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ARTICLE

The eropolitical compound: immanence, transcendence and a parasitic operation of patriarchy in Sanskrit literature

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Abstract

This paper examines a pattern in Sanskrit literature, labelled for convenience the "eropolitical compound". This is a formula whereby a male protagonist's claiming of a feminine figure is made instrumental to, or tied indissociably with, a political victory or reclamation of control over a public domain. This paper first reviews a number of examples of the motif in well-known works of drama, poetry, and eulogistic inscriptions largely of the fourth–seventh centuries CE, setting these against the particular historical and social contexts in which they occur. In a second step, the motif is identified at work in other genre and historic contexts of Sanskrit tradition, suggesting thereby that the figure also requires treatment at a broader level of analysis. The paper's third and final step is to adopt from Simone de Beauvoir the constructs of immanence, transcendence, and the woman as Other, in order to argue that the eropolitical compound is indeed a kind of formula or persisting theme that cuts across multiple historic and genre contexts, and that it should be seen as a normative construct reflecting and enacting a common strategy of patriarchal cultures.

Keywords: Simone de Beauvoir; Epic mythology; Immanence; *Kāvya*; *Praśasti*; Purāṇic mythology; Transcendence; Vaiṣṇava mythology; *Śrī*

> Si la mer et la montagne sont femmes, c'est que
> la femme est aussi pour l'amant la mer et la montagne.
> Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe* I: 264–5

Introduction

In the most famous of all South Asian stories, the hero Rāma violently defeats an enemy male and regains his lost wife. The conquest of Rāvaṇa signals Rāma's reclamation of both public, political power as king and private, domestic felicity: his period of unjust exile comes to a close, he regains the throne of Ayodhyā, the gods are content with the elimination of a dharmic threat, all brought about together with the reclamation of his beloved bride Sītā, the embodiment of all auspiciousness and welfare. This achievement (Vālmīki, *Rāmāyaṇa* 6.97–116) is not without its sour moments and is not the end of the epic, but I think it is fair to say that it is the principal climax of the best-known narrative in the history of South Asia.

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This paper is not about the *Rāmāyaṇa* as such, but is concerned rather with a wider pattern in Sanskrit literature of which the Rāma story is a (perhaps *the*) prime exemplar: Rāma does not simply achieve, accidentally, both heroic and romantic purposes. Rather, it is through or by means of the reclamation of Sītā that the political triumph comes. The two tasks are inseparable and instrumental each to the other. As such, Rāma's romantic–heroic achievement in Laṅkā is a kind of two-in-one or even two-as-one accomplishment. For convenience I will call this formula of doubled realization the eropolitical compound: a male protagonist claims a sexualized feminine figure, and this gesture is tied conspicuously to a political victory, usually configured as the defeat or humiliation of an enemy male. In such cases, the acquisition or reclamation of the feminine object entails an erotic, romantic, sexual, or domestic felicity, and this desideratum stands in an instrumental relationship with the reclamation of control over a public or political domain. These two purposes may be bound causally in narrative, whereby the achievement of one good is made to follow necessarily from the other as in the case of Rāvaṇa's defeat and reunion with Sītā, or figuratively through poetic construction, whereby a poet seeks to collapse and construe the one as the other through simile and other devices of his trade.

The more rudimentary task of this paper is to foreground and identify the eropolitical compound as a recurring pattern and situate it against existing studies treating this theme of the relationship between *kāma* and political power. In Section 1, more circumscribed historic, cultural, and social contexts of pre-modern South Asia are invoked to account for the appeal and pervasiveness of the formula, particularly within the genre contexts of *kāvya* and *praśasti* inscriptions of the fourth–seventh centuries CE. But the theme spills well beyond the historic and genre contexts of these studies, as is clear already from my reference to Vālmīki. Section 2 therefore offers a number of examples – by no means intended to be exhaustive – which attest the same compound form at work in Vedic, epic and *purāṇic* sources. This should make it clear that a larger frame of reference is called for. The more difficult task I set myself in Section 3 is to identify and articulate a gender dynamic operative within the eropolitical compound in order to argue that it participates in or reflects an operation of patriarchy best approached through the vocabulary of Simone de Beauvoir, particularly through her understanding of immanence, transcendence, and the woman as Other.

It is worth declaring at the outset that readers will not find in the small study below any large-scale defence of trans-historical or universalizing theory *per se*. In fact, precisely such an apologetic initially formed part of this study, with the work of Patrick Colm Hogan (2003) forming a key reference point. The present format, however, requires that I set aside this aspect of the argument along with any principled defence of the view that there are indeed habits, strategies and dynamics of patriarchal cultures that cut across time and space, and that thinkers such as Beauvoir have successfully penetrated these and assisted us in naming them. The path of my argument will be rather to demonstrate that available theorizations of the motif which are restricted to more particularist historical and social contexts of pre-modern South Asia cannot fully account for it, since the motif escapes the genre and historical contexts of those theorizations. My purpose is not to replace or invalidate these more particularist readings, but to argue that they alone will not suffice to account fully for the persisting appeal of the eropolitical formula. What is required additionally is an illuminating set of terms developed from Beauvoir. As such I hope not only to demonstrate that the eropolitical compound is indeed a kind of formula or persisting theme that cuts across multiple historic and genre contexts of Sanskrit literature, but that it should be seen as a normative construct reflecting and enacting a common strategy of patriarchal cultures.

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1. Classic forms of the eropolitical compound in *kāvya* and *praśasti*

Once again, the logic of the formula is that a male protagonist (re)claims – often through the killing or humiliation of a rival male – public, political power by means of or indissociably with the (re)claiming of a desirable feminine figure or sexualized feminine principle. My concern is not merely the presence of the common heroic and erotic themes, but the simultaneity and mutual instrumentality of the two purposes. This can be seen at work in any number of examples of courtly Sanskrit *kāvya* and *praśasti* materials from the fourth century CE onwards, but here in Section 1 I will refer particularly to the *Mṛcchakaṭika* of Śūdraka (perhaps fourth century CE), *Raghuvaṃśa* of Kālidāsa (early fifth century), constructions from *praśasti* inscriptions (fourth–ninth centuries), and the *Ratnāvalī* of Harṣa (seventh century). I begin with these examples because they are well known and paradigmatic for later Sanskrit literature. Moreover, a number of studies have already theorized and examined in illuminating ways the relationship between political power, poetry and the domain of *kāma* at various points within this canon, as well as within later Sanskrit works creatively inheriting from them. This will make it clear that the preference, in the courtly context of Sanskrit *kāvya* and *praśasti* composition, for setting kāmic objects of desire – beautiful princess bride figures, sexualized earth bodies, and forms of Śrī or *śrī* – in an instrumental relationship to a male's establishment of public and political power is in a sense overdetermined by multiple but historically localized social, political and aesthetic values. In Section 2, however, I will be concerned to point to examples of the eropolitical compound falling outside of the historic and genre context of Section 1's *kāvya* and *praśasti* examples. This will pull us outwards in search of a more encompassing reading strategy that permits a purchase on the wider set of materials.

My first case then is the *Mṛcchakaṭika* of Śūdraka from perhaps the third or fourth century CE (Acharya 2009: xxiv–xxvi), or possibly one or two centuries later.[1] Summarizing as briefly as possible, the love plot between the hero Cārudatta and Vasantasenā meets its happy resolution simultaneously with that of a political intrigue at court involving a second figure, Āryaka. Indeed, Keith remarked that Śūdraka can be credited with "the originality of combining the political and the love intrigue, which give together a special value to the play" (Keith 1924: 133). Cārudatta's and Āryaka's fates become intertwined throughout the drama, and the latter's political success resolves in favour of the main hero Cārudatta and makes his marriage to Vasantasenā possible. In the last moments, as the union of Cārudatta and Vasantasenā moves towards final fulfilment, a message is conveyed from the triumphant and newly crowned Āryaka to Cārudatta that Vasantasenā has been released from her identity as a courtesan so that she might be permitted to marry Cārudatta.[2] This happy final double felicity is articulated by Cārudatta (10.59):

> My reputation has been purified, and the enemy fallen at my feet is [compassionately] released as well;
> my dear friend King Āryaka, his enemies uprooted, governs the earth.

[1] Morgenstierne 1921; Keith 1924: 128–31; van Buitenen 1968: 30–2; Warder 1977: 20–1; and Goodwin 1998: 172 note 3 configure the *Mṛcchakaṭika* as a later elaboration upon the unfinished *Cārudatta* ascribed to that "Bhāsa" who is referred to by Kālidāsa in the *Mālavikāgnimitra* Act 1 *prastāvanā*. Both *Mṛcchakaṭika* and *Cārudatta* present the same basic plot and set of characters, but it has been argued that the 13 Trivandrum plays, identified by T. Gaṇapati Śāstrī as those of the pre-Kālidāsa Bhāsa (*Svapnavāsavadatta*, ed. Śāstrī 1912: i–xlvii), are not likely to have been composed by a single author, let alone one from the fourth century CE or earlier (see, e.g., Tieken 1993). Moreover, the ten-act *Mṛcchakaṭika* is substantial and complete, while the four-act *Cārudatta* is not. As such I treat here the longer and more complete *Mṛcchakaṭika*, which I consider more likely to be the source of *Cārudatta* rather than the reverse.

[2] *ārye vasantasene parituṣto rājā bhavatīṃ vadhūśabdenānugṛhṇāti* (10.58/59): "Noble Vasantasenā, the delighted king obliges her ladyship with the word 'wife'."

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Moreover, this, my beloved [Vasantasenā], is regained; Sir [Śarvilaka], you meet in me a dear friend, and I a companion in you.
Now, what else is left that I could possibly ask you for, Sir?[3]

The verse divides the two domains of felicity in a symmetrical structure by assigning an acquired feminine object to each half: the first begins with *labdhā* ("obtained"), qualifying the purification (*śuddhi*, fem.) of Cārudatta's reputation (*cāritrya*). This speaks to the public and political issues of the defeat of rival males (Cārudatta and Āryaka alike) and the exercise of worldly power. The second half likewise commences with *prāptā* ("obtained"), qualifying the dearly beloved one (*priy*[*ā i*]*yaṃ*, i.e. Vasantasenā) and speaks to the resolution of Cārudatta's love interest, along with the new friendship established with Śarvilaka. Thus Cārudatta and Āryaka enact the two registers of felicity together, and it is striking and conspicuous that Śūdraka felt compelled – and succeeded in doing so – somehow to configure the love plot so intimately with the political, achieving this by dividing it between two characters who each function on the other's behalf. That the two men's happy fates are closely intertwined is clear from this verse and is indicated repeatedly throughout the play. The final resolution entails a mutually implicated and simultaneous felicity in the private domain of Cārudatta's romantic or erotic fulfilment, and the public-political domain of Āryaka's ascension to royal power – herein lies the "special value" of the play noted by Keith.

For a second example from the *kāvya* corpus, we might point to the *Raghuvaṃśa* of Kālidāsa (*c.* early fifth century CE) which provides many carefully crafted images of political power won through the acquisition of a sexualized feminine object or principle, most often cast as a form of Śrī-Lakṣmī (royal splendour and majesty incarnate as goddess) or Bhū/Pṛthivī/Vasundharā (the feminine earth as goddess). Thus for example at 4.4–7, Raghu's virtues are all framed by means of goddess figures choosing and betaking themselves to the young king (Padmā/Śrī, Sarasvatī and the earth Vasuṃdharā). His ascension to the throne, which necessarily means the domination over his enemies, draws Padmā/Śrī to him of her own accord (*svayam*); likewise, fame-spreading Sarasvatī herself praises him, and the earth becomes "as new" (*ananyapūrveva … vasundharā*, *Raghuvaṃśa* 4.7) to him (in terms nearly echoing a sentiment expressed by Madonna in the 1980s). Intimate sexual bonds with divine female figures who are obtained, appropriated and attracted to him function as the immediate registers of the king's public and political persona, broadcast far and wide. Kālidāsa is also fascinated with the sexuality of violence and the violence of sexuality (e.g. 4.45; 4.68; 6.55) and ceaselessly crafts images of eroticized political victory. Indumatī's *svayaṃvara* choice of Aja as husband in particular, where Aja is especially eroticized as a magnetic Kāma figure, is pervaded with eropolitical compound imagery (e.g. 6.2; 6.69). After she chooses Aja, the rival kings are truly humiliated (7.2) and conspire to seize Indumatī by force from Aja (7.31, 34). During the actual violence that erupts when Aja defends himself and his new bride from the bitter and angry kings, we read (7.63):

Then the young prince, having set the conch upon his lower lip, the nectar of which had been gathered by his beloved, sounded forth.
Thereby it seemed as if the peerless hero were drinking in the incarnate fame won by his own hand.[4]

[3] *labdhā cāritryaśuddhiś caraṇanipatitaḥ śatrur apy eṣa muktaḥ / protkhātārātimūlaḥ priyasuhṛd acalām āryakaḥ śāsti rājā | prāptā bhūyaḥ priyeyaṃ priyasuhṛdi bhavān saṅgato me vayasyo / labhyaṃ kiṃ cātiriktaṃ yad aparam adhunā prārthaye*[']*haṃ bhavantam ||* 10.59

[4] *tataḥ priyopāttarase 'dharoṣṭhe niveśya dadhmau jalajaṃ kumāraḥ | tena svahastārjitam ekavīraḥ piban yaśo mūrtam ivābabhāse ||* 7.63

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The image is complex and marvellously rich: Aja's battle-conch is a pearly white colour – the colour of *yaśas* or fame. When blowing into it and sounding forth with a victory call, it looks rather as if he is drinking from the white shell his well-earned battle glory. But the poet manages to eroticize this by describing Aja's lower lip as *priyā-upātta-rasa*, which can be understood as "possessing nectar gathered by his beloved", or as "possessing nectar gathered from his beloved". Whether we read the compound as instrumental or ablative, the point is clear that Aja's fame and military conquest are encoded with a marker of the intimate sexual relationship which is part and parcel of (ultimately *is*) this public victory itself. It is at one and the same time (a) a military-political achievement entailing the subordination and humiliation of rival males, and (b) the acquisition of the vied-for feminine embodiment, for his own exclusive enjoyment, of that glory. Verse 7.70 celebrates this moment clearly by calling Indumatī Samaravijayalakṣmī, "Battle-Victory-Lakṣmī", in a dynamic portrait of Aja's absolute humiliation of his rivals:

> Having placed his left foot upon the heads of the kings,
> Aja, free from any imperfection, lead home his bride the blameless one.
> The ends of her hair rough from the dust cast up by his chariot and horses,
> truly she became Battle-Victory-Lakṣmī incarnate.[5]

Thus while a narrative plot of the *Mṛcchakaṭika* type may engineer the eropolitical compound causally, Kālidāsa achieves the same end through *upamā* and other poetic images of identification and equation. He of course went on to become a (the) model for all Sanskrit poetry in centuries to come, not least because of the graceful ingenuity of such similes.

While in a sense on the margins of what was considered *kāvya* by literary theorists of ancient and medieval South Asia (Salomon 1998: 236; Pollock 2006: 135), *praśasti* inscriptions contemporary with and subsequent to Kālidāsa's time are nonetheless often closely conversant with the poetic forms of the *Raghuvaṃśa* (or vice versa, see Pollock 2006: 240–44; Singh 2011: 178–80), including of course variants on the eropolitical compound with its logic of the instrumentality of subjugated feminine objects to the wielding of royal power. Thus it is common for *praśasti* poets to construe the winning of political sway as the winning of the goddess Śrī along with, or because of, the subordination of rival males;[6] Śrī-Lakṣmī is not only won or seized aggressively away from rival kings thereby humiliated,[7] but more often herself chooses the worthy king from among other candidates due to his superior virtues.[8] His welfare is thus determined by his manly control over her (early ninth-century Baroda copper plate inscription of Rāṣṭrakūṭa Karkkarāja II, v. 16 lines 21–22):

> He always attained his ends by thinking for himself of productive ways to court the favor of Lakṣmī. But really, what is surprising about this?; any man can keep his own wife under his control without the help of others.
>
> Salomon 1998: 292

Pride and arrogance are the chief vices assigned to these rival kings, "pride goeth before a fall" being the lesson they learn as the goddess earth abandons them for one more

[5] *iti śirasi sa vāmaṃ pādam ādhāya rājñām udavahad anavadyāṃ tām avadyād apetaḥ | rathaturagarajobhis tasya rūkṣālakāgrā samaravijayalakṣmīḥ saiva mūrtā babhūva ||* 7.70

[6] E.g. Junāgaḍh inscription of Rudradāman, fifth century CE Skandagupta addition lines 3–4; Fleet 1888 [1960]: 59.

[7] E.g. Rajim copper plate inscription of Tīvaradeva lines 3–4; Fleet 1888 [1960]: 294.

[8] E.g. fifth-century Eran pillar inscription associated with Budhagupta and nearby Varāha statue, lines 6–7 (Fleet 1888 [1960]: 89); see Cecil and Bisschop 2021.

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worthy.[9] The body of the feminine earth is sexualized in a subjugated posture,[10] a prize for the virile king to enjoy (e.g. sixth-century inscription for Pallava King Siṃhavarman III):

> Have not all the pure virtues of the ruling order – truthfulness, generosity, discipline – found a resting place in this magnanimous man as in no other? It was he who in his full power ravished the land of the Cōḻas, that Lady whose necklace is the Kāverī river, whose veil is the fields of paddy and sugarcane, whose lovely belt is the groves of areca nut and plantains.
>
> trans. Pollock 2006: 121

Similarly the conquered cardinal points themselves can become women.[11] In these and other ways, *praśasti* conventions construct the ideal ruler as one whose domain of power is total and extends to the horizons, attracting and maintaining power over feminized and sexualized principles configured as his wife, prey, or object of erotic enjoyment. These feminine prizes are seized or attracted away from undeserving, arrogant rival males, whose only true place is under his heel. In complex poetic form, then, *praśasti* engages the formula according to which the agonistic but felicitous attainment of public and political power entails, requires or is expressed as the securing of control over a sexualized feminine object.

I take as a final example for this section Harṣa's seventh-century *Ratnāvalī*. In this play, Princess Ratnāvalī, daughter of Vikramabāhu, King of Siṃhala, is intended by her father for marriage to the hero King Udayana. Through a series of mishaps and subterfuges typical of this genre of play, Udayana falls in love with one "Sāgarikā" without knowing her true identity as this very Princess Ratnāvalī. Obstacles to the union are overcome through the complex designs of Udayana's minister Yaugandharāyaṇa, who seeks all along to secure his master's political welfare. The fundamental and final goal, attained promptly once reports of the victory of Udayana's army against Kosala arrive at the court, is the engineering of a marriage between Udayana and "Sāgarikā" or Ratnāvalī, which will make of Udayana a universal sovereign in accordance with a prophecy made by a certain Siddha that whoever marries her will become a king of all the earth (*yo 'syāḥ pāṇiṃ grahīṣyati sa sārvabhaumo rājā bhaviṣyati*, 4.19/20). The penultimate verse encapsulates the love–sovereignty fructification (4.20):

> Vikramabāhu has been brought to a state of equality with myself. This, my beloved
> Sāgarikā [Ratnāvalī] now obtained [in marriage], is the greatest thing in the world. She is the sole means to the acquisition of the earth with her oceans.
> The Queen [Vāsavadattā] is satisfied by obtaining a sister. The Kośalas are defeated.
> So long as you are alive, O best of ministers [Yaugandharāyaṇa], do I not have all that
> I might long for?[12]

The political stake here is higher and more explicit than Harṣa's other Udayana play *Priyadarśikā*, which also follows the compound formula and provides yet another example of the motif. The *Ratnāvalī*'s details concerning the vanquishing of the rival male taking place off stage are conspicuous, bordering on gruesome (4.6). The sovereignty pursued by

[9] E.g. sixth-century Mandasor inscription of Yaśodharman v.2 (Fleet 1888 [1960]: 146).

[10] E.g. eighth-century Alina copper-plate inscription of Śīlāditya VII lines 34 and 56–57 (Fleet 1888 [1960]: 176–8).

[11] E.g. eighth-century Alina copper-plate inscription of Śīlāditya VII line 57 (Fleet 1888 [1960]: 178).

[12] *yāto vikramabāhur ātmasamatāṃ prāpteyam urvītale sāraṃ sāgarikā sasāgaramahīprāptyekahetuḥ priyā | devī prītim upāgatā ca bhaginīlābhāj jitāḥ kośalāḥ kiṃ nāsti tvayi saty amātyavṛṣabhe yasmin karomi spṛhām* || 4.20.

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means of the love union is as grandiose and ambitious as any dominion trumpeted in *praśasti* rhetoric: total control over the entire earth. This is what union with Ratnāvalī brings; she clearly embodies *śrī* or total royal power itself. Additionally she stands in for the riches of the earth (*urvītale sāraṃ*), as is clear in the above verse when Udayana toys with her disguise-name Sāgarikā ("Maritimer" or "Sea-Woman"), describing her as the unique means to acquiring the earth "with her oceans" (*sasāgaramahīprāptyekahetuḥ*). Moreover the status of Udayana as a Kāmadeva figure is continually asserted (e.g. 1.7, 1.8, 1.18–21, etc.), so that we are to understand that his great charm and beauty draw this *śrī*/earth figure to himself magnetically as we have seen above in *Raghuvaṃśa* and *praśasti*. The union thus entails a domestic, erotic felicity and a total public and political dominion, the former being directly instrumental to the latter.

Such examples from the *kāvya* canon can of course be multiplied: one also thinks promptly of the *Mālavikāgnimitra*, *Svapnavāsavadatta* and *Pratijñāyaugandharāyaṇa* as plays in which the final resolution carefully and conspicuously co-ordinates the mutually constitutive realization of a romantic–erotic purpose with a military–political victory.[13] Kālidāsa's paradigmatic plays regularly "create an overdetermined scenario where erotic and political functions happily coincide" (Sawhney 2009: 33).[14] But those familiar with such works hardly need the familiar motif exemplified further. Rather than add to the *kāvya* exemplars, we should turn now to some important studies which have examined this relationship between political power and the domain of *kāma*, broadly understood, within this environment of courtly literary production of *kāvya* and *praśasti* from the fourth century CE onwards.

The fascination with the link, analogue or mutual instrumentality between love and political power can first of all be seen as a function of social practices and ideals of the court environments in which this literature was created. Daud Ali demonstrates that the very way in which power and love were actually pursued and cultivated in the court context made each domain analogous and instrumental to the other: the work of erotic and political seduction was of a piece for courtiers and the aristocracy (Ali 2004: 209–33). In other words, those who sought power and pleasure in the early medieval court did so by cultivating an understanding of political power as seduction and vice versa (Ali 2004: 252–61). These social practices naturally manifest themselves in the literature produced within its circles, and were no doubt shaped by them in turn. Thus when speaking of the Udayana plays such as the *Ratnāvalī*, Ali remarks that "the separation of the political and romantic narratives of these plays suggests … [that] such narrative devices operationalised the explicit linkages between power and romance that were built into aristocratic society… While the perfect alignment of these realms was probably

[13] At the *Mālavikāgnimitra*'s conclusion, the Agnimitra-Mālavikā romance is resolved only as and when two separate political intrigues beyond the palace walls are resolved, one of them being an actual Aśvamedha or assertion of universal sovereignty enacted by Agnimitra's father and son. The news of this triumph warms Dhāriṇī to the Mālavikā marriage. I would go so far as to suggest that the sacrificial horse is a kind of analogue for Agnimitra's love for Mālavikā: obstructed and threatened, it is now freed and finds its ultimate purpose. This eropolitical compound at the macro narrative level is also cleverly encoded in individual verses as well (see e.g. *Mālavikāgnimitra* 5.1 and 5.3). In *Svapnavāsavadatta* and *Pratijñāyaugandharāyaṇa*, both Udayana plays of the *Ratnāvalī* type, the true hero is the ingenious minister Yaugandharāyaṇa, whose resolution of the romantic intrigues of his king are directly instrumental to the restoration of his political power; the duality of the purpose is encoded into the (not one but) two vows referenced in the latter's title (see *Pratijñāyaugandharāyaṇa* 3.7–8).

[14] The example of *Śakuntalā* fundamentally turns around, and seeks as its culminating resolution in Act 7, the balancing of Duṣyanta's public royal duty and personal passion for Śakuntalā. It is, however, so rich and nuanced that the eropolitical impulse within it is less conspicuous than the examples given above. Sawhney's analysis of the play, however, is penetrating and illuminative of the larger gender dynamics I seek to articulate with reference to Beauvoir: see Sawhney 2009: 20–50.

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only rarely achieved by men at court, they nevertheless seemed to constantly dream of it" (Ali 2004: 232).

Similarly, Jesse Knutson (2015) examines the theme within the Gupta–Harṣa context, setting both Kālidāsa and Harṣa against a background of *nītiśāstra* or political theory of the period according to which political fortune is articulated in reference to desire and the management thereof. Knutson argues that for Kālidāsa, the ideal of royal kāmic restraint is informed by political theory works such as the *Nītisāra*, according to which the successful king must exercise control over his own sensual desires if he is to exercise political power over others).[15] Harṣa, by contrast, exercises a more liberal policy, and consequently we see that in his plays, Udayana's political welfare comes about through the forming of new marital alliances, understood by Knutson as the satisfaction of kāmic impulses rather than their strict control. For our purposes what is significant is the recognition on Knutson's part of the instrumental relationship between desire and political aims in such works as the *Ratnāvalī* and *Priyadarśikā*, in which "the king's extramarital dalliances hold the key ... to the expansion and absolute fulfillment of his political fortunes... Personal pleasure morphs into the kind of fulfillment of objective purposes usually associated with spiritual practices of self-restraint, or political practices of calculation, etc." (Knutson 2015: 171). All of this constitutes the literary enactment of the larger social and political ideals of Dharmaśāstra literature, where *artha* (material fulfilment) and *kāma* must ideally be balanced and co-ordinated as legitimate virtues (Knutson 2015: 172), and indeed to realize the one through or by means of the other.[16] There is thus little question that where we see in such classic *kāvya* works as these the co-operation of kāmic and political aims, we are witnessing the poetic enactment of the social ideals of contemporary Nīti and Dharma literature. Such theoretical literature would of course continue to inform *kāvya* and the poetic constructions of idealized kings in later centuries (see, e.g. Cox 2010).

All of this then co-operates with, or can find a sympathetic resonance within the priorities of aesthetic theory, where we find yet another rationale for privileging a marriage of eroticism and violent masculine power. This is because *kāvya*, whether dramatic or purely poetic, evolved in the court context alongside a complex and highly prescriptive tradition of aesthetic theory with which poets and playrights engaged as a matter of course. The most important (that is, historically most privileged) such theoretical consideration is *rasa*, and of the traditional eight chief *rasa*s the two most prized are the *śṛṅgāra* or erotic and *vīra* or heroic. For dramas it is particularly the *phalayoga* or attainment of the chief goal at the play's conclusion which determines the dominant *rasa* of a play. Purely poetic *mahākāvya* is not so directly subject to the requisites of drama (Peterson 2003: 37)

[15] The dissolute and therefore weak Agnivarṇa, the final king in Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa*, constitutes the warning exemplar against the failure of this ideal, while earlier generations uphold it (Knutson 2015: 166–8). This stress on the structural importance of the Agnivarṇa generation in *sarga* 19 (often dismissed by earlier generations as inauthentic, or else seen as symptomatic of the poem's incompleteness – e.g. Lienhard 1984: 177) carries forward from Tieken 1989 and Desző 2014.

[16] Desző (2014) pursues this line of interpretation as well with reference to the *Raghuvaṃśa*, arguing that Dilīpa in particular models a balance of the three *artha*s, erring perhaps only on the side of an enthusiasm for *dharma* (Desző 2014: 162–4). Similarly, Goodwin recognizes the co-operation of *artha* and *kāma* within the figures of the Vidūṣaka and minister characters of Sanskrit dramas. The Vidūṣaka character of *Mālavikāgnimitra*, like the minister character Yaugandharāyaṇa featured in other plays, "is an arthic hero, for the field of strategic action is artha ... Obviously the pursuit of love, as it is envisioned in the *Kāmasūtra* and other such treatises, has a large measure of artha in it, and scholars have long since noted the similarity in language between the *Kāmasūtra* and the *Arthaśāstra*. The lover has to be a strategist; he employs the four means of success ..., has aids in his intrigue, etc. We might see in the Vidusaka here, then, only a comic-erotic parallel to agents of the political action going on offstage, which in fact plays a significant part in the disclosure of Malavika's identity" (Goodwin 1988: 125).

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but is nonetheless highly conventionalized and equally favours the *śṛṅgāra* and *vīra rasa*s above all others. According to Ānandavardhana, one *rasa* should predominate, but others may accompany and serve it in a supporting role (*Dhvanyāloka* 3.21). This may be attained through the supplementation of the chief plot (e.g. Cārudatta's love intrigue in the *Mṛcchakaṭika*) by a *patākā* or subsidary development (e.g. the political intrigue of Āryaka). Thus both the chief plot and chief *rasa* may be assisted and brought to fruition by a subordinate plot and *rasa*, and indeed "[r]eaders with a ready sense of discrimination, who are attentive and intelligent, will rather take a higher degree of pleasure in such a work" (*Dhvanyāloka* 3.23, trans. Ingalls et al. 1990: 505). This formula makes natural if not normative the co-ordination of a dominant *śṛṅgāra* with a subordinate *vīra rasa*, or vice versa. In other words, the vocabulary and priorities of aesthetic theory were highly conducive not just to the heroic and erotic themes, but to their compounding and mutual instrumentality. Moreover, dramatic theory is explicit in requiring that *puruṣārtha* values be privileged in *kāvya*, and indeed they are so indissociable from the basic aesthetics of poetry that they are engaged even in Buddhist and Jain *kāvya*,[17] and Daṇḍin for example defines *mahākāvya* as "turn[ing] upon the fruition of the fourfold ends" (*caturvargaphalāyattaṃ*, *Kāvyādarśa* 1.15, Belvalkar trans. 1924: 2).

Thus far we see that, where we are examining *kāvya* and *praśasti* from the Gupta period onwards, several frames of reference can be invoked to account for a common fascination with images that combine an erotic or kāmic purpose with a military or political one: the analogue of erotic to political seduction as a premise of the court aristocracy's cultivation of power, the formative influence of Nīti and Dharma literature on poets' construction of ideal kings pursuing *artha* and/as *kāma*, and the priorities of a *rasa* theory which both reflected and fed back into this courtly fascination with *śṛṅgāra*, *vīrya,* and the link between them. In this way, it seems clear that the eropolitical compound is overdetermined or enacted through multiple and mutually enforcing systems of meaning in the *kāvya* environment from the fourth century CE onwards.

The longer-term currency of the compound form can then be seen at work in later *kāvya* compositions, which have likewise been theorized in their own particular historic moments. In a 2010 piece, for example, Knutson identifies a trope of eulogistic poetry – what he terms the "Janus virtue" – within the canon of courtly compositions emerging around King Lakṣmaṇasena in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Bengal. As the term suggests, the technique involves the juxtaposition of qualities deemed contradictory or opposed, such as military might vs. ascetic piety or military might vs. scholarly erudition, married felicitously in the person of the king. Knutson's Janus-virtue trope is thus not limited to the erotic–military juxtaposition with which I am concerned, but certainly includes it as one of several modes.[18] Thus he observes that in some of his examples, "military and sexual conquest are equated and brought to reflect on each other" noting additionally that "especially in inscriptional poetry, the figuration of combat as amorous encounter is worthy of further exploration" (Knutson 2010: 385 and note 10). As such Knutson demonstrates that the poetry of this time and place was especially preoccupied with what he calls the Janus figure, which admitted various kinds of pairings including what I would call eropolitical compound constructions. But while Knutson recognizes that such poetic techniques are not unique to twelfth-century Bengal, his investment is

[17] This much is observed by Peterson (2003: 9–10), although her notion that Buddhist and Jain *kāvya* engagement with the *artha*s is subversive rests on a conception of the *artha*s as fundamentally Hindu, a point challenged cogently by Davis (2004).

[18] Thus among various examples, Knutson identifies a verse of the court anthology *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* in which the Janus trope is applied, in *śleṣa* or double-entendre form, to equate sexual aggression against an eroticized female body with military aggression towards the surrounding territories (Knutson 2010: 384–5), not unlike the Siṃhavarman III inscription above.

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in a contextualization of the form in the particular moment of the looming invasion of Khalji Turks. For him the Janus figure is a feature particularly of political poetry and is to be understood very precisely in reference to the impending political crisis of late twelfth-century Bengal. This is exemplary of a recent reinvestment in the local, particular and vernacular in Sanskrit studies.[19]

What I will argue below is that the eropolitical compound is not a feature of political poetry alone, nor even of the *kāvya* genre as a whole, nor is it limited to the social and historic context of the court from the fourth century CE onwards and their later derivatives. I do not believe we can fully account for its persisting appeal by making reference solely to the *artha* system of values, to Dharma- and Nītiśāstra. Nor is *rasa* theory, with its favourite combination of *śṛṅgāra* and *vīra,* the *passe-partout* for explaining the eropolitical compound in all sources. Indeed, it is really from drama that such theory evolves and to which it chiefly applies, while even its most closely related genre – *mahākāvya* – could not always be governed or contained by it (Peterson 2003: 16–7, 38; see also Tubb 1984: 221, notes 7–9), how much less the epic and purāṇic sources which I will take up below.[20] Meanwhile even *praśasti*, so clearly tied to the priorities and tools of courtly *kāvya*, is nonetheless ignored by theoreticians (Pollock 2006: 135), which again should make clear that the compound motif cannot be reduced to or fully accounted for by referring to *rasa* aesthetics alone. And so while certain forms of the motif can be, as we see here, identified and theorized in the circumscribed historical–political moments in which they occur, the eropolitical compound is in fact instantiated in several genres and historic contexts. In Section 2, then, I open the data set further, pointing to the presence of the motif in late Vedic, epic and purāṇic sources. This will ultimately make necessary (in Section 3) a reading strategy that seeks out a very different kind of rationale or accounting, identifying within the compound an operation of patriarchal cultures that functions within and through this normative literature and through its more historically and socially localized registers of meaning.

2. Vedic, epic and purāṇic forms of the eropolitical compound

To recognize the eropolitical compound at work prior to and outside of the setting examined above, one need only consider the genealogy of the *śrī*-king pairing encountered so often in the *Raghuvaṃśa, praśasti* and elsewhere. This is no invention of Gupta poets, but has a long history and basis in Vedic ritual culture. Before the fully anthropomorphized Śrī-Lakṣmī emerged in purāṇic Hinduism, *śrī*, or royal splendour and majesty, was understood in Vedic sources as a feminine principle marking and empowering a king: his legitimacy, regal auspiciousness and power were located in this external and mobile concept or goddess, who, once possessed, becomes a beautiful wife falling entirely under the control of the triumphant king. Gonda's work on kingship (1956a, 1956b) and early Vaiṣṇavism (1954 [1969]) identifies clearly the sources of this formula in the Brāhmaṇas and its development in early Vaiṣṇavism. The key dynamic for our purposes is that by which a king, properly consecrated and ritually established in sovereignty by his Brahmin functionaries, draws *śrī* to himself, who becomes his wife. Thus we see in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 2.4.4.6: "Royal dignity [*rājyam*] he … here obtains, whosoever, knowing this, performs that sacrifice … thereby Fortune (*srî*) is (wedded) to him without a rival wife

[19] See also Knutson 2011, and Bronner, Cox and McCrea 2011.

[20] This is clear, for example, in the limited success theorists had in diagnosing the *rasas* of the epics. While the interpretive tools of *kāvya* theorists were applied to them (see e.g. Tubb 1985), and for all that Vālmīki is dubbed "Ādikavi", the theorists tended not to treat the *Rāmāyaṇa* like a *kāvya*, and *kāvya* anthologists largely ignore it (Warder 1990: 96–7).

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and undisturbed" (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* trans. Eggeling 1882, vol 1: 377).[21] Indeed the notion that she "chooses" the worthy king of her own volition is established early on (Gonda 1956b: 131). Gonda demonstrates that in early sources, "the possession of prosperity and well-being leads to distinction and gives a claim to social pre-eminence" (1954 [1969]: 189). As such the very notion of social distinction, pre-eminence and political power is constructed through the category of *śrī*, which as a feminine noun, is readily (and was) sexualized, lending itself to the image of a wife-figure accompanying and marking the majesty of the superior ruler. This Vedic ritual paradigm survives into and directly informs many of the examples of Section 1 such *Raghuvaṃśa* 4.5 or the Karkkarāja II inscription above. Many centuries after its earliest attested expressions in a largely ritual context, the *śrī*-king formula – that is, the understanding that a king's public distinction and ascendency over rival males is constituted by and embodied in a sexualized feminine figure under his control as wife – was apparently still fascinating and compelling to poets.[22]

From feminine *śrī* to feminine earth is a small step, and indeed the productive and fecund power of the earth itself is often understood as *śrī* or Śrī-Lakṣmī (Gonda 1954 [1969]: 213–4; Kinsley 1989: 56–8). This again is a favourite construct of *kāvya* with a long pedigree rooted in much earlier sources: the desirable wife to be "enjoyed" as a sensual and fruit-bearing object, the exclusive possession of whom entails ascendency in the public space, is as easily configured into an earth-wife as the more abstract *śrī*. To be sure, the earth is also feminized in a desexualized maternal mode in epic and purāṇic sources.[23] But especially in epic sources, the earth as *bhū, pṛthivī* and *mahī* (all feminine nouns) readily becomes the wife of the king: he is her *pati*, a term which should be understood first as "husband" rather than simply "ruler" or "owner" in the compounds *bhūpati, mahīpati* and so on (Hara 1973). Indeed, Hara assembles a wide selection of passages from epic sources demonstrating that the earth as sexualized wife-partner of the king can be expressed in many modes: she is the young pubescent bride (Hara 1973: 98–100), the object of the king's embrace (107–8), even his widow (111–2). The logic and gendered nature of Vedic empowerment by *śrī* equally informs and gives shape to an epic imagery of the earth-king relationship, most famously enacted in the persons of Rāma and Sītā, daughter of the earth. As with the Vedic *śrī*-king pair, the sexualized earth-queen figure, traced by Hara in epic and other sources, clearly carries forward into later *kāvya* and *praśasti* tradition (e.g. the Siṃhavarman III inscription above), and so we see here another eropolitical figuration with a long history which remained appealing for centuries, and which therefore cannot be framed exclusively as a courtly *kāvya* expression or trope of political poetry of the fourth century CE onwards.

Purāṇic Vaiṣṇava mythology is particularly rich in the compound form. We have noted already the quintessential example set by Rāma. Within the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*, the centrality to the narrative of Rāma's doubled gesture of wife reclamation and/as the restoration of political ascendency is emphasized in the Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa, where this climax is prefigured in the Vālin-Rumā-Sugrīva affair (Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* 4): Vālin takes his brother Sugrīva's wife Rumā and exiles Sugrīva, such that Sugrīva finds himself "exiled and

[21] Reference taken from Gonda 1956b: 131. See also Gonda 1954 [1969]: 189; Kinsley 1986: 19–22. For a succinct rendering of the Rājasūya investment of the king with *śrī*, see Bailly 2000: 140–2.

[22] That the Vedic paradigm persists into and shapes the pairing of Viṣṇu and Śrī-Lakṣmī is well known (Gonda 1954 [1969]: 226–31; Gonda 1970 [1996]: 57–61; Kinsley 1986: 26–32; Bailly 2000: 138–40).

[23] Derrett (1959) recognizes and aims to reconcile the apparent tension in mythic vocabulary between maternal and sexualized figurations of the earth vis-à-vis the king. The image of earth-as-mother or desexualized feminine source of prosperity to a masculine ruler and indeed milker of the earth-cow finds a foundational expression in the myth of King Pṛthu (e.g. *Harivaṃśa* 5–6; *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 13). See Huntington 1960; Thapar 1971; Doniger O'Flaherty 1976: 321–31; Bailey 1981; Miller 1990; Nath 2002; Saindon 2005; Saindon 2007; Austin 2022: 125–30.

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wifeless" (*apaviddhaś ca hṛtadāraḥ*, 4.10.22) – a phrase that succinctly expresses the formula in inverted form. Its happy resolution (happy for Sugrīva in any case) renders equally inseparable the reclamation of wife and political power (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.25.38). The Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa micro expression thus points directly to the macro eropolitical theme culminating in the Yuddhakāṇḍa.

Kṛṣṇa mythology is rich in the compound motif. I offer briefly three of the clearer cases here: the abduction of Rukmiṇī, slaying of Naraka, and seizure of the Pārijāta tree. Kṛṣṇa's first wife Rukmiṇī is desirable as an important political stake within a dangerous territory of hostile forces, and is clearly identified as a *śrī* figure (*Harivaṃśa* 87; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10.54). At the eleventh hour before her marriage to his enemy Śiśupāla, Kṛṣṇa steals her away for himself audaciously (the violent subjugation of the enemy males is seen after by Kṛṣṇa's brother Saṃkarṣaṇa), forcing a political alliance with Vidarbha that saves the Vṛṣṇis. In the *Harivaṃśa*, the seizure is explicitly political and undertaken on behalf of his clan (*Harivaṃśa* 87.40; Austin 2014: 32–3), but of course Rukmiṇī is young, beautiful, and desirable as well – an erotic or domestic and a political stake at the same time. Similarly, Kṛṣṇa's slaying of the demon Naraka (e.g. *Harivaṃśa* 91–3; *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 5.20; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10.59) encodes an exaggerated form of the compound: Naraka harasses the gods, seizes several of their precious objects, and threatens cosmic order. Once this enemy male is slain, Kṛṣṇa inherits his wealth which includes 16,000 captive women whom Kṛṣṇa takes as his own wives. The reclamation of the women from captivity is not the principal purpose of Kṛṣṇa's intervention, but of course where one sees a violent subordination of a rival male and restoration of cosmic order, the stake of a sexualized feminine figure is necessary according to the driving impulse of the compound, and here it is multiplied to incredible proportions. The affair of the Pārijāta tree then follows directly out of the Naraka conflict, and articulates the formula once again. What is instructive here is the Pārijāta episode's development over time in multiple sources. The earliest form of the myth does not encode the compound motif in any way: Kṛṣṇa visits heaven, restores the gods' stolen items, and steals, without incident or conflict, the Pārijāta tree in order to plant it in his earthly city of Dvārakā (*Harivaṃśa* 92.65–7). The tree's auspiciousness is then directly tied to Kṛṣṇa's wives and the *saubhāgya* or marital-domestic felicity they embody and create within Kṛṣṇa's home. But this of course won't do: where a feminized object of auspiciousness is seized or appropriated by a virile male, surely there must be male-on-male violence. As such, later *Harivaṃśa* poets developed an extensive recasting of the scene (*Harivaṃśa* Appendix I.29–29A; Austin 2013; 2020) in which the tree's feminine nature and significance within the domestic space of women's duties and ideals were greatly enhanced and made explicit, with Satyabhāmā's prompting role substantially developed, and of course a spectacular battle between Kṛṣṇa and Indra elaborated. This then provides us with the preferred configuration of a masculine power proving itself through the violent domination of a rival male in the acquisition of a feminine and sexualized object of domestic auspiciousness.

Kṛṣṇa's son Pradyumna, and grandson Aniruddha, perpetuate the compound model vigorously in a number of sources that I have already treated in some depth (Austin 2018; 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; 2021), and so I will be as brief here as possible: Pradyumna's basic birth legend (*Harivaṃśa* 99; *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 5.27; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10.55), Aniruddha's very similar coming-of-age story (*Harivaṃśa* 107–8; *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 5.33; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10.62) and a later Pradyumna mini-epic (*Harivaṃśa* Appendix I.29F) all turn around the image of the sexually potent young male attracting and acquiring a feminine partner (respectively, Māyāvatī, Uṣā and Prabhāvatī) from her demonic protecting male figure (respectively Śambara, Bāṇa, and Vajranābha). In all cases, the defeated protecting male figure constitutes a threat to the cosmic and social order. What is especially

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emphasized in all of these cases is the magnetic sexual appeal of the young man (Pradyumna in particular is Kāmadeva reborn; his son Aniruddha inherits this charisma), whom the female figures find impossible to resist. In all these scenarios, the poets celebrate an audacious emasculation dynamic, whereby violent masculine power in the service of political and cosmic order is indissociable from sexual potency: the demons are defeated when, as, and because they discover that their wives and daughters have, right under their noses, become the sexual partners of Kṛṣṇa's son or grandson. In other words, the acquisition of the sexualized feminine object is not just associated with but is the fundamental means to the defeat of the rival male and establishment of public order. In a sense Pradyumna's modelling of the motif is even more explicit than Rāma's, for his entire mythology and persona turns upon a compounded virility according to which sexual power over women is directly instrumental to the emasculation and defeat of rival males (see e.g. Austin 2019a: 210–3).

Other Vaiṣṇava *avatāras* enact the formula throughout purāṇic literature. The Varāhāvatāra or boar myth is especially telling insofar as the myth, like Kṛṣṇa's Pārijāta affair, changes over time so as to conform more perfectly with the preferred compound motif. In earlier forms of the boar myth, the imagery of the rescued or appropriated divine feminine – the goddess earth – entails the establishment of cosmic order, but involves no male-on-male violence. Consequently, this imagery is developed in later and better-loved forms of the myth. In early examples of the episode where the boar is identified as Viṣṇu (e.g. *Harivaṃśa* 31.21–30),[24] the lifting gesture is already sexualized and cosmogonic: the lord king joins with his goddess earth wife to restore life from the period of watery chaos. Indeed, a son is born from the sexual union, namely that Naraka or "Bhauma" (lit. son of Bhūmi, the Earth) mentioned above.[25] But this is not quite yet satisfying, and apparently the tradition could not leave this image unmodified: surely the discovery or recovery of the auspicious and sexualized feminine and the establishment of control over public space must involve the violent conquest of a rival male. And so a later variant "completes" the scenario by incorporating a rival male over whom a victory can be celebrated, namely the demon Hiraṇyākṣa who threatens the submerged earth goddess and is therefore defeated in a more complex gesture of demon-slaying, attaining union with the earth as wife, and establishment of cosmic order (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 3.17–9).[26] As with the Pārijāta tree, we see the preference for the formula driving the evolution of the myth over time.

Readers familiar with epic and purāṇic mythology will be able to populate the stock of examples further. I have largely focused here on Vaiṣṇava sources best known to me, which are popular episodes that many will be familiar with already. It should be clear now that the formula is at work in multiple historic contexts, in different genres of Sanskrit literature, and that it is overdetermined or set into a normative position by

[24] In early prefigurations of the Vaiṣṇava myth, it is not Viṣṇu but Prajāpati or Brahmā who are said to take the form of a boar who lifts or digs up the earth (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 14.1.2.11; *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* 1.1.3.5; see Gonda 1954 [1969]: 138). Even in *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 1.4.8 and the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* 2.102.3, the boar uplifting the earth from the waters is not identified as Viṣṇu, but as Brahmā.

[25] See, e.g., the seventh-century CE copper-plate grant of Bhāskaravarman of Kāmarūpa v.4: "Naraka, the chief of the rulers of the earth, was the son of the wielder of the *chakra* (i.e. Vishṇu), who with a view to lift up the Earth from (beneath) the Ocean, assume[d]) the disguised form of a boar" (Bhattacharya 1913–14: 76). *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 5.29.23 and other purānic sources confirm this sexualized understanding of the boar-earth contact which produces Narakāsura. See Gonda 1954 [1969]: 141–3.

[26] That the earlier forms of the myth involve little or no violence, while later forms such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* do, has been observed already by Vassilkov (2012: 303–4), Brinkhaus (1992: 54) and others. Brinkhaus in particular sees the two trends – the cosmogonic and the agonistic battle with Hiraṇyākṣa – as two initially independent myths (Brinkhaus 1992: 55).

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multiple and co-operating factors. Why is it overdetermined and what are these factors? Why is it that the Vedic *śrī*-king pairing survived the decline of Vedic ritual culture, finding re-expression in the persons of Lakṣmī and Viṣṇu and the *kāvya* creations of so many later generations? Why does Kṛṣṇa mythology prefer to punctuate time and again the defeat of demons and rival males with audacious seizures of sexualized feminine figures? Even if what we are seeing over the centuries is dismissed as copy-catism or derivative replications of the old Vedic *śrī* model, why is this model so popularly replicated? Theory works on *nīti, dharma* and *rasa* constructed social and aesthetic norms that privileged the union and mutual constitution of kāmic and heroic purposes in poetry, and the court aristocracy's cultivation of politics as seduction and seduction as politics conspired towards the same end. Has this no relation to the compounding motif expressed time and again in earlier and non-*kāvya* literature? Where we see such investment in this theme of male figures establishing public and political domination through the medium of subordinated and sexualized feminine figures, we are compelled to consider the possibility that there may also be a more rudimentary gendered impulse at work.

3. Beauvoir: Transcendence, immanence, and the feminine as other

Le deuxième sexe ((DS) Beauvoir 1949 [1986]; 1949 [2015]) is a monumental work that has inspired abundant scholarship since its appearance in 1949, including of course vigorous criticism. A generation of thinkers took shape around responding to Beauvoir, at times rejecting everything she was perceived to stand for. Among the most well known problems with Beauvoir's thought are the sex/gender distinction along with its partner nature/culture (e.g. Butler 1990) and Beauvoir's treatment of sex and gender in isolation from other aspects of identity such as class and race. Many of these critiques have themselves been challenged, however (e.g. Green 2002), and in any number of ways it is clear that Beauvoir's vocabulary continues to be powerfully productive both within and outside of strictly academic modes of feminism (e.g. Guenther 2010). In fact it is now apparent that Beauvoir herself was at times objectified as an Other against whom much so-called second wave feminism postured (Stavro 1999). The assumption, encountered widely today, that Beauvoir is simply antiquated and offers nothing of value any more is galling to those who have demonstrated time and again that her importance lies in much more than just her historic significance as a founding figure of modern European feminism.[27] I obviously cannot review all of these conversations here, and even more obvious is the fact that Beauvoir needs no defending from the likes of me where others have demonstrated the persisting value of her work so articulately down to the present day. However, I do attempt, at least in the notes below, to register some of the more salient critiques which beset Beauvoir's notions of immanence, transcendence and the woman as Other, since these are the particular tools from DS that I wish to consider in relation to the eropolitical compound. First, of course, we must understand exactly what she means by these terms.

The recurring concerns of DS which are so fundamental to understanding the eropolitical compound in Sanskrit materials turn around the formation, in patriarchal cultures, of masculine subjecthood and consciousness over and against an Other-object.[28] Woman is naturally the absolute Other and object in the eyes of the masculine subject:

[27] It has moreover been demonstrated that the easy dismissal Beauvoir receives from so many English readers can be traced particularly to Kristeva and her problematic rejection of humanist feminism rather than any actual familiarity with Beauvoir's work as such (Stavro 1999: 267).

[28] "Elle se détermine et se différencie par rapport à l'homme et non celui-ci par rapport à elle; elle est l'inessentiel en face de l'essentiel. Il est le Sujet, il est l'Absolu: elle est l'Autre" (DS I: 17).

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> Now, what peculiarly signalizes the situation of woman is that she – a free and autonomous being like all human creatures – nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. They propose to stabilize her as object and to doom her to immanence since her transcendence is to be overshadowed and for ever transcended by another ego (*conscience*) which is essential and sovereign.
>
> (DS I: 34, trans. Parshley 1953: 27)

Consequently, the feminine Other becomes the site of the validation of masculine power and virility. Rival male subjects cannot reliably validate male subjecthood except insofar as they may be humiliated and emasculated by him – in other words transformed from rival subjects into subordinate objects of his control. But the agency and subjecthood of other males, which mirror his own with disturbing fidelity, are more often than not a threat. Woman is then the ideal object against which masculine consciousness may posture and assert itself confidently. Denied a full ascription of agency and consciousness, she nonetheless represents the perfect middle ground between the inert passivity of nature and the fully endowed and therefore threatening consciousness of other males (DS I: 239–41). The possession and control of the feminine object is therefore necessary to the full and vigorous exercise of masculine consciousness.

As the ideal Other, woman confirms and affirms masculine subjecthood, and she is consequently assigned the highest value as a possession and object of control. She is the embodiment of that which makes a man a man (i.e. a free and autonomous self), and so is invested with great value even while she is denied participation in the exercise of true agency (DS I: 300). He who fully possesses her in a sense possesses himself, and can thereby hope to escape the emasculating objectification of rival males. In the terms of many of our Sanskrit sources: Śrī-Lakṣmī and all feminine figures who explicitly or implicitly take up her function as a contested object of masculine conflict is the very majesty, power and auspicious strength of the dominant male. One man alone may parade through the public space that falls under his control when and because he takes possession of her. She is both the stake and validator, the prize and the proof of the conqueror's worthiness to seize the prize. "He takes pride in his wife as he does in his house, his lands, his flocks, his wealth, and sometimes even more; through her he displays his power before the world: she is his measure and his earthly portion" (DS I: 290, trans. Parshley 1953: 191–2).

But as yet this does not fully illuminate the eropolitical dynamic. Another construct, shared with and developed by Beauvoir from her existentialist peers, operates within it. This is the binary of immanence and transcendence, which for Beauvoir are the modes and domains of human activity through which human consciousness struggles for subjecthood or resigns itself to passivity and objectification.[29] The immanent is the closed, private domestic space of the home, family, the familiar. It is the domain of repetition, habit, of embodiment with all of its messy necessities, and of course is traditionally identified with and as the feminine. Biology conspires to set woman in this position (DS I: 37–108), but what is far more consequential is patriarchy's opportunistic construction of that biology and women's compliance therewith. By contrast, transcendence is the domain of public, goal-oriented consciousness, of achievement amidst rival subjects, of true creativity. It is the political realm, the realm of scientific discovery and competition, a space in which subjects are turned outwards entirely away from the realities of their embodied and contingent existence. Although historically it has been the sphere of the

[29] Beauvoir's inheritance from Hegel and Sartre on this point is well known and studied; less often recognized is a debt to Lévi-Strauss (Direk 2011).

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masculine, only very rarely engaged by female subjects, it is construed and occupied by men as an unsexed and universal domain of timeless values. If it is only men who enact such values, this only validates the propriety of their control of the public domain and the exclusion of women therefrom. True achievement thus means distinction in the public space of the transcendent, which entails the successful assertion of agency and subjecthood.

Transcendence is nonetheless dependent upon immanence both in practical and ontological terms. In a basic and pedestrian sense, this means that the male actor engaging creatively in projects and achievements in the public sphere depends upon the nurturing ministrations of a mothering partner to sustain his home, children, and indeed his own body – all concerns which he would like to pretend do not touch him. And so however much he prioritizes transcendence and the pursuit of public achievement, he is nonetheless embodied, contingent, and dependent, and he returns to and values the domestic domain without seeking to resign himself to it. And just as the male subject requires that woman be object and Other, transcendence requires immanence. The boy or man proudly leaves his mother or wife behind, turning his back on the home in the pursuit of distinction in the transcendent realm. This movement is hollow and meaningless, indeed is not truly possible, without the foil of the immanent domain embodied in a feminine figure (DS I: 286–7).[30] To transcend means precisely to climb across or beyond, and it is his own embodied, contingent, and habitual existence which he seeks to put behind him by investing all such concerns in the feminine object, who consequently becomes instrumental to his achievement both practically and ontologically. For Beauvoir, then, the pursuit of transcendence involves a parasitic movement: "One who achieves transcendence by leaving the maintenance of life to others therefore 'feeds himself' on the thwarted transcendence of another" (Veltman 2004: 124). Woman, rooted within the nurturing space of the home and accorded no such freedom of movement towards transcendence, is suitably valorized as the very incarnation of nurturing plenitude (DS I: 292). Finally, then, we can say that the objectification and relegation of woman to embodied immanence and domesticity is directly instrumental to the transcendence and subjecthood of male consciousness. It is this instrumentality which the eropolitical compound intuits, celebrates, and perpetuates as a cherished norm.

Again Beauvoir has been critiqued in many registers from the 1950s until today, and anything approaching an adequate review of this scholarship will be impossible here. Where her use of the immanence/transcendence pairing is concerned, a number of charges have been laid at her door. These do not all merit the same degree of consideration.[31] Certainly it is worth recognizing that her use of the construct may perpetuate a "phallic feminism" insofar as it does not advance as far as some might like – that is, to a wholesale rejection and deconstruction of the binary itself, properly recognized as fundamentally vertical.[32] Articulate counter-charges which redeem Beauvoir's binary can

[30] "It is this very 'enrooting' that in man exalts his pride in his transcendence; it pleases him to observe with admiration how he tears himself from his mother's arms to go forth for adventure, the future, war. This departure would be less moving if there had been no one to try to detain him: it would appear like an accident, not a hard-won victory. And, too, he is pleased to know that those arms remain ready to welcome him back. After the strain of battle the hero likes to enjoy again the repose of immanence with his mother…" (DS I: 286–7, trans. Parshley 1953: 189).

[31] One which need not be granted any more oxygen is the notion that Beauvoir's use of these categories are slavishly derivative of her male peers and predecessors. This particular charge is *ad feminem* and falls apart the moment one takes Beauvoir seriously as an independent thinker (see Daigle and Golomb 2009 and Daigle 2017 for far more balanced views).

[32] The charge here is that, while Beauvoir diagnosed and called out the parasitic strategies by which men assume the domain of transcendence, she herself strove for membership in that "male" community alongside Sartre and other male peers. She herself thus perpetuates the dynamic with its accompanying sets of value-

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nonetheless be found in Stavro (1999) and particularly Veltman (2004; 2006; and 2009). But even if we were to leave hanging unanswered the charge that Beauvoir is subject to a personal moral failing for seeking membership in the "male" community of transcendence rather than decrying the vertical binary altogether, this would not compromise the penetrating insight she brings to us concerning the operations of the eropolitical compound.

Beauvoir allows us to see why it is that the two purposes of the compound function together with such conspicuous mutual instrumentality: the violent or political subordination of rival males in the transcendent realm is the act of an agent struggling for articulation as subject, and this depends upon the subordination of the feminine Other in and into the immanent realm – a realm which is therefore precious and valued as the means to realizing public distinction. This is, in other words, all an expression of a particular habit and fantasy of patriarchal consciousness in configuring itself parasitically vis-à-vis the world and other subjects (preferably objects) around it.

Without his *śrī*-wife or goddess-earth-wife, the king is not a king and does not wield political power. The resolution of the romantic plot of a drama is far more compelling when it can be collapsed into or effectuated by a political or military victory, and vice versa. Rāma must not simply kill Rāvaṇa and re-establish control over the cosmic order, he must do so as a function of his regaining his beautiful and most desirable Sītā, daughter of the Earth. Simply lifting the goddess earth, wife of Viṣṇu, from the waters does not suffice: a rival male must be introduced and defeated for the gesture to speak clearly. The imagery of Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa* and of *praśasti* eulogy values not just hyperbolic political mastery and domination, but especially domination expressed as the assumption of control over the universally desired other-object, which must of course be a feminine majesty, splendour, territory or fecund and sexualized earthly domain.[33] The more economically and densely these two purposes can be collapsed and expressed each as modes of the other, the more celebrated the poet and the more enduring the myth. In all these cases, there are indeed more proximate and historically circumscribed registers of meaning according to which the trope can be understood as we have seen in Section 1. But where the trope turns upon a triumphant male's assertion of political power through the objectification of a sexualized feminine figure, I trust that the gender theory I introduce here will not be deemed entirely out of place, and that it is now clearer that the eropolitical compound's continuing appeal cannot be accounted for by referring only to the most immediate environments in which these texts are produced.[34]

Conclusion

I have argued that the eropolitical compound in Sanskrit materials reflects a very particular operation of patriarchal cultures, and that this is inflected through more immediate

loaded and vertical binaries, protesting only their gendered nature (Charbonneau 2000–01: 9–10), all the while seeing no actual value in the domain of immanence (Strickling 1988). Indeed, for Beauvoir the woman who willingly embraces this persona imposed by patriarchy is acting in bad faith (DS I:33; Strickling 1988: 40). Thus rather than reject the power structure *tout court*, Beauvoir struggles for membership in its dominant group and is thereby dismissed by some as a dupe, or tool, of patriarchal culture. See Veltman (2006: 128 note 1) for a bibliography of critiques of the immanence/transcendence dichotomy and particularly Veltman (2009) on the matter of Beauvoir's use of the construct vis-à-vis Sartre's.

[33] On this point particularly see Naidu 2011. While this piece is concerned with contemporary eco-feminism in Hindu studies, she identifies as well the othering operation of patriarchy in traditional Sanskrit configurations of the feminized earth. In this case, however, her concern is not so much the sexualized as the maternalized expressions and their very real ecological consequences.

[34] I acknowledge that this entire mode of analysis leaves entirely untouched the matter of women's actual agency and subjecthood in Sanskrit literary sources. For examples of a more retrievalist or restorative approach to a similar stock of sources, see Shah (2002; 2007; 2017; 2019).

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prescriptive, symbolic and social expressions distinct to South Asia. I propose that Beauvoir's vocabulary provides us a means for understanding better why it is that these local priorities and ideals remained so popular, so worthy of repetition, and so compelling in the first place.

Some readers may have decided by now (or were already unshakeably convinced from the beginning) that what I call the eropolitical compound is adequately accounted for by referring only to local systems of meaning within the pre-modern South Asian context, and that no further theorization of a broader or universalizing type is required. Some indeed may even insist that the multiple examples of the trope given here are all discrete and unrelated, and that nothing of substance connects Rāma's reclamation of Sītā and Udayana's of Ratnāvalī. I thank these readers for their indulgence and can only regret my failure to be more persuasive about what I am convinced is in fact a deeper cross-genre theme operative within the social vocabulary of Vedic ritual, epic and purāṇic mythology, and works of courtly Sanskrit drama and poetry alike. Other readers, I very much hope, will have found the foregoing useful at least for its framing and articulation of the compound theme if not for its theorization.

Clearly I am leaving several substantial questions unposed and unanswered here, for even a monograph would not suffice to treat them: just what exactly is the relationship between historically and culturally circumscribed systems of meaning on the one hand and trans-historical ones on the other? Do such universalizing constructs as "patriarchy" not always depend upon strategic essentialization and blindness to social particulars? And just what, if anything, is South Asian about the eropolitical compound? If the dynamic is present in other traditions of world poetry and literature (it certainly is), and I choose to migrate my analysis outwards to a universalizing frame of reference, then why focus on Sanskrit literature in particular? Such important macro questions have dogged my thinking on this matter from start to finish, but clearly I have found it worthwhile to attempt an offering amidst this set of concerns that I know all too well cannot be treated adequately in the present context.

This brings me to a final point of reflection regarding the work – arguably hubristic – of articulating and interrogating social and literary norms. I feel fairly confident that the majority, possibly the totality, of the authors of the Sanskrit materials discussed here were what today we would call cisgendered heterosexual men invested in a value system deemed natural and simply given. But those who received and responded to this literature were perfectly capable of examining and critiquing its encoded values, for what I have made bold to identify in a scholastic mode was in fact already recognized and intuitively understood within Sanskrit tradition itself. To be sure, there is no Sanskrit name for the eropolitical compound as I develop it here; this is only the rather ham-fisted label I have applied in my attempt to get a handle on the pattern. However, if we return to that greatest of all compound exemplars invoked at the beginning of this paper – Rāma's defeat of Rāvaṇa and/as reclamation of Sītā – we might see within it a kind of critique of the dynamic, or at least of the gender ideals that inform it.[35] As is well known, the climactic and sunny double victory on the battlefield is soon clouded over by Sītā's *agniparīkṣā* (6.100–6) – an ugly moment of paranoia and callousness on Rāma's part that has never ceased to disturb and inspire South Asian storytelling ever since. Vālmīki himself frames the episode as a scandal and means for us to see it as such. And of course the remainder of the epic does not so much heal this moment as follow its poisonous effects through to the tragic final departure of Sītā back into the arms of mother earth, unable to bear any longer the contradictory expectations of a public embodied in her husband the king. Does Vālmīki see, and mean for us to see, the toxicity of the deeper values of which

[35] I am indebted to Brian Black for raising this issue.

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the compound dynamic is an expression? Rāma is the paradigmatic romantic-heroic victor of Sanskrit literature. But he is also – perhaps not accidentally – the site of a centuries-long South Asian critique which has continuously asked why political power seems to require or value so highly the subordinated feminine object. In other words, Beauvoir may be helpful for me and some of my readers as a means to understanding the eropolitical trope; others have done perfectly well for a very long time without us.

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