Yāska and the sentence: the beginning of Śābdabodha?

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The very first section of the Nirukta (1.1) contains, in Sarup’s edition, the following passage:

bhāvapradhānam ākhyātam/ sattvapradhānāni
nāmāni/ tad yatrobhe bhāvapradhāne bhavataḥ
pūrvaparībhūtam bhāvam ākhyātenācāstet/ vrajatī
pacātī/ upakramaprabhṛtyapavargaparyantaṁ
mūrtaṁ sattvakbhūtam sattvanāmabhīhi/ vrajyā
paktir iti/ ada iti sattvānām upadeśahī/ gaur āsvah
puruṣo hastīti/ bhavati ti bhāvasya/ ēste ēste vrajatī
tīśhayātītī/

Roth’s edition has the same text, but without the punctuation. The same is true for Rājāvādeś’s and Vidyāsāgara’s editions (both with Durga’s commentary). Bhadkamkar’s edition (also with Durga’s commentary) takes a middle position, adding some punctuation marks (dandas), but not quite as many as Sarup. Sarup translates:

[T]he verb has becoming as its fundamental notion, nouns have being as their fundamental notion. But where both are dominated by becoming, a becoming arising from a former to a later state is denoted by a verb, as ‘he goes’, ‘he cooks’, & c.

The embodiment of the whole process from the beginning to the end, which has assumed the character of being, is denoted by a noun, as ‘going’, ‘cooking’, & c. The demonstrative pronoun is a reference to beings, as ‘cow’, ‘horse’, ‘man’, ‘elephant’, & c.; ‘to be’, to becoming, as ‘he sits’, ‘he sleeps’, ‘he goes’, ‘he stands’, & c.

Houben (1997: 72) translates, similarly:

...But where both have bhāva “being, becoming” as the main thing, the bhāva which has a sequence is denoted by a verb, e.g. “he goes”, “he cooks”. [But the bhāva] which is an existing thing embodying [a bhāva] from the beginning to the end [is denoted] by nouns expressing an existing thing, e.g. “going”, “cooking”. [The pronoun] adas “that” is a reference to existing things, e.g. cow, horse, man, elephant. [The verb] bhavati “it is, becomes” [is a reference to] a bhāva “being, becoming”, e.g. he is laying (sic), he goes, he stands.

These translations depend in an essential respect on Sarup’s punctuation, or more precisely: on its absence at a crucial juncture. Both the commentaries of Skandasvāmin/Maheśvara and of Durga understand the part tad yatrobhe bhāvapradhāne bhavataḥ as a complete sentence. This is clear from their remarks. The commentary of Skandasvāmin/Maheśvara explains (Sarup, 1982: I p. 9 1.14-16):

tad yatrobhe ityādi/... yatrobhe nāmākhyāte
devadattah pacātī vākṣyavasthāyām, yareteti šrutes
tatreyty adhyāhāryam, tatra bhāvapradhāne
bhavataḥ, bhāvasya sādhvatvāt, sattvasya ca
sādhanatvāt, sādhyasādhanayoṣ ca sādhyasya
prādhānyāt.
[Concerning] yatrobhe etc.: ... ‘Where both’ – i.e. a noun (nāman)² and a verb (ākhyāta) – [means:] in the case of a sentence [such as] ‘Devadatta cooks’. Since yatra ‘where’ is expressed, tatra ‘there’ has to be supplied, [so that one gets:] ‘there both have activity (bhāva)³ as principal [meaning]’, because bhāva is that which is to be accomplished (sādhya), and satva is that which accomplishes (sādhaka), and because, from among that which is to be accomplished and that which accomplishes, that which is to be accomplished is the principal thing.

Skandavāmin/Maheśvara clearly understood tad yatrobhe bhāvapradhāne bhavataḥ to mean: ‘Where both [a nominal word and a verb are present, there] both have activity (bhāva) as principal [meaning]’. They both have bhāva as principal meaning, because the sentence - e.g., ‘Devadatta cooks’ (devadatattā pacati) – has bhāva as principal meaning. This bhāva is expressed by the verb, which is qualified by the noun.

Durga expresses his views in the following passage (Rājavāde, 1921: I p. 16 1. 17-24; Bhadkamkar, 1918: I p. 41 1.):

tad yatrobhe bhāvapradhāne bhavataḥ/...aḥa punar yatra te (variant: yatraite) ubhe bhavataḥ/ kva ca punar ubhe ete (variant: ete ubhe) bhavataḥ/ vākye! tatra kasya pradhānām arthaḥ (variant: pradhānātorthaḥ) kasya guṇabhūta itil śṛṇu/ bhāvapradhāne bhavatas tasya cikṣiratvatvāt/ vākye hy ākhyātām pradhānām tadarthatvād gunabhūtam nāma tadarthatya bhavanispattāv angabhūtavatvāt/ evaṃ tāvad ākhyātām vākye pradhānām/

[Concerning] yatrobhe bhāvapradhāne bhavataḥ. ...But where both of them (i.e. a noun and a verb) occur. But where do both occur? In a sentence. In that [situation], whose meaning is the principal thing, [and] whose is secondary? Listen. They have bhāva as principal [meaning], because [bhāva] is desired to be brought about. For in a sentence the verb is the principal thing, because it is for that, [and] the noun is secondary, because its meaning is subsidiary to the bringing about of bhāva. In this way, then, the verb is the principal thing in the sentence.

Elsewhere, on Nir 1. 9, Durga confirms and elaborates his position by stating that in explaining a sentence a different order of words prevails from that used in recitation. When explaining, the verb is most important, then the noun, then prepositions, and finally particles (Rājavāde, 1921: I p. 62 1. 5-7; Bhadkamkar, 1918: I p. 911. 15-16: vyākhyākāle... ākhyātapaḍaṁ pradhānām tad anu nāma tad anūpasargās tad anu nipātā[ḥ]).

Nilakanṭha Gārgya, the author of the Niruktaślokaavārttika (a metrical commentary), is of the same opinion as his predecessors, as will be clear from the following lines (Vijayapāla, 1982, p. 26 verses 1999ab & 201vd-202ab):

tad yatreyādīvyākṣena vākyārtho ‘py adhunocyate) ...

nāmākhyāte prayuṣyete yadda vākyaṁrasiddhaye ||
ubhe bhāvapradhāne tu tadā syātām itītām |

The sentence tad yatra etc. introduces also the meaning of the sentence. ...

When [both] a noun and a verb are used in order to establish the meaning of a sentence, then both have bhāva as principal [meaning]; this is here proclaimed.

Rudolph Roth, too, takes tad yatrobhe bhāvapradhāne bhavataḥ to be a separate sentence, to be understood in the
way of Durga, Skandasvāmin/ Maheśvara, and Nilakantha. This is clear from his Erläuterungen, where he offers the following translation/interpretation (p.4): “Wo beide verbunden stehen (im Satze) vereinigen sie sich zum Ausdruck eines Werdens.”

It is tempting to understand Durga, Skandasvāmin/ Maheśvara and Nilakanṭha, as well as Roth, in the light of later developments of the ideas about the expressiveness of sentences, developments long after Yāśka that culminated in what came to be known as śabdabodha. It is not necessary here to describe these developments in detail⁴, and it must suffice to recall that the grammarians—who in this respect had to defend their position against the Mīmāṃsakas and the Navya-Naiyāyikas—came to maintain that the meaning of the verb (or more specifically that of the verbal root) is the main qualificand of the sentence, which is qualified, among other things, by the meaning of the noun that is expressive of the grammatical subject.

The earliest author whose surviving remarks are suggestive in this connection is Patañjali (2nd century B.C.E.), whose Mahābhāṣya contains the following statement: ⁵

*āpara āha/ ākhyātam saviśeṣanam ity eva/
sarvāni hy etāni kriyāviśeṣanāni ।

Others say: “A [finite] verb with qualifications [makes a sentence]”, simply. For all these [qualifying words] are qualifications to the action.

It is however far from clear that Patañjali himself accepted this position, nor is it clear that Patañjali proposes to analyse sentences in this hierarchical manner.

This changes with Bhartrhari (5th century C.E.), whose Vākyapadīya contains the following verses: ⁶

*bahūnām sambhave ‘rthānām kecid evopakārīnāḥ ।
samsarge kaścid eśām tu prādhānyena pratiyate ॥

sadhyatvā tatra cākhyātair vyāpārāh siddha- sādhanāḥ ।
prādhānyenaḥbhidyante phalenāpi pravartitāḥ ॥

Where there are many meanings, some are subsidiary; one however is understood to be the principal one when they are intimately related. (40)

In that [situation] activities are expressed, by the verbs, as principal, because they are what is to be accomplished (sādhyā), even though [the activities themselves], whose means of accomplishment (sādhanā) are [already] accomplished (siddha), are urged forward by the result. (41)

Following verses discuss the difference in meaning between verbs like pacāti and nouns like pākah, an issue that is also addressed, it seems, in the passage of the Nirukta under consideration. But Bhartrhari’s discussion does not help us to determine the correct interpretation of that Nirukta passage.

And yet the importance of finding the correct interpretation of this passage cannot be denied. If Durga, Skandasvāmin/ Maheśvara, Nilakanṭha and Roth are right, this passage may contain the earliest seed of what was later to become an important philosophico-linguistic development, leading to śabdabodha in its various forms. This seed consists in the tendency to look upon the sentence as designating a principal meaning qualified by one or more other meanings. Alternatively, if Sarup’s interpretation is correct, the Nirukta contains no such seed.

Sarup was not the first to propose his interpretation. P. D. Gune had done so in an article that came out in 1916. Gune makes a number of observations, among them the following (p. 158-159):

...Both Durga and Roth look upon the sentence beginning from pūrvaparibhātam as a fresh one, not at all connected with the previous one tad yatrobhe-
etc. They appear to think that the sentences beginning with pūrvaparībhūtam etc. and mūrtam etc., are simply further explanations of the ākhyāta and nāma respectively. I would suggest that both have missed the point. I was led to the conclusion by the examples which are given for pūrvaparībhūtam etc. and mūrtam etc. They are vrajati pacaqīti and vrajyā paktiḥ iti respectively. If the sense was as Durga and Roth understood it, what was the propriety of giving vrajyā paktiḥ iti as examples of a sattva and not simply gaur aśvaj etc. as done later on?

Durga and Roth appear to believe that Yāska was thinking of the sentence, when he wrote tad yatrobhe etc. and that his view was that in a sentence, where both nāma and ākhyāta occur, the bhāva predominated. To say the least, Yāska has never for once given any indication that he believed in the doctrine of kriyāpradhānata; there is not the slightest hint, excepting this supposed one. I think Durga has here fathered his views on Yāska and Roth has copied him. Again if the sentence (vākyā) was here foremost in Yāska’s mind, in which he thought of determining the relative importance of the nāma and ākhyāta, he would not have omitted such an important word as vākyā and indicated it by the simple correlative conjunction yatra. Moreover to the etymologist with a vengeance, as Yāska surely is one, the word or pada is everything and the sentence or vākyā is nothing. Lastly the very division of the sentence tad yatrobhe bhāvapradhānē bhavataḥ as tad yatrobhe [-] bhāvapradhānē bhavataḥ as proposed by Durga and accepted by Roth, is highly unnatural and quite out of keeping with the lucid style of Yāska.

His sentences are clear-cut sentences, each having its own verb or predicate. The first part of the division proposed by Durga wants a predicate. And never for once does Yāska omit the word that is most important; while the reading proposed by Durga is egregiously faulty from this point of view...

I think the whole passage is to be explained in the following manner:

Yāska has first defined a nāma as sattva-pradhāna and an ākhyāta as bhāvapradhāna, both being padas... But there are some padas in the former category, where bhāva seems to be prominent. These are namely the abstract nouns, like vrajyā paktiḥ. Here is then clearly a case where the definition of the ākhyāta is applicable to certain kinds of nāma. The question therefore is, “where both i.e., nāma and ākhyāta, are characterized by the predominance of bhāva or becoming, how are you going to decide”? To this Yāska has a carefully considered answer. Says he “where (however) bhāva or becoming predominates in both, there (i.e. in such a case, the absence of the correlative tatra could be understood and is therefore immaterial) the bhāva in a state of flux or change (pūrvaparībhūtam or incomplete) is denoted by the ākhyāta e.g., vrajati, pacati; while on the other hand a complete bhāva (i.e. a bhāva that is no longer in becoming or in change) which has materialized into a sattva, is expressed by the names of sattva, e.g. vrajyā, paktiḥ going, cooking.” In vrajyā, paktiḥ which express a bhāva (e.g. bhāvāvacakam nāma) that bhāva is no longer in the process of becoming but is now complete; and therefore vrajyā and paktiḥ are to be classed under nouns or nāmāni.
The only scholar who, to my knowledge, has taken up the discussion where Gune left it, is V. K. Rajavade, who makes the following remarks (1940: 221):

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Among more recent scholars, Eivind Kahrs (1986: 121) is of the opinion that we shall probably never be able to make out whether the interpretations offered by Durga and Skanda-Maheśvara are in keeping with the intentions of Yāska or not. Ashok Aklujkar (1999: 99), on the other hand, endorses Gune’s position:

Gune (1916: 158-159) rightly argued that Durga’s... explanation of the Yāska sentence *tad yatro bhāvapradhāne bhavataḥ* ... is arbitrary in that it presupposes a sentence context where Yāska gives no evidence of being specifically concerned with sentences. The same criticism would apply to the explanation found in the subsequently discovered commentary of [Skanda-Maheśvara]...

Gune’s observations are no doubt important, and Rajavade’s arguments may not be compelling, yet it must be stated that Gune did not deal with all the questions surrounding the issue. This should be clear from what follows below:

It has already been noted that the choice between the two interpretations presented above depends on the punctuation to be understood and the words to be supplied. Sarup’s translation presupposes the following Sanskrit text (I take what seems to me the minimum possible):


Where both [noun and verb] have bhāva as principal [meaning], [there one expresses a bhāva that develops from earlier to later with the help of a verb --e.g. vrajaṭi, pacatī --. [but one expresses a bhāva that extends] from the beginning to the end,
that is embodied and has become a sattva, with the help of nouns (sattvanāman) -- e.g. vrajyā, paktih.\footnote{\[10\]}

The interpretation of Skandasvāmin/Maheśvara, Durga, Nilakantha and Roth presupposes a different reading:

\[
\text{tad yatrobeh [nāmākyāte tatra etc] bhāvapradhāne bhavatah/ pūrvāparibhūtaṁ bhāvam ākhyātenācāṣe vrajati pacatiyā upakramaprabhityapavargaparyantam/ mārtam sattvabhūtaṁ sattvanāmabhīh [ācāṣe]--vrajyā - paktir iti/}
\]

Where both [nouns and verb occur together, there they] have bhāva as principal [meaning]. [One] expresses with the help of a verb a bhāva that develops from earlier to later [and extends] from the beginning to the end; e.g. vrajati, pacati. [One expresses] something embodied that has become a sattva, with the help of nouns (sattvanāman) -- e.g. vrajyā, paktih.\footnote{\[8\]}

Both these interpretations share a difficulty: what is the subject of ācāṣe? I have supplied ‘one’ in the translation,\footnote{\[7\]} but this is not really convincing since Yāska normally uses a verbal form in the plural in connection with a non-specified subject. Two examples occur in the very same section (Nir 1.1): \[tam imam samāmnāyaṁ nighaṇṭava ity ācāṣate and tatrātān nāmākyātayor laṅṣanām pradisanti.\] Numerous others occur elsewhere in the Nirukta. Some examples from the first chapters are ācākṣiran (1.14); avagrhnantī (1.17); pradisanti, bhāṣante, abhibhāṣante (2.2); etc.\footnote{\[9\]}

A closer study of all the occurrences of ācāṣe and ācāksate in the Nirukta\footnote{\[9\]} reveals that ācāṣe always has a definite subject, whereas ācāksate frequently has a non-specified subject “they/one”. A short survey of the relevant passages confirms this.

Consider first ācāṣe. This verb occurs in the following contexts, and as far as I know nowhere else in the Nirukta.\footnote{\[10\]}

Nir 1.2: jāyata iti pūrvabhāvasyādīm ācāṣe na aparabhāvam ācāṣe na pratiṣedhati [i]...vinaśyaty aparabhāvasyādīm ācāṣe na pūrvabhāvam ācāṣe na pratiṣedhati “The word jāyate (‘is born’) expresses the beginning of the earlier state, [but] it neither expresses nor prohibits the later state;... the word vinaśyat (‘perishes’) expresses the beginning of the late state, [but] it neither expresses nor prohibits the earlier state.”

Nir 1.8: rcaṁ tvah pōsam āste pupuṣvān gāyaṁ iho vṛgah śākvarīṣu brahmā iho vādati jātavidyāṁ yajñasya mātrāṁ vi mimita u tvah/ iti tīvikkaranāṁ vinīyogam ācāṣe “The verse rcaṁ... tvah expresses the application of the ritual acts of the priests.”

Nir 3.12: vipakṣvaprajña atmagatim ācāṣe “The soul is of mature wisdom’ describes the characteristics of the soul” (tr. Sarup).

Nir. 3.22: katarā pūrvā katarāparāyoh kathā jātē kavyaṁ kō vi veda/viśvam maṁna bibhirto yād dha nāma vi vartete dhāni cakriyeval... iti dyāvāprthiyoh mahimānam ācāṣe “The verse katarā... cakriyeval expresses the greatness of heaven and earth.”

Nir. 4.23: ādītīr dyāur ādītīr antārikṣam ādītīr mātā sa pīṭā sa putraḥ viśve devā ādītīh pāncā jānā ādītīr jādīm ādītīr jānītvam/ iti adītīr vibhūtitīm ācāṣe “The verse ādītīr... jānītvam expresses the great power of Aditi.”

Nir 10.26, 12.37 and 12.38 discuss three further Vedic verses, each of which “expounds the course of the life of the soul” (atmagatim ācāṣe; tr. Sarup)
In all these passages ācaśte has a well-defined subject.

The plural ācakṣate, on the other hand, often lacks a precise subject. Examples are numerous, so that the following few must here suffice:

Nir 1.1: tam imaṁ samāṁnāyaṁ nighaṇṭava ity ācakṣate “[They] call this list (samāmnaya) nighantu”.

Nir 1.20; 7.1: tad yāṁ nāṁāṁ prādhānyastuṣṭāṁ devaṭāṁ ma tad daivatam ity ācakṣate “[They] call the names of the deities chiefly praises daivatā”.

Nir. 2.10; 2.24; 9.23; 10.26; 12.10: tatretiḥsāṁ ācakṣate “In this connection [they] tell [the following] story”.

Is there an interpretation of the passage under consideration which provides ācaśte with a subject? Such an interpretation is possible, and might take the following shape:

\[ \text{tad yatrubhe [nāmākhyāte] bhāvapradhāne bhavataḥ pūrvāparībhūtactḥ bhāvam ākhyātenācaste} \]
\[ - vrajati pacati - upakrama-prabhrtyapaśvargaparyantam mūtraṁ sattvabhūtactḥ sattvanāmabhiḥ [ācaste] - vrajyā paktir iti - / \]

The [sentence] in which both [noun and verb] have bhāva as principal [meaning] expresses with the help of the verb the bhāva that develops from earlier to later—e.g. vrajati, pacati—, and with the help of nouns that which is embodied, [extends] from the beginning to the end, and has become a sattva, e.g. vrajyā, paktiḥ—.

Here no tatra corresponding to yatra is supplied, but tad, the very first word of the passage, is taken to correspond to yatra and to be the subject of ācaśte.

This interpretation would oblige us to look upon the subject of ācaśte as something that contains both a verb and a noun; or, in view of plural sattvanāmabhiḥ, a verb and one or more nouns; that is to say: a sentence. It is in the sentence that both noun and verb have bhāva as principal meaning.

This interpretation is not however free from difficulties. There is, to begin with, the “very decided preference for putting the relative clause before that to which it relates” (Whitney, 1888: 196 § 512a). This would support the idea that tad in the above passage is used adverbially. And indeed, there are many passage in the Nirukta where adverbial tad precedes a form of yad, which is then referred back to by a subsequently occurring form of tad. E.g.

1.1 \[ \text{tad yāṁ catvāri padajātāṁ nāmākhyāte copasarganipātāṁ ca tāṁ imāṁ bhavanti.} \]

1.3 \[ \text{tad ya esu padārthaḥ prāhur ime tāṁ nāmākhyātayor arthavikaranam.} \]

1.12; cp. 1.14 \[ \text{tad yatra svarasāmskārau samarthau prādeśikena vikārenāvītavat syātām samviśantāni tāṁ yathā gaur aśvah puruṣo hastī.} \]

1.20 \[ \text{tad yad anyadaivate mantre nipaṭati naighaṇṭukaṁ tat.} \]

1.20; 7.1 \[ \text{tad yāṁ nāṁāṁ prādhānyastuṣṭāṁ devaṭāṁ ma daivatam ity ācakṣate.} \]

2.1 \[ \text{tad yeṣu padeṣu svarasāmskārau samarthau prādeśikena vikārenāvītavat syātāṁ tathā tāṁ nirbrāyāt.} \]

2.2 \[ \text{tad yatra svarād anantarāntardhātarr bhavati tad dviprakṛtināṁ sthānam iti pradiśanti.} \]

2.23; 2.27 \[ \text{tad yad devatāvad upariṣṭat tad vyākhyāsyāmāḥ.} \]

2.24 \[ \text{tad yad dvivid upariṣṭat tad vyākhyāsyāmāḥ.} \]

5.11 \[ \text{tad ya etāś cāndramasya āgāminya āpo bhavanti raśmayas tā aparapakṣe pibanti.} \]
beginning of the sixth century A. D., Maheśvara: twelfth century A. D. ... For the purpose of the present essay, I accept Sarup’s 1931 dating of Durga and [Skanda-Maheśvara]. However, I would not be surprised if future research were to push the dates back.

Bhartrhari lived in the 5th century C. E. The reflections presented in this article suggest that Durga may not have lived before that century, and not therefore in the first century A. D. or even earlier, as proposed by Sarup and Aklujakar.

Notes
1 Rajavade, 1940: 19 has the following punctuation: bhāvapradhānām ākhyātām/ sattapradhānānām nāmaṇi/tad yatrobe bhāvapradhāne bhavatāḥ/pūrvaparībhātām bhāvam ākhyānena caste vrajai/pacaliti/upakramaprabhītī apavargaparyantam/mūrtam sattapradhānām sattavānāmābhī prajā pakti iti/ado iti sattvānām upadeśah/gaur aśvah puruṣa hastitī/ bhavāti bhāvāsya/ āste sēte vrajai /isthitī/
2 Strictly speaking one should translate nāman ‘nominal word’, because it also includes adjectives. For simplicity’s sake I will here use ‘noun’.
3 Skandasvāmī/Maheśvara paraphrases bhāva as kriyā (Sarup, 1982: I p. 9 1. 2).
7 Both Roth and Sarup translate in the passive (‘wird ausgesagt’), ‘is denoted’), which amounts to the same.
8 A possible exception is Nir 2.1: tad yeṣu padeṣu svarasamśkarau samarthau prādeśikeṇa vikāreṇa avitāvya syātāṃ tathā tāni nirābyāt/ athānāvite ‘ṛthe ‘prādeśe kikāre ‘ṛkantaḥ parikṣeta/kenacid vṛttiśāmānyaṇaḥ avidyāmāne sāmānye ‘py akṣara- vānandasāmānya nirābyāt/ na tva eva na nirābyāt/ na samākram ādriyata/ viṣayatvāya hi vṛttayo bhavantī/ yathāḥ tathām vibhaktīn sannamaṇeyt “With reference to [etymology], the words, the accent and the grammatical form of which are
regular and are accompanied by a derivational modification, should be derived in the ordinary manner. But the meaning being irrelevant, and the modification not being in accordance with the grammatical derivation, one should always examine them with regard to their meaning, by the analogy of some (common) course of action. If there be no (such) analogy, one should explain them even by the community of a (single) syllable or sound; but one should never (give up the attempt at) derivation. One should not attach (too much) importance to the grammatical form, for these complex formations (vyrttayaḥ) are (often) subject of exceptions. One should interpret the divisions according to the meaning.”
(Tr. Sarup, modified, partly in the light of Mehendale, 1978: 11, 76, and Scharfe, 1977: 122 with note 26). However, the non-expressed subject of this passage is qualified by the adjective arthanityah, and may therefore be more definite (perhaps nairuktaḥ “an etymologist”) than is clear at first sight.

9 Excluding chapters 13 and 14, which are later additions.

10 The identification of these passages has been much facilitated by the electronic version of the Nirukta prepared by G. Cardona.

References


Abbreviations

Mahā-bh  Patañjali, (Vyākaraṇa-) Mahābhāṣya, ed. F. Kielhorn, Bombay 1880-1885.

Nir.  Nirukta

P.  Pāñinian sūtra

vt.  vārttika on Pāñinian sūtra