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Rule-extension Strategies in Ancient India

Ritual, Exegetical and Linguistic Considerations on the *tantra-* and *prasaṅga*-Principles

Chapter 1

General Introduction

This volume will focus on three textual traditions which deeply influenced the development of a systematic approach to their fields and also to any other topic within Indian thought, namely Kalpasūtra, Vyākaraṇa and Mīmāṃsā. Although, as we will show, they developed alongside each other and shared common presuppositions, the Kalpasūtra is the one which displays the most ancient traits. It consists of a collection of texts of various origin in time and space (see below, § 2.1) based on Vedic prescriptions. Accordingly, of the three partitions of the Kalpasūtra, the most ancient one, and the one which will be more relevant for the present study, is the Śrautasūtra one, which deals with the systematisation of the Vedic ritual. The Gṛhyasūtras deal with domestic rituals and the Dharmasūtras with social conduct. The Mīmāṃsā originated out of the same milieu, but focussed on the development of exegetical rules apt to interpret the Vedic prescriptions, instead of bringing order in specific issues as generally done by the Kalpasūtras. The grammatical tradition (Vyā-karaṇa) regards Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* as its foundational text. The *Aṣṭādhyāyī* is a highly technical text which displays a surprising level of abstraction in its metalinguistic devices. Out of the three, the Vyākaraṇa approach seems to be the most refined and wide-reaching, as regards its exhaustiveness. We shall see that this exhaustiveness relies on the possibility of a network of rules, a network whose basic principles are common to Kalpasūtras, Vyākaraṇa and Mīmāṃsā. We shall only focus on the early history of the last two traditions, which encompasses their foundational texts (the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra*) and their earliest commentaries (Kātyāyana's *vārttika*s and Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* in the case of Vyākaraṇa; Śabara's *Bhāṣya* in the case of Mīmāṃsā).

The basic framework of Sanskrit *śāstra*s 'systematic treatises' (and possibly of many other scientific treatises written in every kind of languages) is based on the practical and effective opposition between general and specific rules. In

the Indian culture this method was probably inaugurated by the tradition of the ritual texts (Kalpasūtra), which developed a methodology often considered as a good antecedent of the grammatical substitution-system (including *ādeśa*, *vikāra*, *pratinidhi* and *lopa*) and of other sophisticated patterns of scientific descriptions, such as the Mīmāṃsā's analogical extension (*atideśa*), centralised simultaneous application (*tantra*) and associative extension of what is automatically involved (*prasaṅga*).[1]

Nevertheless, this underlying arrangement of technical works is not often made explicit, so that all its features have to be patiently detected by a modern reader, often merely by starting from some terminological hints hidden in the texts, such as *tantra* and *prasaṅga*, which are the primary focus of this study.

1.1 Conceptual tools for dealing with continuity and discontinuity

Even Pāṇini, whose grammar attained one of the highest degrees of structural complexity and terminological precision as far as the ancient Indian technical literature is concerned, said nothing directly about his grammar's arrangement. Only later, Pāṇini's commentaries explicitly mentioned the basic principles on which the skeleton of his grammar relies, i.e., *anvaya* and *vyatireka*, and some other crucial devices for dealing with linguistic data from the point of view of Vyākaraṇa.

anvaya and *vyatireka*, literally 'going through' and 'leaving', respectively denote the concurrent occurrence and the concurrent absence of a certain element and the agreement and the difference, or the continuity and discontinuity of a phenomenon (see Cardona 1967–68, pp. 315, 337). In logic, they acquire the derived meaning of positive and negative concomitance. Neither Kātyāyana nor Patañjali themselves defined these principles, although Kātyāyana already employed them, e.g., in vt 9 ad A 1.2.45, which aims at explaining how a single linguistic unit can be abstracted out of an instance of linguistic communication.[2]

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1   The first assumption of this strict relation between ritual and grammatical descriptive pattern was formulated by Louis Renou (Renou 1941–42, pp. 444–449, p. 457 in particular). Analogously, Garge 1949 is a pioneer inquiry into the relationship between Jaimini's and Śabara's works and the Pāṇinian tradition. As for the similarities of language and ritual, a fresh perspective, based on "a certain amount of similarity between languages and rituals" is Mishra 2010, p. 87. For a list of shared ritual and grammatical methods and techniques, see Michaels 2010, pp. 107–111. F. Staal deals with unexpected shared rules, such as phrase-structure rules, transformational rules and self-embedding rules, occurring in the syntax of both ritual and language (Staal 1990, p. 110).

2   This opposition seems to deal with a common didactic method. An instance of its possible transmission within the chain of teachers and pupils is offered also by the Upaniṣadic context, where, according to Wilke and Moebus, the permanent self, which is unchanging (*anvaya*) was differentiated from the transient self, which is contingent (*vyatireka*) (Wilke

The basic "general methodological division in Śāstra between the general (*sāmānya*) and the special (*viśeṣa*)" (Kahrs 1998, p. 183) depends on the former kind of analysis, insofar as the general is what continues (through *anvaya*) and the special is what is different (as one establishes through *vyatireka*). This scheme is also strictly connected with the idea of describing the general case once, and then only the variations from it. Kahrs explains (pp. 184–185):

> [T]he methodology employed revolves around such concepts as *prakṛti* 'prototype' and *vikṛti* 'modification'. This is also referred to in terms of an image from the art of weaving as *tantra* 'warp' and *āvāpa* 'woof' denoting respectively the basic model which is the constant part of a ritual and the special features which differ from one ritual to another.

We shall have several occasions below (§ 3.5.2) to deal with the possible comparison between the ritual descriptive schemas and the linguistic pattern of substitution. In spite of the differences which will be discussed below (see § 3.5.2), what seems to be noteworthy is that the dichotomy between a general/archetypal instruction and specific single rules[3] is already well established in the Kalpasūtra tradition. Furthermore, the archetypal instruction is the one which is taught explicitly, whereas the ectypal ones are analogically inferred and need not be stated, as long as there is no difference with the archetype. Accordingly, the archetypal instruction is said to be *vyākhyāta* ('explained') and, more frequently, *upadiṣṭa* ('directly taught'), in passages such as the following ones:[4]

> *madhyaṃdinaṃ savanaṃ vyākhyāsyāmaḥ. tasya prātaḥsavanena kalpo vyākhyātaḥ. vikārān anukramiṣyāmaḥ* (BhŚrSū 14.1.3).
>
> We shall explain the midday pressing [of Soma]; its ritual disposition has been examined through [the passage on] the morning pressing; we shall [now] list the modifications.

> *paurṇamāseneṣṭipaśusomā upadiṣṭāḥ* (ĀśvŚrSū 2.1.1).
>
> *iṣṭi*s, animal- and Soma-sacrifices have been taught through [the passage on] the Full Moon [sacrifice] (which is their archetype).

This usage of *upadiṣṭa* sounds very close to the grammatical concept of *upadeśa*, i.e., the first enunciation of a linguistic unit (to be taken into account for each

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and Moebus 2011, p. 600).

3   'Archetype' and 'prototype' have both been used to translate *prakṛti*, the former is more common in translations of Mīmāṃsā and Śrautasūtra literature and has therefore also been used in the current study.

4   On a hypothetical chronology of the Śrautasūtras, see below, § 2.1.

future reference in order to correctly apply the substitution-rules referring to it).

In sum, both Grammar and Ritualistics share the common idea described by Kahrs as follows:

> If we have a map —and I think it is justified to call the ritual and linguistic descriptions of the ancient Indians a map— [...] [r]eminding ourselves that the map is not the territory, we may [...] ask what features of the territory are represented on the map. If the territory is absolutely uniform, nothing would be represented on the map except the borders of the territory. Otherwise, what will be represented on a map is really *differences* of various kinds —differences in height, vegetation, surface, population structures, etc. (Kahrs 1998, p. 184).

Kahrs' metaphor has the further advantage of pointing at the dimensional perspective of these texts. Although the temporal dimension of their recitation is inherent in all texts, Grammatical and Ritualistic texts seem to also presuppose a *space* where the sacrifice/language takes place, so that substitutions may be described as happening "in place of", i.e., "at the *place* of...", at the place which might be occupied by.... Similarly, elements which are not prescribed by the rule currently being examined can be introduced, as if they were available somewhere else, in a different portion of the sacrificial/linguistic "space". We shall see (§ 4.1.1) how this spatial metaphor works in the case of *tantra* and *prasaṅga*, but it might be worth remembering that an absence in space is never an absolute absence.

Accordingly, astonishing as this might seem at first sight, absent elements are frequently considered as able to perform a function notwithstanding their absence. This leads to a general question, namely, how can an effect possibly be grasped in absence of its cause?

The answer lies in the fact that spatial absences, unlike temporal ones, do not hinder the possibility of indirect action. In other words, although, e.g., X is not present at place Y, it can still influence what is happening at place Y through its presence at place Z, since it is not altogether temporally (i.e., sequentially) vanished. Some crucial occurrences of *prasaṅga* in Patañjali, in fact, precisely deal with the phenomenon occurring when the sense of a speech unit is intended, in spite of the absence of the speech unit itself. More in general, Ritualists and Linguists elaborated a complex net which allowed an element to be applied to a specific case, although it was not explicitly present there. Indeed —as we shall see— Indian technical literature managed step by step to work out a method which warranted for extending an unit from the place it really occupied to a different one, without undue over-extensions.

1.2   *tantra* as opposed to *prasaṅga*

Let us now focus on two key terms of this net, i.e., *tantra* and *prasaṅga*, both extension-devices, but with very distinct characteristics and functions.

tantra is one of the terms with several distinct technical meanings, departing from its complex Vedic usage. In Vedic ritual literature, *tantra* indicated the standard form of a ritual, including both what is common to all rituals of the same class, and what constitutes the model for several rituals (see Gonda 1977, p. 492, fn 22; p. 510; Gonda 1980, pp. 180, 421). Within Mīmāṃsā, it became a technical term indicating the device by means of which an auxiliary element is performed only once and applied wherever needed, on certain conditions: "There are certain Subsidiaries which, if performed once, effectually help, by that single performance, more than one Act; this help accorded by a single performance of the Subsidiary to several Primaries has been called 'Tantra' (Centralisation, Collectivation)" (Jha and Mishra 1964, p. 307; p. 348 of the 1942 edition).

prasaṅga shares a partly similar meaning insofar as it indicates the possibility of something to be applied to its own case and also to a further one.[5]

Both the terms *tantra* and *prasaṅga* are used in the Pāṇinian tradition, though to the best of our knowledge, except in Bhartṛhari, they are never explicitly contrasted in the same passage (Pontillo 2008, p. 94).

1.3   Questions

tantra and *prasaṅga* are first juxtaposed and contrasted in Bhartṛhari's commentary on the *Mahābhāṣya* (henceforth M) and in Śabara's (3rd–5th c. CE?) on the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* (henceforth MS). Does it mean that they oppose each other? Do Bhartṛhari and Śabara faithfully represent the M and MS (2nd c. BC?) stances on them? And can one detect the stages of the development of *tantra* from its Vedic usage, through the Śrautasūtra one, to the Mīmāṃsā one and further? And what about *prasaṅga*? Is it a linear development, or are there mutual contaminations between the Śrautasūtra and the Mīmāṃsā and Vyākaraṇa usages?

Furthermore, what exactly is *tantra*? The application of a subsidiary (as when one says that something is applied more than once *tantreṇa*) or the subsidiary itself (as when one says that X is *tantra*)? Which of the two usages is metaphorical?

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5   Cf. Pandurangi 2006, p. XXVII: "*tantra* is the technique of single performance with reference to many, while *prasaṅga* is the technique of one item serving the purpose of another also. These two are intended to avoid repetition and economise the effort".