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Sanskrit Beyond Pāṇini
Pluralistic Perceptions of Grammar
in *Apāṇinīyaprāmāṇyasādhana*

ABSTRACT: The present paper proposes to analyse the arguments contained in the *Apāṇinīyaprāmāṇyasādhana* of Melputtūr Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa, the scholar poet of Kerala, challenging the orthodox view that the field of Sanskrit grammar is basically *trimuni* or confined to the discourses of the three sages, namely Pāṇini, Kātyāyana and Patañjali. Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa's work is a short monograph written in the format of a letter addressed to Vainateya, a grammarian from Cola country, who could not digest the liberties taken by the author with Pāṇinian grammar in *Prakriyāsarvasva*, his earlier work. It appears that another scholar, called Sudarśana, seemed to uphold Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa's views. This raging controversy prompted Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa to write *Apāṇinīyaprāmāṇyasādhana*. In this work, he demonstrates that there is no valid proof to warrant the view that alternate systems propounded by scholars like Candragomin and Bhoja are non-authoritative. He argues that though the Pāṇinian grammar is universally accepted because of its inherent qualities, it does not follow that other systems are worthless as Pāṇini himself refers to other, earlier authorities. Therefore, in true democratic spirit and upholding a pluralistic view of language and grammar, he maintains that if there is some

contradiction between Pāṇini and others on specific points, it would be ideal to take these principles as optional. He points out that great authorities like Vyāsa, Śaṅkarācārya and Vidyāraṇya, and poets like Murāri, Sureśvara and Śrīharṣa have occasionally used un-Pāṇinian forms. Thus, through this short treatise, Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa demonstrates that he is a progressive grammarian who accepts accretions and modifications in tradition as language is bound to undergo change. This exchange of views raises interesting questions such as: (i) Is language a monolith to be locked in a specific grammatical system? (ii) Are the innovations inherent in linguistic growth to be denied validity?

KEYWORDS: Pāṇini, Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa, *Mahābhārata*, grammar

The *Apāṇinīyapramāṇyasādhana* of Melputtūr Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa, (hereinafter called Nārāyaṇa), is an interesting grammatical work of pre-modern times.¹ It challenges the orthodox view confining Sanskrit grammar to the discourses of the group of three sages (*trimuni*) consisting of Pāṇini, Kātyāyana and Patañjali. In this work, Nārāyaṇa tries to establish that the non-Pāṇinian systems also have validity and relevance in determining the usage of words which are not attested in the mainstream grammar of Pāṇini. He makes use of all his arsenal to counter the arguments levelled against them.

Nārāyaṇa, whose life time is ascertained as the later half of the sixteenth century and the earlier half of the seventeenth century, is a celebrated scholar poet from Kerala, now chiefly remembered for his mellifluous devotional poem, *Nārāyaṇīya*, but whose contributions to grammar, Mīmāṃsā, Campū literature, and many other disciplines are also equally noteworthy (Rajendran 2008: 21–32). *Apāṇinīyapramāṇyasādhana* was written by Nārāyaṇa as a sequential work of *Prakriyāsarvasva*, his treatise on Sanskrit grammar. Iyer (1972: 24) describes *Prakriyāsarvasva* as “a comprehensive treatise on practical Sanskrit grammar explaining and illustrating the

¹ The text used here is the edition prepared with an English translation by E. R. Sreekrishna Sarma, appended to the *Prakriyāsarvasva* compiled by K. P. Narayana Pisharoti and ed. by M. S. Menon (1998).

entire bulk of the sūtras in Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and its essential ancillaries like the *Vārttikas*, *Paribhāṣās*, *Gaṇapāṭha*, *Dhātupāṭha* and *Uṇādi*." Houben (2014: 1) describes it as a Pāṇinian grammar of living Sanskrit, since it does not confine itself to the Sanskrit language as used and accepted only by the three sages, Pāṇini, Kātyāyana and Patañjali, but also by later authors of Sanskrit tradition. In this work, Nārāyaṇa, in order to sanctify many un-Pāṇinian forms widely accepted in Sanskrit, has drawn material also from other systems, like the *Sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharāṇa* of Bhoja, the *Mugdhabodhavyākaraṇa* of Bopadeva, *Candravyākaraṇa* ascribed to Candra and the *Śākaṭāyana-vyākaraṇa*. Understandably, the work drew sharp criticism from several quarters as not all were happy with this eclectic approach. The introductory verse of Nārāyaṇa's *Apāṇinīyapramāṇyasādhana* states:

O Vainateya! I, the same Nārāyaṇa, [ie. the author of *Prakriyāsarvasva*], now depending upon Sudarśana, [a friendly grammarian from the Cola country] am going to stand after attacking your view [like Lord Viṣṇu, holding the Sudarśana wheel in his hand, mounts on the wings of Garuḍa].²

From this, it can be surmised that Vainateya, a grammarian from the Cola country could not digest the liberties taken by Nārāyaṇa with the Pāṇinian grammar and had severely criticised the author on that count. But it also appears that another scholar, called Sudarśana, seems to have upheld the views of Nārāyaṇa. This raging controversy prompted Nārāyaṇa to write *Apāṇinīyapramāṇyasādhana*, a short monograph composed in the format of a letter addressed to Vainateya, his adversary. He also asks two scholars, Someśvaradīkṣita and Yajñanārāyaṇa, to act as arbitrators in this dispute (Sreekrishna Sarma 1998: 9). At the outset of his work, Nārāyaṇa summarises his arguments to be elaborated later in the treatise:

² *sudarśanakarāṇāmbī so 'ham nārāyaṇo 'dhunā |
vainateya bhavatpakṣam ākramya sthātum ārabhe* || (Sreekrishna Sarma 1998: 1).

Some say that what is said by Pāṇini is authoritative, not other treatises like those of Candra, Bhoja and others; this is most silly; for there cannot be baseless utterances on the part of those [Candra, Bhoja etc.] who are profusely learned; there could be variation in recognition on the basis of qualities. How was it before Pāṇini? Pāṇini himself quotes what was said by his predecessors; even if there is a conflict, an option is to be presumed (ibid.: 10).³

This interesting verse has its own share of ambiguities, but the points it make are clear: (i) the argument that what is said by Pāṇini alone is authoritative and other grammars like that of Candra and Bhoja and others are not authoritative is flimsy; (ii) learned people cannot make baseless statements; (iii) if majority of people have accepted Pāṇini, it is simply a recognition of the merits of his grammar;⁴ (iv) we have to speculate regarding the state of affairs in pre-Pāṇinian phase of grammar;⁵ (v) Pāṇini himself reproduces in his work what is said by his predecessors; (vi) if there is a conflict between Pāṇini and others, we can take all these views as optional. The treatise as a whole is an elaboration of this preamble.

This work, coming as it is from a follower of the Pāṇinian tradition, assumes importance as a document suggesting a pluralistic approach to linguistic usage. It has been a common practice of several literary critics and commentators in Sanskrit to condemn the usage of even

³ *pāṇinyuktam pramāṇam na tu punar aparam candrabhojādīśāstram ke 'py āhus tal laghiṣṭham na khalu bahuvīdām asti nirmūlavākyaṃ | bahvaṅgīkārabhedo bhavati guṇavaśāt pāṇineḥ prāk katham vā pūrvoktim pāṇinīś cāpy anuvadati vīrodhe 'pi kalpyo vikalpah ||* (ibid.).

⁴ This is as per the subsequent explanation of Nārāyaṇa himself in section 18. See Sreekrishna Sarma 1998: 4.

⁵ Houben (2014: 9) interprets *pāṇineḥ prāk katham vā* in a different way: “And how was the situation (with regard to linguistic correctness) before Pāṇini? (Even without Pāṇini’s grammar people could speak correct Sanskrit.)”. Of course this is valid, but I believe the context suggests that Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa was referring to the Pre-Pāṇinian scenario where people were guided by the earlier grammarians, not the Pre-Pāṇinian linguistic scenario as such where the conduct of *śiṣṭas* was the sole guide.

established writers for violating norms stipulated by Pāṇini. The note of caution contained in *Apāṇinīyapramāṇyasādhana* is that before passing such a judgement, it has to be ascertained if there is grammatical sanction for such usages in other systems. Thus, *Apāṇinīyapramāṇyasādhana* raises interesting questions such as: (i) whether language is to be a monolith that must be locked in a specific grammatical system; and (ii) whether usages, which could also include innovations inherent in linguistic growth and unattested by the Pāṇinian grammar are to be denied validity.

With regard to the first question, the attitude of Nārāyaṇa is that Indian grammatical tradition has always been pluralistic. As seen already, he speculates about the status of Sanskrit language before Pāṇini (*pāṇineḥ prāk*)⁶ and he is convinced of the fact that even before his time there must have been some grammatical systems in vogue which ensured correctness of linguistic usage. It would not be proper to imagine that in the Pre-Pāṇinian era, grammatically correct words were not used simply because the work of Pāṇini was not yet available at that time. Nārāyaṇa exposes the shallowness of this position on the basis of several ingenious arguments. Firstly, he alludes to the purposes of grammar mentioned by Patañjali, among which re-contextualisation (*ūha*) of Vedic mantras is very important. The Vedas do not give mantras in all genders and with all case endings. Therefore, in the Vedic ritual, it may be necessary for one to use a mantra given in reference to a particular deity for another deity and for this, suitable linguistic modifications to the mantra by way of substitution, changes of case endings, verbal endings etc. will be necessary. For this, grammatical knowledge is required (Deshpande 1993: 23). Nārāyaṇa contends that in the absence of grammar in the Pre-Pāṇinian times, it must be assumed that there would have been a confusion in the performance of Vedic rituals, which is an untenable assumption.

Another argument adduced by Nārāyaṇa is in all probability based on the maxim cited by Patañjali himself, with the description as “verses

⁶ Sreekrishna Sarma 1998: 2, 10.

called *bhrājāḥ*” (*bhrājāḥ nāma ślokāḥ*) to the effect that a person who is ignorant of the conjunction of words (*avāgyogavit*) gets vitiated.

*yas tu prayuñkte kuśalo viśeṣe śabdān yathāvad vyavahārakāle
so 'nantam āpnoti jayam paratra vāgyogavid duṣyati cāpaśabdaiḥ ||
(Vākaraṇa Mahābhāṣya 2)*

Describing this vitiation as going to hell itself, Nārāyaṇa discusses the implication of this pronouncement. We have to assume that either there were grammatical systems in the pre-Pāṇinian times or not. If there were no pre-Pāṇinian grammarians to guide language users, surely they would have got vitiated due to the usage of ungrammatical words. Such an assumption is absolutely unacceptable. The only way out to ward off such an assumption is to postulate that even before Pāṇini, there were grammarians indeed. This would entail the assumption that there could be authorities other than Pāṇini in Sanskrit grammar.

Thirdly, Nārāyaṇa alludes to another dictum of Patañjali that one becomes socially degraded (*mleccha*) if one utters incorrect words as in the case of *asuras* who mispronounced *he arayaḥ* as *helayo* and got succumbed as a result. If it were so, in the absence of any proper grammar in the pre-Pāṇinian times, everyone would have to be deemed as becoming degraded.

From all this, it can be surmised that Nārāyaṇa envisages a pre-Pāṇinian phase in the history of grammar in which all the linguistic functions related to Pāṇinian grammar were taken care of. He is convinced of the fact that Pāṇini himself was aware of such a phase as he mentions the views of earlier grammarians. It is well known that Pāṇini mentions ten other names in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and Cardona cautiously refers to them as “presumably grammarians” (Cardona 1976: 146). The names thus mentioned in *Aṣṭādhyāyī* are Āpiśālī, Kāśyapa, Gārgya, Gālava, Cakravarman, Bhāradvāja, Śākaṭāyana, Śākalya, Senaka and Sphoṭāyana. There is slight difference in the names mentioned by Nārāyaṇa: only Āpiśālī and Śākaṭāyana figure in his list, and additionally, Indra, Candra and Kāśartsni, not mentioned directly by

Pāṇini, are there. Nārāyaṇa concludes that though the Pāṇinian grammar is universally accepted because of its inherent qualities, it does not follow that other systems are worthless since even Pāṇini himself refers to previous authorities.

Such a position would appear to be upholding a pluralistic view of language and grammar in a true democratic spirit. It is tantamount to say that language is far more complex than any grammar which sets to describe it. Indeed, the language spectrum analysed by Nārāyaṇa includes works of many authoritative figures sanctioned by tradition, such as Vyāsa, Śaṅkarācārya and Vidyāraṇya, and poets such as Murāri, Sureśvara and Śrīharṣa who have occasionally used un-Pāṇinian forms. To illustrate, Śaṅkarācārya has used un-Pāṇinian *hunet* in his *Prapañcasāra*.⁷ Murārimiśra, Sureśvarācārya, the Vedic votaries have used un-Pāṇinian words like *visrāma*.⁸ The author of *Naiṣadha* has used the un-Pāṇinian word *alpamedhasi*.⁹ According to Nārāyaṇa, Vidyāraṇya has accepted the authority of Śākaṭāyana in the use of *kathāpayati* in lieu of *kathayati* accepted by Pāṇini, though as per the text, Śākaṭāyana advocates *kathayati* in VI.2.200.¹⁰ Bopadeva etc. have used several words unaccepted by Pāṇini. Nārāyaṇa further contends that there are regional variations in the acceptance of grammatical schools. For example, northern votaries of the Veda accept Sārasvata grammar, while *Prakriyākaumudī* of Rāmacandra is accepted everywhere. Vedic scholars of the pre-Pāṇinian times have also accepted other grammars.

⁷ The form should be *juhuyāt*. Sreekrishna Sarma (1998: 11) points out that Śaṅkara also uses the Pāṇinian form *juhuyāt* in *Prapañcasāra* VI.91.

⁸ Sreekrishna Sarma (ibid.) takes this as a reference to Bhavabhūti. Though Nārāyaṇa does not mention it, both Kālidāsa and Bhavabhūti have used the un-Pāṇinian form *visrāma*. Cf. Kālidāsa, *Abhijñānaśākuntala* II.40 (Williams 1876: 73). See also Bhavabhūti, *Uttararāmacarita* I.39 (Kale 2010: 36).

⁹ *naivālpamedhasi paṭo ruciratvam asya madhyesamin nivasato ripavas tṛṇāni utthānavān iha parābhavitum tarasvī śakyaḥ punar bhavati kena virodhināyam* || *Naiṣadhīyacarita*, XIII.13. Sreekrishna Sarma (1998: 12) points out that the form should be *alpamedhas* as per Pāṇini (V.4.122).

¹⁰ See Sreekrishna Sarma 1998: 12.

Nārāyaṇa is quite unhappy over the fact that the forms which are at variance with those prescribed by Pāṇini are dubbed as incorrect words (*apaśabdas*). He refers to a view whereby *apaśabda* is a shortened form of *a-pāṇiniyāśabda* which is tantamount to the position that the criterion determining the correctness of a word is whether it confirms to Pāṇinian norms or not (Sarma 1998: 13). He also quotes a passage which makes the deriding statement that Vyāsa has become “the very epitome of ungrammatical expression” (*vyāsaś tanmayatām gataḥ*) and indignantly refutes it, by pointing out that Pāṇini himself has committed grammatical errors in expressions like *ṛddhir ādaic*, which should have been *ṛddhir ādaik* as per the dictum *coḥ kuḥ* (VII.2.30)

Defending the usage of words which occur in the *Mahābhārata* and which are not sanctified by Pāṇini, an anonymous source quoted approvingly by Nārāyaṇa observes: “Could these gems of words, which the venerable Vyāsa took out of the ocean of grammar, be measured in the small puddle of Pāṇini”¹¹ (Sarma: 1998: 14)?

The verse is extremely significant from the point of view of linguistics, as it emphatically asserts the fact that the domain of language is much larger than any codified grammar describing it.

But actually, this assertion of the superiority of the epic Sanskrit over Pāṇinian grammar is problematic. Even if the *Mahābhārata* was to be regarded as a homogenous work that could be traced to a single author, there is no verifiable evidence to conclude that the author of the epic had made use of grammatical tradition of his times. On the other hand, a socio-linguistic analysis of the epic language would indicate that the transmission of the epic stories was carried out by Sūtas, a class of royal servants, who were originally charioteers and whose language was of a popular nature different from the language of the educated Brahmins (Burrow 2001: 51). Burrow points out that the transmission depended on an oral tradition very different from the fixed oral tradition like that of the Vedic school’s oral tradition. As

¹¹ *yāny ujjahāra bhagavān vyāso vyākaraṇāmbudheḥ
tāni kim padaratnāni bhānti pāṇinigoṣṭhade ||* (Sreekrishna Sarma 1998: 2).

a result, the language of the epic came to be approximated to the prevailing type of Middle Indo-Aryan. Burrow (ibid.: 52) documents the following main differences between this epic Sanskrit and the classical Sanskrit as epitomised by Pāṇini:

1. The distinction between the active and the middle forms of the verb gets blurred in the epic as in the expression *śrūyanti* ('are heard');
2. Confusion of gerunds ending in *tvā* and *ya*;
3. Unaugmented preterits occur;
4. Augmented forms are sometimes found with prohibitive particle as in *mā agamah*;
5. The particle *mā* is indiscriminately used with imperative (*mā bhava*), optative (*mā brūyād*), future (*mā drakṣyasi*) and so on;
6. The tenth class and the causative verbs make a middle participle in *ayāna* as in *codayāna* in lieu of the regular *codayamāna*;
7. The rules regulating *ati* and *anti* for the formation of feminine of present participles are not strictly observed.

Thus a linguistic issue regarding the limitation of a stratified grammar like that of Pāṇini in the face of linguistic change gets inevitably reframed as the question of the relative reliability of Vyāsa over Pāṇini in Nārāyaṇa's premodern discourse. The same is the case with the linguistic expressions of other authorities revered by tradition like Śaṅkara when they come into conflict with the prescriptions of Pāṇini.

This brings us to the larger question as to whether Nārāyaṇa accepted the notion of linguistic change in his perspective on grammar. Laddu (1974: 3) has convincingly argued that during the period of Pāṇini, Sanskrit was the means of communication in the ordinary usage, but it was not static over the period and the grammarians coming after Patañjali had their own contemporary Sanskrit as the basis of their observations. However, we find that Indian grammarians generally subscribed to the theology of eternal language in which a direct perspective on historical change is difficult to accommodate. As pointed out by Deshpande, in *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, Pāṇini had accommodated diachronic and synchronic features of the Sanskrit language (Deshpande 1993: 55); Pāṇini thus describes optional usages, marginal and preferred usages and dialectical usages. The language is thus

conceived as a “panchronic flatland with many subdomains” (ibid.: 55). However, later commentators fail to understand the full implication of Pāṇini’s references to various regions and different grammarians and simply take them as expressions of respect. It can be seen that Nārāyaṇa also does not seem to have accepted the notion of historical change. Language ever remains static; but earlier grammars are superseded or supplemented by new grammars which cover linguistic data overlooked in earlier treatises. He views successive grammars as attempts to include that what was left out or overlooked by the earlier grammarians. Thus, Pāṇini composed his grammar after consulting earlier treatises and usages; those points left out by him were explained by Kātyāyana and those overlooked by the later are explained by Patañjali. What is not said even by the last, is explained by Bhoja and others.¹²

The thrust of *Apāṇinīyapramāṇyasādhana*, however, is on the validation of the non-Pāṇinian grammatical systems. Nārāyaṇa demonstrates that there is no valid proof to establish that the non-Pāṇinian systems are unreliable. He maintains that neither the Vedas nor law-givers like Manu have stated that the non-Pāṇinian grammars are not authentic. Further, one cannot argue that the non-Pāṇinian systems are unreliable on the basis of the criterion that they are not accepted by the righteous for there seems to be no reliable criterion to determine who is the righteous and who is not. The opposite is true: a galaxy of illustrious individuals like Vyāsa and Śaṅkarācārya have accepted the non-Pāṇinian traditions in linguistic usage. Nārāyaṇa time and again invites our attention to the pre-Pāṇinian state of language. At that time, Pāṇini had definitely not composed his grammar yet. The pre-Pāṇinian Vedic votaries must have resorted to the grammatical treatises in vogue at that time. Nārāyaṇa also refers to the differences between

¹² e.g. *Apāṇinīyapramāṇyasādhana*: *tenaivam eva vaktavyam dr̥ṣṭvā śāstraguṇān prayogasahitān prāyeṇa dākṣisutaḥ proce tasya tu vic̣yutāni katicit kātyāyanaḥ proktavān | tadbhraṣṭāny avadat patañjalimunis tenāpy anuktaṁ kvaci-llokāt prāktanaśāstrato 'pi jagadur vijñāya bhojādayaḥ ||* (Sreekrishna Sarma 1998: 6).

Pāṇini and the Prātiśākhya texts, which deal with phonetics in great detail. Prātiśākhyas are accepted by the followers of Pāṇini as well. This shows that even those who follow Pāṇini sometimes have to accept non-Pāṇinian sources. Further, Nārāyaṇa contends that Pāṇini has accepted many technical terms like *āṇ* and *auṇ* (as in *āṇi cāpaḥ* and *auṇa āpaḥ*) from the traditional grammar which he would not have done had he believed that they were invalid.

Thus, we can see that in *Apāṇinīyaprāmāṇyasādhana*, what Nārāyaṇa tries to reject is the notion of one grammar one language. It can be seen that he adapts a diachronic perspective for grammar, and refers to grammars composed before Pāṇini. But such a perspective is absent in the case of his concept of language as he does not accept the view that new grammars are necessitated by the need of giving sanction to newly formed words. His concept is that of a language whose some aspects are analysed by Pāṇini, and he believes that other grammatical treatises are necessary to validate forms not covered by Pāṇini. What he envisages is a linguistic scenario in which the non-Pāṇinian usages of the established and reputed authors are not dubbed as ungrammatical. If sanction for such usages is found in the non-Pāṇinian treatises, they should not be rejected but accommodated as optional usages.

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