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Piotr Borek
piotr.borek@uj.edu.pl
(Jagiellonian University, Poland)

Watch out, Pun!
Śleṣa in Brajbhasha Courtly Literature*

SUMMARY: The paper examines several instances of the use of *śleṣa* in a 17th-century Braj poem commissioned by Shivaji Bhosle and composed in the Deccan. The subject of analysis is viewed from two perspectives: of the text's genre (*rītigranth*) and the equivalence between the objects of comparison. To this end, the study brings into focus, on one hand, the issue of striking explicitness *vis-à-vis* deliberate unveiling of double meaning by the poet, and on the other, the relations between selected literary figures and the nature of *śleṣa* embedded within given examples. Besides showcasing an aspect of the poet's virtuosity, the paper seeks to provide a template for wider discussion on the specifically Indian phenomenon of *śleṣa* in Braj courtly literary culture.

KEYWORDS: *śleṣa*, *rītigranth*, Brajbhasha, Bhushan, patronage

The 19th- and 20th-century editorial trajectory of Bhushan Tripathi's (Bhūṣaṇ Tripāṭhī, traditional dates: 1613–1715) *Śivrājbhūṣan* (1673) kept the poem extant in two versions, not much different from each other. Even today the work inspires Indian, and to some extent, Hindu or right-oriented politics, and popular culture. Certain opinions expressed by literary historians and critics, such as Ramchandra Shukla

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(Rāmcandra Śukla) or the Mishra brothers (Miśrabandhu), who have been instrumental in Bhushan Tripathi's (henceforth: Bhushan)[1] inclusion in Hindi literary canon, leave one with an impression that the poem owes its enduring popularity more to the figure of its patron and protagonist, Shivaji Bhosle (Śivājī Bhosle, 1630–1678), than its literary qualities. Indeed, *Śivrājbhūṣan* remains one of the most important literary compositions linking the historical figure of the great Maratha leader with the Hindi language area literary production. However, its mere suitability to the process of constructing a nation-oriented body of literature in the first half of the 20th century, or a certain kind of political compatibility later on, cannot fully justify sustained modern interest, right from the time of publication, in 1888, of Shivsinh Sengar's (Śivsiṃh Seṅgar) anthology *Śivsiṁh-saroj* (Seṅgar 1970), till the present day.[2] In line with certain standards he shared with his fellow poets moving between North Indian courts—though here we have an author who reached the Deccan—Bhushan gave his work the shape of *rītigranth*, if not the most common, then certainly what may be called the signature genre (cf. Busch 2015: 249) of the literary culture to which he belonged. He showed great virtuosity in rendering *vīr ras* (or in Skt. *vīra rasa*), heroic taste, and this is what probably made the early literary historians agree on his status as a skilled author producing high quality poetry. However, literary critics like Mishra brothers or Ramchandra Shukla, along with praises for his mastery, voiced doubts about Bhushan's literary perfection. But what they termed as chaotic language, violation of grammar (*avyavasthit bhāṣā*; *vyākaraṇ kā ullaṅghan*, cf. Śukla 2012: 175) or, closer to the point I am trying to make, distorted words, invented words, unusual Persian and Arabic words and inaccurate use of words (*bigṛe gae śabdoṃ ke rūp*; *gaṛhant ke śabd*; *farsī aur arabī bhāṣāoṃ ke asādharaṇ śabd*; *śabdoṃ kā aśuddh prayog*,

[1] In Hindi literary history, the poet is usually referred to as Bhushan.

[2] For the latest, audiovisual instance of such re-use, see the opening recitation in Marathi of the 2008 television serial, *Raja Shivchatrapati*, on Star Pravah channel, re-broadcasted during the COVID-19 lockdown in April 2020.

(cf. Miśrabandhu 1955: 309–310), might also, strangely, be considered the source of Bhushan's mastery. Especially so, in view of the fact borne out by reading the text, that those so-called shortcomings often appear at *loci* where one might expect multiple meanings and search, rather, for additional merits of his composition.

My earlier research on *Śivrājbhūṣan* focused on the way its author dealt with history, mostly contemporary, and the pragmatic functions of the work commissioned on the eve of his patron's royal consecration (Skt. *rājābhiṣeka*). However, in this paper, I would like to share my preliminary observations on the aesthetic functions of the poem. I may briefly summarise that most of the difficulties I have faced, when attempting to understand the content of passages I quote below, have originated in multiple meanings of single words or verses, sometimes whole stanzas. Some double meanings are transparent to readers and/or listeners of Braj poetry while other make sense only after twisting words and manoeuvring between Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic registers. In this paper, I would like to draw attention to some clearly visible instances where the poet employs the strategy of *śleṣa*.[3] By 'clearly visible instances', I mean stanzas where the reader or listener is warned by the author, in advance, of a possible double meaning. In this sense, arguments submitted here could serve as a template both for a further analysis of instances of *śleṣa* and a larger discussion on *śleṣa* as an essential mode of composition in works constituting the courtly literary culture of Brajbhasha of the period.

Śleṣa was by no means a new invention of vernacular poets who successfully made use of their own sense of immanent poetics[4] by

[3] Although the source text discussed here belongs to Hindi literary tradition and the term has its Hindi form, *śleṣ*, I use the Sanskrit term deliberately. The simple justification that Braj courtly literary culture relied largely on Sanskrit poetics would be probably sufficient, but the more compelling reason is that in the present article I respond to Yigal Bronner's call for Indology "to conceive of *śleṣa* as a general cultural phenomenon that is worthy of charting and understanding in its own right" (Bronner 2010: 9).

[4] The term 'immanent poetics' (*werkimmanente Poetik*) juxtaposed with 'formulated poetics' (*formukierte Poetiks*) "were first introduced by Bruno Markwardt

adapting recognized concepts of Sanskrit literary tradition. Speaking of the latter, in the period starting as early as the 9th (or even before) and lasting possibly till the 18th century,[5] Yigal Bronner diagnoses a "growing anxiety on the part of *śleṣa* writers about being fully understood" (Bronner 2010: 157) and describes various indications of the endeavours undertaken by the poets to prevent readers from misunderstanding their writings. To the best of my knowledge, none of such 'indications', namely "body of instructions, annotation, and secondary literature, such as thesauri and lexicons (often written by the poets themselves)" (Bronner 2010: 157) was available to Bhushan in Braj. However, I presume that the very structure of *rītigranth*s provided basic means to dismiss such an anxiety. Thus, the textual examples I offer below also shed light on the literary functions of the genre and help to understand its popularity among Braj poets. *Rītigranth*s rely on the pattern of usually short *dohā*[6] stanzas containing definitions of literary tropes[7] (*lakṣaṇ*) that precede one or more illustrations (*udāharaṇ*), i.e. stanzas in which the respective tropes have been used. As for the definitions, we should probably imagine their primary function as enunciating the essence of literary tropes for the courtly audience or other consumers of this type of poetry, so that they might direct their attention to the artful

in his *Geschichte der deutchen Poetik* (1956–1967). The first term relates to a set of rules or qualities that organize a literary work but are not verbalized or even realized by the author but can be derived from the structure of the work itself. The formulated poetics, conversely, is such a set of rules that is clearly presented in a discursive way. The latter, usually, characterizes literary manifestos" (Szymaniak 2011: 84). The terms are not widespread in English language literary studies, however Polish literary studies use both of them, immanent poetics (*poetyka immanentna*) and formulated poetics (*poetyka sformułowana*), very often.

[5] As in the case of the 9th-century Nītivarman's *Kīcakavadha* analysed in this context (cf. Bronner 2010: 157) or the examples of 16th- to 18th-century authors who "supplied their works with their own annotation" (Bronner 2010: 156).

[6] *Dohā*—"the most common couplet metre, ubiquitous throughout early Hindi poetry [in which e]ach of two lines consists of 24 *mātra*s" (Snell 1991: 20).

[7] In case of *Śivrājbhūṣan* these are always definitions of *alaṃkāra*s (*artha* or *śabda*).

play of registers suggested in the illustrations that follow. "Watch out!" in the title of the present paper stands, first of all, for *lakṣaṇ*s of those literary figures the realisation of which is based on two different readings.

The application of *śleṣa* mode in *Śivrājbhūṣan* is much more complex than is evident from the examples described below. Showcasing multiple meanings by the author is just one feature which links all illustrations I present. To understand the sense and nature of *śleṣa* instances in the poem, it is necessary to observe closely the ways in which the figure has been skillfully deployed. For,

> *śleṣa*, at least in some cases, is not solely an «embrace» of the signified (e.g. a king and the moon), which it certainly is, but also, and perhaps primarily, a union of two sets of signifiers, each with its own signified. *Śleṣa*, then, is not an allegory or an insinuation based primarily on extralingual factors, but a unique manipulation of language itself with the aim of making it consistently double (Bronner 2010: 5–6).

To this day not much space has been devoted to the use of literary figures in Bhushan's works by Hindi-language academic writing. Main contemporary sources for our knowledge about the author are found either in relatively extensive introductions to several editions of his collected works, or in the monographs on the poet and his oeuvre. However, none of those offer any in-depth analysis of the literary figures employed. Scant interest in this field might be explained by focus on the often ideologically useful historical content which has dominated much of this scholarship.[8] Secondary sources offer some selective references to Bhushan's use of tropes or short reflections on the possible sources of his knowledge of poetics

[8] It is also interesting to observe how one of the leading scholars and editors of Bhushan's poetry attempted to criticize the lack of order in handling literary figures by the author of *Śivrājbhūṣan*. The opinions of such critics can partially explain and further legitimize the general lack of scholarly interest in the analysis of Bhushan's use of literary figures (see Miśra 1994: 52).

(e.g. Dīkṣit 1953: 139–142; Tivārī 1972: 95–98; Miśra 1994: 52–59), discussions on the probably not coincidental similarity in definitions featured by Bhushan and his brother Matiram (Matirām) (e.g. Pāṁvar 1962: 2–6) etc. However, it is the frame glossary of literary figures in *Śivrājbhūṣan* provided by Brajratnadas (Brajratnadās) (cf. Brajratnadās 1930: 63–87) that is possibly the largest pieces of writing referring to the subject at hand.

English-language scholarship has so far paid little attention to *śleṣa* in Brajbhasha courtly literature at all. A few instances of its occurrence in the 17th-century poetry of Keshavdas (Keśavdās) and Matiram have been touched upon by Allison Busch (Busch 2005: 48; 2011: 40, 92–93; 2014: 675–680). Still, Busch strongly emphasises "[the] union of two sets of signifiers" (cf. Bronner 2010: 5–6) or, to be precise, "connection [that] is reinforced at the very level of language itself, which itself points toward some ontological correspondence" (Busch 2005: 48). I intend to illustrate, with the help of Bhushan's stanzas, numerous instances of the use of *śleṣa* device where *śleṣa* appears to be much "more powerful than a mere simile because it produces a deep equivalence between objects at the level of language itself" (Busch 2014: 675).

Apahnuti trickeries

In Sanskrit poetics *apahnuti* is primarily a 'denial' or "a figure in which the object of comparison is affirmed in place of the subject of comparison" (Gerow 1971: 109). It may be also another figure, widely prevalent in the tradition after Bhāmaha, "in which an essential property of the subject is denied and portrayed otherwise" and, eventually, "a figure in which the subject of comparison is portrayed as possessing a quality which in nature belongs to the object of comparison" (Gerow 1971: 109–110). However, in the context of Hindi poetics the word *apahnuti* primarily means 'concealment'.[9] Generally, when speaking of *alaṁkāra*, it refers

[9] This is also the only English equivalent term for *apahnuti* provided in the glossary of literary figures in the context of Bhushan's poetry (see Brajratnadās 1930: 65).

to a figure of speech where the presence of one thing is concealed under something similar. In case of Bhushan's usage, it would be probably equally accurate to understand it as a 'trick' or 'guile'. When several types of *apahnuti*, all derived from Sanskrit poetics, are viewed from the perspective of *śleṣa* reading strategy, two, namely *bhrāṁtāpahnuti* and *chekāpahnuti*, draw our particular attention. In general, the first comes about through correcting the misunderstanding of the interlocutor, the second—skilful denial of his way of understanding things. This is how the poet defines *bhrāṁtāpahnuti*:

> *saṅka aura kī hota hī jahiṃ bhrama kariye dūri* |
> *bhrāṁtāpahnuti kahata haiṃ tahiṃ bhūṣana kabi bhūri* | VB, v. 82
>
> Whenever there is a doubt of another thing [and this] misapprehension is being warded off,
> Bhushan and many poets call it a concealment under mistake.[10]

The above translation has been forged in tune with Appaya Dikshita's (Appayya Dīkṣita) (1520–1592) *Kuvalayānanda* (Śarmā 1903: 29–30), as the Braj *rītigranth* under consideration reveals close resemblance, particularly in terms of the set and order of literary figures presented, with this Sanskrit *alaṁkāraśāstra*. Hindi noun *saṅk*[11] (*saṅka*) has been translated here as 'doubt', but it also may be rendered as 'suspicion', 'hesitation' and 'fear'. In order to show how the above definition could have been an accurate tool of making the audience notice the possibility of *śleṣa* in the coming stanzas, let us render the verse this way: "Whenever there is a suspicion of another thing [and such] misunderstanding is being warded off (…)". This definition serves

[10] All translations from Braj are mine.

[11] Final and medial short *a*, which gets reduced in modern Hindi has been kept in quotations from Braj poetry due to its metrical value. Version of the word given in the brackets corresponds to its appearance in the source text.

two illustrations, both producing two different equivalencies between the objects of comparison at the level of language.

> *sāhitanai sarajā ke bhaya sauṃ bhagāne bhūpa meru ke lukāne te lahata jāiṃ ota haiṃ* |
> *bhūṣana tahāṃ hūṃ marahaṭṭapati ke pratāpa pāvata na kala ati kautuka udota haiṃ* |
> *siva āyau siva āyau saṅkara kī āmadanī sunikai*[ ][12]*parāna jyauṃ lagata arigota haiṃ* |
> *siva sarajā na yaha siva hai mahesa taba jāke upadesa jaccha racchaka se hote haiṃ* | VB, v. 83
>
> Fearing the Lion-Headman, the son of Shahji, kings run away and hide on the Meru mountain. On reaching there they recover [a bit].
> Bhushan: but even there, [due to] the prowess of the Maratha chief they do not gain peace. Wonderful events come to light.
> "Shivaji arrived! Shivaji arrived!"—hearing the sounds of fire approaching, clans of enemies get ready to flee.
> "It is not Shivaji but Shiva"—Yakshas instruct them as if becoming their protectors.

Though the idea of *apahnuti* figure, widespread in Sanskrit literary tradition and understood as a 'denial' (cf. Gerow 1971: 109), is attested to in the last line of the verse, Bhushan's trickery starts one verse earlier and is based entirely on a complex *śleṣa* reading. On the face of things, *śleṣa* here appears to be simple to the core and at the same time somewhat ambiguous. It seems that Hindi word *siv* (*siva*) should refer primarily to Shiva (Skt. Śiva), the god. However, this is certainly not the case here, especially when one looks closely at the context it is typically used in throughout the poem. *Siv* (*siva*) is one of the usual ways to refer to the main protagonist also within some other stanzas where double meaning is out of the question. Thus, it is rather clear that it is indeed Shivaji that must come onto the stage first. Initially, it appears that the kings are

[12] Each space that I added in the process of reading has been put in square brackets.

talking of Shiva and then Yakshas (Skt. Yakṣa) dispels the possibility of doubt ("no, it is not Shiva"), so we deal with a usual *bhrāṁtāpahnuti*, well known to Sanskrit poetics (cf. Śarmā 1903: 29). But we need to address this recurring, spontaneous identification of Shivaji with Shiva for at least two reasons. First of all, the correct form of the word used as Shivaji's name comes with the long vowel (*ā*), unlike in the case of Shiva, the god. However, changing the length of a vowel, in this case shortening a long vowel in the name of the Maratha chief, was a common practice among Braj poets. Secondly, certain confusion arises in the rest of the third line. The Hindi noun, *saṅkar* (*saṅkara*), basically means, 'the sound of crackling fire'; sound that would probably accompany the approach of an army, in this case Shivaji's. Somewhere in between, as it is still not the *śleṣa* here, such crackling fire makes one think of the destructive power of Shiva Nataraja (Skt. Naṭarāja) who is usually visualised as surrounded by a circle of flames. The anticipated double entendre would consist of taking Shankara (Skt. Śaṅkara) here to be a proper noun standing in for Shiva.

In the next illustration, we expect the convention of a dialogue, however the central figure, which is the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb (1618–1707),[13] does not utter a word. His lack of reaction is in itself an answer.

> *eka samai sajikai saba saina*[14] *sikāra kauṃ ālamagīra sidhāe* |
> *āvahigau sarajā samharau ika ora ke logana boli janāe* |
> *bhūṣana bhau bhrama auraṁga ke siva bhvaisilā bhūpa kī dhāka dhukāe* |
> *dhāya kai singhu kahyau samujhāya karaulana jāya aceta uṭhāe* |
> VB, v. 84

[13] Aurangzeb (Auraṅgzeb)–is known to history as the last Great Mughal (r. 1658/9–1707) notorious for his attempts to break away from the politics of religious tolerance followed by his predecessors and introduced by his great-grandfather Akbar (r. 1556–1605). Accusations of Aurangzeb's supposed atrocities against the Hindus have been significantly reiterated within the academia; see e.g. Truschke 2017.

[14] *saina* (ŚB ed., v. 88; *saiṃna* MS, v. 85; *sana* VB ed.).

> Once Alamgir prepared the whole army and set off for chase.
> The lion is about to arrive, kill him!—people standing at one side informed.
> Bhushan [says]—Aurangzeb misunderstood that it was Shivaji Bhosle's [close] attack that made him fall.
> The animal lion!—hunters explained and rushed to lift up the fainted/unconscious [man].

The main point is obviously located in the second line. The remark coming from Aurangzeb's retinue, *āvahigau sarajā samharau*, can be understood in two ways: "Lion is coming, kill him!" and "Shivaji is close, get ready [to fight]!". The ambiguity comes with *sarjā* (*sarajā*), which according to Persian register denotes a leader or headman, but according to Arabic—a lion. Unfortunately, we do not get any unfolding of this story, since the explanation provided by hunters could also be understood in a twofold manner; besides, *siṅgha* (Prakrit register), could, too, be taken in a number of ways—as a 'lion', a 'king' or a 'hero'.

Were the information in the third line to be inverted, we might have initially seen Alamgir (Ālamagīra) as a mere object of mockery. But the suggestion that Aurangzeb might have fainted during the chase out of fear of the animal is not that obvious. The Mughal emperor, known to history for having been repeatedly challenged by the Marathas and their defiant ventures, is unlikely to be portrayed as so faint-hearted and weak, for here, like in many other stanzas of the poem, the greatest power of the Indian subcontinent, the Mughal empire, acts merely as a backdrop for Shivaji and his heroic exploits. There is no glory in defeating a weak opponent, but definitely in putting fear in the heart of a strong one. One of the main functions of the poem composed on the eve of Shivaji's royal consecration is to foreground Maratha leader's fitness for kingship and articulate his claim to autonomy, self-sufficiency and independent sovereignty. This becomes even more evident in the light of other stanzas where Aurangzeb is shown as being afraid of Shivaji (e.g. VB, vv. 94, 191), losing against Shivaji's forays (e.g. VB, v. 94), feeling regret (e.g. VB, v. 191), getting enraged because of Shivaji (e.g. VB, v. 135), etc. In short, Shivaji is depicted as refusing to

bow even to the greatest power around, embodied here in Aurangzeb (e.g. VB, vv. 169, 179).

Nonetheless, it is still puzzling, how should one read the beginning of the third line. Should one take the word *bhūṣan* (*bhūṣana*) as a conventional *chāp*, a poet's signature, and thus close the analysis, or should one assume that Bhushan the poet is stubbornly trying to reinforce hidden mockery by using the word, *bhūṣan*, in some other way and to some other end. If that were indeed the case one might have here a very clever usage of *śleṣa*, where *bhūṣana bhau bhrama auraṁga ke…* would suggest that it is only poet's personal opinion regarding Aurangzeb's misunderstanding; "[According to] Bhushan, Aurangzeb misunderstood…"; however, who knows the real reason for the royal swoon?

An illustration of *chekāpahnuti* reveals both a more complex identification of Shivaji with the lion—both the king and the best of men—and a masterful construction of *śleṣa* relying on at least one full verse and not, as we have seen before, single word or expression. The definition again has the power to alert the audience that more than one sense of speech should be taken into consideration:

> *jahaṁ aura kī saṅka teṁ sāṁci chipāvata bāta* |
> *chekāpahnuti kahata haiṃ bhūṣana mati-avadāta* | VB, v. 85
>
> When the true thing gets hidden by suspicion of another one,
> Bhushan and bright minds call it a clever concealment.

The illustration is composed of two *dohā*s, the first of which is clearly based on *śleṣa*; the second is its explanation. However, as we shall see, the use of *chāp* may also give rise to suspicion of it being a *śleṣa* device. Aurangzeb says to his courtiers:

> *duggahi bala pañjana prabala saraja*[15] *jityau rana mohiṃ* |
> *auraṁga kahai divāna sauṃ supana sunāvata tohi* | VB, v. 86

[15] *sarajā* (MS, v. 87; ŚB ed., v. 93; *saraja* VB ed.). The final *ā* in the word *sarajā*–'chief' (DB: 1997, HŚS: 4992), 'leader' (OHED: 990) or 'lion' (HŚS: 4992;

First, I provide a *śleṣa* reading which seems logical and presents the lines the way the emperor would have intended them to be understood:

> With the strength of Durga and his mighty claws, the lion beat me in the forest,
> I relate my dream to you—Aurangzeb says to his minister.

But apparently Aurangzeb's courtiers interpret the words differently, for their reaction has nothing to do with the above reading:

> *suni su ujīrana yoṃ kahyau sarajā siva mahārāja* | (…) VB, v. 87
>
> Having heard this, the viziers said—The leader! Maharaja Shivaji! (…)

What would be the reasons supporting my belief that the courtiers have compelling grounds to discern the first, underlying meaning obviously not intended by the speaker? In communication ascribed to Aurangzeb (cf. VB, v. 86) *dugga* primarily means a fort or fortress, which is congruent with the Prakrit register; in Braj, it could be both *durga* (Sanskrit register) and *dugga*, like in our verse. It being here the name of the famous goddess is not that obvious but still possible as simplification of consonant clusters, which is another common linguistic manipulation found in works of Braj poets. Another argument which can be formulated on the basis of *jityau* and *rana* might be slightly weaker, as it is a matter of subjective, textual sensitivity to claim that *rana* in a *vīr ras* poem should stand for a battlefield rather than a forest. But along with the perfective verb *jityau* ('[he] won over me'/'[he] vanquished me'/'[he] got better of me'), the semantic field is brought closer to a fight than a chase. But yet more convincing would be the context evidence found in *Śivrājbhūṣan*, i.e.

Persian *sharza* in Steingass 1892: 741) must have been shortened in the VB ed. for metrical reasons. *Saraja* that appears in VB ed. means 'born from a chief' or 'born from a head' and in general does not deliver the *śleṣa* meaning of 'lion'.

multiple uses of *sarajā* (*sarajā*) clearly denoting Shivaji elsewhere in the text. Therefore, what the courtiers understood might be read as follows: "Shivaji defeated me on the battlefield with the strength of his forts and powerful strikes of knuckle-buster".

According to the definition of *chekāpahnuti* this meaning should be considered the true content of Aurangzeb's dream. Therefore, one could assume that the emperor wanted to hide his dream, but the first meaning of the line made his endeavor unsuccessful. At this moment, after hearing the viziers shout the name of Shivaji, someone needed to voice a denial:

> (…) *bhūṣana kahi cakata sakuci nahiṃ sikāra mṛgarāja* | VB, v. 87
>
> Bhushan: embarrassed Chagatai says—No! The king of game![16]

Aurangzeb, embarrassed by the unconscious use of double entendre which revealed that what was intended to be hidden, rushed in with an explanation. But let us see what happens if *bhūṣana* is taken neither as the *chāp*, nor as the name of the speaker, but a mere noun denoting an ornament, which in a *rītigranth* work can easily be an ornament of speech:

> The Chagatai, embarrassed due to uttering the literary figure [replies]—No! The king of game!

Such *śleṣa* reading of this line significantly strengthens Bhushan's mockery of his patron's opponent, shown here as unaware of the overt meaning and evidently not versed well enough to communicate precisely. Bhushan has not only announced, through the definition, the true

[16] The Hindi noun *mṛgarāj* means 'lion' or 'king of animals' (DB: 1731; HŚS: 4002) and *sikār* is 'hunting' (DB: 2054, HŚS: 5109), therefore *sikāra mṛgarāja* can be literarily rendered as 'lion [for] hunting'. The above translation is an outcome of a different word division: *sikāra mṛga rāja*, where *sikāra mṛga* stands for 'game'.

meaning, but probably went even further. Still, we might have missed something. Is Bhushan resorting to mockery again and suggesting that Shivaji's victory over the emperor is what the latter's viziers actually expect? Let us look again at the instance of *supana*, so far translated as 'dream'. One may hear the word as *su pana*, 'this promise', or just a prefixed *pana*, i.e. *su-pana*, which becomes a 'good promise'. So, ministers could have comprehended their sovereign's speech in yet another, significantly different way. A working translation, inverting the lines and combining the overt meaning of one, with the *śleṣa* reading of the other, makes the sarcasm much more legible:

> Aurangzeb says to his viziers—I am telling you a promising thing:[17]
> Shivaji defeated me on the battlefield with the power of his forts and strong strikes of knuckle-buster.

For *chekāpahnuti*, Bhushan provides one more short illustration. It is a *dohā* which contains a wonderfully crafted *śleṣa*, composed of five words:

> *timira-baṃsa-hara aruna-kara āyau sajanī bhāra*[18] |
> *siva sarajā cupa rahi sakhi saraja*[19] *sūra-siramaura* | VB, v. 88

> The remover of darkness, the one of reddish sunbeams has arrived!
> Oh, friend! It is dawn!
> Oh, my soul mate, be quiet! Shivaji the Lion! The best of the Suryavanshi leaders.

In the scene we have here, a girl is talking about the sun and, according to the definition, this is how she tries to stealthily both bury and convey

[17] Eventually, such reading reinforces the message that might have been contained in the first reading, through the notion of a dream, since in Indian, especially Sufi, literature the latter is often a powerful instrument through which the future is revealed.

[18] *bhora* (MS, v. 89; ŚB ed., v. 92; *bhāra* VB ed.).

[19] *sarajā* (MS, v. 89; ŚB ed., v. 92; *saraja* VB ed.).

the information about Shivaji's arrival.[20] Thanks to the *śleṣa* reading of the line, her female friend immediately discerns the truth. The explanation imbedded in the second line, i.e. the statement that it is a conversation about the Suryavanshi (*sūryavaṁśī*)[21] leader makes it even more clear that the opening, extended epithet, *timira-baṃsa-hara aruna-kara*, may also stand for Sivaji as the Vanquisher of the "Timurid-clan-whose-hands-are-red-with-blood". Be it as it may, Shivaji is again being identified with a deity, in this case Surya (Sūrya).

Śleṣa alaṃkāra

> *eka bacana meṃ hota jahaṁ bahu arathana ko jñāna* |
> *sleṣa kahata haiṃ tāhi soṃ bhūṣana sukabi sujāna* | VB, v. 147
>
> When a certain speech is understood in many senses,
> Bhushan [and] the best wise poets call it *śleṣa*.

In *Śivrājbhūṣan*, the first two illustrations of this figure of speech disguise at least two parallel stories, one about god Rama (Skt. Rāma), the other about Shivaji. This is yet another example of a stanza in which Maratha hero has been identified with a deity, in this case a deity that embodies the ideal of a perfect king. We thus deal here with the specific transregional phenomenon of political theology attested to in the Braj literature also prior to the composition of

[20] I express my gratitude to Dr Sukesh Lohar and other participants of the *Early Hindi and Brajbhasha Workshop* organized online by Prof. Imre Bangha, Oxford University, in July 2020, who corrected my understanding of the *chekāpahnuti* figure and pointed out some inconsistencies between my translations of the definition and the corresponding illustrations.

[21] 'One belonging to the solar race of kings'. In Bhushan's words it is literarily *sūra-siramaura*, which means both 'diadem [among] heroes' and 'diadem [of the] sun'. The above reading is in tune with description of Shivaji's lineage (Skt. *rājavaṁśavarṇana*), provided at the beginning of *Śivrājbhūṣan* (VB, vv. 5–14).

Bhushan's poem[22] and frequently present in the writings of the late Mughal court-centred geopolitical arena after Shivaji[23] as well. Although the comparison of both objects is irreducible, especially in view of the political functions of the poem (see e.g. Borek 2017), in itself it does not offer *śleṣa* devices that would point to a particularly strong identification of the hero and god at the level of language. At the end of the last line, one finds a straightforward statement that Shivaji is Rama's avatar:

> *sīya saṅga sobhita sulacchana sahāya jāke bhū para bharata nāma bhāī nīti cāru hai* |
> *bhūṣana bhanata kula-sūra-kūlabhūṣana haiṃ dāsarathī saba jāke bhuja bhua-bhāru hai* |
> *ari-laṅka tora jora sadā sātha bānara haiṃ sindhura hai bāṁdhe jāke bala ko na pāru hai* |
> *tegahi ke meṭe jauna rākasa marada jānyau sarajā sibājī rāma hī ko avataru hai* | VB, v. 148.
>
> He shines together with Sita, Lakshman is his associate and Bharata is his brother on earth [who] attracts with winsome manners,
> Bhushan speaks—ornament of the entire solar race, of Dasharatha's all sons who bear the burden of earth on their arms,
> Shattering enemy's Lanka through/by force, Hanuman [is his] friend [who like an] elephant has no competition in strength,
> He knows how to seize and crush Rakshasas.[24] Shivaji is the avatar of Rama himself.

Śleṣa reading:

[22] For a discussion on earlier Braj instances of the ideal of *rāmrājya*, or the perfect kingdom, as a standard of comparison for rulers see: Cavaliere 2020.

[23] For neighbouring Rajputs, see e.g. "[t]he terms in which Jaisingh came to articulate his identity as king" and his identification with Rama in the 18th-century *Rāmavilāsakāvyam* or "Poem on the Sports of Rāma" in Horstmann 2005: 10–11.

[24] Such reading requires different division of words than in the quotation provided above, i.e. *te gahike* instead of *tegahi ke*.

> He shines [thanks to] his lands, good qualities are his help, his name fills the earth and [his] rightful conduct is attractive,
> Bhushan speaks—ornament among all races of warriors, owns all charioteers and supports the Earth,
> He violently crushes enemies' thighs, has solid arrows [and] keeps the power over ocean, his army has no competition,
> He knows how to erase hostile men with his sword. Shivaji is the avatar of Rama himself.

The narrative structure of this *śleṣa* reminds one of spectacular tradition of co-narration which in Indian *kāvya* saw its model in the simultaneous renderings of the two epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*.[25] Here, *śleṣa* works as an embrace of two objects, the worldly king and the divine embodiment of the ideal kingship. From the pragmatic point of view, it appears to be an extended simile, one of a plethora of literary tools applied by Bhushan for the purpose of generating and reproducing certain textual forms while supporting and validating the already existing expressions for Shivaji's legitimation of kingship. From the point of view of aesthetics, it is not only a masterful application of high literary style which attracts the audience, but also a proof of the poet's virtuosity that places him in the circle of elite poets (*kavikul*) or, in a wider sense, the men of talent (*guṇi* or *gunī*) sustained by the patron and maintaining his complex machinery of power.

In the second illustration of *śleṣa alaṁkāra*, Bhushan goes beyond the identification of the future king with Shiva, Rama and the lion, or the best of men, to bring back his sarcastic discourse aimed at the paramount political power. The following stanza is apparently meant to undermine the sense of subservience to Aurangzeb's army. The first half of the stanza offers two distinct narrations:

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[25] *Rāghavapaṇḍavīya* by 12th-century poet Kavirāja is only one mature example of such full-fledged bi-textual works. The rich tradition of co-narration reaches back beyond the 8th century with Dhanañjaya's *Dvisandhānakāvya*. For the account of the history of simultaneous renderings of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* in Sanskrit literature see Bronner 2010: 91–121.

dekhata sarūpa ko sihāta na milana[ ]*kāja jaga jītibe kauṁ jāmaiṁ rīti chala-bala kī* |
jāke pāsa āvai tākauṁ nidhana karati bega bhūṣana bhanata jākī saṅgata niphala kī |

Who does not feel excited to obtain it when seeing how attractive it is? To conquer the world, it offers means of stratagem and force. [But] the one who gets it, soon becomes poor—Bhushan says—it is useless to be associated with it!

and:

Who does not desire to meet her on seeing her beauty? [She knows] how to win mankind with customary trickeries and coercion.
She quickly dispossesses of the wealth of the one to whom she comes—Bhushan says—a sexual intercourse with her [will] bear no fruit.

The rest of the stanza offers an unravelling of the pun preceded by a clear political message. The third line offers a complex *śleṣa* narrative:

kīrati-kāminī rācyau sarajā sivā kī[26] *kyoṁ hūṁ basa kai*[ ]*sakai na basa karanī sakala kī* |
cañcala barasa eka kāhū pai rahai na ganikā sama nihārī sūbedārī dillīdala kī | VB, v. 149

The fame [like a] desirous woman aimed to take control of the Lion-Headman Shivaji, devoted [to her], [so now] it cannot reside [in] other's deeds.[27]

[26] *kauṁ* (MS, v. 150; *kī* VB ed.).

[27] The line is based on twinning (Skt. *yamaka*); the word *basa* stands for the masculine noun ('power' or 'state of subjection') and for the verbal root ('to reside').

and:

> The welfare [like a] desirous woman aimed to take control of the Lion-Headman Shivaji. However, she who subdues everyone was not able to subdue him in any way.
> [But] the unsteady one cannot stay with anyone [even] a year. He considered the honour of being a subedar in the Mughal army to be just like a courtesan.

According to the first reading, Shivaji is devoted to one loving woman. The male royal lover or Shivaji is the embodiment of fame or glory and his female beloved certainly personifies his highest ambitions. One may immediately interpret this line as a declaration of self-sufficiency; Shivaji's arduous devotion to fame suggests that he is not likely to be subdued by and/or serve anybody else. Moreover, their union bears the marks of exclusivity, for the fame cannot be bound to anyone else. But Bhushan's *kīrati*, read as Hindi *kīrti*, does not only mean 'glory', but can also stand for 'merit' or—more to the point here—'welfare' (*puṇya*) (cf. HŚS: 961 and OHED: 636). This facilitates a *śleṣa* reading of the whole line and reveals another image. The promiscuous woman serves as the object of comparison with the welfare which is tempting one to join the Mughal army.

Historically, the passage refers to the situation where many neighbouring rajahs had already placed their military forces under the command of the Mughal army and were given the rank and honour of subedar or governor of the province in the Mughal administrative and military system. For a new rising regional empire, like the Maratha state founded by Shivaji, it was of utmost importance to attract new alliances and change the geopolitical configuration of power in the region. To this end, other prospective feudal inductees needed to be warned against pinning their hopes on and actively contributing to the strength of Aurangzeb's army, for no matter how alluring this prospect might have seemed, especially in view of the Mughal power and means vested in it, such a set-up could not ensure, in the long run, political stability

for the region. But thanks to the simultaneous narration, the poet juxtaposes those two objects, the service to the Mughal Emperor and dealings with a courtesan, in such a manner that one is made to look beyond the common features they might share, as would have been expected in a comparison. The two short lines have the power to create an illusion that both objects are identical in terms of their recognizable traits as well as in the degree of consequences to be borne, were one to engage with either. The suggestive power of such narrative *śleṣa* greatly surpasses the capacity of a mere simile and produces a full caricature picture, something to be circulated and spread further.

Conclusions

As we have seen, for *bhrāṁtāpahnuti* and *chekāpahnuti*, the identification between lion and headman, Shiva and Shivaji, or Surya and Shivaji, is established primarily, though not only, at the lexical level. One single noun, bearing two meanings or given the second sense throughout the poem, stands for both objects. Both types of *śleṣa* thus differ from the classical *śleṣa alaṁkāra* which operates with a specific *śleṣa* device based entirely on double narration. We may thus define Bhushan's *śleṣa alaṁkāra*s as explicit simile-based identifications, but the above uses of *śleṣa* device definitely serve to reinforce the equivalence between the objects.

What should draw our special attention in the *śleṣa* instances analysed in the present paper, is—as I would call it—their double explicitness which is visible on two levels: the formal and the substantive. First, the reader or listener is either notified about upcoming *śleṣa* or alerted to the possible double meaning to be conveyed through the notion of error or concealment. Thereafter, they are provided with a direct unravelling by means of a simple simile or an explanation of the sense of the pun. It is tempting to interpret this situation as the outcome of poet's "anxiety (…) about being fully understood" (Bronner 2010: 157) and some arguments can be formulated to support such assumption in case of Braj courtly literature in general and, specifically, Bhushan's poem. During Bhushan's time, Braj, a relatively young literary medium, differed

substantially from Sanskrit in terms of its lack of lexicographical and grammatical body of literature, especially of the type exhaustively used by *śleṣa* authors of the Sanskrit literary tradition. It was probably sheer poetic virtuosity that would have been the primary source of *śleṣa* for a Braj poet, a poet, however, who additionally could rely on new linguistic registers. A particularly strong infusion of Persian and Arabic words accompanied the 17th-century rise of this courtly literature, often linked, directly or indirectly, to the Mughal court environs. A huge divergence between the idiolects of particular poets certainly did not make the new endeavours any easier. Another argument, situational, would be more specific to Bhushan and his literary activity in the Deccan; possibly also other poets who acted as forerunners of Braj courtly literary culture in the South. As suggested by Allison Busch in her research on dissemination of *rīti* political culture, while Sanskrit was no longer understood the way it was before in the elite circles of Rajput courts,

> Brajbhasha was unusually versatile as a linguistic medium because it could be refined like Sanskrit, without sacrificing broad comprehensibility. (…) The new Braj genres brought elegance, entertainment, but also potent forms of erudition as well as vocabularies of political expression to the court (Busch 2011: 183).

This complex process, yoked to the need to acquire a widely accepted, traditional courtly status, continued and the career of this vernacular literary language, or just the high-status regional style (cf. Busch 2011: 195), gradually extended along similar patterns to geographically more remote dominions. But enlarging the size of the target audience, till then basically an elite audience, accustomed to Sanskrit or, for that matter, Marathi compositions, was a task that required new means to deliver the message. *Śivrājbhūṣan*, a persuasive text, with its strongly political and probable martial functions,[28] reflecting geographically expansive

[28] On the role of imparting *ojas* or martial spirit as a function of another Braj poem characterised by *vīr ras* see Busch 2015: 262–264.

ambitions of Shivaji, appears as a composition which combines all pragmatic expectations of a royal patron with poetic conventions and high literary style. The mastery of the latter was the minimum prerequisite of poet's authority which conditioned the patron's investment in the composition.

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