late date for BD. So also the term ambāherī in the section taken over from Yāṣṭika's work.