The Nail-Mark That Lit the Bedroom

Biography of a Compound

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A. Introduction

In this essay I set out to examine really long compounds in Sanskrit literature. Extensive experiments with the possibilities and potentials of nominal compounds appear in Sanskrit versified poetry from its inception and, even more so, in belletristic prose, whether inscribed in stone or found in manuscripts that started to circulate in South Asia during the first half of the first millennium CE. By the sixth century, when the Vásavadattā of Subandhu, the first extant Sanskrit kāvya work that is entirely in prose, was probably written, compounds combining ten, twenty, and even thirty words had become a fixture in kāvya.¹

Surprisingly, no analytical framework exists to explain such colossal composite words. From the point of view of Sanskrit grammarians and commentators, the same basic analyses apply to all compounds regardless of their length.² Sanskrit literary theorists have

1. A history of early Sanskrit prose is still very much a desideratum. For prose in early inscriptions, see Sharma 1968, 8–12. For a discussion of Sanskrit works on Buddhist themes that involve prose passages, see Hahn 1977. The poetic nature of the prose in the anonymous Buddhist work the Lalitavistara, potentially a crucial link in the evolution of belletristic prose in Sanskrit, is one of the topics of He 2012.

2. "Most Sanskrit compounds, no matter how many words they are composed of, can be analyzed in the first instance as compounds containing two members ... In the longer compounds, of course, either or both of these members may itself be a compound
little to say about spun-out compounds other than to associate them primarily with prose and its “force” (ṣvās), and view their presence in verse as a matter of regional preference.3 Indologists are at best highly apologetic about the plethora of such monster amalgamations in the Sanskrit canon and, with very few exceptions, have failed even to address the possibility of their having some aesthetic value.4 Scholars working on the vastly creative mechanisms of compounding in modern languages are keenly aware of the imaginative, alliterative, and metaphorical processes involved in compounds such as “Picasso porn” (“the scrambled signal of a pornographic cable channel as seen by a nonsubscriber”) or “Hogwarts headache” (“migraine headache caused by the physical stress of reading the 870-page Harry Potter book, The Order of the Phoenix”).5 But they have yet to come across, let alone analyze, an unostentatious 15-member specimen. In short, it turns out that we know very little about one of the most conspicuous phenomena of Sanskrit literary culture. What happens inside and around a long Sanskrit compound? How does it work syntactically, rhythmically, and figuratively? What, if any, is its aesthetic charm?

If we are to examine really long compounds, we obviously have to look for them in the works of Sanskrit’s prose masters, who, free from the metrical confines of versified poetry, fully explored their potentials. There is no better candidate for this analysis than Subandhu, the great pioneer of ornate Sanskrit prose. In his Vāsavadattā, which narrates the amazing story of a prince and a princess who first come together in a shared dream and then manage to locate one another in waking and pursue their love against all odds, Subandhu invents an entirely new type of literature, marked by a remarkably intricate and largely autonomous linguistic world. At the heart of Subandhu’s prose is his experimentation with simultaneity (ṣīla).6 But Subandhu’s elegant, complex, and extended compounds are equally innovative and occupy a very prominent place in his baroque-like prose.

Taking its inspiration from A. L. Becker’s “biography” of a single Burmese proverb,7 this essay consists of a close examination of one of the many compounds found in Subandhu’s Vāsavadattā. Although the sample, chosen almost randomly, is, at least in one sense, small, I argue that it gives voice to the central themes of the work of which it is a part and exemplifies some of the major socioaesthetic trajectories of kātyā.

The compound under discussion comes from the longest sentence in the Vāsavadattā, which depicts the dream wherein Kandapaketa, the hero, first sees his beloved (whose name, Vāsavadattā, he learns only much later). The length and complexity of this 65-line-long sentence are clearly a statement about the importance of this moment in the plot; they also offer a clue about the possible intersection between the two realms Subandhu foregrounds: the imaginative/inner realm of the dreamer/lover and the intricate linguistic construct of the poet. Subandhu creates in this sentence an almost unbearable syntactic and narrative suspense. Broadly speaking, the sentence has two parts. The first dwells on the nocturnal and highly eroticized temporal setting, just at the moment when the night is reaching its end (avavanduyād yamavatya). The second gradually
zooms in on the physical attributes and many charms of a female object, supplying only at the very end the verb "he saw" (apāyati), the object, "an eighteen-year-old girl" (aṣṭādaśavrīśāyāṁ kanyāṁ), and, finally, the fact that all this took place in a dream (svapna).8

Our compound du jour (or rather, de la nuit) is from the sentence's first part, where the setting of the dreamer is being described. This description is divided into several clusters of clauses. It begins with the gradual and highly erotic depiction of the setting moon, itself the lover of Ms. Water Lily (kumudini-nāyaka). Then it turns to a predawn murmur that begins to build up: the humming of bees, stuck inside louruses that shut at night; the soft singing of mynah birds, a living alarm clock for those women who must now wake and rush home from the apartments of their lovers; the recitation of diligent students who rise early; and the quiet chanting of pilgrims who begin to fill the streets. Several additional clauses are dedicated to a beautiful description of the lamps as they run out of oil and die. This, then, is the darkest hour, right before the dawn, and the sentence turns to describe an important icon of this liminal moment: women who lie embraced by their partners after a long night of love. We are still only halfway into the sentence, which has so far proceeded in adverbial clauses in absolute constructions, called locative absolutes (Sanskrit: sati saptami). Many of these clauses contain or consist of long compounds.9

B. The Sanskrit Compound and the Problems of Translation

Here is the compound under discussion:

[na-naka-pada-dāsta-kėla-pāla-vinirmoka-vedanā-kṛta-
sie-kēna-viniragata-dugdha-mugdha-dāna-kirna-dhavalī-
bhagavānān]10

8. Vīrasaṅkṛiti of Subandhu, pp. 28–41 (unless otherwise noted, all references to the Vīrasaṅkṛiti are to the 1906 edition of T. V. Śrīnivasa Chari.). For a good discussion of sentence structure in the prose of Bāpa, Subandhu’s successor, see Haucck: 1985, 51–70. For a discussion of the structure and plot of the Vīrasaṅkṛiti, see Bronner 2010, 25–26.

9. See Vīrasaṅkṛiti, pp. 28–29 for descriptions of the setting moon, 29 for the description of the predawning murmur, including the hum of the bees, stuck inside the lotus (śītra-kēna-liṅga-khandanā-kramed-pata ṣa-vaḥ-śriya-hakkha-caranāyacī sa-caranāya), and 29–30 for the complex clauses describing the dying away of the lamps. The description of the women begins on page 30 and continues until page 33 (priyaāś dīvyatāmanā kūmāritā).


It is unclear how to render a long nominal stretch into English. We may begin by supplying a word-by-word gloss:


As can be seen, just to replace the Sanskrit words with English ones, thereby creating a so-called English compound, amounts to gibberish. In an article titled “Some Problems in the Translation of Sanskrit Poetry,” Daniel Ingalls discusses a similar situation he encountered when translating a verse from the Vṛṣṇiṭhānara that is dominated by two bulky compounds. Ingalls, too, first supplies a literal paraphrase of the verse and its compounds, both of which are significantly shorter than the specimen from the Vīrasaṅkṛiti, only to note that “to adhere to the original structure will drive [one’s] reader to confusion or laughter, an effect of which one must be ashamed,” for the Sanskrit original “is not confusing or comical; it is clear and passionate.”11

This problem of translation, however, is not necessarily a bad one. As Becker reminds us, “Translation for the philologist ... is not the final goal but only a first step, a necessary first step, in understanding a distant text; necessary because it opens for us the exuberances and deficiencies of our own interpretations and so helps us see what kinds of self-correction must be made.”12 Our initial “translation” certainly highlights several deficiencies dictated by the capacities of the target language. To begin with, every compound elides syntactic information that the listener or reader is expected to restore and process instantly. Take, for example, the initial part of the earlier gloss—“fresh-nail-mark-stuck-hair”—where the fact that the hair is stuck on the fresh nail-marks (the supplied morpheme and preposition are italicized) is not explicitly stated and has to be understood. But it is clear that English readers do not have the habit of cognizing syntactic information in a compound longer than four or five words at most, and that part of the gibberish-like feel of the English nominal amalgamation is that after the first few items it begins to read like a long list of unrelated words. A Sanskrit reader, by contrast, can be trusted to stomach this long, demorphologized nominal sequence whole and cognize the words' syntactic relations despite the fact that much more linguistic matter is actually dropped in Sanskrit, given its intricate system of endings for marking the case, number, and gender of each independent noun. If an English reader is to digest it, the Sanskrit compound

must first be chopped into its constitutive elements, and each must be served with its own syntactic dressing.

Even worse, our strange "English" compound awkwardly replicates the left-branching structure of the original. Again, this is possible in English only in short compounds (for example, "homemade," for something that is made at home, and "snow-white," for someone who is white like snow) and sounds jarring in anything that is more than one or two words longer. Subandhu's compound, by contrast, has a staggeringly complex left-branching structure. "Bedroom" (bhogdāsāsā, literally "pleasure room"), in itself a small compound that stands at the rightmost end of the larger compound, is a head noun that governs a series of subordinated and boxed modifiers. Thus, a translation informed by English syntactic sensibilities will not only lead to chopping up the compound; it will also have to reverse its directionality and follow the logic of its embedded structure by starting from the end and proceeding backward.

Our initial difficulties in translating the compound thus force us to sketch the syntax of Subandhu's elegant and seamless nominal flow. Here is such a rendering of the compound that starts at the end and supplies the missing syntactic information in twelve basic steps:

1. "Bedroom" is modified by the participle "whitened."
2. This participle, in turn, has as its agent a light "beam."
3. "Beam," or "beams," has "tooth," which stands for "teeth," as its source.
4. "Beams" also seems to govern the adjective "charming," which, in turn, is modified by a comparison to "milk," implying that the beams are milk-white.
5. "Beams" is likewise modified by the participle "outlet," or discharged (in the sense of being outwardly projected).
6. "Outlet," for its part, is modified by its cause or source, a "sigh."
7. "Sigh" governs the participle "made," modified, in turn, by its agent, "ache."
8. "Ache" is specified as resulting from a "removal," or release.
9. "Removal" governs its object, a "bunch" of "hair."
10. "Hair" is modified as "stuck."

11. The participle "stuck" is modified by its locus: the hair is stuck onto a "nail-mark" (which, as we have already noted, stands for a plurality of nail-marks), another small compound with which our backward journey almost ends.

12. But if we assume that the reading nātra is correct, the minicompound "nail-mark" is itself modified as "fresh" or "new."

Even this detailed syntactic analysis is partial because "bedroom" is not the real head noun, since the compound as a whole is exocentric. In other words, this vast left-branching compound is only an adjective modifying a noun that appears much further to the right: "lovers [feminine]" (kāminīṣṇu). The compound, then, is not about whitened bedrooms, but about women-in-love who have their rooms whitened.14

Louis Gray's 1913 translation of the Vāsavadattā reflects this syntactic analysis. Indeed, his translation of the sentence proceeds backward, or rightward, in more than one way: the dream's female object is spelled out before the description that precedes it, the head noun of the adverbial absolute clauses (women-lovers) is given before the exocentric compounds that modify it, and each compound, including our specimen, is translated from end to beginning, as can be seen below:

When damsels … illuminated their apartments by the light of the rays of their milk- white teeth, revealed through their sobbing at the pain caused by the loosening of the hair which adhered to the fresh nail-marks.15

Gray's translation is obviously not particularly elegant, and I discuss one of its problematic lexical choices later. But the point is not to criticize previous translators, but to further the Beekerian investigation into our own "exuberances and deficiencies" in order to deepen our understanding of Subandhu's compound. Recall that our first attempt merely to replace the Sanskrit words with English equivalents, using the original word order, resulted in gibberish. Gray's translation,

13. As T. V. Shrivastav notes: viniṅgatāṁ bahir niśūpāṁ dagdhamuḥ kāntavat ibhavat dhavałāḥ sābhāḥ ye datahakyaṁ kāntaṁ tathā dhavañcāḥ (Vāsavadattā, p. 32; the commentator chose not to apply sandhi rules to his gloss). Srivastav notes in agreement with Śrīvarma Tripāthī's older gloss (which follows a slightly variant reading: viniṅgatāṁ bhāvamadugdhahūn dātanavatāḥ tathā śvāvāhāḥ [Vāsavadattā, p. 51]. Another possible analysis is to take the participle "outlet" (viniṅgata) in the sense "exposed" or "revealed," thereby modifying not "beams" but "teeth," the beams' source. This, as we shall see later, is how Louis Gray translated the compound. Gray also understood the comparison to milk as modifying the teeth rather than the light beams they project. Such syntactic

14. One of the first modern linguists to distinguish between exocentric and endocentric compounds was Bloomfield (1933, 235), who acknowledges the inspiration of Sanskrit grammarians in this and other conceptualizations of compounds, and the nature and value of this distinction have been debated ever since (for a good summary with a focus on the English language, see Rencz 2005, 15–39). An even earlier use of this terminology is found in Alekandrav 1888, 110 (I am grateful to Victor D'Avella for this reference). For Sanskrit traditional grammarians, of course, this distinction is old. The Sanskrit term for an exocentric compound is bhavasthairī, while that for an endocentric compound modifies this one.
by contrast, follows the logic of the compound’s embedded syntax in a way that
at least makes sense to English readers. Of course, the exposition proceeds by
way of undoing this very syntax and replacing it with rightward devices, such as
the relative clause (“hair which adhered”), because the English language has a
hard time flexing itself leftward. The main problem with this procedure, aside
from its inherent clumsiness, is that it violates the forward-moving (left-to-right)
temporal logic of the compound’s chain of events, wherein the result of one
action is the immediate cause of the next. Six such actions are referred to in the
compound:

1. [Implied]: the night’s lovemaking left fresh nail-marks on the women’s breasts.
2. Wet wounds from the lover’s nails cause the women’s hair to stick to them.
3. Removal of the stuck hair causes pain.
4. Pain causes sighing.
5. Sighing causes the milk-white rays of the teeth to emanate.
6. The rays wash the bedrooms white.

As Gray’s translation indicates, precisely because of its failure to capture it, the
power of the compound rests partly on this constant forward flow of causes and
effects. The seminal thinker Abhinavagupta made a similar observation when he
was commenting on a compound from the *Veṣṇimāhā*, the difficulties in translat-
ing which are the topic of Ingalls’s aforementioned discussion. This compound
depicts Bhima’s vow to wash Draupadi’s hair in the blood gushing from
Suyodhana’s thighs after he, Bhima, crushes them with his club. Abhinavagupta
notes: “From the long compound, flowing in an uninterrupted stream and
allowing the hearer no pause in all its course, there results an apprehension of
the whole scene as a unity up to the presentation of the broken-thighed Suyodhana.
This serves to intensify the impression of Bhima’s violence.”

Abhinavagupta’s perceptive comment can be taken as a pioneering attempt
to spell out what is actually forceful about the poetic quality of “force” (*ojas*),
which consists, as previous writers have noted, of the dominant presence of large
compounds in prose and occasionally in verse. For Abhinavagupta, the uninter-
rupted flow of fierce acts within the boundaries of one long compound is its
force because it powerfully underscores the overall dramatic nature of Bhima’s
violent undertaking. For Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta, moreover, only
poetry dominated by wrath (*raudra*), bravery (*vīra*), or adventure (*adbhūta*
seems to have “force,” whereas love (*prīgāna*) is typified by “sweetness” (*mādhurya*),
a quality often defined by the lack of long compounds, at least in verse. It should
be remembered, however, that these thinkers are not proposing anything like a
detailed theory of poetic qualities; all they wish to do is to appropriate this
older concept into their thesis about the dominance of suggestion of emotional
“flavors” (*rasas*) in poetry. Hence they briefly demonstrate that qualities like
“force” and “sweetness” are subordinated to emotional flavors, such as “wrath”
and “love,” respectively, or, indeed, that they are qualities of these *rasas*.

Thus one wonders if Abhinavagupta’s insight about the nominal stretch from
the *Veṣṇimāhā* might not also apply to the compound from the
*Vātavṛata*, despite their obvious differences in formal context (one is part of a
verse, the other is in prose), emotional flavor (wrath, eros), and content (each
delineates a very different sequence of actions). This is because Subandhu’s
compound, just like the one from the *Veṣṇimāhā*, if not more so, allows the
hearer no pause in its course and results in the apprehension of the unity of its
drama, delicate and small scale though it may be. The unfolding of this unbroken
chain of sticking-removing-aching-sighing-radiating-whitewashing on the intim-
ate stage of the bodies of these women and their bedrooms, while certainly
savory, has its own kind of tight orchestration and, indeed, force or intensity.
But we can access this force only if we read (or translate) the text in its original
order, from beginning to end.

To conclude: the long suspenseful compound—part of an even longer adver-
bial clause that itself is part of a massive sentence—is constituted by a tension
between two basic organizing logics or linearities: the forceful, forward succession
of acts on the axis of time and causality, and the complex backward arching of a
subordinated, embedded syntax. Although the two can somehow coexist in
Sanskrit, any rendering into English, even aside from the question of its intelli-
gibility, necessarily forces us to sacrifice one of them. Indeed, as it turns out,
much more is lost in translation.

C. Score and Structure

Although the seemingly incessant flow of Subandhu’s compound is unmarked by
morphological case endings, it is annotated by its musicality. This may surprise
those who tend to associate tune and melody with the rich and rhythmic

16. *samaeṣa ca susūtasevaśvahauṇasvabhāviṣī tāvata eva madhye vīrāṇim alabhāmāṇā cūrī
cirasu prasunadhauḥviṣā āryaḥ prātyāyāṃ yathā caryā uparāyaṃ avimāni

17. For Anandavardhana’s and Abhinavagupta’s discussion, see *Dharmapūla* of Ananda-
vardhana and *Abhinishkramana* of Abhinavagupta.
patterns of Sanskrit prosody. But despite not being metrically structured, or precisely because of this fact, Subandhu’s prose has its own rich musical texture, pleasing to the trained ear. I should say that the complex arrangement of the Vāsavadatta as a whole includes duets and solos, harmonies and cacophonies, lines and verses, and pauses as well as crescendos, all of which are beyond the scope of this discussion. But as it turns out, our compound, too, has its own miniscule. To begin with, note the basic echoes that reverberate as it unfolds: the first three words (nava-nakha-pada) present six identical vowels (a-a-a-a) and a nasal initial rhyme in its first pair of words (na ... na). The next triplet of words (daśa-keśa-pāśa) displays a consistent alliteration of sibilant sounds (s ... s ... s) and final rhyme on the final pair of words (a ... a). This is followed by resonance of initial labial sounds (v ... v ... v) in the pair vinirnokā-vedanā, an alliteration that is importantly carried over to the initial vi of vinirgata, several words down. In the next phonetic junction (keśa-sīkāra), one cannot miss another reverberating pair: kr ... kār. This is immediately followed by the perfect end rhymes—udgāha ... udgāha and anā ... anā—of the following two pairs of words, dugdha-mugdha and daśa-kanā, and by the resonance anā ... anā in dhavalīsa-ghoṣāsas as the compound comes to an end.

The compound’s score becomes even clearer when the pattern of “light” (laṭha, marked below by the letter l) and “heavy” (guru, marked by a g) syllables, the two basic values of Sanskrit metrics, is mapped out. It immediately becomes clear that what we are facing is much more than a pleasing set of rhymes and echoes, and that the seemingly amorphous compound is carefully divided into smaller units of two, three, or four words. Each such unit contains not only a distinct rhyme or alliteration among its member words, typically of similar length, but also a unique metrical pattern. Think, for example, of the first triplet of words (nava-nakha-pada) that follows an identical pattern of II-III, the second triplet (daśa-keśa-pāśa) with its symmetrical structure of gl-gl-gl, and the pairs dugdha-mugdha (gl-gl) and daśa-kanā (III-III), all of which show perfect rhythmic harmony between their members. Signaling the end of the compound is a very different pair, dhavalīsa-ghoṣāsas, which stands out for the cacophony of its constituting members. It consists of four light syllables in a row followed by four consecutive heavy ones (III-gl-gl) before the last light vowel su provides the necessary morphological ending, which ties this compound to its larger absolute structure and provides a much-needed breather for the reader/reciter.

The main exception to this otherwise regular succession of euphonically and metrically distinct units of two or three words occurs at the very center of the compound. Here the words are arranged in a more complicated chiastic structure. The nearly identical pair vinirnokā ... vinirgata, with its extended initial rhyme (vinir ... vinir), nearly identical set of vowels (iioa ... iioa), and a similar metrical pattern (ggl ... ggl) flanks this chiasmus from both ends. Couched in between are the words vedanā-keśa-sīkāra, which, technically speaking, are two mini-compounds, the second word of each of which is derived from the same verbal root, kr (“to do”). In addition to the obvious reverberation between keśa and kanā that has already been mentioned, this innermost part of the compound offers an almost palindromic metrical pattern that augments the sense of the chiasmus if it is taken as a single unit that is not parsed into words: gl-gl-gl-gl.

Here, then, is an analysis of the compound that follows its seven basic musical building blocks, as determined by alliteration, initial or end rhyme, vowel harmony, metrical/syllabic pattern, and, in most cases, a combination of all these elements:

(Unit 1) nava-nakha-pada: three words made of six identical vowels (a-a-a-a-a-a), with an initial rhyme in the first two members (na ... na) and an identical syllabic pattern (III-II-I).  
(Unit 2) daśa-keśa-pāśa: three words with a repeated alliteration of sibilant sounds (s ... s ... s), an end rhyme on the last two members (a ... a), and their own repeated metrical pattern (gl-gl-gl).
(Unit 3) vinirnokā ... vinirgata: two words that flank the center of the compound and parallel each other with their extended initial rhyme (vinir ... vinir), near-perfect vowel harmony (iioa-iioa), and very similar metrical design (ggl-ggl).
(Unit 4) vedanā-keśa-sīkāra: the inner duo, consisting of two smaller compounds, each of which ends with the echoing kr derivation (keśa ... kanā). The inner part as a whole has a near-palindromic metrical pattern (ggl-ggl).
(Unit 5) dugdha-mugdha: two words that have an extended end rhyme (udgāha ... udgāha), perfect vowel harmony (uia-uia), and a symmetrical syllabic design (gl-gl).

18. For an initial discussion of the possible importance of such metrical values in prose, see Huxley’s assertion in what he saw as an overall preference for sequences of light syllables in his remarks on the nature of the language of the Samājī or “in the early stage of the dialogue.”

19. It is primarily on the basis of the coherence of this unit and its perfect parallel with the following one that I prefer Hall’s reading, with nasa as the first word of the compound, which would tie this unit more securely with the next pair on either side of the center.
of a woman’s mouth. This may seem far-fetched until we recall that sīr-kara does not so much denote a “sigh” as it reproduces it audibly. It does not seem to be a coincidence that this centernote in the compound’s score is a verbal icon of its referent. Indeed, Subandhu is extremely fond of using a variety of sound bites, onomatopoeia, and echo words. Typically, these are employed in compounds that focus on the acoustics of the environment, such as the humming of bees, the chirping of birds, or the cracking of bones and skulls in the cremation ground through which Kandarpaketu and Vāsavadātā elope. In such cases, as I show elsewhere, the effect of the compound is to reproduce and enrich the sonorous or dreadful qualities of the setting.20

Here, however, although the compound’s complex arrangement, with its centrally located sound bite of a sigh, certainly creates a marvelous musicality, it is not necessarily meant to amplify the soundtrack of the bedroom. Indeed, it is more about light than it is about sound, or, more accurately, it is about the mysterious internal transformation of pain to sound and sound to light. The musical arrangement accentuates the different actors and acts in this process—one can think of the musical units as compensating for the syntactic information lost when the words enter the compound—and intersects in surprising ways with the compound’s two basic verticalities, which are suddenly revealed as more nuanced and complex than they initially seemed. This is particularly evident in the chiastic structure at the heart of the compound. In the logical flow of actions, the crosswise musical arrangement highlights a nexus where a sensory input (vinirnoka-vedana) is received and from which a luminous output (vinirgata… kara) is generated, and where the transformation takes place: note the density of derivations of the verb “to do” (keta, kara) at the core of the chiasmus. In terms of syntax, the two vinir words of unit 3 make up a crosswise structure that complements this logical flow because each point in a different direction. The former word and source of the input, vinirnoka (removal), is a verbal noun that governs an object to its left (a bunch of hair); and the latter, vinirgata (outlet, or output) is an adjective governed by a noun to its right (beams).

The following working “translation” tries to replicate something of the original’s rhythmic structure:

New nail lunules had hair adhered to them, then separated, a pain-turned-sss-sound radiated a snow-white tooth-light that milk-washed the walls of their bedrooms.
Thus the well-crafted musical pattern of the compound, hardly replicable in English, underscores its complex structure and surprising iconicity and provides us with the first clues about an all-important transformation that takes place in its epicenter. To understand this transformation and its wider "ecological" impact further, we will rest our compound for a while and embark on a short detour.

D. Sanskrit Compounds and the Ecosystem of Love

Kateya has a penchant for what we may call, for lack of a better term, ecological flowcharts. To illustrate what I mean by this, it may be useful to start with an example from a poet who belongs to a different tradition, Theodor S. Geisel, also known as Dr. Seuss. Here is an extract from one of his lesser-known works, *Scrambled Egg Super!:

I went for the kind that were mellow and sweet  
And the world's sweetest eggs are the eggs of the Kweet  
Which is due to those very sweet trout which they eat  
And those trout ... well, they're sweet 'cause they only eat Wogs  
And Wogs, after all, are the world's sweetest frogs  
And the reason they're sweet is, whenever they lunch  
It's always the world's sweetest bees that they munch  
And the reason no bees can be sweeter than these ...  
They only eat blossoms off Beezenut Trees  
And these Beezenut Blossoms are sweeter than sweet  
And that's why I nabbed several eggs from the Kweet.21

I cannot think of a Sanskrit poem that is quite like Dr. Seuss's, but there are, nonetheless, some noteworthy commonalities between his verse and kātya.22 One has to do with what I call "kātya's law of sweetness," which states that, as with the Kweet, produced sweetness always results from consumed sweetness.


22. Although many works have been dedicated to the thematic, rhetorical, pedagogical, and political agendas of Dr. Seuss, as well as to his illustrations, the study of his poetry has lagged behind (as noted in Nel 2004, 11–14; for a recent example, see Lange 2009). For a basic study of Seuss's poetics that includes rhythm, suspense, rhyme, and his use of nonsense language, among other features, see Nel 2004, 15–38. I have not yet come across a full-scale analysis of Seussian sweetness.

Consider, for example, a succinct formulation of this law in a poem from Govardhana's famous collection, the *Aryāśaptasati*:

\[
\text{ānātita-dayāśita-sudhā-rādāyitaā śūktayo mādhuraḥ}  
\text{aśāśita-rāsāśa-mukulo na kōlāyā kālām uḍarāyita}  
\]

Sweet are the words of him who has sipped  
elixir straight from his lover's lip.  
Without getting drunk on the mango shoot,  
a cuckoo can't coo its melodious coo.23

A verse is savory if and only if the poet has first savored love. Govardhana supports this positive statement about the human realm with a negative assertion concerning the natural world of mangoes and cuckoos. The structures of both of the verse's lines, providing the positive (anuvya) and negative (vyaśreka) formulations of this law, are, however, almost identical. Each line begins with a compound depicting a sweet substance: savored elixir from the lover's lip and an (un)munched mango blossom. Halfway into each line, the reader realizes that both compounds are exocentric: they are not about the sweet substances themselves but about those who relish them. The entity modified by the first compound, the poet, is only implied, whereas the head noun modified by the second, the cuckoo, is spelled out immediately to its left. But both these entities are located, whether implicitly or explicitly, at the center of their respective lines. Finally, both lines end by depicting the sweet output of poetry and cooing respectively. Note also that each line is tied together by a pattern of sound repetition that validates the law it formulates, in the sense that the words depicting the sweet output echo those depicting the savory input (for example, mādhura and adhāna, kālam and kālita). It should be noted that there is also a verbal echo that ties both halves of the poem together: the all-important word nāśa, which means "sap," "flavor," and also the "emotional flavor" for which poetry is savored, is mentioned in the first line and is reiterated in the second as part of the word conveying "mango" (rāśā). Obviously, Govardhana's perfectly structured "law of sweetness" gives voice to a fundamental aesthetic notion of his literary tradition, according to which an emotional transformation on the part of the poet (or character) is what enables the reader to relish his or her poetry.24

23. *Aryāśaptasati* of Govardhana 1.49. For a recent discussion of the *Aryāśaptasati* and its context, see Knutson 2009, 77–114, where this verse is mentioned apropos the question of the social experience underlying poetry (p. 89).

24. This aesthetic transformation can be explained most straightforwardly in cases where the initial experience is sweet, as with love, although the hegemonic poetic theory insists that good
Subandhu's long exocentric compounds often share a basic structural affinity with Govardhana's lines in that they tend to begin with some outside influence on one or more entity and end, through a chain of "ecological" reactions, in its impact on the outside environment. Moreover, the transformation that these compounds depict typically involves sweet substances and the way their savorness is reproduced and even perpetuated. And, as we have already seen, Subandhu's compounds, too, are tied by a musical pattern, even if it is much richer and far more complicated than in Govardhana's poem. Consider a relatively simple example from the Vāsavadatta, where Kandarpaketu, in his search for the girl from his dream, overhears a parrot that happens to be describing Vāsavadatta and, in this case, the advent of spring in her hometown:

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Here the soft southern breeze (komala-mālaya-mārata), known for its intoxicating sandalwood scent, mobilizes the world of love. It shakes the mango trees (uddhāta-cīta), whose flowers then flow with sap (prasava-rasa). Feasting on this nectar, the cuckoos burst into a frenzy of intoxicated sweet coos (svāda-kapīya-kanṭha-kalacīna-kubha-kubhārava), which fills every corner of the heavens (bharīita-sakala-dīn-mukhah). As in the compound on which this essay focuses, here too Subandhu begins by describing two external actors, the wind and the mango tree, coming into contact, and ends with a much longer description of an output, the perverted but pleasant melody of cuckoos. And as we have come to expect, Subandhu crafts a tightly constructed system of echoes, rhymes, and metrical patterns (for example, mala mala āta āta kantha kantha kuha kuha),25 which also highlights the existence of a center (rasa rasa), where the sweet substance of love is consumed and from which it is reproduced with even greater intensity.

In the second half of the compound (sa-madā-kala-kala-hamsa-sārasa-nasitēddhānta-bhāṅga-vikata-kūra-kaccha-vyādhiita-kamala-sānga-galiya-samara-sandeha-sambhiita-satiyad), the agent that brings about this transformation is the nail-mark that lit the bedroom (vānīh guruhitam "nail-mark that lit the bedroom")

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This time Subandhu begins with birdsong and ends with flower sap. The frenzied, resonant trill of the geese (sa-madā-kala-kala-hamsa) and the passionate crane-cry (sārasa-nasitēddhānta) are the agents that set the world in motion. They stir (vikata-kūra-kaccha) schools of bhāṅga fish, who, in their tumult, hit against clusters of lotuses (vyādhiita-kamala-sānga) with the huge fins of their chins (vikata-kūra-kaccha),27 causing a honey spill that is massive enough to perfume the water (sambhiita-satiyad) of one of India's major rivers.

I will not dwell on the carefully structured mellifluousness of this compound, the mimetic capacities of its phonology, and the recurrence of Subandhu's trademark echo-word kalakala ("murmur") in it.28 Instead, I would like to point out that we are dealing here with a somewhat different chain of events than the simple model of reproducing consumed sweetness, as in Dr. Seuss, and even the

25. Or kuha, which is what Hall (p. 131) and Krishnamacharī (pp. 153-54) read instead of kuha in the above sentence. As for kuha, it is black bazaar bird, a bird that is said to love honey. Hall reads kuha, while Krishnamacharī reads kuha as well.

26. Vāsavadatta, p. 57. The second kala is supplied from Hall (p. 95). I read bhāṅga with Krishnamacharī (p. 109) and Hall (bhāṅga, p. 95) because I cannot find a dictionary that supports Srinivasacharī's understanding of uttaka as a type of a fish.

27. If this is what kaccha actually means. Alternative readings include kaccha ("whiskers") in Krishnamacharī's edition (p. 109) and kaccha ("tails") in Hall's (p. 109). With regard to fish anatomy, the redactors of Subandhu's text were not on the same page.

28. Consider, for example, the splashy, vehemad sounds (kuha-kaccha) that depict and mimic the movements of fish in the water, or the combination mahāraṇa-hinda-sandha ("mass of honey drip"), with its repeated nd consonant cluster, perhaps imitating the sound of honey dripping (or the word drop, binda), which recurs elsewhere in the Vāsavadatta's descriptions of honey. As for kaccha, it is unclear whether it means fish, a measure of weight, or some other concept.
more complicated transformation of relish into sounds that are a feast to the ears, as in Govardinâ’s poem. Rather, it is density and wild frenzy that seem to govern the all-encompassing ecosystem of love as it is portrayed in this compound and that enable its continued generation of sweet ecstasy: birds are absolutely mad with excitement; their cries are so fervent that they cannot but set the fish in motion, even though they are submerged in the water; and the fish can hardly move without ramming into lotuses that are ready to explode with sweet sap. The compound itself teems with words for flora, fauna, and their actions, thereby augmenting the sense of density it depicts. Despite what literary theorists seem to imply, force or intensity (ajis) and sweetness (madhurya) not only coexist in Subandhu’s compounds that depict love, but also seem to depend on each other. Indeed, the fact that in this case it is intense frenzy that produces a sweet substance by no means precludes the reverse transformation. We have every reason to believe that the sap seasoning the Revâ’s water will be consumed to create further frenzy, just as we can assume that the initial avian cries resulted from the birds’ getting drunk on some other sweet substance. The compound’s vocabulary, in fact, substantiates the latter assumption: madâ, which modifies the pleasant singing of the ganders, literally means “intoxication,” not to mention the unmistakable echo of nasa in sâna-sasita (“crane-cry”), quite possibly alluding to the flavor they consumed and reproduced.

As Subandhu portrays it, love has an amazing capacity to reproduce itself and repeatedly trigger a dense ecosystem of flora and fauna, substances and sounds, tastes and scents. This erotic transformation, which spreads in ever-widening circles, is what many of Subandhu’s compounds are all about. What remains to be explained is the relationship between the natural world of cuckoos, mangoes, cranes, fish, and lotuses and the human agents who also inhabit it, such as the women who bathe in the scented water of the Revâ, or Vâsavadatta herself, who suffers tremendously during springtime and may die unless she is united with the man of her dreams. This concern with the role of human, and particularly female, agents brings me back to the compound whose biography I set out to plot.

E. Center and Periphery: Female Subjects and the Forces of Nature

I began this essay with a compound that depicts women lying in the arms of their lovers after a night of love, one that portrays them as the nexus of a mysterious alchemical reaction wherein light is produced from nail wounds.

I discussed at some length the compound’s logical flow, syntax, musical structure, and iconicity. Using different compounds as additional examples, I then described some of the more general principles of Subandhu’s erotic ecosystem. I now wish to return to the original compound and argue that it too, epitomizes the same principles in that it depicts mechanisms for the regeneration of passion, involves a similar mixture of intensity and sweetness, and leads to a commensurate impact on the world. This argument may seem strange, given the obvious differences between the compound describing the women, on the one hand, and those depicting springtime and the river Revâ, on the other. After all, the former focuses on the aftermath of love on the micro level of women’s bodies and in the intimacy of their chambers, whereas the latter depict an erotic frenzy that is conducive to love on the largest possible canvas and with worldwide reverberations. To realize the close affinities that the compound depicting the women nonetheless shares with these other examples, it may be useful to remember its immediate context.

As I noted earlier, this compound is part of a larger adverbial clause that provides the timeframe for Kandarpakutu’s dreamwork. As I also noted, our compound comes at the darkest hour, after the moon has sunk in the ocean and the lamps have died, and right before the break of dawn. What I suggest here is that this temporal context is meaningful, and that our compound, in fact, describes the appearance of a daylight whose rays do not emanate from the sun, as one would perhaps have expected, but from within the women themselves. Support for this strange hypothesis comes from the surrounding clauses and compounds, where human love is said to be the force underlying the movement of the planets and other laws of nature.

For example, it turns out that the lamps die away not because they exhaust their oil or wicks but out of sheer exhaustion, resulting from the hundred times they raised their “necks” upward in hopes of catching a glimpse of the women’s intense lovemaking (lakini-nidhuanâ-lolâ-darianârtham ivâgrikvâ-sadâdânâ-khineyus, p. 29). This is, of course, a conceit (usprekṣa), and Subandhu augments it by the necessary “as if” (iva), but there is no reason to believe that the imagined attribution of human motivations to the lamps, let alone the centrality of the women’s lovemaking in this poetic universe, are not, in some deep way, real. Indeed, later in the same sentence, Subandhu drops his “as if” when he describes the morning breeze as actually supplying itself on flower pollen from the blossoms found in the women’s hair. Moreover, these women’s anket pears need not count on the wind to rattle them, because they jingle with the constant jolting of sex, so that it may well be that the female subjects provide the morning wind not only with its showy flourish of flowering blossoms, but also with the sound of their jingling anket pears.
she can resume her love life (pravāti sāyanitā nītā-nilvāsa-nilvāma nabhāvatā, p. 124).\footnote{30}

Much of this, of course, is neither new nor unique to Subandhu. Many poets before and after him have anthropomorphized the night and the moon and have portrayed many pairs of rivers and mountains as lovers. Subandhu’s innovation consists of delving deep into the world of imagination and dreams and of his invention of a special language necessary for this exploration.\footnote{31}

An important building block of this language is the long adjectival compound. One aspect of these compounds that Subandhu brilliantly exploits is their excentric nature: they are not about their own head noun (for example, bedrooms) but about an entity outside them (for example, the women who inhabit the bedrooms). This makes them particularly useful for the depiction of the whole drama of nature, which, Subandhu believes, is also excentric in the sense that it is a by-product of human love. Masterfully crafted and carefully placed in the context of the much longer sentence, our compound suggests that the women in love lend the dawning day its first light, thereby uniquely underscoring a poetic vision of the female eroticized subject as the world’s most powerful and creative force.

This, however, is only one of our compound’s special linguistic and extra-linguistic capacities. For excentric though it may be, it also has a very marked center that captures the ears (or eyes) of the readers. Even if the entity it modifies is located outside it, its logical, musical, and iconic structure allows us a peak into the inner workings of this eroticized female subject. This, we should note, is a rare and precious opportunity. For all its fascination with love, the Vāsavadātā never actually depicts lovemaking as it happens. This, too, is true not just of this work. Sanskrit poets dwell at great length on the foreplay spot and on the aftermath of love, the emissaries exchanged between lovers, and the pining of the separated, but hardly ever on the way love is actually consummated. There are some obvious reasons for this, of course, including the fear of trespassing the boundaries of propriety. Then there is the theory developed by Ānandavardhana some three centuries after Subandhu, according to which poetry is at its best only if it suggests, rather than explicitly narrates, emotional experiences such as love. Ānandavardhana believed that for a reader to be able to “taste” eros in a poem, it would have to be intimated by things such as the setting (for example, a moonlit night) or the bodily gestures of the characters (for example, trembling),
as well as the description of their beautiful body parts (such as the lips); if, instead, the poet actually says such things as “they fell in love” or “they made love,” the psychoaesthetic effect is instantly destroyed.\footnote{Anandavardhana’s position is actually slightly more nuanced. He argues that a text’s emotional flavor (rasa) is necessarily suggested (nāyika viśhitā eva) and that even in cases where the rasa is mentioned by name (rasaśabdaśvadāna), it is still understood only through suggestion (dvayatālakṣaṇa of Anandavardhana, pp. 78–84). The idea that a direct expression of love actually destroys the experience of rasa is, however, older (see Kātyāyana of Daṇḍin 1.62–64).} Consider, in this context, the speech of the pet parrots, described by Subandhu in another exocentric compound almost immediately following ours. These birds heard the numerous bold words that the women had said while having sex at night, and at dawn they cleverly incorporate them into their chatter, with the instant effect of making these women blush (kṣaya-dā-gata-surata-taitiṣṭya-vacana-satya-smṛtaka-grhma-sa-caṇa-svāhni-kuṇa-janita-mandaksāna, p. 32). Among the many charming aspects of this compound, note the fact that these “bold words” are never actually reported, either in real time or in the parrots’ reworking, but the emotional reaction to them, from a vantage point twice removed, gives some clues about what may have actually been said.

But in my view, the standard theories of propriety and of the suggestive capacities of language fail to capture Subandhu’s poetic project. For him, the inner processes of women in love are simply too complex, enigmatic, and powerful to be captured directly, whether linguistically or otherwise. Love is amorphous (anāgarā) and invisible; it lurks deep inside a woman’s heart and seems to use her eyes as peepholes, as Subandhu tells us when describing Vāsavadatta later in the same dream sentence (ḥṛdayādāsa-grhāvasthitāya hṛc-bhaya-vilārīna gavlīkā-rākṣita uṣājananātā, p. 37). And when it does emerge through these very holes, as we have seen, its forceful eruption is certain to blind the onlooker with its gushing flood of light, comparable to a thousand milky oceans. Thus, the only way to see love is to look inside oneself, with eyes closed, as Kandarpaketa does in his dream, and the only way to describe it is by crafting a language that allows us to look through it and, reflexively, at it.

This brings us back to the very center of the compound whose biography we set out to narrate, and to the chiasmic window or peephole that Subandhu momentarily opens into his female subjects. Leading to this window are the ubiquitous nail-marks, a set of handmade characters that have been compared by some Sanskrit poets to an alphabet (nakha-pada-lipi).\footnote{For examples of images based on the script of nail-marks, see Śrīśālaśaṭha of Māgha 7.38, Vṛshabhakṣayana of Rājika 8.6, and Vyaghraśaṭha of Mañjula 23.37.} This paralinguistic script surely tells a story about the way it was inscribed, just as there is a reason that the women’s hair got loose in the first place. But Subandhu does not settle for this superficial and rather straightforward story. For him, the nail-marks are more interesting as an icon of love’s complex mixture of pleasure and pain. Indeed, the first thing we find in the inner core of the compound, arguably representing the inside of the female subject, is physical pain (vedana). This ache is then transformed (ṛṣa) into the subject’s actual voice, the aforementioned sīt sound, a paralinguistic sign that has become a part of language. As a word, as well as in real life, sīt, too, is a complex symbol, indicating a range of conflicting emotions. Although it is definitely not the “sobbing” of Gray’s translation, it is “supposed to indicate pleasure, pain, or applause,” as one dictionary has it.\footnote{正如他暗示的那样，在所有那些可以理解为阐明这些语言的内涵和意义的上下文中，这种不变的不准确性是至关重要的。} All these emotions and reactions can actually be heard here: pain is particularly obvious, but so is pleasure, especially if we recall that sīt results in light rays from the teeth, an invariable token of smiling in kṣaya.

Like the blush in response to the parrots’ chatter, then, the pain-turned-smile captures the complexity of love the way Subandhu understands it. Here, too, this capturing is done from a stance that is twice (or thrice) removed, in response to the women’s initial response to the remnants of love on their bodies. Seen through Subandhu’s self-reflexive subjects, when reminded of the night’s events, and with the aid of a self-reflexive language that calls attention to its own musical, ironic, and other paralinguistic aspects, love emerges as a special blend of pain and pleasure or, indeed, intensity and sweetness. Pleasure surely outweighs the pain, but the ultimate smile is nonetheless inseparable from the ache that produced it. The sīt sound is thus the nexus of an internal, creative transformation on several levels—of pain to pleasure, presence to memory, and sound to meaning—powerful enough to transform the external world and sufficiently savory to bring about a new day of love.

F. Conclusion

Of the six types of contextual relations that Becker identifies when he is suggesting a “move from a more atomistic mode of interpretation to a more contextual one,” the last is “skeletal relations,” namely, “relations of a text to the unsaid or the unsayable.”\footnote{参见。} It is my understanding that of all the contexts that inform the verbal components of the Vāsavadattā, this last one is the most crucial, precisely because Subandhu viewed the unsaid of love as by definition unsayable. Of course, compounds are only one of the atoms (or molecules) that make up his
rich work, and my essay surely does not do justice to the relations between this one part and its larger whole (Becker’s “structural relations”). Nor should my “biography” of one specimen be taken as a representative of the entire species of long Sanskrit compounds, whether exocentric or not; the great variety of these large creatures, which populate the works of Sanskrit literature in general and prose poems in particular, is still waiting to be studied. These compounds need not share the same acoustic pattern, flow, syntactic design, ecological impact, or iconicity as those of the example I have looked at, and certainly not its emotional flavor.

Still, I hope that the exercise of closely examining one such example is not without merit, if only to call attention to the fact that the long compound as an artifact is carefully constructed and thoughtfully placed so as to contribute to the overall aesthetic effect. Future studies, I hope, will provide a more systematic mapping of such compounds in kātyā in Sanskrit, as well as in languages influenced by it. I am thinking particularly of the Telugu literary tradition, which incorporated wholesale the Sanskrit compound and allowed it unique salience. I suspect that among the features that attracted Telugu writers to such compounds were their potential combination of intensity and sweetness, their unique musical and rhythmical possibilities, and their usefulness for the depiction of internal transformations that affect the outer world. However unrepresentative our compound may be, it should certainly be taken as indicative of the genius of its maker at a particularly productive junction in the history of Sanskrit kātyā.

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Bāna's Death in the Kādambarī

HERMAN TIEKEN

A. Introduction

Following literary tradition, Bāna died while composing the Kādambarī. The text, which was completed by his son, is as a result divided into two parts, a pārvabhāga and utarabhāga. On closer consideration, however, there is something strange about Bāna's death. In the first place, the point in the text where Bāna’s death is supposed to have taken place is almost too good to be true. Secondly, the idea of the completion of the text by the author's son appears to have strong echoes in events narrated in the text itself. Thirdly, the division of the text, which is said to have been caused by the author’s death, seems to have been known from the very beginning. All this raises the question if with Bāna’s death we might not be dealing with a literary fiction. If so, we might ask what could have been the function of this fiction. In this essay, I intend first to have a closer look at the information provided in the text about Bāna's death as well as its completion by his son. After that an attempt is made to explain what might have been behind the "story" of the author's death.

B. His Father's Voice

The greater part of the first three ucchānas of Bāna’s Harīcariṇī is taken up by the author’s autobiography, which relates in detail his life and achievements.