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The Landscape of the Battlefield

The Case of *Varadāmbikāpariṇaya-Campū* by Tirumalāmbā*

ABSTRACT: The article presents an in-depth analysis of the description of the battlefield found in the poem *Varadāmbikāpariṇaya* or "The Marriage of Varadāmbikā," composed in verse and prose (*campū*) by Tirumalāmbā, a poetess active at Acyutadevarāya's court, and most likely his wife. The detailed accounts of war campaigns, with depictions of marching troops and battles, concern the figure of Acyutadevarāya's father, Narasa Nāyaka, whom the authoress calls King Narasiṃha. The verbal portrayal of the battle against the Chola ruler is particularly striking. It is unlikely to find in other works of *kāvya* literary tradition a similarly dazzling compilation of images painting a word picture of the battleground by means of objects and situations belonging to a sphere of human life so different from the deadly combat.

KEYWORDS: *Varadāmbikāpariṇaya-campū*, Tirumalāmbā, Acyutadevarāya, Narasa Nāyaka, Tuḷuva dynasty, Vijayanagara, *kāvya* literature

* I thank the reviewer of this article for all the comments.

Introduction

The present paper will look at the descriptive fragments found in the *campū* or the poem in verse and in prose, and in particular, the description of the battlefield, which will be analysed in detail. As I have already mentioned elsewhere (Sudyka 2023b), the research on the *campū*s is not particularly advanced and even the theoreticians of Sanskrit literature of the past did not devote much space to discussing the nature of this particular literary genre.

In my recent article (*ibid*.), I have highlighted various ways in which the *campū* text may be organized, such as the division into chapters called *ucchvāsa* or *āśvāsa*, but there are also certain other possibilities to structure the contents. We do find *campū*s divided into *stabaka*s, *vilāsa*s/*ullāsa*s and *kāṇḍa*s. Even the term *sarga*, seemingly reserved for an epic poem in verse or *padyamahākāvya*, very often called *sargabandha*, is used by some *campū* authors. Another possible division of a *campū* text would be into *varṇya*s, that is descriptions (lit. "to be described," "what is worth describing"). The latter term is of particular importance in the study of *campūs*, including this paper. Even if there were no internal divisions in the text at all, the descriptions prove to play a crucial role in any long poem. Sometimes it even seems as if the plot is there only to allow the author to weave more descriptive passages into it, just like pearls (Skt. *mauktika*, *muktā*) are woven onto a string to make a necklace. In fact, the beginnings of *kāvya* poetry may be linked to short poems such as *muktaka*s or single-verse poems complete in themselves; those, loosely bound by a theme, began with time to form larger distinct wholes (Lienhard 1984: 63–67).

Early theorists of Sanskrit literature emphasise the importance of the presence of descriptions of diverse nature in literary compositions. They do so when defining the *sargabandha mahākāvya*, i.e., the court poem written in verse, but the same recommendations would apply to narrative works composed in prose and a mixture of verse and prose, i.e., the *campū*s. One could say of those works that they contain collections of ornate descriptions, but the descriptions themselves act, in

turn, as showcases for an array of most precious or spectacular things. In her study of *mahākāvya*s, Ariadna Matyszkiewicz pays special attention to descriptions of mountains and oceans found in Sanskrit grand narratives[1] and writes:

> *Mahākāvya* poets highlight the natural grandeur of mountains and oceans, but only in order to tame it by incorporating into the collection of most precious and astounding things in the world. Within that collection, grand natural objects are turned into most unnatural, highly refined, ornate entities. (Matyszkiewicz 2018: 72)

Her insights hold true not only for the *sargabandha mahākāvya* genre but a wider range of texts as well as descriptions of more than just natural objects such as mountains and oceans. Those could also be "great battles and other momentous events, deeds, objects, and characters, which serve as landmarks of Sanskrit grand narratives" (Matyszkiewicz 2021: 32).

Daṇḍin (7/8 century CE), one of the many literary theorists who discuss the genre determinants of the *mahākāvya*, provides a list of descriptions the poets should include in their works:

> Daṇḍin, Kād. 1.16–17[2]
> (...) the *mahākāvya* (...) is ornamented with descriptions of: a city, the ocean, a mountain, seasons, moonrise, sunrise; play in a garden, play in water, drinking wine, the delights of love-making; separations of lovers and weddings, the birth / the growing up of sons; and also a council, [the dispatch of] an envoy, a march [of an army], a battle, the triumph of the hero (…) (transl. Trynkowska 2000: 40)

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1 See: Matyszkiewicz 2018, Matyszkiewicz 2019, and Matyszkiewicz 2021.

2 *nagarārṇavaśailartucandrārkodayavarṇanaiḥ |*
udyānasalilakrīḍāmadhupānaratotsavaiḥ ||
vipralambhair vivāhaiś ca kumārodayavarṇanaiḥ |
mantradūtaprayāṇājināyakābhyudayair api ||
alaṃkṛtam […] |

Among the items listed, besides themes connected with love, we also find a sequence related to war, and therefore violence, and since the marching out of the army is mentioned, it is clear that the next step on this path is very likely to be a battle. Of course, this particular requirement is also valid in the case of *gadya* or prose poems, and *campū kāvya*s or mixed poems, even if theoreticians of literature are silent on the subject, the lacuna being basically due to the conceptual priority and domination of *sargabandha mahākāvya* in theoretical reflections. However, one needs to keep in mind that mixed prose and verse compositions, already evidenced in the Ṛgvedic dialogue hymns and in the early post-Ṛgvedic texts (Witzel 1997), developed eventually into "prosimetric poetry on the *mahākāvya* scale" (Jones 2018: 103). This, in turn, advanced the possibility, and even the obligation, to comply with certain recommendations specific for all *mahākāvya*s.

Narasa Nāyaka's *"digvijaya"*

The *Varadāmbikāpariṇaya-campū,* the text with which we are concerned here, was written by Tirumalāmbā, a poetess at the court of Acyutadevarāya, king of the Tuḷuva dynasty, who ruled the Vijayanagara Empire between 1529 and 1542. It is likely Tirumalāmbā became one of his wives if we agree that a certain Ōduva Tirumalaidēvi, who is mentioned in the Srirangam inscription (EI 1942: 285–290), is the same person as our poetess (Sudyka 2023a: 607). Varadāmbikā, whose name appears in the title under which the work is known, was the daughter of the Salaga chief and the senior queen of Acyutadevarāya. The second part of Tirumalāmbā's work, indeed, describes the love story of Acyuta and the Salaga princess, but the first part is devoted to another male protagonist, namely Acyuta's father, Narasa Nāyaka, introduced here as King Narasiṃha. The possible reason for such a narrative construction was to legitimise Acyuta's rule. It can be hypothesised that Tirumalāmbā's *campū,* functioning in a specific courtly context, was a well-thought-out, subtle component in the practical implementation of imperial politics (Sudyka 2023a). So, indeed, it does not really matter

that both parts of the text focus on different protagonists: the glory of the father's military superiority is passed on directly to Acyuta, the son, as if two of Acyuta's half-brothers[3] had not occupied the throne in-between. Also, the deeds of both Narasa and Acyuta contribute in equal measure to the wealth and glory of the Tuḷuva dynasty, only in two different spheres of human life. Thus, the first part of the poem is devoted to Narasa's military activities, while the second part describes Acyuta falling in love at first sight with Varadāmbikā, how he pines for her before experiencing conjugal bliss, followed by Varadāmbikā's subsequent pregnancy and birth of the heir to the dynasty—Venkaṭādri.

The hero of the first part, Narasa Nāyaka, began his career as a general of King Sāḷuva Narasiṃha and became the regent after the king's death in 1491. When Narasa Nāyaka died, in 1503, his position was taken over by his eldest son, Vīra Narasiṃha, who in 1505 inaugurated the new Tuḷuva dynasty on the Vijayanagara throne. There is no record of Narasa Nāyaka's coronation, but Tirumalāmbā speaks of him as the king of Vijayanagara and describes his successful campaigns. There can be no doubt about his military exploits which are recorded in inscriptions and various literary sources. Yet, the dates and details of his life and related events are not always easy to ascertain from the sources available to us and it is quite difficult to reconstruct the history of his regency (Michell 2013: 407). From Tirumalāmbā's account one can clearly see that her 'report' was intentionally styled as Narasa's *digvijaya*, the conquest of the four quarters of the world, or of lands extending in all cardinal directions;[4] accordingly, the victories

[3] These were Vīra Narasiṃha (r. 1505–1509) and the famous Kṛṣṇadevarāya (r. 1509–1529).

[4] The poetess announces metaphorically Narasa's expedition in these words:

> VP-C 16
> *haridvadhūr ātmaguṇānurāgiṇīr anugrahīṣyann akhilāḥ karagrahāt |*
> *prahitya dūtim iva kīrtim agrato vibhuḥ pratasthe vijayādaracchalāt ||*
>
> Treating with respect the directions of the world, his brides, who were captivated by his qualities, the ruler, in order to take them as wives, first sent a messenger—his fame and then, on the pretext of honouring Victory, set out.

in the east, south and west are narrated as having occurred in a direct sequence, one after another. However, his expedition to the east is described in a very cursory manner,[5] which reinforces our belief that the idea here was not to present the events in their historical order, but to elevate Narasa's military conquests and view them in terms of *pradakṣiṇa*. Starting in the east, he would thus be circumambulating the nucleus of his kingdom by imitating the auspicious journey of the sun while, of course, visiting major pilgrimage centres and offering rich gifts to the temples.[6]

What we know for a fact is that around year 1497 Narasa marched south with the purpose of re-subjugating the territories which were once controlled by Vijayanagara. After successful conquests there,[7] he attacked and took over Srirangapattana, then continued his march in the westerly direction reaching Gokarna on the coast of the Arabian Sea; sometime in 1497 he returned from this campaign, which although long and extensive did not take him to the north and the east. The conquest of the Raichur Doab, which could be treated as an expedition to the north, occurred earlier, in 1492–1493, and the conflict with the Gajapati ruler happened towards the end of his regency (Nilakanta Sastri 1955: 264–265). Suryakanta, the editor and translator of the *Varadāmbikāpariṇaya-campū*, suggests that Narasa's war expedition to the east should be, in fact, identified with his father Īśvara's military operations. He explains: "Both of them were the subordinates of the

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5 VP-C 17
ādau jitvā harihayadiśām ātmasātkṛtya śaktyā
tatrātyugraṃ dinakaram iva sthāpayitvā pratāpam |
kṣoṇīpālaḥ prathamajaladheḥ kūlamārgeṇa gatvā
pārāvārantaraghanacamūpaṅktir āgād avācīm ||

The king first conquered the eastern side of the world, making it his own through his regal power. There he established his own glory fierce as the sun. Then, with his compact army excelling the ocean, he travelled the road by the sea and reached the south.

6 On the military expedition of King Acyuta having actually the form of a pilgrimage, see Sudyka 2013.

7 He subjugated the territories up to the Cape Comorin (Nilakanta Sastri 1955: 264).

Emperor Sāḷuva Narasiṁha during his war against the Oriya king Kapileśvara who had conquered some portions of the Vijayanagara Empire in the north-east" (Suryakanta 1970: 168–169).

It is very likely that Narasa, as a matter of fact, had participated in the eastern expedition in the army commanded by his father, Īśvara. We know that Īśvara trained him in the art of combat and commanding troops. After Īśvara's death, his son was the natural candidate for the position of commander-in-chief of the Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's forces and, indeed, became one (Hymavathi 1994: 39).

However, it must be remembered that the capture of Udayagiri fort by the general Īśvara mentioned in the *Varāhapurāṇam*, a Telugu poem written by two poets, Nandi Mallayya and Ghanṭa Singayya, took place around 1470 (*ibid.*: 37; Aiyangar 2003: 87–90) and may not be credited to Īśvara's son, Narasa. Moreover, this victory consolidated the supremacy of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha and it was Sāḷuva Narasiṃha who ordered his trustworthy general Īśvara to proceed with the conquest. Thus, it must be recognised that the conquest of the four quarters of the world was not a one-time feat carried out by Narasa. It spanned decades, during which Narasa's position changed from that of a general to that of a self-governing regent; however, the authoress has neatly linked Narasa's many victories, forming a vision of a victorious march of armies under his command to the east, south, west and north. It was certainly a good propaganda move and in keeping with literary convention as far as creating the image of a victorious and noble hero is concerned.

Scenes from the battlefield

In Tirumalāmbā's narrative, the most prominent of Narasa's enemies is the Chola ruler, and the battle against him is described with grandeur, using whole range of images and various literary devices. It is not certain who, in fact, this Chola ruler was, as such a designation could have disguised any one of the governors of the Chola territories.

Nevertheless, fighting against this enemy provides an opportunity to present the five-element political-military sequence: meeting, dispatch of an envoy, march of troops, battle, victory of the protagonist (*mantra-dūta-prayāṇa-āji-nāyakābhyudaya*) recommended to the *mahākāvya* poets in theoretical treatises.

The description of the battle starts with a council of war held in both camps, that of the Chola ruler and Narasa Nāyaka. In this particular case, Narasa's widespread fame as a warrior may be seen as a substitute for the dispatch of an actual messenger.[8] We witness the Chola ruler's advisers speaking of Narasa's victories and suggesting that he surrenders to his opponent. But their advice is not heeded by their lord. Narasa, on the other hand, is depicted as a man who is confident of his superior battle skills and we see him telling the ministers gathered at his side (*pārśvagatān amātyān*), with a smile:

yoddhuṃ prayāma vayam apy ucitaṃ kileti || VP-C 22d ||

"It is indeed appropriate that we march out to fight."

There is no account of a response to this declaration of confidence other than descriptions of the troops preparing for the march. Finally, the Vijayanagara army marches into battle. War drums and the praises of bards are heard, clouds of dust are raised. The deadly combat begins.

And here we come to the crux of the matter, which is the description of the battle and the battlefield itself in the *kāvya* tradition, and what innovations, if any, Tirumalāmbā brings to the subject. Of course, in epic poems such as this, we, too, encounter familiar images known from heroic tales and present in earlier literature, e.g., the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, such as sightings of headless warriors, jackals and vultures feeding on the battlefield, demons feasting on blood and flesh of the fallen, dead horses and elephants, the pearls spilling from the

[8] Usually not all elements of the political-military sequence are present in the *mahākāvya*, and sometimes some are substituted by other devices. See more in Sudyka 2003.

dissected temples of elephants, *apsaras*es ushering slain heroes into heaven. Images like these evoke emotional reactions such as fear and disgust, but also admiration for the valour of the warriors. Besides the presence of these motifs, one can observe how the *mahākāvya* authors bring into play their routine practice of building up their descriptions by masterfully employing a whole series of elements to illustrate the size, the power, and the enormity of the entities and phenomena described. Such mechanisms, which are particularly evident in depictions of oceans and mountains as we already know, are however by no means absent in other descriptions.

In the case of magnificent natural objects, the elements assembled for presentation serve to increase admiration and awe, but while presenting a battlefield such a literary practice usually amplifies the emotions of fear and disgust. Collections[9] of this kind, often present in descriptions of battles, also enumerate various omens foretelling the defeat of one opponent and the victory of the other. A good example of this would be the *Bhaṭṭikāvya* or "The Poem of Bhaṭṭi",[10] where such images constantly appear in the narrative of the Laṅkā war in canto 14 and 17.[11]

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[9] More about the pattern of collection in Sanskrit intellectual and literary culture in Matyszkiewicz 2019: 75–79.

[10] It is no coincidence that the *Bhaṭṭikāvya* otherwise known as the *Rāvaṇavadha*, the *sargabandha mahākāvya* written by Bhaṭṭi around the 7th century CE, was chosen here as a source material. Not only does it contain several longer chapters (*sarga*) recounting the battle of Laṅkā, but it also belongs to the classical literary production of the first millennium, and among texts of that period, it has been recognised as one of the six *mahākāvya*s considered by some critics to be the greatest achievements within the genre. Therefore, this epic poem can provide an excellent background for a work written by a woman in the second millennium CE, when the dynamics and role of works written in Sanskrit are changing (Bronner and Shulman 2006).

[11] E.g.: Bhk 14.20
dadāla bhūr nabho raktaṃ goṣpadapraṃ vavarṣa ca |
mṛgāḥ prasasṛpur vāmaṃ khagāś cukuvire 'śubham ||

The earth split, the sky rained blood enough to fill the hoof print of a cow, deer passed by on the left, birds called inauspiciously (transl. Fallon 2009: 325).

Let us take a look at some images intrinsic to the description of the battlefield—for instance, the image of flowing blood. Turning again to the *Bhaṭṭikāvya*, we find numerous references to rivers of blood streaming from the bodies of slain or wounded animals and humans. Blood gushing from the wounds of the dead and injured is depicted in various ways. Wounded warriors vomit blood. The sky, too, rains blood. The ground of the battlefield consequently turns into a red swamp. At times, we are made to view the frightening scenes of bloodshed through the prism of conventional descriptions of other phenomena.

Bhk 14.27
saṃbabhūvuḥ kabandhāni prohuḥ śoṇitatoyagāḥ |
terur bhaṭāsya-padmāni dhvajaiḥ pheṇair ivābabhe ||

Headless trunks appeared, rivers of blood carried them, the lotus faces of soldiers passed by, banners shone like foam. (transl. Fallon 2009: 325)

The rivers are portrayed as adorned with lotuses, as they normally are in the proper season of the year, but now it is the lotuses of human faces, and instead of water, it is blood flowing down the river, its foam imitated by battle flags bobbing up and down with the waves. The use of the *āsya-padma* metaphor, normally so common in the *kāvya* literature (different synonyms for both face and lotus may be used), here shocks because of the context in which it appears. Examining Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita* and *Saundarananda*, Diletta Falqui observes*:*

(…) comparing the warrior faces to the lotus was a *topos* in the epic, which seems to have been imprinted on the Mahākāvya genre and wisely employed by Aśvaghoṣa, later becoming a consecrated image of classical Kāvya. (Falqui 2023: 35)

It is more frequent in the *kāvya* literature to compare women's faces to lotuses, partly because detailed descriptions of female beauty are more common in the *kāvya* poetry, but even though in epic literature it is the faces of warriors that are often equated with lotuses, such an

image of a river of blood with lotuses of warriors' heads floating in it is certainly not a standard stylistic device in either tradition although it does occur.[12] As Ram Karan Sharma states discussing elements of poetry in the *Mahābhārata*, the lotus is "a favorite *upamāna* for anything that is charming" (Sharma 1988: 86). In the case of the Bhk stanza in question and others of such kind, the presence of lotuses does not turn the whole stanza enchanting or make for a more pleasant experience. On the contrary, the dissonance that has now arisen deepens the feeling of horror.

It is true that such descriptions of excruciating battle scenes by means of a completely different reality do occur in Bhaṭṭi's poem as well as in other *kāvya* compositions, but only occasionally. In Tirumalāmbā's *campū*, on the other hand, this is constantly the case.

The section devoted to the description of the battle opens with an extraordinarily long sentence,[13] appended by a series of sentences subordinated to the main clause, which appears at the very end: *atibhayaṅkaraṁ saṁgaram abhūt*—"There took place an extremely terrible battle, [which was…]." The sentences or *upamāna*s for which the battle is *upameya*, describing different situations and aspects of the combat, are introduced before the quoted closing statement. This prose passage is followed by two stanzas: 33 and 34. They are joined by another, two shorter sentences and verse 35, after which another prose fragment appears as a single extended sentence. The section concludes with stanzas 36–39.

The first to appear is a statement equating what happens on the battlefield with the construction of a heavenly palace, the columns of which are formed by the rising rays of flashing swords. And when this palace is all set, celestial women summoned by the war cries appear, casting glances at the heroes. Indra's wife, too, looks at them through the window. The battlefield itself is named in another subordinate

[12] One could point out also other examples, for instance, stanzas 18.72 and 19.77 in the *Śiśupālavadha* of Māgha (Rajendran, C. 2018: 364). For the same reasons as the *Bhaṭṭikāvya*, this epic poem could also serve as a source of interesting stanzas relating to battle and the battlefield.

[13] In the Suryakanta edition it fits on a few pages (Suryakanta 1970: 40–44).

clause; it is styled variously, as "the courtyard of the palace, where the *svayaṃvara* of celestial damsels takes place,"[14] "a laying-in-chamber for the goddess of Victory,"[15] or "the dining hall of Yama."[16] Furthermore, we are told that what happens on the battlefield resembles a complicated game of chess (Suryakanta 1970: 42).

There is, of course, no shortage of images of blood in the *Varadāmbikāpariṇaya-campū*. The battlefield is compared to a burning forest. The intense fire is red, just like blood, which is also referred to. The severed limbs of the warriors' bodies are respectively the branches, leaves, flowers and fruits with which the ground in this devastated forest—the battlefield—is covered:

> VP-C 34
> *parivahatkṣatajaughapataccamūbhaṭabhujorupadāvayavā mahī |*
> *tatadavāgnigalattaruśākhikāprasavaparṇaphaleva vanī babhau ||*
>
> The earth [of the battlefield], with the arms, thighs, feet and [other] limbs of the soldiers of [both] armies falling in the flowing stream of blood, looked like a forest with branches, flowers, leaves and fruits of trees falling into the spreading forest conflagration.

What we have here is the poetic figure known as the *yathāsaṃkhya* whose essence is the setting forth of two juxtaposed collections of objects "so arranged that item one of the first sequence matches item one of the second, item two of the first matches item two of the second, and so on" (Gerow 1971: 22).

Another complex image the poetess presents us with is the identification of the battlefield with the ocean of heroes' fame fed by the rivers of blood. Rivers always attract elephants. And here, too, those

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[14] *svayaṃvarabhavanāṅgaṇaṁ surāṅgaṇānāṁ* (according to Indian mythology, the heroes who fall in battle are rewarded by *surāṅgaṇā*s/*apsarase*s or celestial females with their embraces; see prose passage before stanza 33; Suryakanta 1970: 43).

[15] *jananasadanaṁ jayendirāyā* (prose passage before stanza 33; Suryakanta 1970: 43).

[16] *āhāramaṇḍapam anīhārakarakumārakasya* (Yama is introduced here as a son of Vivasvat; prose passage before stanza 33; Suryakanta 1970: 43).

powerful animals wade in them, while the shields that have fallen from the warriors' hands bob in the water like turtles. The sight of slaughtered elephants, stranded midstream, and mounted by young demons, broken spears in hand, brings to mind manned rowing boats gliding down the river (Suryakanta 1970: 42–43). Yet another image stages the battlefield as a pleasure-pond (*saṃgara-kelisaras*).[17] Of course, it is all about the enormous amounts of blood that make it up. Elephants dip into it and, instead of lotus-stalks, they pull out the severed limbs of warriors, crush the lotuses of human faces, and eventually the pond is transformed into a curdled mud mixed with flesh and fat.

Warriors, their bodies riddled with arrows, are likened to porcupines (*ibid.*: 41),[18] and those with their swords drawn and raised resemble powerful rhinos (*ibid.*: 43).[19]

The bloodthirsty creatures that are delighted with what is happening are demons, vultures and jackals. However, the authoress uses very complex and astonishing imagery here, too. The daughters of the demons are shown as playing at being cooks: pots are helmets, pearls from elephant

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[17] Prose passage before stanza 36; Suryakanta 1970: 46.

[18] The comparison of warriors, their bodies pierced with arrows, to porcupines is contained in a very long compound word forming a part of an enormous sentence: *sīmādhika-paradhāmālokana-sāmājika-vaimānika-vāmālaka-vimukta-kalpadruma-puṣpa-stabaka-niṣpatita-puṣpandhaya-pakṣa-pavana-tatkṣaṇa-kṛta-sandhukṣaṇa-kopāśuśukṣaṇi-durlakṣya-sādhu-dhānuṣka-kara-pariṣikayāyitacāpa-cakra-nirgatvara-viśikha-nicaya-khacitāṅga-vīra-vara-varga-samudghāṭita-durlalita-śalya-mṛga-samullasanaṁ* ([The battle had] the beauty of subjugated porcupines displayed by hosts of magnificent warriors with their bodies studded with innumerable arrows, discharged from the circle of bows, serving as ornaments for the hands of skilled bowmen, who are terrible to look at with their fire of anger, fanned into flame that very moment by the breeze of wings of bees dropping from clusters of *kalpadruma* flowers, fallen from the tresses of the assembly of wives of gods, watching the infinite and supreme prowess [of the heroes]) (transl. Suryakanta 1970, modified).

[19] In this part of the sentence, the battlefield is compared to a forest full of herds of rhinoceroses: *kāntāram iva khaḍgikulaparivṛtam*. In Sanskrit, *khaḍgin* means both someone armed with a sword and a rhino, which easily allows for the pun. In this way, the recipients of the poem can imagine groups of warriors on the battlefield with swords drawn, as fearsome as rhinoceroses armed with their horns.

temples[20] are rice, pieces of meat serve as charcoal, the blowpipes used for lighting the fire are pieces of chopped-off elephant trunks.[21] A little swing for the demon's child is made of loops of intestines held at either end by a pair of vultures swaying the rope back and forth (*ibid.:* 42). Such a distorted view of reality could be astonishing.

The most realistic depictions concern the behaviour of the enraged elephants.[22] They stamp their feet on the chests of the warriors and throw their horses into the air. But even in these cases, comparisons

[20] These were *gajamuktā*s believed to originate in the projections of an elephant's forehead.

[21] The prose passage after VP-C 34, first sentence:

niśitatara-kṛpāṇa-nikṛtta-hāstika-mastaka-visrasta-mauktika-jāla-pāṇḍara-taṇḍula-bharitāni kālāyasa-śirastrapātrāṇi pratyagra-tarasa-khaṇḍāṅgāra-saṁgatāyāṁ naistriṁśika-pātra-praghaṭitāṅgāra-dhānyām adhiropya mukhārpita-visṛṣṭa-śuṇḍākhaṇḍa-nalaka-mukha-vahamānaiḥ pavamānaiḥ pātita-saindhava-jaṃghā-kāṇḍendhanaṃ prajvalayantyo rajanicara-kumārikā bālikocita-pāka-kelikām ākalayan |

The daughters of night-rangers placed the pots in the form of iron helmets, full of white rice of a collection of pearls fallen from the frontal globes of elephants, cut down by extremely sharp swords, on the char-coal-burners-with-pots-on in the form of swordsmen. These burners contained live charcoal in the shape of pieces of fresh flesh. And then, by means of winds issuing out of the mouths of blow-pipes of the fallen portions of elephant-trunks, which they (i.e. the daughters of night-rangers) had put to their mouths, they kindled the fuel in the form of the long shanks of horses that had been cut down; and amused themselves with the sport of cooking that becomes young girls (transl. Suryakanta 1970).

[22] A veritable catalogue of possible behaviour of elephants and situations concerning them in battle can be found in the *Siśupālavadha* in *sarga* 18, stanzas 26 to 51, and some more. However, Māgha does not need to juxtapose these with other activities of everyday life not involving elephants to show the cruelty of animals trained for and experienced in battle.

E.g.: ŚV 18.57
paunaḥpunyād asragandhena matto mṛdgan kopāl lokamāyodhanorvyāṃ |
pāde lagnām atra mālām ibhendraḥ pāśīkalpām āyatām ācakarṣa ||

One elephant, intoxicated by the smell of blood, trampling people again and again in the battlefield angrily dragged the string of the intestine stuck to its feet, which was long and which looked like a chaint (transl. Rajendran, C. 2018: 344).

are made with other activities: a game in which human heads are the ball (stanza 36) and tearing a horse apart with a tusk is likened to cutting open a coconut with an axe (stanza 38).[23] One of the elephants rips a soldier apart in the way Bhīma did to Jarāsandha (stanza 39).

The prose and verse passages, discussed briefly above, constitute mainly a description of the battlefield, not the fight itself although words denoting the battle (*saṃgara*, *samara*, *samit*) are employed by the poetess while constructing comparisons and metaphorical juxtapositions with other phenomena. However, in stanza 37 it is clearly indicated that the battlefield [*raṇa* (battle) + *mahi* (earth)] is the object of description. The goddess Kālarātrī feeds from the vessel that the battlefield has become for her.[24] Also in the stanza 39 a word meaning battlefield appears [loc. *raṇabhuvi* = *raṇa* (battle) + *bhū* (earth)].

The climactic moment of the clash, that is, Narasa's entry into battle and the combat with the Chola ruler,[25] is described in separate stanzas and prose passages, just as the preparations for the march and the march of the troops were described earlier. It is only at this point that there the room to develop fully the heroic sentiment (*vīra rasa*) appears, for the description of the battlefield was dominated by sentiment of disgust (*bībhatsa rasa*) and feeling of terror (*bhayānaka rasa*). The accumulated images presented through various literary means serve the purpose of arousing emotions well.

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[23] VP-C 38
vetaṇḍeno vāham ekaṃ karāgrād vikṣipyābhād vyomni dantena bhindan |
vidhyann ūrdhvaṃ vibhrameṇaiva vīro vegotkṣiptaṁ nālikeraṁ kuṭhāryā ||

The elephant threw a horse to the sky with the end of his trunk, pierced it with his tusk and shone like a man who gracefully split in the air a heavily tossed coconut with his axe.

[24] VP-C 37a
raṇamahitalapātre kālarātryā prabhoktryā

[25] About a pattern of a single combat, between individual heroes, and the descriptions of large clashes in the epic tradition as well as in the *Kirātārjunīya* of Bhāravi see: Viswanathan Peterson 2003: 141–143.

Conclusions

To sum up, Tirumalāmbā described a situation seemingly unknown to her from personal experience[26]—a gory clash between two armies, the Chola's and the Vijayanagara's—using images most familiar to her, among them also those drawn from mythology. In her presentation of the battlefield, images from normal everyday life collide with scenes full of cruelty. Alongside ghastly episodes, there are homely, familiar ones as well. Such a juxtaposition in translating one reality into another could serve, both, to 'tame' the violence of war, if that is possible at all, and to make the war scenes horrific to the highest degree through a technique quite similar to the one employed in creating descriptions of mountains, oceans, etc. The images Tirumalāmbā collects and uses come from her own lived reality, that is the experience of courtly and everyday life: elephant tournaments, assemblies of ladies watching fights of brave warriors and presenting them with garlands, frolicking in the water, walks in the forest, playing with a ball, games of chess, young girls playing house and, at the same time, learning how to prepare food. A childbirth is mentioned as is also playing with children. As discerned from the images recalled above, indeed it was mainly courtly life, as seen through the eyes of the poetess and probably experienced by her personally, and the everyday life that provided the source material and imagery for her poem to contrast them with cruelties of war. When one begins to read the verses and sentences, the first impression is that they present harmless and innocent

[26] Of course, battles and wars were part and parcel of the medieval Indian world. This is evidenced also by the images of combat in Indian art (Figs 1, 2). We also know, even from the stanzas of the *Śiśupālavadha*, that women accompanied their husbands on war expeditions and could also witness the battle scenes:

> ŚV 18.61
> *tyaktaprāṇaṃ saṃyuge hastinīsthā vīkṣya premṇā tatkṣaṇād udgatāsu* |
> *prāpyākhaṇḍād devabhūyaṃ satītvād āśiśleṣa svaiva kañcitpurandhrī* ||
>
> One lady mounted on a female elephant seeing her husband losing his life in the battle, died instantly out of her intense love for him and because of her unbroken chastity, attaining divinity, embraced him herself (transl. Rajendran, C. 2018: 345).

scenes (lotuses, women, cooking, children playing, etc.), and only gradually comes the awareness that they are in fact something terrible.

Arguably, the description of the battlefield found in Tirumalāmbā's *Varadāmbikāpariṇaya-campū* is one of the most unusual, even in the *kāvya* tradition, which has accustomed its audience to the aura of the extraordinary and the accumulation of elements processed by poetic imagination. This juxtaposition of two worlds,[27] one in which (theoretically) love reigns and the other ruled by violence and force, may also speak about the boundary constantly experienced in the place where the battle is fought—the boundary between life and death. Perhaps showcasing this boundary and imbuing it with an emotional content was one of the aims of such an artistic choice made by the author.

What is more, the poetess probably wanted to intensify the feelings experienced by the audience, as was the customary aim of the creators of Sanskrit poetry. The skilfully chosen poetic figures served this very purpose. Perhaps the juxtaposition of the two spheres: one filled with violence, cruelty, arousing fear, apprehension and disgust, and the other—a domain of love, beauty and peace, carried an inculcated element of didacticism, prompting deeper reflection. The description of the battlefield, thus intensified, showed a dramatic picture of violence, the dimension of which distorted and twisted the image of what is beautiful in the ordinary world.

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[27] This is exactly the mechanism at work in the creation of the figure of speech known as *yathāsaṃkhya*. Unsurprisingly, the poetess also uses this figure, which is rather rare in Sanskrit poetry.

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Fig. 1. Battle scene, the outer walls of Mallikārjuna temple at Srisailam.
Photo: Lidia Sudyka

Fig. 2. Battle scenes on the Keśava temple's wall at Somanathapura, built by Somanātha Daṇḍanāyaka, the general of the Hoysala king Narasiṃha III (1254–1291). Photo: Lidia Sudyka