

Kalpitopamā in the *Saptakumārikāvadāna*

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1. Introduction

The *Saptakumārikāvadāna* (SKA) by Gopadatta is a Buddhist poem that is supposed to be a part of the *Jātakamālā*, a collection of Buddhist legends.¹⁾ The poem is written in a style called *campū*, which is a mixture of ornate prose and verse. Hahn 2010, 467–468 advances the view that Gopadatta's collection of legends, which does not enjoy as much popularity as that of two of his predecessors, Āryaśūra and Haribhaṭṭa's, contains numerous elements of good poetry. A glance at the text of the SKA, however, reveals many instances where Gopadatta does not observe the rules of Sanskrit poetry. From the perspective of Sanskrit poetics, this paper aims to consider the question of the place that the SKA occupies in the history of Sanskrit poetry, focusing on examples of simile (*upamā*).

2. Poetic Rules Concerning the Construction of a Simile

Before moving on to the central argument, it would be useful to take into consideration the rules concerning the construction of a simile. Poetic theory does not allow a poet to use a simile in which a single modifier modifies either the subject or the object of comparison. A poet is required to adhere to either of the following rules: (I) a double meaning must be assigned to a single modifier so that it can modify both the subject and the object of comparison; or (II) the subject and object of comparison must be individually modified by two modifiers that denote the same property. A simile constructed in accordance with the former is known as *śleṣopamā*, whereas that with the latter as *kalpitopamā*.²⁾ An example of *śleṣopamā* is as follows:

Kāvyaḍaṛṣa 2.28abc: *śiśirāṇṣūpratispardhi śrīmat* surabhigandhi ca |
ambhojam iva te vaktram

Your fragrant face, which is as beautiful as the moon, looks like a fragrant lotus flower, whose

enemy is the moon and on which Lakṣmī is sitting.

Here, a double meaning is assigned to the modifiers *śīśirāmśupratispardhi* and *śrīmat* so that they can modify the words *vaktram* (face) and *ambhoja* (lotus flower), of which the simile consists. An example of *kalpitopamā* is as follows:

Kāvyaḷamkāra 8.14: *mukham* ^(a)*āpūrṇakapolam* ^(b)*mṛgamadalikhitārdhapattralekham* *te* |
bhāti ^(c)*lasatsakalakalam* ^(d)*sphuṭalāñchanam* *indubimbam* *iva* ||

Your face, ^(a)whose cheeks are plump and ^(b)on whose surface lines of paint made from musk are partially drawn, looks like the disk of the moon, ^(c)which is waxing and ^(d)on whose surface dark spots are clearly visible.

A face (*mukham*) is compared to the disk of the moon (*indubimbam*). The words *mukham* and *indubimbam* are modified by modifiers (a) and (b) and modifiers (c) and (d), respectively. Modifiers (a) and (c) denote the property of being perfect, whereas modifiers (b) and (d) denote the property of being spotted.

A perusal of Buddhist poetry reveals that efforts were made by the poets to construct a simile within the confines of the rules laid down by theorists. Following is an example of *śleṣopamā* drawn from the *Śīṣyalekha*, which is ascribed to the Buddhist poet Candragomin (ca. fifth-century CE):³⁾

Śīṣyalekha 15: *lajjām* ^(c)*guṇaughajanānīm* *jananīm* ^(f)*ivāryām* ^(g)*atyantaśuddaḥṛdayām* *anuvartamānāḥ* |

tejasvinaḥ sukhā asūn api saṁtyajanti satyasthitivyasanino na punaḥ pratijñām ||

Hahn 1999, 63: “Heroic people pursue ^(f)noble modesty, ^(c)which produces an abundance of virtues and ^(g)indicates a completely pure heart, just as if they would follow their ^(f)noble mother, ^(c)who brings forth an abundance of virtues and ^(g)possesses a completely pure heart. They easily give up even their own lives in their endeavor to be truthful and constant but never their vow.” (Emphasis and subscript mine)

Candragomin assigns a double meaning to modifiers (c), (f), and (g) so that they can modify the words *lajjām* (modesty) and *jananī* (mother), of which the simile consists. Let us then take an example of *kalpitopamā* from verse 31.21 of the *Avadānakalpalatā*, written by the Kashmiri poet Kṣemendra (ca. 990–1066 CE):

Avadānakalpalatā 31.21: *āttaratne gate tasmin rājasūnur* *gataadyutiḥ* |
mātaṁgonmūlitāmbhoja *ivābhūt kamalākaraḥ* ||

When his younger brother carrying off the jewels [the prince had carried on his body] left him behind, he **whose good looks were gone** looked like the lotus pond **from which lotus flowers were completely pulled out by elephants**.

The modifiers *gataadyutir* and *mātaṅgonmūlitāmbhoja* modify the words *rājasūnur* (prince) and *kamalākaraḥ* (lotus pond), respectively. The modifiers in question denote the property of not having an attractive appearance.

The existence of the two examples does not necessarily imply that all Buddhist poets construct a simile in accordance with the rules set down by Hindu theorists. Nevertheless, one can entertain the possibility that from the late fifth-century onward, at the latest, Buddhist poets began writing poems in a way that did not diverge significantly from the contemporary Hindu poetry.

3. Examples of Simile in the SKA

In the SKA, eight examples of simile can be found. Seven out of the eight examples are not constructed within the confines of the rules presented in the previous section. The similes in the SKA can be divided into three types: (A) those that do not conform to rule (I); (B) those that do not conform to rule (II); and (C) those that conform neither to rule (I) nor rule (II). Let us first look at examples classified as type (A):

SKA 32: *ata eva jagāda lokanātho nṛpa karmasvakam eva jīvalokam |*
marañābhimukhaṃ naraṃ svakarma stanapo vatsa ivānuyāti dhenum ||

Therefore, the lord of the earth said that living beings were inevitably subject to the retribution of their past deeds. Just as a calf **drinking milk** from his mother follows her, similarly the power of one's deeds follows one **who is about to die**.

Here, one's deed (*svakarma*) and a human being (*naram*) are compared to a calf (*vatsaḥ*) and a cow (*dhenum*), respectively. This context does not allow us to say that the words *marañābhimukham* (one who is about to die) and *stanapaḥ* (one who drinks milk) are used as modifiers modifying the words *dhenum* and *svakarma*, respectively.

SKA 43: *muhur upāgatasādhvasacañcalaiḥ kuvalayāvayavair iva locanaiḥ |*
taṃ abhivikṣya kalevarapañjaraṃ bahuvidhāni vacāṃsi babhāṣire ||

Having repeatedly seen the bones of a human body with their **frightened and unsteady** eyes which looked like the petals of a water lily, the seven princesses expressed various opinions.

Gopadatta compares eyes (*locanaiḥ*) to the petals of a water lily (*kuvalayāvayavair*). In this context, it is hardly possible to say that the word *kuvalayāvayavair* is modified by the modifier *upāgatasādhvasacāñcalaiḥ* (frightened and unsteady). Let us next take a glimpse at examples classified as type (B):

SKA 12: *tapāṃsy akāleṣv abhivāñchitāni puṣṇanti nārthān manaso 'nukūlān |*
akālagarbhā iva kanyakānām ajātasārāvayavāṅgaśobhāḥ ||

Just as a premature fetus **born without the blood vessels, limbs, and other members of the graceful body** is of no spiritual benefit to women, similarly the untimely performance of penance **you desire** is of no spiritual benefit to women.

Here, the poet compares a premature fetus (*akālagarbhāḥ*) to the performance of penance (*tapāṃsi*). While the word *akālagarbhāḥ* is modified by the modifier *ajātasārāvayavāṅgaśobhāḥ* (born without the blood vessels, limbs, and other members of the graceful body), the word *tapāṃsi* is modified by the modifier *abhivāñchitāni* (desired). A closer look at the text reveals that the property denoted by the former is different from that denoted by the latter.

SKA 14: *soḍhuṃ na duḥkhāni vapuṃṣi śaktāny (h)adrṣṭaduḥkhāni (i)sukhocitāni |*
(j)dantābhīghātā dviradādhipānām (k)abaddhamūlā iva cūtavṛkṣāḥ ||

Just as a mango tree, (k) **which has not yet put down roots** and (j) **whose trunk was broken by large elephants with their tusks**, cannot endure [damage], similarly your body, (i) **which is used to experiencing pleasure** but (h) **has never experienced pain**, cannot endure suffering.

A mango tree (*cūtavṛkṣāḥ*) is compared to a human body (*vapuṃṣi*). The word *cūtavṛkṣāḥ* is modified by modifiers (j) and (k), whereas the word *vapuṃṣi* is modified by modifiers (h) and (i). An examination of the construction of the simile shows that modifiers (j) and (k) denote a property different from that denoted by modifiers (h) and (i). Let us then take a look at examples classified as type (C):

SKA 27: *camarā iva (l)vṛkṣalagnavālā nidhanaṃ kāpuruṣā vrajanti gehe |*
(m)viṣayair uparuddhabuddhimārgā (n)vītathasnehalatānibaddhacittāḥ ||

Just as yaks (l) **whose tails are tied to trees die in a pen**, similarly those who are wretched, (m) **whose intellect is affected by objects of sense**, and (n) **whose mind is set on false love which is no other than a creeper**, die in their homes.

Gopadatta employs a simile in which those who are wretched (*kāpuruṣāḥ*) are compared to

yaks (*cāmarāḥ*). While the word *kāpuruṣāḥ* is modified by modifiers (m) and (n), the word *cāmarāḥ* is modified by modifier (l). It is to be noted that there is inequality in the number of modifiers modifying the words which comprises the simile and that the property denoted by modifier (l) is not the same as that denoted by either modifier (m) or (n).

SKA 113: ^(o)*mīthyāvikalpakṣaṇamātraramyāḥ* ^(p)*svabhāvavāmāḥ* *suranātha kāmāḥ* |
vivarjitāḥ *sadbhir udāracittair mahāprapātā* *iva* ^(q)*sāndhakārāḥ* ||

O lord of gods! Just as one avoids falling into a deep hole ^(q)**where darkness awaits**, similarly those who are noble and righteous avoid falling into the trap of sexual pleasure ^(o)**which one can enjoy only for a moment by virtue of a wrong conception** and ^(p)**which is injurious by nature**.

The poet uses a simile in which sexual pleasure (*kāmāḥ*) is compared to a deep hole (*mahāprapātāḥ*). There is an inequality in the number of modifiers: modifiers (o) and (p) modify the word *kāmāḥ*, whereas modifier (q) modifies the word *mahāprapātāḥ*. Moreover, modifier (q) denotes a property different from that denoted by either modifier (o) or (p).

SKA 114: ^(r)*sarvāṇayopadravahetubhūṭāḥ* *kāmāḥ* ^(s)*khalikārakarā* *narāṇām* |
jugupsitāś caiva bhayāvahāś ca ^(t)*purīṣadigdḥā* *iva kṣṣasarpāḥ* ||

Just as a black snake ^(t)**whose body is smeared with mud** inspires fear and disgust in people, similarly sexual desire, ^(s)**which creates ill feelings** and ^(r)**which is the cause of all misfortunes and miseries**, inspires fear and disgust in people.

Here, the simile compares sexual desire (*kāmāḥ*) to a black snake (*kṣṣasarpāḥ*). The words *kāmāḥ* and *kṣṣasarpāḥ* are modified by modifiers (r) and (s) and modifier (t), respectively. It is difficult to say that modifier (t) denotes the same property as that denoted by either modifier (r) or (s).

4. Conclusion

The examples of simile given here indicate that Gopadatta could not conform his work to the standards demanded by theorists. However, one can hardly ignore the fact that half a verse is quoted from Gopadatta's *Jātakamālā* by Sarvānanda (twelfth century CE) in his commentary on the *Amarakośa*.⁴⁾ This suggests that Gopadatta's *Jātakamālā* enjoyed popularity in the circles of the learned. Moreover, for centuries, poets and theorists have tried to answer the question of the essence of poetry. In poetry that is meant to be listened

to (*śravya*), stress is placed on the use of elaborate ornaments of speech, whereas in poetry that is meant to be seen (*drśya*), stress is placed on the suggestion of a sentiment (*rasa*). Nonetheless, there is no certainty as to what aspect Buddhist poets give the pride of place in their poetry, which is more narrative than aesthetic in character. One cannot eliminate the possibility that the poets attached greater importance to an accurate representation of the plot of Buddhist legends than to the faithful observance of poetic rules. This possibility leads us to reconsider the assumption that Gopadatta wrote the SKA in accordance with the rules established by theorists.

Notes

- 1) It is generally accepted that Gopadatta lived between the fifth- and eighth-century CE. For a detailed study on the date of Gopadatta, see Hahn 1993, 49–53.
- 2) Namisādhū, one of the commentators on the *Kāvyaḷaṃkāra*, glosses the term *kalpitopamā* as “it is (at the same time) imagined and a simile” (*kalpitā cāsāv upamā ca*).
- 3) There is debate as to whether this Candragomin can be identified as the grammarian Candragomin. For details, see Yazaki 2022, 83–86.
- 4) See Hahn 1992, 27.

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