

Poetics in Prakrit

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What is “poetics”?

Systematic knowledge useful for composing, understanding, and criticizing literature.

1. Jinasēna’s *Mahāpurāṇam*, 16.111 [Maḷakheḍa, ca. 850 CE]

pada-vidyām adhicchandō-vicitīm vāg-alankṛtīm ~
trayīm samuditām ētām tad-vidō vāṇmayam viduḥ ~

The **science of words**, the **metrical repertoire**, the **ornaments of speech** —
these three together are what experts call **vāṇmayam**.

In Sanskrit, the various aspects of literary science tend to be discussed in different texts:

- 🌿 Phonology and morphology: *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, *Kātantraḥ*, *Jainēndravyākaraṇam*, etc.
- 🌿 Syntax: *Samanvayadik*, etc.
- 🌿 Lexicon: *Amarakōśaḥ*, etc.
- 🌿 Meter: *Chandaḥsūtram*, *Chandōvicitih*, etc.
- 🌿 Ornaments: ***Kāvyaḷankārah***, *Kāvyaḍarśaḥ*, etc.
- 🌿 Subject matter (*nāyikābhēdaḥ* etc.): *Śṛṅgāratilakam*, *Saḥḍayalīlā*, etc.

Occasionally they are treated “under the same roof,” e.g. Bhōja’s encyclopedic *Śṛṅgāraprakāśaḥ* or the “verbal representation” (*vācīkābhīnayaḥ*) chapters of the *Nāṭyaśāstram*:

- 🌿 ch. 14: Sanskrit grammar
- 🌿 ch. 15: Meters
- 🌿 ch. 16: Characteristics (*lakṣaṇāni*), qualities (*guṇāḥ*), faults (*dōṣāḥ*), and ornaments (*alankārah*)
- 🌿 ch. 17: Prakrit grammar

2. Puttamittiraṅ's *Vīracōḷiyam* v. 3 [Paṭṭukkōṭṭai (perhaps), ca. 1065 CE]

நாமே வெழுத்துச்சொ னற்பொருள் யாப்பலங் காருமெனும்
பாமேவு பஞ்ச வதிகார மாம்பரப் பைச்சுருக்கித்
தேமே வியதொங்கற் றேர்வீர சோழன் றிருப்பெயராற்
பூமே லுரைப்பன் வடநூன் மரபும் புகன்று கொண்டே

nā mēvu eluttu-c col nal-poruḷ yāppu alaṅkārum enum
pā mēvu pañca-v atikāram ām parappai-c curukki-t
tēm mēviya toṅkal tēr vīracōḷaṅ tiru-p peyarāl
pū mēl uraippaṅ vaṭa-nūl marapum pukaṅru koṅṭu ē

After condensing the beautiful expanse of the five topics which inhabit verse — the **letters** that dwell on the tongue, **words**, good **subject matter**, **meter**, and **ornamentation** — he will, after learning the way of the northern treatises, explain [these five topics] upon this earth under the sacred name of *Vīracōḷaṅ*, whose chariot has festoons dripping with honey.

(translation by D'Avella 2021: 404; see also Ciotti 2021: 320)

The “fivefold grammar” (*aiṅtilakkaṇam*) includes *eluttu*, *col*, *poruḷ*, *yāppu*, and *aṅi*, which were influentially discussed together in the *Tolkāppiyam* (ca. 450 CE), but then had separate texts devoted to them:

- Phonology and morphology (*eluttu*, *col*): respective *atikārams* of the *Tolkāppiyam*, *Nannūl*
- Lexicon (*nikaṅṭu*): *Tivākaram*, *Piṅkalanikaṅṭu*, etc.
- Meter (*yāppu*): *ceyyuḷiyal* of the *Tolkāppiyam*, *Yāpparuṅkalakkārikai*, etc.
- Ornaments (*aṅi*): *uvamaiyiyal* of the *Tolkāppiyam*, *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram*, etc.
- Subject matter (*poruḷ*): *poruḷatikāram* of the *Tolkāppiyam*, *Iṅaiyaṅār Akapporuḷ*, etc.

Poetics in Prakrit: an overview

Prakrit has a reputation for being “mispronounced Sanskrit,” the language of women in Sanskrit plays, etc.

But in fact it was a literary tradition *alongside* that of Sanskrit (not just *within* the Sanskrit literary tradition), with major works of lyric poetry and courtly epic:

- ✿ *Gāhāsattasaī*, compiled by “Hāla” (a Sātavāhana king): 2nd c. CE or so
- ✿ *Taraṅgavaī* by Pālitṭa: 2nd c. CE or so
- ✿ *Harivijaō* by Sarvasēna: 4th c. CE
- ✿ *Rāvaṇavaḥō/Sētubandhaḥ* by Pravarasēna: 5th c. CE

Many works of Prakrit literature are lost (including those in gray above). Moreover, we know of works of poetics in Prakrit as well:

- ✿ Meter:
 - ✿ *Vṛttajāṭisamuccayaḥ* by Virahāṅka: 8th c. CE or so?
 - ✿ *Svayambhūcchandaḥ* by Svayambhū: 9th c. CE
 - ✿ earlier works by Sātavāhana, Abhimānaciḥna, Bhujagādhipa, and Harivṛddha referred to in the above texts
- ✿ Lexicography:
 - ✿ *Pāīalacchīnāmamālā* by Dhanapāla: 972 CE
 - ✿ *Dēśīnāmamālā* by Hēmacandra:
 - ✿ earlier works by Sātavāhana, Abhimānaciḥna, Gōpāla, Dēvarāja, Pādalipta = Pālitṭa, Rāhulaka, Śīlāṅka, and Drōṇa referred to by Hēmacandra
- ✿ Grammar: various *gāthās* quoted anonymously in several texts (see Jain 1941)
- ✿ Poetics:
 - ✿ *Alaṅkāradappaṇō* (see below)
 - ✿ one or more works by Harivṛddha, who is quoted in several texts (see below)

It is likely that various aspects of the literary sciences were combined in what later authors refer to as *dēśīśāstras*. Among the authors of *dēśīśāstras* are the poet Pālitṭa and probably the poet Harivṛddha as well (see Ollett 2017: 205–207). One verse of his on the *bhaṇītīs* is quoted by Namisādhu (1069 CE), close to what other authors call either *guṇas* or *anuprāsavṛttis*:

3. Harivṛddha quoted in Namisādhu’s *Kāvyaḷaṅkāraṭippanam* on 2.17 (p. 17) [pre-1069 CE]

*mahuraṅ pharusam kōmalam oḷjassim niṭṭhuraṅ ca laliyam ca
gambhīraṅ sāmāṇṇam ca aṭṭha bhaṇīō nāyavvā ~*

The sweet, the harsh, the soft, the powerful, the severe, the playful,
the profound, and the general: these are the eight *bhaṇītīs*.

The Mirror of Ornaments (Alaṅkāradappaṇō)

This is the only surviving Prakrit work dedicated to literary ornaments. It defines and exemplifies **42** of them, and the definitions are strikingly similar to those of the earliest surviving Sanskrit work dedicated to literary ornaments, Bhāmaha's *Ornament of Literature* (*Kāvyaḷaṅkāraṃ*).

4. Alaṅkāradappaṇō 113 (*uppekkhā*), *Kāvyaḷaṅkāraḥ* 2.91 (*utprēkṣā*)

thēvōvamāi sahiā asanta-kiriā-guṇāñujōēṇa
avivakkhia-sāmañṇā uppekkhā hōi sāisaā ~



avivakṣita-sāmānyā kiñcic cōpamayā saha
a-tad-guṇa-kriyā-yōgād utprēkṣātiśayanvitā ~

SEEING AS, which involves EXAGGERATION,
arises due to the imputation of actions or qualities
that aren't really there, with a hint of COMPARISON,
but without intending to state what they share.

5. *Kāvyaḷaṅkāraḥ* 2.92, Alaṅkāradappaṇō 114 (*uppekkhā/utprēkṣā*)

kiṃśuka-vyapadēśēna tarum āruhya sarvataḥ
dagdhādagdham araṇyānyāḥ paśyatīva vibhāvasuḥ ~



dīsai pūria-saṅkho vva malaa-mārua-ṇarenda-saṅcalaṇē
dara-dalia-malliā-maiḷa-lagga-muha-guñjirō bhamarō ~

In the guise of *kiṃśuka* flowers,
the fire seems to climb the tree and look
all around for which parts of the forest
have not yet been burned.

The bee, buzzing with his mouth planted into
the half-open bud of the jasmine flower,
looks like he's blowing a conch to signal
the movement of the king that is the southern breeze.

6. *Līlāvāī* 27 [ca. 800 CE]

*sañcalaiḥ sīla-lāanta-salila-kallōla-saṅga-ṇivvaviḥ
dara-dalia-mālai-muddha-maūla-gandhuddhurō pavaṇō ~*

A breeze is blowing past, carrying mist
from waves of cool water and thick
with the fragrance of fresh jasmine buds half-opened.

I argue in a forthcoming book on the *Mirror of Ornaments* that this Prakrit work was used by Bhāmaha as a source.

Bhāvaō in the Mirror of Ornaments

The *Mirror* defines and exemplifies about 7 ornaments that are not found in Bhāmaha’s *Ornament of Literature*. One of these is *bhāvaō* (Sanskrit *bhāvakaḥ*), an “inner state,” which has two subvarieties: *āuō* (*āvṛtaḥ*) “covered up” and *aṇṇāvaēsō* (*anyāpadēśaḥ*), “reference to something else”:

8. *Alaṅkāradappaṇō* 79, 81 (*āuō*)

*kassa i vaanēhī jahim piṣuṇēhim uttarēhī ṇajjanti
hiaantarammi ahiam gūdhā bhāvā sa āuttō ~*

When the feelings that are concealed deeply
within the heart are known thanks to someone’s
revealing words at a later time, that is a COVER-UP.



*hā hā vihūa-kara-kisalaāhī lahiūṇa aṁsuam ḍaḍḍham
paḍiā gōlā-ūrē sarasa-misēṇam halia-sōṇhā ~*

Oh my god! With her delicate arms flailing
the ploughman’s daughter-in-law took her burned garment
and fell, by a delicious ruse,
into the Gōdāvarī’s stream.

9. *Gāhāsattasāi* 107

*gōlādaṭṭhiam pecchiūṇa gahavai-suam halia-sōṇhā
āḍhattā uttariuṃ dukkhuttārāi paavīē ~*

When she saw the village headman's son
standing on the Gōdāvarī's bank, the farmer's daughter-in-law
started to go across by the path
that was most difficult to cross.

10. *Alaṅkāradappaṇō* 80, 82 (*aṅṅāvaēsō*)

*aṅṅam bhāṇiūṇa taō aṅṅō paadījaē jahim atthō
aṅṅāvaēsa-ṇāmō sō siṭṭhō sattha-ārēhim ~*

When one thing is said, but something else
is made clear, the authors of *śāstras*
have called it REFERENCE TO SOMETHING ELSE.



*aṅṅē sandhasu bhōiṇi nava-vacchara-selliam baillammi
ālōa-metta-suhaō ṇa kajja-karaṇa-kkhamō ēsō ~*

Hey *bhōiṇī*! Get your yearling calf
cow together with some other bull.
This one's only good to look at.
He's not capable of doing any work.

“Coded” utterances like this, using a familiar set of symbols, were common in Prakrit poetry. There was a genre called *dhavala-* in which a speaker would praise a white bull and indirectly praise a local hero. But this device is known in later Sanskrit poetics as *anyōktiḥ* or *anyāpadēśaḥ*.

11. Quoted in Bhōja's *Sarasvatīkaṅṭhābharaṇam* ex. 4.234 (p. 549) [pre-11th c. CE]

*āsāīamaṅṅāeṇa jettiam tettiām cia vihiṇam
ōramasu vasaha eṅhim rakkhijjāi gahavai-cchettaṃ ~*

You should be satisfied with whatever grazing
you've managed to do so far, bull.
Now the landlord's field is under protection.

Primary texts

Alaṅkāradappaṇō = Forthcoming edition and translation by Andrew Ollett; see also Bhayani (1999) and Nāhaṭā and Nāhaṭā (1968).

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Kāvyaḷaṅkāraḥ of Rudraṭa = *Śrīrudraṭapraṇītaḥ Kāvyaḷaṅkāraḥ Namisādhukṛtayā ṭippaṇyā samētaḥ*. Edited Durgāprasāda and Vāsudeva Śarman Paṇaśīkara. Kāvyaṃālā 2. Mumbai: Nirṇaya-Sāgara Press, 1909.

Gāhāsattasā = *Das Saptaçatakam des Hāla*. Edited by Albrecht Weber. Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1881.

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Vīracōḷiyam = பொண்பற்றி காவலர் புத்தமித்திரனார் இயற்றிய வீரசோழிம் மூலம் பெருந்தேவனார் இயற்றிய உரையும். Edited by கா. ர. கோவிந்தராஜ முதலியார். சென்னை: பவானந்தர் கழகம், 1942.

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