God's Arrival in the Vaiśeṣika System

God is not mentioned in the surviving versions of the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra. He is mentioned in Praśastapāda's Padarthadharmasāṅgrahā, in a passage which is very similar to a sūtra. The sūtra concerned occurs only in the version commented upon by Śaṅkara Miśra; there it is VS 1.1.4, and reads:

\[ \text{dharmaviśesaprasūtād dravyagunakarmasamānyaviśesasa-} \]
\[ \text{mavāyānām padārthānāṁ sādharmyavidharmyābhyaṁ} \]
\[ \text{tattvajñānān ĕniśreyasam} / \]

The similar passage in the Padarthadharmasāṅgrahā reads (Ki p. 4; Ny p. 23–26; Vy I p. 14–15; WI p. 1):

\[ \text{dravyagunakarmasamānyaviśesamavāyānāṁ śaṅnāṁ} \]
\[ \text{padārthānāṁ sādharmyavidharmyatattvajñānamāṁ} \]
\[ \text{niśreyasahetūḥ / tac ēśvaracodanābhivyaktād ēva dharmād eva} / \]

Clearly the expression 'special dharma' (dharmaviśesa) in the sūtra corresponds to 'dharma manifested by God's injunctions' (īśvaracodanābhivyakta dharma) in the Padarthadharmasāṅgrahā. What is more, the latter looks very much like a special interpretation of the former.

However this may be, it seems safe to assume that God did not always play a role in the Vaiśeṣika system of philosophy. In other words, he must have found his way into it at some time or other, at the latest at the time of Praśastapāda. The author of the Yuktidipikā claims that the belief in God as cause of the world among the followers of Kaṇāda, i.e. among the Vaiśeṣikas, was invented by the Pāṣupatas / a Pāṣupata. The fact that the memory of God's arrival in Vaiśeṣika was still alive in the days of the Yuktidipikā confirms our impression of its relatively late date.

God figures most prominently in the Padarthadharmasāṅgrahā in its account of the destruction and subsequent renewal of the world (Ki p. 60–64; Ny p. 134–139; Vy I p. 95–96; WI p. 9–11). This account begins with the statement that the mode of creation and destruction of the four gross elements will be described (ihedānīṁ caturnāṁ
mahābhūtānām srṣīsamhāravidhir ucyate). Their destruction takes place in the order: earth, water, fire, wind. The contacts between the atoms that constitute the gross elements come to an end, so that only isolated atoms remain. This process is triggered by the fact that the ‘unseens’ (adrṣṭa) — i.e., dharmas and adharmas — that reside in the souls and are responsible for the existence of bodies, sense organs, and gross (i.e., composite) elements, cease to function. This itself is simultaneous with God’s desire to destroy the world (mahēśvarasya saṃjihīṛṣāsāsamakālam). The subsequent renewal of the gross elements takes place in the order: wind, water, earth, fire. Here contacts are again established between the isolated atoms. This process is triggered by the ‘unseens’ residing in the souls; these ‘unseens’ have come into action again. This renewed action of the ‘unseens’ is itself preceded by God’s desire to create (mahēśvarasisrksānantaram). The further development of the process of creation takes clearly mythological overtones, which we will consider below.

Here it is important to observe that the account so far considered is not symmetrical. The order in which the gross elements come into existence should be expected to be the exact reverse of the order of their destruction. Since they are destroyed in the order earth, water, fire, wind, their recreation should take the order wind, fire, water, earth. But according to the account in the Padhārthadharmasāṅgraha the order of creation is wind, water, earth, fire. Moreover, the bodies and sense organs which are mentioned in connection with the destruction of the world, do not recur in the description of creation.

With this in mind it is interesting to see that Śaṅkara’s Brahmasūtrabhāṣya (on sūtra 2.2.12) refers to a Vaiśeṣika position concerning the creation of the world which is closely similar to the above one, but which does not refer to God. The passage concerned reads: "Then, at the time of creation, a movement dependent on the unseen/unseens (adrṣṭa) arises in the atoms of wind. That movement connects the atom in which it resides with another atom. Then, in the order of the dyad (dvyanuka) etc., wind comes into being. In the same way fire, water, and earth." Śaṅkara ascribes this position explicitly to the followers of Kanāda (kāṇāda), i.e., to the Vaiśeṣikas, and criticizes it for not including a conscious initial instigator, responsible for the first movement which sets the process going. This means that Śaṅkara did not base his account on Praśastapāda’s Padārthadharmasāṅgraha, which mentions Maheśvara, but on a similar account which did not mention God.