

JOHANNES BRONKHORST

PĀṆINI AND THE NOMINAL SENTENCE

(published in: *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 71 (1990), 301-304)

The question whether Pāṇini accepted so-called nominal sentences in Sanskrit as grammatically complete, has been raised repeatedly in recent years. The discussion to which this article is meant to be a contribution starts with Paul Kiparsky's (1982: 11) observation that Pāṇini did not have to provide for deletion of the copula in nominal sentences. The expression *devadattaḥ pācaka odanasya* "Devadatta cooker of rice", Kiparsky maintained, is a complete sentence in Sanskrit. In a review the present author (1984: 310) pointed out that for Kātyāyana and Patañjali, at any rate, not all nominal sentences are complete. Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* states in so many words that in a nominal sentence like *vrkṣaḥ plakṣaḥ* 'the figtree [is] a tree' the word *asti* 'is' is understood. Madhav M. Deshpande has subsequently (1987) taken my remarks as point of departure for a new investigation of the notion of sentence in Pāṇini, Kātyāyana and Patañjali. Deshpande points out, quite rightly, that Pāṇini's point of view in this matter does not have to be identical with the view of Kātyāyana and Patañjali. Indeed, his article suggests that the views of Kātyāyana and Patañjali may have been influenced by the definition of the sentence which they accept, according to which every sentence must contain a finite verb.

I am in full sympathy with Deshpande's approach, and concede that the possibility that Pāṇini did accept the existence of nominal sentences without copula cannot a priori be excluded. Deshpande comes to the conclusion that this is indeed the case. I have not however been convinced by his arguments and, what is more, I have come to think that his article contains evidence which rather suggests the opposite: Pāṇini did not consider nominal sentences complete.

A priori, it would be surprising if Pāṇini, who lived before Kātyāyana and Patañjali, were to accept nominal sentences as complete, where his two successors don't. Deshpande himself (1987: 86-87) points out that the nominal sentence in Sanskrit gains in importance with the passage of time. This is also the opinion of Andries Breunis (1990: 46), who finds "no obvious reasons for assuming that there exists a nominal sentence, in the proper sense of the term..., in the oldest attested stage of Indo-Aryan". He [302] further points at the progressive use of the nominal sentence in Middle Indo-Aryan languages and Hindi. Hindi forms like *gayā*, which is a descendant of the Sanskrit participle *gata*, have become fullfledged finite verbs! The nominal sentence has thus become a verbal sentence. One expects therefore that Pāṇini, even less than Kātyāyana and Patañjali, would look upon the nominal sentence as complete.

What arguments does Deshpande present to prove his conclusion right? His basic argument is as follows: Pāṇini's grammar can produce nominal sentences without the assumption of an underlying finite verb. And indeed, Deshpande argues convincingly that expressions such as *rāmaḥ sundaraḥ* (p. 72) are derivable without the elision of *asti* or any other finite verb.

The question to be considered is whether *rāmaḥ sundaraḥ*, thus derived, expresses the meaning 'Rāma is handsome'. The two words being default nominatives, their combination might not mean more than English 'Rāma, handsome' and not be a sentence after all. All depends on the question whether or not, in Pāṇini's opinion, 'is' has to find expression; and this, of course, lands us in a circular argument. The same criticism applies to *rāmaḥ gataḥ* (p. 75), and to Deshpande's other examples. Deshpande does not deny that besides this nominal sentence there is a verbal one, *rāmaḥ gataḥ asti*, with the same meaning. Here again the question is: must the meaning 'is' be considered part of the semantic input? Pāṇini does not tell us what, in his opinion, is an acceptable semantic input. Without this knowledge we just don't know whether Deshpande's derivation of *rāmaḥ gataḥ* delivers the required sense.

Consider now the following sentence, quoted by Deshpande (1987: 85) from the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (2.3.1.10):

te paśavo 'mūlā oṣadhīr mūlinīr jagdhvā 'paḥ pītvā tata eṣa rasaḥ sambhavati

These rootless animals having eaten the rooted plants, having drunk the water, therefrom this sap comes about.

Deshpande cites this same sentence in another article (1987a: 254), where he adds in a footnote: "These gerund constructions are exceptional in that they violate P. 3.4.21 (*samānakarṭṛkayoḥ pūrvakāle*)." According to P. 3.4.21 there must be two verbs with the same agent for a gerund ending to be added to one of them. Contrary to this requirement, the gerund clauses in the above example appear to be independent.

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Or are they? The above example could easily be brought in line with Pāṇini's requirements by adding an auxiliary finite verb, then eliding it again. Constructions of a gerund with an auxiliary verb exist, and are not even uncommon. Tikkanen (1987: 174 f.) lists many instances; only two will here be reproduced:

TS 2.5.1.6:

... *brahmahatyāyai hy eṣā vārṇam pratimūcyāste*

... for she is dressed in (lit. sits having put on) the color of brahmin murder.

Manu 3.77:

yathā vāyur samāśritya vartante sarvajantavaḥ/

tathā grhastham āśritya vartante sarva āśramāḥ//

Just like all beings exist in dependence on air, so all stages of life are dependent on the householder.

The step from a gerund with auxiliary verb to an independent gerund is clearly small, and completely parallel to the step from *rāmo gato 'sti* to *rāmo gataḥ*.

Note that independent gerund clauses are not at all infrequent in Brāhmaṇa prose, and occur even in later literature. Deshpande gives a number of examples from the Brāhmaṇas (1987a: 252 f., 259), and refers to Oertel 1926 (p. 25 f., 37 f., 308 f.) for further examples. Also 'Bhāsa's' plays contain some such constructions (G. T. Deshpande, 1971: 86-87; referred to in M. M. Deshpande, 1980: 135-136 n. 52). The following line from the Bhagavadgītā (2.20) is another example:

nāyam bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ

He has not come to be, nor will he come to be.

Let us now assume that Pāṇini knew independent gerund clauses, and did not consider them incorrect. The existence of P. 3.4.21 then forces us to accept that, in Pāṇini's opinion, the presence of an auxiliary finite verb was understood in such clauses. Yet only a stroke of luck helped us to discover this: the fact that Pāṇini felt obliged to define the meaning of the gerund suffix in terms of two verbs with the same agent. In the derivation of *rāmaḥ sundaraḥ* and *rāmaḥ gataḥ*, on the other hand, there is no suffix whose meaning has to be defined in a similar manner. Yet in another way the two clauses *rāmaḥ bhūtvā* and *rāmaḥ gataḥ* might be parallel: both are incomplete as long as no finite verb is understood.

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