

INTRODUCING RASA — A TASTE OF AESTHETICS IN OLD HINDI
with reference to the *Satsaī* of Bihārīlāl

Rupert Snell

Four ideas, or groups of ideas, have to be borne in mind when locating the *Satsaī* in its cultural and literary context. The first of these is the system of literary theory developed over several hundred years by the Sanskrit masters or *ācāryas*, who sought to define the nature of aesthetic 'relish' (*rasa*) and to codify the various components of artistic production and the experience of consuming it. This ultimately produced a meticulous literary typology that established a psychological hermeneutics of aesthetic experience, while also defining such specific archetypes of the poetic heroine as the *proṣitapatikā* (she whose beloved is away on business for a fixed period) and the *khaṇḍitā* (she who reproves her beloved for absence from a tryst). The extent to which New Indo-Aryan languages such as Hindi developed their own bespoke systems of vernacular literary analysis is debated¹; but a debt to Sanskrit tradition is clear in the labels identifying these *nāyikās* or heroines, and indeed in all the categories and conventions through which they are so elaborately defined.

The second important aspect of Bihari's cultural context, and a development from the first, is that in which the meaning of *rasa* became extended to signify not only an *aesthetic* response to the artifice of literary stimuli, but also the spiritual-emotional response to *religious* stimuli, typified in a devotee's response to descriptions of the love of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. This idea, long implicit in the *rasa* concept, was developed into a fully-fledged theological system by the followers of Caitanya (1486-1534); but even if the comprehensive version of this concept may in some way remain the intellectual property of the Caitanya tradition, its broader implications for the interpretation of devotional verse have long since been accepted as part of the cultural mapping of northern India.

The third idea involves an ancient and broad, if not complex, system of literary conventions or *alaṅkāras* that form the fabric of poetic description and narrative. Extending beyond the elaboration of typologies of heroes and heroines (*nāya-nāyikā bheda*), these conventions categorise and describe an astonishing range of literary effects that combine to produce the actuality of an individual verse. This article does not pretend to give a comprehensive

¹ See for example Kali C. Bahl's review article on K.P. Bahadur's translation of the *Rasikapriyā* of Keśavdās (Bahl 1974); and Ganesh Devy's argument for the existence of a 'forgotten' history of vernacular criticism (Devy 1992).

catalogue of these (a book-length task at least!) but to illustrate some typical ones by way of introduction to the broader picture.

The fourth idea — but the first to be overlooked in academia — is both more abstract and more important than the other three, whose onslaughts it has to survive as best it can. It is the living matter of poetry itself. Deep in the heart of this body of verse (whether we examine the *Satsaī* of Biharilal or the corpus of pre-modern Hindi verse generally) is a life-breath that is far more than the sum of its elaborately analysed parts. Even the great classical traditions of textual analysis, even the entire machinery of *alaṅkāra-śāstra* and the sophistications of *rasa*-based theology, cannot account fully for the ability of a poetic vision to ignite feelings in the heart of the reader. The strategies of analysis proposed and argued over by the countless generations of rhetoricians do not tell the whole story; they should neither prescribe nor proscribe our own individual responses, and if we feel moved by the poetry then they fall away as being redundant in any case. Unless our purpose is merely to track the historical developments of a poetic tradition — a ‘meta’ process of examining the lens through which others have read the lines — we should not feel compelled to let our responses be determined by any theory. One does not need to be a grammarian to understand language, and one does not need to be a rhetorician to understand poetry.

The aesthetic principle

Like many a literary theory since, the so-called ‘*rasa* theory’ and its several offshoots were worked over until they reached a daunting level of abstraction and complexity. They tended to develop exponentially, going beyond the task of analysing existing texts and beginning to generate ‘examples’ of their own. As a result, the literature on such subjects is immense, with a bulk and weight that threatens to suffocate the very poetry that it purports to analyse. In the Hindi context it may even be misleading to suggest that a discrete secondary genre of criticism was ‘based’ on a separate primary category of a kind that might now be called ‘creative writing’, since only the thinnest of boundaries existed between creative poetry written to entertain (or inspire, instruct, delight, comfort, admonish, praise, and so forth) on the one hand, and scholastic verse written as a codification of poetic procedures on the other. The distinction between such overlapping categories, and the naming of them, is a major preoccupation in Hindi literary historiography. Some parts of that long debate are closely relevant to the *Satsaī*, since they shape and polish the lens through which the text has traditionally been viewed.

The fundamental enterprise of Sanskrit literary commentary is one of *analysis* rather than ‘criticism’ in the sense that we would generally use the

word today.² The analysis of drama (*nāṭya*) and poetry (*kāvya*) traditionally sought to understand and explain the nature of the aesthetic experience undergone by the audience or reader – especially to address the paradox whereby the depictions of even painful or unpleasant feelings in a poem or a drama can provoke aesthetic *enjoyment* on the part of the readership or audience. This paradox was explained by distinguishing between (a) the nature of directly experienced feeling and (b) the purified, idealised or universalised feelings that are expressed through art – simply put, to distinguish emotional experience from aesthetic experience. As Ingalls puts it (1968:14): ‘The mood is not the original emotion itself or we should not enjoy hearing sad poetry like the Rāmāyaṇa’. Thus the principal thesis of Sanskrit literary theory was that the artifice of emotional ‘representation’ induced an aesthetic feeling that was qualitatively different from the experience of such feelings in real-life situations. The individual who undergoes this experience of aesthetic delight or *rasa* is not concerned with its reality or non-reality, for the experience itself is the thing: ‘A horse imitated by a painter...does not appear to the spectator as being either real or false: it is nothing more than an image which precedes any judgement of reality or non-reality’ (Gnoli 1970:75). Being removed from the circumstances and conditioning of the ordinary life of either the artist/actor/writer on the one hand or the spectator/reader on the other, this experience is ‘universalised’, made general and placed beyond personality. The Sanskrit *ācāryas* call this process *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*, ‘making common’. In this transmutation, as Ramanujan (1978:117-8) explains,

the feelings are purged of their original historical and personal meanings, they live and move in the poetic world of which they have become a part, which they make up, participate in, create and are created by. They are impersonal, capable of communication to other men in similar states, and are generalized: they are no longer private and incommunicable...The emotion produces tears and gestures; cannot the gestures reproduce the emotion?

This principle of aesthetic experience was articulated through a formal distinction between various innate, permanent ‘emotional states’ (*bhāva* or *sthāyī bhāva*) and their corresponding ‘moods’ (*rasa*). Most early theorists accepted a list of eight such pairs:

² There are numerous introductions to Sanskrit literary theory. The account given here has drawn particularly on Bahl 1974; Gerow 1977 and 1981; Gerow & Ramanujan 1978; Gnoli 1970; Kane 1994; Miśra 1951; Raghavan & Nagendra 1970; Warder 1972 and 1975. In particular, Gnoli’s eloquent seven pages, cited below, steer a very coherent course through some inherently difficult terrain.

<i>BHĀVA</i>	<i>RASA</i>
love (<i>rati</i>)	amorous, sensitive (<i>śṛṅgāra</i>)
humour (<i>hāsa</i>)	comic (<i>hāsyā</i>)
grief (<i>śoka</i>)	pitiable, compassionate (<i>karuṇa</i>)
anger (<i>krodha</i>)	furious, violent (<i>raudra</i>)
energy (<i>utsāha</i>)	heroic (<i>vīra</i>)
fear (<i>bhaya</i>)	terrifying (<i>bhayānaka</i>)
disgust (<i>jugupsā</i>)	horrific, disgusting (<i>bībhatsa</i>)
astonishment (<i>vismaya</i>)	wondrous (<i>adbhuta</i>)

The analogy through which the word *rasa*, ‘taste, savour, juice, essence’, is used to designate the experiencing of an emotion is extended further: just as a particular food, when embellished with spices and seasoning, yields a certain *taste*, so a particular emotional state, when embellished with narrative details and perhaps seasonal associations, yields a certain *feeling*. And just as a finely cooked meal is fully appreciated only by the refined palate of the gourmet, so the artistic product is fully appreciated only by the refined sensibility of the trained literary connoisseur, known as the *sahṛdaya* (‘man of heart, man of sensibility’) or *rasika* (‘taster, relisher’).

Three further technical items complete the basic mechanics of the *rasa* theory. The first, *vibhāva*, comprises the causes and conditions of emotion, and has two complementary varieties: *ālambana*, the person in whom an emotion is invested (e.g. the beloved), and *uddīpana*, the circumstances of the emotion (e.g. the moonlit night). The second item, *anubhāva*, comprises the effects of an emotion portrayed in the actor’s performance – in expressions, speech and bodily movement. The third item, *vyabhicāri-bhāva*, comprises transient emotions, such as embarrassment or anxiety, which augment and promote the main one while remaining subsidiary to it. The psychological basis of this system is a belief that the *bhāvas* are primary or dominant emotional states that lie permanently within all natures; *rasa* is the emotion that is provoked or excited by the playing of artistic stimuli upon these permanent emotional modes.

The concept of *rasa* in the sense described here was first systematised in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, whose primary subject is drama (*nāṭya*) rather than poetry (*kāvya*). The *Nāṭyaśāstra* is one of the great technical treatises of ancient India. Though traditionally attributed to a legendary figure named ‘Bharata’, it actually represents the culmination of a gradual development over many centuries, particularly during the classical ‘golden age’ of the Gupta kings in the 4th to 6th centuries A.D.; among its antecedents were the *Kāmasūtra* of Vātsyāyana – an early source for the concept of *nāyaka-nāyikā bheda*, the rigorous classification of ‘heroes and heroines’ which later became a focus of commentaries on vernacular works such as Bihārī’s *Satsaī*. The text of the

Nāṭyaśāstra is generally read through the exegetical interpretation of later commentators. Their main preoccupation was the relationship between aesthetic and emotional experience, with the basic ingredients of Bharata's conceptualisation of *rasa* being analysed in a number of different ways.

The aesthetics of *rasa*, first developed for the drama in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, became applied to other genres of literature, especially by Bhāmaha (c. 5th century), who sought to analyse the distinguishing features of literary expression. This marked the development of one of the main aesthetic ideas, that of *alaṅkāra*, 'ornament'. For Bhāmaha, literature is characterised by its use of *vakratā* or 'obliqueness' in language, this being the quality that distinguishes it from everyday speech and communication; it is on this principle that he formulates a catalogue of *alaṅkāras* in his *Kāvyaṅkāra*. This text, together with the roughly contemporary *Kāvyaṅdarśa* of Daṇḍin³, lays the basis for a classical *alaṅkāraśāstra* or rhetorical science, defining the *guṇa* (distinctive qualities) and *doṣa* (faults) of poetic language⁴, and establishing two complementary types of figures of speech: *śabdāṅkāra* or phonetic figures, and *arthāṅkāra* or figures of meaning. The concept of *vakrokti* or oblique expression was redefined by Ānandavardhana in the 9th century in terms of *vyaṅgya*, the suggested or implied meaning of a statement as distinguished from its explicit meaning.

Developments made by a succession of later writers throughout the medieval period included the addition of a ninth *bhāva*, that of *śānti* (peace, calm), and the associated *śānta rasa* ('calmed sentiment'), to the list of eight inherited from the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. An individual watching a play attains this state of *śānti* or calm beatitude as the culmination of a contemplative process in which his individuality and the limitations of space and time are all transcended. The transcendental (*alaukika*) nature of this state has the nature of religious experience, and *śānta rasa* was accordingly regarded by some as the highest *rasa* of all. Many critics, however, favoured the assertion of the 11th-century writer Bhoja, that 'love' was the supreme emotion, and that *śṛṅgāra* constituted the highest *rasa*, under which all other *rasas* were subsumed; this perception underlay the later development of *rasa* theory in the context of divine love, *bhakti*.

The poetics of *bhakti* also rested, however, on another conception within literary theory, namely that of *dhvani* – 'suggestion', 'resonance' or 'overtone' (Ingalls 1968:18). This is found in the *Dhvanyāloka*, a late 9th-century work by Ānandavardhana who builds on the concepts of *rasa*, *alaṅkāra* and *vakratā* inherited from the earlier tradition. Ānandavardhana's *dhvani* principle

³ There is much debate over whether Daṇḍin precedes Bhāmaha or vice versa; see Kane 1994:78 ff.

⁴ See De 1960:II.8 ff. for a list and discussion.

explains the process by which *rasa* is manifested in poetry: transcending the prosaic function of transmitting information, the poetic word carries a burden of *implied meaning* through which aesthetic pleasure is brought into existence. The *dhvani* phase of criticism goes beyond the mere listing of *alanākāras* – the body or skeleton of poetry – in an attempt to analyse its very soul. Thus the aesthetic flows freely into the religious, as explained by Gnoli (1970:77):

Aesthetic speculation, which was born and grew up on the edge of metaphysical thought, did not omit [...] to enquire into the relations and differences between it and religious experience. The first to face this problem was, in all probability, Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, who maintained that aesthetic experience, being characterized by the immersion of the subject in the aesthetic object, to the exclusion of all else and therefore by a momentary interruption of his everyday life, is akin to the beatitude of ecstasy or the experience of Brahman. Any form of pleasure is an epiphany, even if distant and colourless, of the divine beatitude, which is the very essence of consciousness. Aesthetic experience, being characterized by disinterested and impersonal pleasure, is a modality *sui generis* of the unbounded beatitude that appears to the Yogin in his ecstasy and, in his eyes, transforms Saṃsāra into Nirvāṇa. The mysterious conversion of pain into pleasure, which accompanies the full realization of one's own Self, is to be found equally in aesthetic experience, which possesses the magical power of transfiguring the greatest sadness into the disinterested pleasure of contemplation.

Thus the long and complex history of Sanskrit aesthetics engaged constantly with religious experience, and recognised the potential of emotions and aesthetics in furthering an individual's progress towards spiritual goals.

Rasa and bhakti

No survey of literary texts can really map the true extent to which an idea permeates the deeper levels of a culture, gradually infusing the bedrock of its beliefs and assumptions. The individual texts and *ācāryas* mentioned above are a mere sampling of the many stages along an intellectual journey in which the language of *rasa* became central to both specialist and popular conceptualisations of the connection between aesthetics and religion. As Gerow puts it (1981:227), '*rasa* seems...to have transcended its aesthetic domain and become ... a concept of religious devotionalism. In both, claims were made about its relation to absolute consciousness (*ātman*).' The spread of devotionalism as a popular mode of religious belief and practice was greatly assisted by the accessibility of its emotional content, and its willingness to trade in the coin of human feeling. For not only was *bhakti* capable of being relatively open in social terms, partially breaking the monopoly of the twice-

born over the religious sphere,⁵ it was also open in experiential terms, allowing human emotions to be harnessed for the purposes of drawing closer to the divine. Gerow explains further (1981:241):

‘it is in the emotions only that the great majority of mankind can experience immediate being; it is their only way to god, a way called *bhakti* from the *Gītā* onward. Once the emotions are seen as the exclusive, or only suitable approach, to the divine, worship becomes the experience of the god in possession, and is most akin to human love. And where do we find the sentiment of love most clearly expounded and related to its psychic limits? In aesthetics, for love is the *rasa* par excellence. If such a system of religious devotionism requires a theology, it will find it only in an aesthetic; and an aesthetic was most readily available.’

As we saw in the previous chapter, northern India’s engagement with the full implications of *bhakti* as a manifestation and means of personal faith came fully into the limelight in the 16th century. Caitanya’s example of an ecstatic *bhakti* was based on a passionately emotional engagement with Kṛṣṇa; in the Caitanya school, *śṛṅgāra rasa* was unequivocally established as the highest of the *rasas*, and was dubbed the *madhura* or *ujjala* (‘sweet’ or ‘lustrous’) *rasa*. All other *rasas* were subsumed within it, just as all narratives yielded to the Kṛṣṇa story as the ultimate narrative. This Caitanyite convention involved not just a cursory nod towards the tradition of aesthetic theory, but a wholesale appropriation of the *rasa* principle. Caitanya’s disciple, the brilliant theologian Rūpa Gosvāmī, re-worked the various elements of the *rasa* theory in terms of the theology of Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti*, with Kṛṣṇa himself in the role of the ideal hero.⁶ For Rūpa, *madhura rasa* represents the highest and most fully-experienced phase of devotional experience. His achievement was to formulate a complete synthesis of the *rasa* theory with Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*, making explicit the long-implicit connection between aesthetics and religious experience. Following earlier Vaiṣṇava theology, Rūpa recognised five ‘degrees of the realisation of *bhakti* or faith’ — a pentad of *rasas* which replaced the octad of classical *rasa*-theory. The five were *śānta* (tranquillity), *dāsyā* (servitude, humility) *sakhya* (friendship, equality) *vātsalya* (parental affection) and *mādhurya* (sweetness) (De 1960:267); but in accepting this list Rūpa turned it into a hierarchy in which the fifth element, *mādhurya*, had unequivocal pride of place.

⁵ The social ‘openness’ of medieval devotionism is, however, all too easily overstated, and the common portrayal of *bhakti* as some kind of ‘reform movement’ with a social agenda is anachronistic and misleading. Some schools or traditions of *bhakti* were quite conservative in social terms; and even poets such as Kabīr, often represented as ‘social reformers’ are more accurately to be seen as indifferent to social issues rather than concerned with processes of social change, or were indifferent to the experience of life in the world.

⁶ See David Haberman 2003.

Rūpa’s technical works on *bhakti-rasa* are among the classics of Indian aesthetic theory. But Rūpa himself, being as much concerned with devotional *practice* as with theoretical abstractions, also composed Kṛṣṇa-based dramas to demonstrate the methodology through which the devotee/reader may gain access to the experience of *rasa* by mentally and psychologically assuming the identity of a character in the Kṛṣṇa narrative. In her study of one such drama, the *Vidagdhamādhava* (c. 1533)⁷, Donna Wulff (1984:26) explains Rūpa’s use of the classical *rasa* principle as follows:

Rūpa’s general analysis of *bhaktirasa* follows the classical model quite closely. In the ideal devotee, the *sthāyībhāva* or permanent emotion of *rati*, love for Kṛṣṇa in one of its forms, is gradually transformed into a *rasa*, a refined “mood” or attitude that can, like Kṛṣṇa himself, be perpetually relished. Involved in this process of transformation are the other remaining “ingredients” of *rasa* in the classical theory: the *vibhāvas* or causes of the emotion, here primarily Kṛṣṇa and his close associates, and secondarily such stimulants (*uddīpanas*) as Kṛṣṇa’s flute and the beauty of Vṛndāvana, which serve to heighten the emotion; the *anubhāvas* and *sāttvika bhāvas*, words, gestures, and involuntary physical reactions through which the emotion is expressed; and finally the *vyabhicārībhāvas* or transient emotions, which may temporarily accompany and to a certain extent color the permanent emotion.

The continuum between aesthetics and devotional religion is an essential element in the make-up of a text such as the *Satsaī*. We have already seen how Bihārī’s poems often allude to the attitudes or narratives of *bhakti*, and to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as protagonists in many a romantic situation; in this sense they may readily be categorised as ‘devotional’ in theme. But any attempt at answering the question ‘Is Bihārī a secular poet or a religious one?’ has to begin with an acceptance that no absolute distinction between such categories is conceivable in this sublime marriage of aesthetics and theology. Even for Caitanya and Rūpa themselves, explicit mention of Kṛṣṇa was not essential for the production of *bhakti-rasa* – the account of an unnamed lover might do just as well,⁸ emotional intensity being more important than narrative detail.

⁷Donna Wulff points out (1984:4) that Rūpa composed his literary dramas *before* writing the better-known technical works.

⁸Friedhelm Hardy, 1994:522.

Nāyaka-nāyikā bheda: typologies of hero and heroine

The classification of different types of hero and (particularly) heroine is a central concern of all the Sanskrit *ācāryas* from Bharata onwards.⁹ The hero or *nāyaka* is dealt with relatively briefly in most texts, primarily by reference to eight inherent qualities (*sāttvika guṇas*), and hardly attracts even this much attention in the Hindi tradition. The heroine (*nāyikā*) is a quite different matter, being subject to numerous varieties and elaborations depending on her circumstances, condition and predilections, and the Hindi authors emulated the Sanskrit *ācāryas* in their untiring enthusiasm for the subject. Many of the methods of classification, and their results, are of interest only within the elaborately detailed schema itself, while others have a more general application. In particular the terms *parakīyā* and *svakīyā*, differentiating respectively the ‘heroine who is the wife of another’ from the ‘heroine who is married to the hero’, is of great significance to the theology of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*; for some sectarian traditions the illicit nature of the love between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa is an essential aspect of their *līlā* or ‘divine sport’, whereas elsewhere the pairing of Kṛṣṇa with Rādhā falls into a more safely conventional ‘deity+consort’ pattern, with poets lovingly describing the marriage ceremony in all its normative detail. A third category of heroine is the *sāmānyā* ‘common to all’, sometimes characterised more specifically as the *vaiśyā* or ‘courtesan’; though a stock character of Sanskrit *kāmaśāstra* or erotics, she appears but rarely in the socially more conservative world of Hindi poetry.

The *svakīyā nāyikā* is subdivided into three age-based categories, each suggestive of different levels of experience in the art of love, and hence variously relishable: *mugdhā* (adolescent, artless), *madhyā* (resplendent with the energy of youth) and *prauḍhā* (mature, audacious); some texts apply similar categories to *parakīyā* and *sāmānyā* also. All such heroines were precociously young: the three categories have been assigned to the age-ranges of 11-14, 14-18, 18-24 respectively.¹⁰ Each *nāyikā* may also be further categorised as *dhīrā* (self-possessed), *adhīrā* (unstable), or *dhīrādhīrā* (partially self-possessed). Yet another criterion is the ‘state’ (*avasthā*) of the heroine, an eightfold typology which originates with Bharata. Bharata’s main categories are frequently invoked by Hindi commentators, and may be set out here:

⁹ This section draws on the exhaustive treatment of *Nāyaka-nāyikā bheda* in Rākeśagupta 1967 and De 1960.

¹⁰ It is worth remembering that Shakespeare’s Juliet (herself considerably younger than the Juliet in other versions of the Romeo and Juliet story) ‘hath not seen the change of fourteen years’, and would fit into the youngest of these three categories.

<i>vāsaka-sajjikā</i>	dressed up to receive her lover
<i>virahotkaṅṭhitā</i>	suffering from <i>viraha</i> – the pain of separation
<i>svādhīna-patikā</i>	having her lover subservient to her
<i>kalahāntarītā</i>	remorseful after a quarrel
<i>khaṇḍitā</i>	betrayed; angered at marks of unfaithfulness on the lover's body
<i>vipralabdhā</i>	finding the lover absent from a tryst
<i>proṣita-patikā</i>	languishing when her lover is abroad
<i>abhisārikā</i>	meeting her lover in a tryst

Permutations on the various typologies yield a mathematical total of 384 categories of heroine. In a similar manner the character and role of the *sakhī*, the female friend of the heroine, goes through numerous permutations – sometimes being equated with the *dūtī* or messenger, sometimes differentiated from her in both character and function.

The schema does not stop at the level of the dramatis personae themselves: it also lists and categorises abstracts such as the physical attributes and mental dispositions of the various heroes and heroines. Such extremes of classification are characteristic of the system as a whole: the detailed listing, defining and exemplifying of such categories is the main procedure of Sanskrit literary theory. And if this almost obsessive pursuit of such taxonomy of heroes and heroines remains an all-consuming passion for the Hindi scholarly tradition, it still leaves some energy for a similar process in respect of the language used in *rīti* verse: the *alaṅkāra* tradition.

Alaṅkāra: the ornament of poetry, the poetry of ornament

The taxonomy of *ālaṅkāras* or rhetorical figures in Hindi is a highly detailed system mostly deriving from Sanskrit models. The original list of *ālaṅkāras* as given in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* contained just four main figures – *upamā*, *rūpaka*, *dīpaka* and *yamaka*, defined and exemplified below. This list was expanded enormously by later writers, with a proliferation of categories and sub-categories to rival the immensely well-stocked catalogue of *nāyaka-nāyikā bheda* varieties. The Hindi poets relied primarily on the later Sanskrit texts such as the *Kāvya prakāśa* of Mammaṭa (late 11th or early 12th century), the *Sāhityadarpaṇa* of Viśvanātha (15th) and the *Kuvalayānanda* of Appayadīkṣita (late 16th). While the theoretical principles of Sanskrit *ālaṅkāra-śāstra* were inherited wholesale by the Hindi writers on poetics, differences between the structure of Sanskrit and Braj Bhāṣā meant that not all *ālaṅkāras* were equally well suited to the vernacular context, and only some of them received detailed treatment in the Hindi *rīti* texts. The following section defines some of the most frequently-used *ālaṅkāras* which became the stock-in-trade of Hindi poetics. My examples are drawn from a range of Hindi texts of both before and

after Bihārī's time¹¹, each such example being followed by a quotation from the *Bihārī Satsaī*. The list of *ālankāras* given here, though long, is very far from being exhaustive! It is arranged in Devanagari syllabary order.

¹¹The texts referred to are as follows (historical details from McGregor 1984):

Anga-darpaṇ of Gulām Nabī 'Raslīn', AD 1737. Raslīn, one of many Muslim poets writing in Brajbhāṣā, was killed in the service of Navāb Safdarjang of Avadh in 1750.

Barvai rāmāyaṇ of Tulsīdās, late 16th century; a gem-like miniature Rāmāyaṇ in *barvai* couplets.

Bhāv-vilās of Dev (Devdatt Dube), AD 1689; one of several works by this prolific Rīti poet, its main emphasis is on *rasa* and *nāyikā-bhed*.

Bhāṣā-bhūṣaṇ of Jasvant Siṃh, Maharaja of Jodhpur, early 18th century; the text is based on the Sanskrit works *Kuvalayānanda* and *Candrāloka*.

Hit-taraṅginī of Kṛpārām, late 16th century? Probably the earliest Brajbhāṣā work on poetics.

Kavitta-ratnākar of Senāpati, AD 1649; a virtuoso text illustrating both *bhakti* and Rīti themes.

Kāvya-nirṇay of Bhikhārīdās, AD 1746, a major work on *rasa* and *ālankāra* theory.

Lalit-lalām of Matirām, early 1660s; a text in Rīti style eulogising king Bhāvsimh of Bundi.

Rāmcaritmānas of Tulsīdās, begun in AD 1574: the classic exemplar of Hindi Rāmāyaṇas.

Satsaī-siṃgāra of 'Bhāratendu' Hariścandra. The 19th-century polymath from Banaras took a few dozen couplets from the *Bihārī satsaī* and used them as the opening couplets of poetic expansions in *kuṇḍaliyā* metre.

Śivraj-bhūṣaṇ of Bhūṣaṇ (Bhūṣaṇ Tripāṭhī), AD 1673; a brilliant panegyric on the Maratha leader Śivājī, especially in respect of his antagonism with Aurangzeb.

Sundarī sindūr of Dev (Devdatt Dube); a selection of 105 stanzas originally compiled from Dev's text *Śabd rasāyan* (c. 1643) by the 19th-century polymath Hariścandra of Banaras.

Yamak-satsaī of Vṛnd, late 17th century; Vṛnd was tutor to Rājsiṃh of Kishengarh.

For full discussions of the Sanskrit figures of speech see Gerow 1971; Gerow illustrates his detailed encyclopaedia of the figures with example from both Sanskrit and English sources.

atīsayokti ‘hyperbole’. An intrinsic part of many other figures of speech, this is used very commonly in descriptions of lovesickness. Raslīn’s *Aṅga-darpaṇ* describes the extreme delicacy of the lovelorn heroine’s body:

लगत बात ताको कहा जाकौ सूछम गात ।
नेक स्वास के लगत ही पास नहीं ठहरात ॥ ¹²

How could the wind strike one of such delicate frame?
At the touch of a mere breath she is far away.

The expectation is that the heroine’s body, emaciated by the pain of *viraha*, could be endangered by a strong wind; but so extreme is her emaciation that even a breath – or a sigh – blows her out of harm’s way. The irony is that despite being near to death, she is saved from dying by her own parlous state.

Bihārī speaks hyperbolically of using a rose-petal to pumice the tender feet of the heroine.

छाले परिबे कै डसु सकै न हाथ छुवाइ ।
झझकत हिये गुलाब के झवाँ झँवैयत पाइ ॥ ४८४ ॥

For fear that finger’s touch
might hurt such tender feet, they’re rubbed,
with trembling heart, with pumice rose.

anuprāsa ‘alliteration’. A favourite for all poets, and highly effective when used with subtlety. Much is made of the contrast between retroflex (‘hard’) and dental (‘soft’) consonants, often suggesting harshness and sweetness respectively. In *Rāmāyaṇa* battle scenes, Tulsīdās exploits this feature brilliantly to suggest the violent and dramatic turmoil of fighting, while the doubling of consonants (marked by archaic morphology – see footnote) here adds a further sense of staccato action:

जंबुक निकर कटकट्ट कट्टहिं । खाहिं हुआहिं अघाहिं दपट्टहिं ॥
कोटिन्ह रुंड मुंड बिनु डोल्लहिं । सीस परे महि जय जय बोल्लहिं ॥ >>

‘Herds of jackals snapped and snarled as they tore the dead, feasted upon them and yelled and, when surfeited, howled. Myriads of headless trunks scampered about, while the heads lying on the ground shouted, ‘Victory! Victory!’.¹³

¹²Gulām Nabī ‘Raslīn’, ed. Sudhākar Pāṇḍey, 1987:276.

¹³Tulsīdās, ed. & trans. R.C. Prasad 1994:543. The doubling of some consonants here is achieved by recourse to archaisms: the stem *bol-*, for example, (cf. Hindi *bol-*) is a Prakrit form (Turner 1965:528).

The *Satsaī* includes many a couplet where alliteration is quite brilliantly sustained (and quite untranslatable):

भूकुटी मटकनि पीत पट चटक लटकती चाल ।
चल चख चितवनि चोरि चितु लियो बिहारीलाल ॥ ३०१ ॥

His flirting brow and flashing yellow sash,
his swaying walk and glinting glancing gaze!
Biharilal—he steals my heart away!

*apahnuti*¹⁴ ‘denial’. The quality of the subject or the object is in some way artfully ‘denied’. In his *Aṅga-darpaṇ*, Raslīn describes the splendour of the heroine’s face by reference to the moon (to which it is conventionally compared):

चंद नहीं यह बाल मुख सोभा देखन काज ।
बारी कारी रैन मों महताबी द्विजराज ॥ 15

This is no moon, but the maiden’s face, to see whose splendour
the lunar firework burns in the black night.

In the *Satsaī*, the conventional imagery of the eyes as being ‘like lotuses’ is denied – eyes must surely be made of stone, the poet says, because when they ‘meet’ (i.e. when they strike other eyes), sparks fly.

कहत सबै कबि कमल सैं मो मत नैन पषानु ।
नतरकु कत इन बिय लगत उपजतु बिरह कृसानु ॥ १२० ॥

“Like lotuses”, the poets say; but I’d say eyes are stone;
how else, when hers strike mine,
is sparked this lovesick fire?

asaṅgati ‘disconnection’. An unexpected effect, when an effect is brought about in something that is seemingly unconnected to the cause. In his *Kāvyanirṇay*, Bhikhārīdās shows how the impact of Kṛṣṇa’s loving nature runs counter to his supposed function as saviour:

¹⁴In *Bhāṣā-bhūṣaṇ* and some other Hindi sources the word is sometimes spelt metathetically as *apanhuti* – cf. the spelling *cinha* often seen for Sanskrit *cihna* in modern Hindi.

¹⁵Gulām Nabī ‘Raslīn’, ed. Sudhākar Pāṇḍey, 1987:269.

प्रगट भे घँनस्याँम तुँम जग प्रतिपालन हेत ।
नाँहक बिथा बढ़ाइ केँ औरँन कौ जिय लेत ॥ ¹⁶

Ghansyām, you became incarnated for the sake of protecting the world;
in stealing others' hearts you deepen their pain unjustly.

In the Satsaī, the heroine's beautiful slenderness causes grief (to her rivals).

तीज परब सौतिनु सजे भूषण बसन सरीर ।
सबै मरगजै मुह करी इही मरगजैँ चीर ॥ ३१५ ॥

On Husbands' Day, her rivals dressed in finest garb
and gems; but how their faces crumpled when they saw
her crumpled hems!

unmīlita 'discovered'. Two similar things blend and lose their identity (cf. *mīlita* below), but some difference is ultimately revealed after all. A favourite example is of the milky-white champak garland, invisible against the heroine's fair skin until the garland's petals wilt, at which time they lose their pristine perfection and darken in colour so that they show up against the heroine's unchanging fairness. In his *Hit-taraṅgini*, Kṛpārām exploits another stock image – the merging of budding maturity and childish grace in the appearance of the young heroine:

नवलबधू तन तरुनई नई रही है छाड़ ।
दे चसमा चख चतुरई लघु सिसुता लखि जाइ ॥ ¹⁷

The bride's new young-womanhood courses through her body;
[but] look carefully with glasses and her childish charm still shows
a little.¹⁸

In *Satsaī* 182, the heroine's *bindī*, being of sandalwood paste, merges imperceptibly with her fair complexion; but it is revealed when wine brings a flush to her skin.

¹⁶ Bhikhārīdās, ed. Javāharlāl Caturvedī, 1962:351. The text shows a great deal of 'spontaneous nasalization' – especially in the environment of a nasal consonant such as *n* or *m*. The candrabindu on प्रतिपालन should presumably be located thus: प्रतिपालन.

¹⁷Sudhākar Pāṇḍey (ed.), *Kṛpārām granthāvali* 1969:23 (second pagination sequence).

¹⁸ The 'glasses' trope is also to be found in Bihari *Satsaī* 141 — करी बिरह ऐसी तऊ गैल न छाँड़तु नीचु । / दीनेँ ऊ चसमा चखनु चाहै लहै न मीचु ॥ १४१ ॥ 'Wretched Separation's worn her so, yet dogs her trail; / and even wearing glasses, Death, who seeks her, / cannot find her.

मिलि चंदन बैदी रही गोरे मुँह न लखाइ ।
ज्यों ज्यों मद लाली चढ़इ त्यों त्यों उघरति जाइ ॥ १८२ ॥

On brow so fair her sandal-bindi lies concealed:
but as wine's blush shall flush her face,
so will it stand revealed.

upamā 'comparison, simile'. The most fundamental and frequently-used of all figures of speech. It has four components:

upameya – the thing to be compared, or subject of comparison;
upamāna – the thing to which comparison is made, or object of comparison;
(*sādhāraṇa*-) *dharma* – the property or quality shared by subject and object;
vācaka – the 'signifying' element, such as the word 'like'.

A simile may contain all four elements – 'the lady's face (= *upameya*) is bright (= *dharma*) like (= *vācaka*) the moon (= *upamāna*)'; or one or more elements may be present by implication only, as when the *dharma* is dropped in the expression 'the lady's face is like the moon' (convention dictates that the shared quality is 'brightness' rather than, say, a blemished appearance, or a tendency to wax and wane!).

Here are four couplets from the Bihārī *Satsaī* to demonstrate the various elements described above.

डीठि बरत बाँधी अटनु चढ़ि धावत न डरात ।
इतहिं उतहिं चित दुहुन कै नट लौं आवत जात ॥ १९२ ॥

Between the rooftops, two hearts prance
along a rope of glances: fearlessly, like acrobats,
back and forth they come and go!

वाहि लखै लोइन लगै कौन जुवति की जोति ।
जाके तन की छाँह दिगि जौन्ह छाँह सी होति ॥ १९१ ॥

Next to her body's shade,
the moonlight a mere shadow seems.
Which maiden's luster now will please the eye?

कर के मीडे कुसुम लौं गई बिरह कुम्हिलाइ ।
सदा समीपिनि सखिनु हूँ नीठि पिछानी जाइ ॥ ५१६ ॥

She withers in lovesickness
like a manhandled flower—/ bloom
even her boon companions barely know her.

छुटी न सिसुता की झलक झलक्यौ जोबनु अंग ।
दीपति देह दुहुनु मिलि दिपति ताफता रंग ॥ ७३ ॥

Her youthful luster grows while childish glint still shines;
she glows with mingled brilliance
of shot-silk twines entwined.

The following table shows examples of the four elements in these verses from the the *Satsaī*. An element that is only implied is shown by a bracketed translation.

	UPAMEYA	UPAMĀNA	DHARMA	VĀCAKA
<i>Satsaī</i> 112	<i>cita</i>	<i>naṭa</i>	<i>āvata jāta</i>	<i>laū</i>
<i>Satsaī</i> 111	<i>jaunha</i>	<i>chāha</i>	[brightness]	<i>sī</i>
<i>Satsaī</i> 516	[heroine]	<i>kusuma</i>	<i>kumhilāi</i>	<i>laū</i>
<i>Satsaī</i> 73	<i>deha</i>	<i>taphatā</i>	<i>dīpati</i>	[like]

The many variations of simile include the *pratīpa* or ‘converse simile’, in which the appropriateness of the comparison is mocked – either for a weakness in its subject, or for a weakness in its object. The *Bhāṣā-bhūṣaṇ* gives these illustrated definitions: 55

सो प्रतीप उपमेय कौं कीजें जब उपमानु ।
लोयन से अम्बुज बने मुख सौ चंद्र बखानु ॥ ५० ॥

When the subject of comparison is made the object,
it is an ‘inverse simile’:
*‘the lotus is graceful like your eyes,
the moon is described as your face’.*

उपमे कौं उपमान तें आदर जबै न होइ ।
गर्व करै मुख कौ कहा चंद्रहिं नीकें जोइ ॥ ५१ ॥

[Or] whenever the subject is not flattered by the object:
‘Are you proud of your face? Look well at the moon!’

अनआदर उपमेय तें जब पावै उपमान ।
तिच्छन नैना कटाक्ष तें मंद काम के बान ॥ ५२ ॥

[Or again] when the object is slighted by the subject:
‘Kāmadev’s arrows are blunter than the sharp glances of your eyes.’

उपमे कौं उपमान जब समता लायक नाहिं ।
अति उत्तम दृग मीन से कहे कौन विधि जाहिं ॥ ५३ ॥

When the comparison between the subject and object is not worthy:
'How could her eyes be compared to the fish?'

व्यर्थ होइ उपमान जब वर्णनीय लखि सार ।
दृग आगे मृग कछु न ये पंच प्रतीप प्रकार ॥ ५४ ॥¹⁹

When the object is useless considering the essence of the thing described: *'The [eyes of] the deer are nothing compared to her eyes'*. These are the five types of *pratīpa*, converse simile.

Such uses of the simile, in which a comparison is stated only to be denied as inadequate to the task of offering a worthy descriptive parallel, are very common and have numerous variations.

ullāsa 'shining forth'. Something viewed as a merit or demerit from one perspective may produce the same or opposite effect elsewhere, highlighting the object by implicit comparison or opposition. Bhikhārīdās first defines and then exemplifies one of the sub-categories of this figure in the following couplet from his *Kāvyanirṇay*:

दोष और के और कौं गुँ उल्लासै लेखि ।
रघुपति कौ बँनबास भौ तपसिन सुखद बिसेख ॥²⁰

Observe in the *ullāsa* how a defect for the one is a benefit for the other: Raghupati's forest-exile brought great joy to the [forest-dwelling] ascetics.

Here in the Satsaī, the pleasures of the simple grove come to yield the spiritual benefits of a visit to Prayag, the most sacred of pilgrimage-places:

तजि तीरथ हरि राधिका तन दुति करि अनुराग ।
जिह ब्रज केलि निकुंज मग पग पग होत पयागु ॥ २०२ ॥

Forgoing pilgrimage, cherish the radiance of Hari-Radhika:
then pleasure groves of Braj become Prayag
at every single step along the lane.

ullekha 'representation'. A variety of effects flow from a single stimulus; that is, an object is perceived differently from different viewpoints. The *Bhāṣā-bhūṣaṇ* defines and exemplifies it in a verse which speaks of three

¹⁹ Bihārīlāl, ed. G.A. Grierson, 1896:55.

²⁰ Bhikhārīdās, ed. Javāharlāl Caturvedī, 1962:362.

complementary perceptions of the same person, namely a royal poetic hero who is at once bountiful, amorous and warlike:

सो उल्लेख जु एक कौं बहु समुझै बहु रीति ।
अर्थिन सुरतरु तिय मदन अरि कौं काल प्रतीति ॥ ६० ॥²¹

That is a 'representation' when various people perceive a thing in different ways:
'to supplicants he seems a wishing-tree; to women, a love-god; to an enemy, Death.'

बहु विधि वरनै एक कौं बहु गुण सौं उल्लेख ।
कीर्ती अर्जुन तेज रवि सुरगुरु वचन विशेष ॥ ६१ ॥

A single thing is described in many ways as to its many qualities: 'In fame he is Arjuna, in brilliance the sun, in articulacy the gods' guru Brhaspati'.

The *Satsaī* turns a more cynical eye on the world in contrasting two different human reactions to the meaning and significance of love:

गिरि तैं ऊँचै रसिक मन बूड़े जहाँ हजार
वहै सदा पसु नरनु कौ पेम पयोधि पगार ॥ २५२ ॥

Its depths would drown a thousand ardent hearts
great as mountains; yet it's ankle-deep,
this sea of love, to brutes of men.

kāvyaṅga 'poetic cause'. A statement is followed by a further one that explains it and supplies the reason behind it. *Bhāṣā bhūṣaṇa* has this:

काव्यलिङ्ग जब युक्ति सौं अर्थ समर्थन होइ ।
तो कौ जीत्यौ मदम जो मो हिय में शिव सोइ ॥ १५३ ॥²²

It is a *kāvyaṅga* when a meaning is supported by inference:
'In my heart is Śiva, who defeated you, God of Love'.

The *Satsaī* explains how it is that the heroine's waist and the existence of God are similarly imperceptible.

²¹ Bihārīlāl, ed. G.A. Grierson, 1896:58.

²² Bihārīlāl, ed. G.A. Grierson, 1896:99

बुधि अनमानु प्रमान श्रुति कियेँ नीठि ठहराइ ।
सूछिम कटि परि ब्रह्म की अलख लखी नहिँ जाइ ॥ ६४८ ॥

Good sense and ancient wisdom testify
that while too subtle for the human eye
her waist and God both have reality.

tulyayogitā 'equal pairing'. A number of different subjects share the same quality. The *Śivrāj-bhūṣaṇ* bases an extended series of statements about a historical hero, the Maratha leader Shivaji (sworn enemy of the Mughals) on the shared verb *caṛhata* in its various senses – 'to mount, ascend, attack', and so on. In the translation, verbs representing *caṛhata* are italicised.

चढ़त तुरंग चतुरंग साजि सिवराज
चढ़त प्रताप दिन दिन अति जंग मैं ।
भूषन चढ़त मरहट्टन के चित्त चाव
खग खुलि चढ़त है अरिन के अंग मैं ।
भौंसिला के हाथ गढ़ कोट हैं चढ़त अरि
जोट है चढ़त एक मेरु गिरि सुंग मैं ।
तुरकान गन व्योमयान हैं चढ़त बिनु
मान है चढ़त बदरंग अवरंग मैं ॥ 23

When Shivaji fits out his fourfold army²⁴ and *mounts* his horse
glory *soars* ever higher in his person;
The zeal of the Marathas *rises* as
drawn swords *assail* the limbs of enemies.
Fort and fastness are *sacrificed* by Shiva's hand,
enemies *climb* hill and mountain-peak in flight;
The Turkish hordes *ascend* death's chariot without honour,
and faded fame *adheres* to Aurangzeb.

In the *Satsaī* a series of gifts, given by a series of donors, is predicated on a shared verb for 'gave'.

मानहु मुहुँ दिखरावनी दुलहिहिँ करि अनुराग ।
सासु सदनु मनु ललन हूँ सौतिनु दियौ सुहागु ॥ २८९ ॥

Lovingly at the lifting of the bridal veil,
mother-in-law yielded the house,
husband his heart, rival wives their happiness.

²³Bhūṣaṇ 1937:96.

²⁴The 'four-limbed army' (*caturaṅga*): elephant, horse, chariot and foot.

dīpaka ‘illuminator’. A zeugma – a figure in which two or more items are yoked together by being completed by a shared word or phrase. (English examples often have a wry or comic effect: ‘he signed his name with pride and a borrowed pen’.) The Bhāṣā bhūṣan has this:

सो दीपक निज गुननि सौं वरनि इतर एक भाइ ।
गज मद सौं नृप तेज सौं शोभा लहत बनाइ ॥ ८३ ॥²⁵

When a thing to be described, and some different thing, share the same grace through individual qualities, that is a *dīpaka*:
the elephant through its rut and the king through his valour bask in glory.

In a verse from the *Satsaī* three disparate items – ‘kings, sickness, sins’ – are set up in parallel as ‘oppressors of the weak’.

कहै यहै सुश्रुत सुमृति यहै सयानो लोगु ।
तीनि दबावत निसंकही पातकु राजा रोगु ॥ ४३१ ॥

Veda and scripture say, and the wise agree:
oppressors of the weak are three—
kings, sickness, sins.

dr̥ṣṭānta ‘illustration’. One situation illustrates another; the illustration may offer a concrete image to clarify some abstract concept. In Raslīn’s description of the heroine’s breasts, however, the parallel is between two specific situations:

उठि जोबन में तुव कुचन मो मन मार्यो धाय ।
एक पंथी द्वै ठगन ते कैसे कै बचि जाय ॥²⁶

Rising in youthfulness, your breasts rushed to strike my heart;
How could a single traveller evade a pair of highwaymen?

Bihārī looks for a parallel to express the inability of ordinary folk to influence the affairs of the great, and finds it here:

कैसे छोटे नरनु तैं सरत बड़े के काम ।
मढ्यौ दमामौ जातु क्यौं कहु चूहे कै चाम ॥ ११८ ॥

The works of the great won’t thrive through little men!
Can a mouse-pelt skin a kettledrum?

²⁵ Bihārīlāl, ed. G.A. Grierson, 1896:70.

²⁶ Sudhākar Pāṇḍey 1987:277 (following the variant reading *paṁthī dvai*).

parisaṅkhyā ‘exclusive specification’. Holland 1970:70: ‘where a particular thing, quality or class is excluded from certain situations or places and associated with another’. Bhikhārīdās illustrates a species with an ‘interrogative’ (*prasna-pūrbak*) character, framing it with a caustic tone :

आज कुटिलता कौन में राज मनुष्यन माँहि ।
देख्यौ बूझि बिचारि कें ब्याल बंस में नाहि ॥ 27

In whom is deviousness now to be found? Amongst lords and men!
[For] investigation shows it be absent among the serpent line.

The *Satsaī* tells us that while the phase of the moon can usually be discovered just by looking at it, the heroine’s full-moon face outshines the real moon and makes it invisible.

पत्रा ही तिथि पाइये वा घर के चहुँ पास ।
नितप्रति पून्योई रहै आनन ओप उजास ॥ ७५ ॥

Around that house you’ll need an almanac to find the date:
her lustrous face glows constantly
with full-moon gleam.

bhrama ‘error, confusion’. In this example from Matirām’s *Lalit-lalām*, the heroine’s *sakhī* speaks of the heroine when dazed after lovemaking:

आभा तरिवन लाल की परी कपोलनि आनि ।
कहा छपावति चतुर तिय कंत दंत छत जानि ॥ ८३ ॥ 28

The glow from your darling’s ear-ring falls on your cheeks:
Why conceal it, clever lady, thinking it bruised by your lover’s teeth?

Bihārī: in BR 171, the lovesick heroine is burning up so badly that when she sees fireflies, she thinks they are embers raining from the sky.

बिरह जरी लखि जीगननु कह्यौ न डहि कै बार ।
अरी आउ भजि भीतरी बरसतु आजु अँगार ॥ ५९६ ॥

Scorched in love’s pain, when fireflies came
she burned again: “Oh come inside!”, she cried,
“tonight the sky rains burning coals!”

mīlita ‘fused’. Two qualities of the same thing merge together, the one lost in the other. (See *unmīlita* above.) Rādhā’s complexion is a favourite subject for

²⁷ Bhikhārīdās, ed. Javāharlāl Caturvedī, 1962:492.

²⁸ Matirām, ed. Omprakāś Śarmā, 1983:32.

this figure, as when Matirām's *Hit-taraṅginī* makes her fairness merge with the moonlight.

चली स्याम हित राधिका सरद उजेरी माहिं ।
चंद उजेरी सों मिलत नेकु न जानी जाहिं ॥ 29

Rādhikā set out for Śyām in the autumn moonlight;
merging with the moon's brilliance, she was not seen at all.

A couplet from the *Satsaī* begins with this figure in the first line, describing the heroine's fusion with the moonlight; but the second line adds complexity by invoking an olfactory sense alongside the visual one – compounding brightness with fragrance.

जुवति जौन्ह मैं मिलि गई नैक न होति लखाइ ।
सौधे के डोरें लगी चली अली सँग जाइ ॥ ७ ॥

The lady merged with moonlight,
lost from view: her friends swarmed after,
scenting fragrance trails.

yamaka 'doubling'. A play on words, a repetition of words or syllables similar in sound but different in meaning. It has many varieties. An example is the old saw, *joḡī tāko jāne, jo ḡītā ko jāne* 'Recognise as a [true] yogi he who knows the [Bhagavad] Gītā', in which the four syllables *jo-gī-tā-ko* are configured differently in each of the two successive clauses. Such conventions were more neatly achieved in the days before the advent of printing, when the scribal practice was to run words on continuously with any breaks between them. An artful verse by Senāpati, describing a singer's performance, has the syllables *su-ra-na-dī-jai* readable as either *sura na dījai* ('don't give voice' – a singer asks his two accompanists to allow him a solo) or *sura nadī jai* ('hail [to] the river of the gods (Ganga)' ³⁰ In a *dohā* from his *Yamak-satsaī*, a text specialising in this figure, Vṛnd gives examples in the second and fourth quarters of the stanza:

हरि बिन छिन न सुहात है चंद न चंदन बात ।
तन मन कैसेँ होत सुष बनत न बन तन जात ॥ 31

Without Hari, moon and sandal-breeze appeal not for a moment;
there's no pleasure for body or soul in going to the wood.

²⁹Kṛpārām, ed. Sudhākar Pāṇḍey, 1969:74 (second pagination sequence).

³⁰Senāpati, ed. Umāśaṅkar Śukla, 1936: 113-14

³¹Vṛnd, ed. Janārdan Rāv Celer, 1971:206.

The moon and the sandalwood-fragrant breeze – supposedly ‘cooling’ items, associated with romantic times spent in the *bana* (the wood or wild place, contrasted with domesticity and its social rules) – conventionally remind the separated lover of past joys, deepening the sadness of lovesickness. The *yamaka* appears in two pairs of homonymic doublets – *canda na* reappears as *candana*, and *banata na* reappears as *bana tana*.³² The negative particle ‘na’ is a particularly common *yamaka* component in Hindi, since it conveniently forms *yamakas* with nouns ending with this same syllable (e.g. *candana*, *bana*), or in oblique plurals (e.g. *sarana*, oblique plural of *sara* ‘arrow’), or in infinitive verbs (e.g. *dekhana*, *calana*) etc.

On the pretext of its relevance to the *Satsaī*, a further example can be cited here. It is a commentary poem by Hariścandra, based on a *Satsaī dohā*³³ used as the opening couplet of a stanza in *kuṇḍaliyā* metre. The opening syllable(s) of a *kuṇḍaliyā* must reappear at the end (the syllables *sa-gha-na* appear as *saghana* ‘dense’ in 1a, and within the phrase *sarasa ghana* ‘nectarous clouds’ in 6b); and line 3a must be a repeat of 2b. A second *yamaka* appears in the use of *dhuni* as both ‘river’ (line 4; < *dhunī*) and ‘sound’ (line 5; < *dhvani*). In order to show off these features I have taken some licence in my rather tum-tee-tum translation. My *yamaka* rather desperately matches ‘in groves’ with ‘[lightn-]ing roves’.

सघन कुंज छाया सुखद सीतल मंद समीर ।
 मन है जात अजौं वहै वा जमुना की तीर ॥
 वा जमुना की तीर सोई धुनि आँखिन आवै ।
 कान बेनु धुनि आनि कोऊ औचक जिमि नावै ॥
 सुधि भूलत हरिचंद लखत अजहूँ वृंदाबन ।
 आवन चाहत अबही निकसि मनु स्याम सरस घन ॥³⁴

In groves where flows a cooling gentle breeze
 On Jumna’s bank I’d be, in sweetest ease!
 In sweetest ease the stream delights my eyes —
 not all may rush to hear the fluting prize.
 Yet *Hari’s moon* would, lighten Vrinda’s groves,
 emerging from dark clouds where lightning roves.

In this verse from the *Satsaī*, the word *surati* appears in two different meanings — as tatsama *su-rati*, and as a tadbhava reflecting tatsama *smṛti*:

³²The word *tana* in its first appearance in the line is the noun meaning ‘body’, and in its second appearance is the postposition meaning ‘to, towards’.

³³See BR 204 for the form of the *dohā* given in Miśra’s edition. The couplet is retranslated here to fit the requirements of the *kuṇḍaliyā* metre.

³⁴ Hemant Śarmā (ed.) 1989:100.

सोवत जागत सपन बस रस रिस चैन कुचैन ।
सुरति स्याम घन की सुरति बिसरै हूँ बिसरै न ॥ २२८ ॥

Sleeping, wakeful, dreaming, in joy or anger,
quiet or disquiet, memories of loving dark-cloud Shyam
won't leave my mind.

rūpaka 'metaphor'. The metaphor alleges an identity of subject and object, often expressed through a compound, as in *mukha-candra* 'face-moon', i.e. 'a face as bright as the moon', or 'moon-like face'. It has numerous varieties. The *Bhāṣā-bhūṣaṇ* cites a species in which the subject exceeds the object in some particular respect, as in 'The lady is a jasmine who looks graceful when walking' – i.e. she has a jasmine's graceful appearance, but with the added feature of mobility! *Bhūṣaṇ*' *Śivraj-bhūṣaṇ* gives an extended example in *Chappay* metre, in which a common 'ocean' metaphor – so often applied to the human ordeal of existence in the material world – is equated to the present decadent age of *kaliyuga*, with the poet's patron Shivaji (see the *tulyayogitā* example above) as the boatman who saves his Hindu subjects.

कलिजुग जलधि अपार उद्ध अधरम्म उम्मि मय ।
लच्छनि लच्छ मलिच्छ कच्छ अरु मच्छ मगर चय ॥
नृपति नदीनद वृंद होत जाको मिलि नीरस ।
भनि भूषन सब भुम्मि घेरि किन्निय सुअप्प बस ॥
हिंदुवान पुन्य गाहक बनिय तासु निबाहक साहि सुव ।
बर बादवान किरवान धरि जस जहाज सिवराज तुव ॥³⁵

The Kali age is a boundless ocean billowing mightily with
unrighteousness,
The myriad mlecchas its shoals of turtles and crocodiles.
Hosts of kings are rivers and streams that lose lustre³⁶ on joining it;
Says *Bhūṣaṇ*: it has swamped Earth, overwhelming her with its waters.
Hindus are patrons of merit, merchants maintained by the son of Shivaji;
your glory, King Shivaji, is a ship to them, your sword its fine sails.

Bihārī: BR 72 also takes up the image of the ocean; it represents the 'uncrossable' extent of the hero's physical beauty, and for good measure involves a play on the idea of 'saltiness', i.e. piquant gracefulness.

³⁵*Bhūṣaṇ*, comm. *Rājnārāyaṇ Śarmā*, 1937: 42.

³⁶Literally 'become insipid' – implying saline and undrinkable.

लीनेऊ साहस सहस कीनै जतन हजारु ।
लोइन लोइन सिंधु तन पैरि न पावत पारु ॥ २१४ ॥

However bold, however many times they try,
how can my eyes traverse the salty sea
of that body's loveliness?

leśa 'trace'. Something that is usually perceived as a fault is represented as a merit (or vice versa). An example from Bhikhārīdās uses the image of the young moon – appreciated for its beauty despite its meagre size.

जहाँ दोष गुँन होत है लेस वहीं सुख कंद ।
छीन रूप है द्वैज दिन चंद भयौ जग बंद ॥³⁷

Where a fault is a merit, there lies the joy-giving *lesa* figure;
[though] lean in form, the second-day moon earns the world's praise.

A narrative in the *Satsaī* tells how a negative horoscope (declaring a newborn son to be illegitimate) leads eventually to a happy ending in which the cuckolded husband is avenged.

चित पितमारक जोगु गनि भयो भये सुन सोगु ।
फिर अति हुलस्यौ जोइसी समुझै जारज जोगु ॥ ५७५ ॥

The pandit's son-in-arms was augured
as a patricide—but sorrow changed to mirth
when second reading cast a *bastard* birth!

vakrokti 'crooked speech'. Something is said in such a way that a different, unspoken meaning may be read into it. Gerow (1971:261) notes 'We are here very close to our own idea of irony if we take this to mean reference to something through its opposite, or, at any rate, its other. It differs from irony 'in requiring that the thesis, that is, the conventional formulation which is to be referred to through its opposite, be explicit'. Keśavdās deals with it neatly enough in the twelfth chapter of his *Kavi-priya*:

³⁷ Bhikhārīdās, ed. Javāharlāl Caturvedī, 1962:367.

केसव सूधी बात में बरनिय टेढो भाव ।
वक्र उक्ति तासों कहें जे प्रवीन कबिराव ॥ ३ ॥ ³⁸

When a devious mode is applied to a straightforward thing,
Keśav, wise kings of poets called it 'crooked speech'.

Bhūṣaṇ's *Śivraj-bhūṣaṇ* has an example in which a promise of an honour from 'his Majesty' (the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb) after his return from battle is undermined by the suggestion that it's a battle that his enemy (the poet's patron Shivaji) is sure to win, and from which Aurangzeb will therefore not return. The rhetorical question of the second line has a caustic sarcasm:

करि मुहीम आये कहत हजरत मनसब दैन ।
सिव सरजा सो जंग जुरि ऐहें बचिकै है न ॥ ³⁹

His Majesty spoke of making royal appointments on returning from the fray;
– ah, so that's after joining battle with Shivaji the Lion, and returning safe
and sound, is it?

Bihārīlāl hints at the beauty of the heroine:

लिखन बैठि जाकी सबी गहि गहि गरब गरूर ।
भये न केते जगत के चतुर चितेरे कूर ॥ ३४८ ॥

So many master-artists, puffed with pride,
begin to paint her likeness...
lose their way.

vibhāvanā 'abnormal causation'. An effect is seen to have a cause other than its usual one. Of the six varieties listed by the *Bhāṣā-bhūṣaṇ*, the second is one in which a full effect (*kāraja* or *kārya*) derives from an incomplete cause (*hetu*):

हेतु अपूरण तें जबै कारण पूरण होइ ।
कुसुम वान कर गहि मदन सब जग जीत्यौ जोइ ॥ ११२ ॥ ⁴⁰

When a full effect occurs from an incomplete cause –
'See, Kāmdev [merely] holds his blossom-arrows in his hand
and all the world is conquered.'

In the *Satsaī*, the pleasant moonlight of the month of *Cait* is enough to make the heroine suffer all the pangs of lovesickness.

³⁸ Keśavdās, ed. Viśvanāth Prasād Mīśra, 1990:176.

³⁹ Bhūṣaṇ, comm. Rājnārāyaṇ Śarmā, 1937:246.

⁴⁰ Bihārīlāl, ed. G.A. Grierson, 1896:82.

भौ यह ऐसोई समौ जहाँ सुखद दुख देत ।
चैत चाँद की चाँदनी डारत कियेँ अचेत ॥ ५१९ ॥

It's such a time when even pleasing things give pain;
the moonlight of this springtime moon
will strike me down.

virodhābhāsa 'appearance of paradox'. In this kavitt, Dev elaborately describes an unnamed Rādhā through the successive seasons: her face is like the autumn moon, yet is framed by hair as dark as the monsoon *umāusa* (*amāvasyā*, new-moon night), and so on. Some of the contradictions are spelled out by the clumsy addition of the word 'yet' in my translation — as opposed to the *absence* of conjunctions, or asyndeton, which is of the key features of super-economic line structure in Old Hindi. My version also misses such subtleties as the punning value of *pakṣa* as both 'moon-phase' and 'bird's wing'.

कातिक की राति पून्यो इन्दु को प्रकाश दून्यो
आसपास पावस उमाउस खगी रहै ।
ग्रीषम की ऊषमा मयूष मानिकनि मुख
देखे सनमुख निसि सिसिर लगू रहै ॥
बरसै जुन्हाई सुधा बसुधा सहस्र धार
कौमुदिनि सूखै ज्यौँ ज्यौँ जामिनी जगी रहै ।
दोऊ पक्ष उज्जल बिराजैँ राजहंसी देव
स्याम रंग रँगी जगमगी उमगी रहै ॥ १०५ ॥⁴¹

This (autumn) night of Kātik, the full-moon's light is doubled⁴²
[yet] nearby lingers the darkness of a moonless monsoon⁴³;
Like summer's fire is the brilliance of her jewels;
[yet] her face brings a cold-season's night before our eyes⁴⁴.
The nectar of [winter] moonlight rains on earth in a thousand streams
[yet] day-lilies are parched increasingly as night tarries.

In both phases of the moon, Dev, the regal *hansinī* [Radha] waxes brilliant,
shining joyfully in the bright darkness of Shyam's love.

For Bihārī a thorn in the foot – at first seeming nothing other than a source of pain for the heroine – saves her from a lovesick death.

⁴¹ Dev, compiled by Hariścandra, ed. Kiśorī Lāl 1999:140.

⁴² The heroine's face is a second moon.

⁴³ Her black hair.

⁴⁴ Again, the reference is to the cooling moon.

इहि काँटे मो पाँइ गडि लीनी मरत जिवाइ ।
प्रीति जनावत भीत सौं भीत जु काढ्यौ आइ ॥ ६०४ ॥

The thorn in my foot revived me as I died:
my dearest's fear in drawing it
declared his love.

vyatireka 'dissimilitude'. An inverted simile: one in which the subject excels the object, undermining the authority of the comparison. Here too there are many varieties. In his miniature *Barvai Rāmāyaṇ*, Tulsīdās finds a fault in 'gold', a standard object of comparison for Sītā's fair body:

सम सुबरन सुखमाकर सुखद न थोर ।
सीय अंग सखि कोमल कनक कठोर ॥ २ ॥ ⁴⁵

Alike in hue, in loveliness, and passing fair:
[yet] Sītā's limbs are soft, my friend, while gold is hard.

In the *Satsāi*, the heroine's eyes have a capacity that is lacked by the standard objects of comparison:

बारौ बलि तो दृगनु पर अलि खंजन मृग मीन ।
आधी डीठि चितौनि जिहि कियँ लाल आधीन ॥ ६२८ ॥

In truth, I'd trade the wagtail, deer, and fish, and bee
for these your eyes—whose slightly-open glance
has Lal the lover fully in its power.

vyājokti 'dissimulation'. The real cause for something is hidden by a fraudulent one. In a *savaiyā* quatrain, Bhikhārīdās relates how Kṛṣṇa's intervention in a river accident 'saved' the speaker and gave her a 'new birth' (*abatāra nayau*); the real benefits to her, the *vyājokti* suggests, were amatory rather than redemptive (a sense set up by the allusion to 'slipping in error' in the first line).

⁴⁵Tulsīdās, ed. Brajratnadās 1974:II.17. The example is quoted (with a variant reading) in Rāmdahin Miśra 1951:383.

अबहीं की है बात हों न्हात हुति भ्रँम ते गैहरें पग जात भयौ ।
 गहि ग्राह अथाह कों लै ही चलयौ मँन मोहँन दूरहिं ते चितयौ ॥
 द्रुत दौरि कें पौरि कें दास बरोरि कें छोरि कें मोहिं जियाइ लयौ ।
 इन्हें भेंटि कें भेंट हों तोहि अली भयौ आज तौ मो अबतार नयौ ॥ 46

It happened just now: I was bathing when my foot slipped
 accidentally in the deep;
 A crocodile seized me and took me to the fathomless depths
 when Man-mohan [Krishna] spied me from afar.
 Running swiftly he dived in with panache⁴⁷,
 released me and revived me;
 After embracing him I now meet you, my friend:
 and today I have been born into a new life!

In this verse from the *Satsai* the speaker pretends that the trembling caused by the arrival of a certain dark-complexioned visitor is from fear (rather than passion).

कारे बरन डरावनै कत आवत इहि गेह ।
 कैबा लखी सखी लखैँ लगैँ थरथराँ देह ॥ ५१५ ॥

Why comes that fearsome dark one to the house?
 I've often seen you tremble
 at the sight of him.

śleṣa 'pun'; also referred to by the participle *śliṣṭa*, 'punned, conjoined'. This is a phrase which can be read in two ways, as in the 1940s film-song line 'Like Webster's dictionary, I'm *Morocco-bound*' (see BR 8); but in a proper, full-blown *śleṣa*, two entire sets of meanings must run in parallel. In the following *caupāī* from the *Rāmcaritmānas*, Tulsī sets up two parallel strands of meaning in his comparison of the 'saint' and the 'cotton plant':

साधु चरित सुभ चरित कपासू । निरद बिसद गुनमय फल जासू ॥
 जो सहि दुख परछिद्र दुरावा । बंदनीय जेहिं जग जस आवा ॥ 48

A saint's behaviour is like the cotton plant, whose produce is dry,
 pure and of (good) fibre.
 Though roughly used, it covers the defects of others
 and earns due reverence in the world.

⁴⁶ Bhikhārīdās, ed. Javāharlāl Caturvedī, 1962:452.

⁴⁷ Tentatively reading the given text *barorikē* as *ba rori kē*.

⁴⁸ Tulsīdās VS 2067 (AD 2010): 4 (*Rāmcaritmānas* — *Bālkāṇḍ* 2.3).

The second line here applies equally to both the ‘saintly man’ and the ‘cotton’ of the first: though suffering the hardships of his *sādhanā*, the saint conceals the faults of others, and in this is like cotton thread, which hides man’s nakedness even after enduring the pain of spinning and weaving. Similarly the adjectives *nirasa*, *bisada*, *gunamaya* do double duty: respectively ‘free of passion, pure in spirit, imbued with qualities’ in the first meaning, ‘free of sap, unsullied, composed of thread’ in the second. Puns based on the various meaning of *guna* (Sanskrit *guṇa* – ‘thread, quality’ etc.) are a commonplace of Hindi poetry – see BR 73, 130 etc.

The use of double-entendre in Hindi poetry is rarely as prolonged or comprehensive as in Sanskrit; but the *śleṣa* is still a sufficiently important figure in *rīti* poetry to deserve a second example here. In the first *taraṅga* or chapter of Senāpati’s *Kavitta ratnākara*, each *kavitta* verse can be read in two ways: as referring to summer *or* to the monsoon, to Rāma *or* to Kṛṣṇa, to a damsel *or* to an old hag, and so forth. Our example simultaneously describes a generous man and a miser; the two versions are interleaved in the translation, except where they join together for the shared last verse. The first line includes the phrase *saba daina* ‘to give all’, which is alternatively to be read in a *yamaka* as *sabadai na* ‘not even a word’.

नाहीं नाहीं करैं थोरी माँगे सब दैन कहैं
 मंगन कौ देखि पट देत बार बार हैं ।
 जिनकौं मिलत भली प्रापति की घटी होति
 सदा सब जन मन भाए निरधार हैं ॥
 भोगी हूँ रहत बिलसत अचनी के मध्य
 कन कन जोरैं दान पाठ परिवार हैं ।
 सेनापति बचन की रचना बिचारौ जामें
 दाता अरु सूम दोऊ कीने इकसार हैं ॥ ४० ॥ 49

- 1a He says not ‘No’; if one asks for a little he says to give it all;
 (*saba daina kahaī*)
- 1a He says ‘No no!’; if one asks for a little he says not a word;
 (*sabadai na kahaī*)
- 1b seeing a beggar he gives garments over and over.
 (*bāra* ‘time’)
- 1b seeing a beggar he refuses him repeatedly and closes the door.
 (*bār-* ‘to refuse’)
- 2a For those who meet him it’s a moment for good profit
 (*ghaṭī* ‘moment’)

⁴⁹ Senāpati, ed. Umāśaṅkar Śukla, 1936:13. Śukla’s gloss on pp. 152-53 misses several of the meanings suggested here.; cf. his discussion on p. 41, with a clearer interpretation of the phrase *janama na bhae*.

- 2a For those who meet him there's real loss of income
(*ghaṭī 'loss'*)
- 2b he is ever pleasing to the hearts of all people, for sure;
(*jana mana*)
- 2b he is ever unpleasing in all births, for sure;
(*janama na*)
- 3a he lives as a voluptuary, delighting in the world.
(*bilasata avanī*)
- 3a he lives as a serpent in its hole amidst the seven nether regions.
(*bila sata avanī*)
- 3b He does not hoard gold; almsgiving, recitations and retinue abound.
(*kanaka na jorāī; dāna pāṭha parivāra hai*)
- 3b He hoards every grain; almsgiving and recitations are vexation to him.
(*kana kana jorāī; dāna pāṭha parivā [for paravā(ha) 'care'] rahai*)
- 4 Consider the invention of Senāpati's words, in which
the generous man and the miser are both made as one.

Bihārī: BR 102 contains a pun on *hāsī*, used once to mean 'laughter' and a second time (as *hāsī*) to mean 'like yes' or 'yes-like'.

जदपि नाहिं नाहीं नहीं बदन लगी जक जाति ।
तदपि भौह हाँसी भरिनु हाँसीयै ठहराति ॥ ३२४ ॥

Although her lips reiterate a constant "No Sir! No!"
she smiles with rakish eyebrow—ah,
she's miles from meaning so!

sandeha 'doubt'. There is uncertainty over the differentiation between two similar things. Matirām's *Lalit-lalām* makes a subject of the colour of the heroine's lips, articulating the doubt through the archly ironic repeated adverb *kaidhaū* (*kidhaū*) 'either...or' – 'could it possibly be X, or perhaps even Y?' – while knowing all the while that it is actually Z (i.e. the passion of the heroine, which lends such colour to her pure, 'innocent' petal-like lips):

परचि परै नहिं अरुन रंग अमल अधरदल माँझ ।
कैधौं फूली दुपहरी कैधौं फूली साँझ ॥ ८५ ॥⁵⁰

The redness midst her perfect lip-petals is unfamiliar:
Has the noonflower bloomed, or is it the blush of evening?

⁵⁰ Matirām, ed. Omprakāś Śarmā, 1983:32.

samāsokti ‘brevity of utterance’. The direct description of one thing hints at the indirect description of another. This example from the *Bhāṣā-bhūṣaṇ* has the moon and the sun represent human lovers:

सजनी रजनी पाइ शशि विहरत रस भर पूर ।
आलिंगत प्राची मुदित कर पसारि कै सूर ॥ ९६ ख ॥ ⁵¹

Friend: finding nightfall, the moon roves blissfully
and embraces the East, blithely reaching its hands to the sun.

The many difficulties of translating such a couplet are typified by the dual meanings of the word *kara* (both ‘hand’ and ‘ray’) in the second line.

Bihārīlāl purports to describe a mercantile deal, but the real coin of trade is, of course, love:

लोभ लगे हरि रूप कै करी साँटि जुरि जाइ ।
हौं इनि बेची बीचि ही लौंइन बड़ी बलाइ ॥ ११४ ॥

Greedy for Hari’s assets, my ruinous eyes
struck a secret deal with him,
and sold me off right there and then.

smaraṇa or *smṛti* ‘remembrance’. Recollection of past events: something is brought to memory by something that resembles or suggests it. The *Bhāṣā Bhūṣaṇa* connects *smaraṇa* (written *sumirana* in its vernacular form) to *bhrama* ‘illusion’ and *sandeha* ‘doubt’, in the following pair of couplets:

सुमिरन भ्रम संदेह यह लक्षण नाम प्रकास ।
सुधि आवति वा वदन की देखें सुधा निवास ॥ ६२ ॥
वदन सुधानिधि जानि यह तुअ साँग फिरत चकोर ।
वदन किधौं यह सीतकर किधौं कमल भय भोर ॥ ६३ ॥ ⁵²

The attributes of ‘memory’, ‘delusion’ and ‘doubt’ are clear from their names. ‘On seeing “nectar’s home” (the moon) I am reminded of [her] face’.

‘Partridges wander about with you, thinking your face the moon’;
‘Is this [her] face, or the cool-rayed moon, or a lotus at dawn?’

This poem from the *Satsaī* is a nostalgic pastoral; but the true and unstated focus of the memory is the figure of Kṛṣṇa.

⁵¹Bihārīlāl, ed. G.A. Grierson, 1896:75. (The dohā does not appear in the Prasād edition, 1957).

⁵² Bihārī, comm. Lallū Lāl, ed. Grierson, 1896:59.

सघन कुंज छाये सुखद सीतल सुरभि समीर ।
मनु है जातु अजौं वहै उहि यमुना के तीर ॥ ६८८ ॥

Cool fragrant breezes wafting the shade
of a leafy grove: my heart would be again
on that Yamuna shore.

svabhāvokti ‘natural expression’. Its straightforward naturalness – the direct opposite of *vakrokti* or oblique figurative usage, makes it a contentious ‘figure’, and some authorities do not consider it to be one at all. But the very plainness of a natural image is enhanced by the contrast with elaboration that prevails in *rīti* poetry; its simplicity is a pleasant relief amidst the baroque extravagance of more contrived figures of speech (like that of plain Shaker furniture, or a Western musical scale with neither sharps nor flats). Thus in Kṛpārām’s description in *Hit-taraṅginī* of a young wife after love-making, the verse is effective precisely because her history is so straightforwardly revealed by her appearance:

अरुन नयन खंडित अधर खुले केस अलसाति ।
देखि परी पति पास तें आवति बधू लजाति ॥१८८॥⁵³

Reddened eyes, bruised lip, loose hair, languishing:
the young wife is espied coming bashfully from her husband.

Bihārī: BR 155 describes a heroine whiling away her time on domestic tasks as she waits impatiently for the trysting hour.

Other poetic conventions

Bihārī’s poetry also reflects a number of other conventions running in parallel with the taxonomic classifications described above. These conventions draw together a number of complementary themes, or descriptive items, to constitute certain formalised sets or series of poetic conceits. Too numerous to be described here in full, they can be exemplified by just three of the most common types: the *ṣaḍṛtu-varṇan* or ‘description of the six seasons’, whose title betrays its origin in Sanskrit tradition; and two vernacular genres with vernacular titles – the *bārahmāsā* or ‘[lament of] the twelve-months’, and the *solah siṅgār* (Sanskrit *ṣṛṅgāra*) or ‘sixteen graces’, devoted to loving descriptions

⁵³ Kṛpārām, ed. Sudhākar Pāṇḍey, 2026:25.

of the heroine.⁵⁴ Any one of these might form the organising principle of a short independent poem, or might be framed as a descriptive sequence within a longer text. Bihārī's chosen metre of the *dohā/sorṭhā* is generally too short to exhibit full examples of these figures, but their prevalence is part of the background to his poetry.

Description of the six seasons – *ṣaḍṛtu varṇan*

This convention describes the six seasons of the yearly cycle: spring, summer, rains, autumn, winter, cool season. Deriving from Sanskrit *kāvya*, it is taken up enthusiastically by many vernacular poets, who depict the cycle of seasons as an ever-changing backdrop to their favoured romantic and erotic themes. A framework for conventional description is given by the early 14th-century Maithilī text *Varṇa-ratnākar* by Jyotīśvara, which is a 'sort of lexicon of vernacular and Sanskrit terms, a repository of literary similes and conventions dealing with the various things in the world and ideas which are usually treated in poetry'⁵⁵. The fourth *kallol* or chapter of the text begins with a prose listing of items for use in describing the six seasons, the first of which is 'spring':

॥ अथ वसन्तवर्णना ॥ वृक्षक नूतनता · | पल्लवक उद्गम · कुमुदक सम्भार · मलयानिलक
वेग · कोकिलाक कलरव · भ्रमरक झंकार · कन्दर्प प्रभाव · विरहिनीक उत्कण्ठा · नायकक
हरष · नायिकाक अभिलाष · दिनकरक रम्यता · शिशि(र)क अपगम · मधु(क)रक समृद्धि ·
पूष्पक सौरभ · पवनक आकांक्षा | ⁵⁶

Thus the description of spring. Freshness of the trees; the growing of shoots; a cluster of lotuses; the current of the Malaya breeze⁵⁷; the sweet murmur of the she-cuckoo; the buzzing of the bee; the might of Kāmdev; the longing of the separated woman; the rapture of the hero; the desire of the heroine; the loveliness of the day-maker; the retreat of the cold season; the richness of the honey-bee; the fragrance of flowers; the desire of the wind.

⁵⁴ The 'numerical' titles of such genres brings to mind the parallel convention of such titles as *Satsai/Sattasai/Saptaśati*, as discussed in chapter one; the abstract quality of numbers – the ultimate taxonomic medium – sits neatly in a literary tradition that holds taxonomy in such high esteem.

⁵⁵ Jyotīśvar, ed S.K. Chatterji and Babua Misra 1940:xxi. Chatterji's elegant introduction to this remarkable work is highly recommended.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 18-19. Nouns in possessive case have the Maithili genitive termination *-ka*. The bracketing of syllables in the original indicates textual revisions (the text having been edited from the sole extant manuscript).

⁵⁷ The 'Malaya' mountains, in Kerala, perfume passing breezes with the scent of their sandal trees.

Thus each season has its own particular set of associations. The poet's aim is to exploit their potential in describing the situation of lover and beloved, combining elements of naturalism with a heightened poetic portrayal of the idealised lovers. Court poets such as Senāpati might additionally paint their royal patrons into those heroic roles; and their descriptions would allude to such essential and realistic palace comforts as the *khas-khānā*, a room fitted out with screens of fragrant *khas* grass which, when kept damp, bring a little freshness to the air. The noonday sun of the high-summer month of Jeth (May-June) lends a midnight stillness to the world: but the *riti* poet infuses the mood with a langorous sensuality.

प्रात नृप न्हात करि असन बसन गात
 पैंधि सभा जात जौ लौं बासर सुहात है ।
 पीछे अलसाने प्यारी संग सुख साने बिह-
 रत खसखसाने जब घाम नियरात है ॥
 लागे हैं कपाट सेनापति रंग मंदिर के
 परदा परे न खरककत कहुँ पात है ।
 कोई न भनक हैहै चनक मनक रही
 जेठ की दुपहरी कि मानों अधरात है ॥ १३ ॥⁵⁸

At dawn the king bathes, eats, dresses,
 attends council while the day still pleases;
 When the heat approaches he resorts to a cooled chamber
 revelling in delight, lazing with his lover.
 Senāpati, the pleasure-palace doors are closed,
 the drapes drawn to, not a leaf moves;
 Not a sound; all stirring's stilled –
 like midnight is the afternoon in June.

'Lament of the twelve months': the *Bārahmāsā*.

The second 'seasonal' genre, the *bārahmāsā*, has a more specific theme: a poetic account of the twelve months of the year becomes a calendar of lovesickness, each month being described in terms of the special anguish it brings to a heroine who is enduring the pangs of separation. Pleasant things trigger memories of happier times, while painful things exacerbate the mental suffering of the already languishing *virahinī*. Particularly arduous are the four rainy months, whose onset further postpones an absent lover's return; sometimes the convention is honed down to just this four-month monsoon period or *caumāsā*, whose name then identifies songs of this more narrowly-focussed genre. Unlike the Sanskrit *ṣaḍṛtu varṇan*, the *bārahmāsā* and *caumāsā* are vernacular conventions, very close to the spirit of folk-song (to borrow a Western taxonomy). The *Ras-prabodh* of Raslīn has an elegant section entitled

⁵⁸ Senāpati, ed. Umāśaṅkar Śukla 1936: 57.

‘*Viyog mē bārahmāsā varṇan*’, ‘description of the twelve months in separation’, in which each month is described in a pair of *dohās*. The following two couplets describe the monsoon month of Sāvan with its stormy skies commanded by Maghavā (Indra), who is equipped with arrows (lightning bolts) and bow (rainbow):

हाथ सरासन बान गहि मघवा सासन मानि ।
मन भावन बिन प्रान इन सावन लीन्हौं आनि ॥ १०३० ॥

ज्यौं सागर सलिता लता द्रुमन लगाई अंग ।
त्यौं सावन मिलवत न क्यौं मों मन भावन संग ॥ १०३१ ॥ ≥ 59

Indra has bow and arrow in his hand; yield to his power.
He brings Sāvan to this soul bereft of Life’s Joy.

Why should I not cleave to my Life’s Joy
as stream comes to ocean, as creeper clings to tree’s limbs?

The ‘sixteen graces’ – *solah śiṅgār*

This system of classifying the various attributes of the heroine has no set list of components.⁶⁰ An alternative name is *nava-sat śiṅgār*, in which ‘sixteen’ is represented as ‘nine [plus] seven’, but even this has no obvious implication for a specific breakdown of the contents. Usually the *śiṅgār* are taken as referring to literal acts of ‘embellishment’, namely the applying of cosmetics and unguents, and the wearing of certain garments and adornments. But the list may include physical attributes such as a deep navel or a slender waist, and even abstract qualities, such as skilfulness or loveliness. The ordering of items within the list of sixteen often follows the pattern of another set-piece descriptive convention, the *nakh-śikh varṇan* or ‘[toe-] nail to top of head’ descriptions which progress sequentially up (or sometimes down, in *śikh-nakh* order) the heroine’s body, lingering on such items as her hair, forehead, eyebrows, eyelashes, and so on, as might the eye of some ogling admirer; this convention is itself a popular genre, much favoured in allegorical Sufi romances, where it is interpreted allegorically.⁶¹

The sixteen items within a *solah śiṅgār* may be specifically named as the focus of a conceit; or, as occasionally in devotional verse, may be simply the implicit organising principle underlying a descriptive passage. A typical *solah-*

⁵⁹ Saiyad Gulām Nabī ‘Raslīn’, ed. Sudhākar Pāṇḍey 1987:191.

⁶⁰ For a comparative discussion of *solah śiṅgār* lists see Rupert Snell 1991b:222-24.

⁶¹ For a fine example translated from Qutban’s *Mṛigāvatī* (or *Mṛgāvatī*), dated 1501, see Aditya Behl 2004.

siṅgār in Vṛnd's *Śṛṅgār-sīkṣā*, dated VS 1748 (c. 1691 AD), devotes one *dohā* and usually one *kavitta* verse to each of the sixteen graces, the whole being preceded by an index in *chappaya* metre. The scribe or editor has identified the sixteen components in this index with superscript numerals:

प्रथम सकल सुचि १ समुझि बहुरि करियें तन मंजन २ ।
 बसन ३ महाउर चरन ४ चिकुर रचना ५ मन रंजन ॥
 अंगराग ६ भूषन अनेक ७ मुख वास ८ राग ९ पुनि ।
 अंजन नैन १० चितौनि ११ मधुर बोलन १२ सुहसन धुनि १३ ॥
 चातुरी १४ चलन १५ पतिव्रतपन १६ वृंद नियम कबि यह धरत ।
 जद्यपि अपार सिंगार तरु तिय सिंगार सोरह करत ॥ ४४ ॥⁶²

Firstly, mark, a complete cleansing¹, then a body-grooming²;
 clothing³, lac on the feet⁴, pleasing hair-adornment⁵.
 Then unguents⁶, ornaments a-plenty⁷, mouth-fragrance⁸, [lip-] colour⁹;
 eye-black¹⁰, glancing¹¹, sweet talking¹², smiling tone¹³.
 Skilfulness¹⁴, gait¹⁵, faithfulness to husband¹⁶ –
 Vṛnd, these rules the poet maintains:
 Though graces are unlimited, a woman adopts sixteen.

The poetic importance of the *solah śṛṅgār* conceit lies, of course, in the delicacy of its wording and the skilful versification of the elaborated items themselves: 'smiling', for example, is itself divided by Vṛnd into a further four categories, and 'skilfulness' is associated with the 'sixty-four arts' (*caūsaṭ(h) kalā*) – yet another conventional set of attributes required of the busy and idealised heroine. The quoted verse is nothing more than a convenient listing of topics to be covered more expansively in the *kavitta* and *dohā* verses that follow it. 'Faithfulness to husband', the last item in the list, is there described as the essence of all graces (*saba siṅgāra ko sāra*).

Is it all just 'rhetoric'?

This chapter has brought together some of the literary conventions that form a backdrop to Bihārī's compositions. They feature in texts that would probably have been known to him through routine scholarship, and they are the raw materials to which he would naturally have turned as a basis for his poetic constructions.

But the matter does not end here. It would be a sorry thing if one of the most celebrated poets of the Hindi canon were to be represented as a mere rhymester whose function was to assemble pre-formed rhetorical formulae like so many children's bricks. From the perspective of literary criticism, to use the *alaṅkāras* as a primary means of analysing the poetry of the *Satsaī* is to leave many important things unsaid. The *alaṅkāra* system shows the backdrops of

⁶² Vṛnd, ed. Janārdan Rāc Celer, p.41.

meaning on which a poet may project his inventions, and it facilitates a systematic categorisation of poetic content; but it constitutes a poor methodology for a sympathetic reading and analysis of an individual work. It may calibrate a poem, but cannot celebrate it. Many of the *Satsaī*'s commentators, being in thrall to the *alankāra* tradition,⁶³ put too high a price on the identification of its set-piece categories, contexts and characters: they pin down the text within a classification system similar to the one that Melvil Dewey invented for books in libraries. Literalness, and an insistence on black-and-white distinctions of meaning, is a common and heinous crime among the commentators; when reading their works one sometimes wonders what happened to the rich inheritance of *dhvani* and to the subtlety of interpretation associated with it. In their perennial search for puns, the commentators hope to tease out 'Meaning One', 'Meaning Two' and so forth; and in so doing they regard open-ended ambiguity and allusiveness – the very soul of poetry – as a dangerous leak to be plugged by whatever resources come to hand.

A particular procedural weakness in many of the commentaries is their banal identification of the tropes used in a particular poem, as it were 'ticking the box' to record a usage of *yamaka* or *dr̥ṣṭānta* or *anuprāsa*, without showing much interest in how such figures actually contribute to the total aesthetic effect of the poem. The use of *anuprāsa* (alliteration) provides the clearest example of this. 'This poem contains alliteration' is the dullest of comments; what is needed is an analysis of the way in which the alliteration connects particular words or phrases in the couplet, and of the semantic and aesthetic alchemy that results from the process.

The rhetorical component of Bihārī's poetry, then, has to be seen in the round, and not in isolation. It is to be viewed as a list of potential building materials, not as a blueprint for actual designs, still less a definition of a finished structure. To appreciate the full aesthetic impact of Bihārī's couplets calls for more attention to their individuality and to the totality of ways in which affective language and structural technique is used in specific cases.

⁶³ Even the commonly invoked insistence on the requisite characteristics of the *rasika* or *sahṛdaya* as the ideal 'reader' for such poetry tends to become overblown and hyperbolic: after all, every sophisticated art-form requires its audience to be educated in its conventions, though few rival systems of aesthetics make quite such a song and dance about it as is found in the *rasa*-based system.

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