Sanskrit's science of grammar

It is usual to refer to Sanskrit as devavāni, the speech of Gods, who do not age and who enjoy eternal youth. To a certain extent such a status of remaining for long up to the present has been attained by the language with the codification of laws of Pāṇini. Pāṇini is one of the most shining stars to rise in the intellectual horizon of India. His influence as a single person in moulding a language which holds a vast literature is beyond words. His methodology, logic and the perfect scientific approach have disciplined Sanskrit authors for centuries. The Aṣṭādhyāyī, a work in eight chapters, of Pāṇini is superior to all similar works by the thoroughness with which it examines the roots and the formations of words, by its precision of expression, its terminology and the style adopted by profound concentration to cover the entire aspect of the language within the shortest possible compass. It contains
everything without exception respecting even the words and letters. Patañjali designates Aṣṭādhyāyī as a ‘mahāśāstraugha’ - an extensive ocean of treatise. The study of grammar was developed much earlier than Pāṇini, which is evident from his own references about his predecessors¹. It is crystal clear that the grammatical studies were not inaugurated by, but culminated in, the highly perfect work of Pāṇini.

The Aṣṭādhyāyī is divided into eight adhyāya (chapters) of four pāda (sections) each and contains three thousand nine hundred and eighty three sūtras. Though the subject matter is discussed in a simple manner, the execution seems to be a little complex. The reason may be his attempt to economize the expressions with the sutra style which demands an explanation to accompany it. He is always cautious and accepts the views of different schools wherever necessary. His reverence for current usages deserves mention. In general, the types of rules can be stated as

- definition  samjña
- metarules  paribhāṣa
- headings   adhikāra
- operational rule  vidhi
- restriction  niyama
extension rules *atideśa*

negation rule *niśedha.*

It is highly interesting to recognize the cultural and social aspect of ancient India on which the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* throws light upon, when we deviate from its scientific and technical dimensions. It discusses the geographical names, social life of the period including the food and drink, games, personal dress etc. It mentions different kinds of teachers, students, mode of learning, etc. The activities of all grades of persons and classes in society are recorded. The religious life as well as the political data are considered. In short, besides being a grammatical treatise *Aṣṭādhyāyī* is a mirror in which the cultural and historical Indian life is very much reflected.

In order to accept a particular form, highest consideration has to be given to its actual usage. In fact it is the actual usage that forms the basis of linguistic analysis of ancient grammarians. So it is quite natural for the poets to stick to the grammatical framework while framing their work. Śrīharṣa too is not an exception as he himself is a prominent grammarian. In many instances, it is noticeable that Śrīharṣha applies the grammatical rules without putting much effort and gives the feeling that any substitute to it is not at all possible. He opines that the verbosity and levity of
meaning are two poisons of speech, and eloquence forms the speech, that is precise and essence. He not only obeys the rules but also the statement of rule as such which is applied in such a way that an alternative is incapable. His grammatical allusions are found scattered in many number of verses of different cantos. His aim is to sincerely evince his grammatical discernment. He is very much successful in designing his poetic art with the grammatical speculations in giving a suggestive sense. His poetic and grammatical spirit is interwoven with a unique endearment. In many instances the grammatical observations of Sriharsha discloses his deep insight of grammatical forms of words. He even succeeded in creating some new forms of his own. The words like भूजानि for king, अगद्द्वार for physician, हसस्वरा for smile, मिहिकारुचि for moon are some of the examples. In a verse he shows that sometimes conventional behaviour of people does not honour the rules of grammar. He outshines as a grammarian, and as such he attains so much success simply because he is at par with perfection. Definitely he is an exception to the statement “Poets neglect the grammatical framework”. He interlocks the grammatical rules and concepts in such a way that it enhances the beauty of poetry. Here are the few usages of rules and concepts of Aṣṭādhyāyī found in NC, which suit the situations.
1. रसायनिक प्रयोगः:

Metathesis or वर्णनिपर्वत्य is one of the phonetic changes dealt with in Sanskrit language. It is the transposition of two phonemes (sounds). Acharya permits such usages as, such practice of interchanging of some letters was prevalent. For example the letter ‘र’ is treated as ‘ल’ and vice versa. Likewise the letters ‘व’ and ‘व’, letters ‘ड’ and ‘ढ’ are can be seen as interchanged in NC. Such kind of interchange of letters is accepted and is popularly used by the poets. Śrīharṣa too applies such changes and it is listed below. The interchange of ‘र’ and ‘ल’ appears occasionally.

(a) नरसाधिमप्रमः⁹

The word ‘नरसाधिमप्रमः’ indirectly conveys the sense nala instead of nara, when ‘र’ is replaced by ‘ल’. While convincing Damayanti to accept Indra, Nala says it is an act of foolishness from the side of Damayanti to give respect to a mere man ‘नर’ instead of the powerful Indra. Here the letter ‘र’ of ‘नर’ is replaced by ‘ल’ and conveys the meaning nala. It is a fad of Damayanti to discard Indra for a mere nara or nala.
(b) किं नाम ननसा नरायः

To the messenger of Indra, Damayanti answers thus, ‘अहं
अमराय तस्मै न प्रादिष्टे, किं नाम मनसा नराय’, ie., I have already given my
mind to that nara, who is a part of Indra and helpless to accept
the immortal Indra. Here also ‘रत्न्योर्भेदः’ forces to treat nara as
nala.

(c) विस्लोदयस्य नरस्य

In the context it means that only a righteous man can catch
hold of a heavenly bird like the swan. When ‘रत्न्योर्भेदः’ functions, it
means in which man - nara - the ‘र’ is substituted by ‘ल’, only that
nara, ie. Nala can catch the bird. The structure of ‘विस्लोदयः’ is
explained as ‘विगत: रेण: वस्य सः विरः, तस्य विगतरे नस्य स्थाने लस्य उदयः,
यस्यिस्स्य’. The ‘र’ is removed and instead of it ‘ल’ is introduced
and thus suggests the sense of Nala.

2. सार्याणामेक्षेष एक विभक्तिः (A. 1.2.84)

This is a very important सूत्र, and deals with what is
technically called ekaśeṣa - retention of one. When there are two
or more words of the same form and same case termination stand
together, one is retained and the rest dropped. The sūtra is interwoven in the verse very beautifully. गुखेलुमस्थापस्वन्यक्षेत्राः १३ - While describing the beauty of Damayanti, Śrīharṣa says that God Brahman created many numbers of moon, but all in vain as he was not satisfied with the beauty, and finally succeeded in his attempt by creating Damayanti, whose beauty dominated every other and that only remained undiminished. He compares this with the pāñjinian rule ‘सर्पाणामेक्तेष एक विभक्ते’ (A. 1.2.64).

3. स्थानिवादेशोलनलिविष (A. 1.1.56)

A substitute (ādeśa) is like the occupant (sthānin), but not in the case when the operation is furnished by the individual sounds (अर्थ). A substitute is treated as an occupant and it also performs all the functions of the occupant. The verse where Śrīharṣa inculcates this aphorism is स्थानिवादेशस्वत्त (A. 1.1.56).

Here Nala is treated as sthanin and Indra as ādeśa. But even as a great grammarian, Indra violates the rule, i.e. though he accepted the position of Nala, he failed to discharge the duty. Indra behaved as if he is Nala, which itself is wrong as his plan is to cheat Damayanti. Such a kind of act will never be conducted by a righteous person like Nala. Indra takes only the position of Nala,
but not the function. The function too is expected as this is not the case of individual sounds ie. अनलः.

4. अस्तेसूः (A. 2.4.52)

The meaning of the aphorism is that the root ‘अस्’ ‘to be’ is substituted with ‘धृ’, when a suffix belonging to एर्द्ह ademásुका follows. The perfect past of ‘अस्’ is same as that of ‘धृ’ namely ‘धृपू’ etc. In NC it is applied thus भवतिभवमिवास्सलिभानुः.15

Thus those who reach the city of Kāsi discards the past and attains liberation or oneness with the ultimate truth. It is like the root ‘अस्’ of past tense which functions as the root ‘धृ’ which is of present tense, by the sutra “अस्तेसूः” and as part of that treatment it becomes ‘भव’, ‘भवतिभव्वति’ भवः’ As the root ‘अस्’ of past attains the nature of root ‘धृ’ or ‘भव भव’ which is present one, those who reach the city of lord Śiva becomes one with him. ‘भवः’ is the synonym of Śiva. Here ‘भव भव’ means oneness or unity with Śiva, which is one among many types of liberation.

5. अपवर्ग तृतीया (A. 2.3.6)

The meaning of the aphorism is that the third case suffix is employed after a word which denotes place or time, when the
fulfillment of the desired action is to be expressed. In NC, also points to the philosophy of Carvākas. 

'तुलीय' denotes the neuter gender, i.e., neither male nor female. In another sense it means those who are not interested in worldly pleasures. 'अपवर्ग' expresses liberation. Thus here it suggests that the renounced one is interested only in liberation. Śrīharṣa states that even Pāṇini is with the opinion of 'अपवर्ग तुलीया'. 'तुलीय' is the eunuch and 'अपवर्ग' is liberation. In the context what it points out is the fact that male and female should be indulgent to passion and the eunuchs should strive for liberation as they are impotent for sensual activities.

6. तुल्योत्तमात्मस्थितिश्चर्यतत्स्वाम् (A. 7.1.35)

The meaning of the aphorism is that 'तात�' is optionally substituted for the suffixes 'तु' and 'हि', to convey benediction. The word 'भवताम्' in लोक् is formed by this sūtra. In NC, Śrīharṣa incorporates this sūtra while describing the dawn in the verse भव फणितभवदिल्लेखे. In the early morning the crow makes the noise 'कै कै' and in return the cuckoo sounds 'तुहि तुहि'. The poet interprets this in a very interesting manner. The crow is asking where comes the substitute 'तात�' with the noise 'कै कै' and cuckoo replies 'तुहि तुहि', i.e., in the place of 'तु' and 'हि'. Even the simple creatures like
birds are well versed grammarians in Niṣadha according to Śriharṣa is what one understands from the verse.

7. फणिभाषितभाष्यफळकिका

As far as sūtra meanings are concerned, the phakkikā explains some controversies. It is heard that Vararuci, while going through the Mahābhāṣya, at places where difficulty is experienced in understanding marked some rings, which is so tough that it could be explained only by Patañjali, and the markings got the name phakkikā. A phakkikā means a problem which is raised and solved. It is a mere tradition which is responsible for grouping some controversies under the heading phakkikā. They are grammatical observations that have occupied a unique place in Sanskrit grammatical studies. In the context of NC, it comes while describing the city of Kuṇḍina, the Kingdom of King Bhīma. The city is constructed in such a way that it is not easily accessible to the people outside. The purpose is protection from the attack of enemies. Śriharṣa compares this inaccessibility with the phakkikā of Mahābhāṣya.
The nominative case is foremost among all the cases. In the absence of other case suffixes, nominative case suffix comes by the sutra ‘प्रतिपद्धतिकार्याधिक्षरिणायां वचनमाने प्रथमा’ (A. 2.3.46). Another saying which points to the importance of nominative case is ‘एकवचनमुत्सर्गत: करिष्यते’. The nominative case suffix is used to represent the subject in a sentence, it is ‘कर्तृकारक विभक्ति’ and ‘व्यापाराघ्रण: करता’ i.e., action depends on ‘करता’. In this way also nominative case suffix is uppermost among others. In NC, Śrīharṣa compares Nala, with that of nominative case, as प्रथमाभिषेक. He is counted as first among the righteous men. As the words are derived in the nominative case with the additions of suffixes ‘सू’, ‘औ’, ‘जस्’ and with grammatical applications like guṇa, vṛddhi, dīrgha etc., Nala too keeps the men under him with the qualities of leadership. With his unique abilities, Nala stands tall among men with similar qualities.

9. भुव: स्वरादेशमधाचरामः

According to Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali, ‘स्वयं रज्ज्वे इति स्वरा:’. Vowels are independent and can be pronounced comfortably where as consonants can be pronounced comfortably only in the presence of a vowel. In NC, Śrīharṣa suggests that this is similar to that of
the nature of heaven and earth. The heaven is full of unlimited pleasures and earth lacks them. Here Indra convinces Damayanti that she should opt for Indra and accompany him to his abode, the heaven to enjoy immense happiness. But even if she wishes to stay on earth it is possible for him to turn the earth into heaven, and fill it with happiness in abundance, like a consonant is made easily pronounceable with the help of a vowel. The consonant ‘धू’ can be uttered comfortably as ‘धू’ with the addition of vowel ‘उ’. That is what is meant by धू: स्वराः स्वराय अचार्यः in the verse, an easiness to utter the consonant ‘धू’ with the vowel ‘उ’. Poetically it means heavenly pleasures on earth, make it enjoyable.

10. अयोधिकारे स्वरित्तमिष्यते

The aphorism ‘स्वरित्तनाधिकारः’ (A. 1.3.11) states that, when any सूत्र has a circumflex accent, it is to be learned that, it is a heading and the subsequent सूत्रs are governed by it. Some examples are ‘धातोः’ (A. 3.1.91), ‘प्रत्ययः’ (A. 3.1.1) etc. This concept is related in the context of NC like this. Nala opines that there is nothing wrong in a marriage between a God like Indra and a human being like Damayanti, as the latter will be treated as the goddess in the companionship of the former. In this sense the human nature of Damayanti will get vanished, and she will be like a goddess.
References:

2. NC IX. 8
3. Ibid I. 2
4. Ibid IV. 116
5. Ibid XVIII. 125
6. Ibid XIX. 35
7. Ibid XXII. 82
8. शाक्षे भक्तादि: कवयो भवति
9. NC IX. 44
10. Ibid VI. 95
11. Manusmrti 4-96
12. NC III. 20
13. Ibid VII. 59
14. Ibid X. 136
15. Ibid XI. 117
16. Ibid XVII. 70
17. Ibid XIX. 60
18. Ibid II. 95
19. Ibid III. 23
20. Ibid VIII. 96
21. Ibid IX. 42

22. One has to learn from the commentaries whether a sūtra has a svarita or not.