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The *paribhāṣās* in the Śrautasūtras: Problems, Opportunities and Premises for an Investigation

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Abstract: What is a *paribhāṣā*? How does it work in Śrautasūtra-texts? This paper tries to examine these questions and to trace a story of the *paribhāṣās* in the Śrautasūtras, giving some indications for future researches. Often translated as “meta-rule”, *paribhāṣā* is a primary derivative from the Sanskrit root “*bhāṣ*”, which means “to talk”, with the prefix “*pari*”, which means “around”, “beyond”. The term indicates a specific discourse “around” or “beyond” something. Therefore, it represents the link with the context, a hybrid element placed between text and context. A *paribhāṣā* is an explanation, an element around discourse that acts as a frame for what is said: it is a rule that is valid in a wider context than that of the object under analysis, that goes “beyond” discourse. It is a unique opportunity to glance at the ritual in itself, at the “ritual string”, in opposition to every “discourse of the ritual”. This rule’s validity is put into effect through the other rules expressed within the text, in other words it is a meta-rule. However, the subject of the relationship between *paribhāṣās* and the texts of the *śruti* is still uncharted territory: the categorizations that have so far been suggested are weak or not useful, and need stronger foundations. The present paper pretends to be a first step in this direction.

Keywords: Śrautasūtras, meta-rule, *paribhāṣā*, Veda, ritual

1 Introduction

The main feature of *sūtra* literature is to strive for concision, which is functional to the purpose of the text itself. This kind of text relies on the use of specific tools that allow to strip the expression down to its bare essentials.¹

¹ Renou 1963: 165–169.

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The term *sūtra* indicates a type of extremely concise aphoristic clause generally lacking any finite verbs, which can only be fully understood when placed in context.²

In *sūtra* literature, tools used to sew together individual strings of text which bear information,³ a number of texts stand out, including ritual ones, known as Kalpasūtra, some of which are for public rituals (Śrautasūtra), others for private ones (Gṛhyasūtra). While the essential purpose of *sūtras* is to tie together the different pieces forming one string, they also bind the text to the reality which surrounds it, in an endless game of necessary cross-references which are often implicit, rather than explicit. In fact, *sūtras* not only bind together a ritual's various moments and actions, but they also allow a connection (both literally and metaphorically) to the context where the ritual must be inserted and performed.

Because these works were transmitted mnemonically, it was fundamental to leave out all unnecessary information, which could be inferred by those in charge of sacred rituals, the priests. Thus, the *sūtra* contained the fundamental rules for sacrificial performance.

First, these works could be particularly concise because the text was placed in a context, which supported its development and reception. This context features two essential dimensions, a cultural and a personal one: it relies on the specific competences of the user as well as on the knowledge typical of the society and culture in which the text is transmitted.

Indeed, without knowing each Kalpasūtra's frame of reference it is almost impossible to reconstruct the ritual string.⁴

Second, the text's concise and effective character is achieved by avoiding repetitions. This stratagem consists in establishing a series of general notions that are valid for the whole text and leaving them implicit throughout the work. Therefore, the rules contained in a text can be made explicit each time, stated once and subsequently recalled through different strategies, implied by the context or inferred from other texts on the same subject matter.

² Vergiani 2002: 188.

³ The term *sūtra* literally means “a tool to sew”, “thread”, “cord” from the Sanskrit root *siv*. Monier-Williams (1876: 157–158): “I should remark here that the word *Sūtra* (derived from the root *Siv*, ‘to sew’) means properly ‘string’ and that this name was applied to any series of rules or aphorisms, either because they were, figuratively, strong together, or because they written on leaves held together by strings”. The ritual sequence we usually define as “ritual string” is a sequence of data and/or objects to reprocess (Chierichetti 2013: 23).

⁴ About this “framing” see Patton (2005: 46–48) and Merleau-Ponty (1962 *passim*).

In *sūtra* literature, these tools are used to different degrees. To a certain extent, the development of the *sūtra* genre is tied to the possibility and ability to use these intellectual tools, which can be referred to as *paribhāṣā*.

Often translated as “meta-rule”, *paribhāṣā* is a primary derivative from the Sanskrit root *bhāṣ*, which means “to talk”, with the prefix *pari*, which means “around”, “beyond”.⁵ The term indicates a specific discourse “around” or “beyond” something: *pari* can be interpreted as a location adverb, used metaphorically to indicate a discourse that encircles and contains the main theme or object.⁶ Therefore, it represents the link with the context, a hybrid element placed between text and context in order to ensure that the purpose of the work is fulfilled. In fact, the Greek prefix “*meta*” is a perfect translation of the Sanskrit *pari*, reflecting its double meaning of “around” and “beyond” and indicating something that comes afterwards and therefore transcends the normal level of discourse. A *paribhāṣā* is to be interpreted as an element beyond discourse, an expression that encircles and contains discourse itself, offering a special tool for interpretation. Therefore, a *paribhāṣā* is an explanation, an element around discourse that acts as a frame for what is said: it is a rule that is valid in a wider context than that of the object under analysis, that goes “beyond” discourse. This rule’s validity is put into effect through the other rules expressed within the text, in other words it is a meta-rule.⁷

What does a meta-rule mean in the Śrautasūtras? A “meta-rule” is indeed a rule that controls other rules, a rule valid regardless of location in the text, useful to read and understand the text in its entirety, made of an immense corpus of operational rules. In particular, when faced with ambiguous or contradictory element, it was therefore possible to rely on a meta-rule to understand it. As a consequence, one could expect that these meta-rules were all, at the beginning of the text, applied to certain instances so that any kind of uncertainty could be avoided.⁸ Thus, the reading and understanding of the rules offered by a Kalpasūtra was guaranteed by other stronger and more comprehensive rules, whose specific purpose was to set the context for the application of the former. In fact a meta-rule is a powerful tool that makes for an effective and efficient organization of a specific text. It works through reduction and uniformity, superimposing itself on an existing context and providing a unique interpretation of several variable elements, eliminates repetitions and misunderstandings, solves logical contradictions, conflicting notions,

⁵ The prefix *pari* means “beyond” as well as the Greek prefix “*meta*” originally means “after” to indicate an element transcending the real plane. See Boisacq (1916: 629).

⁶ The word *pari-gam* means “to go round or about or through”.

⁷ Vergiani 2002: 188.

⁸ In the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* the most part of *paribhāṣā-sūtra* is in the first chapter.

supplies missing pieces of information. Therefore, a *paribhāṣā* is an instrument strictly functional to the *sūtra* specific genre (the “weaver” of *sūtras*, i.e. the “author” of the *sūtras*) to eliminate the unnecessary, to help choose one of the possible variants or opinions, or to give a logic interpretation to any elements deviating from or contrasting with the text’s general pattern.

When studying this type of *sūtra*, the first critical issue is to understand their intrinsic nature, their ability to govern a complex intellectual system and at the same time to reduce its complexity.

2 Meta-rules in the Śrautasūtras

The Śrautasūtras, like all texts that rely on the *sūtra* stylistic instrument, have to resort to a number of stratagems to avoid inconsistencies and ambiguities. As these prescriptions and injunctions are aimed essentially at priests, they must be organized effectively and coherently. This purpose is achieved by defining meta-rules that hold together the different components of the text.

The Śrautasūtras are peculiar under many aspects: these ritualistic sources appeared when the Brahmanical culture was at its peak and at its full development.⁹ Even though they are based on much earlier material, most Śrautasūtras are more recent than Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads and are far from being a coherent *corpus*, both in terms of content and in terms of textual form and organization. While they share the use of the *sūtra* stylistic instrument, each is characterized by different elements.¹⁰

Many works belonging to this genre contain a wide variety of *paribhāṣās*, whose individual characteristics and differences must be taken into account when analyzing their nature. If we presuppose that a meta-rule states something about the application of other rules, while a general rule is a statement that is generally valid throughout the text and that is simply more far-reaching, while not affecting the application of other specific rules or of the regulatory mechanism, we have to distinguish several classes of *paribhāṣās* in the Kalpasūtras.

First of all, some *paribhāṣās* are literally “around” (*pari*) the text, because they are basically generic rules, or in other words statements that are valid throughout the text and that the *sūtrakāra* will not have to repeat. *Kātyāyana Śrautasūtra* (KŚrS) states that Vedic rituals are connected to a reward (1.1.2): *phalayuktāni karmāṇi* “every action has a fruit [a reward]” (see Rotaru, this volume). This is a generic

⁹ Gonda 1977: 495–513.

¹⁰ Firstly, the organization of the matter and then several differences about topics, definitions, stylistic choices.

statement, that is applicable in the widest range of contexts. The statement in *Āpastamba Śrautasūtra* (ĀpŚrS) 24.1.24 *adhvaryuṃ kartāram* “The priest *adhvaryu* is the subject”, clarifies the subject of a ritual action in the text even when this is left implicit. This second rule clearly shows how the boundary between a general rule and a meta-rule may be fuzzy: does *adhvaryuṃ kartāram* teach a textual convention by which when the agent of the sentence (*kartṛ* as a linguistic term) is implicit it is to be interpreted as the *adhvaryu* or, more generally, that when an agent is involved in a ritual action it is the *adhvaryu*, unless specifically stated. These *paribhāṣās* can be explicit or implicit. In the Śrautasūtras composed for a specific priest the subject of the operations is always implicit, because it always coincides with the priest himself for whom the manual has been composed.¹¹

Other *paribhāṣās* are closer to being meta-rules, in the sense of *pari-* as “beyond”, as they provide indications that trump any other rule and that establish how to read and/or interpret other rules in the text. The ĀpŚrS states, for example, that in case of a “conflict” between the oblatory material and the divinity the oblation is offered to, the oblatory material prevails: *haviṛdevatāsāmānye havir baliyaḥ* “In case of contradiction in the matching of the material to be offered in the fire and the receiving god, the stronger indication is the one concerning the material” (ĀpŚrS 24.3.46).¹² Thus, the suggestion is valid for a conflictual situation and arises from a possible contrast between two rules. In this case, the meta-rule intervenes to solve the conflict. This rule has a limited application: it is valid exclusively when there is a “friction” between two elements.

Thus an important and problematic issue tied to the *paribhāṣās* in the Śrautasūtras is the identification of the rule’s value. This rule can state a general (and in a certain sense, generic) principle, or it can determine the way one or more *sūtras* work and how they are to be interpreted. The term *paribhāṣā* usually indicates both types of *sūtra*.

3 The *paribhāṣās* as an instrument to read the Śrautasūtras

The genre of the Śrautasūtras must rely on the above-mentioned structures to avoid repetitions and verbosity, which can be extremely detrimental in a work

¹¹ Chakrabarti 1980: 3.

¹² The value of the meta-rule is in the term *sāmānya* (the connection of different objects by common properties). *Āpastamba-Śrauta-Sūtra (Text with English Translation and Notes)*, edited by G. U. Thite, Delhi, 2004.

that functions as a manual, especially if it has to be passed down orally and rely on the good memory and mnemonic techniques of the recipients.¹³ The need for a more efficient way of managing the immense amount of ritualistic information and prescriptions contained in the Brāhmaṇas led to the creation of the Śrautasūtras: the *prayogas*, ritual applications, or *paddhatis*, guide-books for rites or ceremonies,¹⁴ can be seen as the predecessors of the Śrautasūtras.¹⁵ However, these texts are mainly concerned with providing practical or specific information on the sacrifice: its performance is the object of the Śrautasūtras, while the Brāhmaṇas focused on its interpretation.¹⁶ The presence in the Śrautasūtras of typically Vedic characteristics and of a textual development that follows, in the majority of cases, the corresponding Brāhmaṇa (or Brāhmaṇas), suggests that this literature may have developed immediately after the flourishing of the genre of the Brāhmaṇas, and that in some cases the two textual genres overlapped.¹⁷

In fact, the chronology of the Śrautasūtras (and, more generally, of the auxiliary texts known as *vedāṅgas*) is currently still uncertain. It is possible to establish with a certain degree of certainty only a relatively limited time scale, and the *paribhāṣās* have been used to establish a chronological relationship between several texts.

Under these circumstances it is better to remain content with the relative chronology of the Śrautasūtras.¹⁸

In this respect, Kashikar divided the Śrautasūtras in three groups: according to this scholar, the more ancient texts date back to 800–650 BC, a second group dates back to between 650 and 300 BC and the more recent ones are from between 300 BC and 400 AD. Ram Gopal also suggests that the most ancient Śrautasūtras date back to a period between the ninth and the fourth century BC.¹⁹ However, a number of scholars later suggested that Śrautasūtras, as well as most Vedic literature, are more recent²⁰: Pelisero (2007) identifies the period

¹³ Vergiani 2002: 188.

¹⁴ Dasgupta 1900: 271.

¹⁵ Kashikar 1968: 29; Chakrabarti 1980: 26–31.

¹⁶ Smith 1987: 11; Staal 1989: 365; Gonda 1977: 497.

¹⁷ Kashikar 1968: 34.

¹⁸ Chakrabarti 1980: 43.

¹⁹ Gopal 1983: 90.

²⁰ Gonda 1977: 481.

between the fourth and the second century BC as the time when the bulk of Kalpasūtras were composed, with Śrautasūtras certainly pre-dating Gṛhyasūtras.²¹

Regardless of the exact chronology, the composition of these texts occupies a large part of Indian literature's history. While the exact dates of this history can be moved backwards and forwards by a few centuries, the time span during which this literature developed remains unchanged.

... all the Sūtras were not composed at one and the same time and that some of the Sūtras are separated from the others by a long interval of time.²²

During such a long period of time the genre certainly mutated and gradually changed: the *sūtras* and the Śrautasūtras, in particular, became gradually more effective and functional. The texts may have been re-elaborated several times across centuries and the version we have in our hands today may be the result of this long and complex process of refinement.

The presence of the *paribhāṣās* became more marked and coherent with the passing of time, as the *sūtra* genre got rid of unnecessary content and focused on the essential. However, it is obvious that this process of simplification is only possible if the context offers the necessary instruments for reading the *sūtras*.

In Śrautasūtra genre it is possible to devise each step of the transition from more ancient forms to more recent ones, or at the very least, to observe how the *sūtra* genre became increasingly concise thanks to clever textual strategies and rhetorical inventions.

4 The *paribhāṣās* in the Śrautasūtras: Theoretical perspectives

4.1 A critical note to the typological classifications of the *paribhāṣās*

The study of the *paribhāṣās* in ritualistic literature still has a long way to go. Research in this field is scarce: the specific literature merely includes

²¹ Boccia et al. 2000: 62.

²² Gopal 1983: 84.

Chakrabarti's fundamental book and a couple of articles by Chakrabarti and Ranade. The topic is often addressed in books on ritualistic literature and in the modern editions of the most important Śrautasūtras, especially those including an English translation.²³ This still largely uncharted territory faces scholars with an exciting, yet daunting task.

This work addresses this particular topic in two phases: (1) it provides a general overview of the *paribhāṣās* in the Śrautasūtras, followed by (2) an in-depth textual analysis aimed at shedding some light on the function of the *paribhāṣās* in the Śrautasūtras. This work represents an attempt to account for the particularly problematic nature of this research issue and to evaluate the opportunities offered by the study of the *paribhāṣās* in the Śrautasūtras. The object is to establish a number of premises for a more focused enquiry into the role of the *paribhāṣās* in the Śrautasūtras and thus of the ritual they describe.

The Śrautasūtras could be the first texts in Indian literature to use the *paribhāṣās* and *anuvṛttis* “carrying over of items”²⁴: meta-rules and general rules whose validity crosses the text, transversally for the former and in a cascade fashion for the latter. From this moment onwards, the mechanism of the *paribhāṣās* can be found in a number of different texts, from Gṛhyasūtras to the works of the Mīmāṃsā.

Categorizing this type of *sūtra* is not easy. We believe that classification attempts have so far failed to go beyond a theoretical level, and merely represent a first step in the direction of mapping such a vast and complex topic.

It is certainly possible to distinguish between *paribhāṣās* that can only be applied within a single Śrautasūtra and *paribhāṣās* that apply to the entire ritualistic literature. Another classification method is to observe the origin of the *paribhāṣā*: *śrautī* is a *paribhāṣā* contained in the Brāhmaṇas, *jñāpitā* is a *paribhāṣā* in the Saṃhitās that has been codified by the *sūtrakāra*, and finally *sautrī* is a *paribhāṣā* that originates from conventional principles, practical questions or authoritative texts.²⁵ This approach should be critically analyzed

²³ See the Bibliography at the end of this essay.

²⁴ When one rule is valid until an explicit negation, it is called *anuvṛtti*: its cessation is *nivṛtti*. We find an *anuvṛtti* when one proposition, which is afterwards never repeated, but always to be understood, till a new rule is introduced or the *anuvṛtti* is expressly deleted (*nivṛtti*). For the definition above see Joshi (1984: 1).

²⁵ *Śrautī* if the principle is located in the Brāhmaṇas (ĀpŚrS 21.1.8–9), *jñāpitā* if the principle is expressed by the Veda (ĀpŚrS 24.1.2, 21) and *sautrī* if it is a convention, a custom rule or a rule of usefulness (ĀpŚrS 24.1.10, 20, 26, 38). See Pelissero and Freschi, this volume.

as it seems somewhat unconvincing. First, Chakrabarti appears to rely more on content than form. This is a crucial limitation of his classification attempt: it is obvious that the Śrautasūtras get their information from the Saṃhitās and the Brāhmaṇas. As a consequence, it is possible to identify the principles of the *paribhāṣās* in previous texts, and in much the same way it is obvious that certain rules with a more functional and limited role can only be found in the Śrautasūtras.²⁶

Thus, a classification system based on origin is reliable, yet has a limited productivity. In some cases it is no more than a tautology.

Ranade classifies the *paribhāṣās* as statements concerning five types of rules: on the nature of the sacrifice, on general principles, on the individual involved in the ritual performance, on the uttering of mantras, on individual actions and materials involved in the ritual.²⁷ The content of the *paribhāṣās* is very diverse, as they can involve priests, the extension of a mantra, the relationship between the ritual and the mantra, the utterance of a mantra, oblation materials, substitutions and sacrificial tools. Thus, the *paribhāṣās* concern every aspect of the ritual: in fact, the five categories suggested by Ranade coincide with each component of the ritual.

4.2 Position of the *paribhāṣās* in the Śrautasūtras

Another fundamental characteristic of the *paribhāṣās* is their position within the text, which varies significantly. In some cases, the *paribhāṣās* are spread throughout the text, while in others they are concentrated in a specific section. It would seem safe to assume that meta-rules should be found at the beginning of a text, in the introduction. However, only in a few texts the *paribhāṣās* precede the development of the subject matter.²⁸ In fact, the first Śrautasūtra to use the *paribhāṣās* in a specific part of the text – even though not at the beginning – might be the one attributed to Bharadvāja.

The Table 1 below contains significant data on the collocation of the *paribhāṣās* in the main Śrautasūtras.

²⁶ Chakrabarti defines as *sautrī* the *sūtras* of Āpastamba.

²⁷ Ranade 1978: 117.

²⁸ In the KŚrS, in the *Hiraṇyakeśin Śrautasūtra* (HŚrS), in the *Mānava Śrautasūtra* (MŚrS), in the *Śāṅkhāyana Śrautasūtra* (ŚŚrS), in the *Vārāha Śrautasūtra* (VŚrS), in the *Lāṭyāyana Śrautasūtra* (LŚrS) and in the *Vaitāna Śrautasūtra* (VaiŚrS).

Table 1: Position of the *paribhāṣā*.

Śrautasūtra	Position of the <i>paribhāṣā</i>	Type of position
<i>Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra</i>	<i>praśna</i> XX–XXVIII (and XXIV.1.11)	In some sections Not in the initial section
<i>Bhāradvāja Śrautasūtra</i>		Several parts Spread
<i>Āpastamba Śrautasūtra</i>	<i>kaṇḍika</i> 1–4, <i>praśna</i> XXIV	In one section only Not in the initial section
<i>Hiraṇyakeśin Śrautasūtra</i>	1.1	In the beginning
<i>Vaikhānasa Śrautasūtra</i>	No <i>paribhāṣā</i>	
<i>Mānava Śrautasūtra</i>	1.1.1.1–6 and other sections	In the beginning Spread
<i>Vārāha Śrautasūtra</i>	<i>khaṇḍa</i> 1	In one section only In the beginning
<i>Kātyāyana Śrautasūtra</i>	<i>khaṇḍa</i> 1	In one section only In the beginning
<i>Āśvalāyana Śrautasūtra</i>		Spread
<i>Śāṅkhāyana Śrautasūtra</i>	<i>khāṇḍa</i> 1 and 2	In one section only In the beginning
<i>Arṣeyakalpa</i>	No <i>paribhāṣā</i>	
<i>Lāṭyāyana Śrautasūtra</i>	1.1.1–8 and spread	In the beginning Spread
<i>Vaitāna Śrautasūtra</i>	<i>kaṇḍikā</i> 1.1	In one section only In the beginning

As we can see in the table, the collocation of the *paribhāṣās* is not at all homogeneous: in some texts they appear at the beginning, in others they are spread around the text, mentioned whenever they are necessary and without even as much as a dedicated section. It is possible to observe that in the oldest Śrautasūtras, the *paribhāṣās* tend to be spread around the text²⁹: such is the case of the ĀŚrS and the BhŚrS. On the other hand, the texts where the *paribhāṣās* appear in a specific section, and in particular those where they are placed at the beginning, all date from a more recent period. The most emblematic case is that of the KŚrS, according to Kashikar.³⁰

In other words, only the most recent Śrautasūtras seem to feature what the commentators describe as *paribhāṣās*, rules that coincide with general statements or meta-rules, placed at the beginning of the text. However, this hypothesis has yet to be demonstrated. That some Śrautasūtras are characterised by a rather concise and terse style, while others are more verbose and extended, is a

²⁹ Kashikar 1968: 155–163.

³⁰ Kashikar 1968: 161.

fact. The genre is considered to have evolved towards an increasingly synthetic style. However, Monier Williams thought that the oldest Śrautasūtras were the most obscure,³¹ while Macdonell, whose hypotheses were later supported by most scholars, suggested that, as time passed and the genre developed, its style gradually became more and more concise and thus less clear.³²

On the basis of our research there is a number of Śrautasūtras that do not feature any *paribhāṣās* and that are characterized by a more verbose style (*Vādhūla Sūtra*, at least the parts that have been found). Other Śrautasūtras feature *paribhāṣās* spread around the text (BhŚrS and, to a lesser extent, ĀŚrS). Finally, some Śrautasūtras have their *paribhāṣās* concentrated at the beginning of the text, to allow for greater conciseness in the rest of the composition (KŚrS).

The position of the *paribhāṣās* in the ĀpŚrS is rather peculiar. Their collocation at the end of the text is considered by many scholars to be an instance of interpolation. Chakrabarti states that this position is original because the text actually relies on those rules and because these rules basically concern the duties of the *hotṛ*, while the ĀpŚrS, which belongs to the *śākhā* of the *Yajur Veda*, mainly contains rules for the *adhvaryu* priest.

However, this hypothesis is not entirely convincing: the section containing the *paribhāṣās* might have been added at a later time, as rules that were well known in that specific context or in other texts were written down.³³ Their actual position makes these rules less useful as they appear at the end of the manual, but it is possible that the Śrautasūtras were transmitted in a different order from the one that reached us and that their use was more free. Moreover, the order in which each topic appears in the text does not necessarily coincide with the order in which the text was consulted. On the other hand, the order in which the topics are addressed is fundamental for a number of manuals: it could not be changed at will, as this would render the entire text unintelligible.³⁴ In this perspective, the *paribhāṣās* seem to be originally thought of as “instruction manuals” concerning the ritual in the Śrautasūtra.

Kashikar, however, maintains that the section containing the *paribhāṣās* in the ĀpŚrS is an interpolation³⁵: “The *Paribhāṣā* in the *Āpastamba Śrautasūtra* is evidently a supplement”.³⁶ It certainly is an unusual collocation, which

31 Monier Williams 1876: 158.

32 Macdonell 1900: 29.

33 The term “written down” is used in the text according to the considerations of Torella 2008: 157–166.

34 The ĀŚrS does not use the *paribhāṣās* but the rules are valid for all the similar contexts.

35 Garbe 1902 and Narasimhachar 1944. See also Chakrabarti 1979: 31.

36 Kashikar 1968: 156.

however could provide significant information on how ancient Indians considered these rules.

At this point it is necessary to highlight that not all Śrautasūtras contain proper *paribhāṣās*: for instance, the *Āśvalāyana Śrautasūtra* (ĀŚrS) does not rely on real meta-rules to manage its subject matter.

Thus, before attempting an in-depth study of the *paribhāṣās*, it is important to understand that they do not fit clearly defined criteria and are not easily categorised by topic, origin or validity as a number of scholars have attempted to do so far. Regardless of the subtle distinction between general rules and meta-rules, the *paribhāṣās* include *sūtras* that have a precise function, but that cannot be categorised based on other characteristics.

While some Śrautasūtras are structured by these meta-rules, others rely on other systems and do not contain any *paribhāṣās*. In the texts dedicated to ritualistic performance this rhetorical instrument does not have as fundamental a role as one might imagine.

Therefore, to reach a better understanding of the *paribhāṣā*, it is necessary to investigate not only its etymology, but its origins.

4.3 Hypothesis on the origin of the *paribhāṣās*

Scholars agree that the *paribhāṣās* have their origin in the Vedas, even though this opinion is not yet supported by specific research. The expression *iti vijñāyate*, which in the oldest Śrautasūtras introduces a *paribhāṣā*, seems to have origins in the Brāhmaṇas.³⁷ This theory is supported by Chakrabarti³⁸: according to this scholar, the verb refers to a previously “known” element derived from the Brāhmaṇas. Usually a *sūtrakāra* refers to his own *śākhā*³⁹: however, many of the sacrifices described by Āśvalāyana are not featured in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (AB) and, in passages such as ĀŚrS 1.3.12, Āśvalāyana talks about the point of view expressed by Aitareya, which is different from his own.⁴⁰ In fact, it was relatively common for a *sūtrakāra* to obtain details concerning a specific ritual from different Brāhmaṇas, if such information was not available in those of his own school.⁴¹ A certain similarity between different *paribhāṣās* may lead to think that there was a contamination between different schools.

³⁷ *Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra* (BŚrS) 2.1.1; *Bhāradvāja Śrautasūtra* (BhŚrS) 1.17.3.

³⁸ Chakrabarti 1980: 54.

³⁹ *Śākhās* are the “branches” or recensions/schools of the Veda.

⁴⁰ See Chakrabarti (1978).

⁴¹ According to Chakrabarti this could attest a geographic homogeneity.

The term *paribhāṣā* does not appear at all in the Śrautasūtras. Thus, the study of the *paribhāṣās* will have to start from the commentaries and commentators of the Śrautasūtras, as they were the ones who used the term *paribhāṣā* to refer, in the commentary or colophon, to a specific portion of the text. A more detailed study and analysis of these sources may be the object of future research. In the context of this work, it is important to take into consideration that the use of the term *paribhāṣā* for the Śrautasūtras is “applied” by the commentators as a definition to a section of the text or to a group of *sūtra* that contain general rules or meta-rules affecting the way the text itself functions.

Bālakṛṣṇa Miśra in the *Mānava Śrautasūtra Vṛtti* (1.1.1.1) and Dhūrtasvāmin in his commentary to the ĀpŚrS (1.1.1) use the term *paribhāṣā* to define a part of the Śrautasūtra dedicated to general and transversal rules, as well as rules concerning the injunctions contained in the *sūtra*. The term *paribhāṣā* is used in the *Āśvalāyana Śrautasūtra Prayogadīpikā* (1.1.14) and in the colophon of Vidyādhara’s commentary to the KŚrS. Agnisvāmin uses this term in his commentary on the *Drāhyāyaṇa Śrautasūtra* (1.1).

Gārgya Nārāyaṇa uses it in his commentary on the ĀŚrS 7.1.7⁴² and in the commentary known as the *Siddhāntibhāṣya* on the ĀŚrS the term appears several times (ĀŚrS 1.1.8, 12, 13, 15, 17). However, the *Āśvalāyana Śrautasūtra* is one of those Śrautasūtras that do not contain real *paribhāṣās*: the text functions by applying the same rules to similar sacrifices, without relying on authentic meta-rules. This principle is known as *atideśa* (“extended application”)⁴³ and consists in the extension of a specific rule beyond its range of application: in this way, from a few archetypal sacrifices it is possible to obtain the string that represents the core of all variations (ectypes). However, the *atideśa* is a very specific element, as it extends the validity of a certain prescription beyond its natural context of application.

Mahādeva too uses the term *paribhāṣā* in his commentary on the HŚrS (1.1.1) and Ānartīya uses it in his commentary on the ŚŚrS (1.3.1; 3.9.19; 7.4.15; 7.10.2; 7.11.1). Chakrabarti reports on the existence of several handwritten colophons containing this term.⁴⁴

⁴² The aim of this *paribhāṣā* is, according to Gārgya Nārāyaṇa, the omission of some *sūktas* (Vedic hymns). It is an exception: the *sūtra* says *dhruvāḥ śastrāṇāmātānāḥ* “the composition of the litanies remains constant”. Here it is a general rule reaffirming the rule notwithstanding something happened. In the ĀŚrS the *paribhāṣās* are general rules and not real meta-rules.

⁴³ Chakrabarti 1980: 9.

⁴⁴ Chakrabarti 1980: 25.

In these works the term *paribhāṣā* refers to general rules:

It is found that the term was often applied in respect of the general rules that furnish guidance for the correct interpretation and application of a Śrautasūtra.⁴⁵

Therefore, it is possible that the *paribhāṣās* were originally a sort of “instruction manual” on the use of the Śrautasūtra, and that they were developed not at the same time as the text but afterwards, as a sort of guide to help read and interpret the prescriptions contained in the manuals. Their position at the beginning of the text may be due to the fact that they were added at a later time, after the entire text had been constructed, when the need for a form of guidance arose. The usefulness and effectiveness of these guides might have led to their being incorporated into the text from the first writing stages in later Śrautasūtras, which were written at a time when the genre was already fully developed. The *paribhāṣās* became necessary at a later time, when those consulting Śrautasūtras were geographically and chronologically far from the *sūtrakāra*.

The absence of the *paribhāṣās* in the oldest Śrautasūtras may thus be explained by the fact that the latter were developed before a cultural gap intervened between writer and reader, that is to say, before the *paribhāṣās* became truly necessary. Once this gap emerged, the *paribhāṣās*, which originally were separate entities, became part of the text. This hypothesis might be supported by the changing position occupied by the *paribhāṣās* in the different Śrautasūtras: the *paribhāṣās* were probably inserted in the text where a particularly difficult topic needed to be explained. As an explanatory context became gradually less and less available, the need for *paribhāṣā* increased, and drafting a set of rules that could solve certain doubts about the text became a habit. These sections later became an integral part of the Śrautasūtras.

There is a history of the *paribhāṣās*, whose exact coordinates are difficult to pinpoint, but which can be partially reconstructed through the origin of the term and its use to define a specific section of the Śrautasūtras.

4.4 How commentators might have singled out the so-called *paribhāṣās*

This term is used by the commentators in reference to a rule or a general principle, according to what Durgasiṃha states: *paritaḥ sarvato bhāṣyante*

⁴⁵ Chakrabarti 1980: 25.

'rthā ābhir iti paribhāṣā "The *paribhāṣās* are expressions to say what is all around".⁴⁶ These indications are valid throughout the text and are "around" the text regardless of the section where they are located and the subject matter they address.

The most interesting case is that of the *sūtra* 1.2.29 of the ŚŚrS: *ity etat sāvayajñikam* "It is related to sacrifices of every kind". This *sūtra* refers to the first two sections of the text as general rules, which are valid for all rituals. The commentator Ānartīya refers to these sections with the term *paribhāṣā: uktāḥ paribhāṣāḥ* "Here the *paribhāṣās* are exposed" (ŚŚrS 1.3.1). Here, the term *paribhāṣā* is used in reference to a number of *sūtras* that Śāṅkhāyana defined as valid for any sacrificial practice. Therefore, according to Ānartīya, a *paribhāṣā* is a rule that is valid for any sacrifice, thus a general rule.

In this case it is possible to observe how the term *paribhāṣā* did not emerge at the same time of the Śrautasūtra itself. The fact that this term is not used in the Śrautasūtra, but by the commentators, leads to a few considerations on the chronology of the commentaries. As the latter may have been written a long time after the *sūtra*, this absence must be evaluated carefully. The term *paribhāṣā* may have been applied to the *sūtras* after the term itself had come to identify a specific entity, or in other words, once it started being used in a grammatical context. The origin of the term is to be traced back not to the *sūtrakāras* but to the commentators.

In the Tanjore manuscripts 1977 and 2052 of the ĀpŚrS the expression *sāmānyasūtram* is used to indicate a *sūtra* that contains expression later referred to as *paribhāṣā*. The term "*sāmānya*", literally "which is divided with the others", means "general", "universal", "generic". Thus, it identified a general rule that applied not to a single specific aspect but to a wider context.

The following statement by Chakrabarti allows us to better frame the issue:

Considering all the evidence mentioned above, it is not unreasonable to assume that the general rules in a Śrautasūtra were called *paribhāṣā*.⁴⁷

The commentators themselves coined this term and categorised as *paribhāṣās* the *sūtras* with a wider field of application. In fact, it is unlikely that the term *paribhāṣā* was used by the *sūtrakāras*, who did not know the word with the meaning later attached to it by the commentators. One could object that a *sūtrakāra* had no reason to define the sections into which his work was divided,

⁴⁶ Quoted by Chakrabarti 1980: 26 (*Kātantra Paribhāṣā Vṛtti*, Introduction).

⁴⁷ Chakrabarti 1980: 26.

according to the economy principle of the *sūtra*. In fact, in many cases the *sūtrakāra* offers an introductory *sūtra* that announces the subject matter of the text or the nature of a certain rule: such is the case of the *brahmodya*, the *agnyādheya*, the *sākhamedha*, etcetera.⁴⁸ However, even though the *sūtrakāras* felt the need to announce the topic of a specific section, they never used the term *paribhāṣā*.

The most emblematic case is that of section XXIV of the ĀpŚrS, where almost all the *paribhāṣās* of this Śrautasūtra are to be found. The first *sūtra* in this section states: *yajñam vyākhyāsyāmaḥ* which means “we will explain the sacrifice”. While this *sūtra* states the subject matter of the section, the term “*paribhāṣā*” is not used, even though in retrospect, we might think it would be an obvious choice.

When did this term appear? Is its use a mere instance of linguistic innovation or some sort of precise cultural and intellectual statement? Can we assume that its meaning perfectly coincides with the expressions used by the *sūtrakāras* to describe a general, comprehensive rule, or does this term refer to more than that, including rules governing other rules? If the term *paribhāṣā* indicates more precisely the contents of several different *sūtras*, general rules and meta-rules, where does it originate from?

And why did the *sūtrakāras* never mention this term, even in cases where its use would seem natural? The questions above are a necessary starting point for any analysis of the *paribhāṣās* in the Śrautasūtras.

Another term used to refer to these rules is “*nyāya*”, which literally means “general rule”, “model”, “axiom”, “maxim”, “analogy”.⁴⁹ The same term is used by Mahādeva in his commentary to the HŚrS.⁵⁰ Moreover, the term was used by the philosophers of the Mīmāṃsā with the meaning of “leading into” or guiding into a subject matter to illustrate its main aspects (see Freschi and Pellegrini, in this volume).⁵¹

The history of this term in the Śrautasūtras has yet to be written, and one element that must not be overlooked is how the term *paribhāṣā* is never used by the *sūtrakāras*. Tracing the history of this term is the first step in understanding

48 ĀŚrS 10.9.1; ĀŚrS 2.1.9; ĀŚS 2.18.1. In the ŚŚrS every section begins declaring the matter with the formula “*atha ...*” (ŚŚrS 2.1: *atha upanayanam*; ŚŚrS 2.7: *atha anuvacanam*).

49 Etymologically, *nyāya* could have meant: “which comes down to,” “which is instrumental in what is at the bottom of something” and from that “the principle behind something”.

50 Chakrabarti 1980: 27.

51 Chakrabarti 1980: 27.

the nature of these rules and how this literary genre works. It is necessary to establish whether the use of this term involves an interpretation of the text of the *sūtrakāras* or whether it is simply a lexical contribution.

The *paribhāṣās* are rules whose validity extends to the whole text, statements that are valid for the entire Śrautasūtra or even to sacrificial knowledge as a whole. A *sūtra* such as ĀŚrS 1.11.17 *ṛcam pādagrahaṇe* “With the *pāda* the *ṛc* is indicated”, conveys that every time a quarter of the verse is quoted, it is as if the entire verse had been recalled. In this case a *sūtra* is valid for the entire text.

However, there are some *sūtras* that restrict the validity of a rule, and that are still referred to as *paribhāṣās*. When the ĀpŚrS (24.1.9) states that extracts from the *Yajur Veda* must be uttered *upamśu* “in a low voice”, an exception is stated immediately afterwards, concerning the *āśrāva* (invocation), *pratyāśruta* (answer) etcetera (ĀpŚrS 24.1.10). This restricting *sūtra* further complicates any classification effort, as it is not a general rule and it does not offer indications on how rules should function, but it merely states an exception. Yet, this too can be a *paribhāṣā*.⁵²

Identifying a *paribhāṣā* is not easy, as this term has been traditionally referred to general rules, proper meta-rules and exceptions or restrictions to rules. The lack of a definition in the texts further complicates the task.

As previously mentioned, the *paribhāṣās* are rather similar, even though they belong to different schools. However, in some cases there can be contrasting *paribhāṣās*: the HŚrS (1.1.40) states that, when four spoonfuls of liquefied butter are taken with the *juhū*, the *mantra* must be repeated four times. The KŚrS (1.7.8) states that the *mantra* must be uttered once, except in the case of clarified butter, for which the *śruti* must be followed (KŚrS 1.7.10): but here the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (ŚB) which is the Brāhmaṇa of the KŚrS, states that the *yajus* must be uttered only once even if the offer is repeated (ŚB 1.3.2.18).⁵³ Another example: according to the KŚrS (4.1.28) the *piṇḍapitṛyajña* is a supplementary sacrifice (*aṅgatvāt*),⁵⁴ while according to the ĀpŚrS (24.2.36) it is an independent ritual (*anagaṃ*).⁵⁵

⁵² A *paribhāṣā* limiting the field of the rule application is defined as a *saṃjñā* (Chakrabarti 1980: 29–30).

⁵³ Chakrabarti 1980: 75.

⁵⁴ KŚrS 4.1.30: *aṅgaṃ vā samabhivyāhārāt* “Or it is a subservient rite since it is mentioned together”.

⁵⁵ Chakrabarti 1980: 75.

Moreover, the *paribhāṣās* are characterised by several formal differences: omissions, additions or modifications linked with the style of a particular text. The ĀpŚrS (24.2.1) recites: *mantrāntaiḥ karmādīn saṃnipātayet* “The beginning of the [ritual] action should coincide with the end of the *mantra*”; the BhŚrS (1.2.2) reports: *mantrāntaiḥ karmādīn saṃnipātayet (idem)*; only the ŚŚrS (1.2.26) adds: *mantra antena karaṇeṣu karmaṇaḥ saṃnipātanam* “The [ritual] action takes place at the end of the *mantra*”. The same rule is expressed, however one *sūtra* is different from the others.

These substantial differences might lead scholars to believe that the *paribhāṣās* represent an attempt to harmonise a subject matter that lacks linearity. Instead, these formal differences account for the history of this instrument from a stylistic point of view, with a gradual tendency towards a certain conciseness that is typical of the genre.

5 Three short case studies

After providing an overview of the main issues concerning the role of the *paribhāṣās* in the Śrautasūtras, we now move on to observing how the *paribhāṣās* work in three cases. We will identify a few of the elements discussed above as well as new aspects that could represent a starting point for future research.

5.1 The tools of the ritual

An ideal starting point for an analysis of the subject is represented by the *paribhāṣās* that describe the tools to be used in a ritual. While it is true that Indian rituals can be seen as consisting of *dravya* (object, substance), *devatā* (god), *tyāga* (donation), according to the KŚrS (1.2.2), another fundamental component of the ritual is represented by the tools used in its different procedures.

Interestingly enough, the texts providing information on these tools are few. More specifically, a few Śrautasūtras discuss which materials should be used to manufacture such tools.

The table below indicates the *sūtras* that contain rules concerning the wood to be used for said tools.

Tool	Wood	Source
Generic tools	<i>vikaṅkata</i> ⁵⁶	KŚrS 1.3.32
	<i>vikaṅkata</i>	BhŚrS 1.17.1 (<i>ālekhaṇa</i>)
<i>sruva</i> (ladle)	<i>khadira</i> ⁵⁷	KŚrS 1.3.34
	<i>khadira</i>	ĀpŚrS 1.15.10b
	<i>khādira</i>	BhŚrS 1.16.5
<i>sphya</i> (a flat piece of wood shaped like a sword)	<i>khadira</i>	KŚrS 1.3.34
	<i>khadira</i>	ĀpŚrS 1.15.13
	<i>khādira</i>	BhŚrS 1.16.5
<i>juhū</i> (ladle)	<i>palāśa</i> ⁵⁸	KŚrS 1.3.35
	<i>parṇa</i> (<i>palāśa</i>)	ĀpŚrS 1.15.10b
	<i>parṇa</i> ⁵⁹	BhŚrS 1.16.5
<i>upabhṛt</i> (vessel or ladle)	<i>aśvattha</i> ⁶⁰	KŚrS 1.3.36
	<i>aśvattha</i>	ĀpŚrS 1.15.10b
	<i>aśvattha</i>	BhŚrS 1.16.5
tools not used for oblations (<i>ahomārthāni</i> / <i>saṃyuktāni</i>)	<i>vāraṇa</i> ⁶¹	KŚrS 1.3.37
	<i>vāraṇa</i>	ĀpŚrS 1.15.14
	<i>vāraṇa</i>	BhŚrS 1.17.3
<i>Dhruvā</i> (ladle)	<i>vikaṅkata</i>	ĀpŚrS 1.15.10b
	<i>vikaṅkata</i>	BhŚrS 1.16.5
<i>sruca</i> (generic)	any tree	ĀpŚrS 1.15.11
<i>śamya</i> (yoke-pin) ⁶²	<i>khadira</i>	ĀpŚrS 1.15.13
<i>prāśītraharaṇa</i> (vessel)	<i>khadira</i>	ĀpŚrS 1.15.13

It is possible to notice at first glance that the available sources agree on this topic. In this case, it is safe to consider these *sūtras* as *paribhāṣās*, as rules whose validity extends beyond the specific context in which they are found. This type of indication concerning the wood to be used for making certain tools is shared by the various sources, and their relevant contexts and rituals. Indeed, in the three available sources this information is found in the section indicated by commentators as that of the *paribhāṣās*.

⁵⁶ *Flacourtia Sapida*.

⁵⁷ *Acacia Catechu*.

⁵⁸ *Butea Frondosa*.

⁵⁹ *Butea Frondosa*.

⁶⁰ *Ficus Religiosa*.

⁶¹ *Crataeva Roxburghii*.

⁶² A rod or a wedge with a round top used as support.

These are three Śrautasūtras depending from the *Yajur Veda* because the *adhvaryu* priest is in charge of handling the oblation materials and therefore needs to be informed on the tools to be used: the *adhvaryu* or one of his acolytes build the tools.⁶³ In this case, the Śrautasūtras follow the strict categorization prescribed by the manual very closely.

Finally, it is interesting to note that such instructions are offered exclusively by the texts indicated as sources: no Brāhmaṇa provides similar indications. Thus, it is likely that the need to prescribe the use of a specific type of wood was felt at some point in the history of Indian rituals. Perhaps as speculation on the ritual progressed, an attempt to develop a solid framework for the ritual itself and to clarify even the smallest details led to the need to establish a clear rule on this matter. From a stylistic point of view, the ĀpŚrS does not contain similar indications in the XXIV *khaṇḍa*, which is usually the one reserved for the *paribhāṣās*: this proves the heterogeneous treatment of the *paribhāṣās*, which we described above. The other two sources, in a similar manner, contain these indications in the first few *sūtras*. The XXIV section of the ĀpŚrS contains a series of special rules, which have been traditionally defined as *paribhāṣās*. However, throughout the text it is possible to find other rules, which are just as generic and applicable to all rituals. These rules are found in the first part of the text, in the place where other sources contain the same information.

5.2 Mantra and ritual acts

One of the most complex issues of Indian ritualistic literature and of the study of sacrifice concerns the relationship between acts and mantras.⁶⁴

Which of the two elements is most important? Which rule determines how acts and mantras are matched? Is there a semantic relationship between them, or simply a syntactic one?

Some *sūtras* provide relevant information. While they do not completely answer our questions, the details provided by several *paribhāṣās* in the Śrautasūtras are worth considering.

According to the HŚrS (1.1.15–24), mantras are functional to the sacrifice⁶⁵: *yajñakarmārthā mantrāḥ* “The mantras are associated with the ritual acts”.⁶⁶

⁶³ Every priest in the solemn ritual has four acolytes. *Maitrāvaruṇa*, *acchāvāka* and *grāvastut* for the *hotṛ*; *pratiprasthātṛ*, *neṣṭṛ* and *unnetṛ* for the *adhvaryu*; *prastotṛ*, *pratihartṛ* and *subrahmaṇya* for the *udgātṛ*; *brāhmaṇācchaṃsin*, *potṛ* and *āgnīdhra* for the *brahmān*.

⁶⁴ See Patton 2005 and Staal 1989.

⁶⁵ Staal 1989: 67.

⁶⁶ Translated by Frits Staal. We can translate, more appropriately, “the mantras are for the purpose of the ritual acts”.

To each mantra corresponds a single act: “one act, one *mantra*”. In fact, the BhŚrS 1.1.20 states *ekamantrāṇi karmāṇi*, echoed by the ĀpŚrS (24.1.38): *ekamantrāṇi karmāṇi*. This is the general rule.⁶⁷ However, there is an exception, mentioned by the ĀpŚrS (24.1.44): *vacanād ekaṃ karma bahumantram* “a single ritual [must be accompanied by] many *mantras* when explicitly stated”. The ĀpŚrS (24.1.39) specifies that, even in the case of a repeated action, the *mantra* must be pronounced just once. For example, the *vedi* must be sprayed three times, but the mantra *vedir asi barhiṣe tvā svāhā* in the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* (TS 1.1.11.1) accompanies the entire action: “You are the altar: I sprinkle thee, agreeable to the *barhis* (sacrificial-grass covering)”.⁶⁸

Moreover, the ĀpŚrS (24.1.40) specifies that the formula is a single one, to avoid any gaps between the acts:

*kaṇḍūyanasvapnanadītarāvavarṣaṇa medhyapraṭi mantraṇeṣu ca tadvat
kālāvyaveteṣu |*

In the case of scratching, sleeping, crossing a river, being showered upon and addressing the unholy things and in those cases without any time interval [the formula is to be uttered only once].

Here we can see two different types of *paribhāṣā* at work: one *sūtra* offers a general rule that is applicable to different contexts, closely followed by a restriction on the rule itself.

In the context of the sources discussed here, the issue is still unresolved, as there is a problem of a syntactic nature. If act and mantra begin together, as described in the texts (ĀpŚrS 24.2.1), two possibilities arise: the mantra may continue after the act is finished, or vice versa, the act may last longer than the mantra. In the first case, a technical pause is possible; however, the texts do not indicate this explicitly and it may violate the principle that the ritual must be a *continuum* without interruptions.⁶⁹ In the second case, instead, it remains to be clarified whether the mantra must be uttered once for all or whether it can be repeated which would break the rule *ekamantrāṇi karmāṇi*.

When the ritual act is simple but the accompanying recitations or chants last for a long time, the latter may continue after the act has been completed. They may thereby become simultaneous with other acts. An

⁶⁷ Patton 2005: 66: “Generally speaking there is a one-to-one relationship between the mantra and a single ritual act”.

⁶⁸ Translation by Julius Eggeling (1882: 84).

⁶⁹ Hubert-Mauss 2002: 34.

example is the burial of the golden statue of a man underneath the offering altar of the Agnicayana.⁷⁰

In case different materials are offered. The HŚrS (1.1.39–40) says: *dravyaprthaktve bhyāvantate* “[The mantra] comes for every single offering”. The mantra may be repeated as many times as the number of offers of the oblation. In some cases, however, the opposite is true: the mantra only accompanies part of the action (KŚrS 1.7.9–11). The mantra is uttered only once if there is a unity of time, material or intention.⁷¹

The “one act, one mantra” rule applies only to the first type of mantra. This is a general sacrificial rule, yet it is offered only by few texts, all belonging to the *Yajurveda* and in particular to the TS.

Finally, in the case of the ĀpŚrS, this rule is featured in the XXIV section, therefore towards the end of the text. If we consider that in this case the position of the same rule in the other sources under analysis is different (i. e. at the beginning of the text), the collocation of the *paribhāṣās* in the ĀpŚrS could cast some doubts on the issue.⁷²

In this case the *paribhāṣās* seem to be trying to address a rather difficult matter. The subject, according to the examined sources, is not clarified by these general rules. In the case of the ĀpŚrS, these rules seem to have been added only as an attempt to clarify certain doubts.

5.3 The use of *vijñāyate*

The verb *vijñāyate*, passive form from the root *vi + jñā*, can be translated as “it is specifically known”, therefore indicating a well-known element. Its presence in the Śrautasūtras usually introduces a rule that was obviously well known, but which was repeated in a specific ritualistic context. This verb has been identified as a sort of tell-tale, an element which indicates the presence of a *paribhāṣā*.

As a matter of fact, the use of this verb implies the presence of a known rule that is recognized by the *sūtrakāra*, who would have no reason to use this verb other than to recall a known element. It would have to be a rule already present

⁷⁰ Staal 2004: 185.

⁷¹ Chakrabarti states that there are two types of mantra: those uttered by the same person who performs the act (*karaṇamantra*) and those uttered by a different person (*kriyamāṇānuvādin*).

⁷² It is interesting that a general rule is at the end of the text together with the restriction. Chakrabarti (1980: 36): “From a reassessment of their data combined with further grounds, I have arrived at the conclusion that the present position of the *paribhāṣās* in the *Āpastamba Śrautasūtra* (in *Praśna* XXIV) is the original one”.

in the *corpus* of Vedic literature or that could be traced to a specific context by the person performing the ritual.

If we assume this to be the case, then the verbal form *viññāyate* recalls a rule that is already known and codified. Not all *paribhāṣās* are introduced by this verb, yet its presence in the Śrautasūtras is of particular interest. According to Chakrabarti the verb has this function in the oldest Śrautasūtras.⁷³

First, we should address the occurrences of *viññāyate* in some Śrautasūtras.⁷⁴

Śrautasūtra	Occurrences
Āpastamba Śrautasūtra (Kṛṣṇayajurveda Taittirīya Saṃhitā)	123
Āśvalāyana Śrautasūtra (R̥gveda)	7
Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra (Kṛṣṇayajurveda Taittirīya Saṃhitā)	82
Bhāradvāja Śrautasūtra (Kṛṣṇayajurveda Taittirīya Saṃhitā)	88
Drāhyāyana Śrautasūtra (Sāmaveda)	0
Hiraṇyakeśin Śrautasūtra (Kṛṣṇayajurveda Taittirīya Saṃhitā)	5
Kauśika Sūtra (Atharvaveda)	4
Lāṭyāyana Śrautasūtra (Sāmaveda)	1
Mānava Śrautasūtra (Kṛṣṇayajurveda Maitrāyaṇīya Saṃhitā)	0
Śāṅkhāyana Śrautasūtra (R̥gveda)	0
Vaikhānasa Śrautasūtra (Kṛṣṇayajurveda Taittirīya Saṃhitā)	5
Vaitāna Śrautasūtra (Atharvaveda)	496
Vārāhaś Śrautasūtra (Kṛṣṇayajurveda Maitrāyaṇīya Saṃhitā)	0

The number of occurrences in the texts varies greatly: in some it does not appear at all, while in others it is used significantly often.

A closer look at how this verb is used offers some interesting insights.

The *sūtra* 2.5.1.9 of the ĀŚrS recites:

viññāyate abhayam vo abhayam me astv ity eva upatiṣṭheta pravasan pratyetya ahar ahar vā iti |

It is made known that [he] should honour with the ‘*abhayam vo ’bhayam no astu*’⁷⁵ *mantra* when leaving, or every day after coming back.

This *sūtra* is found in the context of the *agnihotra* ritual. The topic is the *agnihotra* and more specifically the ritual in relation to a journey. The text

⁷³ Chakrabarti 1980: 54.

⁷⁴ We examined the digital texts at <http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/indexe.htm>.

⁷⁵ “Be safe for you, be safe for us”.

prescribes that, upon returning from the journey or every day after returning the *abhayam vo 'bhayam no astu mantra* should be uttered.

The same *mantra* is prescribed by the ŚŚrS (2.14.1):

pravatsyann agnīn samikṣate abhayam vo abhayam no astu iti |
Somebody who is about to start on a journey looks at [his] fires [reciting]
“*abhayam vo abhayam no astu*.”

As shown above, the ŚŚrS omits the verb *vijñāyate* while the ĀŚrS keeps it. When *vijñāyate* is used, it refers to a specific context or tradition, while if it is omitted this tradition is considered a given: the absence of the verb “*vijñāyate*” may indicate that that reference to another work or another context is not necessary. On the other hand, the absence of a specific verb may identify a more recent, and therefore more “evolved” text in the history of the genre in *sūtra*.

Quite significantly, the AB uses this verb only once (4.22.1) when explaining why there is a suture on the skull.⁷⁶

In the case under analysis, the disappearance of this verb – which, in many texts, introduces a *paribhāṣā* – could be the starting point for an in-depth analysis of Indian ritualistic literature and, more specifically, of its need to rely on other traditions, at least until it has become fully established.

From a purely stylistic point of view, the omission of the verb suggests an evolution towards a more concise style, an element which should be taken into consideration when analysing the relationship between the ĀŚrS and the ŚŚrS.⁷⁷

The use of this indicator suggests the intention to recall a tradition and to emphasise that it is well-known which would not be necessary if it was actually universally known. As the genre of Śrautasūtras became established, this need to constantly recall a tradition gradually subsided.

The stylistic choice can be accompanied by an explicit reflection on the cultural context, which could emerge from the use of the term *paribhāṣā*.

6 Conclusions

The subject of the *paribhāṣās* is a rather complex one, and in the Śrautasūtras the role of this stylistic, rhetorical and cultural element is not clearly defined,

⁷⁶ The human head is the model for the *viṣuvan* (central) day (a central day of the *sattra*) that is to say it is halve.

⁷⁷ On the relationship between the ĀŚrS and the ŚŚrS see Kashikar 1968: 80ff. and Gopal 1983: 68–72.

mainly because the term is applied *a posteriori* and it appears in very different texts. Through this work, we have identified several key elements for an approach to the analysis of the *paribhāṣās* in this type of text.

- (1) First, the term *paribhāṣā* is used only by the commentators to talk about a large number of similar *sūtras*.⁷⁸ At this point of the research, it is complex to treat the *paribhāṣās* in the Śrautasūtras as a single and clearly defined research subject, because it is not possible to identify common features between these kinds of texts, with regard to this type of *sūtra*. Talking about *paribhāṣās* in the Śrautasūtras means, first of all, discussing the use of this term by the commentators, and identifying which *sūtras* are described with this term and why. The next step should include analysing the presence of the *paribhāṣās* in the different texts and identifying their characteristics and peculiarities.
- (2) Second, starting from the use of the term, there needs to be some clarity on what a *paribhāṣā* is and this issue cannot be separated from a specific cultural product, intellectual context and use. We need to establish whether *paribhāṣā* is to be interpreted as a meta-rule (a rule that governs another rule) or as a general rule, characterised by an extensive or restrictive value. A *paribhāṣā* could also be all these things simultaneously, but in this case it should be distinguished from a *vidhi* or a *niyama*, by using other categories typical of the commentaries.⁷⁹
- (3) The term *paribhāṣā* is a definition applied *a posteriori* to a type of text containing general rules or rules that govern other rules, but also general principles, restrictions, resolutions of contradictions or critical operational issues. These *sūtras* are defined as *paribhāṣās* only in the commentaries, and not by the *sūtrakāras*. Therefore, before moving on to a specific analysis on the subject, it is necessary to trace a history of how this term has been used and clarify what *paribhāṣā* means to the commentators of the Kalpasūtra. Where does this term come from? In which cultural context did it emerge and become widespread? Where does it appear for the first time?
- (4) Then, it is necessary to acknowledge that the Śrautasūtras contain *paribhāṣās* that vary greatly in terms of nature, subject, type, form and position. Therefore, an analysis of the *paribhāṣās* in the Śrautasūtras must concentrate on what exactly is defined as a *paribhāṣā* within each single

⁷⁸ Chakrabarti 1980: 25. Jaimini proposes an interesting distinction: *pratinidhi* (substitution), *krama* (traditional), *tantra* (main), *samuccaya* (conjunction). See Kashikar (1968: 155).

⁷⁹ *Vidhi* and *niyama* offer simply a rule: a *paribhāṣā* is on one side a general rule, its application is wide, and on other side a metarule because its task is “to rule the rules”.

text. The history of that particular text may offer insight into how the text itself was received and which was its role in the development of intellectual thought in ancient India.

- (5) The subject of the relationship between *paribhāṣās* and the texts of the *śruti* is still an uncharted territory: the categorisations that have so far been suggested are weak or not useful, and need stronger foundations. Is it really possible to trace the origin of these rules in the *Brāhmaṇas* or in the *Samhitās*? Do their presumed Vedic roots differentiate them from other types of prescriptions found in the *Śrautasūtras*? Are there real formal correspondences or simply semantic connections, which in some case are merely generic cultural references?
- (6) The study of the *paribhāṣās* is made even more problematic by the fact that these alleged meta-rules are not always effective and coherent. Complex examples such as the *paribhāṣās* concerning the relationship between act and *mantra* or the case of the verb *vijñāyate* may represent a starting point for an in-depth analysis of specific issues. The functioning of each rule is a fundamental aspect of the investigation into this particular phenomenon.

Finally, if we want to accept the definition of *paribhāṣā* offered in the commentaries for certain kinds of rules, first we must identify which types of rules are found in the *Śrautasūtras*, how these work, whether a definition is provided for them, and then how they contribute to the overall structure of the text.

Only once these steps have been completed, it will be possible to address the role of the *paribhāṣās* as a characteristic instrument of the genre in *sūtra* and their capacity to establish a cultural tradition, a *reductio ad unum* that strips down the complex ritualistic tradition leading to a practice and interpretation of the ritual in ancient India guided by a coherent logic.

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