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“On Some Quotations of Māgha’s Verses” by Ludwik Sternbach – A Critical Review

Abstract

In his article “On Some Quotations of Māgha’s Verses”, published in *Sambodhi* 8 (1979), Ludwik Sternbach devotes special attention to fourteen stanzas (cited in the annex to the paper) which are ascribed to Māgha in some *subhāṣita-saṃgrahas* and other Sanskrit texts but are not found in the *Śiśupāla-vadha*. Sternbach claims that nine of them (verses 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 12 of the annex) are authentic Māgha stanzas, missing from the extant text of his *mahā-kāvya*. Moreover, he maintains that “the placing of ‘new’ Śiś[upāla-vadha] verses in the respective *sarga*-s seems not to present any difficulties, for *sarga*-s of [the] Śiś[upāla-vadha], similarly as *sarga*-s of the Kirātārjunīya are, generally, composed in distinct metres” (p. 140). In the present paper, I discuss seven stanzas from the annex to Sternbach’s article (numbers 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 12) and the possibility of their inclusion into the respective cantos of Māgha’s poem pointed out by the eminent scholar.

In his article “On Some Quotations of Māgha’s Verses”, published in *Sambodhi* 8 (1979), closely following the publication of the second volume of his major work *A Descriptive Catalogue of Poets Quoted in Sanskrit Anthologies and Inscriptions* (1978), Ludwik Sternbach devotes special attention to fourteen stanzas (cited in the annex to the paper) which are ascribed to Māgha in some *subhāṣita-saṃgrahas* and other Sanskrit texts but are not found in the *Śiśupāla-vadha*. Sternbach claims that nine of them (verses 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 12 of the annex) are authentic Māgha stanzas, missing from the extant text of his *mahā-kāvya*. Moreover, he maintains that “the placing of ‘new’ Śiś[upāla-vadha] verses in the respective *sarga*-s seems not to present any difficulties, for *sarga*-s of [the] Śiś[upāla-vadha], similarly as *sarga*-s of the Kirātārjunīya are, generally, composed in distinct metres and only the last verses in the *sarga*-s are composed in longer, seventeen and nineteen syllable metres” (Sternbach 1979: 140).

In my PhD thesis, written under the supervision of Prof. M. Krzysztof Byrski and published as Trynkowska 2004b (for an earlier English version of chapter 3.1.3, see

Trynkowska 2004a; for a revised and slightly enlarged English version of chapter 3.2.1.2, see Trynkowska 2004c), I carry out a detailed analysis of nine extended descriptive passages of the *Śiśupāla-vadha*, belonging to seven different *sargas* of the poem, including those mentioned by Sternbach. Additionally, I examine in detail another sustained descriptive passage of Māgha's *mahā-kāvya*, belonging to one more canto of the work – also mentioned by Sternbach – in Trynkowska 2006. Following in the footsteps of Indira Viswanathan (Shetterly) Peterson and David Smith, specialists in Bhāravi's *Kirātārjunīya* and Ratnākara's *Hara-vijaya* respectively (see Shetterly 1976, Peterson 1989 and 1991, Smith 1985, 1989 and 1992), I argue that at least the descriptive parts of the *Śiśupāla-vadha* are well-structured, coherent artistic wholes, and not random collections of single-stanza poems, connected only by a common theme, as maintained in some publications on the literary genre of *mahā-kāvya* even today. It is thus natural that the propositions of Sternbach have attracted my attention.

In the present paper, I discuss seven verses from the annex to Sternbach's article and the possibility of their inclusion into the respective *sargas* of the *Śiśupāla-vadha* pointed out by the eminent scholar.

Let us begin with number 9 in Sternbach's annex, a stanza in the *vaṃśastha* metre, ascribed to Māgha by Kṣemendra (11th century A.D.¹) in his *Aucitya-vicāra-caracā* (ad 30, no. 87):

*bubhukṣitair vyākaraṇaṃ na bhuṃyate
pipāsitaiḥ kāvya-raso na pīyate /
na vidyayā kenacid uddhṛtaṃ kulam
hiraṇyam evārjaya niṣphalāḥ kalāḥ //*

The hungry cannot eat grammar,
nor can the thirsty drink the nectar of poetry;
no one has ever elevated a family by learning.
It is gold that you should amass; the arts are useless.

According to Sternbach, this verse originally belonged to the first canto of the *Śiśupāla-vadha*, which is indeed the only *sarga* of Māgha's *mahā-kāvya* composed in *vaṃśastha*. I have analysed this part of the poem in detail elsewhere (Trynkowska 2000 and 2004d; see also Trynkowska 2004b: 63-64, 74-83), here it should be enough to briefly recapitulate its content.

In the first stanza, the hero, Kṛṣṇa, while living in Dvārakā, notices the sage Nārada descending from the sky. There follows a description of the sage in nine stanzas (2-10). Nārada reaches Kṛṣṇa's palace and is received with reverence by the hero, who is delighted with his arrival (11-24). In stanza 25, Kṛṣṇa begins to speak. He praises the sage and asks

¹ According to De (1923: 139) and Kane (1923: CLXIII).

him the purpose of his visit (26-30). Nārada begins to speak (31a). Initially, he claims that his main purpose has been to see the hero and extols him as a god who descends from heaven to earth in order to kill evil human rulers, such as Kāṃsa, and *asuras*, such as Hiranyākṣa (31b-40). Later, however, the sage reveals that he has brought a message from Indra (41) and conveys it to his host. The king of the gods calls to mind the fate of the mighty *daitya* Hiranyakaśipu, who terrorised the residents of heaven and was eventually killed by Viṣṇu's Nṛsiṃha *avatāra* (42-47). Next, Indra reminds Kṛṣṇa of the story of the frightening *rakṣas* Rāvaṇa, who was Hiranyakaśipu reborn: he fought against the gods for the control of the universe until slain by another *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, namely Rāma (48-68). The final part of the message (69-73) directs the attention of the hero to the fact that Rāvaṇa has been reincarnated as the powerful Śiśupāla, King of the Cedis; Indra laments over the oppression of the world by this villain and asks Kṛṣṇa to kill him. Nārada echoes his request (74). In the last stanza of the canto (75), the hero agrees and the sage leaves.

Obviously, if the verse discussed here is to form a part of a longer literary text, it should be put into a character's mouth. As pointed out in the above summary, the first *sarga* of the *Śiśupāla-vadha* abounds in speeches. However, I fail to see how our stanza could be included into any of them. This bitter complaint of a scholar and poet suits neither the content nor the tone of Kṛṣṇa's reverential reception of Nārada (whom he praises as "a treasury of the Vedas"²), Nārada's eulogy of Kṛṣṇa or Indra's terrifying story of the atrocities committed by Hiranyakaśipu, Rāvaṇa and Śiśupāla, ended with his humble request to the hero to kill the king of the Cedis. Consequently, the verse cannot be placed in the canto.

Number 6 in Sternbach's annex is a stanza in the *anuṣṭubh* metre, attributed to Māgha in the *Sūkti-ratna-hāra* (197.111) of Sūrya Kaliṅgarāja (14th century A.D.³):

*na kulaṃ vṛtta-hīnasya pramāṇam iti me matiḥ /
antyēṣv api ca jātānāṃ vṛttam eva viśiṣyate //*

I think that high birth cannot be the measure
of one whose conduct is not right,
while even those born among the lowest
can distinguish themselves by right conduct.

In Sternbach's opinion, this verse originally formed a part of the second *sarga* of the *Śiśupāla-vadha*, which is one of the two cantos of Māgha's poem composed in *anuṣṭubh*. The other is *sarga* 19, which deals exclusively with the final battle between the armies of Kṛṣṇa and Śiśupāla, and therefore may indeed be omitted from our discussion. *Sarga* 2 is a different matter. Sternbach believes that our stanza fits this canto well; moreover,

² ŚV I, 28, p. 12: *nidhiḥ śrutinām*.

³ According to Sternbach (1974: 19).

he identifies the two verses directly following it in the *Sūkti-ratna-hāra* (197.112 and 197.113) as ŚV II, 85 and ŚV II, 86 respectively. Thus, the *sarga* seems to merit an analysis of its contents.

In the first stanza, Kṛṣṇa, invited by Yudhiṣṭhira to attend his *rāja-sūya* sacrifice, hesitates over whether he should immediately march against Śiśupāla or accept this invitation. Together with his two elder relations, Balarāma and Uddhava, he arrives at the assembly hall to take counsel (2-5). In stanzas 6-7, the hero begins to speak. He argues for marching against the king of the Cedis without delay and asks Balarāma and Uddhava their opinions (8-13). There follows a description of Balarāma, who begins to speak (14-21). He agrees with his brother and produces further arguments supporting their position (22-67). In stanza 68, Kṛṣṇa requests Uddhava to take the floor. Uddhava begins to speak (69). He advises caution and tries to argue the hero into attending Yudhiṣṭhira's sacrifice (70-117). In the last stanza of the canto (118), Kṛṣṇa concludes the council.

Among the arguments put forward by Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma and Uddhava in support of their respective stances are, admittedly, many general observations similar to the verse discussed by us at the moment. However, the overwhelming majority of them deal with the course of action which should be taken by rulers and other persons against their enemies, and thus are firmly connected with the subject of the council. Still, in the speeches of Balarāma and Uddhava, we also find a few stanzas devoted to the broader theme of the right and wrong behaviour of men, including verses 85 and 86 pointed out by Sternbach. Consequently, although our stanza does not suit the content of the *sarga* as well as Sternbach maintained, it could have been placed in one of its speeches, were it not for one fact: it is a verse from the *Udyoga-parvan* of the *Mahā-bhārata* (MBh V, 34, p. 144) and therefore the whole discussion in which we have indulged here has been purely academic.

Let us now pass on to number 7, an *upajāti* stanza, which is cited as Māgha's verse by Veṇīdatta (17th or 18th century A.D.⁴) in his *Padya-veṇī* (749):

*naktan-divopātta-ghaṭāmbu-sekaiḥ
saṁvardhitaḥ kesara-pādapo 'yam
mām eva santāpayati śrito he
kṛtajñātām rakṣati kaḥ palāśo //*

Ah! This *kesara* tree, which I have raised
by watering with a pot day and night,
torments <burns>⁵ me now,
when I have sought shelter under its branches.
Has any *palāśa* tree <demon eating flesh> ever been grateful?

⁴ According to Sternbach (1974: 28).

⁵ I use angle brackets to enclose the second meaning of the preceding word or phrase.

Sternbach takes the view that this lament of a man separated from his beloved in the vernal season was originally included either in the third canto of the *Śiśupāla-vadha*, which is the only *sarga* of Māgha's *mahā-kāvya* with *upajāti* as its dominant metre, or in the initial part of the fourth canto, which begins with 18 *upajāti* stanzas, while its remaining verses are composed in a variety of metres.

The contents of the third canto are, in brief, as follows:

In the first stanza, Kṛṣṇa, who has finally decided not to march against Śiśupāla immediately, is about to leave for Indraprastha. Ready to set off, the hero is portrayed in twenty-one stanzas (2-22).⁶ Together with the army of the Yādavas, he departs from his palace and rides through the streets of Dvārakā (23-31). The city attracts his attention (32) and is, consequently, described in thirty-one stanzas (33-63).⁷ Kṛṣṇa and the troops accompanying him eventually depart from Dvārakā (64-69). The next twelve stanzas (70-81) depict the ocean coast outside the city.⁸ In the last stanza of the *sarga* (82), the hero and his soldiers leave the ocean far behind.

The initial sixteen stanzas of the fourth canto describe the Raivataka mountain passed by Kṛṣṇa on his way to Indraprastha. Its sight delights the hero (17). On noticing his master's admiration for Raivataka, Kṛṣṇa's *sūta*, Dārūka, begins another depiction of the mountain (18).

It is not possible to insert the lyric verse which interests us here in any of the descriptive and narrative passages mentioned above. Although the portrait of Kṛṣṇa contains a group of three stanzas which we could classify as erotic (14-16), they differ from our verse, since they depict the beauty of the women surrounding the hero and their behaviour, revealing their amorous feelings towards him. Five erotic stanzas found in the description of Dvārakā are also unlike our verse: they present the charms of the women of the city (47, 54) and scenes of love-making between its inhabitants (45, 53, 55); moreover, all the stanzas of this passage are syntactically connected with the thirty-second stanza of the *sarga* – each of them takes the form of an attributive subordinate clause, linked to the main clause contained in stanza 32 by the relative pronouns 'which' (*yad*) or 'where' (*yatra*), referring to the noun 'city' (*pur*) – and thus our verse certainly cannot be placed among them. There are no other erotic stanzas in the part of the *Śiśupāla-vadha* analysed by us at the moment. However, since we find ten such stanzas in the second description of Raivataka, which extends over the rest of canto 4 (19-68: 23, 27, 38, 42, 45, 51, 57, 62, 66, 67 – they depict women in love and scenes of love-making in the mountainous setting), we could not have completely excluded the possibility of the placement of our verse in the first description of the mountain in this *sarga*, were it not for one matter: again, all the stanzas of the passage are syntactically connected.

⁶ For a detailed analysis of this passage, see Trynkowska (2004a); see also Trynkowska (2004b: 88-94).

⁷ For a detailed analysis of this passage, see Trynkowska (2004b: 99-110).

⁸ For a detailed analysis of this passage, see Trynkowska (2004c).

Number 8 in Sternbach's annex, a *vasanta-tilakā* verse, is quoted as Māgha's stanza in the *Subhāṣitāvalī* (1561) of Vallabhadeva (not earlier than the 15th century A.D.⁹):

*nārī-nitamba-phalake pratibadhyamānā
haṃsīva hema-raśanā madhuraṃ rarāsa /
tan-mocanārtham iva nūpura-rāja-haṃsāś¹⁰
cakrandur ārtta-mukharaṃ caraṇāvalagnāḥ //*

While being tied round the broad hips of a woman,
her golden girdle sounded softly, like a female goose;
the ganders of the anklets of the lady clung to her feet
and jingled loudly, as if piteously crying for the release of their mate.

According to Sternbach, this portrait of an attractive woman putting on her jewellery comes either from the second part of the fourth canto of the *Śiśupāla-vadha* (19-68), which, as mentioned above, is composed in a variety of metres, but *vasanta-tilakā* figures prominently among them (16 out of 50 verses), or from the fifth canto of Māgha's *mahā-kāvya*, which is the only *sarga* of the poem with *vasanta-tilakā* as its dominant metre.

We already know that the second part of canto 4 is taken up with Dārūka's description of the Raivataka mountain. The stanza which interests us now does not fit this context. Moreover, all the verses of the passage contain either a noun or a demonstrative pronoun and noun denoting Raivataka (19, p. 95: *nageśam* – "the king of the mountains"; 20, p. 95: *giriṣ ayam* – "this mountain"; 21, p. 96: *acala eṣa* – "this mountain"; 65, p. 112: *eṣa śailaḥ* – "this mountain"; 68, p. 113: *asau ... adriḥ* – "that ... mountain") or a pronoun having the same reference (22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 34, 36, 38, 41, 44, 45, 46, 49, 55, 56, 60, 62, 63, 64, 67: *iha* – 'here'; 23, 33, 35, 57, 58, 66: *atra* – 'here'; 25, 27, 29, 39, 40, 43, 48, 51, 54, 61: *idam* – 'this'; 31, 37, 42, 47, 52, 59: *etad* – 'this'; 32, 50, 53: *adaś* – 'that'). Consequently, the inclusion of our stanza here is out of the question.

In the first verse of *sarga* 5, Dārūka's speech fills Kṛṣṇa with desire to spend some time on Raivataka. All the remaining stanzas of the canto (2-69) depict the hero's encampment on the mountain. Eleven of them (7, 11, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 26, 27, 29, 34) portray the women accompanying the army of the Yādavas: a woman from a gynaeceum falls off her donkey (7); the dark dust raised by the Yādava troops makes the eyelashes of their women thicker (11); servants help queens out of their palanquins (17); servants help women from a royal gynaeceum dismount from their horses (18); the hair of a young woman, scattered with flowers from her broken garland, looks more beautiful than the tail of a peacock (19); exhausted, sweaty queens sleep in their tents (22); a woman's blouse clings to her sweaty body (23); the eyes of the women surpass in beauty the eyes of a doe (26); courtesans adorn themselves and please exhausted men with their services (27);

⁹ According to Sternbach (1974: 22-23).

¹⁰ In Sternbach's article: °*rāja-haṃsāś*; the correction is mine.

women bathe in a river (29); a woman's breasts resemble the two prominences on an elephant's forehead (34).

A scene of a lovely woman at her toilet would not be completely out of place in the above context, so I cannot entirely rule out the possibility that our verse originally belonged to this *sarga*. However, I find it highly doubtful, as all the above stanzas, even those that do not explicitly mention the encampment of the Yādava army on Raivataka, contain distinct references to travelling, breaking the journey, exhaustion, sweating, or (mountainous) nature, which our verse totally lacks.

Finally, let us turn to numbers 1, 3 and 12, all composed in the *mālinī* metre. Sternbach is of the opinion that they were originally included in the eleventh canto of the *Śiśupāla-vadha*, which is the only *sarga* of the poem with *mālinī* as the dominant metre. In its first stanza, the bards (*māgadha*) of Kṛṣṇa, who sleeps in his camp on Raivataka, start telling the hero, loudly, to the accompaniment of stringed instruments, about the dawn of a new day, obviously in order to awaken him. In the following forty-one descriptive verses (2-42), the *māgadhas* report to Kṛṣṇa on the activities taking place in the camp in the last part of the night; next, up until the very end of the canto (43-67), they describe the sunrise.¹¹

Number 1 is attributed to Māgha by Bhagadatta Jalhaṇa in his *Sūkti-muktāvalī* (1258 A.D.;¹² 287.9):

*adhirajani-mukhe yaḥ sāndra-lākṣānurāgair
vyatikarita ivoccaiḥ pāṭalatvaṃ dadhānaḥ /
uṣasi sa khalu dīpaḥ pāna-nirdhūta-rāgaḥ
sphurad-adhara ivāyaṃ dhūśaratvaṃ bibharti //*

This lamp, which at the beginning of the night
shone brightly, as if thickly painted with red lac,
has become dull and flickers now that the day dawns,
like a quivering lip with its colour destroyed by drinking.

In this case, I can agree with Sternbach without any hesitation: the above charming stanza, suggestive of love-making being witnessed by the lamp at night, could have originally belonged to the eleventh *sarga* of the *Śiśupāla-vadha*. It could not have been included in the description of sunrise, as each verse of this passage mentions the sun or sunshine (43, p. 280: *vāsarāṇām vidhātuḥ*; 44, p. 280: *arkaḥ*; 45, p. 280: *vivasvān*; 46, p. 281: *atuhina-rucinā*; 47, p. 281: *sūryaḥ*; 48, p. 281: *sapta-saptiḥ*; 49, p. 282: *bhās-kareṇa, ātapena*; 50, p. 282: *tapana*; 51, p. 282: *ahima-rocir*; 52, p. 283: *dina-kara*; 53, p. 283: *bhānoḥ*; 54, p. 283: *ravi*; 55, p. 284: *ātape*; 56, p. 284: *harid-aśvaḥ*;

¹¹ For a detailed analysis of this passage, see Trynkowska 2006.

¹² According to Sternbach (1974: 17).

57, p. 284: *bhāsvatā*; 58, p. 285: *gharma-bhānur*; 59, p. 28: *divasa-kara*; 60, p. 286: *arkaḥ*; 61, p. 286: *ayuga-saptis*; 62, p. 286: *uṣṇa-raśmiḥ*; 63, p. 286: *daśa-śata-kara-mūrtau*; 64, p. 287: *ahima-raśmir*; 65, p. 287: *atuhina-dhāmnī*; 66, p. 288: *bhāsvān*; 67, p. 288: *ahnām ... nāyakaḥ*). However, it could easily have formed a part of the previous descriptive passage (cf. verse ŚV XI, 18, similar in content).

Number 3 is ascribed to Māgha in the *Subhāṣitāvalī* (1046) of Vallabhadeva:

*alam alam anugamya prasthitam prāṇa-nātham
prathama-viraha-śoke na pratikāra eṣaḥ /
sapadi ramaṇa-yātrā śreya ity āraṭantyā
caraṇa-patana-pūrvam sā niruddheva kāñcyā //*

“No more, no more following the lord of your life, who has set off on his journey!
This is not the right remedy for the pain of the first stage of separation;
it is better if your beloved leaves at once!” – as if shouting these words,
the jingling girdle of a woman fell at her feet and stopped her.

The fact that the unfortunate lady who runs after her departing partner has evidently just risen from their bed, putting on (or rearranging) her jewellery in haste, suggests the interpretation of the above stanza as a dawn scene. However, since it, obviously, does not take place in Kṛṣṇa’s camp (no man travelling together with the hero leaves his beloved on Raivataka!), the verse cannot be inserted in the first descriptive passage of the eleventh canto of the *Śīsupāla-vadha*. Its insertion in the description of sunrise is also impossible, on the same grounds as in the case of stanza 1.

Number 12 is cited as Māgha’s verse by Śrīdharadāsa (1205 A.D.¹³) in his *Sad-ukti-karṇāmṛta* (131):

*sa jayati giri-kanyā-miśritāścarya-pūrtis
tripura-yuvati-līlā-vibhrama-bhramśa-hetuḥ /
upacayavati yasya pronnataika-stanatvād
upari bhujaga-hāraḥ sthāna-vaiṣamyam eti //*

Victory to him who fills with wonder
when united with the Daughter of a Mountain;
who is the destroyer of the charming coquetry
of the young women of Tripura;
on whose broad chest his snake necklace lies askew,
as a full breast rises there on one side!

¹³ According to Sternbach (1974: 16).

The placement of this praise of the great god Śiva in the eleventh *sarga* of the *Śiśupāla-vadha* is simply out of the question.

To sum up: Out of the seven stanzas from the annex to Sternbach’s article which we have examined in this paper, five (numbers 3, 6, 7, 9 and 12) certainly could not have belonged to the respective cantos of Māgha’s *mahā-kāvya* pointed out by the eminent scholar; in one case (number 8) it is possible but highly doubtful; only one verse (number 1) fits the indicated *sarga* perfectly and therefore could have been originally included there, although it is, of course, by no means certain.

I have left here without examination two stanzas in Sternbach’s annex (numbers 2 and 11), both composed in the *śārdūla-vikrīḍita* metre, ascribed to Māgha by Vallabhadeva in his *Subhāṣitāvalī* (3072 and 3073 respectively). Sternbach claims that they “could have been included at the end of any *sarga*-s of the Śiś[upāla-vadha]”. The task of investigating this proposition – definitely not impossible, but arduous and time-consuming – may perhaps be carried out in another paper.

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