CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SEMANTIC HISTORY OF SAMNYĀSA

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Samnyāsa is a relatively new term in the Sanskrit vocabulary. It occurs rarely in the Vedic corpus and did not enter the Buddhist or Jaina vocabularies. Even medieval Sanskrit lexicographers ignore this term. Samnyāsa is used exclusively in Brāhmaṇical writings, and in its early usage indicated only one aspect of renunciation, namely the abandonment of ritual activity. In the early phase of its semantic development several attempts were made to give it restricted technical meanings. These, however, did not gain popular acceptance. An important stage in this development is the use of samnyāsa to designate the rite of renunciation. Samnyāsa must have acquired its classical meaning as a generic term for renunciation and a synonym of such well-known terms as pārivrājya and pravrājya several centuries after Manu. We find it used with that meaning in texts belonging to the 3-4 century A.D.

Samnyāsa is the most common term for the lifestyle of a world renouncer both in Sanskrit and in the modern Indian languages. It is often given as the title of the fourth āśrama.1 Samnyāsin is commonly used as a synonym of terms such as parivrājaka, pravrājīta, śramana, bhikṣu and yati. I shall call this the classical meaning of S.2

Perhaps due to the extensive use of S with that meaning in the medieval Sanskrit literature, scholars have tacitly assumed that the term had an identical meaning also in the ancient period of Indian literature. Evidence, however, does not warrant such an assumption.

I. S is not a common term in the Vedic literature. Only the verbal forms of S occur in the pre-upanisadic texts: twice in the Samhitās and twice in the Brāhmaṇas. In these S is unrelated to renunciation. The expression nāmaṃ tām navyam samnyāse is used in a hymn Indra found in the Jaimitiya Samhitā [2.7.3]. It is repeated in the Mahānāmārācika [8] of the Kautuma Samhitā and in the Aitareya Āranyaka [4.9]. The precise meaning of the term samnyāse in this context is unclear.3 The meaning of S is clearer and more specific in the Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā: āngiraso vai svayam-font yatra mekhalāḥ samnyāsyaṁca tato śrao jāyata [3.6.7]. According to this myth, śrao grass, which is used to make girdles, first grew at the place where the Āngirasas had cast off their girdles when they were about to go to heaven.4 Here S refers to the act of throwing down together in a pile objects no longer wanted. It implies rejection or discarding—an important aspect of its meaning in later usage.

Both occurrences of S in the Brāhmaṇas are in the Satapatha. The meaning of S and the context in which it is used there are the same as in the Maitrāyaṇī. The first occurrence is in the myth on the origin of the elephant. The seven sons of Aditi fashioned man out of the aborted eighth son. In the process they cut off some of the flesh, which they ‘threw down in a pile.’ From that the elephant came into being: tasya yāni nāmānī samvyāśa samnyāsā tato hasti samudhavat [3.1.3.4]. The second is in the myth on the origin of aśvavāla

1 Both the Vācaspatiya and the Śābdakalpadruma give caturthāśrama as a synonym of samnyāsa. The only definition of samnyāsa that the Viśvaśadānāmaṇjūva gives is caturthā āśrama.

2 In this paper samnyāsa, samnyāsin, samnyāsana, samnyās and other cognate terms will be collectively referred to as ‘S’.

3 The editors of the VVRI word index consider samnyāse to be an obscure term. A. B. Keith is also of the same opinion: cf. Aitareyāranyaka (Oxford, 1909), p. 263, note 7. Sāyaṇa, commenting on the Mahānāmārācika, 8, and the Aitareya Āranyaka, 4.9, explains samnyāse thus: samyay niṭṭārī prakṛṣṭpāni, āśmin karmanī havīṣo bhokṣṭvera sthāpayāmi. According to Sāyaṇa, therefore, it refers to the bringing down of Indra to partake of the sacrifice.

4 For another version of this myth see Taittirīya Samhitā, 6.1.3.

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grass. The sacrifice, assuming the shape of a horse, had escaped. The gods ran after it. They caught hold of its tail, tore it out and 'threw it down in a pile': tāṁ ḍhupya sārdhām sammyāsa tata etā osadhayāh samabhavan [3.4.1.17].

In the classical Upaniṣads S occurs only in a single verse of the Mundāka: sammyāsa-gadā yatah śūndhāsatvāḥ [3.2.6]. The fact that yāti are purified through the practice of sammyāsa suggests that in the eyes of the author of the Mundāka sammyāsa is a discipline undertaken by a yāti and, therefore, not synonymous with a yāti's state of life. The Mahānārāyana Upaniṣad, apart from citing the above Mundāka verse at 229, does not use S at all, although its editor, Varenne, calls it "une sorte de 'Brève du Renonçant'" and its last part "une sammyāsa-ucpaniṣad." Four times [516 (twice), 530, 538] it uses the term nyāsa with a meaning approximating sammyāsa. Both the Mundāka and the Mahānārāyana are rather late Upaniṣads and are in all probability post-Buddhist. S is repeated twice in the stock phrase sammyāsu ca yogī cāmmayāyī ceti in the Maitrāyani Upaniṣad [6.10]. This text is even later than the other two, and Van Buitenen in his critical edition considers the passage in question an editorial interpolation.

II. Surprising as it may seem, S is totally absent in the Buddhist and the Jain vocabularies. It is not found either in Pāli, which has parallels for all common Sanskrit terms for a renouncer and renunciation,9 or in Jain Prākṛt.10 As far as I can determine S is not found in Mahāyāna literature. According to Edgerton sammyāsa [= sammyāsa] in Buddhist Sanskrit signifies a kind of disease.11 This evidence indicates that S did not belong to the vocabulary of the common ascetical heritage of both Brāhmaṇism and the heterodox sects.

III. Even in post-Vedic Brāhmaṇical literature S is not as commonly used as we have been led to believe. In the Śrāutasūtras S, always in the verbal form, is used a total of five times. These usages, again, are outside the context of renunciation. In at least three of these occurrences S is used to indicate the discarding of unwanted items. The Baudhāyana Śrāutasūtra, describing the pātisanāyāja offerings, states that blades of darbha are placed between the wife's thighs and arranged in a straight row from the gārhapatiya fire to the dhāvanāya. What remains is 'thrown down' on the bed of grass covering the altar: atha yaṁ atiśtiyante tāṁ bahiṣṭha samygasyati [3.30]. Similarly, in the same text, the Agnīdha priests are said to eat pieces cut from the oblation and to 'throw down' the remainder: sadavattam nighrene bhakṣayīvā bahiṣṭha samygasyanti [5.15]. A very similar usage is found in the Vaiśekhāna Śrāutasūtra where the remnants of food sticking to the fingers after eating are said to be 'thrown down': tatah kimciad avagṛhavya bhāriṣṭa lepaṁ samygasyati [9.9]. The Hiranyakeshi Śrāutasūtra uses the term with reference to the instruments used to construct the altar. After its construction they are 'thrown down in a pile': sphyh svasīt ity utkare vedikaraṇāni samygasyāni yathārāpaṁ [8.5.23].12 Finally, in the Baudhāyana Śrauta the term is used without connoting rejection merely to indicate the depositing of several items together in one place: dṛhṭya samidha āgnidhasye samygasyanti [5.16].

S is also absent in the Grhyasūtras, with the exception of the Vaiśekhāna and the Āgīvēśya, both of which was born in 1524 A.D. This isolated occurrence of S in such a late and non-Jain work serves to highlight its conspicuous absence in early Prākṛt literature.


12 At least according to the commentator, Gopinātha Bhattachārya, rejection or discarding is not implied here: yāh sphydhibhi vedhi kṛṇa tāṁ vedikaraṇāṁ samyag nyasyāṁ samyagastāṁ etadṛśāṁ yathārāpaṁ yathāhṛtyam upatiṣṭhatam ity arthah | ... samadbhiḥ prabhadbhbhena nyāśaḥḥ | nyāṣitam tadbhi nādhināvṛtya arthah | nityupasargā samyagārthah | utkare sphyadbhbham nyasaṁ nam parākarmikarthe | samygaśāmabdbdusvāraṣā | anyathā samygyaṣiḥ brahāḥ |
which belong to a period long after the composition of the classical śūtrās.\textsuperscript{13}

Pāṇinī and Patañjali, both of whom use several terms for a renouncer,\textsuperscript{14} fail to mention S. The Amarakośa, moreover, does not use S among the synonyms for 'renouncer'.\textsuperscript{15} What is even more remarkable and surprising is that S has not entered the Sanskrit lexicographical tradition at all. Even medieval lexicographers, during whose time S was undoubtedly in common use, totally ignore it. Both Halāyudha [10th cent. A.D.] and Yādavapakrāśa [11 cent. A.D.] omit it in the list of synonyms for 'renouncer',\textsuperscript{16}

although they give it as a synonym for 'fasting.'\textsuperscript{17} The absence of S in the Amarakośa, therefore, does not warrant the conclusion that it was not in use during the time of Amarasimha.\textsuperscript{18} Sanskrit lexicographers apparently did not introduce current usages into their lexicons but followed the established vocabularies handed down by their predecessors. We can, however, safely conclude that at least during the formative period of the lexicographical tradition, i.e., several centuries before Amarasimha, S was not considered a synonym of other common words for a renouncer, such as bhikṣu and parivṛtaṇa.

Other ancient texts in which S is absent include the Arthaśāstra, the Kāmasūtra, and the Pañcatantra, all of which use several terms for a renouncer.\textsuperscript{19} Surprisingly the Rāmāyaṇa never uses S within the context of renunciation. S is found in the Rāmāyaṇa at 3.8.25 with the meaning of 'giving up' but without any reference to renunciation.\textsuperscript{20} At least twice samyṣṭā is used in it to mean 'deposit' or 'trust.'\textsuperscript{21} The glaring absence of S as a term for renunciation in the

\textsuperscript{13} Caland places the Vaiśhānasamārthasastra around the 4th century A.D. (Vaiśhānasamārthaśāstra, Calcutta, 1929, pp. xv-xvi). The recent work of Ram Gopal supports Caland's date: "Although all the arguments advanced by Prof. Caland may not meet with general acceptance, we see no reason to dispute the view that the Vaiśhānasamārthasastra in its present form is a very late work." \textit{India of Vedas Kalpasūtras} (Delhi, 1959), p. 79. On the Āgīvīśa Gṛhyasūtra Gopal comments: "Judged from the point of view of matter, style and language, this Grihya is far removed from the other Griyās. Its style is diffuse and discursive and is marked with a stamp of recentness. Some of the topics treated of in the Agnī. G.S. are absolutely foreign to the tenor of the other Gṛhyāsūtras and bear the stamp of later religious ideas." Ibid., p. 30. "The Āgīvīśa Gṛhyasūtra appears to be the latest of all the Gṛhyasūtras now available in print. Its style of composition can hardly deserve the name of Sūtra-style ... All pieces of internal evidence point to the recentness of the Agnī. G.S. . . . The Agnī. G.S. is, on the whole, a late compilation," Ibid., p. 80. S occurs once in the Bauddhāyana Pitṛmedhasūtra, 2.4.17. Caland calls the second Prāṇa of this text, in which S occurs, "decidedly secondary": \textit{The Pitṛmedhasūtras of Bauddhāyana Hīracakrīn and Gauḍānta} (Leipzig, 1896), p. ix.

\textsuperscript{14} parivṛtaṇa, śramaṇa, bhikṣu, yati, maskari; Pāṇinī, Asāhdyāyi, 4.3.110; 6.1.154; Patañjali, Mahābhāṣya on Pāṇinī, 1.1.39; 2.1.1; 2.4.12; 3.2.14, 124-125; 4.2.66; 5.1.174, 113; 6.1.13, 154.

\textsuperscript{15} bhikṣuḥ parivṛtṛ karmanā pārāśary api maskari / tapasi ṛtнима pārāśary vācanyamu muñc | Amarakośa, ed. V. V. Jhalikākara (Bombay, 1886), 2.7.42.

\textsuperscript{16} yati pārāśary bhikṣuḥ parivṛtṛ pārāśaryākāraḥ / anuśākṛ pārāśaryākāraḥ jāti / Yādavapakrāśa, Vaijayanti, Bhārāṇaḥāya, 160. pārāśary vrati bhikṣu maskari pārāśaryā | parivṛtṛ karmanā tapasi karmāṇi tapasi samṛcitāḥ | Halāyudha, Abhidhānaratnamālā, 2.254. Hemacandra, in his Ānēkārthasaṃgraha, mentions yati [2.186] and pārāśaryā [4.16] but not S.

\textsuperscript{17} Cf. Vaijayanti, Brāhmanābhāya, 144; Abhidhānaratnamālā, 4.75. The Vaijayanti [Parāśarya, 28] uses the term samyṣṭāpallī to mean a hut.

\textsuperscript{18} Winternitz places the Amarakośa between the 6th and the 8th century A.D.: \textit{History of Indian Literature}, trans. S. Jha (Delhi, 1967), III-II, p. 456.

\textsuperscript{19} Arthaśāstra: pravṛtta [1.10.7; 1.11.8; 1.12.26; 2.1.29.30, 32; 2.23.2; 2.28.18; 2.36.39; 3.1.12; 3.4.37; 3.20.16; 4.4.3; 4.13.36; 12.2.21; 13.2.44], parivṛtṛākāra [1.1.12; 1.1.12.10.13; 3.3.13; 3.4.4.9; 4.1.62; 4.1.3.5; 5.1.19.50; 5.2.11; 5.3.23; 11.1.52; 12.2.20], yati [3.16.37].

\textsuperscript{20} Pañcatantra: parivṛtṛ [1.1.2.123, 170; 2.9.115], parivṛtṛākāra [1.1.13.135; 2.9.115], parivṛtṛākāra [1.1.128, 158; 2.1.96.21], bhikṣu [5.46.52], śramaṇa [5.49].

\textsuperscript{21} Kāmasūtra: kṣapitā [4.1.9], kṣapitā [5.4.43], tāpasi [5.4.43], pravṛtā [1.5.23.29; 5.5.8], bhikṣu [1.5.34; 6.1.9], bhikṣukā [1.3.14; 1.4.35; 4.1.9; 5.4.43.63; 5.5.24], bhikṣukā [5.5.24].

\textsuperscript{22} yadī rājyaḥ hi samyṣṭats. The reference is to Rāma’s abdication. The critical edition gives several variant readings of samyṣṭats: parivṛtṛāya, samyṣṭate. The Rāmāyaṇa uses several terms to indicate a renouncer: parivṛtṛāka [3.44.2, 3.45.1; 3.47.8; 3.52.15], bhikṣu [2.27.31; 3.44.8, 3.47.6; 4.3.3, 21; 4.14], śramaṇa [1.1.13.8, 18.3.18], śramaṇa [1.1.46; 3.69.19; 3.70.7].

\textsuperscript{23} evaī rājyaḥ manma bhārata datvam samyṣṭasvavariṣṭam [2.107.14], bharatā śivasū kṣepa samyṣṭasvam pāvate tathā | bhārata tu mayi samyṣṭaś ca kṣepayat saukṛtvam [2.232], sa nyāsāvadhānā [variant samyṣṭasvavādānā] datvam punye tapasi tīṣṭhaḥ [3.8.15]. Cf. also 3.8.16.17. At 5.5.3 S is used in the compound prāṇasamyṣṭa to mean suicide.
Ramayana becomes even more significant when contrasted with the Mahabharata in which it is used a total of fifty-three times [cf., below, IV, VI]. We may reasonably conclude that S was at best a very uncommon term for renunciation during the period when the Ramayana was put into its present form. It is nevertheless found in the Dharmaśāstra literature that one would expect to find the most frequent use of S. This is no doubt true of the medieval commentatorial and nībandha literature. But the picture is very different in the literature of the more ancient period. S is absent in the three oldest documents, namely the Dharmaśūtras of Gautama, Proto-Baudhāyana and Āpastamba. Vasiṣṭha [10.4] is the first dharmaśāstra writer to use the term, but with a very special and restricted meaning [cf., below, IV]. It is also absent in the Viṣṇudharmasūtra, with the exception of a single occurrence in a subhāṣya verse [22.91] found also in Manu [5.108] and in a somewhat different form in Yājñavalkya [3.32]. Yājñavalkya uses the expression nyastakarmā [3.204] where nyasta stands for saṃnyasta. Manu, as we shall see, uses S only to indicate a special type of ascetic and not with reference to renunciation in general [cf., below, IV].

IV. Each Indian religious tradition placed emphasis on different aspects of a renouncer's life-style. In the earliest phase of renunciation known to us through Buddhist, Jain and Brāhmānical writings the most important elements were considered to be the life of homelessness and mendicancy. Consequently, we find the descriptive epithets parivājak, parivāt, pravrajita and bhikṣu among the most frequently used terms to indicate a renouncer. Within the Brāhmānical tradition, however, there occurred over a time a noticeable shift in emphasis from wandering-mendicancy to the abandonment of ritual activity as the central feature of renunciation. This emphasis is expressed in the very rite of initiation into renunciation, whose main focus is the abandonment of all the accessories of the ritual, such as the sacred fires, the sacrificial thread, the top-knot, and the sacrificial utensils. The Bhagavad Gītā in its diatribe against renunciation betrays the fact that during its time the essence of renunciation was generally considered to lie in the abandonment of ritual acts [cf., below, IV]. This understanding of renunciation has remained constant throughout.

22 It is generally agreed that the Ramayana assumed its present form several centuries before the final redaction of the Mahābhārata. Jacob reckons that the Ramayana must have been generally familiar as an ancient work before the Mahābhārata reached its final form: Das Ramayana (Bonn, 1893), p. 71. Winternitz agrees with Jacob's assumption [A History of Indian Literature, trans. S. Keitark (Calcutta, 1963), 1-11, p. 442] and states: "It is probable that the original Ramayana was composed in the third century B.C. by Vālmiki on the basis of ancient ballads." Ibid., p. 453. A. L. Basham also considers that "the legend was perhaps committed to verse in the form in which we have it, but excluding the first and last books, a little before the commencement of the Christian era." The Wonder that was India (London, 1967), p. 414.

23 Scholars are in agreement that the third and fourth prāsnas of the Baudhāyana Dharmaśūtra are later additions: cf. G. Bühler, The Sacred Laws of the Aryas (SBE, Vol XIV; Oxford, 1882), II, pp. xxxiii-xxxv. P. V. Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra (Poona, 1931), I, p. 23. I believe that the section 2.17-18, which concludes the second prāśna and deals with the rite of renunciation and the duties of a renouncer, also forms part of these later additions: cf. P. Olivelle, "The Notion of Āśrama in the Dharmaśūtras," Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens, XVII (1973), pp. 29-30. For the sake of convenience I shall call these later additions collectively "Deutero-Baudhāyana" and the older section consisting of the first prāśna and the first 16 chapters of the second prāśna "Proto-Baudhāyana." In the latter, which should be considered the authentic sūtra, renunciation is dealt with at 2.11.9-34. S is totally absent in the Proto-Baudhāyana, while it is regularly used in the Deutero-Baudhāyana. For further details see my article "Renouncer and Renunciation in the Dharmaśāstras," in Studies in Dharmaśāstra, ed. R. Larivière, in press.
Brähmanical history. A work as late as Vāsudeva-
śrama's Vātīdharmaprabhāśa defines renunciation thus:
samnyāsaścāmaśāṃ śaktyaḥ krīdākleśaṃ niyamattitaka-
kāmyaśtātuśrīnāraṃ prāśamantraṃ samuc-
caryā parītyaṃ. The prāya, namely, the formula
samnyāsanam mayā (I have renounced), is considered
the essential act of the rite of renunciation.28 According
To Vāsudeva it is karma (ritual acts) that one abandons
when one utters this sacred formula.

One of the earliest terms used to express this aspect
of a renouncer’s life was anārāmbha. Anārāmbha is a
term commonly associated with the performance of
ritual actions. Vasiṣṭha, for example, states: ārām-
hayaṇāṇī jāpayaṇaḥ viśiṣṭho daśabhīr gunaḥ.29 The
Gītā uses ārāmbha with that meaning at 3.7; 4.19;
14.12; 18.48. Already in the Gautama Dharmasūtra
[3.25] the renouncer is characterized as anārāmbhin.
This is echoed in the Gītā’s recurrent phrase sarvān-
haparipaṭtyāgī [12.16; 14.25]. That the prevailing view
considered anārāmbha essential to the goal of renuncia-
tion is indicated by the Gītā’s attack on it: na kar-
manānī anārāmbhān nāṣkarmāṃ puruṣo śinute
[3.4].

It is only to this single aspect of Brähmanical
renunciation that S refers in its earliest recorded usage
within the context of renunciation. Vasiṣṭha, the first
dharmaśāstra writer to use the term states:

\[
\text{sāmnyāsat sarvakarmānī vedam ekaṃ na sāmnyāsat} \\
\text{vedasāmnyasatonācaḥ chādras tasmaḥ vedanāmaṃ }
\]

[10.4]

The meaning is clear: S should be directed at ‘all rites’
but not at the Veda. Manu attaches a technical mean-
ing to S [cf., below, IV], but it is always directed at karma:
samnyāsa sarvakarmā [6.95], evam sāmnyāṣa kar-
manā [6.96]. In Yājñavalkya also, where we find the
expression nyastakarmā [3.204], S has the same
meaning.

27 Ed. P. Olivelle (Vienna, 1976), 1.2. Vāsudeva expands on
this definition at 1.3-17. For a study of this definition see my
article cited in the preceding note.

28 atra samnyāso nāma uṣrāmbād anārāmbād vacṣapāsā-
rāman gacchānti samkalpaḥ prāśaṃcetāpram abhayadānām
cei cītyāya eva. Vāsudevāśrama, op. cit., 20.1. The same
assertion is made by Viśveśvara Sarasvati in his Vātīdharmasū-

29 Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra, 26.9. The term is used with refer-
ence to magical rites in the Aṅkāśṭra, 9.7.68. Cf. also Manu
7.43; Mahābhārata, 12.12.17.

The Bhavavad Gītā uses S twenty-two times.30 The
author of the Gītā attempts to reinterpret the meaning
or discover the ‘true’ meaning of S. He proposes that
attachment to or the desire for the fruits of karma
[sanga, phala] ought to be considered the proper object
of S, not karma as such. The very fact, however, that he
felt the need to undertake such a reinterpretation
proves that S was commonly thought to refer to
the abandonment of karma. S is used thirteen times in
the Gītā with karma as the object31 and nine times with
desire or attachment as the object.32 Significantly the
Gītā calls a person who abandons his attachment to
the fruits of karma ‘nityasamnyāsin’ [5.3]. The meaning
of this term becomes clear when we contrast the
nityasamnyāsin with the regular samnyāsin. The latter
abandons karma once, namely during the rite of
renunciation, whereas the former is engaged continually
in abandoning attachment. For the Gītā the
nityasamnyāsin represents the true renouncer: sa
samnyāsat ca yogi ca na nirantar na cācāryā [6.1]. Thus
the Gītā proposes sārvasamkalpāsamnyāsat [6.2.4] as an
alternative to the oft repeated injunction sarvakarmānī
samnyāset. What is significant for our study is that the
Gītā never uses S as a synonym of parivṛtta or
bhikṣu.33 S indicates only a very restricted, though
important, aspect of a renouncer’s life.

In chapter 18 the Gītā attempts to draw a distinction
between samnyāsa and tyāga [18.1]. At first sight
the distinction is clear enough:

\[
kāmyānām karmanāṃ nyāsanāṃ samnyāsanāṃ kavyo vidūkha \\
sarvakarmaphalātyāgaṃ prāhau tyāgaṃ vicakṣaṇah ā\\n\]

[18.2]

Tyāga thus indicates the internal quality of detach-
ment, while samnyāsa is the actual abandonment
of optional rites.34 However, the Gītā does not consis-
tently maintain such a distinction. We have seen that S

30 Gītā, 3.3.30; 4.41; 5.1.2 (twice); 6.1.13; 6.1.2 (twice); 4.9.28;
12.6; 18.1.2 (twice); 7.12; 49.57.

31 Gītā, 3.3.30; 4.41; 5.1.2 (twice); 5.13; 12.6; 18.1.2 (twice),
7.57.

32 Gītā, 5.3.6; 6.1.2 (twice); 4.9.28; 18.12.49.

33 It is significant that the Gītā attacks only the abandonment
of ritual activity and not other aspects of renunciation, such
as wandering and mendicancy.

34 This restriction of samnyāsa to the optional rites is
generally followed by later Brähmanical writers. Both the
Vācaspatya and the Śabdakalpadruma give the Gītā’s definition
as the primary meaning of samnyāsa.
is often used with reference to the attachment to karmaphala. Discounting the uses of tyāga outside the present context, it is used twenty-one times in the Gītā with reference to the attachment to karmaphala and only ten times with reference to karma. Even though S is used more frequently with reference to karma and tyāga with reference to saṅga and karmaphala, the two terms are used interchangeably in the Gītā as in other literature on renunciation. Nevertheless, the fact that when making the above distinction the author of the Gītā instinctively chooses S to indicate the abandonment of karma is further proof that this term referred primarily to the abandonment of rites.

A new dimension of S is unveiled in a stock phrase of the Gītā: mayi sarvāḥ karmāṅi samśaya [3.30; 12.6; 18.57]. Abandonment is here transformed into surrender; God is the ‘place’ where karma is ‘thrown down.’ S is thus incorporated into the realm of bhakti. Samśaya as ‘surrender’ is also the theme of 9.27:

yat karoṣī yad aṁśaḥ yaj uṣhoṣi dādāsi yat
yat tapasyasi kaunteya tat karasya madarpanam

One who performs karma as an arpana is called in the very next verse samnayasya vāyuktaṁ [9.28]. Karmasamnyāsa, in this sense, is equal to what the Gītā at 11.55 calls maikarmakṛti. This meaning of S is related to some of its uses outside the context of renunciation noted earlier. In the Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā [cf., above, I] and in the Śrautasūtras [cf., above, III], just as in Gītā 3.30, the place where the items are thrown down is indicated by the locative case. In the Rāmāyaṇa [cf., above, III] S is used with the meaning ‘deposit’ or ‘trust,’ which comes close to what the author of the Gītā has in mind when he states that one should surrender karma to God.

During the formative period in the semantic history of S attempts were made to give it a more precise and technical meaning. One such attempt is found in Manu 6.86-96. Manu deals with the fourth āśrama, i.e., renunciation, which he calls mokṣa [cf. 1.114; 6.35,36,37,44], at 6.33-85. Verse 6.86 concludes that section

and clearly indicates the conclusion of one topic and the beginning of another:

esa dharma nāśītaḥ vo yaṁ nāṁ niyātātmanam
vedasamnyāsikānām tu karmayogam nibodhatā

This expression is used by Manu repeatedly to signal the passage from one topic to another. Manu, thus, clearly distinguishes vedasamnyāsīka from yati, i.e., the normal renouncer, whose duties he has described under the fourth āśrama in the section immediately preceding this verse. In that section consisting of fifty-three verses Manu does not use S at all. Instead he uses the older terms pura-vṛjā [6.33,41,85], pra-vṛjā [6.34,38,39] and yati [6.54,55,56,58,69,86]. In the eleven verses [6.86-96] on the vedasamnyāsīka, on the other hand, Manu uses S five times [6.86,94,95,96 (twice)]. The list of topics given in the first chapter also indicates that Manu envisages a distinction between yati and vedasamnyāsīka.

strīdharmayogam tāpasyaṁ mokṣam samnyāsam eva
ca / [1.114]

Commentators of Manu as well as modern scholars have assumed that in this verse mokṣa and samnyāsa are used as synonyms. Nevertheless, such an assumption is unfounded. In this list Manu never uses two terms to describe one topic. Mokṣa and samnyāsa refer to two different sections of the book, i.e., 6.33-85 dealing with renunciation and 6.86-96 on the vedasamnyāsīka. It is the life-style of a vedasamnyāsīka that Manu calls samnyāsa.

35 Cf. Gītā, 1.9,33; 2.3; 4.9; 8.6,13.
36 Gītā, 2.48,51; 4.20,21; 5.10,11,12; 6.24; 12.11,12(twice); 16.21; 18.1, 2(twice),6.9(twice),10.11(twice).
37 Gītā, 12.16; 14.25; 18.3(twice),5.7,8(twice),11.48.
38 Roughly this period is from the 2nd century B.C. to the 4th century A.D. Cf., below, VII.
39 At the start of the section on the king: esa vo bhūhitā
dharma brāhmaṇasya catuvadāh / puyo kṣayaphalaṁ
prītya rājaṁ dharmam nibodhatā // [6.97]. Before the section on acts that lead to liberation: esa sarvah samuddhiṁ
karmāṅm vah phelodayaḥ / saṁbhreyasyakṣam karma
40 Bühler translates the passage thus: "... (the manner of gaining) final emancipation and (of) renouncing the world." Govindarāja takes the two terms as referring to the same state: bhukṣoḥ samāníkaṁ悦 mokṣaṁ sammyāsa eva bhuk-
sudharmopākāra eva. Kulūkā takes mokṣa as the 'dharma of renouncers' but equates it with samnyāsa: mokṣaphetuvān
mokṣam yatidharmam / yatidharmāvī prī samnyāsasya
prītahugupadeśāh prādāhavyajña-tāpanārthāḥ // This interpre-
tation is repeated almost verbatim by Rāghavānanda. Sarvajñaṇāraṇya also equates the two: mokṣam mokṣāhetu-
karmasamnyāsam karmaphalasya.
What, however, is this śaṃnyāsa and how does it differ from normal renunciation (pārīvṛtyā)? After opening the discussion of śaṃnyāsa at 6.86, Manu devotes the next two verses to stating that all four āśramas assumed successively lead a man to the highest state (nayantā paramām gatim). Then he introduces a rider: it is not necessary to go through all the āśramas in order to reach that state. In verses 6.89-90 he praises the householder's āśrama as the highest and the best. Everyone, irrespective of one's āśrama, should observe the dharma consisting of ten points [6.91-92]. Those who study this tenfold dharma and live according to it attain the highest state [6.93]. The point Manu wants to make is clear: it is not necessary to become a renouncer (yati) to attain liberation. Even a householder who follows the tenfold dharma can be liberated. It is within this context that Manu offers śaṃnyāsa as an alternative to renunciation (mokṣa or pārīvṛtya).

Following the tenfold dharma, a twice-born may 'abandon' (śaṃnyāset) after paying the three debts and learning the Upanīṣads [6.94]. What he abandons is made clear in the next two verses where we find the expressions śaṃnyasya sarvakarmāṇī [6.95] and śaṃnyasya karmāṇī [6.96]. The vedasāṃnyāśika, therefore, gives up all ritual activity incumbent upon the head of a household. In this he is not different from a regular renouncer. Unlike the latter, however, he neither leaves home (pravrajati) nor wanders homeless (parivrajati). He lives at ease under the protection of his son: puratāśyarje sukham vaset [6.95]. For Manu, therefore, śaṃnyāsa is a type of retirement. The retired person is still technically a householder; he has not entered the fourth āśrama.41 In his concluding statement [6.96] Manu states that such a person destroys his sins by śaṃnyāsa,42 and attains the highest state (prāpnoti paramām gatim). This refrain repeated three times in nine verses shows that Manu is attempting to demonstrate that śaṃnyāsa is an alternative path to liberation not inferior to regular renunciation.

This technical use of S became obsolete after Manu. As far as I can determine, the term vedasāṃnyāśika occurs in three other places: Deuterobaudhāyana, 2.10.18.24; Kūra Ṛṣya, 1.2.82; Yādavaprabhāśa's Yatidharmasamuccaya.43

Another technical use of S similar to that of Manu is found in the Āśrama Upaniṣads. This text gives a fourfold classification of each āśrama and presents the ghoraśaṃnyāśika (or ghoraśaṃnyāśin) as the fourth class of householder.44 As opposed to the vedasāṃnyāśika, the ghoraśaṃnyāśika does not give up ritual activity. However, he undertakes an ascetical life-style and subsists by gleanings (uḍākhyāna). A significant aspect of both these technical uses of S is that they refer to some type of householder and not to a renouncer. This further supports our thesis that at the outset S was not synonymous with renunciation.

V. In the early usage of S we have seen that its direct object, usually karma, is explicitly mentioned. This is true especially when the verbal forms of S are used. Over time, however, S comes to be increasingly used without an object. When thus independently used S refers to the performance of the rite by which one becomes a renouncer. The rite itself is referred to as śaṃnyāsa.45 Deuterobaudhāyana [2.10.17.1] and the Āṅgica Śrīyantra [3.7.11] open their description of the rite with the identical expression: aḥtāthah samnyāsavīdhiḥ vyākhāyaṃah. The Baudhāyanā Śrīyantra uses a similar expression: aḥtāthah kapilasamnyāsavīdhiḥ vyākhāyaṃah [4.16.1]. In the same context the Vaiṣikānaṃā Sahasradātra uses

41 The commentators Medhatithi, Govindarāja and Nārāyaṇa take the vedasāṃnyāśika as belonging to the householder's āśrama. Only Kullika assumes that vedasāṃnyāśika is a Kutićaka, namely the fourth class of renouncer. Of course, the life-styles of holy householders are probably the historical roots from which the Kutićaka class of renouncers developed.

42 In the light of this belief that śaṃnyāsa destroys sins we can understand the assertion in the subhāṣita verse referred to above [cf. fn. 24] that śaṃnyāsa is the purifican of Brahmins, as the current is that of a river and the monthly period that of a woman. In that verse too S probably does not refer to renunciation as such, but either to the life-style of a vedasāṃnyāśika or to the inner quality of detachment taught in the Gītā.

43 Ed. Śrībhagavadācārya (Baroda, 1937), p. 29. Yādava is here citing a passage of Saunaka. Both in the Kūra and in the Yatidharmasamuccaya the vedasāṃnyāśika is given as one classification of renouncers. The meaning in Deuterobaudhāyana is less clear: vyākṣṭāḥkāmarājaḥ samnyāśika. The commentator Govindasvāmin takes him to be a householder: vedasāṃnyāśikā gṛhaḥṣṭa eva kṛtakaranyo bhūdhāyate. Vāsudevārāma [op. cit., 22.12 and 41.7] gives a different reading of this passage: vyākṣṇādaśokvādaḥ samnyāśi.

44 Āśrama Upaniṣad, ed. O. Schrader in Samnyāsa Upaniṣads (Madras, 1912), p. 97 line 1; p. 98 line 1.

45 For numerous examples of such usage see Viśveśvara Sarasvati, op. cit., pp. 1-5; Vāsudevārāma, op. cit., 1-21.
the expression *sāṃnyāsakramam* [2.6]. Deuto-
Baudhāyana calls the rite *sāṃnyāsā* also at 2.10.17.5.
Once *sāṃnyāsā* became fixed as the title of the rite, the ex-
pression *sāṃnyāsan karoti* comes to be used with
increasing frequency with reference to the performance
of the rite, in place of the verb *sāṃnyasyati* (or
*sāṃnyasyati*). In the ancient literature we find it used in
the Vaikāhāsaka Dharmasūtra and the Mahābhārata.46
This expression is used only when referring to
the performance of the rite. The usual verbal form
(*sāṃnyasyati*) is used in every other context.

One probable reason for calling the Brāhma-
nical rite of renunciation ‘sāṃnyāśa,’ instead of, for example,
pārīvṛtiya or pravājīyā as in Buddhism, is the
prāśāmantra: ‘sāṃnyastam mayā.’ The proclamation
of the prāśa is considered the essential act of the
rite. The formula expresses what the Brāhma-
nical tradition considers the essence of the life-style into which one is
initiated by that rite, namely the non-performance of
ritual actions [cf., above, IV].

The classical use of *S* as a generic term for renuncia-
tion and as a synonym of the older terms such as
*pārīvṛtiya* was probably facilitated by its use with
reference to the initiatory rite of renunciation. In fact,
it is in those documents that use *S* in the sense, such as
the Deuto-Baudhāyana, the Vaikāhāsaka Smārta-
sūtra and the Mahābhārata, that *S* is also used in
the classical sense. The Deuto-Baudhāyana [3.2.17]
and the Vaikāhāsaka Smārtasūtra [5.8; 10.8] use
*sāṃnyāśa* clearly as a synonym of *yāti*.

VI. There is great uncertainty regarding the chron-
ology of the various strata that comprise the epic
Mahābhārata.47 It is, therefore, difficult to draw firm

46 Vaikāhāsaka: *vamāti sāmyāsām kuryā* [2.6]. Mahābhārata:
*apārīkśaḥ hi sāmyāsāh kartavyā ti śiyāte* [12.10.17]; viṣṇuśād
pariśambhīya sāmyāsām kuro ye tathā [12.17.9]; kadda vayaṃ
kariyāṇāh sāmyāsām [12.270.3].

47 J. A. B. van Buitenen, the latest of a long line of
distinguished Mahābhārata scholars, states: “There is a gen-
eral agreement that the oldest portions preserved are hardly
older than 400 B.C. . . . While this *terminus a quo* is
reasonable, and generally agreed upon, it is a far more
difficult to set a date *ante quem*; views on this depend on
what one accepts as the ‘real’ Mahābhārata. In particular, the
didactic portions of what has been called the pseudo-epic were
added to very late, perhaps as late as the fourth century A.D.”
The Mahābhārata: 1 The Book of the Beginning (Chicago,
1973), p. xxv. The passages we are dealing with probably
belong to a period closer to the latter date, i.e., 4th century
A.D., than to the former.

conclusions from a study of *S* in the epic. Nevertheless,
it is significant that, if we exclude the Gītā [cf., above,
IV], *S* occurs twenty-one times in the Śāntiparvan,
one in the Anuśasanaparvan and five times in the
Anugītā, while it appears only four times in the rest
of the epic.48 The Śānti, the Anuśāsana and the Anugītā
contain some of the latest additions to the epic.

Only four times *S* directly related in the
Mahābhārata to *karma* or *yajña* [3.2.75; 12.21.8;
12.148.9; 12.154.30]. On several occasions, however,
the direct object of *S* is mentioned: *agni* [12.285.37],
tapas, *vidyā* and *sarvar* [12.154.30]. On five occasions
the epic uses *S* with reference to the rite of renunc-
tion [9.49.54, 6.5; 12.10.17; 12.17.9; 12.270.3]. The re-
interpretation of *S* made by the author of the Gītā is
echoed in several passages, as when Bīhma tells Yudhiṣṭhīra
that if by *sāṃnyāśa* one obtains perfection then hils
and trees would have attained it long ago [12.10.24].
He then goes on to explain the true renouncer in terms
similar to Gītā 5.3:

*ete hi niyāsायanta nirupadrawah |
aparigrahandavat ca satatam tāmacārimah /// [12.10.25]*

In s similar vein, Janaka while still a householder is
called *sāmyāsāpahālīka* [12.308.4]. The most common
use of *S* especially in the Śāntiparvan, is either in the
classical sense or with reference to the inner virtue of
detachment.49

One class of literature that we have not yet examined
is the group of twenty texts commonly known as the
Sāṃnyāsa Upaniṣads.50 The dates of these docu-
ments are very uncertain. However, a reliable relative chron-
ology has been established by Schrader,51 which is
supported by the recent study of Sprockhoff;52 Only the
older group of eight Upaniṣads is relevant to our

48 Śāntiparvan, 10.17.24, 25; 17.9; 21.8; 47.36; 148.9.13;
154.30 (4 times); 155.9; 189.7.14; 211.7; 270.3; 285.37; 308.2
(twice); 4. Anuśasanaparvan, 135.75. Anugītā, 47.1, 4.5; 48.7;
24. In the rest of the epic *S* occurs at 2.8.33, 3.2.75; 9.49.54, 55.
At 9.47.15 *S* occurs outside the context of renunciation:
deham *sāmyāsya*.

49 Cf. 2.8.33; 12.10.24, 25; 12.47.36; 12.148.13; 12.155.9;
12.189.7; 12.211.7; 12.270.3; 12.308.2, 4; 13.135.75; 14.47.1, 4.5;

50 All these documents are cited by the page and line
numbers of Schrader’s edition: cf. fn. 44.


52 Sāmyāsa: Quellenstudien zur Askese im Hinduismus
(Wiesbaden, 1976).
study. They are: Āruṇi, Laghu Śaṃśyaśa, Kuṇḍikā, Kāthaśṛuti, Paramahāma, Jāhāla, Brahma and Āśrama. The rest, according to Sprockhoff’s study, belongs to a very late period and regularly use S with the classical meaning. In the texts of the older group S occurs five times in the Kuṇḍikā [19.2, 3, 4, 7; 20.4, seven times in the Kāthaśṛuti [31.1-2; 34.1; 37.7; 40.1] and four times in the Jāhāla [63.5; 69.1, 2; 71.4]. Most of these uses conform to the classical meaning. In the Āruṇi, on the other hand, which is probably the oldest of these Upaniṣads, S is used only in the pratṣaṇānta [9.3]. It is significant that Āruṇi uses the terms vi-vṣṛj, vi-vṣṛj and vi-vṣṛj eleven times [3.2; 5.1, 2; 6.1-5; 8.1-2; 9.2; 12.1] to mean discarding or abandoning, but never S. Similarly, it uses the terms yati [8.2; 11.3] and parivṛjaka [11.1] for a renouncer, but not samyūya. S is also totally absent in the first section [15-17] of the Laghu-Śaṃśyaśa, which is the oldest stratum of that text. In the Paramahāma S is used only once and there it has a direct object: svaputra-mitrakalatrabanavāhitāḥ chiśvīhīgapāvatām svādhyāyaṁ ca sarvakarmāṇi śaṃśyaśya [46.4]. In this text also the term samyūya is absent, while other common terms for a renouncer occur frequently: bhikṣu [51.1; 52.1; 53.1, 2, 3, 4], tyāga [54.1], yati [54.4], yogin [54.5]. S is absent in the Brahma Upaniṣad, while in the Āśrama it occurs only in the expression ghorasamidyāśi [cf., above, IV].

The absence of the classical usage of S in the Āruṇi supports Sprockhoff’s estimate of its date, i.e., the last centuries before the Christian era.33 Similarly, the total absence of S in the older section of the Laghu-Śaṃśyaśa indicates that Sprockhoff is right in assigning to it a rather early date, close to the oldest Upaniṣads and the Gṛhyaśūtras.34 With reference to the Jāhāla, however, I must disagree with Sprockhoff, who places it around 300 B.C.35 Sprockhoff’s argument is based on Kane’s view that Baudhāyana, 2.10.17.2 and 2.10.17.15 refer to Jāhāla, 4.36 We have shown above [fn. 23] that this section of Baudhāyana is a later addition. Thus Kane’s dating of Baudhāyana, i.e., 500-200 B.C., cannot be applied to this text. The frequent use of S by Jāhāla in its classical meaning makes it impossible to assign it a pre-Christian date. I agree with Sprockhoff that the Jāhāla and the passage of Baudhāyana in question, which I have called Deutero-Baudhāyana, belong roughly to the same period. Both these documents, I feel, cannot be too far removed in time from the Vaikhānasamārtasūtra and should be placed around 3-4 century A.D.

VII. CONCLUSIONS. S is a very uncommon term in the Vedic literature and in the ancillary śūtras. The earliest records we possess indicate that it was first used outside the context of renunciation to indicate the physical discarding of something no longer wanted [cf. I. III]. More rarely it indicated the depositing of an object in a given location [cf. III].

The entry of S into the vocabulary of renunciation may be placed around the 3rd-2nd century B.C. Several pieces of evidence support that date. The absence of S in the Buddhist and Jain literature points to a period well after the 5th century B.C. One cannot otherwise account for this absence in light of the fact that the Buddhists and the Jains use all the other common terms for renunciation found in the Brāhmaṇical tradition. Its absence in the lexicographical tradition and in the classical Gṛhyaśūtras also point to a date close to the beginning of the present era. Even stronger evidence is forthcoming from the dharmāśātric tradition. S is absent in Gautama, Proto-Baudhāyana and Āpastamba, all of whom should be placed before the 3rd century B.C., while it appears in Vasiṣṭha, who should be dated around the 3-2 century B.C.37 Furthermore, S is not used as a term for renunciation in the Rāmāyana, while it is commonly so used in the didactic portions of the Mahābhārata. This too points to the period between the composition of the Rāmāyana and the final redaction of the Mahābhārata, i.e., close to the beginning of our era [cf. fn. 22 and 47].

Within the framework of renunciation S is used exclusively in the Brāhmaṇical tradition. In the earliest period of such usage it referred specifically to the abandonment of ritual activity, considered within Brāhmaṇism as the most distinctive feature of renunciation.

The centuries immediately following the introduction of S into the vocabulary of renunciation saw several attempts either to find new meanings of S or to give it more specific and technical meanings. The Gītā changed the object of S from karma to sāṅga [cf. IV]. Both Manu and the Āśrama Upaniṣad take S as

33 Ibid., p. 32.
34 Ibid., p. 47.
36 Ibid., p. 106; cf. P. V. Kane, op. cit., p. 30.
37 With regard to the dates I have followed Kane: Gautama 600-400 B.C., Baudhāyana 500-200 B.C., Āpastamba 450-350 B.C., Vasiṣṭha 300-100 B.C.
referring to a holy life-style adopted by householders [cf. IV]. During this period S had not yet acquired a definite and universally accepted meaning.

We come a step closer to the classical meaning when S is used as the title of the rite of initiation into renunciation [cf. V].

S must have acquired its classical meaning a considerable time after Manu. We encounter the classical usage for the first time in the Vaikhānas Smārtasūtra, Deutero-Baudhāyana and the didactic portions of the Mahābhārata, especially the Śāntiparvan and the Anuṣṭāṇ. We would not be far wrong in placing this final semantic development of S around 3rd-4th century A.D.

**TABLE**

**OCCURRENCES OF S IN ANCIENT SANSKRIT LITERATURE**

*Note: Numbers within brackets refer to the section of this article in which the uses of S in a given document are dealt with. An asterisk after a title indicates that it is cited according to the page and line number of Schrader’s edition [cf. fn. 44].*

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<td>Yajñavalkya Smṛti</td>
<td>3.32, 204 [III, IV; fn. 42].</td>
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