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The notion of *atiśaya* in Sanskrit literary theory

Abstract

The poetics of the Sanskrit ornate epic (*mahākāvya*), recognized as the most prestigious genre of Sanskrit *kāvya* literature, significantly rely on literary devices creating the sense of grandeur. The aim of this study is investigate the notion of *atiśaya* discussed by early works on Sanskrit literary theory and to identify it as a focal term within a discourse explicating the poetics of grandeur characteristic of *mahākāvya* genre. The here introduced distinction between *atiśaya* and hyperbole enables to capture the specificity of literary grandeur in *mahākāvya* compositions and elucidates the broader matter of 'excess' in the Sanskrit literature.

Keywords: Sanskrit ornate epic, literary theory, *atiśaya*, *mahākāvya*, hyperbole

Introduction

What distinguishes *kāvya* poetry from other kinds of writing in Classical Sanskrit language is its unique notion of literariness that relies on selecting the highlights of nature, intensifying them through the detailed description in ornate language, and thus turning them into highly artificial objects of pleasure. This literary strategy, characteristic of *kāvya* literature as such, is most manifestly visible in the Sanskrit ornate epic, originally designed as its most distinguished genre. With their epic plots, ornate depictions of the peaks of courtly reality and grand natural landscapes amplified by mythical imagery, Sanskrit

mahākāvya compositions are bound to appear to a foreign reader as refined elaborations of excess. It is one of the reasons why until very recently[1] the genre has suffered depreciation and neglect from classically educated Indologists, accustomed to occidental patterns of literary mimesis and Aristotle's golden mean. Although, within the last few decades several aspects of *mahākāvya*'s unique aesthetics, such as narrativity (Smith), rhetoric (Peterson), or descriptiveness (Trynkowska) have been studied insightfully, the matter of literary excess, instinctively connected by Western scholars with this genre of Sanskrit *kāvya* literature, still remains to be examined.[2] Unlike *itihāsa-purāṇa* tradition, from which they derive narrative frames, literary motives, and the affective structure characteristic of grand narratives, *mahākāvya*s belong to the context of worldly (*laukika*), or profane literature created by professional authors in accordance with conventions discussed by the Sanskrit literary theory (*alaṅkāraśāstra*). Therefore, unlike mytho-religious narratives (*itihāsa-purāṇa*), *mahākāvya*s functioned within a system furnished with terms enabling to recognize, verbalize, and critically evaluate several constituents of an aesthetic experience. Sanskrit *alaṅkāraśāstra*, which was the source of these terms, provides an invaluable insight into the original perception of Sanskrit *kāvya* literature with its broad repertoire of often untranslatable literary devices. It appears to be particularly essential in grasping the distinctive nature of a 'hyperbole' employed in the Sanskrit *kāvya* literature and in specifying its place among a broad variety of literary entities that allot to the poetics of grandeur characteristic of the *mahākāvya* genre. The findings regarding the hyperbole and the poetics of grandeur established within the context of *kāvya* and its theoretical background, which is *alaṅkāraśāstra*, may also shed light on the analogical, excess-oriented literary entities present in *itihāsa-purāṇa* works[3], and, possibly, other classes of Sanskrit literature.

I. Hyperbole and *atiśayokti*

Detachment from the material reality, prevalence of the supernatural, idealisation, and hyperbolization are still most likely to be regarded by a typical non-Indian reader as the distinctive features of the two great Sanskrit epics, *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, representing the *itihāsa-purāṇa* tradition.[4] As their condensed, literary reworkings,

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[1]   Anna Trynkowska, *Struktura opisów w zabiciu Śiśupali Maghy*, Warszawa 2004, pp. 15–16.

[2]   Indira Viswanathan Peterson, *Design and Rhetoric in a Sanskrit Court Epic. The Kirātārjunīya of Bhāravi*, Albany 2003; David Smith, 'Construction and Deconstruction, Narrative and Anti-narrative: The Representation of Reality in the Hindu Court Epic', in: *The Indian Narrative: Perspectives and Patterns*, eds. Christopher Shackle, Rupert Snell, Wiesbaden 1992, pp. 33–59; Trynkowska, *Struktura opisów w zabiciu Śiśupali Maghy*.

[3]   These include a variety of hyperbole characteristic of *itihāsa-purāṇa* and *śāstra* literature, which matches the Western notion of this figure, but also other literary entities indicative of grand narrative style, such as epic themes (the ocean, mountain ranges, deep forests, battles etc.), enumerations, and other.

[4]   Smith, *Construction and Deconstruction*, p. 34.

*mahākāvya*s bring the grand narratives of *itihāsa-purāṇa*s, centred on events and characters that indicate atemporal concepts rather than living experiences, to the realm of closely represented, tangible, material reality. They do it, however, by preserving, refining, and integrating together the literary techniques of idealization and hyperbolization.

The merging of these two techniques within the *kāvya* aesthetics, where the exaggeration is used as a way of intensifying the beauty of idealized objects, may be regarded as the source of difference between the hyperbole, present in the Western literary theory since the Classical antiquity, and the Sanskrit figure of speech (*alaṅkāra*), known as *atiśayokti* or *atiśaya*, which is both translated as 'hyperbole' and identified with that figure of speech from the Western tradition.[5] This identification is well founded, as the essence of *atiśayokti* figure, coming in several theoretical variants, is to greatly intensify the ordinary qualities of things by modifying their tangible nature, which can be stated about the hyperbole as well. Nonetheless, unlike the hyperbole, which can be understood both in the general sense of exaggeration and in several other literary and linguistic contexts accepted by the Western tradition, *atiśayokti* has its own distinctive character determined by the idealising convention of *kāvya* literature, which, in the Indian tradition, is the main context for the literary theory (*alaṅkāraśāstra*). While a hyperbole can be easily explicated through 'excess', implying some kind of surplus or through 'exaggeration', implying something that modifies or even transcends the reality, *atiśayokti* would be elucidated more accurately through 'intensification',[6] as it is typically concerned with amplifying the beauty of tangible objects, what may be effected by transcending or transforming the sensual domain, and not the other way round, as in the case of hyperbole.

The author of a recent study on the hyperbole in the Western tradition, Joshua R. Ritter, argues that the hyperbole, endowed with 'a de-stabilizing epistemological and ontological force', should be regarded a trope *par excellence*, or a 'trope-producing trope' as it represents 'the tendency of all tropes towards excess'.[7] A similar view is put forward by Jonathan Culler, who states that exaggeration underlies any kind of lyric poetry, as it transforms even the commonest, most natural subjects (ex. the wind) through poetic intensification.[8] The same intuitions regarding the all-embracing character of a hyperbole appear to be shared by the early Sanskrit literary theorists.

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[5]   Among others by Edwin Gerow. See: Edwin Gerow, *A Glossary of Indian Figures of Speech*, Mouton, Paris–Hague 1971, 'atiśayokti', pp. 97–98.

[6]   Sanskrit *atiśayokti* is translated as 'intensification' by Yigal Bronner. See: Yigal Bronner, 'Understanding Udbhaṭa: The Invention of Kashmiri Poetics in the Jayāpīḍa Moment', in: *Around Abhinavagupta. Aspects of the Intellectual History of Kashmir from the Ninth to the Eleventh Century*, eds. Eli Franco, Isabelle Ratié, Berlin 2016, pp. 88, 117.

[7]   Joshua R. Ritter, 'Recovering Hyperbole: Re-Imagining the Limits of Rhetoric for an Age of Excess' (PhD diss., Georgia State University 2010), pp. 20, 36–37.

[8]   Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford 1997, p. 76.

II. (Re-)constructing 'atiśaya' in early Sanskrit literary theory

1. Bhāmaha's *Kāvyālaṃkāra*

In its role of a figure of speech, *atiśayokti* lies at the centre of Bhāmaha's (7th century CE) literary theory presented in *Kāvyālaṃkāra*. His brief definition of this figure of speech illustrates the mimetic[9] bent of the Sanskrit *atiśayokti*, which distinguishes it from the hyperbole. *Atiśayokti* employed in BhKL.2.82 alters the ordinary experience in a striking manner while still remaining within the confines of nature. It does not invoke any supernatural imagery and appears as a literary device that is artfully hidden from the listener. Bhāmaha programmatically excludes from poetic compositions any supernatural elements that diverge from common experience, rules of nature and logic.[10] Accordingly, a hyperbole in this context should rather intensify the given reality in a way that is barely noticed, rather than break up with it:

> But [experts] *consider a statement that transcends the domain of ordinary experience due to some cause to be atiśayokti when employed as a literary device. For instance.* (BhKL.2.81)[11]

[An illustration of *atiśayokti* figure:]

> *The Seven-leaved trees concealed by moonlight, that shared the colour of their own flowers, were only inferred from the humming of bees.* (BhKL.2.82)[12]

Immediately after defining and illustrating the figure Bhāmaha postulates its universal character and the trope-creating potential by connecting it with a general quality (*guṇa*), and, accordingly, a larger literary entity, which is 'atiśaya' or 'pre-eminence'. This brings

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9　By 'mimetic' I mean including a credible representation of the external, perceivable, material reality. Within the conventions of *kāvya* literature and Sanskrit literary theory constructed around it, the term 'mimetic' captures the close, detailed depictions celebrating the 'svabhāva', or the 'innate nature' of things, which, though often inventively transformed through figurative language, is always represented within the criteria based on empirical observation and the accepted standards of rationality. Nevertheless, the standardized character of *kāvya*, which strongly relies on conventional themes and modes of depiction, often makes its imagery appear detached from the actual experience, on which it was originally based, and, accordingly, not fully mimetic in the Auerbachian sense.

10　Ex.: kathaṃ pāto 'mbudhārāṇāṃ jvalantīnāṃ vivasvataḥ |
　　　asambhavād ayaṃ yuktyā tenāsambhava ucyate || BhKL.2.48 ||
How can it be that blazing clouds fall from the sun? Since it involves improbability, [this defect] *is called 'improbability'.*

11　nimittato vaco yattu lokātikrāntagocaram |
　　　manyante 'tiśayoktiṃ tām alaṅkāratayā yathā || BhKL.2.81 ||

12　svapuṣpacchavihāriṇyā candrabhāsā tirohitāḥ |
　　　anvamīyanta bhṛṅgālivācā saptacchadadrumāḥ || BhKL.2.82 ||

him to the conclusion that any poetic expression (*ukti*) is necessarily 'pre-eminent' (*atiśaya*), as has been already established by the tradition (*āgama*):

> *Expressions like that get elevated through the use of a pre-eminent quality. Actually, the tradition holds that every* [poetic expression] *should be regarded as an expression of pre-eminence* (atiśayokti). (BhKL.2.84)[13]

> *This* [atiśayokti] *appears in every instance of vakrokti, carrying an indirect meaning. A poet should strive to employ it,* [since] *what figure of speech is there without it?* (BhKL.2.85)[14]

Since Bhāmaha's *Kāvyālaṃkāra* is most probably the oldest preserved authorial work on Sanskrit poetics[15], it is not clear which particular source is recognized here as 'the tradition' (*āgama*). The only known Sanskrit work on literary theory that predates Bhāmaha is Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* (2nd century BCE/2nd century CE), a compilatory treatise on performing arts and poetics. It mentions *atiśaya* among 36 *lakṣaṇa*s, or marks of a good play[16], defining it as follows:

> *When, after praising many qualities belonging to a common man, a distinctive quality is praised, the wise should recognize it as 'atiśaya'.* (NŚ.16.20)[17]

As stated in the above cited BhKL.2.85, Bhāmaha identifies *atiśayokti*, understood as a figure of speech, with *vakrokti*, which may be literally translated as 'crooked/curved/bent speech'. Actually, he uses the term 'vakra' (adj. crooked/curved/bent) earlier in the treatise while discussing a matter that is vital for the subject of *atiśayokti* understood through the prism of a hyperbole:

> *Mere* [words] *like 'excessive/very much/extraordinary' do not create literary beauty.*

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[13] ity evam ādir uditā guṇātiśayayogataḥ |
sarvaivātiśayoktis tu tarkayet tāṃ yathāgamam || BhKL.2.84 ||

[14] saiṣa sarvaiva vakroktir anayārtho vibhāvyate |
yatno 'syāṃ kavinā kāryaḥ ko 'laṅkāro 'nayā vinā || BhKL.2.85 ||

[15] Yigal Bronner, 'A Question of Priority: Revisiting the Bhāmaha-Daṇḍin Debate', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 40/1 (2012), pp. 67–118.

[16] The author of *Nāṭyaśāstra* does not provide a general definition of the 36 *lakṣana*s, described one by one. According to Abhinavagupta's commentary on NŚ (*Abhinava Bhāratī*), written around the 10th century CE, *lakṣaṇa* differs from *guṇa* (literary quality) in not belonging to *rasa*, or the soul of poetry, and from *alaṅkāra* in belonging to the body of poetry, which *alaṅkāra*s only adorn as external ornaments. See: Venkataraman Raghavan, *Studies on Some Concepts of the Alaṅkāra Śāstra*, Adyar 1942, p. 6.

[17] bahūn guṇān kīrtayitvā sāmānyajanasambhavān |
viśeṣaḥ kīrtyate yas tu jñeyaḥ so'tiśayo budhaiḥ || NŚ.16.20 ||

> *The ornamentation of speech is accepted as the use of language where*
> *the referent is indirect* (lit. 'curved'). (BhKL.1.36)[18]

The stanza implies that authors of *kāvya* literature should avoid literal expressions of grandeur, characteristic of *itihāsa-purāṇa* works, and should rather put their poetic skill into conveying, in non-direct manner, a sense of intensity or grandeur, identified here with beauty, by means of transforming a given linguistic reality.

The identification of *vakrokti* with *atiśayokti* strongly supports the coherence of Bhāmaha's literary theory elucidated in *Kāvyālaṃkāra*, with the *alaṅkāra* placed at its heart. As can be inferred from the entirety of the treatise, which concentrates on this category of literary composition in particular, while reducing the scope of other categories acknowledged by *Nāṭyaśāstra* (*rasa*, *guṇa*, *lakṣaṇa*), the main element that distinguishes poetry from other forms of linguistic expression is the *alaṅkāra*, or the figure of speech. Bhāmaha introduces the term 'vakrokti' in order to capture the general effect of a distortion, or, in other words, 'curve'/'bend', brought by any *alaṅkāra* into the verbally processed reality, which, however, remains subordinate to the binding rules of linguistic correctness. Identifying the abstract, theoretical term of 'vakrokti' with a particular figure of speech, which by definition transforms the ordinary experience, allows him to introduce a unifying principle that does not weaken the consistency of his literary theory, which is not only built upon the notion of *alaṅkāra*, but also practically oriented, avoiding abstract speculations and categorial classifications that will preoccupy later Sanskrit theorists. Eventually, it may be concluded that Bhāmaha's understanding of *atiśayokti* in terms of scope matches the understanding of a hyperbole shared by contemporary Western scholars, Joshua Ritter and Jonathan Culler, mentioned in the previous section of this study.

2. Daṇḍin's *Kāvyādarśa*

Unlike Bhāmaha, another author of an early work on Sanskrit poetics, Daṇḍin (7th/8th century CE), does not explicitly assign to *atiśayokti* an exact, fundamental place within his theory. The main reason for this lies in the greater complexity of Daṇḍin's literary theory, which embraces several positive constituents of a literary composition, and, accordingly, becomes multicentred, in contrast with Bhāmaha's restrictive and monocentric approach.

Firstly, Daṇḍin does not share the views of Bhāmaha regarding *vakrokti* as the sole criterion for a literary composition, proposing to divide the literary language into two classes denominated as *vakrokti* and *svabhāvokti*. While *vakrokti* encompasses the forms of literary expression based on the creative transformation of reality expressed through language, *svabhāvokti* contains those forms of literary expression which capture the reality

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[18] na nitāntādimātreṇa jāyate cārutā girām |
      vakrābhidheyaśabdoktir iṣṭā vācām alaṃkṛtiḥ || BhKL.1.36 ||

in its most natural form and highlight its beauty by means of plain language.[19] Accordingly, Daṇḍin advocates also the forms of literary expression that may be regarded as structural opposites of *atiśayokti* in Bhāmaha's interpretation and of the hyperbole in Western sense.

Secondly, he attaches a proportional significance to *alaṅkāra*s and other positive constituents of literary composition, namely ten *guṇa*s or literary qualities, which he incorporates into the notion of literary 'style' (*mārga*).[20] In his discussion of two theoretical models of literary styles based on separate sets of *guṇa*s, he shows great partiality towards the moderate, well balanced, and seemingly natural *vaidarbha mārga*, which matches the style of Kālidāsa, while pointing out the imperfections of the other, *gauḍīya mārga*, which exemplifies various realizations of linguistic excess. However, in spite of that, the first section of *Kāvyādarśa*, where Daṇḍin defines and illustrates the ten *guṇa*s along with the *mārga*s constituted by them, provides a significant insight into the notion of *atiśaya* in its relation to a hyperbole, which would be hardly possible to infer from Bhāmaha's concise statements.

In stanzas KD, 1.85–1.92, Daṇḍin discusses the *kānti guṇa* or the quality of 'splendour', which he considers specific to *vaidarbha mārga*. He defines it as the quality of 'being universally pleasing' (*sarvajagatkāntaṃ*) reached by expressing a certain pre-eminence without transgressing the domain of ordinary experience:

> *Splendour* (kānti guṇa) *pleases everyone, as it does not surpass the ordinary state of things. It can be traced even in descriptions and reports.* (DKD. 1.85)[21]

The matter is further explained with the aid of an illustrative stanza:

> *'Oh, perfect-bodied girl, there is not enough space between your creeper-like arms for these expanding breasts of yours.' Such a* [verse] *as this, which is augmented by the description of a singular feature, is realistic and pleasing to anyone who adheres to the ways things work in the world.* (DKD. 1.87–1.88)[22]

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[19] Sushil Kumar De, *Vakroktijīvita a Treatise on Sanskrit Poetics by Rājānaka Kuntaka*, Calcutta 1961, introduction, pp. xx–xxiv.

[20] Names of ten *guṇa*s (śleṣa, prasāda, samatā, mādhurya, sukumārata, arthavyakti, udāratā, ojas, kānti, samādhi) and much of their definitions were adopted by Daṇḍin from an earlier tradition, elements of which are documented in *Nāṭyaśāstra* and Bhāmaha's *Kāvyālaṃkāra*. *Nāṭyaśāstra* (16.97–114) mentions the entire set of ten, while Bhāmaha (2.1–3) speaks only about three *guṇa*s (mādhurya, ojas, and prāsada).

[21] kāntaṃ sarvajagatkāntaṃ laukikārthānatikramāt |
tac ca vārtābhidhāneṣu varṇanāsv api dṛśyate || DKD.1.85 ||

[22] anayor anavadyāṅgi stanayor jṛmbhamāṇayoḥ |
avakāśo na paryāptas tava bāhulatāntare ||
iti sambhāvyam evaitad viśeṣākhyānasaṃskṛtam |
kāntaṃ bhavati sarvasya lokayātrānuvartinaḥ || DKD.1.87–1.88 ||

The above cited definition of *kānti guṇa* strongly corresponds to the already discussed definitions of *atiśayokti* and *atiśaya*. Analogically to *Nāṭyaśāstra*'s *lakṣaṇa atiśaya*, it is specified here as an expression of *viśeṣa* or a distinctive quality, the prominence of which does not transgress the confines of commonsensical reality.[23] According to Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary, Sanskrit words 'viśeṣa' and 'atiśaya' share a common set of meanings, including 'distinctive quality', 'excellence', 'superiority'. While in the *Nāṭyaśāstra viśeṣa* functions as either a synonym or specific aspect of *atiśaya*, Bhāmaha's definition omits it, employing only *atiśaya*.

Apart from that, *kānti guṇa* clearly mirrors the characteristics of *atiśaya cum vakrokti* defined by Bhāmaha and the *atiśaya lakṣaṇa* of *Nāṭyaśāstra*, being a verbally expressed quality of comprehensible pre-eminence. Moreover, Daṇḍin emphasizes the realistic aspect of *kānti guṇa* through contrasting it with *atyukti* or 'exaggeration' characteristic of the lesser, *gauḍīya mārga*:

> *That sense which is expressed through an excessive, erroneous transposition, which seems to transcend the world, is enormously pleasing to the intellectuals,* [but] *not to other people.* (DKD.1.89)[24]

[As in]:

> *Oh, lovely lady, considering the expansion of your breasts, the universe formed by the creator appears quite small.* (DKD.1.91)[25]

This sharp distinction between *kānti guṇa*, whose close affinity to the notion of *atiśaya* in other Sanskrit works has been indicated above, and *atyukti*, which can be adequately translated as 'exaggeration', furthers the understanding of *atiśaya* as a literary entity that substantially differs from the Western hyperbole understood as a figure of excess or exaggeration. The difference between the two is clearly indicated by the illustrative stanzas DKD.1.87 and DKD.1.91, the former of which amplifies the pre-eminence of woman's figure by intensifying the material, tangible reality and the latter of which amplifies that actual pre-eminence by referring to non-material, supernatural reality. *Atyukti*, or exaggeration, illustrated by the latter example, appears here as an elite form of literary intensification, which discourages the universal audience by the idiosyncrasy of the supernatural imagery or the mind-challenging ideas tied to it. Contrastingly, the universal appeal of *kānti* or 'splendour' relies on the realistic account of material reality (*loka*) and rules of rational reasoning (*nyāya*) shared by general audience of pleasure-seeking, educated courtly society united by common sense of taste. The limits set for

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[23] See: NŚ.16.20 cited in the footnote no. 14 on p. 5.
[24] lokātīta ivātyartham adhyāropya vivakṣitaḥ |
yo 'rthas tenātituṣyanti vidagdhā netare janāḥ || DKD.1.89 ||
[25] alpaṃ nirmitam ākāśam anālocyaiva vedhasā |
idam evaṃ vidhiṃ bhāvi bhavatyāḥ stanajṛmbhaṇam || DKD.1.91 ||

the *kānti* guṇa by Daṇḍin appear to demarcate the boundaries of *atiśaya*, suggesting to understand it in terms of a refined intensification, rather than hyperbole.

Atiśayokti alaṅkāra, defined by Daṇḍin in the second section of *Kāvyādarśa*, shares the characteristics of both *kānti* and *atyukti*.[26] Analogically to *kānti guṇa*, it is considered an expression of *viśeṣa* (distinctive quality) and analogically to *atyukti* it is supposed to transcend the limits of reality:

> *Atiśayokti should be* [regarded] *an expression of distinctive quality* [viśeṣa], *which passes beyond the limits of reality, as it is the principal figure of speech.* (DKD.2.214)[27]

The examples of *atiśayokti* provided by Daṇḍin in following stanzas closely mirror those, which in the previous chapter illustrated the *kānti guṇa*. The similarity to DKD.1.87 is particularly visible in:

> *Dear, I have been wondering until this very moment: is there a waist between your breasts and hips?* (DKD.2.217)[28]

In this and other stanzas of the section, illustrating the *atiśayokti* figure, the outstanding qualities (*viśeṣa*) are imagined as unordinary, but yet material. They are supernatural not in the sense of transcending nature or belonging to some otherworldly reality, as was the case with those representing *atyukti*, but rather in the sense of transforming, intensifying, or introducing a poetic bent into the material reality, as was the case with Bhāmaha's *vakrokti*. Therefore, 'passing beyond the limits of reality' (lokasīmātivartinī, DKD.2.214) from the definition of *atiśayokti* should not be identified with 'transcending the world' (*lokātīta* DKD.1.89) from the definition of *atyukti*. Accordingly, *atiśayokti alaṅkāra* does not equal exaggeration.

Daṇḍin calls it 'alaṃkārottamā', which may be translated as 'the principal', 'the best', or, literally, 'the highest', 'the most elevated' figure of speech, recognizing the transcending potential of *atiśayokti* as the source of this epithet. In the concluding stanza of the *atiśayokti* section, he specifies a broader literary entity called 'atiśaya', which, analogically to Bhāmaha's *atiśayokti/vakrokti*, is the basis of all other figures of speech:

> *An expression that accounts for the greatness of poets, recognized as the single source of other figures of speech, is called 'atiśaya'.* (DKD.2.220)[29]

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[26] Cf. Sławomir Cieślikowski, *Teoria literatury w dawnych Indiach*, Kraków 2016, p. 247.

[27] vivakṣā yā viśeṣasya lokasīmātivartinī |
asāv atiśayoktiḥ syād alaṃkārottamā yathā || DKD.2.214 ||

[28] stanayor jaghanasyāpi madhye madhyaṃ priye tava |
asti nāstīti saṃdeho na me 'dyāpi nivartate || DKD.2.217 ||

[29] alaṃkārāntarāṇām apy ekam āhuḥ parāyaṇam |
vāgīśamahitām uktim imām atiśayāhvayam || DKD.2.220 ||

Thus, here again *atiśaya* is presented as the essence of all figures of speech, accordingly understood as intensifying alterations of reality. Moreover, Daṇḍin connects it with literary grandeur, reminiscent of *mahākāvya* compositions, and thereby displays the ultimate affective potential and literary prestige of this figure of speech. However, apart from this philosophical characterization of an abstract, categorical unit, the context suggests to understand Daṇḍin's *atiśaya* also technically, as a literary entity very similar to *guṇa* which infuses other figures of speech with the quality of 'pre-eminence' characteristic of *atiśayokti*.

As stated at the beginning of this section, Daṇḍin's theoretical elaboration of *atiśaya* is disproportionately succinct relative to its declared importance, since all the theoretical details regarding it are condensed into two above discussed stanzas (DKD.2.214 and DKD.2.220). However, apart from the concise explicit theory, *Kāvyādarśa* contains also a volume of implicit information that can be inferred not only from his discussion of *kānti guṇa*, but also from stanzas illustrating other literary entities. On the one hand, numerous exemplary stanzas provided by Daṇḍin evoke a sense of material grandeur, which is a quality largely conformable to his notion of *kānti guṇa*, defined as pre-eminence (*atiśaya*) confined within the limits of tangible, material reality. It is visible in stanzas containing materially grand imagery, such as the ocean, the mountain, luminaries, or the universe, employed within various figures of speech. This applies, for example, to:

a) a stanza based on *heturūpaka alaṅkāra*, or a type of simile in which the poetic identification of two things is expressed through causal relation:

> *By your profundity you are the ocean, by your gravity you are the mountain, by your ability to grant peoples' desires you are the wish-giving tree*. (DKD.2.85)[30]

b) a stanza based on *śliṣṭākṣepa alaṅkāra*, or a poetic objection (*ākṣepa*) expressed through paronmasia (*śleṣa/śliṣṭa*). Here, the real moon is excluded, while the face identified with it through paronmasia is valued as superior to it:

> *Considering your moon-face with glowing star-pupils, whose ambrosial nature challenges lotuses, what is the use of another moon?* (DKD.2.159)[31]

c) a stanza based on *arthāntarākṣepa alaṅkāra*, or a poetic objection (*ākṣepa*) expressed through *apodixis* (*arthāntaranyāsa*), where the illustrative rationale based on common knowledge (*arthāntaranyāsa*) is used to object the previous statement, which it illustrates:

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[30] gāmbhīryeṇa samudro 'si gauraveṇāsi parvataḥ |
       kāmadatvāc ca lokānām asi tvaṃ kalpapādapaḥ || DKD.2.85 ||
[31] amṛtātmani padmānāṃ dveṣṭari snigdhatārake
       mukhendau tava saty asminn apareṇa kim indunā || DKD.2.159 ||

> *How marvellous it is, that even though your courage has pervaded the Universe, it is still unsatisfied. Or indeed, when has anyone ever seen the satisfaction of blazing fire?* (DKD.2.165)[32]

These and several other illustrative stanzas of *Kāvyādarśa* support Daṇḍin's recognition of *atiśaya* as a primary underlying element of other *alaṅkāra*s since, at the core, they all aim at communicating pre-eminence of a given subject, which is also expressed through the materially compelling imagery. They also display the correspondence between *atiśaya* and *kānti guṇa*, expressing the utmost pre-eminence (*viśeṣa/atiśaya*), which is bound within the confines of material reality. This evidence may be regarded as sufficient to consider Daṇḍin's notion of *atiśaya* as a broad category that pervades a number of literary entities, including *alaṅkāra*s, *guṇa*s, and themes. The proposed broad interpretation of *atiśaya* in *Kāvyādarśa* would challenge the narrow, literal one, drawn from Daṇḍin's example of *atiśayopamā alaṃkāra*, or the pre-eminent (*atiśaya*) simile (*upamā*):

> *The moon is seen in the sky* [but] *your face just in you. There is no other difference. This is atiśayopamā.* || DKD.2.22 ||[33]

This illustration of a simile expressed through *atiśayokti* figure exactly mirrors his three stanzas illustrating atiśayokti (DKD.2.215, 217–218). It is analogically mimetic, focused on natural detail, and based on blurring the boundaries between separate things. In verbatim readings of *Kāvyādarśa* following the exact lexical items that appear in the text, this may speak for understanding *atiśaya* in the narrow sense, namely as the essence of *atiśayokti* figure, defined through the two examples (DKD.2.215, 217–218), which can be used in combination with other figures of speech. However, such a narrow understanding of *atiśaya* would contradict not only the holistic interpretation of the term, which considers data inferred from seemingly unrelated parts of the text along with possible synonyms (*viśeṣa*), and Daṇḍin's brief definitions, but also his own, third example of *atiśayokti* that differs from two previous ones:

> *Oh, king, the cavity of triple-world is great indeed, as it demarcates the mass of your glory, which is impossible to demarcate.* (DKD.2.219)[34]

Analogically to former three illustrative stanzas, this one also indicates a blurring of boundaries between two objects, in this case, between the cavity of the universe and the royal fame. However, unlike them, it is neither realistic, nor focused on the natural detail, but rather operating on the cosmic macroscale, rooted in mythical imagery.

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[32] citram ākrāntaviśvo ‹pi vikramas te na tṛpyati
kadā vā dṛśyate tṛptir udīrṇasya havirbhujaḥ || DKD.2.165 ||
[33] tvayy eva tvanmukhaṃ dṛṣṭaṃ dṛśyate divi candramāḥ |
iyaty eva bhidā nānyety asāv atiśayopamā || DKD.2.22 ||
[34] aho viśālaṃ bhūpāla bhuvanatritayodaram |
māti mātum aśakyo ‘pi yaśorāśir yad atra te || DKD.2.219 ||

Furthermore, it indicates an actual grandeur, characteristic of royal and religious eulogies, which is intensified into sublimity through a contradictory statement (*virodha alaṃkāra*) 'demarcates what is impossible to demarcate'. For this reason, the stanza supports the broader sense of *atiśaya* along with the broader scope of *atiśayokti alaṃkāra*, which are both communicated in Daṇḍin's theoretical statements.

3. Vāmana's *Kāvyālaṃkārasūtravṛitti*

Kāvyālaṃkārasūtravṛitti of Vāmana (8th century) significantly differs from the preceding Sanskrit literary theories, which focused on itemizing and defining various constituents of a literary composition, in its strictly systematic approach, where the itemized constituents are subject to organizing principles that address the notion of 'literature' from the philosophical perspective, namely, identifying the essence, structure, and purpose of a literary composition.[35]

The first link that ties Vāmana's treatise with the formerly discussed works lies at the very core of his literary theory introduced in the first chapter of *Kāvyālaṃkārasūtravṛitti*, where he recognizes *rīti* as the 'essence' or 'soul' (*ātman*) of literature (VKL.1.2.6)[36] constituted by different sets of ten *guṇa*s, or, literary qualities, each manifesting on both auditory (*śabda*) and conceptual (*artha*) levels. Vāmana's *rīti* is a systemically developed equivalent of Daṇḍin's *mārga*. While *mārga* of *Kāvyādarśa* serves as one of several terms that describe a literary work, *rīti* of *Kāvyālaṃkārasūtravṛitti* serves as the principle distinguishing literature from other types of writing. Consequently, Vāmana broadens also the scope of ten guṇas, adopted from Daṇḍin and/or an earlier Sanskrit discourse on 'style' (*mārga*/*rīti*), by recognizing each of them on the layer of sense (*artha*) and sound (*śabda*), therefore doubling their definitions and making them encompass a broader range of literary language.

After appointing *guṇa* as the literary entity that forms the essence of literary expression, he defines it by, again, naming another, more abstract essence, expressed through it, which is *viśeṣa*, or 'distinctive quality', closely connected or even synonymous with *atiśaya* of the former Sanskrit theorists. Apparently, the term 'viśeṣa', which in Daṇḍin's *Kāvyādarśa* was applied to *kānti guṇa* and *atiśayokti alaṃkāra*, is adopted by Vāmana to the definition of *guṇa* in general. This adaptation of 'viśeṣa' term should be interpreted as a transfer of theoretical emphasis from a particular *alaṃkāra*, which is Daṇḍin's *atiśayokti*, and a particular *guṇa*, which is Daṇḍin's *kānti*, to *guṇa* in general, whose prior importance within the *rīti* system is declared in VKL.1.2.6–1.2.8.[37] This confirms

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[35] See also: Sushil Kumar De, *Studies in the History of Sanskrit Poetics*, vol. II, London 1923, p. 90.

[36] rītir ātmā kāvyasya | VKL.1.2.6 |
Style is the soul of literature.

[37] viśiṣṭā padaracanā rītiḥ | VKL.1.2.7 |
Style is a distinctive arrangement of words.
viśeṣo guṇātmā | VKL.1.2.8 |
Distinction is the soul of literary quality.

the great importance assigned to *atiśaya* by Daṇḍin and furthers the understanding of Vāmana's *rīti* as an arrangement of words that incorporates an abstract entity, denominated as 'distinctive quality' (*viśeṣa*), through concrete, specified entities, denominated as literary qualities (*guṇa*s).

Furthermore, Vāmana's literary theory apparently breaks what has been established here as an account of *atiśaya* into two parts. While 'viśeṣa', used by the author of *Nāṭyaśāstra* as an explanatory term for *atiśaya lakṣaṇa* and by Daṇḍin as an explanatory term for *atiśayokti alaṃkāra*, is transferred here to the definition of *guṇa*, the term 'atiśaya' is entirely separated from the context of *rīti* constituted by *guṇa*s and analysed exclusively within the domain of *alaṃkāra*s, which are discussed in the fourth chapter of *Kāvyālaṃkārasūtravṛtti*.

In the introductory *sūtra* opening the fourth chapter, he uses the word 'atiśaya' to designate the effect produced by *alaṃkāra*s on the literary 'brilliance' (*kāvyaśobhā*),[38] recognized as the effect of *guṇa*s:

> The brilliance of literature is to be created through the fulfilment of literary qualities and figures of speech are the causes of its pre-eminence [...][39]

In the light of the above statement, Vāmana's system appears as three-layered structure with an abstract *viśeṣa* at its core expressed through perceptible *guṇa*s, which constitute *rīti*, identified as the soul of literature, which, at the most external layer, is covered with figures of speech that in their role of non-essential, auxiliary elements intensify the effect of *guṇa*s, rendering it 'pre-eminent'. In the light of this, Vāmana's treatment of *atiśaya* as such closely follows Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin, who also reserved this term for the intensifying effect of *alaṃkāra*s on language. However, Vāmana's account of the term along with literary phenomena related to it is more systematized and detailed than the accounts of previously discussed literary theories.

Vāmana introduces his innovatively systematic approach also into the analysis of conceptual figures of speech (*arthālaṃkāra*), regarding them all as elaborations of a simile (*upamā*) that can be explained through characterizing the relation between the subject of comparison (*upameya*) and the object of comparison (*upamāna*), what places the further investigation of the notion of *atiśaya* and literary entities related to it within a new, broader context demarcated by the simile. His restrictions imposed on the simile closely correspond with Daṇḍin's criticism of exaggeration (*atyukti*) as opposed to the restrained pre-eminence exemplified by *kānti guṇa*. Among the defects (*doṣa*) of the simile he mentions excess (*adhikatva*), which manifests as an inadequate superiority of the object of comparison in terms of attribute (*dharma*), measure (*pramāṇa*), or class (*jāti*).[40]

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[38] The Sanskrit word 'śobhā' categorically corresponds with the Western notion of beauty. I choose to translate it as 'brilliance' in order to preserve the connotations of light, lustre, splendour, which distinguish the Sanskrit word 'śobhā' from the English word 'beauty'.

[39] guṇanirvṛtyā kāvyaśobhā | tasyāś cātiśayahetavo 'laṃkārāḥ | [...] VKL.4.1.0 |

[40] [...] jātipramāṇadharmādhikyam adhikatvam iti | [...] VKL.4.2.11 (vṛtti).

His illustration of the superiority in measure (*pramāṇādhikya*) closely mirrors Daṇḍin's example of *atyukti*, being also based on a far-fetched comparison involving a reference to supernatural entities:

> *Your navel is like the underworld, your breasts are like two highest mountains and lines of your braided hair resemble the fall of Yamunā river*. (VKL.4.2.11)

Moreover, he further specifies 'implausibility' (*asaṃbhava*) as another defect of simile, which results from a failure of reasoning (*anupapatti*) in the literary expression.[41] It is a restricted form of a general literary defect defined under the same name by Bhāmaha (BhKL.2.48).[42] Vāmana illustrates it with a stanza, where the radiance of smile on woman's face is compared to the radiance of moonshine inside the blooming lotus,[43] which, as indicated by the author, is an implausible comparison owing to the fact that lotuses do not bloom in the moonlight.[44]

In the following *sūtra*, which closes the second section of the fourth chapter, Vāmana again refers to *atiśaya*, introduced in the opening of the chapter as the effect or purpose of *alaṃkāra*s. However, in spite of the fact that the theoretical weight of *atiśaya* is confirmed by this concluding *sūtra*, the term itself remains undefined, which suggests that it was treated by the author as self-evident. The *sūtra* states that 'pre-eminence includes no discord',[45] which observation most probably applies to all the defects of simile specified in the preceding 13 *sūtra*s (4.2.8–4.2.20). In the light of that, *atiśaya*, or pre-eminence, appears as an aesthetic goal of figures of speech, which may be defined as a literary intensification carried out in accordance with systematic rules, including grammatical correctness, valid reasoning, symmetry, adequacy, and custom.

The term 'atiśaya', remaining undefined, reappears in several *sūtra*s of the fourth chapter's third section. In VKL.4.3.9 it is recognized as the purpose of *utprekṣā alaṃkāra*, which is based on describing one thing through the nature of another.[46] Here Vāmana refutes the view held by unnamed tradition, which identifies *utprekṣā* with *atiśayokti alaṃkāra*,[47] providing the definition of the latter in the following *sūtra*:

> *Atiśayokti is* [based on] *positing a conceivable property and amplifying it*. (VKL.4.3.10)[48]

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[41] anupapattir asaṃbhavaḥ | VKL.4.2.20. Compare: BhKL.2.48, p.4 of this paper.

[42] See: p. 4 of this paper.

[43] Skt. 'aravinda', Lat. *Nelumbium Speciosum*.

[44] cakāsti vadane tasyāḥ smitacchāyā vikāsini |
unnidrasyāravindasya madhye mugdheva candrikā || VKL.4.2.20 ||

[45] na viruddho 'tiśayaḥ | VKL.4.2.21 |

[46] atadrūpasyānyathādhyavasānam atiśayārtham utprekṣā | VKL.4.3.9

[47] utprekṣaivātiśayoktir iti kecit | tan nirāsārtham āha ---- | VKL.4.3.9 (vṛtti)

[48] saṃbhāvyadharmatadutkarṣakalpanātiśayoktiḥ | VKL.4.3.10, saṃbhāvyasya dharmasya tadutkarṣasya ca kalpanātiśayoktiḥ | VKL.4.3.10 (vṛtti)

The fact that Vāmana explains *atiśayokti alaṃkāra* by means of a word 'utkarṣa', translated here as 'amplification', provides a vital insight not only into the notion of *atiśaya* in general, but also into its significance within *Kāvyālaṃkārasutravṛitti*.

Firstly, nominal meanings of 'utkarṣa' provided by Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary, which include: 'elevation', 'increase', 'eminence', 'excess', and 'abundance', broaden the scope of possible connotations attached to 'atiśaya' with terms indicating a state of being or raising upward, excess or a state of increasing, and profusion.[49] Since this set of meanings is shared by both Sanskrit 'atiśaya' and English 'sublime', it may be regarded as an argument for interpreting the term in relation to the Western discourse of the sublime, which is further justified by the fact that 'utkarṣa' and its cognates are used as synonyms of 'atiśaya' also by later Sanskrit literary theorists.[50]

Secondly, in his commentary to the first sūtra of the simile-section Vāmana specifies the object of comparison (*upamāna*) in the simile by means of a word 'utkṛṣṭa', translated below as 'superior', which is a past passive participle derived from the same grammatical root (ud-kṛ) as 'utkarṣa' (ud-kṛ) and, accordingly, shares a number of its meanings in an adjectival form, including 'eminent', 'superior', and 'excessive':

> The object of comparison is [an object] whose superior quality constitutes the resemblance with another object compared [to it]. The subject of comparison is this other object of a lesser quality which is compared [to something else].[51] (VKL.4.2.1)

This explication indicates that Vāmana's concept of a simile itself to some extent merges with what has been presented here so far as the notion of *atiśaya*. Since he recognizes the simile as the essence of all other conceptual figures of speech and *atiśaya* as the effect they produce on the literary language, the merging of this two concepts can be regarded as another indication of the substantial consistency of his literary theory. It also further confirms the applicability of some of his observations concerning simile to the notion of *atiśaya*.

While the second illustrating example of *atiśayokti* provided by Vāmana mirrors the scheme assumed by the previously discussed definitions of this *alaṃkāra*, presenting an image of women indiscernible from moonlight owing to the brightness of their bodies and apparel, the first one diverges from it, bearing a close resemblance to Daṇḍin's example of *atyukti* with its supernatural imagery, which is, however, neutralized by the vivid naturalistic detail:

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[49] Accordingly, meanings like 'elevation', 'pre-eminence', 'increase', and 'excess' are shared by Sanskrit 'atiśaya' / 'utkarṣa' and English 'sublime'.

[50] For example by Kuntaka (10th century CE) in his *Vakroktijīvita*.

[51] upamīyate sādṛśyam ānīyate yenotkṛṣṭaguṇenānyat tad upamānam | yad upamīyate nyūnaguṇaṃ tad upameyam | VKL.4.2.1.

*If two streams of the celestial Ganga could flow through the sky one after
another, they would be compared to his chest dark as a tamāla tree and
a pearl necklace.* (VKL.4.3.10)[52]

Another, and final to be mentioned, issue in which Vāmana differs from the prior discourse built around the notion of *atiśaya* is his approach to *vakrokti*, which he considers a *lakṣaṇa* and defines as 'a secondary signification based on resemblance'.[53] On the basis of illustrative examples, in one of which the opening of lotuses is expressed by verb denoting the action of opening the eyes (un-mīl, unmīlati),[54] it may be specified, after Edwin Gerow, as a metonymy of resemblance, where a part of expression is 'used in a figurative sense based on similitude'.[55] Vakrokti, thus understood, encompasses only that part of linguistic expression where a non-literal use of language implies a simile without one being directly stated. Such a reduction of *vakrokti*'s scope followed by a precise specification of the term should be regarded as a significant, original contribution to the discourse of *atiśaya*, compatible with the author's *rīti* system based on *guṇa*s, which indicates that 'pre-eminence' may be separated from 'figurativeness' as defined by Bhāmaha, and, accordingly, appear as a broader notion with its own connotations.

In essence, a close study of Vāmana's *Kāvyālaṃkārasūtravṛtti* shows how the explicit account of *atiśaya*, which in works of Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin is limited to brief statements, assumes a more detailed and systematic form underlain with its own distinctive traits. Vāmana's treatise is also an early example of how the constituent elements of *atiśaya* discourse, traceable in preceding works, are absorbed into the key concepts of an authorial, unified literary theory.

Conclusion and prospects

The here presented study opened with a recognition of grandeur-based poetics underlying the *mahākāvya* genre. An adequate identification of this poetics grasped by an alien reader from *mahākāvya* compositions required establishing a preliminary distinction between the basic Western notion of a hyperbole and a Sanskrit literary entity identified with it by some scholars.

The Sanskrit notion of *atiśaya* was appointed here as a focal point in the search for elements of Sanskrit literary theory able to explain the grand narrative techniques of *mahākāvya*s within their original context. The three earliest preserved authorial works

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[52] ubhau yadi vyomni pṛthak pravāhāv ākāśagaṅgāpayasaḥ patetām|
tenopamīyeta tamālanīlam āmuktamuktālatam asya vakṣaḥ || VKL.4.3.10
[53] sādṛśyāllakṣaṇā vakroktiḥ | VKL.4.3.8
[54] unmimīla kamalaṃ sarasīnāṃ kairavaṃ ca nimimīla muhūrtāt | VKL.4.3.8 (vṛtti)
The day lotus of the lake opened just while the night one was closing. Here, we are not told that lotus is like an eye, it is only the verbs 'unmilīla' and 'nimimīla' that imply this.
[55] Edwin Gerow, *A Glossary of Indian Figures of Speech*, 'vakrokti', p. 262.

on Sanskrit poetics discussed here already contain the key components of the notion of *atiśaya* that will be adopted and reworked by later theorists. These three early works already reveal the categorical complexity of the literary phenomenon, partly expressed through meanings denoted by the term 'atiśaya', which surpasses the terminological boundaries, and, therefore, may be understood as an implicit discourse that calls for an adequate interpretive reconstruction. The broader phenomenon denominated here as 'the discourse of *atiśaya*' appears as a continuous current within the Sanskrit literary theory, built upon a recurring set of synonyms and explanatory terms for 'atiśaya', such as 'viśeṣa' or 'utkarṣa', together with conceptual categories, such as the quality of 'greatness', 'highest intensity', 'transformation', or 'distinction', which correspond to a poetics of *mahākāvya*s intuitively grasped on the level of reception.

An insight into the notion of *atiśaya* in early works on Sanskrit Poetics situates the term in the broader context of a theoretical approach to issues that constitute its background, such as the dichotomies of excess and grandeur, realism and poetic fancy, which may be addressed from an intercultural perspective involving Western literary theory and philosophical aesthetics. Moreover, here discussed substratum of *atiśaya* discourse explains the specificity of what has been so far recognized as the Sanskrit equivalent of a hyperbole. It shows that *atiśaya* differs from a hyperbole in its close association with the category of 'brilliance', or 'beauty' (BhKL.1.36: *cārutā*, VKL.4.1.0: *śobhā*),[56] intensifying and transformative rather than transgressing faculty, inherent realism, and complexity.

Finally, thus established notion of *atiśaya* may serve as a valuable categorical criterion in the study of later Sanskrit literary theories, and, along with the broader discourse centred around that term and its synonyms, may allow to recognize some of their elements that have been so far overlooked. Accordingly, the class of works on the Sanskrit literary theory belonging to different ages may be differentiated on the basis of approaches taken by individual authors on *atiśaya* and the entire discursive framework to which it belongs. Furthermore, the discourse of *atiśaya* may be found as both a source and a reflection of changes introduced to *kāvya* compositions throughout ages.

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[56] See: pp. 104, 111 of this paper.

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