

E. GEROW

WHAT IS KARMA (KIṂ KARMETI)?  
AN EXERCISE IN PHILOSOPHICAL SEMANTICS

At a recent conference on « karman and rebirth »<sup>1</sup>, I was widely suspected to have made a joke when I observed that the sense of « karma » most familiar to me was that of the grammatical « direct object »: *īpsitatamaṃ karma*<sup>2</sup>. The « joke » of course presumes a commonplace: that the senses of « karma » worth enquiring into must have to do either with a reality principle (as when the world and the sacrifice are both said to be a « karma ») or a condition of moral or ethical bondage (as when « karma » is said to be the mechanism of *samsāra*). Grammar deals with mere « words »; it cannot capture the *seriousness* of the *kosmos*.

Yet the conference was animated by one of the laudable trends of current research on India: that indigenous conceptual systems are best enquired into through terms that are recognizably indigenous<sup>3</sup>. One, therefore, runs a certain risk in laughing at those dimensions of a conceptual system that are *most* strikingly « indigenous », such as the fact that « karma » means also « direct object » and is functionally equivalent to our term « passive voice ». Our understanding of the term's cosmic and ethical significance may in fact depend on our explaining that « coincidence ».

And this is precisely the issue that I want to raise in this paper, taking as my text Renou's well known reference to the grammatical karma: « karman "action" (en tant qu'objet direct, objet du verbe transitif) appartient aux milieux rituels où le mot, depuis le RV, dési-

---

1. *Workshop on Karma and Rebirth*; Lake Wilderness, Washington, Oct. 22-23, 1976. See « Minutes » mimeographed, subsequently cited.

2. « kartur īpsitatamaṃ karma » PĀṆINI (*Aṣṭādhyāyī*) 1.4.49 « ...la chose que l'agent souhaite atteindre par dessus toute autre (porte le nom de) karman ("objet-direct")... ».

3. Cf. MARRIOTT and INDEN, *Toward an Ethnosociology of South Asian Caste Systems*, to appear in DAVID, *The New Wind...*, The Hague, Chicago.

gnait l'acte par excellence, c'est à dire, le rite »<sup>4</sup>. But is the grammatical meaning of « karma » simply a function and a reflex of the term's other (or more general) meanings, as this quote suggests, or is it also at the heart of any proper understanding of those more general meanings? Let us consider how we might inquire into that latter possibility as we ponder another of Renou's remarks: adhérer à la pensée indienne, c'est d'abord penser en grammarien<sup>5</sup>.

An inquiry into indigenous conceptual systems begins, whether we like it or not, with words, which often we do not even translate — « karma » (« action/act ») — and is thus in principle a *grammatical* problem. The straightforward or first level question, « what does karma mean? » if successfully answered will put us in command of an indigenous dictionary wherein are delimited the term karma and its symbiotic relatives (conceptual: such as dharma, yāga; or etymological: such as kriyā, karṭṛ)<sup>6</sup>, and as well these terms' usage or capacity to combine (their « syntax »).

But when we inquire into « karma » we use concepts indigenous to our own standards of expression; the term may assume meaning and functions that derive from the syntax and context of our inquiry. Even when untranslated, the term absorbs senses from the English sentence context that it does not or cannot have in Sanskrit and thereby loses even the clarity of being an « unknown quantity ». For example, « Does fate equal karma, or is karma used to explain fate? »<sup>7</sup>. By leaving the term untranslated the « appearance » of a new technical term is created in English itself: *karma*, which « appearance » only conceals the analytical fatuousness of the question itself. If « true », then indeed « fate equals fate » and if not, « fate does not equal fate ».

Many of our questions are also naive in the sense that they must ignore relations that are implicit in the Sanskrit vocabulary; and they are equally moot in that they can, therefore, be answered « yes » in terms of one set of lexical contingencies, and « no » in terms of another. One's karma is indeed one's dharma, if by « karma » we mean « kartavya »<sup>8</sup> and it is equally *not*, provided we take karma in its siddha (« accomplished, reified ») sense of « kṛta », distinguished thereby from one's dharma<sup>9</sup>.

And so from the Gītā we take our third text: kim karma kim akarmeti kavayo'py atra mohitāḥ<sup>10</sup>.

4. JA, 1941-42, p. 157; reprinted STAAL, *A Reader on the Sanskrit Grammarians*, p. 464 (Cambridge, 1972). Also cited by CARDONA, *Pāṇini*, p. 231, who, nevertheless, calls attention to the difficulties in simply equating the terms from the two milieux.

5. IC<sup>2</sup>, § 1519.

6. Often « duty/caste duty »; « (vedic) sacrifice »; « action/activity »; « agent ».

7. Question 18, p. 3, *Minutes of Workshop on Karma and Rebirth...*

8. As in the Gītā and Vedic texts.

9. As in the advaita texts and the physical treatises.

10. 4.16, cited N. N. ВИДЕ, *infra* note 47.

This inquiry is *about* a grammatical problem and is grammatical by method. It is, therefore, insufficient simply to propose removing such terminological confusions as a mode of problem-solving. The inter-language character of the problem is the problem and cannot be eschewed unless and until we *all* speak English. Where terms are not translated, as in the naive question « what is karma »? one language (here Sanskrit) is in effect made the object of inquiry in a context where the other defines the methodology and solution. In making such a distinction between our « method » and their « reality » what we miss is that in the present case there are no objects other than words: the « term » karma is nothing but its use by Indians variously to organize and illuminate their experience; the problem is signalled for us not by the fact that the experience is necessarily different or « indigenous » (for there would be in that case no basis for comparison; no *simile* for inquiry), but by the fact that the *term* or its « translation » is functionless in our experience, that is, not used to organize our world. This difference of *form* (more than of content) suggests that our problem is more akin to that of the possibility of different grammars: different organizations of the « same » world: a world that, therefore, not only seems variable but achieves distinction and precision in its variety. To a certain extent then the inquiry into karma becomes thirdly an exercise in rethinking the world (assuming for the moment karma is a crucial term in the Indian « world »), and an exercise in giving up our own or « native » grammar. Thus the « grammatical » problem insensibly becomes, for us, an *ethical* and philosophical problem<sup>11</sup>.

We derive from this introduction the three topics of 1) Lexicon, 2) Syntax, and 3) Kosmos for the main body of this paper: 1) the *term* karma is important in Indian theory, which suggests that we examine first the Indian lexicon; 2) the *syntax* of the term karma is an important issue when the term is used in propositions or to form questions, which suggests that we inquire into the linkages of karma to other terms; specifically the grammatical « karma » that is itself used to explicate a sentence model, or syntax; and 3) the *semantics* of the term karma as determined by the grammarians may be crucial to our understanding of its various *contexts*, or « worlds », which suggests that we examine whether the wider or « non-grammatical » karma may not itself be implied by a grammar that has already been worked out by the grammarians<sup>12</sup>.

---

11. Cf. WITTGENSTEIN, Phil. Unter. I.19, *Und eine Sprache vorstellen heisst, sich eine Lebensform vorstellen.*

12. ASHOK AKLUJKAR suggests the following caveat at this point: « The theory / view of karman that the first employment of the term in grammatical discussions presupposed is to be distinguished from the theory that developed around karman as a technical term. But speculation on the first is equally interesting », YĀSKA, for example, uses *karman* in the sense of « action ». See notes 21 and 42 and, in general, discussions of the ritual origins of Indian technical terminology; cf. CARDONA, p. 231.

Each of these reference points is supported by an observation which in isolation may appear paradoxical, but which when put in the context of our problematic, encourages us in our inquiry: viz. (1) In the Indian lexica, the « grammatical » sense of *karma* is invariably given *first*, suggesting its primary character<sup>13</sup>. (2) In the Indian grammar, the sentence or assertion is both an act (in its own right) and takes an act (*kriyā/karma*) for its content<sup>14</sup>, which clarifies both the place of grammar within ritual and the formal model of the grammar itself, which is not merely actional, but « intentional » without being « volitional »<sup>15</sup>. (3) It is a grammarian, Bharṭṛhari, who, speculating on the cosmic-mystic sense of « karma », establishes a *coherence* among the Indian views of karma that derives ultimately from the notion's *grammaticality*. It is perhaps Bharṭṛhari who provided the rationale for the transformation of a *word* for « action » (*karma*) into the status of a world- or reality-principle in Indian speculation, a status that words for « being » enjoy in our own. And this surely is the *general* issue that focusses our interest in the Indian's « exaggeration » of karmic matters, and expresses best the alienation we feel in the presence of the notion « karma »; for (to capture its philosophical seriousness) we ought to be able to translate it not as τὸ πρᾶγμα but as τὸ ἔν<sup>16</sup>.

(A) Karma in the lexicon. A term suffused with as many ambiguities — cultural and contextual — as *karma* surely needs definition. In order to hold the cultural ambiguities to a minimum we examine the voluminous Sanskritic lexical tradition. The fact that Sanskrit is defined through Sanskrit establishes as purely as possible the Indian contexts of relevance, and deletes the most troublesome source of ambiguity: that we naively assume our own language as method.

Most useful is the compendium of Tarkavācaspati, the *Vācaspatyam*, which conflates in six encyclopaedic volumes of ca. 4000 pages the Sanskritic lexical traditions. Compiled between 1865 and 1875 (?) by a team of orthodox pundits, it reflects the intellectual fluctuations of the medieval period without showing the least trace (save in its motivation) of Western influence. In its third volume approximately fifty (pp. 1724-71)

13. NILS SIMONSSON points out an exception in the Nyāyakośa.

14. *kriyāvacaṇo dhātuḥ* [Vārttika ad P 1.3.1] « the (verbal) root expresses an act(ivity) ». The verb [al idea] is of course for the grammarians the head of the sentence, as against Mīmāṃsā and Nyāya. See notes 32 and 39, *infra*.

15. The most generally applicable rules in the grammar seem conditioned by and to explicate the speaker's *intention*, as for example, P 3.2.123 « varttamāne lat ». « Les desinences du "lat" valent quand il s'agit de l'actuel » (RENOU, *op. cit.*, p. 206), or rather « on condition of (wishing to express) presence, the suffixes of the present (are enjoined) ». It is the Nyāya that seems to have adopted a « volitional » model. Our discussion of « bhāva » in what follows will make this clear.

16. Cf. K. A. S. IYER, *Bharṭṛhari, a Study of the Vākyapadīya...*, Poona, 1969, esp. ch. 6 « On action » (*kriyā*). Words for « being », when they do figure in the discussion (as in the Vārttika, « bhāvavacaṇo dhātuḥ », or YĀSKA's, « bhāvapradhānam ākhyātam », are invariably interpreted in actional terms (as KAIYATA, « bhāvavacaṇaḥ kriyāmātravācī »; IYER, p. 329).

pages are devoted to karma and compounds beginning with karman-<sup>17</sup>; of these pages two entries occupy the bulk; karma itself (pp. 1730-37) and the compound « karma-vipāka » (pp. 1742-70). Although the latter entry is central to other concerns of the karma theorists, detailing 80 or so consequences in later births of various (mostly immoral) behavior in this one, we pass it by here, as being itself consequential and not crucial to an understanding of *karma*.

We find, *sub karma*, five contextual meanings distinguished in principle; that is, all the variety of meaning which the term has undoubtedly had over ca. 35 centuries, is reported under five general headings, which are (as we would expect in an Indian undertaking) not historically, but śāstraically, motivated. As noted earlier, a meaning attributed to Vyākaraṇa, or the Pāṇinian grammar, is given in primo loco; follow senses said to pertain to the Vaiśeṣika system (realistic pluralism or atomism, and one of the « six systems »), (3) Hari (i.e., Bharīḥhari, the sixth century linguistic philosopher who established grammar as a vehicle suitable for the mokṣamārga), (4) to Mīmāṃsā, under which are grouped almost all the senses of the term karma pertaining to the Vedic period and to the ritual traditions, and (5) agriculture (kṛṣi) (though this latter meaning is for the most part *Vedic*).

We will now inventory the various senses of karma, before proceeding to the second part of this paper, which will attempt to assess the *significance* of the emphasis on grammar (vyākaraṇa) among these meanings. In doing so we will somewhat alter the order as given in the lexicon, proceeding perhaps in a way more suited to a Western sense of order, from the *least* to the *most* grammatical meaning.

(5) Agriculture/kṛṣi. At issue here is a sense akin to that of Hesiod's « Works and Days»: and one which would appear to be closer to a literal and valueless sense of « act » than any other. But even here the term *karma* is related to the terms which enliven its « abstract » uses, especially « phala », for the « fruits » of ploughing are indeed its consequences. « phalaṃ karmāyattam »<sup>18</sup> say the mīmāṃsakas, playing on both senses. And « phalasya karmanispatter lokavat »<sup>19</sup>. None of the phrases adduced in establishing this sense unequivocally refers to « ploughing » in such a way as to rule out an implication of the more philosophical meaning. In fact, this « literal » sense of *karma* seems

17. There is often variation in Western texts between these two forms of the same word. Briefly, « karma », is the fully inflected nominative singular (neuter), whereas « karman- » is the so-called stem form, without any inflection. It is normal to cite Sanskrit nouns in the latter form (Nala, not Nala-s), but evidently because it is confusing to Western readers to think of a longer form as uninflected, « karman » (and most other n-stems) constitute exceptions to the rule. We will try to conform to this practice (cf. brahma and brahman).

18. « The fruit depends on the act » (p. 1737).

19. « Since the fruit is the result of the act, just as in the world » (*ibid.*), said to be from Jaimini.

necessary only to justify the explanation of its abstract meanings, « *tad yatheha karmacitalokaḥ kṣiyate* »<sup>20</sup>.

(4) The *mīmāṃsakas* (or « *vaidikas* »). Under this heading are grouped the « types » of karma that express most clearly its ritual and voluntaristic or moral aspects, but exclude its elemental and cosmic senses. The *yāga*, or « sacrifice », the *karma* par excellence, is not defined as such, but rather classified according to several bi- or tri-partite distinctions that indeed sum up the moral teaching of Hinduism. A karma is first of all (a) either *nitya* « obligatory » — without reference to an occasion, as *saṃdhyāvandana*, or *naimittika*, « obligatory given an occasion », such as the life cycle rituals, or *kāmya*, « voluntary » (where the self is the occasion) such as the *aśvamedha*; (b) secondly, karma may be classified with specific reference to its consequence or *phala*, inasmuch as a karma may be done without positing a fruit (as presumes the first type of the former classification) and is called « *sāttvika* »; or may be done for a fruit and must involve effort (such as the third type) and is called « *rājasa* », or have an evil and perhaps unwanted effect, and be termed « *tāmasa* ». This classification covers a wider field than the former, including a greater range of moral options, and demons as agents and perhaps also error. It is also clearly *Sāṃkhyan*, speaking historically. The third classification (c) adds the dimension of motivation or subjective choice to the second according as an action may tend to better the condition of the agent (and be *śukla*) or to worsen it (and be *kṛṣṇa*) or be neutral (and be *kṛṣṇaśukla*). Presumed here evidently is the entire theory of rebirth and *samsāra*, which provides a teleology for the individual actor. The subjective end, as distinguished from the objective (or *phala*), is made a variable of distinction. (d) Lastly, karma is said to be two-fold insofar as it tends to promote (*pravṛtta*) or discourage (*nivṛtta*) further action. The former is « *kāmapūrvakam* », presumptive of a desire, the latter is « *jñānapūrvakam* », presumptive of knowledge. Here the fourth goal *mokṣa*, the non-goal, has been added to the theory as a variable, in such a way again as to deflate the foregoing distinctions, for all actions tending to their own continuity (in effect, all of the above) are now limited by an action that is in some sense not an action at all. We have now brought the *Vedānta* under our « *vedic* » rubric.

(2) *Vaiśeṣika*: The *vaiśeṣikas* (realists), according to the lexicographer, consider karma not so much in its ethical or psychic dimension, but as a physical category: karma here means *motion*, and is specifically distinguished from volition and will (*yatna*). In the category schema with which the *Vaiśeṣika* is associated, karma in effect becomes synonymous with « *kriyā* », one of the four basic existential categories (with *jāti*, genus or universal class; *guṇa*, quality; and *dravya*, substance or indivi-

20. « So just as here [in this transmigration] the world accumulated by acts perishes » (*ibid.*).

dual). Yatna, or psychological « motion » is considered, on the contrary, to fall under the category « guṇa », as do all the psychic states (« qualities » of substance not involving motion). The vaiśeṣika view of « motion » resembles Aristotle's, in being subdivided into different local types, of which locomotion (gamana) is one. The others are rising (utkṣepaṇa), descending (avakṣepaṇa), contraction (ākuñcana) and expansion (prasaṛaṇa). Interestingly, we find no « decay », as this involves a change of state, and, therefore, is *qualitative* (ref. guṇa) <sup>21</sup>.

(1) Vyākaraṇa: The bulk of the lexical entry on karma is devoted to this discussion. It is not only the first item treated but is accorded the greatest expository development (pp. 1730-35). *Vistarabhayāt* we will note here only the highlights and distinguishing characteristics of this long section.

Of course, in one sense grammar is entitled to precede other classifications, having inherited from the older Nirukta its most basic function: nirvacana, or the etymological analysis of words. « karman » itself is suitably explained by reference to its root element (kṛ-) and suffix (man-[in]), with notes as to its gaṇas (word classes conditioning certain types of rule eligibility). But this, like the etymologies in Webster's, is meant as prologue to the main entry, and is not to be confused with it.

The original contribution of grammar to the « meaning » of karma is of course Pāṇini's definition of what we call the accusative case or direct object. « The direct object is that which [to reach] is most desirable to the agent [of the verbal action] <sup>22</sup>. Clearly we are in a volitional mode, but unlike that of the mīmāṃsaka, the stress is less on the effect (phala), which is after all supra-mundane, and more on the process itself (vyāpāra) <sup>23</sup>. On the other hand the Vaiśeṣika emphasis on objective motion is incommensurate with the grammarian's « karma », which is in the first place the object of a *desire*.

This type of karma, patterned in a theory of general verbal syntax, is subject to several sets of distinctions, which further clarify its essential character. First, grammatical karma is said to be threefold (following Bhartṛhari), as it is (a) nirvartyam, or created (ex nihilo, yad asaḥ jāyate), as « he makes a pot »; (b) vikāryam, or modified (out of an already existant) as « he makes ear-rings [of gold] »; or (c) prāpyam, or attained: the « object » of the verb of motion (the completion of whose

21. Included among the bhāvavikāras of YĀSKA, *jāyate 'sti vipariṇamate vardhate 'pakṣiyate vinaśyati* (cited also MBh ad 1.3.1 [NSP, p. 124]). The matter pertains to the grammatical « vikāryam », infra.

22. Supra, note 2.

23. *kā punaḥ kriyā / ihā / kā punar ihā / ceṣṭā / kā punaḥ ceṣṭā / vyāpāraḥ* (MBh ad Vt « kriyāvacaṇo dhātuḥ », P 1.3.1 [NSP, p. 114], what is « kriyā »? striving). What is « striving »? movement. What is « movement »? process (!). The pretext here is perhaps the already cited evidence that many legitimate « direct objects » and other uses of the accusative (as « poison » in the sentence « The King drinks poison ») are not « desired » at all by their agents.

activity does not modify the object in any way, as with verbs of pure motion: the « going » does not change the town reached)<sup>24</sup>. Already we can see that these principles of definition function to mediate what appear to be the opposed « karmas » of the vaiśeṣikas and the mīmāṃsakas, the « objective » and the « ethical » karmas.

Referring specifically to the « most desired » [īpsitatamam] element of the sūtra, the essence of the relation between the agent, or producer of the effort, and his « result » is summed up thus: taking the first triad as expressing the varieties of « karma » that are in fact (consciously *desired*, we may add four more, as « karma » is (d) neither desired nor not desired, as « he touches grass [while going to the village] », (e) in fact explicitly *not* desired, as in the example « he drinks poison », (f) unmentioned (akathitam) by other technical kāraka designations, and (g) required by concord (purely and simply [anyapūrvakam])<sup>25</sup>. The latter two types of « karma » share the unintentionality of the previous two types, but find their motivation in the syntax itself rather than in the indifference or « ignorance » of the so-called agent. Under « unmentioned » are grouped the double direct objects of Sanskrit, as « gām payo dogdhi » (lit.: « he milks the cow milk »). The last category comprehends those cases of the accusative (and any other case in similar circumstances) which are not directly motivated by a relation to the verb, but rather are what they are by virtue of agreement with a term already so motivated. In Sanskrit and most Indo-European languages, qualifying adjectives take the case (number, etc.) of their noun. The Indian grammarians realized that this use of « accusative » served a quite different function than did the accusative of primary reference. Put simply, the latter explicated a verb-noun relationship (kāraka syntax), the former related two nominals, and was not a kāraka.

(3) Bhartṛhari. The « karman » attributed to the philosophical grammarian Bhartṛhari, and accorded a separate and distinct entry in the lexicon of Tarkavācaspati, cannot be discussed in fact without entering upon the second topic that we proposed dealing with in this paper:

(B) The significance of karman in and to syntax. Pāṇini's gloss of karma « īpsitatamam » is given flesh in the medieval semantic grammars in the following way: in every act designated by a verbal root (e.g. « to go » or « to cook ») are two complementary semantic aspects: a function/process or vyāpāra, indicating the change per se, and the fruit, or phala, indicating the tendency or end of that change<sup>26</sup>. As the commentaries illustrate, the « function » in cooking is the series of motions involved, the placing of the coals, the lighting of the fire, the blowing

24. Vākyapadiya 3 (sādhana), 45 (IYER ed., p. 266).

25. P 1.4.50-51; also Vākyapadiya 3 (sādhana), 46 (IYER ed., *ibid.*).

26. Vaiyākaraṇabhūṣaṇasāra 2 (KSS 188, 1969), p. 11; Paramalaghumañjūṣā (Bārda Research Ser., § 7, 1961), p. 89, etc.

on the embers, etc., whereas the « result » is the moistening of the grain. In « going », similarly, the « function » is the leaving of the place occupied, while the « result » is the attainment of the next place. That these two aspects of verbality are general, and not as might at first be supposed limited to transitive verbs, is established also by examples: « to sit » involves both the « function » of flexing the muscles and limbs in certain sequences, but also the « result » of a certain posture attained. Yet the distinction between function and result is also useful for *discriminating* transitive from intransitive. The two aspects of the verbal action look to different external substrates for their practical realization: whereas the *vyāpāra* is based typically in the agent (*karṭr*), or in the examples, in the *cook*, or the *walker*, the *phala* usually finds its substrate or basis in the object of the verb, the *karma*, or in the examples, in the rice or the place reached. In this way, though the mode of analysis is actional, the *karma* is linked closely to the « objective » *phala*, whereas the more internal or processual aspect of the verbal idea is associated with the *karṭr*; *karma* is ipso facto *contrasted* with « *vyāpāra* », with the more intentional side of activity. Further, intransitive verbs constitute that interesting class of actions whose *vyāpāra* and whose *phala* cannot be conveniently so distinguished, just as the posture assumed is equally supported by the body of the agent along with the set of actions (flexing, etc.) that directly depend on the agent. These verbs in effect have no « *karma* », no « external » [direct] object although they most certainly do have a *phala*; it is precisely this relationship of *karma* to *phala* that defines the class of intransitives<sup>27</sup>.

« Fruit » or « result » understood in this functional sense avoids the apparent pitfalls of the one-sidedly volitional « *īpsitatamam* »; in place of the direct meaning « wished for » is substituted the inferred meaning « resultant of ». The willing is indeed a conscious or semantic dimension of many verbs; where it is only implicit, the verbal process itself is indistinguishable from the « effort », or the *yatna*, and is only conventionally and topically related to an « agent » as its *substratum*, [as in] « the leaf falls ». This suppression of the « true » or volitional agent shows *inter alia* that as far as result is concerned, the *substratum* of such acts is indeed the *karma*. The « leaf » might equally be thought here to *undergo* the activity. But the conscious will of an agent may also be *present* but as an adventitious « quality » that no longer links the « functioning » with the « result » of the act. In the sentence « The king drinks poison », the « *vyāpāra* » or function of putting to the lips, swallowing, etc., is linked volitionally to the agent, or king; but the « fruit » or the result of that drinking, whose substrate is the « object » (the poison) is in fact independent of the King (needing only the « poison » again as a quasi-« agent » to become explicit). Not only is the

27. VBS § 5, p. 68: *svārthaphalavyadhikaraṇavyāpāravācakatvam* (*sakarmakatvam*).

possibility of error<sup>28</sup> built into the semantics, but, insofar as the « doing » supersedes the « willing » of the action, the determinations that are proper to the agent, such as consciousness, volition, etc., lose importance in an interpretation of the verbal notion. Those proper to the « karman » ipso facto gain in importance.

The peculiarity of Bharṭṛhari's view of « karman » is that he appears to adopt this position in its extreme form. According to Tarkavācaspati, Hari differs from the older grammarians in *defining* kriyā as « vyāpara » (function, or process) *only* and never as yatna, or motivated effort. And this to avoid the imputation of intransitivity to all syntactic frames, which would be implied by a view that « action » were wholly or in essential part volitional process (and ipso facto incorporate the *object* of that volition) or, put in another way, that a « yatna » or effort be the link between the « function » and the « result ». Such a view, attributed to the older vaiyākaraṇas, indeed induces the later naiyāyikas to assert effort (in their jargon, kṛti) as the sense of the verb in all sentences, functionally the equivalent of the root kṛ-, made thereby into the root par excellence. But of course Hari, or the view attributed to Hari, looks (away from this subjectivism [with its obvious problems]) to a notion of vyāpara that emphasizes process and sequence (krama) and is thus exempt from the problems of volitionality. But vyāpara so separated from any agent, and becoming the exclusive meaning of the root (dhātu) now coincides with the « result ». Hence « karma » as the substrate of the latter and kriyā (= vyāpara) become synonymous. To which synonymy the koṣa bears witness<sup>29</sup>.

To see better the structure of distinctions underlying this revision of theory and its purpose, let us return to the older discussions of karma, and rephrase them in terms that will lead more clearly to Bharṭṛhari's definition. The issue in situating Bharṭṛhari (always in the view of the Koṣakāra, let it be said once and for all) vis à vis the other schools is that of specifying the relationship severally asserted between the terms kriyā and karma (grossly, « action » and « act », or perhaps « activity » and « action »)<sup>30</sup>.

1) Vyākaraṇa. As we saw, the older grammarians were able to distinguish the terms (indeed their whole notion of syntax depended upon that distinction) insofar as the expressor of kriyā, namely the dhātu or (verbal) root [though it is misleading to denote the root as

28. For it is « error » and not whether the King really desires the poison that is the issue.

29. « vyāpāramātrārūpakriyāyām » (p. 1736).

30. The English « translations », like the originals, are in se ambiguous: the sense intended has more to do with the distinction itself; and in that distinction the term kriyā would have more verbal or processual overtones, the terms karma more nominal or resultative [cf. discussion of vyāpara and phala, supra]. As the English term « action » itself indicates (without any reference to the Sanskrit), a mere term taken in abstracto may properly, given a context, fall on either side of the distinction.

« verbal » at all in Pāṇinian grammar] involved two semantic dimensions<sup>31</sup> which are differently based (for transitive verbs) in the *kartr* (agent of the action) and his desired « object » or *karman*. The *dhātu* provides the nexus or linkage between the « terms » of the utterance, and most directly between the process and the result, which result is manifest as the *karman* of the action (insofar as it is externally determined and not merely a semantic dimension of the verbal idea — the case for transitive verbs).

In this way, the *karman* by association with the resultative dimension of the verbal idea is contrasted with the sequential or motivational dimension of that idea. Not only is the *karman* differentiated from the *kriyā* by being associated with only one aspect (the *phala*) of the latter, it further attains prominence in the analysis of propositions that are from the Pāṇinian point of view noting more than delimitations or realizations of the *termini* whose nexus is the verbal root idea, the *kriyā*. For reasons that are never announced, but seem embedded in the syntactic possibilities of Sanskrit, not only are verbal ideas invariably twofold (semantically) but in any given sentence, one or the other must be given « prominence » (assertive or topical primordiancy). Indeed the transformation of *dhātu* into assertion invariably involves the selection of *vyāpāra* or *phala* as the primary « topic » of semantic reference (the other becoming subordinate just like any of the other « *kāraḥ* » [locative, ablative, etc.])<sup>32</sup>. We call these assertional alternatives active and passive voice. As Cardona has demonstrated<sup>33</sup> beyond any reasonable doubt, neither is inherently primary in Pāṇinian syntax (such that one could be said to be a « transform » of the other); both are indifferently realized from the semantics of the verbal root idea by a process that

31. [Later termed] « *vyāpāra* » and « *phala* ».

32. P 3.4.69. The fact that such sentences as « *sthāli pacati* » « the oven cooks » [where in effect not the agent but the locus (*adhikaraṇa*) normally expressed by the locative, is seemingly expressed as agent] constitute problems proves that such is the case. It is perhaps with a view to avoiding, the problem that Pāṇini adopts the neutral term « *svatantraḥ* » « independent » in defining *kartr* (1.4.54). Much of the grammarians' discussion of syntax concerns such « effortless » subjects, made problematic by the grammarians' own intentional model, with its Vedic overtones; as well as by the Nyāya's insistence that an « effort » (*kr̥ti*) was the chief meaning of the sentence. Cf. CARDONA (1976), p. 219. Paramalaghumañjūsā, p. 103 ff. That there is deemed to be but one topic, one *pradhāna* (and never more) in the sentence, reflects the Mīmāṃsā doctrine of *ekavākyatā*, according to which there is no possibility of construing a sentence by correlating *equivalent* terms and, therefore, among them no syntax: cf. the KAUMUDĪ to ARTHASAṂGRAHA (NSP ed., p. 38): *na hi guṇa-pradhānabhāvam antareṅvayaḥ sambhavat, dvayoḥ pradhānayoḥ guṇayoḥ vā parasparākāṅkṣārahitaṭvenānvayayogyatvābhāvāt*.

33. « Some features of Pāṇinian Derivations », from *History of Linguistic Thought and Contemporary Linguistics*, ed. Herman Parret, Berlin/New York, 1976, *passim* and esp., p. 141; « Pāṇini's *Kāraḥ* », JIP 2 (1976), note 36.

resembles arbitrary selection<sup>34</sup> (again « motivated » by the speaker's *intention* only). And by that selection, emphasis on *vyāpāra* gives topical prominence to the *karṭṛ* (active) while emphasis on the *phala* gives prominence to the *karman* (passive). Topical prominence is recognized at the « surface » also by the nominative case, which denotes nothing but the *karṭṛ* or the *karman* that has already been selected as reference/support for the *vyāpāra* or *phala* at the level of verbal derivation<sup>35</sup>. The *karma* then defines one of the two options that at the verbal level (*dhātu*) remain implicit and can become explicit only in the sentence, only at the level of assertion. Without the distinction *kriyā/karman/karṭṛ*, this delicate optionality would be impossible to postulate or explain. Indeed the assertion as such is nothing more than the specification of the actional qualities of the verbal nexus, which inevitably involves the selection of one (*karṭṛ* or *karman*) as primary (announced by the verb directly, through its invariably associated terminations).

The Sanskrit examples have become so ubiquitous that we repeat them: *odanaṃ Devadattaḥ pacati* (Devadatta cooks rice: active, or « *karṭari* ») and *odano Devadattena pacyate* (The rice is cooked by Devadatta: passive or « *karmaṇi* »). On one level of analysis (call it surface, or the phonological) the sentences are evidently different, but on another (the « *kāraka* » or semantic level in the Pāṇinian grammar), it is either very difficult to determine the sentences' difference, or they are simply not different (= mean the same thing). That basic unity is stated in the Pāṇinian grammar in terms of the *kāraka* theory of syntactic semantics. According to the Pāṇinīyas, the words « rice » and « Devadatta » in both sentences express the *same* syntactic function, namely « direct object » (*karman*) and « agent » (*karṭṛ*)<sup>36</sup>. The reason they are differently realized or expressed in the two sentences has to do with the basic option before us in forming any verb, discussed above. Since the *kriyā* expressed by the root (*dhātu*) is in any case primary, the option, which is general in all verbs, is also the most basic option of the syntax. Depending on the choice made, the rest of the sentence is determined automatically, as for example:

34. Though it may have many contextual conditions, and have social and stylistic connotations. Cf. GONDA, *Remarks on the Sanskrit Passive*, Leiden, 1951, pp. 3-4. The « volitional » is again superadded to the « intentional ».

35. P 2.3.46 by the « *anabhihite* » convention (2.3.1), see below, p. 99. On « *bhāve* », the third possible sense expressed by the verbal suffix according to P 3.4.69, see *infra* p. 100.

36. KAIYATA ad 3.2.124: *ihāyaṃ lakāro laḥ karmaṇi ca bhāve ca ity anena karṭṛ-karmaṇor vidhīyamānaḥ guṇabhūte kriyāṃ prati karṭṛkarmaṇi pratipādayati*. We ignore the nicety that the nominative merely agrees with the verbal suffix, the proper expressor of the *kāraka*. *Supra*, note 35. AKLUJKAR adds: « It should be noted that "agency" is not confined here to animate conscious entities, that is to living beings ». Cf. BHARTṚHARI, 3, 7, p. 103 ff.

ACTIVE	pac + kartṛ	odana + karman	Devadatta +
	pac-ati	odanam (acc.)	[agreement: kartṛ] Devadatta + ḥ (nom.)
PASSIVE	pac + karman	odana + [agreement: karman]	Devadatta + kartṛ
	pac-yate	odana + ḥ (nom)	Devadatt[e]na (inst.)

The single convention needed to form correct strings is that of « aṇābhīhite » whereby a term gets its case only if its inherent kāraka has not already been expressed by the verbal termination (-ati or -yate, for example). The first case [= nominative] thus expresses *no kāraka per se*.

Kārakas that cannot be expressed by the verbal termination, for example, adhikaraṇa (« location ») are indifferently realized in either model; if we were to add the notion « sthāli » « oven » to the sentence above, it would be formed in both sentences sthāli+adhikaraṇa sthāli+ām sthāly+ām<sup>37</sup>.

Let us now contrast this syntactic karman with the terms found in the other śāstras. 2) The Vaiśeṣika notion is enchantingly simple. Instead of distinguishing kriyā and karman, the physicists identify the terms, such as in effect karman becomes a word for « motion » purely and simply; neither kriyā nor karman can legitimately be used to express the « motions » of the soul, sp. « yatna », which is located in the category *guṇa*. The entire grammatical theory, according to the vaiśeṣikas is founded on category (padārtha) mistakes. It should be noted, however, that both the older grammarians and the physicists agree in distinguishing karma from the semantic area in which « effort » or (pra)yatna is located: the former by distinguishing karma and kartṛ (or phala and vyāpāra), and the latter by considering « efforts » an affection of the soul (ātman)<sup>38</sup>. Karman is *not* to be found associated with agents or willing.

3) The commonplace that the root (dhātu) expresses an action or kriyā is in the Mīmāṃsā reinterpreted to signify that the root kṛ- (from which is formed the noun kriyā, as well as all the others that figure prominently in our discussion), is the « basic » root idea, and is as such implicit in all roots. This notion is doubtless traceable to the mīmāṃsakas' curious « explicitation » of such verbs as « ...yajeta » as « yāgaṃ kuryāt ». According to Mīmāṃsā the *root* (in this case yaj- is itself the *direct object* or « karman » (in both grammatical and ritual terms!) of the notion of universal effectivity (bhāvanā) expressed by the verbal

37. Shortcuts adopted in the derivation. Cf. supra, note 32.

38. The later Nyāya evidently agrees, considering « effort » (kṛti) [as the chief meaning of the sentence] to be a property of the (individual) ātman, the subject of the sentence: ... kṛtīmān Devadattaḥ. See CARDONA (1974b, pp. 245-54; 1976, p. 230).

ending [here optative or injunctive] which is primary and has the meaning « *kriyā* », and is « translated » by the « root » *kr-*. The *Mīmāṃsā* notions is thus not far in principle from that of the *Vaiśeṣika*, for in both the « *dhātu* » (per se) is *karman*.

4) In *Nyāya*, the « *vyāpāra* » or verbal process is related to the underlying agent (*karṭṛ*) or efficient cause of the action, through the « *yatna* » of the latter. The later *naiyāyikas* as we have seen assert that the universal root *kr-* is implicit in the verbal ending but in accordance with their view of *karṭṛ-prādhānya* is itself dependent on the external « agent », expressing nothing but the « effort » of that agent. The *naiyāyikas* thus raise « effort » to the status of verbal universal, but remain true to the older *Vaiśeṣika* in considering « *yatna* » merely an adjunct (of individual substances, such as the ubiquitous « *Devadatta* »). But if this interpretation is accepted, it will be equivalent to asserting that the *verb* *kr-* is intransitive, just as « *prayatate* » its putative semantic equivalent, is intransitive: « he strives »<sup>39</sup>.

The issue as to what the *dhātu* itself *means* does not at first appear to affect one way or the other the actual derivations of « active » and « passive » sentences which proceed through the *kriyā-kāraka* model and utilize centrally the notion « *karman* ». That issue is raised when this model is addressed from the perspective of the intransitive verb, that is, one that requires no (explicit) direct object or *karman*. A verb like « sit » is in both English and Sanskrit intransitive; we cannot say \*He sits a seat, or \*He sits a posture: « He sits » is a complete utterance: *Devadatta āste*. Now the question is posed: « how is the “ delicate optionality ” implicit in the verbal “ root ” to be conceived for such sentences? ». The *prima facie* answer, that such verbs are inherently « active » is rejected as inconsistent with the intentionality of our verbal semantics. Instead the *Pāṇinian* grammar adopts an epicycle, the notion « *bhāva* »<sup>40</sup>.

39. VBS 5cd (Kāśī 188, p. 62) *kr̥ṇō 'karmakatāpatter na hi yatno'rtha isyate*. On these various modes of construing the sentence, see MATILAL, *Indian Theorists on the Nature of the Sentence*, in « Foundations of Linguistics », 2 (1966), and CARDONA, *Paraphrase and Sentence Analysis*, JIP 3 (1975), *passim*, and « *Kārikas* », pp. 251-54.

40. *laḥ karmaṇi ca bhāve cākarmakebhyah*: P 3.4.69. « *Bhāva* » is a common meaning of abstract or « infinitival » (WHITNEY, § 1145, 1148 *bgf.*) nouns, as P 3.3.18 « *bhāve* », enjoining the suffix (gh)a(ñ): « *pāka* », « cooking ». As our later authors will show, the meaning is not different from the « *vyāpāra* » of the root when properly understood. Cf. the historical relationship between the *yā-* passive and the *ya-* present in Sanskrit, the latter used primarily for « intransitive » notions: GONDA, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-4. « *Bhāva* » is found in the *Nirukta* (1.1) in the sense of « *verbality* » in general, as opposed to the « *sattva* » of nouns. R. ROCHER recognizes the problem of the passive impersonal very clearly in her article *Bhāva « état » et Kriyā « action » chez Pāṇini* (Recherches Linguistiques en Belgique, 1966, pp. 115 ff.), but because she focusses on the semantic contrast with *kriyā* rather than on the functional contrast with *karman* the simple solution presented here escapes her.

In the sentence given above, there is no real problem:

Devadatta + [agreement: kartṛ] ās + [kartṛ]  
Devadatta + ḥ (nom.) ās + te

All accept that Devadatta is the agent of the act « sitting ». But as to the « passive », a basic condition is missing, namely, an external object (karman) which can be realized (at the surface level) by the nominative case:

Devadatta + kartṛ ās + [\*karman] Ø + [agreement: karman]

Such sentences are in most languages not formable, for the simple reason that most languages resist subjectless utterances. But in Sanskrit it came to be possible to form for every active sentence, transitive or intransitive, a corresponding « passive » or « passive-like » sentence.

Devadatt[e]na ās-yate (Ø) \*« by Devadatta [it] is seated ».

In the Pāṇinian kāraka formulation, however, this sentence, though perfectly well formed could not be explained as « passive », for (we must realize) the term needed: karman, was ex hypothesi not available to the analysis. Karman is not a possible « meaning » of the termination of an intransitive verb. The anabhihite convention would be violated if so explained: as in the above example: if there were admitted a termination for ās- in the sense « karman » then there ought equally to be a term agreeing with the karman, and subject to the nominative case ending. To avoid this difficulty the term « bhāva » was appropriated from the older Nirukta as a « meaning » for the verbal termination of such subjectless sentences:

Devadatta + kartṛ ās + bhāva.

The « bhāva » is realized exactly as would be a corresponding passive (karman)<sup>41</sup>:

Devatt[e]na (inst.) ās + yate

but the problem occasioned by calling the ending « karman » is avoided. The older grammarians are content by this device to have preserved the « delicate optionality » of the root (kriyā) even where karman is not « available ». The newer school (Bhartṛhari, et. al.) raise this notion of « bhāva » from the status of an « epicycle » to that of the center of the verbal universe!

In the neo-grammarians' scheme, to say that the root expresses « vyāpāra » only, excluding the sense « effort » is to make « bhāva/bhāvanā » the only possible « meaning » of the root. The root has become its own āśraya (« basis ») in the sense that no external karman (or

41. By 3.1.67, « sārva dhātuke yak », cf. CARDONA, « Kārakas », pp. 241-43.

karṭṛ) may be postulated to subtend its « two » meanings. It is equally empty to speculate which of the two meanings — vyāpāra or phala — is more or less primary (or which is the basis of the other — a concern that seems to have animated some the the « older » school): vyāpāra, so circumscribed, *is* phala, nothing but its own tendency to eventuate in such and such: bhāva. By this argument, not only has « vyāpāra » been shifted away from the external agent and finds its basis along with the « phala » as its « karman », that very karman now only incidentally refers to the external object. It is nothing *but* the « root » grasped as primary, as « bhāva », and it is to *it* that the termination refers. In effect karman becomes a synonym of all these terms: vyāpāro bhāvanā saivot-pādanā saiva ca kriyā<sup>42</sup>. In syntactic terms it amounts to saying that the « passive » impersonal has now become the normative mode of expression.

---

42. TARKAVĀCASPATI, p. 1736.

The attribution of this line to BHARTRHARI in the lexicon raises a number of thorny historical issues. The argument of the paper, based on a set of distinctions offered by traditionalists, depends on the intellectual relations inherent in or attributed to those distinctions. That they do not always fit with « history » is itself interesting, and perhaps more significant than the alternative.

In view of the KOṢAKĀRA, BHARTRHARI or his Vākyapadiya is deemed the source of the view of kriyā/karman to which the bulk of this paper is devoted. This is a true attribution to the extent that the *tradition* of grammatical speculation founded by HARI, but continued ably by much later writers, such as BHATTOJDIKṢITA, KAUNḌABHAṬṬA and NĀGEŚA, is taken as the source of reference. The tradition is taught today as a distinct subject in the Sanskrit colleges (often termed « siddhāntavibhāga » of the grammar curriculum), and roughly approximates to the philosophico-semantic branch of grammar, the aim of which was the establishment of grammar as a soteriological vehicle alongside such canonical mārgas as Vedānta, Sāṃkhya, Bauddha, etc. (cf. *Sarvadarśanasamgraha*).

But the writers grouped together in this tradition are not always in agreement amongst themselves, and though they certainly develop and expand the themes of HARI, they often do so in quite different perspectives. In fact, the historical problem is neatly summed up in tracing the filiation of this very source.

Unless I am very much mistaken, the line is not BHARTRHARI's at all, but occurs in the kārīkā portions of the Vaiyākaraṇabhūṣaṇasāra (§ 5, p. 62, KSS 188, apparently so CARDONA, « Paraphrase... », note 18) and is, therefore, likely the work of BHATTOJDIKṢITA [there is some dispute in tradition as to whether the kārīkāś as well as the commentary were written by KAUNḌABHAṬṬA, but the opinion of modern pundits (cf. pp. 9-10, *ibid.*) generally distinguishes the two. The possibility of identity is suggested only by the pronoun confusion in the final line of the initial colophon « kurve 'ham... » and the initial line of commentary « atra asmābhir iti śeṣaḥ »]. Now that is not to say that there is no ground for attributing this point of view to HARI. But in point of fact, HARI does not appear to be familiar with the distinction phala/vyāpāra (in such terms: « phala » is used in the context of « upagraha » [i.e. senses of the middle voice], clearly derivative of 1.3.72 « kriyāphale » [svaritañīta...]); his stress in enquiring into the meaning of kriyā (not dhātu, N.B.: Vākyapadiya III: kriyāsamuddeśa) is on the distinction first offered in the *Nirukta* between the sādhyā and the siddhā (*ibid.*, § 1) which grosso modo characterizes the difference between verbs and nouns. Although sādhyā bears relationship to the vyāpāra and the siddhā (evidently) to the phala, HARI's interest is in expressing the irreducibly « verbal » meaning associated with the sādhyā aspect, which he does

ultimately through the notion of sequence or *krama*. An act expressed as sequence is expressed verbally; an act expressed otherwise, is a noun §§ 3, 4 ff.). Verbality is the «unity» that nowhere «exists» but is imposed on the sequence, such that «he cooks» is a proper utterance whether the cook is laying the fire, lighting it, preparing the food, or just sitting waiting for it to boil.

This certainly resembles the view that *vyāpāra* only is the meaning of the root, but in fact is a translation into objective reference of that statement: the *sādhya* is the «meaning» of the (verbal) activity.

Further to complicate matters, TARKAVĀCASPATI, in attributing this line to BHARTḤARI, not only appears to confuse HARI and BHARTḤI, he also misapprehends the meaning of the line, at least according to KAUNḌABHAṬṬA. That is to say, if KAUNḌA can be trusted, BHARTḤI does *not* accept the view that *vyāpāra* only is the meaning of the root (but is rather merely asserting the inadequacy of the *naiyāyika* view that *yatna* *only* is the meaning of the root (kr-)). The consequence for our treatment of the *kārikā* is of course that BHARTḤI must be considered an «older» grammarian, accepting *vyāpāra* and *phala* as separate meanings of the root, in contradiction both to BHARTḤARI (putatively) and NĀGEŚA. But it is equally possible (at least if one accepts the different authorship of *kārikā* and *sāra*) that KAUNḌA has confounded BHARTḤI's plain intent, for the first half of the verse does not appear to say the *kriyā* is *also* *vyāpāra* etc. (which would logically have been adequate to deny the NĀYĀYIKA's exclusive reliance on «*yatna*»): *na yatna iti na yatnamātra iti* (KAUNḌA).

NĀGEŚA at any rate associates BHARTḤI with the view that *phala* and *vyāpāra* are separable and separate meanings of the root, which view he takes as *pūrvapakṣa* in establishing his *siddhānta* that the root has one meaning only, which we may indifferently term *phala* or *vyāpāra* depending on the circumstances (*phalāvaccchinne vyāpāre vyāpārāvaccchinne phale*). (PARAMALAGHUMANJŪŚĀ, pp. 89-90 [*pare tu* is taken as referring to himself: *svamatam āha pare tv ityādi*: Comm. of KĀLIKAPRASĀD SŪKLA, *ibid.*]).

By this he means that «*phala*» and «*vyāpāra*» are related to one another as for example an individual («cow») and its species («bovinity»: *go-tvam*) are related; that is without any construction of the relationship in sentential or predicative terms (which would appear possible and necessary if *phala* and *vyāpāra* were considered two different «meanings» of the root (*phalaviśiṣṭavyāpāra*)). And this view is not simply an evasion. We take it as asserting unequivocally the basic identity of *phala* and *vyāpāra* (call it by either name, but *vyāpāra* in the sense *bhāva* fits best), which achieve distinction only when construed with the *karma* or *karṭṛ* of the verbal suffix, that is with the *karma* or *karṭṛ* given topical prominence in the sentence/assertion [*karṭṛkarmārthakatattatpratyayasamabhihivyāhāraś ca tattadbodhe niyāmaka iti* (p. 90)]. This issue is to be distinguished from the one CARDONA raises («*Kārikas*», notes 35, 45), which seems to involve an incompatible conclusion. The «older» school of grammarians (BHARTḤI, KAUNḌABHAṬṬA) may indeed have regarded active and passive sentences as «synonymous» (CARDONA): but the question they ask (if the post-NĀGEŚA Commentators can be trusted: cf. *Jyotsnā* ad PLM, Baroda, 1961, p. 140) namely which of the two verbal meanings (*phala*, *vyāpāra*) is primary and which is subordinate, demonstrates for our purposes (whatever their answer) that the meanings were considered *two*, and indeed were to be construed somehow. That the *vyāpāra* was understood also as «primary» in the passive sentence evidently reflects the influence of YĀSKA's dictum: *bhāvapradhānam ākhyātam*, etc., and does not affect the point we are making here, that the «older» school was concerned with the two kinds of sentences as options, reflecting a choice among the external relations of the verbal termini.

NĀGEŚA, on the other hand, by refusing to consider the *phala* and *vyāpāra* as fundamentally different, both avoids the problem of *construing* their relationship, and reduces the difference between active and passive sentences to one that concerns *only* externals: is purely formal in other words. Compare his «*siddhānta*» and definition of transitivity (PLM, p. 100): *vastutas tu śabdaśāstriyakarmasamjñākārthānvayārthakatvaṃ sakarmakatvaṃ*.

NĀGEŚA in any case is at some pains to establish (*vis-à-vis* the verb « jānāti » that the « meaning » of this root is not exclusively grounded on changes in its « object » (cf. *bhinatti*), but is in fact grounded on both its « object » and its « agent » (to avoid the imputation of « karmavat... » by 3.1.87). In such roots, the « meaning » is grounded equally in both: *yatra kartṛkarmasādhāraṇarūpaṃ phalaṃ śabdena pratipādyate... »* (PLM, p. 102).

K. P. ŚUKLA, in his Introduction to the PLM, emphasizes also the duality of KAUNḌA's verbal śakti: *atra prācīnavaiyākaraṇāḥ phalavyāpārayor dhātuḥ (VBS 2) iti dvivacanena phalanirūpitā vyāpāranirūpitā ca dhātoḥ prthak śaktiḥ* (p. 34), in contrast with NĀGEŚA's attempt to overcome the duality by the notion of mutual qualification (as cited above). ŚUKLA moreover wants to move beyond a relative identity to a total identity (*vastutas tu viśiṣṭe śaktir nāsti... i.e. « śakti » is in the viśeṣaṇa only in that case*) which he also finds implicit in NĀGEŚA himself: *ubhayāṃśe ekā khaṇḍaśāś śaktir iti na śaktidvayakalpanam na vā bodhajanakatvasambandhadvayakalpanam, pratyuta navyānām api tat kalpaniyan bhaved iti tattvavidaḥ (ibid.)*.

The point of view which we find attributed in the *Koṣa* to BHARTRHARI is thus in effect that of NĀGEŚA. And this we find suitable, inasmuch as NĀGEŚA represents the final flowering of the Indian grammatical tradition (18th century), and deserves our most profound regard in other respects for his powerful and original argumentation. Moreover, if it is indeed to NĀGEŚA that we must look for this key to understanding the grammatical and the philosophical *karman*, the chronology of the problem becomes much easier to follow. Instead of being forced to deal with HARI, who precedes the formulation of certain issues crucial to our understanding of both the grammatical and the philosophical *karman*, being both « pre-ŚAMKARA » and « pre-phala-vyāpāra », we may much more reasonably look to NĀGEŚA, the culmination of our philosophico-grammatical tradition, for the necessary insight.

And so with this in mind, I think we may be almost in a position to substitute NĀGEŚA's name for HARI's (in the *Koṣa*), despite the fact that the words are probably BHARTRHARI's. The necessities of the *argument*, in any case, suggest a closer relation between BHARTRHARI and NĀGEŚA than between either and HARI, with KAUNḌABHARTRHARI perhaps playing the role of a conservative.

A copy of S. D. JOSHI's unpublished Ph. D. dissertation (Harvard, 1960) was recently conveyed to me by Prof. DANIEL INGALLS, to whom I express my deep appreciation. In it, JOSHI covers some of the ground I do in this footnote and elsewhere: although I learned of the dissertation's existence after this paper was essentially complete, it is my good fortune to be able to check some of these points against JOSHI's authority. Although recognizing (p. XXXIV) the « identity » of *kriyā* and *vyāpāra*, JOSHI also calls attention to other contexts in which the two terms' meanings differ. The chief alternative, that « *vyāpāra* » designates the verbal process distributively, whereas « *kriyā* » designates it collectively, is, I think, only a confirmation of the argument of this paper, for HARI especially, who would analyze any « specific » or « component » processual « unit » into an infinitely divisible set of sub-units (p. XXXVI). On another point (p. LVI), JOSHI suggests that the grammarians owe to GAṄGEŚA the notion that the root is a composite of two « meanings »: *phala* and *vyāpāra*. It is in any case the superaddition of the « *phala* » to the older notions of YĀSKA and PATAÑJALI that occasion our discussion. In the perspective he adopts, the conclusion of this paper will seem like a restatement of the status quo ante: *vyāpāra* only is the meaning of the root, except for the fact that the argument here proceeds not by exclusion but by inclusion, by attempting to understand even the « *bhāva* » as a (and in fact *the*) crux of the verb's sentential function. JOSHI's treatment of « *bhāva* » is brief, and quite matter of fact; it is not possible for me to decide how he might respond to the argument put forth here. The thesis is especially useful for the manner in which it clarifies the different śāstras' different constructions of the root meaning (*śābdabodha*); it is unfortunate (for this writer especially) that it has remained so long unpublished.

The ubiquity of « passive » syntax in later Sanskrit has often been commented on<sup>43</sup>. From the point of view of the semantic analysis of the root (dhātu), it is not so much the passive (karmaṇi) as the « bhāve »

43. GONDA, *op. cit.*

Various writers on Indo-European have independently concluded to a concept of the original IE « passive » that resembles the neo-Pāṇinīyas' in sublating the distinction between the passive and the « impersonal »: « Passivische Idee ist also: die Auffassung oder Vorstellung eines Geschehens der Wirklichkeit als Handlung, die an einem Seienden vollzogen wird und deren Urheber vorstellbar sein muss » [ALICE BERGER, cited GONDA, p. 76, ft. 103]; MEILLET, followed to some extent by GONDA, traces the « passive » rather to the true impersonal, or *agentless* (not *objectless*) verb. GONDA prefers the term « eventive »: « arbor cadit » as opposed to « agricola caedit arborem » or « arbor caeditur ab agricola » (GONDA, pp. 75-6). But of course, these are precisely the intransitives whose « passive » defines the trenchant or « true » passive also.

The generalization of the passive construction to intransitive verbs is in part a feature of all Indo-European, but is nowhere carried out with such rigor and uniformity as in Sanskrit. Still it is informative to examine other older IE languages, in the light of the argument that it is precisely the pervasiveness of the « impersonalization » of Sanskrit that marks it also as « philosophically » distinctive. Aside from the usual « subjectless » impersonals, of which all the languages have a small and usually overlapping inventory: ἔνεστι (it is possible), licet (it is permitted) (often understood as having sentences for subjects, GOODWIN, § 898), the ubiquitous « meteorological » verbs: advesperascit, οἶσι, etc., etc. All these types are easily illustrated from the modern languages as well: it rains, il pleut, es regnet, showing the same « dummy » pronoun (cf. ARISTOPHANES', *mot: ἀλλὰ τις ὄσει*; CLOUDS, 368). aside from these, the classical languages show great variation in extending the « normal » passive construction to other areas. Greek seems to be the least inventive, indeed this is not surprising, for among all older IE, the distinction of usage between active, *middle*, and passive is most clearly preserved here. But in two areas Greek shows traces of our construction: with verbs implying a cognate accusative, a « subjectless » passive is frequently made: ἐῤηπαιση αὐτοῖς παρεῤεῤῶδατο (T. 1.46: G § 1240), which is of course nothing more than the suppression of the « cognate » (now) nominative: a preparation was prepared. The other frequent construction is that involving a participle, often the future passive. As GOODWIN remarks « Even an intransitive verb may thus have a passive voice » (*ibid.*): τὰ ἡμαρτηρῶνχ; the errors which have been committed.

In Latin, this « participial » usage appears with apparently wider extent, affecting in principle all intransitives: diu pugnatum est (CAESAR). But against this, is the widespread use of « passive » participles from intransitive verbs in *active* meaning: pransus, having dined, etc. (HB 290). Provoking this latter usage may well be the similar case of deponents: secutus sum, not \*I am followed, but « I have followed ». Compare the Sanskrit usage of certain past participles in the active: ahaṃ grāmaṃ gataḥ (as well as grāmo mayā gamyate/gataḥ). That these usages concentrate in the participle (past and future) in fact robs them of the kind of significance we are seeking, for it is everywhere arguable whether in fact the « passive » participles are properly so considered. Their « passivity », as implied by Sanskrit and Latin at least, may be a secondary specialization paralleling the developing morphological passive of both languages (Latin, by capturing the old middle inflexions; Sanskrit, by specialization of the -ya- suffix in present stems).

It is in Old Irish, often more conservative than its better known classical relatives, that a case truly parallel with the Sanskrit is observed, though perhaps not so widely distributed over the lexicon. « Tiagair o Chunn co Conchobar » (QUIN, p. 51) is a fairly typical case, the force of which is somewhat obscured by the usual contextually justified translation: (messengers) are sent from Conn to

or passive intransitive construction that is typical, wherein is emphasized the *phala* or result of the action even in those cases when the *phala* has no external support (or, « karman »). The *deed* we might say, becomes its own doing, or the deed itself is deemed the *pradhāna* or head of the sentence, quite apart from any « external » support or basis (given topical prominence in the usual « active » or « passive » constructions). If the notion « vyāpāra » is understood not to require the chief connotation « effort » (*yatna*) and thus be linked inescapably with the *karṭṛ*, its *basis* can be only the *karman* itself, not the « external » *karman* but that « within » the verb, asserting the primary verbality of the root itself: *bhāva*. The *deed* is primary, and not what is done<sup>44</sup>.

Vis à vis the Mīmāṃsā view, the revision attributed to Hari consists chiefly in a refusal to treat a meaning of the verbal root, the *karman*, as secondary. But in conceiving of *karman* as primary, it cannot itself be motivated by another *bhāvanā* — an « efficiency » that barely conceals the circularity of interpreting the universality of the verb « *kr-* » in the ending while taking it also as its own « direct object », the *karman* in every root. What indeed do we make of the root *kr-* itself? How do we interpret the verb form *kar-o-ti*? On the analogy of *yajeta*, it would be « *karma kuryāt* »: and this latter form would itself be analyzable into « *karma kuryāt* », an infinite regress. The new grammarians postulate the universality of « *kr-* » as well, but abandon the Mīmāṃsā's notion that the « root » is secondary to the termination (and in that obvious sense is its « *karman* »). The equation of *vyāpāra*, one of the

---

Conchobar/Conn sends (messengers) to Conchobar. That *messengers* is not implied at all is clear from the *number* of the finite verb: always singular, as in the Sanskrit: *āsyate tair atra* « They sit here ». We have a genuine « *bhāva* » construction, which the Sanskrit student would have no hesitation in translating: it was gone from Conn to Conchobar (scil. by messengers). We have here, as was said, a finite verb, not a participle, used in the arbitrary singular of the impersonal, but passive (clearly passive, for OI shows passives only in the third persons) in form. The same construction is often seen with the participle, just as in Sanskrit: Doeth o Ailill agus o Meidb do chungid in chon (Scela Mucce..., p. 1). It was come from Ailill and Meidb for asking about the dog (scil. by messengers). Not only verbs of motion are subject to this construction: other intransitives, as eighthir « it was shouted » (a cry goes up) show the same treatment, which is quite general in Old (Middle) Irish. Did the Irish have a « *karma* » theory? It wouldn't be the first parallel between the two cultures that had been observed. Cf. DILLON and CHADWICK, *The Celtic Realms*, pp. 26-33.

44. But of course « *karma* » means *deed*. Still the argument concludes by taking it as a *nomen actionis*, a quasi *ghaṇ-anta*, in the sense « *bhāve* », supra note 40. Prof. NILS SIMONSSON calls my attention to the parallel conclusion of the medieval Pāli grammar *Saddanīti*: *Yasmim payoge yaṃ kammuno kiriyāpadena samānagatikam katvā vinā kammena niddisīyati kiriyāya padam... tam tattha bhāvattadīpakam... (.)*. *Evam sante pi bhāvo nāma kevalo bhavana-lavana-pacanaḍiko dhātuattho yeva*. « That construction illustrates the sense "bhāva"... wherein is expressed the word for the action without the object, having made an identity of the action-word (verb) and the object (*kamma*). Such being the case, "bhāva" is the mere sense of the root itself, "be, wash, cook", and the like » (*Saddanīti* I, pp. 7-8; ed. Helmer Smith, Lund, 1928).

two « aspects » of root meaning, with the « bhāva(nā) », in effect restates the Vaiśeṣika notion that to be « karman » indeed expresses the *primary* character of the root's meaning (kriyā) rather than its dependent quality. It is as though the Mīmāṃsā formula were turned inside out, the root remaining « karma » but that « karma » no longer requiring an *external* « bhāvanā » or effectivity to be object to.

Vis à vis the Vaiśeṣika view it is difficult to see that Hari has radically modified it except of course to use it in a new syntactic analysis. But on the Vaiśeṣika view, though karman was an (external) motion, it was in no way any more « primary » than the yatna which was an effect of the ātman: both kriyā and guṇa are thought of as correlative qualities of substance. Similarly, the Vaiśeṣika made little or no mention of « result » (phala) and this was to be a keystone of the karma syntax.

Hari's revision has now been stated in terms of its proximate motivations; and in the context of the technical distinctions, the possible interpretations of the term « karman »; we have now to turn to the question of the wider motivations of these changes, and their significance in understanding the cultural and cosmic developments of the term « karman ». It is precisely our contention that the « cultural » karman with its cosmic and soteriological overtones, is very little but the *meaning* implicit in every sentence (its universal syntactic import) when read according to the syntactic theory outlined above.

(C) What conclusions do we draw from this exercise in syntactical definition? We have used the lexicon and syntax as our guides up to this point, on the ground that they best discriminate those variations in meaning that are the cultural content and specificity of the notion « karman ». We have attempted further to rationalize the variety of meanings, to explore their inner relationships, to see in what sense they imply a logical progression (not *NB* a historical progression), a progression which in our view is both illustrative of grammatical distinction and eventuates in a grammatically adequate view of « karman ». But we have further supposed that the grammatical « karman » is a key to understanding the wider and more culturally evident « karmāṇi ». In this third part of the paper we have to pursue that question, however speculative it may appear.

But the Indian tradition *is* speculative, and we meet it chiefly in a speculative form; it is much more difficult to clarify the genuinely « indigenous » at this level<sup>45</sup>. Fortunately, the tradition does provide us with one modern account of the « theory » of karman, kept as pure as is reasonable to expect under the circumstances, by its expression in chaste Sanskrit, and by its anti-Western polemical style. In « The Karma Theory » of N. N. Bhide<sup>46</sup> we have a lively survival of traditional

---

45. This was indeed the problem with which we started, and the reason that we began with a study of the vocabulary.

46. University of Mysore, 1950. My thanks to ASHOK AKLUJKAR for bringing this work to my attention.

lore on the subject of karma, not so much unaffected by Western views (for the author is not deaf and dumb) as successfully integrating Western views into a traditionally Indian mode of exposition: the dialectic of pūrvapakṣa and siddhānta. Needless to say the Indian view (so labelled) is siddhānta. Though the bulk of the work is eristic in tone and devoted to an exposition of the errors of Western scholarship, we find the portions devoted to the traditional « karma theory » very useful for our purposes.

But we cannot forbear to quote Bhiḍe as he explains why karma studies are in such an unrelieved state of confusion<sup>47</sup>. This condition of moha has four causes (kāraṇāni). The first three are perhaps ineluctable, the fourth we can only hope by this paper not to have compounded: 1) The tradition, says Bhiḍe, provides us with no single thorough exposition of the karma doctrine in one work<sup>48</sup>; 2) in classical times at least, everyone, even the Buddhists and Jains, accepted the karma doctrine « with their eyes shut »<sup>49</sup> and with such universal acceptance, 3) we find today no means of verifying the truth or falsity of the doctrine itself<sup>50</sup>. The most important cause of confusion, says Bhiḍe, is the fourth, which merits some vivid, though still chaste, expression, viz., the wild and irresponsible manner in which Western scholars have attacked the question. Standards of Western scholarship are deficient on a number of points: though scholars have expended much effort, they are unable to understand the essence of oriental culture<sup>51</sup>; they concentrate on the words (viz., texts) only<sup>52</sup>; they join words (viz., arguments) together in any way at all<sup>53</sup>; they turn the unmentioned into the chief reason<sup>54</sup>; they construct arguments at will<sup>55</sup>; and finally they are more interested in establishing their own favorite novelties than the true siddhānta<sup>56</sup>.

This last sally comes very close to the quick, in expressing the contempt with which a traditionalist views the ever-changing quicksand of Western « truth », which seems always to owe as much to the agenda of the inquirer as to the nature of inquiry. Hoping to atone for past sins accumulated, we proceed to Bhiḍe's exposition of the karma doctrine.

47. Citing *Gītā*, 4.16: kim karma kim akarmeti kavayo'py atra mohitāḥ; supra note 10. « What is action? what is inaction? even inspired sages are confused about that! ».

48. viṣayasyāśya kutrāpy ekatra granthe sākalyena vivecanam naiva samlakṣyate: p. 2.

49. prāyena sarvair eva bauddhajainādibhir avedikair api karmatattvam nimīlitalocanair ivāṅgikṛtam apratiravam; *ibid.*

50. tasya [karmatattvasvarūpasya] satyatvam mṛṣātvaṃ vā niścetum pratyakṣikam pramāṇam adya nopalabhyam; *ibid.*

51. prāyasaṅskṛtes saram avagantum akṣamāḥ, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

52. kevalam śabdāmātre bhiniviṣṭāḥ; *ibid.*

53. yathākathamcana śabdān yojayantaḥ; *ibid.*

54. anullekham eva pramukham pramāṇam prakalpya; *ibid.*

55. yathākāmaṃ tarkam vidhāya; *ibid.*

56. svepsitatamaṃ siddhāntam sthāpayantaḥ; *ibid.*

Bhīḍe's analysis is shot through with grammatical distinctions and terminology. Like the Koṣakāra, he can begin the discussion of « karma » only with the root from which it is formed: (ḍu)kr(ṇ) [karaṇe]. His immediately subsequent definition of karma (though we must remember his purpose is to clarify the widest cultural implications of this unique concept) is strikingly like that above referred to as Bhartṛhari's: « ... kriyāvācītvam. Kriyā ca pariṇāmarūpo vyāpāraḥ » [the word karma is expressive of an action (kriyā). An « action » is a process (vyāpāra) which has the form of a transformation (pariṇāma)<sup>57</sup>. Further, action implies an agent, but does not require one; hence *karma* is the name of an action viewed generally: of a process merely (without reference to its agent) having the form of a transformation<sup>58</sup>. Having finessed the agent, and linked the terms karma, kriyā and vyāpāra, Bhīḍe leaves the purely grammatical arena by following the implications of the term « pariṇāma » (transformation), introduced as a synonym of vyāpāra: akhīlasya jagataḥ pratikṣaṇaṃ pariṇāmitvāt karmamayatvam<sup>59</sup>: « the entire world (jagat: lit. "the constantly moving") being every instant subject to transformation (= change) consists of karma ». One effortless (pun!) leap takes us from the *root* to the universe (at least the universe of saṃsāra). From this point the exposition assumes a more traditional cast, a mix of Advaita and Sāṃkhya. Definitions of « world » (jagat) help in discriminating the one reality not subject to change: brahman, whose first « act » (karman), nevertheless, eventuates in and establishes the conditions for the world (jagat = saṃsāra)<sup>60</sup>.

There follows a derivation of the world via māyā<sup>61</sup> and a straightforward genesis of the five indriyas (sense faculties) and bhūtas (elements) in the Sāṃkhya manner — which Bhīḍe says has been accepted by the Vedāntins and others. The account becomes interesting again as we discover *this* world (bhūr nāma:), which in addition to being a result of vipariṇāma: one of the seven known worlds, is characterized as (a) perceptible, accessible to senses (indriyagocaram) and (b) as comprehensive of entities that move and entities that do not move (carācarasāhitam)<sup>62</sup>. The notion of jagat in general becomes particularized as *this* world. But the definition remains the same. Agency is bondage.

The other six worlds (bhūvar, svar, mahas, jana, tapas, satya) are then distinguished in terms of qualities proper to agents: subtlety and grossness (of cognition/effort). Bhīḍe emphasizes that the worlds inter-

57. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

58. *Ibid.*: pariṇāmarūpasya sakartṛkākartṛkasya vā vyāpāramātrasya karmasamjñā.

59. *Ibid.*

60. svāntaraviratagatimayatvāj jagad iti; pūrve nāmarūpe parityajya nāmarūpāntaraprāptiḥ; *ibid.*

61. parimitasvarūpatvam: « whose nature is delimitation » (or, « being delimited »), *ibid.*, p. 39.

62. *Ibid.*

penetrate, are formed of the same matter ([karma] and imply the same agent[s]): they are not one atop another like stories of a palace. Gods are simply more subtle agents<sup>63</sup>. The worlds interpenetrate; karma is pervasive. Other characteristics of the processual notion implied by this analysis are (1) its uninterruptedness, (2) its terminability only by inherent result (phala) (or from the point of view of the agents, the [1] latency and [2] the certitude [bondage] of karman). There is no accident in this comprehensive system, for only in karman does the world achieve definiteness. Accountability and responsibility merge. The random is literally the unthinkable.

Even mokṣa is seen as a phala (the negative phala, terminating phalas) requiring its own karman, great, in fact superhuman, effort (prayāsa)<sup>64</sup>. There is no instant release, just as there is no randomness. Thus Bhīḍe leads us into the ethical domain of karman: falling in the chain of existence is easy, rising is hard (falling means « transformation » from the subtle to the gross, rising the opposite: both are « pari-nāmas ») and to the Indian, equivalent to the categorical imperative: for the only way in sum to *rise* is to help (selflessly) each other (those below you in the chain of existence) (since all are equally *bound*). But we do it not to help *them*, but to acquire merit for ourselves; the ultimate selfishness remains for we cannot escape so easily from ourselves, that is, from the karmāṇi that constitute our « selves ». And equally, those below owe debts (of gratitude?) to those who have helped them rise to their present condition (and the interpenetration of all karma rules out the possibility that we can have risen through selfishness alone), specifically the three debts that are the cornerstone of the elite's daily ethic: to the gods, to the fathers, and to the teachers/seers. The *karma* that is required of us in recognition of their help which, in turn, helps us by accelerating the wave of karma produced, is called, in the case of the Gods, etc., yajña, or yāga, in the case of the pitṛs, sons (expressed as the necessity of piṇḍa) and in the case of the teachers, study and teaching (continuing the tradition). In all cases, it is by a specific karma that the effects of karma are modified to our greater good: kim api viśiṣṭaṃ karma kartavyam<sup>65</sup>.

Finally, seen from the ultimate perspective of its own modification, or its progress through various agents (« bhāve »), karma is said to be threefold: prārabdha (begun), when having been done (= kṛta) it is now working itself out through some agent or other; saṃcita (accumulated), when it is done, but has not yet found its « agent » (is latent); and kriyamāṇa (or saṃcīyamāṇa) when it is now in the course of *being* done (in this body)<sup>66</sup>.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

65. *Ibid.*: « Let some special karma be undertaken ».

66. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

In this synthetic account of karma, many of the leading themes of the various dictionary definitions are marvellously correlated and the ethical and cosmic «senses» are derived in admirably grammatical fashion<sup>67</sup> from basic meanings that are *suâ naturâ* grammatical. Merely by summing up the principles of Bhide's analysis we may assert in what sense the cultural karma is *nothing but* the grammatical karma (as interpreted by the neo-grammarians).

The first, already noticed, is the equation *kriyā = vyāpāra = karma*. The second is the pervasive subordination of the *karṭṛ* (agent) to the karma: Not only is the verbal idea indifferent to (more basic than) agency (indifferent to whether or not there is an agent) but the place of the agent is strictly dependent on a primordial act (*karman-jagad-bhū*) which is the field of the agent's activity and achieves differentiation *through* the *karṭṛ* (almost as *karaṇa!*<sup>68</sup>). Moreover, the ethical model of karma makes clear the sense in which (to the reversal of our personalized views of ethics) the karma *uses* the *karṭṛ*, in a sense, to «purify» itself. Freedom, as in the *Gītā*, involves suppression of the agent, but not the *act!* Thirdly, in dramatic terms, activity (*kriyā*), which is *karman*, and not *karṭṛ*, is given the status of independent or first principle, capable of subsisting (*sattā!*) on its own (in fact *being* nothing but *continuity* [= change, *pariṇāma*], and calling into play agents and other conditions as its modalities of expression (the «world» is the affirmation [= modality] of *karman*).

To conclude, the world achieves the status of a (*mahā*) *vākyam*<sup>69</sup> only when karma is raised to the dignity of an independent principle. But why is the term *karman* needed at all? Why would not *kriyā* suffice? In fact the older sense of *karman*, as adjunct to a *kriyā* (the «direct object») appears to have been sublated into its very principle, by in fact cancelling the older distinction between *karman* and *bhāva*. And indeed if the verbal idea is indifferent to agency (as having «*vyāpāra*» inherent within it) it is equally indifferent to *result*. It is, in *Bhartṛhari's* terms a *krama*, a gradation whose unity is a fiction organized by the *using* mind focussing on «result». The only difference between a transitive and an intransitive construction lies in externals: in the former a substratum outside the verbal act was explicitly called for; in the latter it was not called for, but was present in the very act itself: «to sit». The karma model in its cosmic and ethical senses equally asserts the primacy of activity and result over their external substrates: activity is terminable only by its *inherent* result, which inevitably (save the case *mokṣa*) is another activity; activity and result are ultimately one if the

67. Grammar is «derivation» (*vyākaraṇa*) in the Indian sense.

68. *Karṭṛkaraṇayos tṛtīyā* (1): P2.3.18, «Les désinences du troisième cas valent quand il s'agit de l'agent, de l'instrument» (*RENOU*, vol. 1, p. 115).

69. A «grand assertion» or argument comprehending in coherent fashion all individual assertions (*Mīmāṃsā* term. Not to be confused with *Śaṅkara's* «*mahāvākya*», i.e. «*upaniṣadic citation*»).

notion that agents are primary is given up, for it is only in terms of the agent that activity and result *appear* different (goal, effort, etc.). Everything falls into place once the *karman* of the older grammar is abstracted from its external support (the direct object) and shown to be (from the angle of the verbal root itself) nothing but the *bhāva*, or tendency to *be* definite: the *vyāpāra*, the process.

It is perhaps carrying this argument into the realms of poetics to assert that the notion of karma itself is indeed an inescapable function (and *result*) of the passivization or impersonalization of the Sanskrit sentence. But that is in fact what we have concluded. Both Advaita and Bauddha philosophies overcome « *karman* » by a process of (sentence) analysis akin to the one we have examined.

It is not surprising that of the various philosophical formulations of « agency » and « action », it is the Advaita that most rewards our examination. Bhartrhari is himself an early advaitin, at least so considered by the tradition, which labels his version « *śābdādvaita* » — so to distinguish it from the more authoritative (and later) *Śāṅkarādvaita*. In all the Advaitas the key to unlocking the ontological confusion that compromises our natural experience is proper understanding of agency: *kartṛtva*. The natural man confounds (identifies) agency and Ego, says « I walk », « I make mats », « I am cold, hot... » (or rather, confuses « agency » and « consciousness » — the result *being* Ego). Advaita here uses the older Sāṃkhya analytic dualism to great effect. The point of philosophical re-evaluation of this experience — which also redefines the nature of things — is to disassociate consciousness and agency: the « unconscious » (*prakṛti*) becoming the « agent » of all true propositions, the conscious « subject » being liberated of all predicates. We now assert two instead of one: « *It is cold, hot...* » and « *I am (...)* ». Grammatically speaking, simple assertive propositions involving personal agents are no longer possible, and each one has to be analytically dissolved into a predicate (or content: hot, etc.) and a « subject ». But terms as such cannot *be* propositions; in the place of one, we must apply a « dummy » subject for the real predicate (the English « *it* » - *prakṛti*) and an empty predicate for the real subject (*puruṣa/ātman*, as unqualified « consciousness »). In the Pāṇinian analysis of these new propositions, the former is alone genuinely interesting, as containing all possible real content of a worldly nature. And it is precisely the « agency » of such propositions that has disappeared — agency as something other than and opposed to act, as predicate. We can say, if agency goes, all that remains on which to ground the assertion is « *karmaṇi* » (for those propositions where the act does pertain to an external « object » (« the town is walked to [by... X] ») or « *bhāve* » (for intransitive verbs and existential predications, where no ground is available *ex hypothesi* save the act asserted itself: *It is sat down (by... X)*). We thus see in the proper (true) advaitic assertions the correct realization of the grammatical categories themselves. Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

The « grammatical » problem for advaita is neatly solved by making all sentences with real content « passive » (karmanī/bhāve), in fact « impersonal »; but the question of the « other » sentence remains: is there a grammatical model also for a « contentless » active assertion? Notions of « creative energy » (śakti etc.) in the other systems might seem to fit this need, but in Śāṅkarādvaita at least (probably not in Bhartṛhari's), creative force itself (as in Śāṅkhya) is located on the wrong side of the division, and in fact corresponds to the māyā, nothing more than the « X » in our putative « impersonal » sentences *supra*. Brahman/ātman understood in transcendental terms certainly provides a notion of absolute universality that is inactive and thereby contentless; perhaps all we can say is that « agency » itself becomes equally impersonal when abstracted from all possible predicates. Grammatically, this side of the Advaita provides more problems than solutions: the « absolute » is anirvacanīya.

It is likely the Bauddha śāstra that provides us with the most logically satisfying philosophy — one that is in complete accord with the new « language ». And this is done by simply facing the difficulty just mentioned, and denying the need for any « active » sentence at all — contentless or not: the doctrine of nairātmyam. In effect, for the Bauddha, there is *no agent*. Change simply is; it is inherent in being; it is being, it needs no « explanation ». Our « bhāve » sentences now become the only possible expressions: not « I am white / I sit » but « It is white... / It is seated... ». As Hirianna says « Thus according to Buddhism, when we say for instance “ It thinks ” or “ It is white ”, we mean by the “ it ” nothing more than when we say “ It rains ” »<sup>70</sup>. In other words, the « It » is truly a « saṃghāta », a dummy term — not even needed in the less analytical Sanskrit, where the « passive » (kriyate) had been generalized to all verbs — to verbality itself (āsyate). (The peculiarity of « varṣati » is thus not that it has no « subject », but that the verb retains the external « active » form — an archaic survival no doubt — impeding the expected novelty \*vr̥ṣyate!). And the « it » does not imply, does not correspond to a universal positive « subject » (as in the advaita ātman), of which it signifies the absence in « real » sentences. This, it seems to me, is nearly an exact replica (in « philosophical » or « metaphysical » terms) of the position attributed to the grammarians and to Bhartṛhari. So that Hari appears once again more kin to the Bauddha, than in fact to the standard (Hinduized) Advaita.

It is not, let us emphasize, the contextual senses of the passive<sup>71</sup> that we are concerned with, but rather, the grammatical form itself, and the interpretation given there to by the Indian philosophical grammar.

70. Outlines of Indian Philosophy, p. 140.

71. So thoroughly classified and discussed by GONDA, *op. cit.*, and with whose caveats we entirely agree: as for example that the passive can and must be used in those contexts where it is inconvenient or impolite or impossible to designate the agent, and is thus not a « pure equivalent » of the active.

Let us, nevertheless, attempt to draw the strands of our three sections together by illustrating the ethical implications of « passivization » as a generalization of syntax meaning; put in another way, we will invert the usual order of « explanation » (and this is good advaita methodology) so that instead of employing a theory of syntax to give good interpretations to the many individual sentences that illustrate it, we will attempt to express the general sense in every one of those sentences imparted to it by the form of its expression.

From the beginning, Indian grammar determined the « subjects » of every sentence in the verb form itself. Pāṇini located the *karṭṛ* (agent) and the *karman* (object) in the verbal termination that indeed identified the complete form *as* verb<sup>72</sup>. The suffix thus appears to determine both verbality and subject: *pacyate odanaḥ* (Devadattena), *pacati odanam Devadattaḥ*; and to be ipso facto the *ground* of the sentence syntax. It is equally true that the sentence spells out the implications of the formal act-theory (via the *kāraṅas*) that becomes impliable only when the root is determined as verb (I mean, the noun « Devadatta » implies in itself no *kāraṅa*, no effectuating of the act implied in every sentence, until its verb is specified); and also the surface realization of the sentence (the « cases » automatically follow once the verb is determined in its subject role [*kartari* or *karmani*])<sup>73</sup>.

From this angle, the formula attributed to Hari appears only to generalize the sentence form: to find a *more* universal notion of verbality than the one which determined verbality only in a *choice* (*karṭṛ* or *karman*). It in no way alters the pre-eminence enjoyed by the verb in the sentence syntax, nor its role in determining the sentence's *subject*. But if that subject is not to be determined in a choice, that is, by *reference* to the external agent or object (result) of the activity, it can be found only in the universality of that reference, that is, in the *vyāpāra* or *phala* which underlies the choice and defines the « sense » of rootness. But if we were to ask, is it the *vyāpāra* or the *phala* that determined subject-capacity and pre-eminence of the verb, we would not have achieved any more general stance than the older grammar, we would simply have replaced one choice with another (albeit in the root now and not *in* its ending). The only solution is that the verb itself (the « root » itself) in virtue of its very nature must be capable of standing as its own subject, and in so doing is pre-eminent in the sentence. The ratio *karman* : *phala* :: *karṭṛ* : *vyāpāra* is abrogated: the *vyāpāra*, the « processual meaning » of the verb is boldly identified with the verb in its resultative guise: *karman*. After all the only purpose served by

72. The « root » (*dhātu*) per se as we have repeated ad nauseam underlies both nouns and verbs, which are realized (and differentiated) only by specific suffixes.

73. Cases like « *pācaka* », « cook », where the nominal suffix is said to have the sense « agent of » (cf. English -er) are easily accommodated, for in such cases it is to the subordinate root « *pac* » that the nominal « agent » looks, not to the independent (verbal) root elsewhere in the sentence.

making the distinction vyāpāra/phala was to justify the syntactic distinction karṭṛ/karman! And if we ask, what can this « general sentence » mean? we must reply with the caveat that we have not so much « passivized » the sentence, as we have made it *neutral* to the distinction active/passive. The most convincing exemplification of such sentences is found in the case of the so-called passive intransitives. Here there simply is no subject external to the verb: none is possible, for intransitives have no objects (by definition) that could be made into subjects of a passive construction. So if such sentences are possible, and not only possible, but uniformly realizable for every intransitive, then it cannot be denied that for one class of sentences at least, the verb (in its « bhāva » mode) is the subject in virtue of its processual function, and not simply as agreeing with or underlying an externally exemplified kāraka-term.

It is a short step to the general semantics of such sentences: the verb in its verbality (processual meaning: vyāpāra) is paramount, and that « meaning » is ipso facto *subject* of every utterance (karman in the sense vyāpāra, viz. « bhāva »). Every sentence on the model of the passive intransitive *asserts* « karman » as its subject; in fact « karman » amounts to determining a verb *as* subject: determining the process as capable of being referred to. Karman and vyāpāra are distinct not so much (now) as aspects of the meaning of (verb) roots, as they illustrate two levels of grammatical analysis: vyāpāra captures the sense of the root semantically, « karman » syntactically.

Now if every utterance asserts a karman which is none other than the verb process itself, we have, it seems, correctly derived the *ground* of the philosophical karma theory from its own grammar; for as N. N. Bhide asserts, the karma theory is a theory of actional metaphysics wherein every act (read: fully realized assertion: kriyā) devolves from a primary or pre-existent result (karman) which is nothing but (the nature of) activity itself (the « world » itself is nothing but vyāpāra). The « karma » theory may then be compared to the equivalent theory in English, that would assert the primacy and universality of the « it » that we find implicit as subject in every otherwise subjectless sentence: it is raining: it was seated by Devadatta (Devadattena āsyate); and by virtue of such implicitness, present also in every realized (passive) subject: the food (it) was cooked by Devadatta. It-ness in this sense is the « karma » theory, and as English differs in its capacity to form such sentences (« it was seated by Devadatta » being impossible), so does the English speaker resist theories of universal « passivization ». And equally, as Bhide so cogently remarks, the karma theory is so inherent in Sanskrit that none have deemed it necessary to propound it. What to us is exotic is to the Indian a pre-condition of speech. « Karma » is a turn of phrase... Translation becomes a function of the sophistication of our grammar.

Now the issues we have raised in this paper have been quite carefully expressed in terms other than those used to formulate the old saws about the « passive » character of the Hindu mind, or the influence of passive syntax on the contemplative bias of Hindu philosophy<sup>74</sup>. We are not to be taken as giving voice to a new version of these discredited socio-cultural notions, which seem to assert some behavioral consequence of a grammatical cause. Our object here has been simply to explore the relations between two *theories* (and, therefore, between two inherently universal structures which have no immediate behavioral implications) to see in what way they may illumine each other or shed light on the problems of their formulation. Both indeed are aspects of a large structure of Indian or Hindu intellectuality, and both doubtless have behavioral and practical implications. But I do not wish to be thought dabbling in this area. It is enough if certain very general theories are seen possibly to be related, and indeed that a philosophical theory of action may indeed merely restate in objective terms the same theory of action carefully worked out and assumed in a tradition of highly literate Sanskrit speakers. Which is the cause and which effect is in this sense not interesting: what *is* interesting is the possibility that we speak our philosophies along with our grammars.

*University of Chicago.*

---

74. Compare the observations of H. NAKAMURA which are moderate enough.