

# AN ACCOUNT OF ANCIENT INDIAN GRAMMATICAL STUDIES DOWN TO PATANJALI'S MAHABHASYA\*: TWO TRADITIONS

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IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT INDIAN GRAMMARIANS from Panini onward were primarily concerned with *bhasa*, the living or current speech, because pre-Paninean grammarians were essentially, if not entirely, dedicated to the task of preserving from loss or change the text of the sacred Vedas. The former were thus secular grammarians; the latter, theological ones. This distinction in purpose or principle of work serves as a useful criterion in determining the historical strata of Indian grammatical studies. By their distinctive ends, the earlier phase may well be called Vedic grammatical studies; the later phase, Sanskrit grammatical studies. It should not, however, be thought that there is an absolute division in time between these two periods, because some of the rescensions we have of *sutras* on Vedic grammar, like the *Unadi Sutra*, belong to the post-Paninean period. This historical view should be taken rather as an attempt at distinguishing at least two "atmospheres" of general attitude towards grammatical studies in early India down to Patanjali, the commentator of Panini, who virtually marks the end of a line of great Indian grammarians.

From this distinction, it is clear why the content of the earlier phase should have been, as it was, the language of the religious literature of the Vedas, while that of the later should be the language and literature of the cultured few (*sistab*) which has become distinct from the Vedic as well as from that of the great masses of the people. In style, however, these distinct studies do not show any particular qualities which can be taken as added criteria for their distinction, the style of the *Nirukta* of Yaska (who is considerably older than Panini) being in the general form of the much later Sanskrit prose and that of Panini's *Astadhyayi* being of the same style as that of the rest of the *Veṅga Sutras*, which are older than it and belong to the earlier persuasion of grammatical studies.

The earliest extant evidence of grammatical studies in India is the *samhita* (verse) text of the *Rgveda*, which already is an impressive monument

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\* Entirely dispensed with in this paper are the standard ICO diacritical marks on the roman transliteration of the Sanskrit *navari*, on account of the unavailability of a number of these at this issue's printers.—*Editors*.

of phonological knowledge. The grammatical studies that went into the making of the *sambhita* are indicated by the *padapatha* or Vedic word-text, in which the euphonicly combined Vedic hymns were analyzed into their component parts, i.e., into words unmodified by Vedic phonetics. While its obvious motive (like that of the rest of the *pathas*: the *kramapatha*, the *jatapatha* and *ghanapatha*) was to safeguard the sacred text from change, it also succeeded in pushing back the *sambhita* text to a probably even earlier form of itself and in giving a basis for future studies by the theological grammarians. The time separating the *sambhita* text from the *padapatha* is not much. This is believed to be so because, although the latter already has "undoubted misinterpretations and misunderstandings" of the former, it is older than the *Aitareya Aranyaka*, *Yaska*, and the *Rgveda Pratisakhya*. The *padapatha's* place in the history of Vedic literature should then be sometime a little after the composition of the *sambhita* text, together with the *Brahmanas* but before the advent of the *Aranyakas*, the *Upanisads*, *Yaska*, and the *Pratisakhya*s, in that order. Following Professor Macdonell's conjecture (HSL, p. 50; please see "References" below), as this seems reasonable, this period could have been a little after 600 B.C.

The *Brahmanas*, although not in their older portions, already deal with points about the number of syllables in a word or a group of words in the *sambhita*. These do not agree with the *sambhita* version, due to the phonetic contraction rules already applied in it.

In the "appendices" of the Vedas, i.e., the *Aranyakas* and *Upanisads*, grammatical studies have grown some more, for here we have technical terms for certain groups of letters as well as elaborate phonetic rules to govern the sacred text. Also, the names of earlier theological grammarians are mentioned here for the first time.

Coming now to the *sutra* portion of Vedic writings. These are the *Vedangas* or "limbs" of the Veda. There are six classes of these, but two (*kalpa*, ceremonial, and *vyotisa*, astronomy) are not at all concerned with grammatical studies. The four are *siksha* or phonetics, *chandas* or metre, *nirukta* or etymology, and *vyakarana* or grammar. As a whole, they were meant to help the Veda-student in correctly reciting and interpreting the Vedic texts. As such, they arose from the needs of the religious activity of the Vedic Indian, but, as we shall see, at least one (*vyakarana*) branched out into an intensive study of the *bhasa* or spoken version of the ancient religious language. This last, although belonging temporally somewhere in the middle of the *sutra* period, really starts a different era of grammatical studies in early India, making, as it were, the big jump between religious grammatical studies and secular grammatical studies.

Works which have the title *sikṣa* are now known to be only late additions to the *Brahmanas*. The *Brahmanas* themselves, however, as we have seen, deal with Vedic phonetics. But the works which best represent this *Vedāṅga* are the *Pratisakhyas*. The objective of this last is to work out in full the relationship between the *sambhita* and the *padapatha*, thus producing a thorough, well-ordered account of euphonic combination in the Vedas, as well as a reliable guide for the reciter of Vedic mantras. There are four of such *pratisakhyas* known today: one belongs to the *Rgveda*, another to the *Atharvaveda*, and two to the *Yajurveda* (one attached to *Vajasaneyi Sambhita*,<sup>1</sup> the other to *Taittiriya Sambhita*). The *Samaveda*, because already written as a song (*saman*) should be sung, does not have need for a *pratisakhya*, which is so called because "intended for the use of each respective branch (*sakha*) of the Vedas" (Macdonell, HSL, p. 268). The word *sikṣa* itself is already mentioned in the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* (VII, 1), and there is meant to deal with letters, accents, quantity, pronunciation, and euphonic rules.

Of the *Vedāṅga chandas*, there is a *Chandah Sutra* by Pingala, which claims the title of *Vedāṅga*, but which is, like the *sikṣa* treatises, now known as a late supplement. Although it also treats of Vedic prosody, it is actually the standard work on post-Vedic prosody, being mainly concerned with the latter. The subject of Vedic metres is already mentioned in the *Brahmanas*, though here blurred by frequent mystical allusions, while in the *sambhitas*,

<sup>1</sup> *Vajasaneyi pratisakhya*, xii, 5:

*namabhyatam upasarga nipatas catvory abuh padaiatani sabdah |*  
*tan nama yenabhidhahati sattvam tad akhyatam vena bhavam sa dhatub ||*  
*Prabhy a para nir dur anu vy upa sam pari prati ny aty adhi sud avapi |*  
*upasarga vimsatir arthavacakah sabetarabhyam itare nipatabh ||*  
*krivavacakam akhyatam upasargo visesakrt |*  
*sattvabhidhaya kam nama nipatab padapuranah ||*  
*nipatanam arthavasan nipatanad anarthakanam itare ca sarthakah |*  
*neyamta ity asti samkhyeha vanmaye mitaksare capv amitaksare ca ye ||*

"Grammarians speak of the noun (*nama*), the verb (*akhyata*), the preposition (*upasarga*), and the particle (*nipata*) as the four classes of words. The noun is that by which an entity is designated, a verb that by which a becoming is designated; this (latter) is called a root (*dhatu*). There are twenty prepositions—*pra*, *abhi*, *a*, *para*, *nis*, *dus*, *anu*, *vi*, *upa*, *apa*, *sam*, *pari*, *prati*, *ni*, *ati*, *adhi*, *su*, *ud*, *ava*, and *api*—and these acquire meaning when joined with nouns or verbs. The rest of the words are the particles. The verb expresses an action; the preposition defines it; the noun designates an entity; the particles are but expletives. There are, however, besides the particles which have no meaning, others which have, for we see that some particles are used on account of their sense; but it is impossible to say how many there are of each class, whether they are used in measured or in prose definition." Cf. Muller, *HASL*, pp. 161-162.

Also in the *Pratisakhya* of Katvayana, i, 27:

*tinkertaddhita catustaya samasab sabdam ayam ||*

"Verbs with their conjugational terminations, nouns with their primary nominal suffixes; nouns with their secondary nominal suffixes, and the four kinds of compounds,—these constitute language." Cf. Muller, *HASL*, pp. 163-164.

names are found which are later seen as technical terms of metres. In the *Aranyakas* and *Upanisads* entire chapters are devoted to this subject. But, like the story of the *Vedanga siksa*, it is only in the *sutra* period when a systematic accounting of this subject is made. These are found in the *Sankhayana Srauta Sutra* (VII, 27), in the last three *patalas* or sections of the *Rgveda Pratisakhya*, in the *Nidana Sutra* of the *Samaveda*, and in two *anukramanis* or metrical Vedic indices (a section each) of Katyayana.

It is when we turn to *nirukta* and *vyakarana* that we find the usual ingredients of grammar dealt with. As it has turned out, in both *Vedangas* only one work survives to represent the *Vedanga*, having, it seems, superseded all of the similar treatises preceding it: for *nirukta*, Yaska's work by that name, and for *vyakarana*, Panini's *Astadhyayi*. In these two fields, which are concerned with strict grammar, there are two distinct pictures clearly discernible; the *Nirukta* appears at the end of a line of etymological works which are exclusively concerned with Vedic words; the *Astadhyayi*, although also appearing at such a point relative to Vedic grammatical treatises, really stands at the beginning of Sanskrit grammar works. If we can agree to combine these two *Vedangas* into what we usually call "grammar," and knowing that Yaska is the older of the two in this (the *sutra*) period of early Indian grammatical studies, we can, I think, take Yaska as "the last of the Vedic grammarians" known to us and Panini as "the first of the Sanskrit grammarians".

It is noteworthy that the *padapathas* already indicate a good measure of grammatical analysis of words, that, later, the *Brahmanas* mention grammatical terms like *vibhakti* or case-form and *vr̥san* or masculine, and that, later still historically, more of such references are seen in the *Aranyakas* and the *Upanisads*. At the time of Yaska not only have the four parts of speech been distinguished from one another (this process of distinction rather than word-analysis may have been the original meaning of *vyakarana*) and the verb and noun stems and affixes been recognized, but also elaborate doctrines on the origin of nouns were being discussed. On the latter, Yaska decided to hold the doctrine of the verbal origin of nouns, and Panini followed him in this.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> On this, Yaska has a vigorous, quite up-to-date argument, which Professor Muller (HASL, pp. 164-168) translates in full: "Sakatayana maintains that nouns are derived from verbs, and there is an universal agreement of all Etymologists (Nairukta) on this point. Gargya, on the contrary and some of the grammarians say, not all (nouns are derived from verbs). For first, if the accent and formation were regular in all nouns and agreed entirely with the appellative power (of the root), nouns such as *go* (cow), *asva* (horse), *purusha* (man), would be in themselves intelligible. Secondly, if all nouns were derived from verbs, then if anyone performed an action, he would, as a subject, be called in the same manner. For instance, if *asva* horse were derived from *as*, to get through, then anyone who got through a certain distance, would have to be called *asva*, horse. If *trina*, grass, were derived from *trid*, to pierce,

Yaska's *Nirukta* explains in fourteen books (two being later additions) the so-called *Nighantus* which are collections of rare or ambiguous Vedic words, adapted for the teaching purposes of the Brahmins of the time. There were five of these before him—three of synonyms, one of especially difficult words, and the fifth of the Vedic gods. In treating of these etymologically, he uses as examples many *sambhitas*, mostly *Rgvedic*. The *Nirukta* employs Sanskrit prose of the classical type, and is thereby probably the earliest example of Sanskrit prose.

then whatever pierces would have to be called *trina*. Thirdly, if all nouns were derived from verbs, then everything would take as many names as there are qualities belonging to it. A pillar, for instance, which is now called *sthuna*, might be called *daresaya*, hole-rest, because it rests in a hole; or *sanjani*, joiner, because there are beams joined to it. Fourthly, people would call things in such a manner that the meaning of nouns might be at least intelligible, whatever the regular formation may be by which the actions of these things are supposed to be expressed. Instead of *purusha*, man, which is supposed to be formed from *purisaya*, dwelling in the body, they would say *purisaya*, body-dweller; instead of *asva*, horse, *ashtri*, pervader; instead of *trina*, grass, *tardana*, piercer. Fifthly, after a noun has been formed, these etymologists begin to discuss it, and say for instance that the earth is called *prithivi*, broad, from *prathana*, stretching. But, who stretched it, and what was his resting-place while he stretched the earth? Sixthly, where the meaning cannot be discovered, no modification of the root yielding any proper signification, Sakatayana has actually taken whole verbs, and put together the halves of two distinct words. For instance, in order to form *satya*, true, he puts together the causal of *i*, to go, which begins with *ya*, as the latter half, and the participle of *as*, to be, which begins with *sa*. Lastly, it is well known, that beings come before being, and it is therefore impossible to derive the names of beings which come first, from being which comes after.

"Now all this arguing," Yaska continues, "is totally wrong. For however all this may be, first, with regard to what was said, namely, that, if Sakatayana's opinion were right, all words would be significative, this we consider no objection, because we shall show that they are all significative. With regard to the second point, our answer is, that we see as a matter of fact that it is not so, but that of a number of people who perform the same action, some only take a certain name, and others do not. Not everyone that shapes a thing is called *takshan*, a shaper, but only the carpenter. Not everyone that walks about is called a *parivrajaka*, but only a religious mendicant. Not everything that enlivens is called *ivana*, but only the sap of a sugar cane. Not everything that is born of Bhumi (earth) is called *Bhumija*, but only the planet Mars (*angaraka*). And the same remark serves also as an answer to the third objection. With regard to the fourth objection, we reply, we did not make these words, we only have to explain them; and there are also some nouns of rare occurrence, which you, grammarians, derive by means of krit suffixes, and which are liable to exactly the same objection. For who could tell, without some help from etymologists, that some of the words in the Aikapadika-chapter mean what they do mean? *Vratati* is derived by you from *vrinati*, he elects, but it signifies a garland. The same applies to your grammatical derivations of such words as *damunas*, *jatya*, *atnara*, *jagaruka*, *darvihomin*. In answer to the fifth question we say, Of course we can discuss the etymological meaning of such words only as have been formed. And as to the questions, who stretched the earth, and what was his resting-place, all we can say is, that our eyes tell us that the earth is broad and even though it has not been stretched out by others, yet all men speak as they see. With respect to the sixth objection, we admit, that he who combines words without thereby arriving at their proper meaning, is to be blamed. But this blame attaches to the individual etymologist, not to the science of etymology. As to the last objection, we must again appeal to the facts of the case. Some words are derived from qualities, though qualities may be later than subjects, others not."

Panini's *Astadhyayi* has about 4,000 terse *sutras* which, as the name implies, are presented in eight books. These treat of technical terms and rules of interpretation (1), nouns in composition and case relations (2), the adding of suffixes to roots (3) and to nouns (4,5), accent and changes of sound in word-formation (6,7), and the word in the sentence (8). The underlying principle of Panini's grammar is, as we have seen, that nouns are derived from verbs. This work is extremely difficult to follow, because it is clearly meant for students of grammar who already know the language and have only to be reminded which is vulgar and otherwise, and also because of its unswerving determination for brevity. Thus Max Muller (SG, pp. ix-x) cites the example of a labyrinth of rules and exceptions governing the aorist form of the verb root *jagr* "to awake" which goes through nine changes in all, inspiring a grammarian to immortalize the linguistic phenomenon in a couplet!<sup>3</sup> Like the other two great grammarians who followed him (Katyayana and Patanjali), Panini made *bhasa* the subject of his grammar. In working out his linguistic doctrine (of nouns being derived from verbs) on the speech of the cultured of his day, he had recourse to the *Unadi* list of affixes or assumed invisible affixes. He employs diverse methods to secure brevity, algebraic formulae to stand for words being the chief of them. Others are "pregnant use" of the cases, the employment of "leading rules," etc.<sup>4</sup> Panini's date is uncertain, but this may be placed with some degree of probability in the middle of the fourth century B.C., based on its relative position with the time of Yaska, Katyayana, and Patanjali and the probable duration of time between them. He was later than Yaska, and came before Katyayana (c. 250-200 B.C.) and Patanjali (c. 150 B.C.). He was a native of Salatura, near the modern Atak, where Hsien Tsang claims to have seen a statue to his memory. Dakṣi was his mother. Tradition says he was killed by a lion.

Katyayana's *Varttikas*, some 1,245 *sutras* of which have been preserved in Patanjali's *Mahabbhasya*, present critical annotations of Panini's grammar. These would seem quite fair if one assumes that a considerable time must have elapsed between Katyayana and Panini to bring about appre-

<sup>3</sup> The couplet runs thus:

*guna vrdhīr guṇo vrdhīḥ pratisedho vikāṇanam /*  
*punar vrdhīr nisedho 'to yan purnah praptavo nava //*

"Guna, vrdhī, guṇa, vrdhī, prohibition, option, again vrdhī, and then exception—these, with the change of r into a semivowel in the first instance, are the nine results." See Muller, SG, p. x.

<sup>4</sup> An example of the combination of the "pregnant use" of the cases and the employment of "leading rules" is I, 4, 23: *Karake*. Meaning roughly: "on the special relation to a word expressing an action, which is to be understood in the aphorisms which follow." *Karaka*, "case-relation" is here in the locative case, and as such is to be construed briefly as "On Case-relation". *Karake*, being at the head of a number of rules on case-relations, is to be taken as an *adhikara*, a leading rule. It introduces a whole subject.

ciable changes in usage. This is the main reason for placing Katyayana a century or more removed from Panini. On the same account, it would appear that Patanjali is little removed from Katyayana. Katyayana adds to or subtracts from the scope of the Paninean rules by examining earlier criticisms on these (he was not the first to question Panini's grammar), accepting or rejecting these criticisms based on present usage. The identification of Katyayana with a Vararuci to whom many works are ascribed, including the Prakrit grammar *Prakertaprakasa*, has not been proved, but Patanjali identifies Katyayana as a southerner.

Patanjali's *Mahabhasya* criticizes Katyayana's criticisms, and many times defends Panini; but it also criticizes and explains other Paninean rules. Besides Katyayana's *Varttikas* and other *Varttika* verses which may not be Katyayana's, Patanjali had before him some *karikas* or memorial verses which may have been by many people, including himself, and works by Vyadi, Vajapyayana, Pauskarasadi, Konikaputra, and Gonardiya. The method of the *Mahabhasya* is simple but lively stylistically, with questions like "What?" and "How?" being posed and resolved; introducing current proverbs and references to daily social life, it is a veritable "source of information for religious and social history as well as for literature" (Keith, HSL, p. 428).<sup>5</sup> Although his date is still in dispute, relative to his predecessors he may safely, though tentatively, be placed c. 150 B.C. He is believed to have been the embodiment of the thousand-headed serpent of time *Sesa*, which is Visnu's resting-place in his slumber. He is also believed to be identical with the author of the *Yoga Sutras*, but at least the grammatical slips by the latter have not at all contributed towards a reasonable identity between the two writers.

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<sup>5</sup> Professor Keith, to illustrate this point, quotes and translates the following from the *Mahabhasya*:

*apanya ity ucyate tatredam na sidhvati Civa Skando Vicakha iti. kim karanam? Mauryair hiranyarthibhir arcab prakalpitah. bhavet tasu na syat. yas tv etah samprati pujarthas tasu bhavisyati.*

"The difficulty is raised, with regard to Panini's proviso that images are not to be vendible, that on this doctrine the forms Civa, Skanda, and Vicakha, are incorrect. Why is that? Because the Mauryas, in their greed for money, used as means images of the gods (i.e. they bartered them, so that the forms should be Civaka, etc.). (Final answer.) Very well, granted that the rule for dropping *ka* does not apply to those images of the Mauryas; still as regards images now used for purposes of worship it does apply."

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