

Change in Disguise: The Early Discourse on *Vyājastuti*

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This paper is concerned with a relatively minor topic: a potential misunderstanding on the part of Indologists regarding the exact nature of a specific literary device as defined in the work of one early writer on Sanskrit poetics. Yet, as I hope to show, this misinterpretation rests upon a much earlier and willful misconception on the part of the tradition itself, which found the poetic device as it was originally defined highly problematic. Thus the paper deals, through this admittedly narrow scope, with the mechanisms of and interrelations among processes that are crucial for our understanding of the tradition of Sanskrit poetics, as they are to any intellectual history: innovation, conservatism, and censorship.

VYĀJASTUTI: THE CLASSICAL DEFINITION AND ITS PECULIARITIES

The literary device in question is *vyājastuti*. It is one of a subset of ornamental devices, or *alamkāras*, which seem to mimic courtly speech behaviors, such as elegant pretexts, veiled criticisms, and sophisticated flattery. Such rhetorical devices are typically defined as instances of implicature, each with its own pragmatic effect. In this they differ from such mainstays of Sanskrit ornamentation as simile (*upamā*) and metaphorical identification (*rūpaka*), which are analyzed according to their formal propositional structure (A is like B, A is B) and the logical relationship they entail (semblance, identity). *Vyājastuti* was designed to allow for two very different pragmatic effects. The classical definition of this device—given by Maṃmaṭa (c. 1100), in his highly influential *Kāvyaprakāśa* (Light on Poetry)—consists of two mirroring cases: a literal expression of blame the actual effect of which is congratulatory, and, inversely, a statement that is phrased as praise, but actually delivers a harsh critique.¹

Maṃmaṭa therefore supplies his readers with two examples. In the first, a king seems to be criticized for the severe offense of turning away a helpless shelter-seeker. The refugee, it turns out, is the goddess Lakṣmī herself, Fortune embodied. Thus this “offense,” which has the king dubbed “the chief among those who pay no mind to hospitality,” is in fact a strong praise for his relentless effort to distribute wealth among his people.² The second variety is

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1. *Kāvyaprakāśa*, sū. 169, p. 670: *vyājastutir mukhe nindā stutir vā rūḍhir anyathā*.

2. *Kāvyaprakāśa*, pp. 670–71:

*hitvā tvām uparodhavandyamanasām manye na mauliḥ paro
lajjāvarjanam antareṇa na ramām anyatra saṃdrśyate |
yas tyāgaṃ tanutetarām mukhaśatair etyāśrītāyāḥ śriyaḥ
prāpya tyāgagrīvāmananam api tvayī eva yasyāḥ sthitiḥ ||*

You're the chief among those who pay no mind to hospitality; no one else even comes close.
And her shamelessness, I'd say, is hard to come by elsewhere.
A hundred times she came to you, pleading that you take her, only to be publicly disowned.
And yet, despite the humiliation of her rejection, Fortune stuck by you, and you alone.

exemplified by a verse phrased as a great compliment to the ocean. It is said to be unparalleled in its “commitment to helping others,” thereby “handily defeating Bodhisattvas”—those ideal compassionate beings known for their eagerness to sacrifice everything for the sake of benefiting others. But it then turns out that the peerless selflessness of the ocean consists of its willingness to share the desert’s shameful moral burden, by also ignoring the pleas of thirsty travelers. In other words, the “praise” of the ocean is nothing but a roundabout and highly ironic denunciation of this vast body of water as no better than arid land.³

It is worth noting right away that resorting to such rhetorical devices, the actual implication of which is entirely at odds with the phrase’s purported meaning, is not risk-free. The portrayal of a king’s lavishness as an act of abandoning the asylum-seeking Fortune runs the risk of being taken at face value—as criticism of the king’s impoverishment of the treasury. This is perhaps the reason that Mammaṭa chose as his example a poem that explicitly states that Lakṣmī, despite the ignominy of her rejection by the king, decided to stick by him (*tyāgakṛtāvamānanam api tvayy eva yasyāḥ sthitiḥ*). As for the second variety of *vyājastuti*, where the ironic “praise” for altruism is noting but a harsh condemnation of the addressee as close-fisted, it obviously must be used with extra caution. It is perhaps no coincidence that Mammaṭa chose as his example a poem where the entity being criticized, namely the ocean, cannot retaliate.

I will come back to the question of risk involved in such eulogy and critique. In the meantime let me point out that Mammaṭa’s formulation of *vyājastuti* has several unusual features. To begin with, this ornament stands out in combining two very different propositions yielding opposite effects. While this fact alone does not strike me as necessarily abnormal,⁴ what is even more peculiar is the apparent discrepancy between the dual nature of Mammaṭa’s *vyājastuti* and its name, which more easily connotes only one of the two cases, namely blame disguised as praise. This is because the noun *vyāja* (‘fraud’, ‘deceit’, ‘disguise’) when used in the beginning of a compound is typically taken adverbially to mean ‘treacherously’, ‘deceitfully’, or ‘by means of fraud or disguise’, and a compound *vyāja*-X usually means ‘having only the appearance of X’.⁵ The name *vyājastuti*, then, seems to denote “praise only in form,” or “feigned praise,” thus capturing only the second of Mammaṭa’s two subcategories. A more fitting name for this device would have been *nindāstuti*, or “praise-blame,” and such a rhetorical device of a dual pragmatic effect is indeed listed in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, an encyclopedic text that may have preceded the earliest extant works on Sanskrit poetics.⁶ Yet

3. *Kāvyaprakāśa*, p. 671:

*he helājītabodhisattva vacasām kiṃ vistarais toyadhe
nāsti tvatsadṛśaḥ paraḥ parahitādhāne gṛhitavrataḥ |
tṛṣyatpānthajanopakāraghaṭanānvaimukhyalabdhyāśo-
bhāraprodvahane karoṣi kṛpayā sāhāyakam yan maroḥ ||*

Ocean of water, you handily defeat the Bodhisattvas. What else is there to say?

You stand alone in your commitment to helping others.

Refusing to fulfill the pleas of travelers, dying of thirst, the desert has incurred such infamy,
and out of your sheer kindness, you offered to help and share the blame.

4. Think, for example, of the mirroring *sat* (‘auspicious’) and *asat* (‘inauspicious’) varieties of Daṇḍin’s *nīdarśana* (*Kāvyādarśa* 2.346–48). Nonetheless, it seems that only in the context of praise and blame do we have an *alaṃkāra* that is actually defined as two opposite cases or propositions. See also the case of *leśa*, mentioned in n. 24 below.

5. Thus *vyājaguru*—an imposter teacher, *vyājāhvaya*—a false name, *vyājasupta*—feigned sleep, etc. (Monier-Williams).

6. *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* 14.13–14: *stutirūpeṇa yā nindā nindāstutir ihocyate | nindāstutis tathavoktā nindārūpeṇa yā stutiḥ* “We define *nindāstuti* as blame in the form of praise and, likewise, as praise in the form of blame.” On the early date of this text relative to Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin, see Tubb 1979: 49ff.

as far as I can see, *nindāstuti* is never mentioned in the discourse on poetics proper, where only *vyāpastuti* is recognized. The discrepancy between the name *vyāpastuti* and its classical definition may lead us to assume that this device began its career as a case of blame concealed by praise and later expanded to include the opposite possibility. Surprisingly, however, Indologists postulate exactly the inverse scenario, namely that “earlier writers consider only the case of blame concealing praise,” and that it is later thinkers who “extend the figure and take account of the other possibility” (Gerow 1971: 286). The puzzling implication of this apparently unanimously held view is that a category named X first connoted only instances of its exact opposite Y, and only later expanded to include X itself. This strange sequence of events is, at the least, in need of explanation, if it is not a sign that something has gone amiss in our construction of the discourse on *vyāpastuti* in the early days of Sanskrit poetics.⁷ In what follows, I will try to reconstruct the history of this early debate.

BHĀMAHA'S VYĀPASTUTI

The first extant text that systematically defines and illustrates a large host of literary ornaments is Bhāmaha's *Kāvyaḷaṃkāra* (Ornament of Poetry). We know almost nothing about Bhāmaha's precise time and place, and hence cannot be entirely sure that his work did, in fact, predate Daṇḍin's *Kāvyaḷadarśa* (Mirror of Poetry, c. 700), the only other treatise to survive from this early phase of Sanskrit poetics.⁸ But as I hope to demonstrate below, there is good reason to believe that Daṇḍin's *vyāpastuti* was conceived in response to Bhāmaha's, or to what we may call the Bhāmaha position even if it was first formulated by another author. So I will assume the priority of Bhāmaha for purposes of the following discussion and will come back to this question briefly below.

Bhāmaha addresses *vyāpastuti* in Chapter Three of his work, the second of two chapters dedicated to literary ornaments. Here he deals primarily with miscellanea: *alaṃkāras* that do not necessarily follow the pattern of simile (*upamā*) and metaphorical identification (*rūpaka*).⁹ As is typical in his discussion of minor *alaṃkāras*, Bhāmaha offers only a cryptic definition of *vyāpastuti* and a single example (*Kāvyaḷaṃkāra* 3.31–32):

dūrādhikaguṇastotravyapadeśena tulyatām |
kiṃcid vidhisor yā nindā vyāpastutir asau yathā ||
rāmaḥ saptaḷbhinat sālān girim krauñcam bhrḡuttamaḥ |
śatāṃśenāpi bhavatā kiṃ tayoḥ sadṛśaṃ kṛtam ||

A critique of someone who desires to attain parity, however partial [with a standard of a tall order], when disguised as praise for a quality that is far beyond [his], is *vyāpastuti*. For example:

Rāma pierced seven sālā trees [with a single arrow]. The Best of Bhṛguś [Paraśurāma] pierced through Mount Krauñca.

Is there anything you have done to resemble those two even to the hundredth degree?

7. Note, however, that Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan take *vyāpastuti* to mean originally “praise by means of a trick,” a gloss which, while not entirely impossible, seems driven more by the prevalent historical construction than by the typical role *vyāja* plays in such compounds (Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan 1990: 167–68). Of course, as already noted by Trivedi and others, the name lends itself to both interpretations and can thus fit the classical definition with its dual nature (see Trivedi in his notes to *Ekāvali*, p. 242).

8. For a good summary of the debate regarding the relative dates of the two authors, see the discussion of Batuk Nāth Śarmā and Baldeva Upādhyāya in their introduction to the *Kāvyaḷaṃkāra* of Bhāmaha (pp. 35–40). Incidentally, this discussion rather convincingly concludes that Bhāmaha lived well before Daṇḍin.

9. See McCrea 2008: 42–43 for a discussion of the *rasa*-related ornaments, another group of odd *alaṃkāras* that Bhāmaha discusses in this section.

Bhāmaha's definition is admittedly elliptic, but one thing seems to be clear: for him *vyājastuti*, as the name suggests, consists of blame (*nindā*) disguised as or hidden by praise (*stotravyapadeśena*). So much is stated unequivocally. Less apparently obvious is the nature of both the critique and its disguise, and their relation to the desire to attain at least a partial similarity with somebody else.

Here, as often, the example helps to clarify matters considerably. A speaker, possibly a court poet, is addressing a king. He begins by portraying the deeds of two great heroes from the epic, the two Rāmas: the arrow shot by one famously pierced through seven trees in a row, while the missile of the other cut right through a massive mountain. Once he is done with extolling the feats of the two glorious men, the speaker turns to the addressee and asks him, scornfully, if he could claim even the tiniest fraction of their achievements. In light of this example, I think we can interpret Bhāmaha's definition as follows: *vyājastuti* is a thinly disguised critique of someone who desperately strives for parity of some sort or another (*tulyatām / kimcit vidhitsoḥ*) with the great luminaries of the past, but who is really not even remotely like them.¹⁰ Our pathetic addressee is tricked into believing that he is about to be praised for the status he covets or boasts: the conventions of *kāvya*'s praise poetry invariably lead him to expect that the invocation of the two Rāmas will result in some favorable comparison with them. But midway through the verse the speaker reveals his reproach, which appears to be particularly pointed given its phrasing as a rhetorical question and its frustration of the addressee's expectations.

Obviously, this kind of "trick praise"—another possible translation for *vyājastuti*, better befitting Bhāmaha's notion of this device—is quite tricky for the poet. Even assuming no further retaliation from the king, it is hard to imagine that the poet could keep his job after uttering it. Thus *vyājastuti*, if my interpretation of Bhāmaha is correct, amounts to a scathing letter of resignation, containing a truth about the boss that an employee would not normally dare to express. This is not what one would typically expect to find in a textbook for those who "wish to produce poetry" and plan to "master the crafting of poetic ornaments," Bhāmaha's self-proclaimed target audience (*Kāvyaḷaṃkāra* 6.3–4). At the same time this notion of *vyājastuti* seems to fit a somewhat acerbic tone in Bhāmaha's work, his audible silence when it comes to mentioning any ties to a royal court, and the fact that, unlike Daṇḍin, Bhāmaha does not begin his book by mentioning that poetry can serve to glorify great monarchs.¹¹ Rather, he prefaces his book with a grim warning about the thankless nature of a bard's job (*Kāvyaḷaṃkāra* 1.12):

10. The adjective *vidhitsu* is derived from the desiderative of *vi+dhā*, a lexeme that means "create, shape, make, cause, produce, arrange, distribute, change into," etc. (a wide semantic range that is determined to a large extent by the object the verb takes). Thus *X-vidhitsu* typically refers to "someone who wants to make X." For example: *vidhitsuḥ kalahasyāntaṃ gadāṃ jagrāha pāṇḍavaḥ* (*Mahābhārata* 6.58.29) "wishing to bring about an end to the battle, Bhīma grabbed his mace"; *kṛtakavilobhanaṃ vidhitsau yuvatijane* (*Kirātārjūṇiya* 10.17) "a young woman who was hoping playfully to seduce [Arjuna]." In our case the object of *vidhitsu* is the abstract noun *tulyatā* ('parity'), hence the overall meaning is something like "someone wishing to forge parity," or "hoping to procure parity," or, as I translated above, "someone who desires to attain parity." A very similar use of *vi+dhā* in the desiderative is found in Vallabhadeva's commentary on *Kumārasambhava* 2.60, where Kālidāsa's language is portrayed as *aupamyavidhitsayoktam* ("spoken with intention of creating an analogy"). Bhāmaha himself uses the desiderative of *vi+dhā* one more time and in exactly the same sense of wishing to bring something about: *kāvyaṃ vidhitsatā* (*Kāvyaḷaṃkāra* 6.4) "he who desires to create poetry." On the question of the syntactic role of *vidhitsoḥ* in relation to *nindā*, see n. 15 below.

11. Bhāmaha speaks of poetry as immortalizing those who have gone to heaven (*upeyūṣāṃ api divaṃ*), whereas Daṇḍin specifies that the immortalized are *ādirājas*, or former kings (*Kāvyaḷaṃkāra* of Bhāmaha 1.6,

*nākavitvam*¹² *adharmāya vyādhye daṇḍanāya vā |*
kukavitvam punaḥ sākṣān mṛtim āhur manīṣiṇaḥ ||

There's nothing wrong about not being a poet. There are no health-hazards. No risks of incarceration.

Being a poetaster, however, is death then and there, so say the wise.

The implication of this "proceed-at-your-own-risk" warning may be that being a poet is a lose-lose situation. By writing well and sticking to your truth you may transgress moral and social boundaries (*adharma*), endanger your physical and mental health (*vyādhi*), or get persecuted (*daṇḍana*), whereas the results of doing a poor job are even worse.¹³ All this goes to show that my interpretation of Bhāmaha's *vyāpastuti* as an unusually blunt statement by any *kāvya* standard fits surprisingly well in a hitherto unnoticed cynical tone regarding the political realm that is found elsewhere in his work.

It must be noted, however, that my interpretation of Bhāmaha's *vyāpastuti* has, as far as I can see, never been suggested or even contemplated by scholars, and stands in stark contrast to that of all of my predecessors. For over a century Indologists have taken Bhāmaha's definition of *vyāpastuti* as a device meant actually to compliment its addressee and took his illustration as successfully achieving this goal. According to this interpretation, the very mention of the patron in the same breath as the two Rāmas, however unfavorably, intimates that they are somehow comparable, precisely because no human king can be expected to repeat their divine deed.¹⁴ To the best of my knowledge, no explicit argument has ever been made for this received interpretation of Bhāmaha's formulation, and no one has explained

Kāvyaḍarśa, 1.5). Indeed, Daṇḍin, who lived in Kāñcīpuram, alludes to his likely patronage by the Pallava dynasty in his treatise—the answers to one of the verses illustrating "name-riddles" (*nāmapraheḷikās*) are the Pallava dynasty and its capital Kāñcīpuram (*Kāvyaḍarśa* 3.114). Support for the notion that this verse, in effect, praises Daṇḍin's royal patrons comes from its partial citation in the Mamandur inscription of Mahendravarman I (De 1988: 1.58 n. 1). In another work, the *Avantisundarikathā*, Daṇḍin also reports that his great grandfather, the poet Dāmodara, was invited by the Pallava monarch Siṃhaviṣṇu to his court (*Avantisundarī* 9–11). We know that most later Kashmiri writers on *alaṃkāra* (e.g., Vāmana, Udbhaṭa, and Ānandavardhana, but not Rudraṭa) were patronized by a royal court, as this information is given by the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, which even specifies Udbhaṭa's astronomical per diem of 100,000 dinars (*Rājatarāṅgiṇī* 4.495). By contrast, we know nothing of Bhāmaha's possible connection to a court, neither from his own work, nor from works by others. This lack of information seems telling.

12. The 1981 edition of Batuk Nāth Śarmā and Baldeva Upādhyāya reads *akavitvam* rather than *nākavitvam*, which makes no sense to me and is probably a typographical error. Every other edition I consulted has *nākavitvam*.

13. It is also possible to take this verse as a mere warning against composing bad poetry. As Rājaśekhara has said, perhaps echoing Bhāmaha: *varam akaviḥ na punaḥ kukaviḥ syāt. kukavitā hi socchvāsaṃ maraṇam*. "Better not to be a poet at all than to be a bad poet. Bad poetry, after all, is a painful death" (*Kāvyamīmāṃsā* of Rājaśekhara, p. 21). Bhāmaha's choice of words, however, suggests to me that he, unlike Rājaśekhara, is really speaking about two different situations. This is because he mentions two separate sets of hazards, in two different lines, one associated with *kavitva* 'poesy' and the other with *kukavitva* 'bad poetry'. It is thus quite possible that he refers here to perils that have to do with poetry that is actually good and that conspicuously include political incarceration. But however we decide to interpret the verse, it is telling that Bhāmaha opted to open his textbook with this kind of warning about the poet's job. Again, the comparison to a parallel verse in Daṇḍin is instructive. Daṇḍin does indeed mention one risk related to the craft of poetry—namely that of making a fool of one's self—but he does so in the context of highlighting the magical potency of poetry when written properly. Moreover, there is nothing in his verse about health hazards, incarceration, or death (*Kāvyaḍarśa* 1.6, see also 1.3–4).

14. Perhaps the earliest to give this rationale is Johannes Nobel: "In diesem ausgesprochenen Tadel liegt ein Lob verborgen. Denn Rāma und Paraśurāma konnten als Götter diese außergewöhnlich großen Taten vollbringen, die für einen menschlichen König unmöglich sind" (Nobel 1912: 284–85).

how exactly it could be derived from the text as quoted above.¹⁵ Indeed, scholars who discuss *vyājastuti* often tend to gloss over Bhāmaha's definition and example.¹⁶

It should also be noted, however, that some of my predecessors, beginning with K. P. Trivedī and Johannes Nobel, followed a slightly varied reading of Bhāmaha's definition. Instead of *tulyatām kiṃcid vidhitsor yā nindā*, which I translated as "a critique of someone who desires to attain parity, however partial," these scholars read *tulyatām kiṃcid vidhitsayā nindā*, as meaning something like "a critique motivated by a wish for parity, however partial." Trivedī and Nobel both noted that this reading is preferable as it conforms to the metrical pattern of the *anuṣṭubh* meter, where the fifth syllable of every pāda is, in theory, always light.¹⁷ Needless to say, it also better fits their understanding of Bhāmaha's device as a case of a clever compliment. Yet this variant reading, which is not particularly well attested,¹⁸ replaces a negligible metrical problem—note that it is not at all uncommon for Bhāmaha to have a heavy fifth syllable in his *anuṣṭubhs*¹⁹—with a syntactical one, namely the presence of the correlative pronoun *asau* in the absence of its relative counterpart, highly unusual in his style of definition. Moreover, it creates a serious hermeneutical problem: for if Bhāmaha imagined his *vyājastuti* as praise disguised as blame, as these scholars believe, why did he state, to the contrary, that it consists of blame disguised as praise (*stotra-vyapadeśena . . . nindā*)? Indeed, if the whole point of his *vyājastuti* is to insinuate partial resemblance between a king and the heroes of the past, why does the illustration explicitly deny the very possibility of similarity even to the hundredth degree?

REHABILITATING VYĀJASTUTI (1): DAṆḌIN

So where does the Indological interpretation come from? I believe that it is based on the way in which Bhāmaha's immediate successors sought to read, or rather emend, his idiosyncratic *vyājastuti*. In fact, the variant reading referred to above may be seen as a part of

15. Any argument in favor of the received interpretation of the definition as quoted above would have to include a satisfactory syntactical explanation of *vidhitsoḥ* (for the derivation of this adjective see n. 10 above), and particularly of its relation to *nindā*. Nouns such as *nindā* (and also *stava*, *stuti*, *praśaṃsā*, etc.) routinely take objects in the genitive. Typical examples include: *bhavataś ca praśaṃsābhir nindābhir itarasya ca* (*Mahābhārata* 3.34.72) "... with praise for you and censure for the other" (trans. van Buitenen 1975: 289); *pariṇatisukumāra svādumākanda nindām katham iva tava bhr̥ṣṭo rājakiraḥ karotu* (*Subhāṣitaratnaśoḥ*, v. 1120, p. 201) "Oh mango, sweet and beautiful in ripening, / how can the royal parrot make it out your fault . . ." (trans. Ingalls 1965: 319); *pareṣāṃ nindā na kartavyā* (*Vikramacarita*, p. 44) "one must not . . . revile others" (trans. Edgerton 1926: 49). Thus I have taken *vidhitsoḥ* as an objective genitive that denotes the object of the blame (the poet's patron-king). In order for the definition to imply what my predecessors have taken it to mean, namely that it is the *speaker* who actually wishes to create some affinity between the addressee and the two Rāmas (rather than the addressee himself), one would presumably, have to take *vidhitsoḥ* as a subjective genitive (describing the poet). Such constructions of *nindā* with a genitive denoting an agent, while perhaps possible, are extremely rare. An even less plausible solution would be to take *vidhitsoḥ* as an ablative, and translate the definition as speaking of "blame [coming] from someone who desires to create partial affinity." I have yet to come across such constructions of *nindā* (or *stava*, etc.) with a subject in the genitive or in the ablative.

16. Thus in addressing the history of *vyājastuti* both Gerow (1971: 286) and Porcher (1978: 329–32) quote and discuss Daṇḍin's formulation and silently avoid Bhāmaha's.

17. See Trivedī in his notes to *Ekāvalī*, p. 643, and Nobel 1912: 283–84.

18. It is not adopted in any of the editions of Bhāmaha that I have been able to consult, although it is mentioned in Jayamaṅgala's commentary on *Bhaṭṭikāvya* ad 10.60.

19. Indeed, the very first pāda of the book has a heavy fifth syllable, and such "irregular" pādas continue to appear quite regularly. Judged on a sample of the first twenty verses of the first two chapters of Bhāmaha's treatise, instances of a "heavy fifth" appear every four or five verses. See, thus, *Kāvyaṭṭamkāra* of Bhāmaha 1.1a, 1.5a, 1.10a, 1.14c, 1.15a, 1.15c, 2.6c, 2.7c, 2.17a, 2.19c.

this larger effort to sanitize Bhāmaha's sarcasm, while at the same time placing *vyāpastuti* within a more coherent system of ornaments. This dual effort seems to begin with Daṇḍin's *Kāvyādarśa*, in many ways the closest text to Bhāmaha's *Kāvyālaṃkāra*. Like Bhāmaha, Daṇḍin too has an ornament called *vyāpastuti*, defined in a manner that recalls Bhāmaha's formulation and illustrated first with a verse that includes a comparison with Rāma (*Kāvyādarśa* 2.341–42):

yadi nindann iva stauti vyāpastutir asau matā |
doṣābhāsā guṇā eva labhante hy atra sannidhim ||
tāpasenāpi rāmeṇa jiteyaṃ bhūta dhārīṇi |
tvayā rājñāpi saiveyaṃ jītā mā bhūn madas tava ||

It is considered a *vyāpastuti* when a verse appears to be blaming but in fact amounts to praise. In such cases, apparent "flaws" turn out to be nothing but strengths. Example:

So you conquered this territory, king. No reason to be proud.
This very tract of land was once won by that hermit, Rāma.

Everything about Daṇḍin's brief passage betrays an acute awareness of Bhāmaha's discussion, even as the result is remarkably different. First, Daṇḍin's *vyāpastuti* explicitly entails praise in the guise of blame, rather than the other way around. Then, partly to ensure that there is no further misunderstanding, Daṇḍin provides a second formulation that reuses a key term from Bhāmaha's definition. His *vyāpastuti* is not about unfavorably comparing an addressee with another's superior merit (*dūrādhikaguṇa*). Rather, it consists of playfully presenting the addressee's very merits, or pros (*guṇā eva*), as if they were cons (*doṣābhāsāh*). All this becomes perfectly clear through the illustration, which exploits Bhāmaha's basic scenario to create a very different effect. If Bhāmaha's illustration featured a king who has done nothing remotely comparable to the deeds of Rāma, the conquest of Daṇḍin's monarch are not an inch shorter than Rāma's (*saiveyaṃ*). Indeed, the whole point of this poem is that this king's extraordinary military achievements, exactly identical to those of the epic hero, are presented, tongue in cheek, as no big deal, precisely because of the precedent set by "that hermit, Rāma."

Having thus transformed Bhāmaha's *vyāpastuti* into a rhetorical tool that is appropriate to Sanskrit courtly culture, Daṇḍin turns to another task: demonstrating that this device is pervaded by *śleṣa*, the all-important technique of exploiting homonyms, homophones, and other linguistic ambiguities in order to create a doubled text. The two registers of such "bitextual" *vyāpastutis* support its two possible interpretations. The first conveys the apparent condemnation, while the second turns things around, replacing the initial "flaws" with something truly praiseworthy. Daṇḍin provides two additional examples of *vyāpastuti*, both of which involve *śleṣa*, and concludes his discussion by stating that there are numerous other possibilities of bitextual *vyāpastutis*.²⁰ This move should be seen as part of Daṇḍin's larger agenda of presenting *śleṣa* as central to ornamental language (*vakrokti*).²¹ Moreover, Daṇḍin clearly wishes to move away from the limiting formal analysis found in Bhāmaha, wherein *vyāpastuti* necessarily involves a comparison, insofar as the desire to attain parity with someone is part

20. *Kāvyādarśa* 2.345: iti śleṣānuviddhānām anyeṣāṃ copalakṣyatām | vyāpastutiprakārāṇām aparyantaḥ pravistarāḥ || "Thus we have exemplified some varieties of *vyāpastuti* pervaded by *śleṣa*, examples which could easily be multiplied."

21. *Kāvyādarśa* 2.360: śleṣaḥ sarvāsu puṣṇāti prāyo vakroktiṣu śriyaṃ "As a rule, *śleṣa* augments all instances of *vakrokti*." See Bronner 2010: 214–30 for a detailed discussion of Daṇḍin's notion of *śleṣa* and its central role in ornamental language.

of the definition, and where praise and blame directly result from the success and failure of the subject of the comparison (*upameya*) to match the achievements of the standard (*upamāna*). Thus, of Daṇḍin's two additional examples, the first still likens a king to Viṣṇu, while the second involves no *upamāna* whatsoever.

Examining Daṇḍin's additional examples will enable us to better understand his notion of *vyājastuti* vis-à-vis Bhāmaha. In the first of his two bitextual illustrations of *vyājastuti* we find what appears to be a strong denouncement of the king's moral conduct (*Kāvya-darśa* 2.343):

pumṣaḥ purāṇād ācchidya śrīs tvayā paribhujyate |
rājann ikṣvākuvaṃśasya kim idaṃ tava yujyate ||

You snatched the old man's fortune/wife and made it/her yours to enjoy.
King, is this a proper behavior for a descendent of the Ikṣvāku line?

The addressed king appears to have stolen the fortune and/or the wife of some elder predecessor and made it/her his possession. These are certainly harsh words. But based on the multiple meanings of the word *śrī* (kingship, wealth, Lady Fortune, goddess Lakṣmī) and on the possible interpretation of the "old man" (*pumṣaḥ purāṇāt*) as referring to the primordial being Viṣṇu Puruṣottama, it turns out that the verse ultimately refers to the king's success in matching God's example:

You snatched Lakṣmī from Viṣṇu and made her yours to enjoy.
King, is this a proper behavior for a descendent of the Ikṣvāku line?

The king's "crime," it turns out, consists of his obtaining Lakṣmī, the very embodiment of Viṣṇu's glory, precisely what ideal kings are expected to do.

Note, again, the way Daṇḍin cleverly distances himself here from Bhāmaha's formulation. If in Bhāmaha's *vyājastuti* there is a stress on the unbridgeable gap between the far superior qualities of the divine standard and a human king, here, as in Daṇḍin's previous example, the stress is on absolutely full compatibility between the two: the king can claim Viṣṇu's very Lakṣmī as his own. Moreover, it seems that the use of a rhetorical question in this context is purposeful, a final gesture towards Bhāmaha's example, as it serves to illustrate how such questions can be used fruitfully in the context of *vyājastuti*. For depending on the different reading of the *śleṣa*, this question is answered in two opposite ways: "no" is the reply when a descendent of Ikṣvāku is interrogated about his right to snatch another man's throne (or wealth, or queen), but an emphatic "yes" if the question is whether a king, scion of Rāma (the most famous descendent in the line of Ikṣvāku), should attain Viṣṇu's Lakṣmī. The king is, after all, similar to or even identical with Viṣṇu.

Ultimately, though, Daṇḍin wishes to move away from the restrictive proposition of the simile, built into Bhāmaha's definition and found or implied in all of his examples so far. For him, the tongue-in-cheek phrasing of merits as demerits can be expressed in a variety of ways and propositions, and has more to do with the ability of the poet to use the special doubled language of *śleṣa* than with the goal of expressing similarity, whether partial or full. To highlight the expanded propositional possibilities of his *vyājastuti*, Daṇḍin gives one final example (*Kāvya-darśa* 2.344):

bhujaṅgabhogasaṃsaktā kalatram tava medinī |
ahaṃkāraḥ parāṃ koṭim ārohati kutas tava ||

Your lowly wife is addicted to sex with her playboy mates.
So how come your pride reaches such record highs?

This would have amounted to an unimaginably harsh reproach of a queen's conduct, had not the words denoting 'lowly' (*medinī*), 'playboy' (*bhujaṅga*), 'addicted' (*samsakta*), and 'sex' (*bhoga*) also connoted a second set of meanings ('Earth', 'snake', 'held-fast', and a snake's 'hood' respectively). If construed based on these second meanings, the first half of the verse actually reads:

The Earth, your wife, is held fast by the hoods of Śeṣa.

The cosmic serpent Śeṣa bears the burden of the earth with its many hoods. Saying that Śeṣa holds fast a king's land is a particularly elegant way of telling him that his territory is coterminous with the entire world. This hyperbolic and eulogistic reading of the verse's first half allows the rhetorical question in the second to be answered emphatically: there is, indeed, good reason for this king's pride.

Daṇḍin's last two examples come very close to the praise-faked-as-blame variety of Mammaṭa's *vyāṣṭuti*, with which this paper began. In fact, Mammaṭa's illustration, just like one of Daṇḍin's examples, includes a pun on the word *śrī*. The one noticeable difference, however, is in the degree of playfulness. The rebuke register of Daṇḍin's examples is quite scandalous in its references to a king's snatching of another man's wife/wealth or in its reference to his queen's love life. This is probably the actual source of relish in such verses. But one can conceive of kings who may not take kindly even to such tongue-in-cheek references. There is good reason to believe that Mammaṭa did not approve of Daṇḍin's example, for he classifies a poem that uses punned words to refer to a queen's loose morality as a case of defective poetry, yielding the fault (*doṣa*) of a distasteful or inappropriate meaning (*anucitārtha*) (*Kāvyaaprakāśa* 299). Evidently, Daṇḍin was far more comfortable with such facetious poetry, as playfulness is the hallmark of his *vyāṣṭuti*.

Before concluding our discussion of Daṇḍin's quiet overhaul of Bhāmaha's *vyāṣṭuti*, let us consider the implications of his banishing censure from the domain of this device. Was Daṇḍin opposed to the use of poetry for conveying criticism? The answer to this question becomes clear if we briefly consider Daṇḍin's formulation of another literary ornament, *aprustutapraśamsā*, or "praise of the irrelevant." Gerow has already noted that Daṇḍin's unique interpretation of this device serves as an outlet for indirect faultfinding and, hence, is the counterpart of his *vyāṣṭuti* (Gerow 1971: 286; see also 116–17). The exact relationship between the two devices becomes manifest if we consider Daṇḍin's self-annotated illustration of *aprustutapraśamsā* (*Kāvyādarśa* 2.339):

sukhaṃ jīvanti hariṇā vaneṣv aparasevinaḥ |
jalair ayatnasulabhais tṛṇadarbhāṅkurādibhiḥ ||

The life of deer is so easy in the forest, where they serve no one.

Water is available without effort, and so are grass, darbha shoots, and the like.

Here, as Daṇḍin himself explains, "a speaker with presence of mind (*manasvin*) expresses his frustration with the difficult life at the service of his king by glorifying animal life, a topic that is not pertinent to the situation."²² Instead of a direct and crude depiction of servitude (something like "you work like a dog and don't earn a dime"), the speaker cleverly describes the pleasant life of forest deer who go about freely and who have easy access to an unlimited supply of water and food. For Daṇḍin, praising the irrelevant is ultimately a stratagem for complaining about an acutely relevant reality.

22. *Kāvyādarśa* 2.340: *seyam aprastutavātra mṛgavṛttiḥ praśasyate | rājānuvartanakleśanirvinṇena manasvinā ||*

Evidently, then, Daṇḍin approved of using *kāvya* for passing negative political commentary. But it may have been his insight as a political insider that, whereas praise may involve a great deal of playfulness, criticism necessitates far more subtlety and tact. Daṇḍin's division of labor between the ornaments of *vyājastuti* and *aprustutaprasaṃsā* sheds additional light on his reshaping of Bhāmaha's formulation.²³ Daṇḍin, after all, could have posited a dual category of *vyājastuti*, combining both feigned praise and feigned blame as in the aforementioned *nindāstuti* of the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*.²⁴ But for him Bhāmaha is the primary intertext, and it seems that Daṇḍin was quite purposeful in keeping the name of Bhāmaha's device while replacing its original effect and relegating veiled criticism to an altogether different domain. Perhaps he wanted to indicate by this that the deceit and playfulness associated with the word *vyāja* do play a major role in a eulogy, but that reprimanding is an altogether different ballgame, necessitating different rules and sensibilities.

If my interpretation of the above textual passages is correct, it provides further support to the view that Bhāmaha predated Daṇḍin. While the relative chronology of the two thinkers calls for further research, and while the arguments presented above by no means prove it conclusively, it is hard not to see Daṇḍin's discussion of *vyājastuti* as a direct response to the definition and example as found in Bhāmaha's text, even if it is always possible to argue that these were first formulated in a third text, with which both thinkers were conversant.²⁵

REHABILITATING VYĀJASTUTI (2): VĀMANA

Vāmana, who was situated at the court of King Jayāpīḍa of Kashmir (r. 779–813) and composed a treatise on poetics in the style of Pāṇini's aphorisms on grammar, also engaged in the task of reshaping Bhāmaha's *vyājastuti*. In fact, Vāmana kept even closer to Bhāmaha's words and formulation than Daṇḍin. He defined *vyājastuti* as "the critiquing of the addressee's failure to repeat great deeds of celebrated personae; the ultimate import of such a critique, however, being praise" (*sambhāvyaviśiṣṭakarmākaraṇān nindā stotrārthā vyājastuti, Kāvyaḷaṃkārasūtravṛtti* 3.4.24). Commenting on his own definition, Vāmana glosses 'celebrated personae' (*viśiṣṭa*) with language that is highly reminiscent of Bhāmaha's (*atyantaḡuṇādhika* for *dūrādhikaguṇa*). His sole illustration of the device should also sound familiar (*Kāvyaḷaṃkārasūtravṛtti*, p. 191, ad 3.4.24):

babandha setuṃ giricakravālair bibheda saptaikaśareṇa tālān |
evaṃvidhaṃ karma tatāna rāmas tvayā kṛtaṃ tan na mudhaiva garvaḥ ||

He bridged the ocean with ranges of mountains. He shot one arrow through seven trees.

This is what Rāma did and you haven't. You have no reason to feel proud.

As Vāmana's discussion makes palpably clear, the actual intent of this verse is to establish *similarity* with the illustrious Rāma (*viśiṣṭasāmyasampādanena*) in areas that do not pertain

23. In fact, Daṇḍin's *aprustutaprasaṃsā* in itself carefully reshapes Bhāmaha's formulation of that figure, but this is a different story that I hope to discuss elsewhere.

24. Indeed, Daṇḍin is aware of another case in which both blame and praise are part of a single ornament, as is clear from his discussion of *leśa*. By way of concluding his presentation of *leśa* as a case where a pretext is used to conceal an otherwise embarrassing or secretive state of affairs (*Kāvyaḷadarśa* 2.263–66), he reports that an alternative understanding of this ornament exists: "According to some, *leśa* is a case where either blame or praise is produced by a pretext" (*leśam eke vidur nindāṃ stutīm vā leśataḥ kṛtām* (2.266, see also the examples in the following verses). This *leśa* seems confusingly close to *vyājastuti* in its classical, dual form, and Bhoja takes them to be identical (*Sarasvatikaṇṭhābharana* 4.56), but as also noted by Appayya Dikṣita, even if for us the two may appear similar, for Daṇḍin they are clearly distinct (*Kuvalayānanda* 230–32).

25. This was also the conclusion of Nobel, despite the fact that he understood Bhāmaha's *vyājastuti* very differently (Nobel 1912: 284–85).

to his miraculous feats such as shooting one arrow through seven trees, which no human could anyhow hope to repeat. Vāmana replaces the devastating condemnation found in Bhāmaha's rhetorical question ("Is there anything you have done to resemble those two even to the hundredth degree?") with a "line-item" critique, which serves to emphasize the otherwise impressive similarity between them, followed by a tongue-in-cheek conclusion that is reminiscent of Daṇḍin: "You have no reason to feel proud." The result is deceptively similar to Bhāmaha's original, and it is quite possible that some of my predecessors in the field have read Bhāmaha with the text of Vāmana in mind. Nonetheless, Vāmana too radically alters Bhāmaha's *vyāpastuti*, as is evident precisely due to the similarity between the two illustrations: one is a slap in the king's face, the other is truly meant as a compliment.

The full import of Vāmana's move can only be realized if examined in the context of his rethinking of all poetic devices as variations on one basic formula—the simile. This theoretical overhaul, meant to put the highly heterogeneous and unruly crowd of *alaṃkāras* into a single and coherent framework, has had different effects on different devices. Some fit the mold easily, others had to be altered significantly, and a few had to be discarded altogether. Bhāmaha's *vyāpastuti* belongs in the middle group. A device defined first and foremost by its interpersonal message and the deceptive manner in which it is delivered now came to be analyzed primarily through its assimilation to the proposition of the simile. For this purpose, Vāmana chose to emphasize one aspect of Bhāmaha's device, namely the mention of powers that only the standard of comparison possesses. This allowed him to preserve *vyāpastuti*, now a congratulatory statement, within a larger group of simile-like devices that allow for some asymmetry between the subject (*upameya*) and the standard (*upamāna*). This becomes clear if we consider the placement of *vyāpastuti* in Vāmana's work. This device is immediately preceded by *viśeṣokti*, where the mention of just one difference between the two serves to emphasize their otherwise overall parity, and it is followed by *tulyayogitā*, where an inferior subject succeeds in obtaining a momentary parity with the standard.²⁶ The implication is that *vyāpastuti* presents a case of midrange disparity between two analogous entities: while the divergence is not limited to just one point as in *viśeṣokti*, it is not pervasive as in *tulyayogitā*.

To summarize, both Daṇḍin and Vāmana seem to agree that Bhāmaha's "no-holds-barred" *vyāpastuti* is entirely unacceptable. Yet while both share the agenda of turning *vyāpastuti* into a eulogy that is presentable in court, they each devise a rather different device. For Daṇḍin, the essence of *vyāpastuti* is that a great asset is presented as if it were a liability. This means that in case of an analogy the very fact that a king's feats are identical to Rāma's is humorously presented as belittling them. For Vāmana, however, what defines *vyāpastuti* is not full but partial similarity. For him the device stems from a gap between the subject and the standard of a simile: the fact that kings do not shoot through seven trees as do paragons in the epic. These different formulations should be seen in the context of the opposing theoretical agendas of both authors. Daṇḍin wishes to free *vyāpastuti* from the confines of the simile, or of any propositional structure for that matter, and to emphasize the role *śleṣa*—which for him is the dominant mode behind poetic speech (*vakrokti*)—plays in this device. Vāmana, by contrast, deals with *vyāpastuti* only through the prism of the simile, as one of several cases of partial similarity. These differences notwithstanding, one thing that Daṇḍin and Vāmana clearly share is their primary intertext. Their *vyāpastutis* provide different

26. *Kāvyaśleṣaśāstravṛtti* 3.4.23, 26: *ekaguṇahānikalpanāyāṃ sāmādārḍhyam viśeṣoktiḥ*. In between *vyāpastuti* and *tulyayogitā* Vāmana inserts his *vyājokti*, which is not closely related to this category but which contains the word *vyāja* in its name.

solutions to the same aesthetic and theoretical problem presented by Bhāmaha, and both authors, and Vāmana in particular, stay deceptively close to Bhāmaha's original formulation, salvaging as much as possible from his language.

RETHINKING *VYĀJASTUTI* (1): UDBHAṬA

This, however, is the last we see of Bhāmaha's formulation or hear of kings who failed to repeat Rāma's feats.²⁷ It is ironic that the trend of discussing *vyājastuti* anew, without any apparent indebtedness to Bhāmaha, begins with Udbhaṭa, the author most associated with Bhāmaha in the field of *alaṃkārasāstra*. This is partly the result of an accident of history. Udbhaṭa, probably a junior contemporary of Vāmana at Jayāpīḍa's court, composed a vast and erudite commentary on Bhāmaha's treatise, where he must have discussed and explained Bhāmaha's *vyājastuti* at some length. Yet this important and oft-quoted commentary, the *Vivarana*, did not reach our hands. A sole and poorly preserved birchbark manuscript of the *Vivarana* was discovered in Gilgit in the first half of the twentieth century, but the fragments later published by Raniero Gnoli do not, unfortunately, contain the section dealing with *vyājastuti*.²⁸

Yet whatever Udbhaṭa had to say apropos of Bhāmaha's *vyājastuti*, the *Kāvyālaṃkārasārasaṃgraha* (Compendium of Essentials of Poetic Ornaments), his own independent treatise on literary ornaments, entirely ignores the way his important predecessor described this device. Here are Udbhaṭa's own definition and illustration of *vyājastuti* (*Kāvyālaṃkārasārasaṃgraha* 5.9 and example 8):

śabdaśaktisvabhāvena yatra nindeva gamyate |
vastutas tu stutiḥ śreṣṭhā vyājastutir asau matā ||
dhig ananyopamām etāṃ tāvakiṃ rūpasampadam |
trailokyē 'py anurūpo yad varas tava na labhyate ||

27. This is true as far as poetic theory is concerned. Note, however, the following interesting verse by Bilhaṇa (*Vikramāṅkadevacarita* 18.35):

kartuṃ kīrtiyā tilakam alakāgopurāṇām gatena
krauñcasyāṅge bhṛgupatiśaraśchidram adrer vilokya |
yena kṛiḍālavaśabalitāḥ pīvare bāhudaṇḍe
caṇḍadhvāne dhanuṣi ca ruṣā sūtritā dṛṣṭipātāḥ ||

Marching to dot the gates of Alakā with the mark of his glory,
 he saw the cleft left in Mount Krauñca by Bhṛgupati's arrow.
 He gave his massive arms and his bow of a terrifying twang
 an angry look mixed with a tinge of humor.

Bilhaṇa's description of King Ananta of Kashmir clearly evokes the examples of Bhāmaha and Vāmana, where a king attempting the same deed is negatively compared with Balarāma (aka Bhṛgupati). The angry look the king gives his arms and bow indicates that they have not yet performed something akin to Balarāma's feats of archery, and the gaze's tinge of humor (*kṛiḍālava*) suggests that this anger is not devoid of playfulness, as in *vyājastuti*.

Note, however, that Bilhaṇa introduces some important additions to Bhāmaha's original scenario. First, he makes sure to dwell on Ananta's massive arms, fierce bow, and the fact that he is in the midst of a glorious march to Alakā, Kubera's mythic city, which lies beyond Mount Krauñca (in this sense it may be that Balarāma is actually portrayed as subservient to Ananta, insofar as he has paved the way for his victorious march across the mountains). Second, and more important, the criticism is now attributed to the king himself (as is implied by his gaze) and thus ultimately suggests both his humility and his intention to reach complete parity with a mythic hero (see also verse 18.37, where the same king is unhappy with his ancestors for not repeating Rāma's killing of Rāvaṇa). In this way, Bilhaṇa cleverly transforms Bhāmaha's original blunt accusation of a king ("Is there anything you have done to resemble . . . [Balarāma] / even to the hundredth degree?") into something that actually functions as real praise in the guise of blame. I discuss Bilhaṇa's overall tendency to plant his often-critical views of kingship in the words and thoughts of kings themselves in Bronner forthcoming.

28. The missing section is between fragments 40 and 41 in Gnoli 1962.

When the words' direct semantic capacity convey blame,
but actually praise makes far better sense, this is *vyāpastuti*.

Damn this peerless beauty of yours!

For nowhere in the entire triple world will you find a groom who is your equal.

Let us begin with the example. It is addressed to Pārvatī, who is in the midst of a harsh regime of self-inflicted austerities, carried out in hopes of winning the heart of the god Śiva. The speaker is none other than Śiva himself, disguised as an ascetic. The verse forms part of a larger passage in Udbhata's *Kumārasambhava*—a text accompanying his treatise and providing it with illustrations—where the disguised Śiva complements Pārvatī for her extraordinary beauty and expresses feigned surprise at her self-imposed ordeal. By choosing this passage to exemplify *vyāpastuti*, Udbhata seems to send a message: *vyāpastuti* is precisely the verbal ploy its name indicates, a perfect tool for the speech of disguised characters. Moreover, Śiva's *vyāpastuti* is not about any shortcomings of Pārvatī in comparison to some other attractive women, as the discussions of Bhāmaha and Vāmana may have led us to expect. Such an approach, Śiva must have felt, would not have done him much good while courting Pārvatī. Nor does Śiva tell Pārvatī that she is exactly as beautiful as some other woman, taking a cue from one of Daṇḍin's examples. Quite to the contrary, Śiva emphasizes Pārvatī's peerless beauty, unparalleled in the entire universe. It is this amazing asset that is presented as if it were a liability: so beautiful is she that she will never find a match.

It is important to note, however, that unlike Daṇḍin Udbhata does not equate *vyāpastuti* with the presentation of a strong point as a weak one. Rather, the key to his definition of this device is the disparity between a statement's immediate semantic import and its pragmatic effect. The illustration's surface layer amounts to an insult, stemming from the literal meaning of the first word "Damn" and the rationale supplied by the verse's second half ("for nowhere in the entire world . . ."). Yet regardless of the actual import derived from the constituent words, we realize that Pārvatī's "curse" is her stunning beauty, for which the speaker wishes to cleverly praise her. Thus, in his definition of *vyāpastuti*, Udbhata moves further away from Bhāmaha than what we have seen in Daṇḍin. For not only is *vyāpastuti* liberated from the bonds of the simile—thereby also delivering a silent blow to Vāmana's theory—his analysis is oblivious to any figurative structure whatsoever. Nor does Udbhata make any mention of Daṇḍin's all-important *śleṣa* in this context. The one defining factor in Udbhata's understanding of praise-in-the-guise-of-blame is the gap between the denotative and suggestive capacities of the utterance. This is in keeping with Udbhata's overall theoretical agenda of subjecting Sanskrit poetics to the analytical procedures of Vedic hermeneutics (*mīmāṃsā*) and grounding each *alaṃkāra* in a specific semantic-cognitive scenario.²⁹

Before moving on, it may be worth noting that, despite all the extra caution and cleverly chosen words, Śiva's compliment may actually have had an unsettling effect on Pārvatī. After all, what worries her is exactly the problem of finding a match. We, the readers, know the true identity of Śiva, and know that he is, indeed, the one suitable husband for her in the entire universe. But she still does not know this for sure, and Śiva's *vyāpastuti*, while praising her beauty, may actually magnify her real anxiety. Indeed, Narayana Daso Banhatti, the editor of the Poona edition of Udbhata's text, comments on this verse with disapproval: "This is not a very good example of *vyāpastuti*," he says, for Pārvatī's beauty "is really censurable if it hinders her union with a fit husband . . . and this kind of meaning indicating the

29. McCrea 2008 masterfully demonstrates the full impact of *mīmāṃsā* on the theory of Ānandavardhana. But as I hope to show elsewhere, this process begins earlier and is evident throughout the work of Udbhata.

reality of *nindā* [blame] lingers in our mind when we read the verse.”³⁰ Banhatti goes on to express his preference for the classical examples given by Mammaṭa, where any notion of blame dissolves entirely. His words indicate yet again an acute awareness of the risky nature of *vyājastuti*. They suggest, moreover, that *vyājastuti*, even in the conventional meaning of praise through seeming blame, is actually riddled with an inherent ambivalence, at least in the deeper and more interesting verses, where the negative pole simply refuses to disappear and retains a lasting reciprocal relationship with the positive one.³¹

RETHINKING *VYĀJASTUTI* (2): RUDRAṬA

Rudraṭa, who probably lived in Kashmir in the early decades of the ninth century, demonstrated both eclecticism and innovation in his fascinating, albeit compact, discussion of this figure. One obvious novelty pertains to nomenclature. Departing from the unanimous naming practice of his predecessors, Rudraṭa called *vyājastuti* by a slightly different name: *vyājaśleṣa*. This minor alteration is meaningful, as it is indicative of Rudraṭa’s overall attempt to re-theorize Sanskrit poetics. Rudraṭa offered a systematic way of dealing with ornaments. His system can be seen as a compromise between two extremes: Udbhaṭa’s basic abandonment of formal analysis of *alaṃkāras* (in favor of grounding them in their distinct semantic and cognitive processes) and Vāmana’s insistence that they are all explicable through a single formal analysis, that of the simile. While allowing the analysis of the simile to apply to a large group of ornaments, Rudraṭa realized that this one mold cannot fit the vast variety of figurative devices. Thus he came up with a more nuanced fourfold classification, dividing *alaṃkāras* into those based on a factual statement (*svabhāvokti*), analogy (simile, etc.), hyperbole, or *śleṣa*.³²

For each of these realms Rudraṭa offered separate analytical tools. This is particularly apparent in his highly innovative discussion of *śleṣa*, which is where *vyājastuti*, or *vyājaśleṣa* as he calls it, fits in. In classifying (and renaming) *vyājastuti* as part of the domain of *śleṣa*-based ornaments, Rudraṭa signaled his indebtedness to Daṇḍin, who first suggested the dominance of *śleṣa* in instances of feigned critique. Rudraṭa’s definition of *vyājastuti* also shows direct continuation from Udbhaṭa, for, like him, he believed that this device is defined by the gap between a statement’s literal meaning and its actual import (*anyā vivakṣitāyāḥ*).³³ For Rudraṭa, however, this gap was not a peculiarity of *vyājaśleṣa*. His discussion of all the devices under the heading of *śleṣa* is pervaded by a unique awareness of the complex and numerous possible relationships between an utterance’s directly denoted meaning and the meaning it suggests. Indeed, Rudraṭa’s concept of *śleṣa* in many ways directly heralds Ānandavardhana’s theory of suggestion. Rudraṭa seems to believe that the charm of *śleṣa* is rooted in the way a second meaning reflects on the one grasped first. Such a second meaning can either enhance the first, complement it with a proverb or a general truth, expand its emotional flavor by adding another aestheticized mood (*rasa*), or even cleverly contradict it, as in the case of the device under discussion.³⁴

All this is clearly reminiscent of Ānandavardhana’s notion of suggestion, which probably postdated Rudraṭa by no more than a few decades. Indeed, one of Rudraṭa’s two examples

30. *Kāvyaṭīkārasārasaṅgraha*, p. 129 of the annotations.

31. Think, in this connection, of the only seemingly humorous insults the disguised Śiva makes against himself in Kālidāsa’s *Kumārasambhava*, and of Pārvaṭī’s basic acceptance of them as truth (*Kumārasambhava* 5.65–82). I am grateful to David Shulman for sharing his thoughts with me on this point.

32. See Gerow 1971: 35–48 for an overview of this system.

33. *Kāvyaṭīkāra* of Rudraṭa 10.11: *yasmin nindā stutito nindāyā vā stutiḥ pratiyate anyā vivakṣitāyāḥ vyājaśleṣaḥ sa vijñeyah*.

34. See *Kāvyaṭīkāra* of Rudraṭa 10.3ff. and Bronner 2010: 228–31.

for *vyāśleṣa* seems inseparable from a whole genre of poems that later came to be closely associated with Ānandavardhana's theory of *dhvani*. Before discussing this genre, however, I should first introduce Rudraṭa's most noticeable innovation in this discussion. Rudraṭa was the first to fix *vyāpastuti* / *vyāśleṣa* in its classical dual form as a case of "either blame understood out of praise or praise understood out of blame."³⁵ This move is a perfect example of Rudraṭa's seemingly contradicting tendencies, namely his attempt to be as inclusive as possible when it comes to his predecessors and his endeavor to move the discussion forward. Inclusiveness is seen in the fact that *vyāpastuti* / *vyāśleṣa* now consists both of praise disguised as blame, which is what Daṇḍin, Vāmana, and Udbhata all thought about when they thought of this device, but also of a left-handed compliment wherein blame is masked as praise—a softer version of Bhāmaha's thinly disguised critique of kings. Yet what allows Rudraṭa to think of these two very different *vyāpastutis* as instances of one and the same device is his highly innovative analysis of the many scenarios of apprehension entailed by *śleṣa*. As Rudraṭa shows, poets exploit polysemy and other syntactic and semantic ambiguities to create all kinds of cognitive and emotional interplays between two sets of meanings. Within these, the two types of Rudraṭa's *vyāśleṣa* logically form part of the same cognitive scenario, namely the contradiction and then replacement of some evaluative speech act ("meaning 1") by the import of another ("meaning 2"). For the first time in the history of the tradition then, *vyāpastuti* expanded to contain both possibilities found in the *Viṣṇu-dharmottarapurāṇa*'s *nindāstuti*.

In accordance with his new, dual definition, Rudraṭa supplied his readers with two examples. His illustration for "praise through blame" is a variant of one of Daṇḍin's examples, where punned and playful vocabulary applies both to a king's wife and land (*Kāvyālaṃkāra* 10.13). His example for the opposite variety, however, introduces something entirely new into the discussion, by tapping into the popular "blaming the messenger" genre. The basic setting for this kind of poetry is when a woman sends her female friend as a messenger to her sweetheart, hoping that the friend will help woo the man and/or arrange a rendezvous with him. Yet when the go-between returns, it becomes immediately apparent that not only did she fail in her mission, but that she pursued the man for herself and, in fact, hopped right into bed with him. Often the returning go-between would offer an alibi to explain incriminating evidence such as fresh nail-marks on her body. The unimpressed betrayed lady typically responds with a sarcastic expression of her "gratitude" to the messenger. Such poems must have been quite popular even by Rudraṭa's time, as a part of a larger body of suggestive erotic vignettes in both Prakrit and Sanskrit. The Sanskrit anthologies, the earliest of which is a couple of centuries later than Rudraṭa, even dedicate a separate section to this poetry. The genre's growing popularity may be partly related to its association with Ānandavardhana's authoritative theory of *dhvani*. Ānandavardhana himself does not explicitly make this association, but several centuries later Mammaṭa chose a poem critiquing a messenger as his definitive example of poetry at its best, that is, poetry where suggestion is the main source of charm. As Mammaṭa's text enjoyed great influence on the later discourse, this poetic form came to be considered a paradigmatic example of *dhvani*.³⁶

For Rudraṭa, however, sneering at the messenger is a perfect example of a left-handed compliment, the second category of the *śleṣa*-based cognitive reversal that he associated with this device. Here is his second example of this device, where the messenger's alibi was that her mission was aborted due to a dangerous snakebite (which explains the marks

35. *Kāvyālaṃkāra* of Rudraṭa 10.11. See n. 33 above for the text.

36. For a discussion of this genre, Mammaṭa's example, and the later discussion about it, see Bronner and Tubb 2008.

on her body), and that her life was barely saved by a doctor who gave her the antidote. In reply to this farfetched story the lady says (*Kāvyālamkāra* 10.12):

tvayā madarthe samupetya dattam idaṃ yathā bhogavate śarīram |
tathāśya te dūti kṛtasya śakyā pratikriyānena na janmanā me ||

For my sake, you went and offered your body to that snake.

No matter how long I live, messenger, I'll never be able to pay you back.

Two carefully chosen homonyms enhance the interplay between this poem's apparent praise for the go-between's "sacrifice" and its scathing critique of her act of betrayal. First, the noun *bhogavant* can connote a 'snake' (reading *bhoga* in the sense of 'hood'), in which case it can construe as part of the speaker's acknowledgement of the messenger's story. But the word also means 'lover', or 'playboy' (taking *bhoga* in the sense of 'sensual pleasure'), thereby leaving no doubt as to which "snake" the messenger has actually offered her body. Second, *pratikriyā*, like English 'payback', can be taken both positively in the sense of 'reward' and negatively in the sense of 'revenge'. Thus while presumably expressing her gratitude, the speaker really promises to resent her former girlfriend "no matter how long I may live." As in Bhāmaha's verse, then, the damning type of *vyājastuti* can amount to severing one's ties with the addressee. But Rudraṭa, like Daṇḍin, seems to believe that there are certain truths one cannot speak to power. His device is thus both theorized anew and made safe by the fact that his illustration is depoliticized and addressed to *kāvya*'s favorite punching bag, the treacherous go-between.

MAMMAṬA AND THE LATE DISCOURSE ON *VYĀJASTUTI*

It is easy to see how we get from Rudraṭa's definition to Mammaṭa's classical formulation, with which we began. Mammaṭa differed from Rudraṭa by reverting to the original name, *vyājastuti*, and by his conspicuous silence on the role that *śleṣa* had to play in this device—as is consistent with his agenda of minimizing and containing *śleṣa* altogether.³⁷ Nonetheless, his example of disguised flattery, with which I opened the paper, does include a subtle pun on the word *śrī*, just as in Daṇḍin's and Rudraṭa's illustrations. More significantly, Mammaṭa adopted Rudraṭa's crucial expansion of *vyājastuti*, taking the device as consisting of two opposite cases of what are, nonetheless, variations on the same cognitive scenario. From this point on there was no looking back: the tradition never again doubted the dual nature of *vyājastuti*.

This is not to say that the discussion of *vyājastuti* ends with Mammaṭa, but rather that the post-Mammaṭa debate, found both in the numerous commentaries on his influential work and in independent treatises, is focused on a distinct set of issues. First, there was the problem of differentiating the implicature involved in this and similar devices from what Ānandavardhana termed *dhvani*. Ānandavardhana himself made the case that, while a whole variety of literary ornaments including *vyājastuti* have suggestion built into them, their main source of charm is their literal meaning, to which the suggestion is subordinated (*guṇibhūta*).³⁸ Mammaṭa, who subscribed to this view, avoided any mention of *dhvani* while defining *vyājastuti*. Yet there is good reason to believe he was acutely conscious of this delicate matter in his choice of illustrations. This is because, as already noted, he chose a poem critiquing a messenger that is reminiscent of Rudraṭa's *vyājaśleṣa* as his example of *dhvani*, rather than keeping it as an illustration of *vyājastuti*. As shown elsewhere, the debate over Mammaṭa's

37. On which agenda, see Bronner 2010: 236–37.

38. See *Dhvanyāloka* 470–71 for a mention of *vyājastuti* in this respect.

example of *dhvani* was lasting and lively (see Bronner and Tubb 2008). A second, related issue in the later discussion on *vyāṣṭuti* is the attempt to demarcate it clearly from a whole variety of other ornaments based on implicature (*aprastutapraśaṃsā*, *paryayokta*, etc.) on the basis of a more coherent theory of the cognitive processes involved in each case and their semantic and contextual constraints. This attempt is most apparent in Appayya Dikṣita's *Kuvalayānanda*, where we find a bold attempt to reapportion and theorize anew the entire realm of these devices.³⁹

Thus, while the discussion on *vyāṣṭuti* continued, it was, by and large, a new discussion. Many of the older issues were simply left behind: the attempt to provide some kind of a formalist analysis for *vyāṣṭuti*, most identified with Vāmana, was altogether dropped, as was Rudraṭa's agenda to subordinate it to *śleṣa*. Indeed, the somewhat peculiar history through which Mammaṭa derived his formulation was basically discarded, and the starting point for all future arguments about it was Mammaṭa's own text. The same is true with respect to the poetry cited in connection with this device. We find nothing that is even remotely reminiscent of Bhāmaha's harsh political commentary (or even of Vāmana's and Daṇḍin's attempts to rehabilitate it) under *vyāṣṭuti*. In all subsequent treatises, the damning category of this device is very rarely directed at one's king, and when it is, this is done to subtly insinuate that the poet is not being sufficiently paid. In other words, Bhāmaha's template for a resignation note has been replaced by a request for a raise.⁴⁰ Elsewhere, even the damning category of *vyāṣṭuti* can be turned into an indirect praise, as in Vidyānātha's *Pratāparudriya*. In this text on poetics that is also a long and elaborate eulogy for the author's patron, the praise that is disguised as blame is addressed to the author's king, whereas the blame that is disguised as praise is directed at his enemies, so that, in effect, both varieties of *vyāṣṭuti* end up being laudatory (*Pratāparudriya* 138–39). Perhaps wishing to set aside the large question of loaded and tense relations between kings and poets, visibly manifested in the early phases of this discussion,⁴¹ the later theoreticians clearly preferred to play it safe in choosing which illustrations to cite.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

What can we learn from the story narrated above? One lesson is the great degree of dynamism typifying Sanskrit poetics. Each and every thinker whose views we examined sought explicitly or implicitly to reinvent the discipline. It is thus crucial to realize that the changes a device like *vyāṣṭuti* underwent must be seen in the context of larger theoretical shifts: Daṇḍin's vision of *śleṣa* as pervading poetic expressivity (*vakrokti*); Vāmana's formal analysis of all literary devices as permutations of simile; Udbhaṭa's grounding of them in

39. I intend to discuss this attempt elsewhere. For a discussion on the many innovations of Appayya Dikṣita in this work, see Bronner 2004.

40. For a particularly elegant example see *Kuvalayānanda*, p. 130. Another illuminating illustration is given by Mammaṭa apropos his discussion of the poetic fault (*doṣa*) of inconclusive or equivocal language (*saṃdigdha*). Mammaṭa notes that employing equivocal language is not always a liability and is, in fact, recommended in cases of *vyāṣṭuti* verses that cleverly comment on a pertinent situation. He gives an example of a verse where the words of a poet addressing a king lend themselves to two different interpretations based on a *śleṣa*. Ostensibly the poet is telling the king that his own home is just as posh as the king's palace (*samam āvayoḥ sadanam*). But resegment the utterance into words and the verse actually emphasizes the vast discrepancy between the palace and the poet's impoverished hut, thereby amounting to a clever request for a raise (*Kāvya prakāśa* of Mammaṭa, pp. 422–23). For further discussion of poetic faults and their relationship to *śleṣa*, see Bronner 2010: 159–69.

41. For a depiction of the relationship between poets and patrons as a tense mutual dependence that constantly threatens to break down see Shulman 1992.

the semantic capacities of denotation and metonymy (*abhidhā* and *lakṣaṇā*) and the cognitive processes these entail; Rudraṭa's fourfold system of ornamentation; Ānandavardhana's discovery of a hitherto unrecognized capacity of language, which, while operative in many of the different *alaṃkāras*, necessitated a new cognitive and aesthetic analysis; and Mammaṭa's attempt to harmonize these *alaṃkāras* within a theory now crowned by Ānandavardhana's theory of *dhvani*. Tossed between ever shifting conceptual frameworks, the ornament of *vyājastuti* has demonstrated a constant and impressive fluctuation. Think, for example, of the radically opposed views concerning the role *śleṣa* plays in this device. Whereas some thinkers did their best to minimize (Mammaṭa) or even sever (Udbhaṭa) the ties between the two phenomena, others maintained that *śleṣa* either dominates (Daṇḍin), or indeed pervades (Rudraṭa), the whole spectrum of *vyājastuti*. This oscillation is closely related to the heated debate on *śleṣa*, a discussion that is beyond the scope of this paper, but which displayed an even greater degree of volatility.

At the same time the story of *vyājastuti* also reveals a deep-rooted conservatism in the discipline. The constant shifts I referred to reflect, to a large degree, changing attitudes towards a conceptual heritage that writers on Sanskrit poetics were doing their best to preserve, even as they were allowing themselves to be influenced by disciplines as diverse as dramaturgy (*Nāṭyaśāstra*) and Vedic hermeneutics (*Mīmāṃsā*). At every junction, these writers opted not to collapse different categories for the sake of yielding a more coherent and parsimonious theory. Ānandavardhana could easily have absorbed feigned praise or blame along with other ornaments into his new notion of *dhvani*, but chose not to do so. Rudraṭa never argued that his overall cognitive analysis of *śleṣa* made the distinctions between the different *alaṃkāras* he now viewed as subtypes of *śleṣa* insignificant. And this is to say nothing of the absence in Sanskrit poetics of crosscut categories such as irony or sarcasm, under which a variety of individual devices could have been subsumed. The story of *vyājastuti* indicates the amazing resilience of the individual *alaṃkāras*: Sanskrit literati were extremely reluctant to omit it or change its name—note that even Rudraṭa's unsuccessful renaming attempt still kept the crucial element *vyāja* in the title—even if this meant that the actual understanding of this device was considerably altered within each round of theorization. What is true for *vyājastuti* is true of many other devices: Sanskrit poicians continued to work with and around these ornaments in order to preserve an insight still held as valid, namely that these *alaṃkāras*, suggested by the field's founding fathers, each had some unique charm.

In the case of *vyājastuti*, however, the fascinating interplay between innovation and conservatism took an unusual twist, which cannot be explained simply as a compromise between the conflicting commitments to old insights and new theoretical frameworks. This is because, as I have tried to demonstrate, Bhāmaha's immediate successors—Daṇḍin, Vāmana, and perhaps also Udbhaṭa in his lost *Vivarāṇa*—while keeping the device's name and some elements from its definition, actually replaced it with an altogether new device achieving exactly the opposite effect of what Bhāmaha had in mind. What for Bhāmaha was a pointed attack on a king's claim to be Rāma-like while deceiving him to think that he is about to be praised, these later thinkers turned into true praise, cleverly phrased as if it were blame. This is the most dramatic redirection in the story of *vyājastuti*, and yet it too is not highlighted as such by its authors, who present their actions as if they were merely fine-tuning. True to the spirit of the device they had in mind, Daṇḍin and Vāmana gave Bhāmaha false credit by salvaging as much as they could from his original language and imagery, where in fact they were censoring his critique of the political and aesthetic orders.

This change-in-disguise does more than explain the strange discrepancy between the name *vyāpastuti* and the device it connotes in the works of Bhāmaha's successors, let alone the confusion about it in the field of Indology. It also alerts us to the fact that while these thinkers each had his theoretical axe to grind, their theories were never disassociated from socio-aesthetic value judgments. I believe it was these judgments that, first and foremost, drove Bhāmaha's followers to rewrite or emend his formulation and examples, before they turned to theorize the device anew. And while Bhāmaha's sensibilities as I understand them may stand out as exceptional, there is no reason to believe that values and tastes in this scholarly tradition were otherwise immune to variation and change. Think, for example, of the difference between Daṇḍin and Maṃmaṭa in this regard: whereas the former highlighted the playful and even salacious aspects as the source of charm in a feigned critique, the latter was increasingly anxious to "play it safe" with *vyāpastuti*. It is my sense that attentiveness to such different aesthetic preferences and to the interaction between them and the opposing trajectories of innovation and conservatism is crucial to our understanding of the history of Sanskrit poetics. Indeed, it is my belief that studies such as the one attempted above, though focused on a seemingly delimited and even rather marginal figure, can culminate into an "alternative" history of *Alaṃkāraśāstra*, one that will look very different from any of the standard narratives of its evolution. As always, the apparently minor details, far from the limelight, are the most telling, revealing the underlying lines of force and stress.

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