

**The Function of similes within the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata:  
parallel features and differences between the two Sanskrit Epics**

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## Abstract

The present thesis examines the role of similes within the Sanskrit Epics. Acknowledging the fact that, as a product of an oral tradition, both Epics display upamās which do not fulfil any specific function within the narrative, but are merely employed as “line-fillers”, this research investigates similes employed with a specific purpose within the texts. The methodology employed is the contextual analysis of passages drawn from both Epics: similes occurring within each section are translated and taken into account in the immediate context in which they occur. The current research suggests the following arguments:

- That the range of similes employed within a passage is chosen according to the subject-matter of the passage, thus implying a connection between the subject-matter and the ranges of upamānas employed.
- That the similes often fulfil more than one purpose at a time: a secondary function often occurs when similes appear in sequences.
- That each Epic displays comparisons whose function is specific to that Epic.
- That Mahābhārata and Rāmāyāṇa display comparisons fulfilling a similar function when occurring in similar contexts.

Comparisons are generally employed by the bard in order to draw the audience's focus on a particular moment within the narrative: the analysis of similarities and differences between the function of comparisons featured in each Epic suggests a more central role of similes within the non-verbal dialogue between the bard and the audience.

## Introduction

The *alaṃkāras* and the evolution of rhetoric in ancient India

The *alaṃkāras*, considered the equivalent to the figures of speech in the western tradition, have been, in ancient India, an object of much interest. The first treatise to mention the *alaṃkāras* is the Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharata, composed around the early centuries of the modern era, but most probably completed around the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. In chapters VI, VII and XVI, Bharata expounds his basic theory on the use of figures of speech.<sup>1</sup> A first notion of *rasa* and *bhāva* is introduced, along with the definitions of *guṇa* and *doṣa* (applied to poetry) and of *alaṃkāra*, as basic elements of *kāvya*. Although the objective of the Nāṭyaśāstra is the investigation of the art of drama, the treatise is the first code of conventions and characteristics of poetry in the Sanskrit tradition. Chronologically affiliated to the date of composition of the expanded version of the Nāṭyaśāstra are also the first treatises of rhetoric. The very first example of *alaṃkāraśāstra* is the Kāvyaālaṃkāra, composed by Bhāmaha, considered the founder of the school of rhetoric Ālaṃkārikā. In the same period, another author, Daṇḍin, wrote the Kāvyaadarśa: all the posterior treatises on poetry are modelled on this text. Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin introduced a new methodology in the study of poetry: the subdivision into categories based on structure and content shed light in the multiplicity of poetical tools available to the poet of their time. The flourishing of rhetoric schools between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century is the direct consequence of the evolution of use of *alaṃkāras* over the centuries, which began in the Vedic texts. The attempt made by the first rhetoricians to classify similes according to the nature of their *upamāna* shows the will to establish a code of conduct in the use of similes which could be followed by poets.

### Studies in *Mahābhārata*'s similes

More recent attempts to classify similes have been made: S. N. Gajendragadkar, Ram Karan Sharma and Yaroslav Vassilkov examined similes in the *Mahābhārata*.

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<sup>1</sup> The word *alaṃkāra* and the expression 'figure of speech' are to be considered, in this thesis, equivalent.

In his article ‘A Study in Mahābhārata Similes’,<sup>2</sup> Gajendragadkar makes an important attempt to underline the role of similes within the *Mahābhārata*. The study articulates the analysis of *alaṃkāras*, similes in particular, in two stages: the analysis of the scope of the selection of *upamānas* introduced by the poet to illustrate what he is describing, and the structure of such similes. Gajendragadkar classifies similes in nine main categories, according to the function they fulfil within the text:

- 1– Illustrative
- 2– Sympathetic
- 3– Imaginative
- 4– Improbable
- 5– Anticipative
- 6– Emotional
- 7– Artificial
- 8– Sacerdotal
- 9– Decorative

Some of those categories of comparisons are concerned with literary techniques such as explaining a particular concept (1-illustrative), showing the impossibility of an action (4-improbable), anticipating an event (5-anticipative) or simply embellishing the text (9-decorative). Others are employed in order to affect the emotive state of the audience: the composer of the poem creates a fictitious *upamāna* in order to raise the sympathetic feelings of the audience towards the *upameya* (2-sympathetic) and inserts *upamānas* such as parents and teachers in order to appeal to the feelings of love (6-emotional). In order to add greater sanctity to the *upameya*, the composer also selects comparisons from the realm of the sacrifice (8-sacerdotal). According to Gajendragadkar, there are two kinds of *upamā* which lack in a specific function: similes whose *upamāna* has been created to fit a specific *upameya*<sup>3</sup> (3-imaginative), and examples in which *upameya* and *upamāna* have nothing in common (7-artificial).

Although this attempt to classify similes is original, the research shows two

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<sup>2</sup>Gajendragadkar, S. N. 1950: A Study in Mahābhārata Similes. *Journal of the University of Bombay* 19.2: 49-62.

<sup>3</sup>Contrarily to the sympathetic ones, the poet shows no bias towards the *upameya*.

weaknesses: the idea that the function fulfilled by similes is defined by the type of *upamāna* they display, and the assumption that *Mahābhārata* similes are always chosen to follow a constant pattern of specific functions.

The first idea that the function of similes be defined by the type of *upamāna* employed makes the following fallacy: as the the present thesis suggests, similes displaying a type of *upamāna* tend to accomplish different purposes within the text. Comparisons displaying a mythological *upamāna*, for instance, are employed with two different functions within the *Mahābhārata*: in order to state a special relationship between the *upameya* and the *upamāna*, as in the case of the ‘identifying’ similes described by Vassilkov,<sup>4</sup> and as ‘attention switch markers’<sup>5</sup>, in order to introduce new elements within the narrative, such as a new narrative plane.

The idea that comparisons are always employed in order to accomplish specific functions within the text appears to be far-fetched. The fact that figures of speech could be employed with a specific purpose within the *Mahābhārata* is widely accepted, but to state that this is always the case simply denies the nature of this Epic as a product of an oral tradition: the hypothesis that the choice of similes is the product of a specific pattern in functions does not take into account the formulaic nature of many similes in the Epics. The investigation of the functions that similes fulfil within the text implies the possibility to find uses that bear features of an oral style: in some battle scenes, for instance, similes do tend to pile up regardless of the relationship with each other.<sup>6</sup> As shown for the first time by Hopkins in the early twentieth century, most comparisons belong to a common stock: ‘Such stock of similes belong to neither epic, but to the epic store in general, as may be seen consulting the long list of identical similes in identical phraseology common to both epics’.<sup>7</sup> Similes apparently belong to the traditional stock of knowledge that the audience of the Epics well knew and appreciated.

Ram Karan Sharma, in his *Elements of Poetry in the Mahābhārata*,<sup>8</sup> presents a

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<sup>4</sup> The ‘identifying similes’ in the final battle between Karṇa and Arjuna will be considered in Chapter 1 of this analysis:

Vassilkov, Y. 2001: The Mahābhārata Similes and Their Significance for Comparative Epic Studies. *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* T. LIV, Z: 1-31.

<sup>5</sup> Similes accomplishing this purpose are analysed in chapter 3 of the present thesis.

<sup>6</sup> Brockington J.L 2000: Figures of speech in the Rāmāyaṇa. In: *Epic Threads*, John Brockington on the Sanskrit Epics. Delhi: Oxford University Press: 126-162. 127.

<sup>7</sup> Hopkins, E.W 1901: *The Great Epic of India, its Character and Origin*. New York: Scribner.205-207.

<sup>8</sup>Sharma, R. K. 1964: *Elements of Poetry in the Mahābhārata*. Berkeley: University of California



detailed account of what he defines as ‘poetic expressions of the corpus’. As the author states in its introduction, his work does not intend to be a rhetorical discussion about poetry in that epic, on the contrary, his research enumerates all those repetitive linguistic features that occur within the *Mahābhārata*.

In chapter 1 the author refers to the *upamās* and their basic symbolic meanings: Sharma organises his catalogue of comparisons according to the type of the *upamāna*, such as Gods, animals, human beings. Acknowledging that the development of the study of *alaṃkāras* lacks a full encyclopaedia of traditional Sanskrit stock-in-trade comparisons, he lists similes found in Books 1 (Ādiparvan), 3 (Vanaparvan) and 6 (Bhīṣmaparvan) of the *Mahābhārata*. Chapters 2-8 deal with other *arthālaṃkāras*, chapter 9 analyses popular idioms and chapter 10 deals with the *śabdālaṃkāras*. In chapter 11, Sharma gives a full description of the techniques of oral style in the poem. Although the author suggests that very often there is a special relationship between *upameya* and *upamāna*, he does not investigate this aspect further.

An attempt to investigate the relationship between the *upameya* and *upamāna* has been made by Yaroslav Vassilkov, in his influential article “The Mahābhārata Similes and Their Significance for Comparative Epic Studies”. Vassilkov’s paper is mainly concerned with a specific kind of *upamā* present in the Karṇaparvan: the mythological similes (viz., similes that refer to traditional Sanskrit myths). This type of comparison, which he defines as ‘idealising simile’, ‘projects the picture of an epic battle onto the background of the cosmic myth in order to provide it with a deeper perspective and additional greatness.’<sup>9</sup> Among those there are *upamās* that the author calls ‘identifying’<sup>10</sup> similes: comparisons that constantly link a particular character with a particular God and imply a mythological connection, perhaps even a relation of identity between the epic hero and the deity. In the Karṇaparvan this tendency is very obvious, particularly in descriptions of fighting: in those passages, in fact, similes referring to Karṇa liken the character to the god Vṛtra while instances referring to Arjuna compare him to Indra. According to Vassilkov, this is neither due to a supposed mythological origin of the Epic, nor to later religious interpolations.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Vassilkov 2001: 18.

<sup>10</sup> Vassilkov 2001: 24.

<sup>11</sup> Vassilkov 2001: 25.

He is rather in favour of another explanation that takes into account other oral traditions such as the New Guinea serial songs, folklore genres that precede the Epics. Those proto-epic genres are usually panegyric (eulogy, hymn) for a military leader that has to be glorified by the bard. The function of the serial songs is to keep up a constant correlation between the real plane of narration (viz., the story of the hero's deeds) and the mythic plane (a glorification of the mythic exploits done by the God whose incarnation or whose human counterpart the hero was supposed to be). As a consequence, it is necessary for the bard to co-ordinate two levels of narration. Similes are the best poetic means to be employed with this purpose: on the one hand, mythological comparisons show the separation between the two planes of narration, on the other hand, similes remind the audience of the implicit identity between the hero and the God.<sup>12</sup>

The originality of Vassilkov's approach lies both in the analysis of *upamās* in performance and in the investigation of the relationship between the *upameya* and the *upamāna*. Similes in the battle scenes analysed by Vassilkov fulfil a specific function which becomes apparent through the investigation of the context in which similes occur. The methodology employed by Vassilkov in his paper has to be regarded as a good starting point for future research on similes.

#### Studies in *Rāmāyaṇa*'s similes

Two influential articles on *Rāmāyaṇa*'s *alaṃkāra* have been published in the past years: John Brockington's "Figures of Speech in the *Rāmāyaṇa*"<sup>13</sup>, and Marie Claude Porcher's "Remarques sur la fonction des figures de style dans le *Rāmāyaṇa*".<sup>14</sup>

In his article, mainly concerned with figures of speech, Brockington provides an extensive description of *alaṃkāras* within the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Similes, whose frequency overshadows the presence of other types of figures of speech enriching the text, are treated mainly in the light of their subject matter and on

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<sup>12</sup> A similar conclusion has been reached on the way Homer employs similes in fighting scenes. See: Bowra, C. M. 1930: *Tradition and design in the Iliad*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. See Coffey, M. 1957: The Function of the Homeric Simile. *American Journal of Philology* 78: 113-132.

<sup>13</sup> Brockington 2000: op cit.

<sup>14</sup> Porcher, M. C. 1996: Remarques sur la fonction des figures de style dans le *Rāmāyaṇa*, in *Langue, style et structure dans le monde indien: centenaire de Louis Renou; actes du Colloque international*, Paris. This study deals with similes in Books III and V of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

syntactical/grammatical features. Although his work is mainly on structural aspects, Brockington also makes a few remarks on the possible role fulfilled by similes within the text. For instance, he points out that comparisons occur mainly in dramatic or emotional situations. Passages where fighting scenes occur are particularly rich in similes, but also descriptions where little happens are usually characterised by a large number of comparisons. In Brockington's opinion similes are employed in order to emphasize emotionally charged scenes.<sup>15</sup>

In another important study on figures of speech within the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Porcher divides similes displayed within the text into two different categories: comparisons occurring in speeches and those occurring within descriptions. Porcher's classification of similes within the *Rāmāyaṇa* is discussed in chapter 2 of the present thesis.

As my analysis of similes within the *Rāmāyaṇa* suggests, the range of functions of comparisons featured by the text is much more diversified: there are indeed, descriptive similes occurring in speeches, as well as similes introducing or closing a speech, which have to be analysed according to the function they fulfil within the immediate context in which they occur.

#### Similarities and differences between the two Epics

The Sanskrit tradition places the two Epics in two separate categories: while the *Mahābhārata* is traditionally remembered as the *itihāsa*, thus implying some historicity of the events narrated in the Epic, the *Rāmāyaṇa* is remembered with the name of *adīkāvyā*. For the rhetoricians of the *alaṃkāraśāstra*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* is not only the first example of *kāvya*, but it is also the source of inspiration for poets and narrators who composed in *kāvya* genre. This difference in the way the two Epics are considered does not prevent scholars from investigating the many apparent similarities between the two texts. Most of the studies carried out on similarities between the two Sanskrit Epics are concerned with the Rāmopākhyāna of the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>16</sup> Other, more extensive works on the common elements between the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* date back to Weber at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In

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<sup>15</sup> Brockington J.L.1984: *Righteous Rāma: the Evolution of an Epic*. Delhi: Oxford University Press: 144.

<sup>16</sup>For a list of studies on the Rāmopākhyāna see Brockington J.L. 1998: *The Sanskrit Epics. Handbuch der Orientalistik, Vol II*. Leiden: Brill. 473-477.

his long article “Über das Rāmāyaṇa”, Weber points out that there are similarities between the two texts, without further investigating the matter.<sup>17</sup>

Hopkins, in his “Parallel features in the two Sanskrit Epics” took a first step in this direction, thus marking the beginning of the studies on the relationship between the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Hopkins's article was followed by a second, more articulate investigation of the similarities between the two Epics in his “Allusions to the Rāma Story in the Mahābhārata”.<sup>18</sup> As pointed out by Hopkins at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* show a number of similarities, such as general phraseology<sup>19</sup> and passages of traditional proverbs and tales.<sup>20</sup> According to Hopkins, such similarities are a result of the common source of material from which both Epics drew, each text adding it ‘to its own store’.<sup>21</sup> The analysis so far shows that the two Epics indeed developed in parallel, perhaps even in the same region, at least in the later stages,<sup>22</sup> thus justifying the similarities in style and phraseology. According to Hopkins, both Epics lack the most complicated figures of speech that often occur in later *kāvya* literature. In particular, *upamās* and *rūpakas* occur in older layers of the Epics, while other *alaṃkāras* are met in later *stratas* of the text.

Among the similarities between the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, there are a number of themes, such as the political intrigues, the forest<sup>23</sup> and the battle. Despite these apparent common features of the two Epics, there are differences in the way these themes are portrayed. Along with the major themes shared by the two texts, such as the political manouvres (the Sabhāparvan and the Ayodhyākāṇḍa), the exile in the forest (Āraṇyakaparvan and Araṇyākāṇḍa) and the war (books VI, VII, VIII,

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<sup>17</sup> Weber, A.F. 1870: Über das Rāmāyaṇa. *Abhandlungen der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin*. (English trans. D. C. Boyd 1872). 1-118

<sup>18</sup> Hopkins, E.W. 1930: Allusions to the Rāma Story in the Mahābhārata. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 50: 85-103.

<sup>19</sup>Hopkins. W.E. 1898: Parallel Features in the two Sanskrit Epics. *American Journal of Philology* 19:138-51.

<sup>20</sup>Hopkins. W.E. 1899: Proverbs and Tales Common to the two Sanskrit Epics. *American Journal of Philology* 20: 22-39.

<sup>21</sup> Hopkins 1899: 23.

<sup>22</sup> Brockington 1998: 484.

<sup>23</sup> The word forest is employed in the present thesis, to translate both *vana* and *araṇya*. See Sprockhoff, J.F: 1981. Āraṇyaka und Vānaprastha in der Vedischen Literatur. *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens*, 25: 19-90. According to Sprockhoff, in vedic texts, the word *araṇya* indicates the wasteland, whereas the word *vana* means “forest”. In the Mahābhārata, however, the two words are used interchangeably. Sprockhoff 1981: 84.

IX and X of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*), there are a number of minor themes, or subject-matters, within the Epics. Some of them are specific to each text, others are common to both Epics. Within each one of these minor themes, similes tend to be employed in a specific way.

The *Sabhāparvan* is a central book to the *Mahābhārata* in the same way the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* is to the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The *Sabhāparvan*, considered the oldest *parvan* within the *Mahābhārata*, describes the political intrigues that lead to the Pāṇḍavas' exile, the key point in the plot, the essential circumstances that result in the war between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas. Similarly to the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* for the *Rāmāyaṇa*, it contains the description of the events that will lead to the characters' banishment to the forest. The *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* belongs to the main core of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as proven by Brockington,<sup>24</sup> and it is therefore an important source for the material to be analysed in this thesis: the book features an introductory part of the story, including a description of its main characters and of the key episodes of the plot.

Another major theme, common to both *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, is the account of the vicissitudes of the heroes during the time spent in the forest. Despite the apparent similarities between the way the *Āraṇyakaparvan* and *Araṇyakāṇḍa* portray this theme, there is a basic difference in the role the forest fulfils within each epic.

Unlike the *Āraṇyakaparvan*, which is an *ensemble* of stories and anecdotes, the *Araṇyakāṇḍa* features a number of important events, all linked in an indissoluble chain of causes and effects that will lead to the battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa: in the case of the *Mahābhārata*, the book of the forest represents an important step towards the maturity of Yudhiṣṭhira, a sort of transition that allows the main characters to grow and reach full maturity, in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, a number of events taking place in the forest are important events in the plot, such as the mutilation of Śūrpaṅkhā, which draws Rāvaṇa's attention towards Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, and the consequent abduction of Vaidehī.

According to Thomas Parkhill, Rāma's sojourn in the wilderness does not contribute to his maturity in the same way the forest contributes to the evolution of

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<sup>24</sup> Brockington 1984: 144.

Yudhiṣṭhira in the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>25</sup> As Parkhill points out, the role of the wilderness as threshold between the stages of life was indeed deeply rooted in Indian culture. That is not to say that the forest in the *Rāmāyāṇa* does not fulfil a function of threshold between boyhood and adulthood: in the *Bālakāṇḍa*, the forest fulfils exactly this function. According to Parkhill, the *Bālakāṇḍa* episode in which both Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, brought into the forest by the seer Viśvāmitra, are compelled to accomplish several tasks, among which the killing of a *rākṣasa*, is a clear example of characters crossing this important threshold. Such an episode, similar to an instance occurring within the *Ādiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, reveals the common idea of the forest as a means through which the characters achieve adulthood. But maturity comes at a price for the protagonists of both the Epics: maturity can be achieved through a series of perils that will test the characters' strength and valour, highlighting their skills and weaknesses.

The episodes mentioned above provide indeed a proof of the idea of the forest as a threshold between boyhood and adulthood, but within the *Aranyakāṇḍa*, a more central book within the Epic, this concept appears to be blurred. It is never clear in the text, what the forest represents in the mind of the authors of the *Rāmāyāṇa*. Although it can be easily inferred that, in fact, because of all the perils and tests the Rāma faces during his stay in the forest, the book indeed represents this maturation, it is never spelled out and made obvious for the audience to see.

According to Parkhill, in the *Aranyakāṇḍa*, the forest represents an uncivilised world, a non-structured reality, different from the structured life within cities, that the hero is forced to experience in order to re-establish an order that has been altered. In the case of the *Rāmāyāṇa*, Rāma plays an important role in the process of asserting the altered structure of society: the killing of Rāvaṇa is an important task set by the gods in order to enable them to rule again. The *rākṣasa*, in fact, cannot be killed by a god, because of a boon granted to him by Brahmā, which allows him to rule over the gods, thus overturning the natural order of society.

The basic difference between the function played by the forest within the *Āranyakaparvan* and the *Aranyakāṇḍa* lies in the role performed by their protagonists. In the *Mahābhārata*, the natural order has been altered by the behaviour

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<sup>25</sup> Parkhill T. 1995: *The Forest Setting in Hindu Epics, Princes, Sages and Demons*. Lewiston: Mellen University Press.19-21.

of its protagonists: Yudhiṣṭhira, having gambled away his kingdom and even his own brothers and wife, acted unrighteously. Although it is stated on several occasions that this is part of a larger scheme in order to cause the war between the two branches of the family, it is clear that the sojourn in the wilderness provides the tests that will lead Yudhiṣṭhira to a stage of maturity that will make him fit for kingship. In the case of the *Rāmāyāna*, there appears to be no need for evolution. The main character of the *Rāmāyāna* is an ideal one: Rāma is the perfect ruler, his father and the council of the noblemen consider him mature and virtuous enough to rule the kingdom. Although the lack of moral struggle in the protagonist of the *Rāmāyāna* is ascribed to a later stage of composition,<sup>26</sup> we can easily argue that generally, the behaviour of Rāma is regarded by the authors of the text as virtuous in every aspect. But what is the role of the forest within the Araṇyakāṇḍa then, if not an important threshold between life-stages? The answer is again in the forest as a place where no social rules apply, a place where demons rule and the normal order of society is not respected. The forest represents the order that has been overturned and requires the deeds of the hero to be re-established. Rāma has to fight against several demons, lose his wife and conquer Laṅkā to bring order again in a society where, against the normal state of things, demons, not gods, rule.

The war is another major theme shared by the Epics, although a major difference becomes apparent when analysing the behaviour of its combatants: unlike the *Mahābhāra* war, where the morality of the acts of its protagonists is blurred and unclear, the war between Rāma and Rāvaṇa is a war between good and evil.<sup>27</sup> The Yuddhakāṇḍa, the last book of core of the epic, is the final book of the *Rāmāyāna* and its longest *kāṇḍa*, constituted by 116 *sargas*. The end of the Epic relates about the battle between the *rākṣasas* and the troops of the army assembled to liberate Sītā. The acts of the characters within the *Rāmāyāna* appear to be more straightforward and in line with their behaviour. In the case of the *Mahābhārata*, the events happening during the war are narrated in 5 books of the Epic: the Bhiṣmaparvan, the Droṇaparvan, the Karṇaparvan, the Śalyaparvan and the Sauptikaparvan. Among these, the Karṇaparvan features a number of similes whose analysis reveals a few

<sup>26</sup> Brockington 1998: 386

<sup>27</sup> Mehendale M.A. 1995: *Reflections on the Mahābhārata war*. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies. 58.

surprises.

My research on similes in the *Mahābhāra* and in the *Rāmāyāna* has been carried out considering the three main themes occurring in both the Epics: for the *Mahābhāra*, passages from the Sabhāparvan, the Āraṇyakaparvan and the Karṇaparvan are analysed; the analysis of the *Rāmāyāna* considers passages drawn from the Ayodhyākāṇḍa, the Araṇyakāṇḍa and the Yuddhakāṇḍa.

The present thesis considers the main themes shared by the Epics as a starting point to the investigation of similarities and differences in the way similes are employed within the Sanskrit Epics: *upamās* are occasionally employed with a similar purpose within the two Epics when occurring in similar contexts.

The idea of the comparison as a powerful, effective literary device employed in order to enhance the text, so as to achieve a certain effect on the audience, shows, more than anything else, that the Epics shared not only a similar cultural background, but also a group of composers/bards, who were indeed familiar with the use of similes with specific purposes in recurrent contexts.

The methodology in the study of similes within the Sanskrit Epics:  
a definition of contextual analysis

Previous analyses of similes within the Sanskrit Epics have always regarded the *upamā* as a poetic means through which the poet's insight is expressed on the events of the main narrative. It is therefore important to determine what functions comparisons may fulfil within the Epics. Previous studies<sup>28</sup> have been mainly concerned with the *upamānas* and the *tertium comparationis* (viz., the quality and/or the action common to both the *upameya* and the *upamāna*). But the essential nature of comparison is based on the triple structure *upameya-tertium comparationis-upamāna*: by omitting even one of the three basic elements, the comparison can be no longer defined as such. The analysis of the *upameya* implies a concern with the relationship between the *upamā* and the text: whenever similes carry out specific functions, this is always due to a particular connection between *upameya* and *upamāna*.

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<sup>28</sup> Sharma 1964; Gajendragadkar 1950; Brockington 2000; op.cit.



The contextual analysis of similes takes into account the relationship between the *upameya* and *upamāna*, (e.g. the immediate context in which the simile occurs); then takes into account other similes within the passage. The analysis then considers comparisons in relation to the literary frame, the particular stage in the plot in which the passage occurs. The investigation of *upamās* encountered within the sections considered, and the analysis of the relationship between the similes and the literary frame in which the passages are displayed, shed light on the multiplicity of functions accomplished by similes within the Epics.

Studying the function fulfilled by similes through the use of contextual analysis highlights differences but also the striking similarities between the use of similes within the two Epics. The main aim of this study is demonstrate that a definition of the function of simile can be reached only through the analysis of the context in which similes occur.

The first chapter of this thesis analyses similes within the *Mahābharata*. Two types of *upamā* are examined: similes in narrative digressions and mythological comparisons occurring in fighting scenes. Similes in narrative digressions are examined through the investigation of comparisons in the Mantraparvan (MBh, II.12-17) and the Nalopakhyāna (MBh III.50-78): the analysis of the Mantraparvan shows how similes can vary according to the subject-matter of the passage, the Nalopakhyāna is considered in order to analyse specific functions fulfilled by similes within narrative digression.

Mythological similes occurring in the final battle between Karna and Arjuna (MBh, VIII.63-68), previously analysed by Vassilkov, are investigated in order to show a specific function fulfilled by mythological similes within the passage: the stressing of a relation of identity between a deity and a character.

This research deals with similes within the *Rāmāyaṇa* following a similar division to Porcher's.<sup>29</sup> Similes within narrative and those within speeches do tend, within the *Rāmāyaṇa*, to fulfil different functions: comparisons occurring within the narrative tend to emphasize differences between characters, whereas in dialogues *upamās* are often employed in order to stress speech-acts. For the analysis of similes

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<sup>29</sup> In her research, Porcher follows L. Renou's division between similes occurring within the narrative and comparisons occurring within dialogues. Renou, L.1959: Sur la structure du kāvya. *Journal Asiatique*, Paris. 1-114: 2.

occurring within dialogues, the conversation between Mantharā and Kaikeyī (Rm, II.7-9) and the instance between Daśaratha and Kaikeyī (Rm, II.10-12) are considered. Similes in narrative passages or discourses, on the other hand, are taken into account in order to describe the guiding functions of similes: the comparisons employed in order to stress important events occurring within the narrative. The analysis of this type of *upamā* considers the following episodes within the *Rāmāyaṇa*: the beginning of the Ayodhyākāṇḍa (Rm, II.1-3), the mutilation of Śūrpaṅkhā (Rm, III.16-17) and Garuḍa's healing power (Rm, VI.40). The analysis of similes within the *Mahābhārata* follows a different pattern of analysis. Research on similes within the *Mahābhārata* shows a far more differentiated use of similes within the different speech-acts of the various characters the function of similes in speeches depends greatly on how each discourse is employed within the main narrative, whether to introduce different types of narrative digressions or didactic material.

Chapter 3 of the present thesis considers the similarities between the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In order to show such similar use of comparisons within the texts, two main types of simile are taken into account: *upamās* occurring within dialogues, whose purpose is to offend another character, and mythological similes occurring within the narrative in fighting scenes. The objective is to show how similes within the two Epics can be employed in similar contexts and with a similar purpose.

As will be shown, each Epic displays its own set of comparisons, fulfilling very specific functions, which are employed only within that Epic and in that specific case. Along with features that belong to each Epic, there are similes fulfilling very similar functions, often in contexts which are common to both Epics.

The contextual analysis of similes within the Epics shows how comparisons tend to be employed in order to fulfil more than one purpose at a time: a main function, fulfilled within the immediate context in which similes occur, and a secondary function, which becomes apparent through the analysis of other comparisons within the passage and taking into account the relevance of the events occurring within the passage, to the main plot.

The analysis of similarities and differences between the function of

comparisons featured in each Epic reveals a number of principles behind the use of comparisons in the Sanskrit Epics.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Part of the present work has been accepted for publication. *Cosi* (forthcoming) : Upamās occurring in speeches: “abusive” similes in the Sabhāparvan and Karṇaparvan. In: proceedings of the 13<sup>th</sup> World Sanskrit Conference. Edinburgh 2006.

## 1. Similes within the *Mahābhārata*

### 1.1 Function of similes within narrative digressions.

One of the main differences between the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* is given by the large number of narrative digressions displayed by the latter. Such narrative digressions occur at a given stage of the narrative, introducing a parallel dimension to the audience. A parallel reality often implies a different subject matter: for this reason, the analysis of narrative digressions provides a classic example of similes/subject-matter association. The present section considers comparisons in narrative digressions in two stages: the first section shows how the introduction of a narrative digression influences the range of *upamānas* displayed by the similes; the second part analyses similes within a single narrative digression, describing how comparisons can be employed in order to fulfill a single function throughout the whole digression.

The Mantraparvan features a number of sequences that are considered in order to show how similes tend to vary when the subject-matter of the passage changes. The episode of Nala and Damayantī is considered for the analysis of similes fulfilling a specific function within this popular narrative digression. For this analysis, two features are considered: the type of *upamāna* and the structure of the similes.<sup>31</sup> Comparing the structure and the range of *upamānas* employed in different passages reveals a connection between similes and themes: *upamānas* tend to occupy the fourth *pāda* of the verse, although there are instances of longer similes, occurring more frequently in longer verses. Longer similes, usually employed in more descriptive passages, usually take up two *pādas* of the stanza; shorter similes also occur within the *Mahābhārata*, often in specific contexts.

Before analysing the structure of the digressions to be taken into account, it is important to place such digressions within the structure of the main Parvan in which they occur. The analysis of the context in which they are featured, in fact, is the starting point of the investigation of similes.

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<sup>31</sup> By “structure of similes” is implied the length of the comparison, that is to say the number of *pādas* (or occasionally less than a *pāda*). Also similes expressed in compounds will be considered as having a different structure from comparisons expressed by *iva* or *yathā*.

## 1.2 The Mantraparvan within the Sabhāparvan: differences between similes in narrative digressions and similes in the main narrative

The Sabhāparvan is constituted by ten minor parvans: *The building of the Assembly Hall, the Description of the Halls of the World Guardians, the Council, the Slaying of Jarāsaṃdha, the Conquest of the World, The Royal Consecration, the Taking of the Guest Gift, the Slaying of Śiśupāla, the Dicing Game and the Sequel to the Dicing*. The structure of the Sabhāparvan has been the object of much debate among scholars. Van Buitenen argues that the structure of the entire book is based on the ancient vedic ritual of the *rajāsūya* sacrifice.<sup>32</sup> The ritual, as described in the Black and the White Yajurveda, was performed in order to elevate a local sovereign to a Universal one. Taking into account Heesterman's book, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration*,<sup>33</sup> which investigates the ancient ritual, Van Buitenen points out a number of similarities between the structure of the book and the ritual of the consecration. According to van Buitenen, such similarities cannot be coincidental but could only be explained with a direct knowledge of the ritual by the composer of the Sabhāparvan. The number of common elements is indeed striking: as highlighted by van Buitenen, parts of the ritual such as the taking of the guest gift and the following dicing game, appear to be suspiciously similar to the chain of events occurring within the Sabhāparvan. The dicing game in particular, in its inevitability, seems to van Buitenen only possible if considered as part of the original ritual. Van Buitenen's efforts to explain these striking similarities fail to clarify some episodes within the book, which clearly contrast with the scenario of a holy rite: the betting of Draupadī, for instance, appears to be rather unusual. As observed by Renate Söhnen-Thieme, some of the common elements between the ritual of the *rajāsūya* and the events occurring in the Sabhāparvan, such as the occurrence of the dicing game, do not necessarily show a supposed influence of the ancient ritual on the structure of the book.<sup>34</sup> In the author's opinion, forms of entertainment such as dicing were indeed

<sup>32</sup>van Buitenen, J.A.B. 1972: On the Structure of the Sabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata. In: *India Maior: Congratulatory Volume Presented to J. Gonda, ed by J. Ensink and P. Gaeffke*. 68-84. Leiden: Brill. (Reprinted: 1988: *Studies in Indian Literature and Philosophy: Collected Articles of J.A.B. van Buitenen, ed. By Ludo Rocher*. Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies. 305-21). 307

<sup>33</sup>Heesterman, J.C. 1957: *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration. The Rājāsūya described according to the Yajus texts and annotated*. The Hague: Mouton & Co. 'S-Gravenhage

<sup>34</sup>Söhnen-Thieme, R. 1999: On the Composition of the Dyūtaparvan in the Mahābhārata. In:

very common in Indian courts. Other clues, such as the inevitability of accepting the challenge of the game on Yudhiṣṭhira's part, which van Buitenen also considers as necessary because part of the ritual, can be understood, in Söhnen-Thieme's opinion, by considering the Pāṇḍavas' respect towards their uncle Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the regent king. The problems concerning the composition of the Dyūtaparvan, which are the subject-matter of Söhnen-Thieme's paper, are considered in the second section of this thesis, in the analysis of similarities and differences between the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Beyond van Buitenen's interpretation of the structure of the Sabhāparvan, which primarily deals with the origins of the book itself, there is a second approach to the *parvan's* structure to be considered: the subdivision into main narrative and narrative digressions within the book. As Rajendra Nanavati points out, the Sabhāparvan features a number of narrative digressions.<sup>35</sup> Such digressions appear to belong, in his opinion, to a secondary stage of composition. The attempt to identify those parts of the two Epics which do not belong to the original plot, is a striking one: in his classification of the different layers he identifies within the text, the parts which do not fit in the pattern of the original story are those in which the events do not show any direct consequence in the main events of the plot. Such methodology can pose a series of questions, such as whether to consider every narrative digression as part of the original story or not. In analysing the Sabhāparvan, Nanavati classifies the tale of the birth of Jarāsaṃdha (II.16.12-17.27) as secondary material, an expansion to the original core of the book. The origin of the episode is indeed important to understand the difference among functions of similes occurring within the Epics: differences in style can sometimes be explained through a different stage of composition. Although the identification of the chronological stratification of the passages featuring similes is not the objective of this research, it is important to mention that a later stage of composition can be a useful clue in our understanding of the way composers employed similes within the text.

The killing of Jarāsaṃdha is one of the most famous episodes within the second

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*Composing a Tradition: Concepts, Techniques and their relationships. Proceedings of the First Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas.* Zagreb: Croatian Academy of Science and Arts: 139-154. 140-1

<sup>35</sup>Nanavati, Rajendra I. 1982: *Secondary tales of the two Great Epics.* (L.D. Series 88). Ahmedabad: L.D. Institute of Indology.

book of the *Mahābhārata*. The slaying of Jarāsaṃdha finds its reasons in Yudhiṣṭhira's plan to perform the *rājasūya* sacrifice. He is advised to do so by Kṛṣṇa, who makes him aware of the necessity of killing Jarāsaṃdha, who holds supremacy among the other kings, before accomplishing the conquest of the world. Yudhiṣṭhira decides to follow his father's suggestions<sup>36</sup> and allows Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma and Arjuna to leave for the Magadha Kingdom in order to kill Jarāsaṃdha. They reach the capital of the Kingdom in disguise and provoke the King, who accepts the challenge and is defeated by Bhīma, after a wrestling combat that lasts several days. After the liberation of the kings, the Pāṇḍavas set out for the conquest of the world in the name of their elder brother. They head off to conquer the four quarters of the world: Arjuna subjugates the North, Bhīma the East, Sahadeva the South and Nakula the West. Once the conquest of the world is accomplished, the *rājasūya* is finally celebrated.

As observed by Brockington,<sup>37</sup> internal evidence within the text allow us to place the Jarāsaṃdha episode sometime later than the earliest core of the *Mahābhārata*. Linguistic and stylistic evidences bear, in fact, features of a later style.<sup>38</sup> The Mantraparvan, the sub-section immediately preceding the episode of the killing of Jarāsaṃdha, reveals important information about the king of Magadha: his strength and the political moves that allowed him to hold captive the kings are fully explained by Kṛṣṇa in *adhyāya* 13. The description Kṛṣṇa gives to the eldest Pāṇḍava brother leads to the first narrative digression of the book: the tale of Jarāsaṃdha's birth. We can therefore divide the Mantraparvan of the Sabhāparvan into two main sections: the first part, featuring the dialogue between Yudhiṣṭhira and his kinsmen (12.5-20) and between Yudhiṣṭhira and Kṛṣṇa (12.30-16.10), and the second section displaying Kṛṣṇa's tale about Jarāsaṃdha's birth (16.10-17). In order to show the significant differences between similes in narrative digressions and similes in the main narrative, all comparisons occurring within the *parvan* are taken into account,

<sup>36</sup>The wise Nārada gives Yudhiṣṭhira a message from his father Pāṇḍu in the next world, exhorting him to undertake the ceremony of the *rājasūya*, emblem of universal sovereignty (MBh II.11.50-70).

<sup>37</sup>Brockington, J.L.2002: Jarāsaṃdha of Magadha. In: *Stages and Transitions: Temporal and Historical frameworks in Epic and Purāṇic Literature. Proceedings of the second Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas*. Croatian Academy of Science and Arts: Zagreb

<sup>38</sup>The usage of a small number of derivative forms in particular is regarded by Brockington as the main clue to the hypothesis of a later stage of composition for this episode. Brockington 2002: 74.

considering the immediate context in which they occur, then sequences of similes occurring within each of the two sections are compared, in order to highlight differences between the two groups.

### 1.2a Similes in the Mantraparvan (MBh II.12-17).

In the Mantraparvan, the second section of the Sabhāparvan, there are twenty-two similes over 222 verses. *Adhyāya* 12 features four comparisons, all very short and whose *upamānas* relate mostly to family members, guru-pupil relationship and Gods. In verse II.12.8 a short simile occurs, *piteva* (like a father): Yudhiṣṭhira, who is still uncertain about performing the royal consecration, is compared to a father. The simile, occurring within the main narrative, also expresses the point of view of some characters within the text: as Yudhiṣṭhira goes on reassuring his people ‘like a father’ everybody shows love and affection to him thus he becomes known as ‘Ajātaśatru’ (MBh II.12.9).

When Yudhiṣṭhira realises that he needs advice before undertaking the task of the royal consecration, he immediately thinks about Kṛṣṇa (MBh II.12.25). The comparison in verse 2.12.27 defines Acyuta as being *gurūvat*, ‘like a guru’, but also in this instance, the *upameya* (the Pāṇḍavas’ cousin) is described by a comparison occurring within the main narrative, but expressing the point of view of Yudhiṣṭhira. The third and the fourth instances of comparison within this passage occur in II.12.32 and II.12.33. They still refer to Kṛṣṇa, who is received by the Pāṇḍavas ‘as a brother’ (*bhrātrvat*) and welcomed ‘like a guru’ (*gurūvat*).

*Adhyāya* 13 describes the political rise of Jarāsaṃdha, indulging in details. Within the account of Jarāsaṃdha’s political exploits, comparisons tend to be similar both in structure and content to instances occurring in the previous passage: in II.13.9 Vakra, king of Karūṣas joined Jarāsaṃdha ‘like a pupil’ (*śiṣyavat*), but in II.13.13 there is the first instance of a simile of the length of one *pāda*:

II.13.13:

*muraṃ ca narakaṃ caiva śāsti yo yavanādhipau /*

*aparyantabalo rājā pratīcyāṃ varuṇo yathā //*



‘He punished the Greek kings Mura and Naraka and governs with unlimited power, toward the west like Varuṇa.’

Although the type of *upamāna* is different from the previous instances (a god instead of a family member or a guru), the simile is, like the others, quite short. The comparison that follows in verse II.13.15 corresponds to the style of those occurring in *adhyāya* 12: ‘like a father’ (*pitṛvat*). Another very short instance, displaying an *upamāna* similar to the simile in II.13.13, is present in II.13.36: similar to the immortals (*amarasaṃkāśau*). All similes in both *adhyāyas* 12 and 13 have a common feature: independently of the type of *upamāna*, they are shorter than a *pāda* (except instance in II.13.13, which tends to fill one *pāda* of the verse). The range of similes occurring in this passage is not employed in order to embellish it: it is quite clear that the main purpose of employing this kind of short comparison is to explain a particular point within the narrative, rather than to idealise the *upameyas*.

In *adhyāya* 14 there are two similes that follow the same tendency of the previous instances within this section: in II.14.7 another very short comparison appears in Kṛṣṇa’s speech about the necessity to kill Jarāsaṃdha: ‘a king without initiative collapses like an anthill’ (*valmīka iva*). The second instance occurs in verse II.14.9 where Bhīma encourages his brothers before departing for the conquest of Magadha: ‘we shall conquer Magadha like three fires’ (*traya ivāgnayaḥ*). These instances are shorter than a *pāda* and they do not appear to bear decorative features. This is due to the subject matter of the passage: there is no account or description suitable for a decorative style. As shown by the analysis of the other *adhyāyas*, descriptions and narrative digressions require a much more decorative style.

*Adhyāyas* 16 and 17, featuring the account of Jarāsaṃdha’s miraculous birth, are quite rich in comparisons. The first instance appears in verse II.16.8 and both the structure and the *upamānas* employed are different from the instances in *adhyāyas* 12-16:

II.16.8

*eko hy eva śriyaṃ nityaṃ bibharti puruṣarṣabha /*

*antarātmeva bhūtānām tatṣaye vai balakṣayaḥ //*

‘He alone always bears the royal fortune, bull among men, like the inner soul of creatures; when he is destroyed his armies are destroyed as well.’

The comparison, here, is exactly one *pāda* long and the *upamāna* is different from the instances previously mentioned.

The second simile follows in II.16.10:

*kṛṣṇa ko ’yaṃ jarāsaṃdhaḥ kiṃvīryaḥ kiṃparākṛāmāḥ /*

*yaḥ tvāṃ spr̥ṣṭvāgnisadr̥śaṃ na dagdhaḥ śalabho yathā //*

‘Kṛṣṇa, who is that Jarāsaṃdha? What is his power and what are his exploits, that having touched you, who are equal to fire, he has not been burnt like a moth?’

This *upamā*, much more elaborate than other instances, can be read in two different ways: there are, in fact two very short similes that work together to give sense to the sentence. The first instance compares Kṛṣṇa to the fire (*agnisadr̥śaṃ*), the second case, although indirectly, compares Jarāsaṃdha to a moth who dared to attack the Vṛṣṇis.

In the next passages similes are much more numerous and, in a few cases, the structure appears to be far more elaborate. The first sequence occurs in II.16.13-14:

*rūpavān vīryasaṃpannaḥ śrīmān atulavikramaḥ /*

*nityaṃ dikṣākṛṣatanuḥ śatakratur ivāparaḥ //*

*tejasā sūryasadṛśaḥ kṣamayā pṛthivīsamaḥ /*

*yamāntakasamaḥ kope śriyā vaiśravaṇopamaḥ //*

‘Incomparably powerful, handsome and brave, his body was always lean from the sacrificial consecration, similar to a second Indra. In splendour he was like the sun, in patience like the earth, in anger like Yama and in wealth like Kubera.’

In this stanza, Kṛṣṇa gives the first proper description of Jarāsaṃdha. As frequently happens in descriptions, comparisons tend to be mostly decorative, especially if the intent of the speaker is to glorify the *upameya*. In this particular instance, there are five short comparisons in two verses, and they are all related to deities. Furthermore, an *utprekṣā* follows in verse II.16.15, where is related how the world is pervaded by his qualities, as by the rays of the sun (*sūryasyeva*). The short sequence of similes provides not only Jarāsaṃdha's description, but also Kṛṣṇa's opinion of the King of Magadha: at first glance it appears as if Kṛṣṇa considers him a good king, which would contrast with what he states in *adhyāya* 13, where he relates how Jarāsaṃdha was chosen by lineage to be the universal sovereign, clearly implying that the king of Magadha is unsuitable for such a role.<sup>39</sup> But rather than looking at what similes say about Jarāsaṃdha it is more interesting to look at what the comparisons do not say about Jarāsaṃdha's qualities. In the Sabhāparvan, in *adhyāya* 5, the famous kaccit *adhyāya*, the wise Nārada mentions all the characteristics of a good king: in doing so he employs three similes, one of which is featured here.<sup>40</sup> In Nārada's speech, the

<sup>39</sup> II.13.20-25

<sup>40</sup> The three *upamās* (in II.5.46, II.5.78 and II.5.113) present in *adhyāya* 5 of the Sabhāparvan are all very short.

II.5.46

*kaccit tvam eva sarvasyāḥ pṛthivyāḥ pṛthivīpate /  
samaś ca nābhiśaṅkyaś ca yathā mātā yathā pitā //*

‘Are you impartial and not suspicious to all the world, oh Lord of the world, like a mother, like a father?’

This is an instance of *mālopamā*, namely a simile composed by multiple *upamānas* but only one element of connection between *upameya* and *upamānas*. The common element here is not very clear, probably the entire set of qualities listed in the passage is the feature common to both the King and a mother or a father: the notion of impartiality of the parents as a duty for a monarch.

The second instance in II.5.78 shows a different kind of *upamāna* but, once again, a very short comparison. This is also listed among Jarāsaṃdha's qualities.

II.5.78

*kaccid daṇḍyeṣu yamavat pūjyeṣu ca viṣāṃ pate /  
parīkṣya vartase samyag apriyeṣu priyeṣu ca //*

‘Oh Lord, do you behave like Yama towards the people who must be punished and those you must honour, in the same way whether they are dear to you

king has to be impartial ‘like Yama’’, but above all he has to be ‘like a father’ to his people. This aspect is stressed several times, emphasized by a second simile, which compares the figure of a king to a mother and to a father. A king has to look after his people, caring for them as if they were his own children: of all the qualities listed in Kṛṣṇa’s short description this quality is missing. This is, in my opinion, no coincidence: the king of Magadha is valiant, rich, impartial, patient and bright, but he is not the caring and loving figure that a sovereign should be for his people. The description, apparently contrasting with the previous statement, reveals the lack of quality of the king of Magadha.

In *adhyāya* 16, the account of the miraculous birth of Jarāsaṃdha is related by Kṛṣṇa: rich in folkloristic elements,<sup>41</sup> this passage is the first instance of narrative digression occurring within the Sabhāparvan. Two similes occur in verses II.16.18-19, where, for the first time, a longer comparison appears:

II.16.18-19

*sa tābhyāṃ śuśubhe rājā patnībhyāṃ manujādhipa /*  
*priyābhyāṃ anurupābhyāṃ kareṇubhyāṃ iva dvipaḥ //*  
*tayor madhyagataś cāpi rarāja vasudhādhipaḥ /*  
*gaṅgāyamunayor madhye mūrtiman iva sāgaraḥ //*

‘The king shone with his wives, loving and suitable, oh Overlord of men, like an or not?’

The simile in II.5.113 follows perfectly the style of the previous instances:

II.5.113

*kaccid andhāṃś ca mūkāṃś ca paṅgūn vyaṅgān abāndhavān /*  
*pīteva pāsi dharmajña tathā pravrajitān āpi //*

‘You, who know the law: do you protect the blind, the dumb, the crippled, the handicapped, the orphans and the vagrant ascetics like a father?’

<sup>41</sup> Brockington, Mary 2000: Jarāsaṃdha and the magic mango: causes and consequences in epic and oral tales, In: *On the Understanding of Oral Cultures, Proceedings of the International Conference on Sanskrit and Related Studies, Warsaw, 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> October 1999, ed by Piotr Barcelowicz and Marek Mejer*. Warsaw: Oriental Institute: Warsaw University: 85-94.

elephant with its females. Between the two of them, the Lord of the Earth glowed like the embodied ocean between the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā.’

Both comparisons refer to Jarāsaṃdha’s father and his wives, but while the structure of the first instance is one *pāda* in length, the second is longer, taking the whole line. The *upamānas* are: an animal in the first instance and the ocean in the second case. The water appears again in two similes occurring within the same *adhyāya*: the first occurrence is in II.16.42, where Jarāsaṃdha, when he was a new born baby, is described as crying ‘like a cloud full of water’ (*satoya iva toyadaḥ*); in II.16.46 Jarā, the *rākṣasī* who finds the child, decides not to take it away from the sonless king, ‘like a cloud that carries off the sun’ (*meghalekheva bhāskaram*). The *upamānas* in the last three similes are all related: the ocean, the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā appear in the first instance, the water in the second (in the form of a cloud bearing water) and a cloud in the third case.

In *adhyāya* 17, after the king has been reunited with his baby son, the *rākṣasī* leaves. The wise Caṇḍakaśika, who at the beginning of the digression gives the mango to the king’s wives, returns and predicts Jarāsaṃdha’s future. In the passage featuring his prediction, more similes occur. The fire is the common element in the first two comparisons: in II.17.7 the king of Magadha is compared to a fire to which an oblation has been offered (*hutāhutir ivānalaḥ*), in II.17.15, kings who try to attack Jarāsaṃdha will die ‘like moths in a flame’ (*śalabhā iva pāvakam*). The similes that follow in the same chapter are related to different topics. In verse II.17.13-14 two instances occur: in verse 13 it is stated that even the weapons of the Gods will not hurt the king of Magadha, ‘like the current of a river does not hurt a mountain’ (*gīrer iva nadīrayāḥ*); in verse 14 Jarāsaṃdha is compared to the sun with the stars (*jyotiṣām iva bhāskaraḥ*).

The water appears once again in verse II.17.16:

*eṣa śriyaṃ samuditāṃ sarvarājñāṃ grahīṣyati /*  
*varṣāsv ivoddhatajalā nadīr nadanadīpatiḥ //*

‘He will seize the collected fortunes of all the kings, like the Ocean receiving the

rivers swollen with the waters in the rainy season.’

The second instance introduces a different kind of image: after the rainy season, as a consequence, crops prosper:

II.17.17

*eṣa dhārayitā samyak cāturvarṇyaṃ mahābalaḥ /*

*śubhāśubham iva sphītā sarvasasyadharā dharā //*

‘Endued with great strength, he will uphold correctly the four varṇas, like the prosperous earth that bears all types of crop, both the prosperous and the non prosperous ones.’

The link between the two similes is a thematic one: they are closely related not by a common image, but rather as one consequence of the other. Instance in II.17.17 is clearly a thematic sequence on its own.

#### 1.2b Sequences of similes within the main narrative and within narrative digression.

The analysis of similes within the Mantraparvan reveals a connection between the main subject-matter of the different passages and the range of *upamānas*/structure employed. As mentioned before, the section is divided into two main parts: the conversation between Kṛṣṇa and Yudhiṣṭhira about the Royal consecration, including the account of Jarāsaṃdha's political exploits, and the tale of Jarāsaṃdha's birth. The first section (12-16.10), displays 12 similes over 154 verses, whereas the second (16.11-17) features 10 comparisons over 68 verses. The account of Jarāsaṃdha's birth is richer in similes than the account of his political life, employing one *upamā* every 6.8 verses, as opposed to the lower proportion of comparisons in the first bulk, where one simile occurs every 12.83 verses.

The choice of the *upamāna* appears to depend greatly on the subject matter of the passage in which the comparisons occur. In each of the two parts analysed, in fact, two main groups of comparisons can be identified: comparisons occurring in the

first group share similar structures and *upamānas*; the similes in the second part display a more varied range of *upamānas*, but share a similar decorative function.

Comparisons in the first part of the Mantraparvan tend to be very short and bear features of non-decorative style: they are related to family members, gods and the guru-pupil relationship (which can also be associated to a relationship between a father and a son). This pattern occurs in *adhyāyas* 13, 14 and partly in 16, in Kṛṣṇa's speech about the political reasons to undertake a war against the king of Magadha. Within the first part of the Mantraparvan: the *upamānas* range from family members, gods, guru-pupils relationships, all the living creatures, moths and an anthill.<sup>42</sup> A very interesting instance occurs in II.14.9, when Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna and Bhīma are compared to three fires: this instance is connected to the simile in II.16.10, where Yudhiṣṭhira asks Kṛṣṇa, 'who, having touched you, who are like fire, would not burn like a moth?'. In this case there appears to be a cause-effect relationship between the two similes.

When Kṛṣṇa begins to relate about Jarāsaṃdha's miraculous birth, the range of comparisons employed changes dramatically: in the second part of the Mantraparvan, the narrative digression displays features of a more decorative style. By verse 13 of *adhyāya* 16 similes tend to employ a wider range of topics: in Jarāsaṃdha's description he is compared to all the basic elements of the known world, such as the earth, the sun and the gods. By comparison, similes in the second part are more numerous and the structure of some instances comparing the king to the sun and to the earth appear to be more elaborate.<sup>43</sup> Jarāsaṃdha is again compared to the sun in II.16.15. Comparison featuring water as *upamānas* occur in II.16.19, 42,

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<sup>42</sup> II.12.8 *piteva* ; II.12.27 *gurūvat* ; II.12.32 *bhrātrvat* ; II.12.33. *gurūvat* ; II.13.9 *śiṣyavat* , II.13.13 *varuṇo yathā* , II.13.15 *pitṛvat* , II.13.36 *amarasaṃkāśau* ; II.14.7 *valmīka iva* , II.14.9 *traya ivāgnayaḥ* ; II.16.8 *antarātmeva bhūtānām* ; II.16.10 *śalabho yathā*.

<sup>43</sup> II.16.13-14 *śatakratur ivāparaḥ, tejasā sūryasadṛśaḥ, kṣamayā pṛthivīsamah, yamāntakasamaḥ kope śriyā vaiśravaṇopamaḥ*; II.16.15 *sūryasyeva*; II.16.18-19 *priyābhyām anurupābhyām kareṇubhyām iva dvīpaḥ, gaṅgāyamunayor madhye mūrtiman iva sāgaraḥ*; II.16.42 *satoya iva toyadaḥ*; II.16.46 *meghalekheva bhāskaram* ; II.17.7 *hutāhutir ivānalaḥ*; II.17.15 *śalabhā iva pāvakaḥ*; II.17.13-14 *gīrer iva nadīrayāḥ, jyotiṣām iva bhaskaraḥ*; II.17.16 *varṣāsv ivoddhatajalā nadīr nadadīpatiḥ*; II.17.17 *śubhāsubham iva sphītā sarvasasyadharā dharā*.

46, connected in a sequence water-cloud+water-cloud: a sort of associative idea process seems to influence the choice of *upamānas* in this short sequence. The sun and the fire appear again, to describe the king of Magadha. The last two similes provide an interesting case in this chapter: they work together as a cause-effect rather than on a thematic basis. The simile in II.17.7 displays the image of the rainy season (vital element in Indian agriculture), and then in II.17.15 the image of the opulent crops that rise as a consequence of the monsoon.

The analysis of comparisons occurring within the Mantraparvan clearly shows that two different sections co-existing within the same *parvan*, dealing with different subject-matters, display similes which appear to have different functions and structures. Comparisons within these two sections feature different ranges of *upamānas* and various patterns in length. It is also important to mention that these similes are featured by a narrative digression whose secondary nature is apparent. Narrative digressions introduce a secondary narrative plane: similes in general have, within the text, a very similar function, e.g. they provide a parallel narrative, which draws the audience's attention towards a specific feature of the *upameya*.

As shown in the next section, similes within narrative digressions tend to fulfil very specific functions, which can be understood only with the contextual analysis of all similes within the secondary tale in which they are encountered.

### 1.3- The Nalopakhyaṇa within the Āraṇyakaparvan.

The Āraṇyakaparvan is the third book of the *Mahābhārata*. It is traditionally divided into two main sections: the Vanaparvan, narrating the vicissitudes of the five Pāṇḍava heroes, and the Āraṇyakaparvan, the section that lends its name to the entire book, displaying a large number of narrative digressions. Although one of the major-sized books of the entire epic, there is very little action: the main narrative path covers only half the total of 299 *adhyāyas*, the second half being a mere succession of short stories of different contents and purposes. Although the two sections interrelate throughout the whole *parvan*, they fulfil different functions, and vary in style. The narrative path of the Vanaparvan, which originally gave the name to the book, has been gradually enriched by a large number of short stories of didactic



content within narrative frame of 'embedded stories'.<sup>44</sup> This corpus of short stories, traditionally called *Āraṇyakaparvan*, the section of the forest teachings, can be divided into the following sections: the story of Nala; the accounts of pilgrimages to the sacred places that inspires many episodes related to it; the battle with the Nivātakavacas; the session with Mārkaṇḍeya. This last section contains a number of tales, including the story of Rāma.

Despite the length of the book, very little happens in the *Vanaparvan*. Amongst the events narrated, only a few are relevant to the main plot: others seem to have a marginal importance, showing features of short stories, whose isolation in the narrative plot unveils similar features to the didactic short tales in the minor section of book III.

Although very little action occurs, no one can doubt the importance of Book III. In the introduction to his translation of the *Āraṇyakaparvan*, van Buitenen points out the meaning of the forest in ancient India:<sup>45</sup> the ambivalent nature of the image, both demoniac and idyllic. The theme of the heroes dwelling in the wilderness was a popular one: Rāma, forced into the exile in the forest, shares the same fate as the Pāṇḍavas; the forest also occurs in the story of Nala, and even in the episode of Sāvitrī. The ambivalent nature of the wilderness is also analysed by Parkhill,<sup>46</sup> who interprets this aspect as an essential test for the transition between boyhood and adulthood. Within the *Mahābhārata*, the forest has, according to Parkhill, an 'empowering' function: the maturation of the characters is an essential part of it in both Epics, as the main protagonists gain depth so as to be fit for kingship. In his introduction, van Buitenen first indicated how the character of Yudhiṣṭhira in particular seems to gain a major perspective.<sup>47</sup> Also the relationship among the Pāṇḍavas seems to grow stronger during the time spent in the wilderness: they behave as limbs of one single body and although the dwelling in the forest is the consequence of Yudhiṣṭhira's inconsiderate behaviour, the matter of splitting up, of leaving him alone to face the consequences of his own misdeeds, is never raised. The

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<sup>44</sup> Minkowski, C. 1989: Janamejaya's *sattra* and ritual structure. *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 109.3: 401-420.

<sup>45</sup> van Buitenen, J. A. B. 1975: *The Mahābhārata, Vol. II- 2 The Book of the Assembly Hall; 3 the Book of the Forest. Translated and edited by J. A. B. van Buitenen*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. 176.

<sup>46</sup> Parkhill 1995.

<sup>47</sup> Van Buitenen 1975: 177.

Kauravas also appear to gain more depth: their behaviour confirms their lack of honesty and determination to slay their cousins before the thirteenth year, as shown by the episode of the cattle expedition (MBh III.224-244). The passage not only enlightens as to their evil attitude, but also contrasts with the Pāṇḍavas' truthfulness and loyalty to members of their own family.

There are also a few episodes that are relevant to the plot at a later stage. Two in particular are very interesting, both related to the weapons the heroes employ in the battle that occurs later on: Arjuna's journey to the world of Indra (MBh III.43-79) and the robbing of the earrings (MBh III.287-94). Both episodes relate to the strategy of the weapons, but while in the latter Karṇa is tricked into giving his armour to Indra disguised as a brahmin, the former is accomplished by Arjuna in order to gain the weapons that leads him and his brothers to victory against the Kauravas.

The Vanaparvan-Āraṇyakaparvan plays a very important role within the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>48</sup> It is, in fact, the book of evolution: the main characters undergo a phase of maturation, the relationship among them gains strength, but also the main narrative is enriched with several elements which, although marking a pause in the plot, also provide the characters with the chance to elaborate further on their actions. Past events are fully analysed, often with the guidance of seers who join the Pāṇḍavas in their exile. The evolution of the characters takes place through a number of tests, but also through the teachings they receive while in the wilderness: at this stage, in which the main characters seem to gain more depth and learn from their own mistakes, the short stories play a major role in this process. Each narrative digression grants a moment of reflection to the main characters. The episodes all have different settings: most of them have a didactic content, some others are told to cheer up the brothers, such as the story of Rāma (MBh III.257-75), related in order to uplift the mood of Yudhiṣṭhira after the abduction of Draupadī. Each story fulfils a specific purpose, provides a teaching that the characters treasure and from which they learn an important lesson. It has been shown how this rich episodic material is largely Purāṇic: many of the episodes are to be found in the Skanda, Padma and Brahma Purāṇas. The entire story of Skanda (III.213-221), for instance, reoccurs in almost identical form in the Skanda Purāṇa. The story of the princess Sukanyā and

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<sup>48</sup> Van Buitenen 1975: 177.

part of the Rāmopākhyāna are also repeated entirely in the Skanda.<sup>49</sup> Other episodes or sections are to be found in others, such as the Kūrma, Varāha, Vāyu, Viṣṇu, Viṣṇudharmottara, and in the Harivaṃśa. Although it can be easily inferred that the *Mahābhārata* is the original source from which the Purāṇas draw their material, it can be argued that, in a few cases, the Epic and the Purāṇas may have independently drawn the material from a third source. The most striking instance is the episode of Sāvitrī (MBh III.277-83), also occurring in the Matsya Purāṇa, where the content of the story is essentially the same, but with a different format and no evidence of mutual relationship.

The choice of the compilers to enrich the section of the forest with narrative digressions has a specific purpose within the story, because the forest is the place where the main characters find their way to maturity. Considering such didactic purpose of the narrative digressions, the analysis of similes featured in the digressions might reveal a few surprises. As suggested in this chapter, sequences of similes within narrative digressions often show a more individual type of structure, which varies according to the nature of the embedded story itself. Unlike sequences within the main narrative, which tend to vary according to the subject-matter of the passage in which they occur, the similes within narrative digressions often display a homogeneous range of *upamānas*: this display of thematic unity often reveals an important function fulfilled by similes within the main plot. The Nalopākhyāna (III.50-78) provides a perfect example of sequences of similes occurring within narrative digressions.

The story of Nala and Damayantī is one of the most popular narrative digressions within the *Mahābhārata*. The earliest version of the story appears in the *Mahābhārata*, narrated by the wise Bṛhadaśva, in an attempt to console a distressed Yudhiṣṭhira. Several other versions became popular over the centuries, making the tale one of the most popular in Indian Literature.<sup>50</sup> The role played by this narrative digression within the Epic has been widely discussed by Biardeau,<sup>51</sup> who sees the

<sup>49</sup> *Mahābhārata- Vol. III, The Āraṇyakaparvan*, Critical edited by Vishnu S. Sukthankar, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1941. 14-15.

<sup>50</sup> Among the most famous version are Nannaya's 11<sup>th</sup> century Telugu version; the Naiṣadhīyacharita by the medieval poet Śrīharṣa; the 14<sup>th</sup> century Naḷavēṅpā, by the Tamil poet Pukaḷentippulavar; an 18<sup>th</sup> century Kathakali script from Kerala, the Naḷacarita, by the poet Unnāyi Vāriyār and the Naḷaccakiravartti katai.

<sup>51</sup> Biardeau, M. 1984-85: Nala et Damayanti, les heroes Epiques. *Indo-Iranian Journal* 27: 247-74; 28:1-34.

central role of Damayantī in the tale as indicative of a more central role of Draupadī within the *Mahābhārata* (and also a more intriguing connection to Kṛṣṇa). The role of this narrative digression is not discussed here, but a few remarks on similes occurring within the section might be useful in our understanding of the tale as a unit within the context in which it occurs. As Biardeau points out, the section shares some important themes with the main story: elements such as the dicing game, the loss of the kingdom are among the number of similarities between the Nalopākhyāna and the *Mahābhārata*. But she still regards the narrative digression as a separate unit from the Epic.<sup>52</sup>

David Shulman, in his article “The riddle of Nala”, also appears to agree with Biardeau, considering the short story as a single digression within a separate frame.<sup>53</sup> Considering the digression and its frame as two separate tales, which have been ‘encapsulated’<sup>54</sup> one within the other, is an interesting issue. Alf Hildebeitel partially disagrees with Biardeau's and Shulman's view on the role of this famous narrative digression within the *Mahābhārata*: in his opinion, there is much more in common between the tale and the frame than the eye can see.<sup>55</sup> Hildebeitel stresses a number of similarities between Nala and Damayantī and the five Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī. He also reads between the lines to point out a series of messages addressed to some of the characters of the *Mahābhārata*, to Yudhiṣṭhira and Draupadī in particular.<sup>56</sup> The series of messages intended for the king and the queen are meant to encourage them to forgive and learn from their mistakes. In order to fulfil its didactic purpose, the tale has to deliver its teaching, to both the characters of the narrative frame and to the audience, although in a cryptic way: the embedded message in the story of Nala and Damayantī is the interaction between Nala and Damayantī, their yearning and looking for each other.

According to Shulman, three aspects of the story of Nala and Damayantī are important in our understanding of this narrative digression within its literary context: the three aspects concern the boundaries of the self, the issue of faith (and

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<sup>52</sup>Biardeau 1985: 4.

<sup>53</sup>Shulman, D. 1994: The Riddle of Nala, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*. Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publisher 22: 1-29.

<sup>54</sup>Shulman 1994: 2.

<sup>55</sup>Hildebeitel, A. 2001: *Rethinking the Mahābhārata, A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 215-239.

<sup>56</sup>Hildebeitel 2001: 230-31.

consequently of the character's autonomy), and of the implications of real self-knowledge.<sup>57</sup> All three aspects are analysed through a close investigation of several versions of the story, later South-Indian texts. The representation of the self and its boundaries, are the story's mainstay: according to Shulman, the most fascinating of the three aspects (which is also the one that is more apparent within the *Mahābhārata* version of the story), is the definition of the self that becomes apparent in Nala's behaviour towards Damayantī. In particular, the way Nala perceives himself appears to be one of the main themes of this narrative digression. Since the *svayaṃvara* is held at the court of Bhīma, Damayantī plays a more decisive role within the story: she has to recognise Nala from the other gods (disguised as other Nalas), also in the final stage of the tale, she is the one who recognises him, after putting him through a series of trials. In both episodes, along with other clues that the author lists in his article,<sup>58</sup> it appears clearly that the character of Nala is defined through the ability of Damayantī to recognise him: it is obvious, in Shulman's opinion, how the image of Nala becomes a sort of mirror-image of Damayantī. Both characters long for each other during the years of separation, they communicate from afar through a series of verses recited to intermediaries. Rather than a lack of autonomy, Nala's behaviour is described by Shulman, as a 'more individualized and critical inability to speak for oneself'.<sup>59</sup>

The idea of Nala as a mirror image of Damayantī is a fascinating one, but to better understand the relationship between the two characters, we should have a closer look at the way the story defines them. Similes, in this respect, offer an easy tool to investigate the 'boundaries of the self' concerning each character: *upamā* establish a similarity between two elements, thus defining the elements themselves. *Upamās* provide an important clue to the concept of the mirror image in the story of Nala and Damayantī.

### 1.3a Similes within the story of Nala and Damayantī

The Nalopakhyāna is a triumph of descriptive similes. As shown in the previous section of this thesis, narrative digressions tend to display homogeneous

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<sup>57</sup> Shulman 1994: 7.

<sup>58</sup> Shulman 1994: 15-16.

<sup>59</sup> Shulman 1994: 17.

sequences of similes. This homogeneity, due to the fundamental unitary character of narrative digressions in general, often provides important elements to the description and as in this particular case, fulfils a well-defined function that bears an important message to the listeners.

In the case of the Nalopakhyāna, similes display a much more varied range of *upamānas*: this is due to the length of the digression, in which the protagonists of the story face many different situations. The story itself does not display unity of action, but despite the variety of *upamānas* employed, it is still possible to identify a number of similes fulfilling a similar function within the text. This analysis highlights two important aspects of similes in narrative digressions: how sequences are organised within the passage, and the functions fulfilled by comparisons in relation to the literary frame in which the Nalopakhyāna occurs.

The Nalopākhyāna is narrated in *adhyāyas* 50-78 of the Āraṇyakaparvan. This is a much larger *parvan* than the Mantraparvan, embedded with a considerable number of descriptive passages, several of which are embellished by a large number of similes of different type. As within the Mantraparvan, the choice of *upamānas* tends to vary according to the subject-matter of the passage. In the introductory sequence, a description of the encounter between Nala and Damayantī is enriched by the portrayal of their physical appearance. Several mythological similes are employed in order to emphasize their beauty:

III.50.2

*atiṣṭhan manujendrāṇām mūrdhni devapatir yathā /  
uparyupari sarveṣām āditya iva tejasā //*

‘He stood at the head of the kings of men, like the Lord of the Gods, above them all, like the sun with his splendor.’

Nala's description is then followed by Damayantī's portrayal:

III.50.11-12

*atha tāṃ vayasī prāpte dāsīnām samalaṃkṛtam /  
śataṃ sakhīnām ca tathā paryupāste śacīm iva //  
tatra sma bhrājate bhaimī sarvābharaṇabhūṣitā /  
sakhīmadhye' navadyāṅgī vidyut saudāmanī yathā /*

*atīva rūpasampannā śrīr ivāyatalocanā //*

‘On reaching her prime of life, a hundred well-decked servant-girls and friends waited on her as on Śacī. There, the daughter of Bhīma shone, adorned with all types of ornament, in the midst of her friends, with her flawless limbs, shining like lightning, extremely beautiful like Śrī, with long eyes.’

Two more comparisons describing Nala close the sequence:

III.50.14

*nalaś ca naraśārdūlo rūpeṇāpratimo bhuvi /  
kandarpa iva rūpeṇa mūrtimān abhavat svayam //*

‘And Nala, tiger among men, was peerless on Earth in beauty, like Kandarpa himself embodied, in his appearance.’

III.50.26

*damayanti nalo nāma niṣadheṣu mahīpatiḥ /  
aśvinoḥ sadṛśo rūpe na samās tasya mānuṣāḥ //*

‘Damayantī, there is a king in Niṣadha, named Nala; he is similar to the Aśvins in beauty, no men are equal to him.’

*Adhyāyas* 51 and 52 display a small number of comparisons. The first instance in III.51.3 compares Damayantī, confused because of her infatuation for Nala, to a madwoman:

III.51.3

*ūrdhvaḍṛṣṭir dhyānaparā babhūvonmattadarśanā /  
na śayyāsanabhogeṣu ratim vindati karhicit //*

‘Looking up (at the sky?) and lost in meditation, similar to a madwoman, she never finds any pleasure in lying in bed, sitting, or eating.’

A short sequence describes the encounter between Nala and the Gods, on their way to Damayantī's *svayaṃvara*. Surprised by the prince's beauty, the deities stand in admiration. Two comparisons liken him to the sun and to the god of love:

III.51.26-7

*atha devāḥ pathi nalaṃ dadṛśur bhūtale sthitam /*

*sākṣād iva sthitam mūrtyā manmatham rūpasampadā //*  
*taṃ dṛṣṭvā lokapālās te bhrājamānaṃ yathā ravim /*  
*tasthur vigatasamkalpā vismitā rūpasampadā //*

‘Then the Gods saw Nala on the path, treading on the Earth, before their eyes, like the embodied Manmatha in beauty. Seeing him, shining like the sun, the Guardians of the World stopped, abandoning their purpose, surprised by his beauty.’

*Adhyāya* 52 displays only one simile in the sequence in which Nala and Damayantī meet for the first time, once again comparing him to a god:

III.52.19

*kas tvaṃ sarvānavadyāṅga mama hr̥cchayavardhana /*  
*prāpto 'sy amaravad vīra jñātum icchāmi te 'nagha //*

‘Who are you, flawless beauty, increasing my love? You arrived like an immortal; oh faultless hero, I desire to know who you are.’

As the plot evolves gradually, the attention switches from the interaction between the two lovers to the action surrounding the *svayaṃvara*. A sequence of similes in *adhyāya* 54 describes some among the protagonists of the event:

III.54.3

*kanakastambharuciraṃ toraṇena virājitam /*  
*viviśus te mahāraṅgaṃ nṛpāḥ siṃhā ivācalam //*

‘The kings entered the arena, adorned by golden columns and illuminated by the (decorated) arched doorway, like lions enter a mountain.’

III.54.5-7

*tāṃ rājasamitiṃ pūrṇāṃ nāgair bhogavatīm iva /*  
*sampūrṇāṃ puruṣavyāghrair vyāghrair giriguhām iva //*  
*tatra sma pīnā dṛśyante bāhavaḥ parighopamāḥ /*  
*ākāravantaḥ suślakṣṇāḥ pañcaśīrṣā ivoragāḥ //*  
*sukeśāntāni cārūṇi sunāsāni śubhāni ca /*  
*mukhāni rājñāṃ śobhante nakṣatrāṇi yathā divi //*

‘That assembly of kings was filled, like Bhogavati by snakes, crowded by tigerlike



men, like the cave of a mountain by tigers. Their stout arms were visible, similar to clubs, well shaped (*ākāravantaḥ*) and very smooth (*suślakṣṇāḥ*), similar to five-headed snakes. With fine tufts of hair, fine noses, and eyes and brows the faces of the kings shone like stars in the sky.’

The terrifying image of the kings gathering before the competition features the first instance of sequence of comparisons whose *upameyas* are not Nala or Damayantī. The kings are mainly compared to wild animals, in order to emphasize their masculinity and vigor in battle. A final sequence concludes the passage, with the final reconciliation between the two lovers, granted by the Gods who finally renounce the contest for Damayantī. As the focus switches to the two main characters, similes employ mythological *upamānas* once again:

III.54.34-7

*avāpya nārīratnaṃ tat puṇyaśloko'pi pārthivaḥ /  
reme saha tayā rājā śacyeva balavṛtrahā //  
atīva mudīto rājā bhrājamāno 'ṃsumān iva /  
arañjayat prajā vīro dharmeṇa paripālayan //  
īje cāpy aśvamedhena yayātir iva nāhuṣaḥ /  
anyaiś ca kratubhir dhīmān bahubhiś cāptadakṣiṇaiḥ //  
punaś ca ramaṇīyeṣu vaneṣūpavaneṣu ca /  
damayantyā saha nalo vijahārāmaropamaḥ //*

‘King Puṇyaśloka, having obtained that jewel of a woman, made love to her like the killer of Bala and Vṛtra with Śacī. Extremely happy, the king, shining like the sun, pleased his people by reigning according to the Dharma, and also offered the horse sacrifice, like the son of Nāhuṣa, Yayāti, and the wise one (offered) many other sacrifices furnished with abundant gifts. And again in lovely woods and gardens, Nala disported himself with Damayantī like an immortal.

After a positive ending of the events that took place at the *svayamvara*, only a few similes occur in the section between *adhyāyas* 55 and 60. A very short comparison occurs, probably employed for explicative purposes, rather than decorative ones:

III.57.1

*damayantī tato dṛṣṭvā puṇyaślokaṃ narādhipam /  
unmattavad anunmattā devane gatacetasam //*

‘When Damayantī saw that the king Puṇyaśloka was bereft of his senses in the dicing like a madman, she (who was) not a mad woman <was overcome by fear and sorrow>.’

The only instance of short mythological comparison occurs in *adhyāya* 58, where Damayantī addresses Nala by calling him ‘equal to the immortals’ (*amaraprabha*)

III.58.32

*panthānaṃ hi mamābhikṣṇam ākhyāsi narasattama /  
atonimittam śokaṃ me vardhayasy amaraprabha //*

‘Best of men, you are repeatedly telling me the way, and this is the reason (*atonimittam*) you make my sorrow increase, oh equal to an immortal.’

Then in *adhyāya* 59 a descriptive simile occurs:

III.59.23

*dvidheva hṛdayaṃ tasya duḥkhitasyābhavat tadā /  
doleva muhur āyāti yāti caiva sabhāṃ muhuḥ //*

‘Then his heart was split in two by grief, like a swing, coming and going constantly to the hut.’

After the forced separation from her husband Nala, Damayantī wanders about the forest where she meets a hunter, who soon tries to seduce her. She then casts a curse upon him, resulting in his death. The similes occurring in this passage describe her emotive and physical state:

III.60.18-19

*unmattavad bhīmasutā vilapantī tatas tataḥ /  
hā hā rājann iti muhur itaś cetaś ca dhāvati //  
tām śuṣyamāṇām atyarthaṃ kurarīm iva vāsatīm /  
karuṇaṃ bahu śocantīm vilapantīm muhur muhuḥ //*

‘Similar to a madwoman, the daughter of Bhīma, lamenting “oh, oh, king!”

continuously, was running back and forth.’

‘Drying up excessively, like a female osprey, lamenting very much and piteously and complaining again and again.’

III.60.31

*tām ardhavastrasaṃvītām pīnaśroṇipayodharām /  
sukumārānavadyāṅgīm pūrṇacandranibhānanām //*

‘Clothed in half a garment (*ardhavastrasaṃvītām*), having swelling hips and breasts (*pīnaśroṇipayodharām*), with delicate and flawless limbs and a face similar to the full moon.’

The concluding comparison describes the death of the malicious hunter:

III.60.38

*uktamātre tu vacane tayā sa mṛgajīvanaḥ /  
vyasuḥ papāta medinyām agnidagdha iva drumah //*

‘As soon as she spoke these words, the hunter fell lifeless to the ground like a tree burnt by fire.’

Her perils continue in *adhyāya* 61, where, after wandering alone for three days, she finally joins a group of ascetics, performing meditation in the forest. The first instance describes the mountain that she questions hoping to find her beloved husband:

III.61.36

*nānādhātusamākīrṇaṃ vividhopalabhūṣitam /  
asyāraṇasya mahataḥ ketubhūtam ivocchritam //*

‘Covered with many minerals and adorned with various stones, rising like the flagpole (becoming the banner) of this great forest.’

In the second simile, again she talks about Nala:

III.61.54

*kadā nu snigdhaḡambhīrām jīmūtasvanasaṃnibhām /  
śroṣyāmi naiṣadhasyāhaṃ vācaṃ tām amṛtopamām //*

‘When shall I hear the voice of the king of Niṣadha, similar to the amṛta, deep and

dark like a thundercloud.’

III.61.57

*sā gatvā trīn ahorātrān dadarśa paramāṅganā /  
tāpasāraṇyam atulaṃ divyakānanadarśanam //*

‘Having walked for three days and three nights, the beautiful woman, saw an unequalled forest of ascetics, similar to the garden of heaven.’

Once she reaches the hermit, she questions the forest trees, describing her lost husband. Two similes occur, likening Nala to Indra and to heavenly bodies:

III.61.76-7

*nalo nāma nṛpaśreṣṭho devarājasamadyutiḥ /  
mama bhartā viśālākṣaḥ pūrṇenduvadano 'rihā //  
āhartā kratumukhyānām vedavedāṅgapāragah /  
sapatnānām mṛdhe hantā ravisomasamaprabhaḥ //*

‘His name is Nala, best of kings, equal to the king of gods in lustre, my moon-faced, wide-eyed husband, slayer of his enemies.

The offerer of the principal sacrifices, expert in the Vedas and the Vedāṅgas and killer of his enemies in battle, shining like the sun and the moon.’

One unusual simile follows next:

III.61.98

*aho batāyam agamaḥ śrīmān asmin vanāntare /  
āpīḍair bahubhir bhāti śrīmān dramīḍarāḍ iva //*

‘Oh, poor me! This tree, firm, in the depths of the forest, beautiful with abundant chaplets is resplendent, similar to the beautiful king of Dramiḍa.’

This is indeed a very unusual comparison: Dramiḍa, an ancient word for Tamilnad, it is not sufficient to identify the king.<sup>60</sup>

The last instance portrays Damayantī when encountering a caravan by a river. Her aspect is described in the way it appears to the members of the caravan:

III.61.110

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<sup>60</sup> Van Buitenen 1973: 823. The author also points out the impossibility of saying what motivates this simile.

*unmattarūpā śokārtā tathā vastrārdhasaṃvṛtā /  
kṛśā vivarṇā malinā pāṃsudhvastaśiroruhā //*

‘Similar to a madwoman, she was oppressed by grief, dressed in half a garment, thin, pale, dirty, her hair soiled with dust.’

Her description continues in *adhyāya* 62:

III.62.19

*tāṃ vivarṇāṃ kṛśāṃ dīnāṃ muktakeśīm amārjanām /  
unmattām iva gacchantīm dadṛśuḥ puravāsinaḥ //*

‘Pale, caked in dirt, miserable, having her hair dishevelled, unwashed, the inhabitants of the city saw her going similar to a madwoman.’

*Adhyāya* 62 also features a dialogue between Damayantī and the queen mother of the city of Cedis: after travelling several days with the caravan, she finally reaches the city of Cedis, where she is engaged as a chambermaid by the queen mother. The Queen perceives Damayantī’s high status, but is puzzled by her being unaccompanied:

III.62.23

*evam apy asukhāviṣṭā bibharṣi paramaṃ vapuḥ /  
bhāsi vidyud ivābhreṣu śaṃsa me kāsi kasya vā //*

‘Even though visited by misfortune, you carry a beautiful body, you shine like lightning among the clouds. Tell me, who are you, or to whom do you belong?’

In her speech, the queen compares her to lightning, but, by contrast, Damayantī’s reply employs a non-decorative comparison to define herself:

III.62.27

*asaṃkhyeyaguṇo bhartā mām nityam anuvrataḥ /  
bhartāram api taṃ vīraṃ chāyevānapagā sadā //*

‘My husband is a man of countless virtues, always devoted to me, and I have always been inseparable from my brave husband like a shadow.’

Also her description of Nala, previously described as similar to an immortal, now

compares him to a madman:

III.62.29

*tam ekavasanaṃ vīram unmattam iva vihvalam /  
āśvāsayantī bhartāram aham anvagamaṃ vanam //*

‘Wearing only one garment, the hero was distressed like a madman, I consoled my husband and followed him to the forest.’

In the final speech, the queen once again uses a simile to describe Damayantī, comparing her to a goddess:

III.62.43

*sairandhrīm abhijānīṣva sunande devarūpiṇīm /  
etayā saha modasva nirudvignamanāḥ svayam //*

‘Sunandā! Accept this woman of high birth who looks like a goddess as your chambermaid, enjoy yourself with her, without care.’

Unlike previous *adhyāyas* where only a few short sequences usually occur, *adhyāya* 65 features one long sequence accompanied by similes in pairs. The first simile describes Damayantī during her time spent at the court of the Cedis, where she manages to disguise her beauty:

III.65.7

*mandaprakhyāyamānena rūpeṇāpratimena tām /  
pinaddhām dhūmajālena prabhām iva vibhāvasoḥ //*

‘She, (standing with Sunandā) with her uncomparable beauty which weakly sparkled, was disguised like the light of the sun by mass of clouds.’

Despite her attempt to hide her stunning allure, the brahmin Sudeva, engaged by Damayantī's father in order to find her and bring her home, recognises the princess. As he notices a resemblance to Damayantī, the brahmin meditates for a while before concluding that the beautiful chambermaid has to be the princess Damayantī:

III.65.9-16

*yatheyaṃ me purā dṛṣṭā tathārūpeyam ānganā /  
kṛtārtho 'smy adya dṛṣṭvemāṃ lokakāntām iva śriyam //*

*pūrṇacandrānanām śyāmām cāruvṛttapayodharām /  
 kurvantīm prabhayā devīm sarvā vitimirā dīśaḥ //  
 cārupadmapalāśākṣīm manmathasya ratīm iva /  
 iṣṭām sarvasya jagataḥ pūrṇacandrāprabhām iva //  
 vidarbhasarasas tasmād daivadoṣād ivoddhṛtām /  
 malapaṅkānuliptāṅgīm mṛṇālīm iva tām bhṛśam /  
 paurṇamāsīm iva niśām rāhugrastaniśākarām /  
 patīśokākulām dīnām śuṣkasrotām nadīm iva //  
 vidhvastaparṇakamalām vitrāsitavihaṅgamām /  
 hastihastaparikliṣṭām vyākulām iva padminīm //  
 sukumārīm sujātāṅgīm ratnagarbhagrāhocitām /  
 dahyamānām ivoṣṇena mṛṇālīm aciroduddhṛtām //  
 rūpaudāryaguṇopetām maṇḍanārḥām amaṇḍitām /  
 candralekhām iva navām vyomni nīlābhraṣaṃvṛtām //*

‘This woman is like the one I saw before, she has the same appearance, today I have achieved my task by seeing her, similar to Śrī, the darling of the world.’

‘Her face is like the full moon, she is dark, with beautifully round breasts, a goddess who lights up the sky (all the directions) with her light.’

‘With beautiful eyes, like the lotus or the petals of the palāśa, similar to Love's Lust, desired by all the world, like the light of the full moon.’

‘Like a lotus stalk pulled from the lake of Vidarbha as if by a fault of fate, her limbs are covered by dust and mud.’

‘Like the night of full moon when the moon has been swallowed by Rāhu, like a dried up river, wretched and bemused by the anguish for her husband.’

‘Or a lotus pond with withered flowers, with birds frightened away, perturbed by elephant trunks and turbid.’

‘This fine woman, delicate, with highbred limbs, used to houses filled with jewels, scorched by the heat like a lotus plucked too soon.’

‘Beautiful and noble, without ornaments, though worthy of them, like a sliver of the new moon in heaven, covered by dark clouds.’

III.65.20-21

*imām asitakeśāntām śatapatrāyatekṣaṇām /*

*sukhārhām duḥkhitām dṛṣṭvā mamāpi vyathate manaḥ //*  
*kadā nu khalu duḥkhasya pāraṃ yāsyati vai śubhā //*  
*bhartuḥ samāgamāt sādhvī rohiṇī śaśino yathā //*

‘There she is, an unhappy woman who deserves happiness, with long eyes like the hundred- petal lotus, black locks in her hair, seeing her my mind wonders.’

‘When indeed will the shining woman reach the further shore of her unhappiness, by meeting her husband, like Rohiṇī meets the moon?’

III.65.25

*ayam āśvāsayāmy enām pūrṇacandranibhānanām //*  
*adr̥ṣṭapūrvām duḥkhasya duḥkhārtām dhyānatatparām //*

‘I will comfort her, her face similar to the full moon, who has never before been a witness to sorrow, now struck by grief and given to brooding.’

As the brahmin Sudeva's doubts gradually fade, he decides to confront Damayantī. He approaches and greets her, but the Queen mother, noticing the brahmin's interest towards the chambermaid, makes inquiries about Damayantī:

III.65.36

*etad icchāmy ahaṃ tvatto jñātum sarvam aśeṣataḥ //*  
*tattvena hi mamācakṣva pṛcchantyā devarūpiṇīm //*

‘I wish to know all the truth from you completely. Tell me the truth, I ask about a woman who looks like a goddess.’

As the identity of Damayantī is revealed, the brahmin introduces her true identity to the queen mother, in *adhyāya* 66:

III.66.5-8

*asyā rūpeṇa sadṛśī mānuṣī neha vidyate //*  
*asyās caiva bhruvor madhye sahaḥ pīplur uttamaḥ //*  
*śyāmāyāḥ padmasaṃkāśo lakṣito 'ntarhito mayā //*  
*malena saṃvṛto hy asyās tanvabhreṇeva candramāḥ //*  
*cihnabhūto vibhūtyartham ayaṃ dhātrā vinirmitaḥ //*  
*pratipatkaluṣevendor lekhā nāti virājate //*  
*na cāsyā naśyate rūpaṃ vapur malasamācitam //*



*asaṃskṛtam apī vyaktaṃ bhāti kāñcanasaṃnibham //*  
*anena vapuṣā bālā piplunānena caiva ha /*  
*lakṣiteyaṃ mayā devī pihito 'gnir ivoṣmaṇā //*

‘There is no woman here with a beauty similar to this one, and indeed, in the middle of the eyebrows of the dark woman, there is her excellent mole, similar to a lotus, disguised, hidden to me, covered by dust like the moon by light clouds, created by her Creator, as a sign of wealth and prosperity. Like a sliver of moon on a cloudy new moon-day, it shines faintly, and yet her beauty has not been lost. Her body is covered with dirt but, even unadorned, shines like gold. This girl has been identified by me as the queen, by her beauty and by her mole, like covered fire (identified) by its heat!’

After being praised by the brahmin, with the description of Damayantī's beauty, she appears in all her splendour:

III.66.10

*sa malenāpakṣṭena piplus tasyā vyarocata /*  
*damantyās tadā vyabhre nabhasīva niśākaraḥ //*

‘So, with the dirt wiped off, then Damayantī's mole shone forth, like the moon in a cloudless sky.’

Similes occur with less frequency in the final part of the narrative digression: only 15 similes occur within 13 *adhyāyas*. *Adhyāyas* 67, 68, 69, 72 and 76, display no comparisons.

Damayantī, recognised by the queen mother as her niece, asks to return home and the Queen grants her permission. As she reaches home, Damayantī dispatches brahmins all over the country to find Nala. One of the brahmins finds a *sūta* called Bāhuka, suspected to be Nala in disguise, and refers to Damayantī about his findings. Trying to find out more about Bāhuka's identity, she sends the brahmin back to Ayodhyā with the message of a second bridegroom choice ordered for Damayantī. The prince of Ayodhyā, hearing about the new *svayaṃvara* decides to take part and orders Bāhuka to go with him. Reluctantly, Bāhuka, who is in fact Nala in disguise, obeys the king's order. They cross several countries and the travel is then described

by two similes employing the same *upamāna*:

III.70.1

*sa nadīḥ parvatāṃś caiva vanāni ca sarāṃsi ca /  
acireṇāticakrāma khecaraḥ khe carann iva //*

‘So he crossed, without stopping, rivers, mountains, forests, lakes like a bird flying up high in the sky.’

III.70.38

*hayottamān utpatato dvijān iva punaḥ punaḥ /  
nalaḥ saṃcodayāmāsa prahr̥ṣṭenāntarātmanā //*

‘In the highest spirit Nala urged on his fine horses again and again, like birds flying high.’

During the journey to the *svayamvara*, the king teaches Nala the gift of counting, a talent possessed by good dice players, causing Kali to leave Nala's body. As Nala and the king reach the palace, Damayantī, on hearing the sound of the chariot driven by Nala, starts hoping that her husband might come. *Adhyāya* 71 displays the sequence of similes describing the train of her thoughts:

III.71.4

*damayantī śuśrāva rathaghoṣaṃ nalasya tam /  
yathā meghasya nadato gambhīraṃ jaladāgame //*

‘Damayantī heard the noise of Nala's chariot, similar to a thundering, deep monsoon cloud at the onset of the rainy season.’

III.71.9

*adya candrābhavaktraṃ taṃ na paśyāmi nalaṃ yadi /  
asaṃkhyeguṇaṃ vīraṃ vinaśiṣyāmy asaṃśayam //*

‘If today I cannot see Nala, the hero with the moonlike face, of countless virtues, without any doubt I shall perish.’

III.71.11-12

*yadi mām meghanirghoṣo nopagacchati naiśadhaḥ /  
adya cāmīkaraprakhyo vinaśiṣyāmy asaṃśayam //  
yadi mām siṃhavikrānto mattavāraṇavāraṇaḥ/  
nābhigacchati rājendro vinaśiṣyāmy asaṃśayam //*

‘If the Naiṣadha, does not come to me today, thunderous like a cloud, shining like gold, without any doubt I shall perish.’

‘If the Indra of kings, valiant like a lion, who is the best elephant among rutting elephants, does not come to me today, without any doubt I shall perish.’

The sequence links a series of *upamānas*, which can be broadly divided into two categories: the image of Nala arriving on his chariot, the description of Nala himself and his virtues. In the simile at III.71.4 the noise of Nala's chariot is likened to a monsoon cloud at the onset of the rainy season (*yathā meghasya nadato gambhīraṃ jaladāgame*), but in III.71.11 Damayantī hopes to see him coming ‘thunderous like a cloud’ (*meghanirghoṣo*) and ‘shining like gold’ (*cāmīkaraprakhyo*). While the first instance explicitly mentions the chariot, the second suggests an image of Nala on his chariot. Both similes recall *upamānas* portraying atmospheric events. One short comparison defines Nala as ‘moonlike-faced’ (*candrābhavaktraṃ*). The second category, relating about Nala's virtues, displays animals as *upamānas*. Two comparisons, both occurring in III.71.12 liken Nala to a lion (*siṃhavikrānto*) and to an elephant (*mattavāraṇavāraṇaḥ*).

*Adhyāya 73* features only one instance, where Nala, finally reunited with his children, cries for relief:

III.73.25

*bāhukas tu samāsādya sutau surasutopamau /  
bhṛśaṃ duḥkhaṇīrātātmaṃ sasvaraṃ praruroda ha //*

‘Bāhuka, having found his children, similar to children of the gods, was wrapped in great grief and started to cry loudly.’

The concluding part of the section describes the events following the reunion between Nala and Damayantī, displaying a few similes. In explaining to his wife how he was tricked into gambling by Kali, Nala says:

III.74.18.

*sa maccharīre tvacchāpād dahyamāno 'vasat kaliḥ /  
tvacchāpadagdhaḥ satataṃ so 'gnāv iva samāhitaḥ //*

‘Kali dwelled in my body, burning with your curse, always ablaze with your curse,

like kindling piled on a fire.’

The description of Damayantī, fully recovered, also is featured here:

III.75.26-7

*damayanty api bhartāram avāpyāpyāyitā bhṛśam /*

*ardhasamjātasasyeva toyam prāpya vasuṃdharā //*

*saivam sametya vyapanītatandri*

*śāntajvarā harṣavivṛddhasattvā /*

*rarāja bhaimī samavāptakāmā*

*śītāṃsunā rātrir ivoditena //*

‘Also Damayantī, having obtained her husband, was also refreshed fully, like the earth with half grown crops obtaining rain.’

‘Bhīma's daughter indeed, rejoined (with her husband), her weariness removed, her fever appeased, her heart swelling with joy, with her desires fulfilled, shone like the night with a rising moon.’

The descriptions of their changes and of the transitional physical state they undergo, employ two proverbial similes: Nala's inconsiderate behaviour was caused by Kali, and his body was burning ‘like kindling piled on a fire’ (*agnāv iva samāhitāḥ*), while Damayantī, undergoing several changes because of the reunion with her husband, is likened to ‘the earth with half-grown crops obtaining rain’ (*ardhasamjātasasyeva toyam prāpya vasuṃdharā*). Descriptions involving their non-transitional state, employ, as usual, heavenly bodies as *upamānas*, as in III.75.27, where she is compared to the ‘night with the rising moon’ (*śītāṃsunā rātrir ivoditena*).

Three concluding comparisons confirm the general tendency to compare the two main characters to heavenly bodies and to deities. Of the three instances, two occur in two different speech acts (III.77.13- Nala speaking and III.77.28- Puṣkara) and one in the main narrative, as a close to the section:

III.77.13

*dhanenānena vaidarbhī jitenā samalaṃkṛtā /*

*mām upasthāsyati vyaktaṃ divi śakram ivāpsarāḥ //*

‘Decked by the wealth that has been won the princess of Vidarbha will serve me

clearly, like an Apsaras Śakra in heaven.’

III.77.28

*mahatyā senayā rājan vinītaiḥ paricārakaiḥ /*

*bhrājamāna ivādityo vapuṣā puruṣarṣabha //*

‘With his large host and his well-mannered servants, he shone like the sun with beauty, oh bull among men.’

III.78.3

*āgatāyāṃ tu vaidarbhyāṃ saputrāyāṃ nalo nṛpaḥ /*

*vartayāmāsa mudīto devarāḍ iva nandane //*

‘So king Nala, after the arrival of the princess of Vidarbha and his sons, spent his time happily like the king of the Gods in the Nandana Park.’

### 1.3b Similes in a mirror-image

The Nalopakhyāna features 70 similes; among these, 21 are employed to describe Nala, 27 to describe Damayantī and 3 similes portray them together. There are also similes which describe details of the characters: 3 similes describe Damayantī's birthmark, 3 similes portray Nala's noise/voice, one instance describes Damayantī's heart.<sup>61</sup> Five similes describe the kings gathering for the first *svayamvara*,<sup>62</sup> seven describing various characters, such as the hunter dying in the forest.<sup>63</sup> Other similes referring to other minor characters do not appear to be relevant to this analysis, partly because of the low number in which they occur, and partly because they are not organised in sequences.<sup>64</sup>

Similes occurring within this narrative digression primarily fulfil a descriptive function: they aim to describe physical appearance or the emotional state of Nala and Damayantī. The physical description of the two characters appears almost redundant in its repetitiveness, displaying a similar range of *upamānas*: 10 similes compare Nala to gods and immortals,<sup>65</sup> 5 compare Damayantī to a goddess.<sup>66</sup> In III.52.34, they are compared (together) to Śacī and Indra. Celestial bodies and

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<sup>61</sup> III.59.23.

<sup>62</sup> III.54.3; 5-7.

<sup>63</sup> III.60.38.

<sup>64</sup> The only exception is the short sequence describing the kings attending Damayantī's *svayamvara* (III.54.3-7), but this short sequence is not relevant to the objective of this research.

<sup>65</sup> III.50.2,14,26; III.51,26,19; III.54,37; III.58.32; III.61.54,76; III.78.3.

<sup>66</sup> III.50.11-12; III.63.43; III.65.9,36

atmospheric events are also employed: 8 similes compare Damayantī to moon or lightning,<sup>67</sup> 4 similes liken Nala to the sun, the clouds or to the moon.<sup>68</sup> In II.75.27 Nala and Damayantī are compared, respectively, to the rising moon and to the night. Descriptions of their emotive state are also frequent, generally associated with madness: Damayantī is compared to a madwoman<sup>69</sup> 5 times, Nala is described as similar to a madman twice.<sup>70</sup>

Comparisons indirectly describe Nala and Damayantī, by portraying personal details of the two characters: Damayantī's birthmark and Nala's voice/noise. I will start from the latter, since it occurs earlier in the digression. When Damayantī, abandoned in the forest, cries thinking about Nala, she wonders when she will hear the voice of Nala 'similar to the amṛta, deep and dark like a thundercloud' (III.61.54).<sup>71</sup> A similar *upamāna* is employed to describe the noise of Nala's chariot (*rathaghoṣam*, III.71.4), 'similar to a thundering, deep monsoon cloud at the onset of the rainy season'. In hearing the noise, Damayantī swears that if she does not see Nala 'thunderous like a cloud', she will perish (III.71.11). The image of a thundering cloud appears to be connected to the voice/noise made by Nala: this personal detail allows Damayantī to recognise her husband when she hears the noise of the chariot. In III.61.54 the princess yearns to hear the voice of her husband, in III.71.4 she hears the noise of the chariot and recognises it, and she is expecting to finally meet her husband, thinking that she will die if not, in III.71.11. As we know, Nala is disguised as the charioteer Bāhuka and, although suspecting that the charioteer is indeed Nala, Damayantī will send her chambermaid to pose a series of trials to him, to force him to reveal his real identity.

Nala is not the only one who has been in disguise: Damayantī herself, during her year at the court of Cedi, has disguised herself as a hairdresser, serving as Sunandā's chambermaid. King Bhīma, Damayantī's father, sends the brahmin Sudeva to search for her and when the brahmin arrives at the court of the king of Cedi, he immediately notices Damayantī (III.65.7), then, knowing that she bears a birthmark, he looks at her carefully. When he spots the birthmark under the dirt that covers it, he

<sup>67</sup> III.60.31; III.62.23; III.65.11,16,25; III.66.7,10; III.75.27.

<sup>68</sup> III.51.27; III.61.77; III.71.9,11; III.77.28

<sup>69</sup> III.51.3; III.60.18; III.III.61.110; III.62.19.

<sup>70</sup> III.57.1; III.62.29.

<sup>71</sup> *jīmūtasvanasaṃnibhām / śroṣyāmi naiṣadhasyāhaṃ vācaṃ tām amṛtopamām.*

recognises her. A series of similes mark this discovery: in III.66.5 her birthmark is compared to a lotus. In my opinion this particular simile is describing the shape of the birthmark itself, it is not idealising the mole, as in the case of similes in verse 6, where the disguised birthmark is compared to a ‘moon covered by clouds’, and to verse 7 to a ‘sliver of moon on a cloudy new-moon day’. In verse 10, after the dirt covering Damayantī’s mole has been wiped off, her birthmark shines ‘like the moon in a cloudless sky’.

Both Nala and Damayantī hide, in disguise, but they are both recognisable because of personal details: the voice/noise, in the case of Nala, the mole in the case of Damayantī. The important moment in which the two characters are recognised is marked by comparisons. In the case of Nala, his voice is compared to an atmospheric event, while in the case of Damayantī’s mole, her birthmark is likened to a celestial body ‘similar to the moon covered by clouds’.

The analysis so far allows us to make a few remarks about similes within the episode of Nala and Damayantī:

- 1- The overwhelming majority of comparisons occurring within the section are employed to describe the two main characters.
- 2- There are two types of descriptions: their physical state and their mental state
- 3- The range of *upamānas* employed to describe the two characters are similar
- 4- They are both recognised through a characteristic, which is compared to a celestial body or to an atmospheric event.

The two characters share similar physical descriptions and a similar state of mind. It can be easily inferred that Nala and Damayantī are two characters whose bodies and minds appear to be similar, almost mirroring each other: the ‘mirror effect’ described by Shulman, is achieved also through the display of similes.

Similes within this section are employed in order to re-inforce the idea of the two characters as mirroring each other's actions. If the fact that their physical appearance is similarly divine seems to be obvious (they are embodied perfection), the similar manner in which their mental and emotional state is described is much more powerful: the two characters really yearn for each other and suffer in the same, intense way. The analysis of similes within the Nalopakhyāna shows how *upamās* in narrative digressions tend to be employed in a specific way: comparisons describing

their physical and mental state, hide an embedded message of unity between the two characters.

What is the message delivered by this particular narrative digression, hidden in the image of two characters acting, suffering and yearning for each other in the same way, then? The message becomes apparent if we consider, as suggested by Hildebeitel,<sup>72</sup> the audience in the literary frame in which the narrative digression occurs: the story appears to be a warning to the listeners of the tale, in this case Draupadī and Yudhiṣṭhira. The story of Nala and Damayantī occurs at a crucial point during the life in the wilderness: Yudhiṣṭhira expresses his anguish at the loss of his kingdom and banishment to the forest; the wise Bṛhadaśva tries to convince him that his situation is better than he thinks it is and tells the story of king Nala. The aim of the story is to show that separation from one's own relatives and kinsmen is much worse than losing a kingdom. The story of Nala and Damayantī is a story of separation, loss and reunion, but, as the story unravels, what becomes apparent is that the two main characters, although separated by the events, behave, yearn and suffer in the same way. They search for each other, using riddles to communicate: the story of Nala and Damayantī teaches the listeners about communication, family bounds and respect (Nala refusing to bet his own wife is another clear message to Yudhiṣṭhira). But the importance of the relationship between husband and wife appears to be central in the story: they are one single body, they act, move and suffer in an identical way. The *upamās* displayed within the Nalopakhyāna stress throughout the digression the similarities in the characters' behaviour and intense, synchronized, acting and suffering.

Similes, whose main function in the immediate context in which they appear is merely descriptive, reveal a secondary function when considered within other sequences of similes occurring within the whole narrative digression and considering the function of the Nalopakhyāna within the moment in the plot in which the digression is encountered.

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<sup>72</sup> Hildebeitel 2000: 238.



#### 1.4 Mythological similes within the Karṇaparvan:

identifying similes within the final combat between Arjuna and Karṇa

In his paper, Vassilkov, analyses the mythological similes within the Karṇaparvan. He defines them as ‘idealising simile’, already mentioned in the introduction to this thesis.<sup>73</sup> The author points out that in the battlebooks of the *Mahābhārata*, any *upameya* can be compared to Indra or Namuci, depending on whether the character is victorious or not: Karṇa is occasionally likened to Indra when victorious at that particular stage of the battle. Vassilkov describes this tendency as ‘situational’.<sup>74</sup> Among those comparisons, there are *upamās* that the author calls ‘identifying’<sup>75</sup> similes: comparisons that constantly link a particular character with a particular God.

The objective of this section is not a close examination of the ‘identifying’ similes, already provided by Vassilkov's investigation of the relationship between the *upameya* and the *upamāna* within the passage, but the analysis of the final combat between the two warriors in relation to the literary frame in which it occurs the *Mahābhārata* war.

In his paper, Vassilkov lists the ‘identifying’ similes occurring within the final combat between Arjuna and Karṇa, in *adhyāyas* 63-68:

VIII.63.5

*tau dṛṣtvā vismayam jagmuḥ sarvabhūtāni māriṣa /  
trailokyavijaye yattāv indravairocanāv iva //*

‘Having seen the two similar to Indra and to Vairocana carefully preparing for the battle of the conquest of the three worlds, all the creatures became astonished.’

VIII.63.16

*indravṛtrāv iva kruddhau sūryācandramasaprabhau /  
mahāgrahāv iva krūrau yugānte samupasthitau //*

‘Enraged like Indra and Vṛtra, shining like the sun and the moon, they were filled with wrath like two large planets risen for the destruction of the world at the end of a yuga.’

VIII.63.19

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<sup>73</sup> Vassilkov 2001: 18.

<sup>74</sup> Vassilkov 2001: 17.

<sup>75</sup> Vassilkov 2001: 24.

*ubhau viśrutakarmāṇau pauruṣeṇa balena ca /  
ubhau ca sadṛśau yuddhe śambarāmararājayoḥ //*

‘Both were endowed with great celebrity for their prowess and might, both resembling in battle the asura Śambara and the king of the celestials.’

VIII.63.29

*tāv ubhau prajihīrṣetām indravṛtrāv ivābhitaḥ /  
bhīmarūpadharāv āstām mahādhūmāv iva grahau //*

‘Both of them desirous to take (each other’s) life like Indra and Vṛtra, they were similar to two large planets of terrible forms facing each other.’

VIII.63.63

*tad bhīrusamtrāsakaram yuddham samabhavat tadā /  
anyonyaspardhinor vīrye śakraśambarayor iva //*

‘Then, that battle between the two warriors occurred, overwhelming timid people with fear, fiercely challenging each other similar to Śakra and Śambara in prowess.’

VIII.64.08-9

*na cābhimantavyam iti pracoditāḥ  
pare tvadīyās ca tadāvatasthire /  
mahārathau tau parivārya sarvataḥ  
surāsurā vāsavaśambarāv iva //*

‘Thus instructed not to underestimate, the enemies as well as your own warriors then stood still, surrounding the two great car-warriors from every side like the gods and the asuras (surrounding) Vāsava and Śambara.’

VII.64.10-11

*ubhāv ajeyāv ahitāntakāv ubhau  
jighāmsatus tau kṛtināu parasparam /  
mahāhave vīravarau samīyatur  
yathendrajambhāv iva karṇapāṇḍavau //*

‘Both invincible, both capable of exterminating foes, both desiring to slay each other, each displaying his skills upon the other, the two best of warriors (Karṇa and the Pāṇḍava), approached each other in that great battle like Indra and the asura Jambha.’

VIII.65.5

*sa samnipātas tu tayor mahān abhūt*  
*sureśavairocanayor yathā purā /*  
*śarair vibhugnāṅganiyanṭrvāhanaḥ*  
*suduḥsaho 'nyaiḥ paṭuṣoṇitodakaḥ //*

‘But the encounter between the two of them was fierce like the one between the chief of the Celestials and Vairocana in the battle of old. The limbs of the two heroes, unbearable for others, and marked by a river whose water was blood, as well as their drivers and animals, became mangled.’

VIII.65.7

*ubhau mahendrasya samānavikramāv*  
*ubhau mahendrapratimau mahārathau /*  
*mahendravrāpratimais ca sāyakair*  
*mahendravṛtrāv iva samprajahratuḥ //*

‘Both equal to the great Indra in prowess, both car-warriors similar to the Great Indra, as they struck each other with shafts resembling the great Indra’s thunder, they were similar to the Great Indra and Vṛtra.’

VIII.65.19

*anena vāsya kṣuraneminādya*  
*samchinddhi mūrdhānam areḥ prasahya /*  
*mayā nisṛṣṭena sudarśanena*  
*vajreṇa śakro namucer ivāreḥ //*

‘Now, putting forth your might, cut off the head of your foe with this Sudarśana, whose edge is keen as a razor, that I give to you, like Śakra (striking the head) of his foe, Namuci with his thunderbolt.’

VIII.65.37

*tatas tribhiś ca tridaśādhipopamaṁ*  
*śarair bibhedādhirathir dhanamjayam /*  
*śarāms tu pañca jvalitān ivoragān*  
*pravīrayām āsa jighāmsur acyute //*

‘Then, Adhiratha’s son pierced Dhanamjaya, who resembled the chief of the thirty gods, with three arrows, but (he) set forth five shafts similar to five snakes, desiring to strike the body of Acyuta.’

VIII.66.30

*tam asya harṣam mamṛṣe na pāṇḍavo  
bibheda marmāṇi tato 'sya marmavit /  
param śaraiḥ patribhir indravikramas  
tathā yathendro balam ojasāhanat //*

‘The Pāṇḍava did not endure his joy: he, conversant with the vital parts, then pierced his vital parts. The one with the prowess of Indra struck the enemy with feathered arrows just like Indra(struck) Bala with great energy.’

VIII.68.52-4

*sa devagandharvamanuṣyapūjitaṁ  
nihatya karṇam ripum āhave 'rjunaḥ /  
rarāja pārthaḥ parameṇa tejasā  
vṛtraṁ nihatyeva sahasralocanaḥ //  
tato rathenāmbudavṛndanādinā  
śarannabhomadhyagabhāskaratviṣā /  
patākinā bhīmaninādaketunā  
himenduśaṅkhasphaṭikāvabhāsina /  
suvarṇamuktāmaṇivajraavidrumair  
alamkṛtenāpratimānaramhasā //  
narottamau pāṇḍavakeśimardanāv  
udāhitāv agnidivākaropamau /  
raṇājire vītabhayau virejatuḥ  
samānayānāv iva viṣṇuvāsavau //*

‘As Arjuna had killed his enemy, Karṇa, worshipped by gods, men and gandharvas, in that battle, Pārtha shone with extreme energy, like the deity of a thousand eyes killing Vṛtra.’

‘Then, riding on that car whose rattle resembled the roar of the clouds and whose splendour was like the meridian sun of the autumnal sky, adorned with banners and equipped with a standard incessantly producing an awful noise, whose effulgence resembled that of the snow or the moon, the conch or the crystal, endowed with incomparable swiftness, golden ornaments, amulets and corals.’

‘Those two best of men, the Pāṇḍava and the crusher of Keśin who were like the fire,

or the sun in splendour, fearlessly careering in the battlefield they shone like Viṣṇu and Vāsava on the same chariot.’

VIII.68.62

*vihāya tān bāṇagaṇān athāgatau*

*suhṛdvṛtāv apratimānavikramau /*

*sukhamṁ praviṣṭau śibiraṁ svam īśvarau*

*sadasyahūtāv iva vāsavācyutau //*

‘Casting off those arrows, those two mighty warriors, endowed with unrivalled prowess, happily entered their own acampment surrounded by their friends, like Vāsava and Acyuta invoked by the sacrificial priests.’

In the similes listed by Vassilkov, Arjuna and Karṇa are likened to Indra and Vairocana (63.5, 65.5), to Indra and Vṛtra (63.16; 29, 65.7, 68.52), to Indra and Śambara (63.19; 63, 64.8), to Indra and Jambha (64.11), to Indra and Bala (66.30) and to Indra and Namuci (65.19); Arjuna is compared to Indra (65.37) and Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa are compared to Indra and Viṣṇu (68.53-54; 62).<sup>76</sup>

The occurrence of ‘identifying’ similes within the *Mahābhārata* poses a series of questions. As Vassilkov points out in his article, this type of simile is widely employed within the Karṇaparvan in order to coordinate a real plane of narrative and the mythological one. The supposed mythological identity of the hero and the deity is somehow implied throughout the narrative, but then only revealed during the final combat between the two characters.<sup>77</sup> We should then expect the *Rāmāyaṇa*, whose main character Rāma is the alleged reincarnation of Viṣṇu, to use a similar display of ‘identifying’ similes. But this is not the case: this type of simile never occurs in the battle book of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. This particular function fulfilled by similes is typical of the *Mahābhārata*: within the *Rāmāyaṇa* mythological similes are rarely employed within single combats, with a few exceptions of mythological comparisons whose function, as suggested in the third chapter of this thesis, is completely different: when mythological similes occur within the *Rāmāyaṇa*’s battlebook, they mark the transition between stages in fighting scenes. This particular type of similes is common to both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

<sup>76</sup> Vassilkov 2001: 19-20.

<sup>77</sup> Vassilkov 2001: 23-24.

It would be logical to argue that the status of the *Mahābhārata* as *itihāsa* suggests that the audience was well aware of the supposed historicity of the events narrated within the *Mahābhārata*, therefore the need to employ 'identifying' similes in order to stress the characters' alleged semi-divine nature. Yet it would be difficult to say whether the audience was aware or not of this distinction between the fictional events of the *Rāmāyaṇa* or historical events narrated within the *Mahābhārata*. The fact that the tradition remembers the *Mahābhārata* as the *itihāsa* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* as the *ādikāvya* does not imply that an audience was aware of this scholarly distinction between the two texts. What compelled the composers of the *Mahābhārata* to employ similes which would constantly remind the audience about the supposed divine nature of the characters within the *Mahābhārata*? In my opinion, it is the fact that the main characters of the story do not behave like divine beings at all. Despite their heroic feats, Arjuna and the other Pāṇḍavas appear to be incredibly human.

According to Oscar Botto, the Sanskrit Epics evolve in a different fashion from the way the Homeric Poems did: the heroes of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* are essentially human and only later do they become sons and incarnations of gods.<sup>78</sup> This process of evolution appears to be exactly the opposite of that of the Iliad and the Odyssey, whose heroes are humans, but originally were deities. It is important to mention that also the two Sanskrit Epics show differences in this respect: according to Brockington, in the case of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, some of the most human features of Rāma were gradually erased, although the story retained some of his ambiguous feats.<sup>79</sup> The *Mahābhārata*, on the other hand, maintains the human behaviour of its characters, especially of Arjuna: this human dimension of the Pāṇḍavas becomes apparent especially during the war against the Kauravas.

The *Mahābhārata* war, unlike that in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, is permeated with ambiguities: the battle between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas is a fratricidal war, fought for the sake of a kingdom. This morally ambiguous situation generates confusion in Arjuna, who, at the beginning of the Bhīṣmaparvan, gives voice to his doubts, the moment culminating in his refusal to fight against the Kauravas' army. Kṛṣṇa then unfolds the teachings of the Bhagavadgītā, explaining the concept of

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<sup>78</sup> Botto, O. 1970: Origini e Sviluppo dell'Epica Indiana. *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, Quaderno 19: 655-677.

<sup>79</sup> Brockington 1984: 323-327.

*kṣatradharma*: according to Kṛṣṇa's teachings, a war against kinsmen can be fought, because fighting is part of the *dharma* of a *kṣatriya*.<sup>80</sup> The Bhagavadgītā supplies a moral background that the fratricidal war appears to lack, also providing those means that will help doubtful Arjuna not to hesitate in battle. But, if the ambiguities that lie at the very foundation of the *Mahābhārata* war can be clarified by Kṛṣṇa's teachings, the equivocal behaviour of some of the main characters of the Epic, of Yudhiṣṭhira and Arjuna in particular, permeate the Epic with conflicting emotions, often leaving the audience to wonder about the morality of its main characters. Moreover, the name of *dharmayuddha*, which occurs within the text, makes this ambiguity more obvious.<sup>81</sup>

In his *Reflections on the Mahābhārata war*,<sup>82</sup> Mehendale investigates the concept of *dharmayuddha*, as applied to the conflict between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas. In the first chapter of his book, the author argues that the term can be interpreted in two different ways: the first one relates to the idea of *dharma* of a *kṣatriya*; the second to the notion of *dharma* as a set of rules, in this case, mutually agreed-upon rules, which the combatants are due to respect throughout the conflict. Of the two possible interpretations, Mehendale agrees that the latter looks the more suitable to the text. The author investigates this second option further, analysing this collection of rules, mentioned on several occasions before and during the war.<sup>83</sup> Mehendale also looks at the general behaviour of the combatants during the fight, extrapolating a further set of rules, apparent in their conduct in single combats within the Epic.<sup>84</sup> Do the characters respect this war canon? As the author points out, warriors on both sides break the ruling on several occasions. Although a partisan audience would expect the Kauravas to be responsible for most of the breaches of rules, the Pāṇḍavas are responsible for transgressing the code of conduct as well: Arjuna, *senāpati* of the Pāṇḍava army and son of Indra, breaks the rules on several occasions during his numerous single combats, such as in the killing of Bhūriśravas.<sup>85</sup>

Another important episode within the final battle between Karṇa and Arjuna

<sup>80</sup> MBh, VI.24.31

<sup>81</sup> MBh, VII.164.10, *dharmayuddham ayudhyanta*.

<sup>82</sup> Mehendale 1995.

<sup>83</sup> The code of war is reported in the Bhīṣmaparvan, VI.1.27-32.

<sup>84</sup> For more general rules of war conduct, see Mehendale 1995: 8-11.

<sup>85</sup> Arjuna attacks Bhūriśravas from behind (MBh VII.118.4-10).

is worth considering in regard to Arjuna's heroic deeds in battle. At the final stage of the fight against Karṇa, the *senāpati* of the Kuru army finds himself facing Arjuna, with one of his chariot's wheels stuck in the ground. Karṇa excuses himself, calling upon one of the supposed agreed-upon rules before the battle, which states that a warrior should not attack another warrior when the latter is in an obvious position of disadvantage. As Mehendale points out, there is no such rule among those mentioned in the Epic therefore Karṇa has no excuses to leave the battlefield. Arjuna also reminds him that in the past Karṇa never respected such a rule himself. But there is a more important detail within this episode, whose importance is, in my opinion, underestimated: although in a position of obvious disadvantage, Karṇa manages to fight back against Arjuna, and almost kill him- not quite what we would expect with regard to the son of Indra. In a clear position of advantage, Arjuna fails to kill Karṇa, whose chariot is stuck in the ground.

Arjuna's behaviour during the war also shows his inability to understand the teachings of the Bhagavadgītā: if we take into account other episodes within the battle books of the *Mahābhārata*, we realise how Arjuna still finds morally unacceptable most of the tricks Kṛṣṇa suggests to Yudhiṣṭhira when plotting against the enemy (VI.103.24-51). In the Bhīṣmaparvan, when Yudhiṣṭhira plots the killing of Bhīṣma,<sup>86</sup> Arjuna refuses to carry out the task (VI.103.84), considering it an act of cowardice to stand behind somebody's back in combat.<sup>87</sup> This contrasts with his behaviour during Karṇa's generalship, when Arjuna not only violates the agreed-upon rules on several occasions, but, even abandons the battlefield when hearing that his brother Yudhiṣṭhira has been wounded in battle (*adhyāyas* 46-47). The visit he makes to his elder brother is not welcomed by Yudhiṣṭhira, who harshly reproaches him for leaving the battlefield. Arjuna's display of brotherly affection is not well received and prompts Arjuna's reaction, threatening to kill Yudhiṣṭhira and only Kṛṣṇa's intervention prevents a fight between the two brothers.

The ambiguities of the conduct of war gain a deeper perspective by analysing Yudhiṣṭhira's behaviour. It is well known that the eldest Pāṇḍava brother, advised by

<sup>86</sup>Hiltebeitel, A. 1976: *The Ritual of Battle, Krishna in the Mahābhārata*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca and London.

<sup>87</sup>Arjuna does not refuse to kill Bhīṣma, but to kill him in a way that is against the rules. But in refusing to take up the task assigned by his elder brother and that had been suggested by Bhīṣma himself, he once again breaks the rules of the kṣatradharma, as they are expressed in the teachings of the Bhagavadgītā.



Kṛṣṇa, orchestrates the death of three *senāpatīs* of the Kauravas' army. Alf Hiltebeitel, in *The Ritual of Battle*,<sup>88</sup> analyses the deaths of Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Karṇa.<sup>89</sup> As highlighted by his investigation, the ambiguous moral conduct of Yudhiṣṭhira the Dharmarāja, and ultimately of Kṛṣṇa, is apparent in his strategy to kill the three marshals. In the episode of the killing of Bhīṣma, he obtains vital information on how to kill him in battle from Bhīṣma himself, through a series of riddles. In the case of Droṇa's death, he causes the *senāpati*'s death through a misuse of truth.<sup>90</sup> But while, in the case of the death of Bhīṣma and Droṇa, Yudhiṣṭhira abuses his position of Dharmarāja, in the case of Karṇa his strategy is, if possible, even more subtle: in his case Yudhiṣṭhira exploits Śalya, his maternal uncle and Karṇa's charioteer in battle, who helps Arjuna during the fight against Karṇa.<sup>91</sup>

According to Mehendale, the *Rāmāyāna*, unlike the *Mahābhārata*, shows a great respect for the warfare rules on behalf of its characters.<sup>92</sup> Unlike the *Mahābhārata* war, for which a set of rules was decided, the *Rāmāyāna* war simply follows the rules common in those days. During the war, Rāma lists these rules, when talking to Lakṣmaṇa.<sup>93</sup> These rules are indeed similar to the ones occurring within the *Mahābhārata*, but the behaviour of Rāma is different from the Pāṇḍavas': Rāma,<sup>94</sup> a champion of *dharma*, strictly follows them and passively accepts the enemy cheating in combat. The Pāṇḍava heroes, caught in an ambiguous, fratricidal war, often decide to break these rules. As explained before, the *Mahābhārata* war displays ambiguities that the *Rāmāyāna* lacks almost completely: the war between Rāma and Rāvaṇa is a war between good and evil, the war between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas is a confusing war, in which the main combatants display a morally ambiguous behaviour.

Such morally ambiguous behaviour appears to contrast with the supposed

<sup>88</sup> Hiltebeitel 1976: 244-250.

<sup>89</sup> The death of Śalya is not taken into account here, because he is lawfully slain by Yudhiṣṭhira in battle

<sup>90</sup> Hiltebeitel 1976: 244-54.

<sup>91</sup> This episode, which will be thoroughly analysed in the third chapter of this thesis, displays a sequence of abusive similes.

<sup>92</sup> Mehendale 1995: 58-65.

<sup>93</sup> Rm VI.6.38

<sup>94</sup> This section considers the behaviour of the characters during the war: Rāma's behaviour prior to the war often can be considered as morally questionable, such as in the episode in which he kills Valin, striking him from behind, clearly against any war rule. See also: Scharf: P.M 2003: *Rāmopakhyaṇa, The Story of Rāma in the Mahābhārata, An Independent-study Reader in Sanskrit*. Routledge Courzon: London : 9.

status of the five Pāṇḍava brothers as semi-gods: the display of similes in the combat between Karṇa and Arjuna, reminds the audience of Arjuna's alleged semi-divine nature.

In my opinion, the need to constantly remind the audience of the semi-divine nature of its characters arises from the lack of divine dimension in the main characters' behaviour. Arjuna appears to be, among the characters of the *Mahābhārata*, the one whose behaviour is predominantly human. From the outset of the war, Arjuna appears to doubt the purpose of the war itself, shaking before the enemy line, at the idea of killing his own relatives. This moving reaction, which reveals the *pietas* of the honest hero, is a reaction to the absurd, but necessary war against the Kauravas. Kṛṣṇa instructs him with the teachings of the Bhagavadgītā, in order to make him overcome his fears and doubts about the war, but Arjuna fails to learn the lesson.

As observed by Vassilkov, the 'identifying' similes in the final combat between Karṇa and Arjuna supply a mythical background to the Epic, but it is not hazardous to say that such mythological display is needed by the extreme human nature of its characters. The same cannot be said about the *Rāmayaṇa*: Rāma's feats and behaviour during the war speak for him. The similes supply something that the narrative lacks: the *Mahābhārata* war, with its contradictions, the fear of its combatants, the continuous breach of rules on both sides, reveals a war between men, who have been branded by tradition as the sons of gods and whose human nature compelled the composers of the epic to remind the audience of their alleged divine nature, providing a mythological background to the *dharmayuddha*.

## 2 Similes within the Rāmāyaṇa

In her paper “Remarques sur la fonction des figures de style dans le Rāmāyaṇa”, Marie-Claude Porcher analyses the functions of figures of speech, particularly similes, in that Epic.<sup>95</sup> In her research she points out a basic difference between the function of figures of style occurring in the main narrative and within speeches/dialogues. *Upamās* are employed, according to Porcher, in order to ‘reinforce antitheses, condemnations, denunciations etc.’ in the former, whereas in the latter, comparisons are employed in order to ‘underline the different speech-acts’. According to Porcher, the analysis of comparisons within these two types of style sheds light on the double function of *alaṃkāras* within the text: didactical and aesthetic. In the author's opinion, this double function mirrors the main function of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.<sup>96</sup>

In her analysis of similes occurring within the main narrative, Porcher takes three main episodes into account: the kidnapping of Sītā (III.52), the description of Rāvaṇa's gynaeceum (V.10) and the burning of the city of Laṅkā (V.54). In her investigation of similes within dialogues, she provides a general view on dialogues within the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

In her analysis concerning similes in the descriptive passages, the author considers the *upamā* as a poetic means through which the composers of the Epic stressed antitheses between characters opposing each other. In the case of Sītā's abduction, for instance, the author points out how comparisons are employed in order to emphasize the main differences between Sītā and Rāvaṇa.<sup>97</sup>

Porcher's examination of the description of Rāvaṇa's gynaeceum sheds light on the function fulfilled by comparisons in passages where long descriptions are encountered. According to the author, similes can be employed in order to suggest an idea throughout the passage. The long portrayal of Rāvaṇa's wives sleeping in the gynaeceum conveys an idea of chaotic sensuality and the past brutalities that the women in the gynaeceum experienced. According to Porcher, in the voluptuous

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<sup>95</sup> Porcher 1996. The author considers *upamās* and *utprekṣās* occurring in narrative/descriptive passages and *upamās*, *nidarśanās* and *rūpakas* in discourses.

<sup>96</sup> Porcher 1996: 431.

<sup>97</sup> Porcher 1996: 432. The idea expressed in the passage is an opposition between the fragile Vaidehī and the powerful and monstrous image of the king of Laṅkā.

description of the extremely beautiful women, lying asleep, intoxicated by their sensual lust for Rāvaṇa, similes stress the latent violence of the *rākṣasas'* world.<sup>98</sup>

The *upamās* within the episode of the burning of Laṅkā display a number of mythological *upamānas*. Porcher observes that such similes accomplish two functions within this passage: on the one hand, they anticipate the destruction of Laṅkā, on the other hand, the mythological *upamās* supply the episode with a mythological background recalling the end of a cosmic era.<sup>99</sup>

As observed by Porcher, the main difference between the *kāvya* and the Epics lies in the predominant role of dialogues in the latter.<sup>100</sup> Within the *Rāmāyaṇa*, a number of important word-exchanges take place. Porcher considers several instances of speeches condemning Rāvaṇa's behaviour, which appear to be very numerous, especially within the *Araṇyakāṇḍa*.<sup>101</sup> Comparisons within these speeches appear to be, in the overwhelming majority, stereotyped expressions which 'reinforce the expressivity of the discourse'. In Porcher's opinion, the 'echoing from one *sarga* to the other' of these *upamās*, provides a key for the interpretation of the text: for, instance, the author sees a connection between similes in discourses and the occurrence of mythological similes in the final battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa.<sup>102</sup>

Although concluding that her research is not at all exhaustive, according to Porcher, similes are used to emphasise antitheses in the descriptive/narrative style, whereas in the dialogues, comparisons appear to underline the different speech-acts.<sup>103</sup>

In my opinion, the main limit in Porcher's classification of figures of speech (of *upamās* in particular) in the *Rāmāyaṇa* lies in the different methodology employed in order to analyse the similes occurring within the two different narrative styles. In her analysis of similes in narrative/descriptive passages, Porcher considers the role of similes within the passage, taking into account all comparisons; she then considers the role of similes in relation to the main plot: this allows her to see the

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<sup>98</sup> Porcher 1996: 435.

<sup>99</sup> Porcher 1996: 437.

<sup>100</sup> Porcher 1996: 438. See also Renou & L, Filliozat, J. 1985. *L'Inde Classique, Manuel des études Indienne, avec le concours de P. Demieville et O. Lacombe, P. Meile*, Vol I. Paris: Payot. 400.

<sup>101</sup> Porcher 1996: 440.

<sup>102</sup> Porcher 1996: 442.

<sup>103</sup> Porcher 1996: 447.

anticipative role of *upamās* within the main story.<sup>104</sup> In the case of dialogues, on the other hand, her analysis on figures of speech is restricted to various speech-acts from characters who rebuke Rāvaṇa for his behaviour.<sup>105</sup> Each instance appears to be singled out from the context in which it occurs.

The objective of the present research is the contextual analysis of comparisons occurring within passages displaying speech acts and similes occurring within the main narrative. In the case of similes occurring within dialogues, this thesis employs a different approach from Porcher's: the analysis of the context in which similes occur implies the examination of comparisons occurring 'around' speech-acts as well. The contextual analysis of similes within the *Rāmāyaṇa* partly confirms Porcher's classification of similes, but also sheds light on the multiplicity of function accomplished by similes within the two different styles.

This chapter is divided into two sections: in section 2.1 the analysis looks at the function fulfilled by similes within passages featuring dialogues. The Ayodhyākāṇḍa is a book rich in dialogues important to the main plot of the story and among instances of dialogues within the text, two instances are taken into account: the dialogue between Mantharā and Kaikeyī (Rm II.7-9) and the instance between Daśaratha and Kaikeyī (Rm II.10-11).

Section 2.2 examines the descriptive similes in narrative passages. The *Rāmāyaṇa* displays several instances of descriptive similes acting as a guide to the audience in the evolution of the episode, underlying important passages, emphasising single speech-acts and the thoughts of the characters. Examples from all three books are considered: the introductory part of the Ayodhākāṇḍa (Rm II.1-3), is analysed in order to provide a first example of similes that guide the audience; the mutilation of Śūrpaṅkhā (Rm III.16-17) is taken into account in order to describe both similes that guide the audience and similes emphasising speech-acts; and the divine intervention of the bird Garuḍa (Rm VI.40) is examined to provide an instance of similes that point to important moments within the passage.

## 2.1 Dialogues in the Ayodhākāṇḍa: similes within speech-acts

and similes that precede/follow speech-acts

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<sup>104</sup> Porcher 1996: 437.

<sup>105</sup> Porcher 1996: 437-438.

This section considers similes occurring in passages where speeches are encountered. The present analysis takes into account two types of comparison occurring within passages featuring dialogues: comparisons that occur within speech-acts and similes that precede or follow speech-acts.

As for the comparisons occurring in speech-acts, one important episode will be taken into account: the dialogue between Mantharā and Kaikeyī. This famous instance will reveal patterns of similes within dialogues. Then similes preceding or following speech-acts will be considered, in the analysis of the dialogue between Daśaratha and Kaikeyī.

As shown by the present analysis, these two types of comparison often fulfil similar purposes within the passage in which they occur.

### 2.1a Dialogue between Mantharā and Kaikeyī

The dialogue between Mantharā and Kaikeyī is one of the key events within the Ayodhākāṇḍa. The news of Rāma's consecration triggers the anger of Mantharā, the evil hunchback, who advises Kaikeyī, Daśaratha's second wife, to force her husband to fulfil two boons he previously granted to her: to consecrate Bharata and to banish Rāma to the forest. The dialogue between Mantharā and Kaikeyī displays a number of similes: the analysis of these comparisons and the way they are employed within the dialogue reveals an important function of similes within the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Sarga 7 begins with the news reaching Mantharā, the evil hunchback, who happens to be walking towards the terrace where she meets one of the maids, who tells her the news of Rāma's consecration. The angry hunchback leaves the terrace in a hurry. The ascending and descending of the terrace are emphasized by two similes:

II.7.1

*jñātidāsī yato jātā kaikeyyās tu sahoṣitā /  
prāsādaṃ candrasaṃkāśam āuroha yadṛcchayā //*

‘But the female slave, who had lived with Kaikeyī's family (since she) was born, by chance ascended the terrace which resembled the moon.’

II.7.8

*dhātryās tu vacanaṃ śrutvā kubjā kṣipram amarṣitā /  
kailāsaśikharākārāt prāsādād avarohata //*

‘Having heard the nursemaid’s words, the hunchback became very angry, quickly descended from the terrace which resembled mount Kailāsa.’

Having reached Kaikeyī’s chamber, the hunchback angrily approaches the queen (v 10), warning her about the imminent threat of the prince’s consecration.

II.7.11

*aniṣṭe subhagākāre saubhāgyena vikatthase /  
calaṃ hi tava saubhāgyaṃ nadyaḥ srota ivoṣṇage //*

‘Because the beauty of your face is not desirable (anymore), you boast about your beauty, indeed your beauty is fleeting, like the current of a river in the hot season.’

The hunchback expresses her opinion about the king’s decision to consecrate Rāma as prince regent in II.7.23-4:

*śatruḥ patipravādena mātrevā hitakāmyayā /  
āśīviṣa ivāṅkena bāle paridhṛtas tvayā //  
yathā hi kuryāt sarpo vā śatrur vā pratyupekṣitaḥ /  
rājñā daśarathenādya saputrā tvam tathā kṛtā //*

‘He is an enemy passing for a husband, o child, (he is) like a poisonous snake hidden in your bosom as if with maternal affection.

In the same way a snake or an enemy would act if ignored, so king Daśaratha acts today towards you and your son.’

Sarga 8 features the whole dialogue between Mantharā and Kaikeyī. Trying to convince the queen to act to prevent the prince’s consecration, the hunchback describes the probable future after Rāma becomes prince regent:

II.8.4

*prāptāṃ sumahatīm prītiṃ pratītāṃ tām hatadviṣam /  
upasthāsyasi kausalyāṃ dāsīva tvam kṛtāñjaliḥ //*

‘Having obtained the object of great joy and having killed her enemies, you will have to wait on Kausalyā like a slave, with your hands cupped in reverence.’

But Mantharā’s attempts are checked by the queen’s respect for Rāma:

II.8.8

*bhrātṛṇ bhṛtyāṃś ca dīrghāyuh pīṭvat pālayiṣyati /  
saṃtapyase katham kubje śrutvā rāmābhiṣecanam //*

‘The long-lived one (Rāma) will protect his brothers and his dependents like a father. How can you be upset, o hunchback, having heard about Rāma’s consecration?’

But the hunchback replies, angrily accusing Kaikeyī of being a bad mother:

II.8.16

*asāv atyantanirbhagnas tava putro bhaviṣyati /  
anāthavat sukhebhyaś ca rājavaṃśāc ca vatsale //*

‘That son of yours will be excluded irremediably from kingship and from happiness, like a poor child, o loving mother!’

Again, the queen refuses to believe what the hunchback says:

II.8.20

*goptā hi rāmaṃ saumitrīr lakṣmaṇaṃ cāpi rāghavaḥ /  
aśvinor iva saubhrātraṃ tayor lokeṣu viśrutam //*

‘Indeed Saumitri will protect Rāma like Rāghava will protect Lakṣmaṇa, as their friendship is celebrated in the Worlds like the Aśvins’.’

The *sarga* concludes with Mantharā’s idea of the imminent threat posed by the consecration:

II.8.25

*abhidrutam ivāraṇye siṃhena gajayūthapam /  
pracchādyamānaṃ rāmeṇa bhārataṃ trātum arhasi //*

‘Like the leader of an elephant herd is attacked by a lion in the forest, so Bharata will be attacked by Rāma, and you must protect him.’

In *sarga* 9, the queen capitulates and admits her worries about the sudden turn of events. Having heard the hunchback's idea of forcing the king to grant her two boons previously promised, she begins her praise of Mantharā:

II.9.33-4



*tvam āyatābhyāṃ sakthibhyāṃ manthare kṣaumavāsini /  
agrato mama gacchantī rājahaṃsīva rājase //  
tavedaṃ sthagu yad dīrghaṃ rathaghoṇam ivāyatam /  
matayaḥ kṣatravidyāś ca māyāś cātra vasanti te //*

‘O Manthara, with your extended thighs, wearing linen garments, going before me, you shine like a royal goose.’

‘That hump of yours is similar to the long and stretched beak of a chariot! There your ideas, your magic powers and your political knowledge must be stored.’

The flattered hunchback speaks to Kaikeyī. Her words are emphasized by a simile, where the image of the queen lying on the bed is described. The simile also marks the beginning of the last of Kaikeyī’s actions in this section, in which she strips herself of all her jewellery.

II.9.40

*iti praśasyamānā sā kaikeyīm idam abravīt /  
śayānāṃ śayane śubhre vedyām agniśikhām iva //*

‘Thus flattered, she spoke to Kaikeyī, who lay on her beautiful couch like the flame of fire on an altar.’

After removing all her gems and necklaces, the queen demands to see the king: another simile describes the queen lying on the floor. This image contrasts with the previous comparisons, which provided a sumptuous image of Kaikeyī:

II.9.46-7

*athaitad uktvā vacanaṃ sudāruṇaṃ  
nidhāya sarvābharaṇāni bhāminī /  
asaṃvṛtām āstaraṇena medinīm  
tadādhiśīsyē patiteva kinnarī //  
udīrṇasaṃrambhatamovṛtānanā  
tathāvamuktottamamālyabhūṣaṇā /  
narendrapatnī vimanā babhūva sā  
tamovṛtā dyaur iva magnatārakā //*

‘Having thus spoken those harsh words and having laid aside all her jewels, then the

angry woman lay down on the ground bare of any spread, like a fallen Kiṃnara woman.’

‘With her face surrounded by the darkness of her swollen rage, her fine garlands and ornaments stripped off, the wife of the Lord of men was dejected like the sky surrounded by darkness when the stars have plunged.’

#### 2.1b- Dialogue between Daśaratha and Kaikeyī (Rm II.10-12)

Along with similes occurring in speeches, which are usually employed in order to enrich different speech-acts, there is a second kind of comparison occurring in passages featuring dialogues: similes emphasizing something that has just been said or that is about to be pronounced by a character.<sup>106</sup> This particular type of simile is indeed very common within the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which widely employs it, but there is a passage within the Ayodhyākāṇḍa where comparisons fulfil exclusively this purpose.

The dialogue between Daśaratha and Kaikeyī is a central one within the Epic. Intoxicated by the words of Mantharā, the evil hunchback, Kaikeyī demands that the king fulfil her boons, previously granted to her when the queen saved the king’s life. The passage portrays Daśaratha’s reaction to the queen’s dreadful requests.

In *sarga* 10, the king, happily enters his wife’s chambers, in order to bring her the good news of Rāma’s consecration, only to find her lying on the floor, stripped of all her jewellery. Shortly before speaking to her, the king is portrayed by a comparison that clearly depicts the affection he feels towards his wife:

II.10.4

*kareṇum iva digdhena viddhāṃ mṛgayuṇā vane /  
mahāgaja ivāraṇye snehāt parimamarśa tām //*

‘Like a great elephant in the wilderness, the king affectionately caressed her, similar to a female elephant pierced by a hunter with a poisoned arrow in the forest.’

The king questions the queen, worried at the sight of her being so distressed, demanding the reasons for her sorrow. The queen first asks the king to grant her the

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<sup>106</sup> Similes that precede or follow a speech are often stereotyped expressions. See Brockington J. L. 2000: Stereotyped expressions in the Rāmāyaṇa. In: *Epic Threads- John Brockington on the Sanskrit Epics*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 109; 112.

boon he previously promised to her, then she reveals the nature of her requests. Again, before her demands are spelled out, a simile anticipates the evil nature of the queen's wishes:

II.10.20

*tena vākyena saṁhṛṣṭā tam abhiprāyam ātmanah /  
vyājahāra mahāghoram abhyāgatam ivāntakam //*

‘delighted with those words, she uttered her dreadful purpose that was like a visitation of Death.’

The queen requests Bharata's consecration and the banishment of Rāma. After the woman utters her dreadful words, another comparison marks the end of her speech, describing the king's reaction to his wife's demands:

II.10.30

*tataḥ śrutvā aja aja kaikeyyā dāruṇam vacaḥ /  
vyathito vilavaś caiva vyāghrīm dṛṣṭvā yathā mṛgaḥ //*

‘having thus heard the ruthless words from Kaikeyī, the Great King was shaken and unnerved, like a deer seeing a tigress.’

Daśaratha attempts to make his wife change her mind, by declaring his affection towards her son. The display of fatherly love does not move the woman, who remains firm in her decision. In the final verse of the *sarga*, the king collapses, stricken by sorrow, at the end of his speech:

II.10.41

*sa bhūmipālo vilapann anāthavat  
striyā gṛhīto hṛdaye' timātrayā /  
papāta devyāś caraṇau prasāritāv  
ubhāv asaṁsprśya yathāturas tathā //*

‘Seized in his heart by a woman without bounds, the protector of the Earth began to cry as if hopeless. Trying to touch the queen's outstretched feet, he fell like a sick man.’

In *sarga* 11 only one simile describes Daśaratha's grief:

## II.11.1

*atarhaṃ mahārājaṃ śayānam atathocitam /  
yayātim iva puṇyānte devalokāt paricyutam //*

‘the great King lay down, not accustomed to this, ill-befitting his dignity, miserable like Yayāti (falling) from the Worlds of the gods when his merit was exhausted.’

But the discussion continues in *sarga* 12, when the queen shows her complete indifference to the king's grief. Her cold and shameless words are marked by a pair of similes in which the king, forced by his wife into banishing Rāma, is described as being left without choice:

## II.12.08-9

*evaṃ pracodito aja kaikeyyā nirviśaṅkayā /  
nāśakat pāśam unmoktuṃ balir indrakṛtaṃ yathā //  
udbhrāntahṛdayaś cāpi vivarṇavadano' bhavat /  
sa dhuryo vai parisṇandan yugacakrāntaraṃ yathā //*

‘the King, thus pressured by the shameless Kaikeyī, was unable to free himself from her trap, like Bali from Indra’s.’

‘with his heart distressed, the King was pale-faced, like a beast of burden moving between the yoke and the wheels.’

In a final attempt to convince her, the king makes his last plea, his words are anticipated by a comparison:

## II.12.15

*sa nunna iva tīkṣeṇa pratodena hayottamaḥ /  
rājā pracodito' bhīkṣṇaṃ kaikeyīm idam abravīt //*

‘ Subjected to pressure like a fine horse urged with a sharp goad, the king spoke these words to the implacable Kaikeyī.’

### 2.1c Function of similes in passages displaying dialogues

Similes in passages featuring dialogues can fulfil different functions. They can be employed in order to emphasize different opinions or they can stress the words of the different speakers, by anticipating or following speech-acts.

Within the passage displaying the dialogue between Kaikeyī and Mantharā the most prominent function of similes is the stressing of the initial differences between Kaikeyī and Mantharā. In *sarga* 7, the hunchback harshly approaches the queen, insulting her. The *upamānas* employed within the *sarga* depict the beauty of the queen as being fleeting ‘like the current of a river’ and the king as being a traitor, comparing him to a snake. In *sarga* 8 the hunchback foresees the future of the queen as being that of a slave. To the harsh words of Mantharā, the queen replies using similes portraying the sweet-mannered nature of Rāma: similes in Kaikeyī’s speech-acts display fathers and the Aśvins as *upamānas*. The contrasting ideas between the two women are stressed by the *upamānas* displayed by the comparisons. When the queen finally acknowledges that the hunchback might be right, she praises Mantharā, comparing her to a royal goose and to the beak of a chariot.

Within the section, two similes anticipating/following speech-acts also occur: in verse 40 before the hunchback gives her final advice to the queen, and in verse 46-47, when the queen, having proclaimed her purpose to have Bharata consecrated instead of Rāma, strips herself of all her jewellery.

Simile in 9.40 describes Kaikeyī lying on the couch, lending a sumptuous image of the queen, similar to ‘sacrificial fire’. When the queen strips herself of all her jewelry, she appears to be similar to a fallen Kiṃnara (9.46). These two contrasting images mark the moment in which Kaikeyī, having acknowledged that the hunchback is right, acts: the moment in which the Queen throws her jewelry on the ground is marked by these two comparisons, marking the ‘before’ and the ‘after’ (also stressing the ‘before’ and ‘after’ Mantharā’s words). The use of two contrasting images within the passage marks the importance of a key-event within the narrative. *Upamās* within this passage apparently fulfil two basic purposes: they are employed in order to emphasise the different speech-acts and to stress the differences between the two characters.

The analysis the passage featuring the dialogue between Daśarātha and Kaikeyī reveals a very important characteristic of comparisons within the text. As shown by the investigation of *upamās* occurring in *sargas* 7-9 of the Ayodhyākāṇḍa, comparisons are often employed in order to stress differences between the two speakers. If we take into account all similes occurring within the passage, the images

portraying the king and the queen differ greatly: the queen appears to be the evil torturer whereas the king appears to be the victim of her wife's evil machinations. The range of *upamānas* employed to describe the king varies, depending on the moment in which the simile occurs: Daśarātha is 'like a great elephant in the wilderness' (II.10.4), when consoling his wife; in his reaction the king is similar to a sick man (II.10.41); miserable 'like Yayāti' (II.11.1); and similar to a beast of burden (II.12.09) and 'like a fine horse pressured with a sharp goad' (II.12.15).

Similes portraying Kaikeyī, on the other hand, describe the torturer in this relationship: consoled by her husband, Kaikeyī is like a female elephant pierced by a hunter with a poisoned arrow (*before* expressing her requests, II.10.4), similar to a tigress (II.10.30). Her words are like a visitation of death (II.10.20): this particular case is a clear example of anticipative function of similes: Daśarātha dies as a result of the evil deeds of his wife.

The relationship between the king and the queen is emphasized by two similes: the king is similar to 'a deer seeing a tigress' when hearing Kaikeyī's requests (II.10.30) and like Bali trapped by Indra (II.12.8).

Two similes precede speech-acts: in II.10.20 (Kaikeyī's words, before announcing her dreadful requests) and in II.12.15. Two instances follow speech-acts within the passage: in II.10.30 (the king's reaction to the queen's words) and in II.10.41 (the king collapsing at the end of his speech).

In the passage featuring the dialogue between Daśarātha and Kaikeyī, similes preceding/following speech-acts are employed, similarly to comparisons occurring within speech-acts, in order to reinforce the idea expressed in the speech, by anticipating or emphasizing the words of the speaker. The anticipative function is quite apparent when similes occur before the character speaks, while similes employed to stress words are often placed after. This idea is also reinforced by the use of descriptive similes within the passage: the relationship between the king and the queen is highlighted with a number of descriptive comparisons, which constitute the frame to the various speech-acts.

Both dialogues analysed in this chapter are key-moments to the main plot: on the events narrated within these two episodes depends the fate of Rāma as regent prince, and his consequent banishment.

The contextual analysis of similes occurring within passages displaying dialogues reveals that:

- 2- Two types of simile occur in passages displaying dialogues: comparisons occurring within the speech-acts and similes preceding/following the speech-acts.
- 3- Both types of comparison are employed in order to reinforce the idea expressed by the speech-acts and to stress differences between the two speakers.
- 4- In both cases, similes are employed to stress important moments within the narrative.
- 5- The contextual analysis of these two types of simile reveals that *upamās* within dialogue can accomplish more than one purpose at a time. The second function becomes apparent when considering other *upamās* within the passage in relation to the event within the main plot.

## 2.2 Similes in narrative passages

As previously mentioned, similes within the narrative can be employed with different purposes within the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The overwhelming majority of comparisons appear to fulfil a descriptive function. But there are two important secondary aspects of this descriptive function, which is apparent within the *Rāmāyaṇa*: on the one hand, the marking of important moments within the passages, on the other hand, the guiding by the similes into the progression of the story.

Each step in the progression of the story is marked, in a very distinctive way, as shown by the analysis of the *sargas* 1-3 of the Ayodhyākāṇḍa. The first three *sargas* of the book, which constituted the original beginning of the text, feature an introductory section, where few of the main characters of the story are introduced by the author, providing a perfect example of descriptive similes.

The main function of similes to be analysed within this section is the marking of important events in the plot. Within the *Rāmāyaṇa* comparisons are often arranged within passages to emphasize important moments, such as a crucial decision, a sudden turn of events in the development of the story or the character's insights on a particular decision.

This is also the case within the analysis of the mutilation of Śūrpaṅkhā: this famous passage is also taken into account because of the coexistence of similes within dialogues and within narrative. The short conversation between Rāma and the demoness features, in fact, instances of similes fulfilling functions similar to those found in the dialogues occurring within the Ayodhyākāṇḍa.

The final section of this chapter considers similes that mark important moments within the narrative. The episode taken into account, in which Garuḍa appears in order to save the life of Rāma and Lākṣmaṇa, provides interesting examples of such similes. The peculiarity of the instances found in this episode, though, is the extent to which these specific functions of similes are employed within the narrative.

## 2.2a Similes that guide the audience, *sargas* 1-3 of the Ayodhyākāṇḍa

Daśaratha, King of Ayodhyā, finally decides to consecrate his son as prince regent. He calls for a *sabhā* to be held in order to announce his decision to the assembly of the noblemen. Along with the main characters, the section also features a detailed description of the palace of Ayodhyā.

*Sarga* 1 features the departure of Bharata and Śatrughna, Rāma's younger brothers, to the city of Kekayā, where their maternal grandfather is waiting for them. Lost in thought, the king considers his own affection towards his sons. This passage, revealing the king's preferences among his sons, features a short sequence:

II.1.8-11

*rājāpi tau mahātejāḥ sasmāra proṣitau sutau /  
ubhau bharataśatrughnau mahendravaruṇopamau //  
sarva eva tu tasyeṣṭāś catvāraḥ puruṣarṣabhāḥ /  
svaśarīrād vinirvṛttāś catvāra iva bāhavaḥ //  
teṣām api mahātejā rāmo ratikaraḥ pītuḥ /  
svayambhūr iva bhūtānām babhūva guṇavattaraḥ //  
gate ca bharate rāmo lakṣmaṇaś ca mahābalaḥ /  
pītaraṃ devasaṃkāśaṃ pūjayām āsatus tadā //*

‘Also the Great King often thought of his two sons, both absent, Bharata and Śatrughna, similar to Great Indra and to Varuṇa.’



‘But he cherished indeed all of the four bulls among men, like four arms extending from his body.’

‘But, among all of them, it was the Mighty Rāma who brought the father most pleasure, as he was the most virtuous, like the Self-existent Brahmā among the other beings.’

‘Then, as Bharata was away, the mighty Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa showed reverence to their god-like father.’

In his brothers’ absence, Rāma fulfils his duties as prince, taking care of the kingdom. *Sarga* 1 features a long description of Rāma’s good-natured personality, concluding with the king’s decision to consecrate him as prince regent.

II.1.26-8

*evam śreṣṭhair guṇair yuktaḥ prajānām pārvivātmajaḥ /  
saṃmatas triṣu lokeṣu vasudhāyāḥ kṣamāguṇaiḥ /  
buddhyā bṛhaspates tulyo vīryeṇāpi śacīpateḥ //  
tathā sarvaprajākāntaiḥ prītiṣaṃjananaiḥ pituḥ /  
guṇair viruruce rāmo dīptaḥ sūrya ivāṃśubhiḥ //  
tam evaṃvṛttasaṃpannam apradhṛṣyaparākramam /  
lokapālopamaṃ nātham akāmayata medinī //*

‘Thus the prince, endued with the best of qualities, he was celebrated by the people of the three worlds, as he was similar to the earth in patience, wise like Bṛhaspati and mighty like Śaci’s Lord (Indra).’

‘Then Rāma, with all those virtues, prized by all people and a source of joy for his father, shone like the sun with his rays.’

‘Such was his mature conduct and invincible valour that he was like a guardian of the world, that the earth desired to have him as a master.’

II.1.31-2

*vṛddhikāmo hi lokasya sarvabhūtānukampanaḥ /  
mattaḥ priyatara loke parjanya iva vṛṣṭimān //  
yamaśakrasamo vīrye bṛhaspatisamo matau /  
mahīdharasamo dhṛtyāṃ mattaś ca guṇavattaraḥ //*

‘Indeed his first desire is the prosperity of the world and he has compassion to all the creatures. He is loved in the world more than I am, like a cloud full of rain.’

‘He is similar to Yama and Śakra in valour, to Bṛhaspati in wisdom, steady as a mountain and richer in virtues than I am.’

II.1.37

*sa labdhamānair vinayānvitair nṛpaiḥ  
purālayair jānapadaś ca mānavaiḥ /  
upopaviṣṭair nṛpatir vṛto babhau  
sahasracakṣur bhagavān ivāmaraiḥ //*

‘The king appeared surrounded by honoured and humble kings, by men from the cities and provinces, sitting respectfully, he resembled the blessed god of thousand eyes (Indra) (surrounded) by the immortals.’

In *sarga* 2, the king calls the assembly in order to deliver the news of his son’s consecration:

II.2.1-2

*tataḥ pariśadaṃ sarvām āmantrya vasudhādhipaḥ /  
hitam uddharṣaṇaṃ cedam uvācāpratimaṃ vacaḥ //  
dudubhisvanakalpena gambhīreṇānunādinā /  
svareṇa mahatā rājā jīmūta iva nādayan //*

‘Then the Lord of the Earth (Daśaratha) called the whole assembly to order with his voice similar to the noise of a kettledrum and resonant like a storm-cloud, the king, with a huge roar, made the incomparable and well-suited speech.’

II.2.9-10

*anujāto hi me sarvair guṇair jyeṣṭho mamātmajaḥ /  
puraṃdarasamo vīrye rāmaḥ parapuraṃjayaḥ //  
taṃ candram iva puṣyeṇa yuktaṃ dharmabhṛtāṃ varam /  
yauvarājyena yoktāsmi prītaḥ puruṣapuṃgavam //*

‘Indeed my eldest son was born with all virtues (resembling) me, Rāma is a conqueror of enemy fortresses, similar to the conqueror of fortresses in prowess.’

‘I will joyfully invest Rāma, champion of righteousness and bull among men, as the

prince regent, a union propitious like the (union) between the constellation Puṣya and the moon.’

At the news of Rāma’s installation as new prince regent, the assembly rejoice:

II.2.13

*iti bruvantaṃ muditāḥ pratyānandan nṛpā nṛpam /  
vṛṣṭimantaṃ mahāmeghaṃ nardantaṃ iva barhiṇaḥ //*

As the king spoke, the kings rejoiced at his words like peacocks at the rumble of a cloud full of rain.

II.2.19

*divyair guṇaiḥ śakrasamo rāmaḥ satyaparākramaḥ /  
ikṣvākubhyo hi sarvebhyo 'py atirikto viśāmpate //*

‘With these divine virtues, Rāma, whose prowess is truth, is equal to Śakra, exceeds indeed all the other Ikṣvākus, Lord of the Earth!’

After Daśaratha’s description of Rāma’s duties, the assembly also sing the prince’s praise, listing his virtues and well-suited behaviour:

II.2.25-6

*saṃgrāmāt punar āgamyā kuñjareṇa rathena vā /  
paurān svajānavan nityaṃ kuśalaṃ pariṛcchati //  
putreṣv agniṣu dāreṣu preṣyaśiṣyagaṇeṣu ca /  
nikhilenānupūrvyā ca pitā putrān ivaurasān //*

‘Coming back from a battle, with his elephant or chariot, he always asks about the welfare of the citizens as if his own kinsmen, about their sons, wives, servants and pupils, without omission and in the right order, like a father with his own children.’

II.2.28-9

*vyasaneṣu manuṣyāṇāṃ bhṛśaṃ bhavati duḥkhitaḥ /  
utsaveṣu ca sarveṣu piteva parituṣyati //  
satyavādī maheṣvāso vṛddhasevī jitendriyaḥ /  
vatsaḥ śreyasi jātas te diṣṭyāsau tava rāghavaḥ /  
diṣṭyā putraguṇair yukto mārīca iva kaśyapaḥ //*

‘When accidents (occur) to the men (of the city) he becomes extremely sad and he enjoys all their celebrations like a father.’

‘He is a great archer, a man who tells the truth, who seeks the counsel of the aged men and a man in control of his senses. You are blessed with a son like yours, Rāghava, born to good fortune, endowed with the favourable virtues of a son like Mārīca Kaśyapa.’

II.2.34

*taṃ devadevopamam ātmajaṃ te*

*sarvasya lokasya hite niviṣṭam /*

*hitāya naḥ kṣipram udārajuṣṭam*

*mudābhiṣektuṃ varada tvam arhasi //*

‘(O Lord!) Your son is similar to the Lord of the gods, committed to the welfare of the entire World. For our good welfare, o Granter of boons, you should quickly consecrate the exalted prince joyfully.’

In *sarga* 3, the king finally communicates his decision to his son. Daśaratha demands that his son go to visit him on the roof-top terrace of the palace:

II.3.8-10

*atha tatra samāsīnās tadā daśarathaṃ nṛpam /*

*prācyodīcyāḥ pratīcyāś ca dākṣiṇātyāś ca bhūmipāḥ //*

*mlecchāś cāryāś ca ye cānye vanaśailāntavāsīnaḥ /*

*upāsāṃ cakrire sarve taṃ devā iva vāsavam //*

*teṣāṃ madhye sa rājarṣir marutām iva vāsavaḥ /*

*prāsādastho rathagataṃ dadarśāyāntam ātmajam //*

‘Then, the Kings who were sitting there, the eastern, western, northern and southern kings, the Mlecchas and the Aryan and all the others who lived in the forests and on the mountains, all paid homage to King Daśaratha, like the Gods to Vāsava.’

‘The royal seer, standing on a terrace among them like Vāsava among the Maruts, looked at his son approaching on his chariot.’

As the king observes the chariot that brings the prince approaching, he looks at his son. The narrative follows the king's gaze and yet another description of Rāma

occurs:

II.3.11-3

*gandharvarājapratimaṃ loke vikhyātapauruṣam /  
dīrghabāhuṃ mahāsattvaṃ mattamātaṅgāminam //  
candrakāntānanaṃ rāmam atīva priyadarśanam /  
rūpaudāryaguṇaiḥ puṃsāṃ dr̥ṣṭicittāpahāriṇam //  
gharmābhitaptāḥ parjanyaṃ hlādayantam iva prajāḥ /  
na tatarpa samāyāntaṃ paśyamāno narādhipaḥ //*

‘(Rāma) was similar to the king of the Gandharvas, known in the entire world for his prowess, having very long arms, endowed with enormous strength and having the gait of an elephant in rut.’

‘Rāma was extremely handsome and with a face (glowing) like the moon. With the beauty and with the qualities of nobility he captivated the eyes and the minds of men.’

‘As he approached, the King could not have enough of the sight of him, like creatures parched by the heat of the summer refreshed by the rain.’

II.3.15

*sa taṃ kailāsaśṛṅgābhaṃ prāsādaṃ narapuṃgavaḥ /  
āruroha nṛpaṃ draṣṭuṃ saha sūtena rāghavaḥ //*

‘Rāghava, bull among men, went to see the king accompanied by his charioteer, ascending the lofty terrace similar to the peak of Mount Kailāsa.’

II.3.19-20

*tad āsanavaraṃ prāpya vyadīpayata rāghavaḥ /  
svayeva prabhayā merum udaye vimalo raviḥ //  
tena vibhrājitā tatra sā sabhābhivyarocata /  
vimalagrahanakṣatrā śārādī dyaur ivendunā //*

‘Rāghava reached the throne and he illuminated it with his own glow, like Mount Meru when the bright sun rises.’

‘There the assembly was lit up by him like the autumn sky with all its bright stars and planets by the moon.’

II.3.22

*sa taṃ sasmitam ābhāṣya putraṃ putratatāṃ varaḥ /*

*uvācedaṃ vaco rājā devendram iva kaśyapaḥ //*

‘The King best of fathers, speaking to his son with a smile, said these words, like Kaśyapa (speaking) to the Lord Indra.’

The encounter between father and son concludes with the advice of the king to the prince:

II.3.28

*tuṣṭānuraktaprakṛtir yaḥ pālayati medinīm /*

*tasya nandanti mitrāṇi labdhvāmṛtam ivāmarāḥ /*

*tasmāt putra tvam ātmānaṃ niyamyaiḥ samācara //*

‘The one who protects the Earth keeping the people happy will please his allies like the immortals obtaining the nectar. For this reason, oh son, hold yourself in check and behave appropriately.’

This section features 31 similes organised into three main descriptions: the first instance occurs in *sarga* 1, when the narrator describes the king’s feelings towards his sons, the second occurs in *sarga* 2, in the speech made by the king in the assembly, the third instance is the visual description of Rāma, occurring within the main narrative, but describing what the king sees.

The way comparisons are arranged within this passage reveals another important function of similes within the narrative: *upamās* can in fact be employed in order to mark important moments within the main narrative, or emphasize the perspective expressed by a character. In *sarga* 1, the description of the King’s feelings towards his sons, is described through a short sequence of similes. The Epic begins with the departure of Bharata and Śatrughna. This event is a crucial one to the main narrative: the presence of Bharata, devoted to his elder brother Rāma, would prevent his mother’s plans to banish his elder brother from Ayodhyā. The absence of Kaikeyī’s son is therefore an important coincidence in the plot. The importance of this moment is emphasized by a simile, describing the king’s pride in his sons. The first *upamā* compares Bharata and Śatrughna to Indra and Varuna and the second instance in verse 9 refers to all four princes, who are like ‘four limbs to their father’s body’. But the short sequence reveals a preference of the king among his offspring:

Rāma is the favourite prince, because of his endless virtues. In verse 10 the eldest son of Daśaratha is compared to Brahmā. Verse 11 describes how, during Bharata and Śatrughna's absence, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa serve their god-like father. Each character occurring within this first passage is described through the use of a comparison. The sequence fulfils an introductory function to the following description of Rāma (vv12-28), which displays four *upamās*, in verses 26-28, where Rāma is compared to Indra, Bṛhaspati, to the sun and to the world guardians. Similes mark an important moment in Daśaratha's thoughts, as we can deduce by verses 29-30, where the king, having observed all the virtues of his son, asks himself when he will be consecrated.<sup>107</sup> Having assembled all the chiefs of the provinces, the king sits in the assembly like 'Indra surrounded by the gods'. The simile emphasizes the image of power and authority evoked by the king surrounded by the assembly of noblemen.

Similes in *sarga* 1 clearly show a pattern which follows the chain of thoughts of Daśaratha, marking the moment in which one thought consequently leads into another. The logical structure in the sequence of similes, which follows the path of the thoughts and actions of the king, can be summed up as follows:

The departure of Bharata and Śatrughna (simile praising them), makes him think about the love for all his sons (simile praising all of them), to his favourite son, Rāma (simile), who is is very virtuous (long description of Rāma's virtues, concluding with two similes), having considered all of his son's virtues he thinks about the consecration (followed by a simile justifying his decision), he calls the assembly and sits among the noblemen (simile portraying the king).

*Sarga* 2 begins with another simile, in this instance the voice of the king speaking at the assembly is emphasized with a comparison: the voice of Daśaratha is likened to the noise of kettledrum or clouds. The comparison marks the beginning of the speech made by the king to the *sabhā*: as shown in section 2.2b, similes often mark the beginning or the end of a speech. After talking about the role of the dynasty of the Ikṣvākus, the king begins the praise of his son, culminating in the announcement of his imminent consecration in verse. Two similes underline this

<sup>107</sup> *Etaiḥ tu bahubhīr yuktam guṇair anupamaiḥ sutam/  
 dr̥ṣṭvā daśaratho rāja cakre cintāṃ param tapah //  
 eṣā hy asya parā prītir hṛdī saṃparivartate /  
 kadā nāma sutam drakṣyāmy abhiṣiktaṃ ahaṃ priyam //*

special moment, comparing Rāma to Indra and the consecration to the conjunction of Puṣya and the moon. The end of Daśaratha's speech is marked by the noblemen's reaction to the news: they rejoice like 'peacocks at the rumble of a cloud full of rain', in verse 13. Noticeably, the king's voice has been previously compared to a cloud full of rain (II.2.2). Questioned by the king on account of their vivid reaction, the noblemen enumerate Rāma's endless virtues, emphasizing his righteous conduct towards the citizens of Ayodhyā. This second portrayal of the prince also displays several similes, most of which underline several aspects of Rāma's personality: he is compared to Indra (v 19 and v 34) to a father twice (vv 26 and 28) and to Mārīca Kaśyapa (v 29). The description clearly evokes the figure of a powerful but sweet-mannered prince, which will be suitable for kingship.

*Sarga* 3 opens with a visual description of the assembly, portraying, in verses 8-10, the noblemen surrounding the king. The portrayal of Rāma occurs when the king observes the approaching chariot bringing his son to the terrace. The eyes of the king follow his son's movements: a sequence of various types of similes, such as animal, mythological similes and comparisons displaying celestial bodies as *upamānas* are employed within this passage.

Similes are arranged to express one single idea: that the time for Rāma to be consecrated as prince regent has arrived. The king is compared to Indra in II.3.8-10, in II.2.28-29 the assembly referred to Rāma as Kaśyapa, but in II.3.22 the king is Kaśyapa, and Rāma is Indra. The description of the lofty rooftop terrace also reinforces this idea within the passage: the rooftop is described in verse II.3.15 as being 'like mount Kailāsa' and similar to Mount Meru, but Rāma, with his glowing face and the brilliancy of his figure, illuminates the throne and the whole lofty terrace (v19). The physical features and virtues of Rāma make the throne shine.

The contextual analysis of similes within this passage clearly shows that similes within this narrative passage accomplish two main functions: the marking of important moments, and the expression of the character's point of view

## 2.2b- The mutilation of Śūrpaṅkhā (Rm III.16-17)

Another important role is fulfilled by the *rākṣasas* the hero meets in the forest. Parkhill calls them the 'threshold guardians', pointing out that: 'In the Hindu epics



the *rākṣasas* at the edge of a forest represent the watchful powers on the edge of the unknown against whom the heroes repeatedly demonstrate their competence and courage'.<sup>108</sup> Several demons reveal themselves to be positive characters, showing the heroes the way, or as in the case of the *Mahābhārata*, even giving birth to children fathered by the hero (as in the case of Bhīma and Hiḍimbā). This positive attitude is often revealed after a struggle or after the defeat of the demon, which is sometimes revealed to be a demon because of a curse, as in the case of Virādha. The case of the Śūrpaṅkhā is different though, since the *rākṣasī* plays a different role within the main plot: the encounter with the demoness triggers a series of events that will lead to the war between Rāma and Rāvaṇa.

The mutilation of Śūrpaṅkhā, one of the most famous episodes within the *Rāmāyaṇa*, is one of the many encounters with *rākṣasas* during Rāma's stay in the forest. While in Pāñcavatī, Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa meet the *rākṣasī* Śūrpaṅkhā. The demoness starts making sexual advances to Rāma, who flatters her with compliments. Mistakenly considering Sītā the only obstacle to her wedding to Rāma, the demoness tries to attack Rāma's wife, prompting Lakṣmaṇa's reaction, who badly mutilates her. The episode, central to the main narrative, triggers another encounter between Rāma and the *rākṣasas*: having been badly mutilated by Lakṣmaṇa, Śūrpaṅkhā goes to her brother Khara, asking for help. After Khara's defeat, Śūrpaṅkhā resorts to her elder brother Rāvaṇa. Although the *rākṣasī* does not fulfil the role of 'guardian of the threshold', the encounter with her will lead to more fights, and consequently to the war against the *rākṣasas*.

The account of the event begins with a description of Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, talking in their leaf-hut. A simile is employed to describe Rāma and Sītā sitting next to each other:

III.16.3

*sa rāmaḥ parṇaśālāyām āsīnaḥ saha sītayā /*  
*virarāja mahābāhuś citrayā candramā iva /*  
*lakṣmaṇena saha bhrātrā cakāra vivīdhāḥ kathāḥ //*

'The great-armed Rāma, sitting in the leaf hut with Sītā, shone like the moon beside Citrā. He began to talk to his brother Lakṣmaṇa about many things.'

<sup>108</sup> Parkhill 1995: 136

Śūrpaṅakhā approaches them, with her eyes on Rāma:

III.16.6-7

*siṃhoraskam mahābāhuṃ padmapatranibhekṣaṇam /  
sukumāraṃ mahāsattvaṃ pāṛthivavyaṅjanānvitam //  
rāmam indīvaraśyāmaṃ kandarpasadṛśaprabham /  
babhūvendropamaṃ dṛṣṭvā rākṣasī kāmamohitā //*

‘With the chest of a lion, great-armed, with eyes like lotus petals, a fine youth very strong and bearing all the signs of royalty, Rāma, dark like the blue lotus, radiant like the god of love, was similar to Indra, and when the rākṣasī saw him, she grew wild with desire.’

Questioned by the demoness, the prince introduces himself:

II.16.13

*āsīd daśaratho nāma rājā tridaśavikramaḥ /  
tasyāham agrajaḥ putro rāmo nāma janaiḥ śrutaḥ //*

‘There was a king named Daśaratha, valorous like the thirty gods, and I am his eldest son, called Rāma, famed among the people.’

Having declared her love for Rāma, the demoness asks him to be her husband.

Rāma's reply is a humorous one:

III.17.5

*enaṃ bhaja viśālākṣi bhartāraṃ bhrātaraṃ mama /  
asapatnā varārohe merum arkaprabhā yathā //*

‘Large-eyed woman, serve this brother of mine, as a wife. As without a co-wife, o elegant woman, you will be shining like the sun on mount Meru.’

Lakṣmaṇa, imitating his brother, also mocks Śūrpaṅakhā, inviting her to become the junior wife of his brother. Angry at the mockery she has to endure, the demoness tries to attack Sītā:

III.17.17-8

*ity uktvā mṛgaśāvākṣīm alātasadṛśekṣaṇā /*

*abhyadhāvat susaṃkruddhā maholkā rohiṇīm iva //*  
*tāṃ mṛtyupāśapratimām āpatantīm mahābalaḥ /*  
*nigrhya rāmaḥ kupitas tato lakṣmaṇam abravīt //*

‘Having spoken thus, she became enraged, and with eyes flashing like firebrands she rushed towards the fawn-eyed (princess) like a giant meteor towards Rohiṇī.’

‘As she was about to fall upon her, similar to the noose of death, mighty Rāma, having restrained her, angrily told Lakṣmaṇa.’

Rāma asks his brother to mutilate Śūrpaṅkhā. Lakṣmaṇa obeys his brother and brutally disfigures the *rākṣasī*.

III.17.23

*sā virūpā mahāghorā rākṣasī śonitokṣitā /*  
*nanāda vivīdhān nādān yathā prāvṛṣi toyadaḥ //*

‘The *rākṣasī*, mutilated and extremely dreadful and spattered with blood, roared several times, like a storm cloud in the rainy season.’

Wounded and disfigured, Śūrpaṅkhā reaches the settlement where her brother Khara lives and asks for revenge:

III.17.25

*tatas tu sā rākṣasasamghasamvṛtaṃ*  
*kharaṃ janasthānagataṃ virūpitā /*  
*upetya taṃ bhrātaram ugratejasam*  
*papāta bhūmau gaganād yathāśaniḥ //*

‘But then, mutilated, she made her way to her brother Khara, endowed with terrible energy, who was staying in Janasthāna surrounded by a group of *rākṣasas*, and fell before him on the ground like a thunderbolt from the sky.’

The sequence of *upamās* employed within the whole passage shows a well defined structure. Similes employed within this famous passage can be divided according to the function they fulfil within the immediate context in which they occur: several decorative similes are employed along with comparisons emphasising a speech-act.

The idyllic portrait of the three main characters conversing at the leaf-hut is

emphasised by a comparison, comparing Rāma and Sītā to the moon and the constellation Citrā (III.16.3). This simile highlights the superior status of the two characters to the demoness and underlines the special bond between husband and wife. Śūrpaṅakhā, with her lustful attempt to court Rāma first, and later with the request for help from her brother Rāvaṇa, will try and partially succeed to break the bond between them.

The second instance, occurring in verses III.16.6-7, describes Rāma and his physical beauty. This is not just an ordinary description of the prince: this is how the demoness sees him. The description of his beauty is indeed an insight into the *rākṣasī*'s feelings and thoughts. This simile plays an important role within the passage: it underlines an important event within the episodes, that is to say the *rākṣasī*'s lustful attraction towards the prince. A third simile occurs in verse III.16.13: Rāma introduces himself to Śūrpaṅakhā. The comparison praises the valour of king Daśaratha. The mention of his lineage is not casual: Rāma states his superior status to the demoness.

A simile is employed by Rāma to tease the *rākṣasī*: encouraging her to marry his brother, the prince tells the demoness that, having married Lakṣmaṇa, she will shine 'like the sun' (III.17.5). This simile clearly mocks the demoness, whose appearance we know to be dreadful. Porcher points out how, within this episode, descriptive similes are employed in order to stress the physical differences between Rāma and Śūrpaṅakhā.<sup>109</sup>

Śūrpaṅakhā becomes increasingly angry at Sītā: the demoness threatens to slay the princess and her threats are emphasised by a simile (III.17.17). Another *upamā* follows, stressing Rāma's orders to kill the demoness (III.17.18). In this case two comparisons are employed in order to underline the importance of words that are about to be said: the words spoken by Rāma order the mutilation of Śūrpaṅakhā. Lakṣmaṇa obeys his brother and carries out his orders. The demoness, badly mutilated, leaves. Two similes close the episode, both likening the *rākṣasī* to atmospheric events. In III.17.23 she is compared to a storm cloud, in verse 25 she is described as being similar to a thunderbolt falling from the sky. The two similes fulfil also an anticipative function: they convey a sense of a threat and

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<sup>109</sup> Porcher 1996: 433.

inauspiciousness.

The analysis of this famous passage highlights several functions fulfilled by comparisons: similes tend to mark important moments within the passage. When Rāma speaks his orders to Lakṣmaṇa, a simile emphasizes this moment, as we know, her mutilation causes Sītā's abduction and the consequent war between Rāvaṇa and Rāma..

Similes at the beginning of important passages often are particularly important to the main plot, because they provide a frame-image: the initial simile portraying Rāma and Sītā provides a perfect incipit to the episode, whose central theme is the bond between husband and wife, whose relationship will be severely tested by the events that will follow their encounter with the demoness.

Similes within this section are arranged so that, guided by the comparisons, the audience is allowed to foresee events that will happen and focus on important actions that occur within the passage.

#### 2.2c- Similes that mark important moments within the narrative:

##### Garuḍa's healing power (Rm VI.40)

In the Yuddhakāṇḍa several instances of similes emphasising important moments occur. One of the most noticeable episodes is the struggle between Indrajit, Rāvaṇa's son, and Rāma and Lākṣmaṇa, which results in the temporary defeat of the two princes, who are eventually saved by the healing power of Garuḍa. Comparisons appear to be placed to mark the important passages within the episode.

At the beginning of the siege of Laṅkā, the battle ensues between the two opposing armies. In the initial phases of the war Indrajit takes part. When fighting against Rāma and Lākṣmaṇa, Indrajit, who has the power to become invisible whenever he wants, uses the trick to assail the two princes. When invisible to the eyes of Rāma and Lākṣmaṇa, he discharges a huge number of arrows, which seriously wound the two brothers. At this stage the army panics, believing the two brothers to be dead. Sugrīva, the Vānara king, unaware of what happened to the two brothers, wonders why the army flees:

VI.40.1

*athovāca mahātejā harirājo mahābalaḥ /*

*kim iyaṃ vyathitā senā mūḍhavāteva naur jale //*

‘Then the glorious and mighty king of apes said: why is the army agitated like a boat on the water, by a fickle wind.’

The second image portrays Rāma and Lākṣmaṇa lying on the ground, wounded by the arrows, as described by Vibhīṣaṇa, who approached them in order to assist them:

VI.40.17

*śarair imāv alaṃ viddhau rudhireṇa samukṣitau /  
vasudhāyām imau suptau dṛśyete śalyakāv iva //*

‘Those two, pierced by abundant arrows and spattered in blood, resembled two porcupines asleep on the ground.’

Believing the two princes to be too seriously wounded to continue in the battle, Sugrīva takes responsibility for Sītā's rescue:

VI.40.25

*ahaṃ tu rāvaṇaṃ hatvā saputraṃ sahabāndhavam /  
maithilīm ānayaṣyāmi śakro naṣṭām iva śriyam //*

‘But I, having killed Rāvaṇa along with his son and his family, shall rescue Maithilī like Śakra (saving) his lost Śrī.’

Before the king of Monkeys decides to send Hanumān to fetch the magical herb to heal Rāma and Lākṣmaṇa, Garuḍa appears. The moment in which the divine bird appears, is marked by a simile:

VI.40.36

*tato muhūrtad garuḍaṃ vainateyaṃ mahābalaṃ /  
vānarā dadṛśuḥ sarve jvalantam iva pāvakaṃ //*

‘Then a moment later all the vānaras saw the mighty Garuḍa, the son of Vinata, blazing like fire.’

The bird salutes the two brothers, touching their faces. The touch of the divine bird heals the wounds:

VI.40.38

*tataḥ suparṇaḥ kākutsthau dṛṣṭvā pratyabhinandya ca /  
vimamarśa ca pāṇibhyāṃ mukhe candrasamaprabhe //*

‘Then Suparṇa, having seen and saluted the two Kākutsthas, with his wings stroked their faces whose radiance was similar to the full moon’s.’

After healing the Rāghavas, Suparṇa leaves:

VI.40.59

*pradakṣiṇaṃ tataḥ kṛtvā pariṣvajya ca vīryavān /  
jagāmākāśam āviśya suparṇaḥ pavano yathā //*

‘Having gone around him and having embraced him, the heroic Suparṇa similar to the wind left reaching the sky.’

As Rāma and Lākṣmaṇa appear to have been completely healed by the divine birds, the army rejoice:

VI.40.60

*virujau rāghavau dṛṣṭvā tato vānarayūthapāḥ /  
siṃhanādāṃs tadā nedur lāṅgūlaṃ dudhuvuś ca te //*

‘Then, having seen the two Rāghavas healed, the vānara leaders with a lion-like roar, then roared and shook their tails.’

A second simile, very similar to the previous instance in verse 60, appears in verse VI.40.64:

*tatas tu bhīmas tumulo ninādo  
babhūva śākhāmr̥gayūthapānām /  
kṣaye nidāghasya yathā ghanānām  
nādaḥ subhīmo nadatām niśīthe //*

‘Then, a terrible roar was released from the leaders of the monkey troops, like a terrible noise of a mass of clouds resounding in the night, at the end of the summer.’

Within the short section analysed, a number of comparisons occurring in key moments of the passage can be identified. The arrival of Garuḍa and his divine intervention are the most relevant events within this episode, although other

important moments also occur. At the very beginning of the section, we see the army panicking as a result of the sight of the two brothers seriously wounded on the battlefield.<sup>110</sup> The army flees, compared, by Sugrīva, to ‘a boat being blown away by the wind’. The second simile occurs in verse 17, when Vibhīṣaṇa reports seeing Rāma and Lākṣmaṇa ‘lying like two porcupines asleep on the earth’. The third instance occurs in verse 25 where Sugrīva resolves to save Sītā, despite the defeat of Rāma and Lākṣmaṇa in battle: the resolution to continue the war is also a very important moment within the passage, establishing the loyalty of the king of monkeys and compelling Sugrīva's counsellors to advise the king to ask Hanūman to go and fetch the ambrosia that will heal the two brothers. The advice certainly is a consequence of the apparent will of the king to carry on with the war. But the task will not be accomplished, because of Garuḍa's prompt intervention. Three similes mark this important appearance: the instance in verse 36 describes the arrival of the divine bird, that in verse 38 marks the moment in which the bird heals Rāma and Lākṣmaṇa, and the simile in verse 59 marks the moment in which the bird leaves. The three similes employ the following upamānas: celestial bodies, (the sun in verse 36, the moon in verse 38) and atmospheric events (the wind in verse 59).

After the bird finally leaves, the army, realising that Rāma and Lākṣmaṇa are again ready for battle, rejoice. Simile in verse 60, portraying the army celebrating, closes a ring: the episode opens with the army fleeing in terror (Rm VI.40.1) and closes with the rejoicing army (Rm VI.40.60). That this is the main purpose of the simile is quite apparent in the occurrence of a second simile in verse 64, very similar in content to the instance in verse 60, where, again the army celebrates.

That similes in this section clearly are employed in order to mark important moments is apparent if we single out each event marked by the simile:

- v. 40: the army flee
- v. 17: the two brothers lying wounded on the battlefield
- v. 25: Sugrīva's resolution to save Sītā
- v. 36: Garuḍa arrives
- v. 38: Garuḍa heals the brothers

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<sup>110</sup> The army also flees at the sight of Vibhīṣaṇa, believing him to be Indrajit. In order to clarify the mistake, Sugrīva asks the king of bears, Jāmbavān, to tell the army that the rākṣasa standing next to the brothers is indeed Vibhīṣaṇa.



v. 59: Garuḍa leaves

v. 60: the army celebrates

v. 64: the army celebrates

The structure of the episode is similar to a ring: the *upameya* of the first and the last similes are the same. The passage employs similes in order to mark important moments, but this emphasis also provides a frame within which the main events unfold.

### 2.3 Similes in passages displaying dialogues versus similes in narrative passages

Similes occurring within the *Rāmāyaṇa* can be broadly divided (as first suggested by Porcher) into similes occurring within dialogues and similes featured in narrative passages. This division is not purely based on the classification of the passages in which the comparisons occur, but rather on the function fulfilled by the simile in that passage.

The present analysis partly confirms Porcher's; similes in narrative passages tend to stress antitheses between characters. As the contextual analysis of comparisons in this thesis shows, similes in descriptive/narrative passages are also employed in order to stress important moments within the narrative, by guiding the audience in the evolution of the episode.

The contextual analysis of similes occurring within dialogues demonstrates that *upamās* are often employed, within the *Rāmāyaṇa*, in order to stress an idea expressed by the speech-acts. Similes preceding/following speech-acts often fulfil a very similar function. In both cases the idea expressed in the speech-act becomes more apparent when considering other similes (often descriptive similes) occurring within the passage.

The analysis of the passages taken into account reveals a deliberate intent by the authors of the Epic, who were employing similes as literary devices with the intent of drawing the audience's attention towards important moments within the narrative or towards antitheses

### 3. Similarities between the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa

The work carried out during my research on similes within the Epics, reveals that there are groups of comparisons which occur in relation to specific themes within the main narrative.

The Sanskrit Epics share two types of comparisons: the abusive similes and the mythological similes in battle scenes. In the case of the abusive similes, comparisons occurring in both Epics are considered the structure of similes is considered, as well as range of *upamānas* employed within the similes. In the case of the mythological comparisons, two characteristics will be taken into account: the range of *upamānas* and the moment in which the comparisons occur within the narrative.

#### 3.1 Abusive similes

The investigation takes into account the Dyūtaparvan of the *Mahābhārata*, a dialogue form the Karṇaparvan and a passage occurring within the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the abduction of Sītā. The analysis of this famous episode of Rāma's story highlights the similarities between similes featured within the Dyūtaparvan and comparisons occurring in that passage, followed by the analysis of a third instance: the harsh exchange between Karṇa and Śalya. This particular case shows features common to both previous instances: the Karṇaparvan, in fact, employs more sophisticated abusive similes, displaying similarities with both instances occurring in the Dyūtaparvan and instances in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The analysis of *upamās* within the Dyūtaparvan is first taken into account, to show how similes are employed within discourses, then, the present research focuses on the abusive similes, in order to highlight the different types featured elsewhere by the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*.

The aim of this analysis is to show how, within the Sabhāparvan and the Karṇaparvan of the *Mahābhārata*, a specific type of comparison repeatedly occurs within dialogues, a set group of abusive<sup>111</sup> *upamās* within the traditional stock-in-trade comparisons.

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<sup>111</sup> By the word “abusive”, I imply, similes employed in order to insult somebody; therefore, regardless of the *upamānas* displayed by the simile, the word classifies comparison employed with a specific function.

### 3.1a The Dyūtaparvan

The Sabhāparvan is considered the key book of the Mahābharata, in which the events in the main narration lead to the loss of the kingdom and the consequent fratricidal war between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas. Within the second book sub-sections, the Dyūtaparvan features the intense chain of events that will lead to the exile of the five protagonists of the *Mahābhārata*.

According to Edgerton<sup>112</sup> the number of inconsistencies shown by the Dyūtaparvan's plot is consistent with the hypothesis of two parallel versions amalgamated into one. As later shown by Renate Söhnen-Thieme,<sup>113</sup> a careful analysis of the sub-section reveals that the triṣṭubh verses only duplicate the contents of the anuṣṭubh verses. This inclines the author to consider the former later than the latter.

The Dyūtaparvan features a number of discourses and conversations among different characters, mainly between Vidura and Duryodhana, displaying a considerable number of similes. A number of *upamās* within the section occur in descriptive passages. Duryodhana, during his conversation with his uncle, profusely describes the Pāṇḍavas and their riches. Talking to Śakuni, he tells him that the sacrifice held by the Pāṇḍavas was similar to the one Indra held among the Gods (II.43.20, *yathā śakrasya deveṣu tathābhūtaṃ mahādyute*). He also says that his enviousness is burning him day and night, drying him like a small pond (II.43.21, *śuṣye toyam ivālpakam*). He also describes the kings waiting at the gates of the Hall like vaiśyas paying taxes (II.43.25, *vaiśyā iva karapradāḥ*). Then Duryodhana talks about the previous attempts to kill the Pāṇḍavas, all miserably failed, while Yudhiṣṭhira prospers like a lotus on the water (II.43.33, *vṛddho'psv iva pañkajam*).

Similes appear again in *adhyāya* 46, after two chapters where no comparison is employed. The first instances found are employed in the conversation between King Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his son Duryodhana. The King tries to convince his son to give

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<sup>112</sup> Preface to the Sabhāparvan, Critical Edition II, xxxiii.

<sup>113</sup> See Söhnen-Thieme, R.1999: 'On the Composition of the Dyūtaparvan in the Mahābhārata', in *Composing a Tradition: Concepts, Techniques and their relationships. Proceedings of the First Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas*. Croatian Academy of Science and Arts. Zagreb. 139-154.

up his envy and the decision to hold a dicing game to take revenge on the Pāṇḍavas. The king lists all Duryodhana's possessions that make him shine like the lord of the gods in Heaven (II.46.16, *divi deveśvaro yathā*). But the prince replies that his fortunes are not even comparable to Yudhiṣṭhira's: the Kauravas resemble servants if compared to him (II.46.21, *āvarjitā ivābhānti nighnās*).

In *adhyāya* 47 Duryodhana tells about the riches amassed by the Pāṇḍavas at the consecration, describing the horses they received as homage as having the swiftness of the wind (II.47.13, *anilaramhasaḥ*). He also relates how some of the ambassadors of other countries have been refused at the gates of the Hall, although bringing many riches as gifts:

II.47.16-18:

*ekapādāṃś ca tatrāham apaśyaṃ dvāri vāritān /*  
*balyarthaṃ dadatas tasmai hiraṇyaṃ rajataṃ bahu //*  
*indragopakavarṇābhāñ śukavarṇān manojavān /*  
*athaivendrāyuddhanibhān saṃdhyābhrasadrśān api //*  
*anekavarṇān āraṇyān grhītvāśvān manojavān /*  
*jātarupam anarghyaṃ ca dadus tasyaikapādakāḥ //*

‘I myself saw the One-footers excluded at the gate, after they arrived with large tributes in gold and silver. They brought horses, some of the colour of rain mites, of parrot-colours, fast as thought and some resembling the rainbow, others the clouds at twilight. They seized many-coloured wild horses as fast as thought, and the One-footers presented him with priceless gold. ’

The description continues in *adhyāya* 48, with more details about the tribute. In II.48.5 Duryodhana tells about the honey and the yak-plumes, glittering like the moon (*śaśiprabhān*). In II.48.19 he relates about the elephants, as big as mountains (*śailābhān*). In the next *adhyāya* the description concludes with the assembled kings and seers that resemble the seven seers in heaven who came to the great Indra, the king of Gods (II.49.12, *mahendram iva devendraṃ divi saptarṣayo yathā*). The last

instance in this chapter is in the lament of Duryodhana, who tells his father that, like a yoke tied by a blind man (II.49.24, *andheneva yugam naddham*), all has come loose: the junior branch prospers and the senior one declines. This kind of proverbial simile occurs several times across the section, particularly in the speeches made by the men in the assembly during the dicing game.

In *adhyāya* 50 comparisons are non-decorative and quite short. Here the similes add more emphasis to Duryodhana's speech, in order to convince his father to hold the dicing game. All similes seem to be proverbial, such as for instance in II.50.21, where Duryodhana says that the king who does not contend is eaten up by the earth, like a snake eats up mice (*sarpo bilaśayān iva*). In II.50.23, he expresses the concern caused by the flourishing of the Pāṇḍavas, by saying how they will, one day, cut the Kauravas' roots, like a swelling disease (*vyādhir āpyāyita iva*). A similar comparison is employed in II.18.13 by Yudhiṣṭhira, before the departure of his brothers for the conquest of Jarāsaṃdha. But while the former is talking about the cousins and the danger they represent for himself, the latter expresses his concerns about the expedition: Yudhiṣṭhira without his brothers feels miserable like a disease. The third instance is in II.50.24, where a more articulated comparison is employed to describe the danger the Pāṇḍavas represent:

II.50.24:

*alpo 'pi hy arir atyantam vardhamānaparākramah/  
valmīko mūlaja iva grasate vṛkṣam antikāt //*

‘Though small, an enemy whose strength grows in an excessive way swallows you up, like an anthill swallows up the tree near whose root it was born.’

This simile, a longer one, is neither formulaic nor decorative. It is rather similar to a short story set up in order to explain Duryodhana's point of view.

Only one instance occurs in *adhyāya* 51: trying to convince his father to hold the game, Duryodhana tells him that the indulgent person who avoids risks and protects himself, perishes as if he were standing like straw that putrefies in the rainy season (II.51.8, *varṣāsu klinnakaṭavat*).

In *adhyāya* 52 Vidura is sent to invite the Pāṇḍavas. At his meeting with Yudhiṣṭhira the latter asks the former about his uncle, King Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Vidura replies telling him that the old king is healthy and he sits in the midst of his kinsmen similar to Indra (II.52.6, *Indrakalpaiḥ*). After inviting him to the dicing game, Vidura tries to discourage Yudhiṣṭhira from accepting the challenge, but the king of Indraprastha replies that he is obliged to accept because he has to follow his destiny:

II.52.18

*daivam prajñāṃ tu muṣṇāti tejaś cakṣur ivāpatat /*

*dhātuś ca vaśam anveti pāśair iva naraḥ sitaḥ //*

‘Fate steals one’s reason like glare blinds the eyes.

A man follows the will of the Placer as if tied with fetters. ’

This sentence reflects all Yudhiṣṭhira’s awareness of the events to come. Both simile and utprekṣā are proverbial rather than decorative. The last simile is in II.52.27: the queen Gāndhārī surrounded by all her sisters-in-law resembles the constellation Rohinī surrounded by the stars (*tārābhir iva rohiṇīm*). The constellation of Rohinī does not shine at all: the simile probably refers to the voluntary blindness of Gāndhārī.

Two similes employing the gods and the sun occur in *adhyāya* 53:

II.53.20-21

*śuśubhe sā sabhā rājan rājabhis taiḥ samāgataiḥ /*

*devair iva mahābhāgaiḥ samavetais triviṣṭapam //*

*sarve vedavidaḥ sūrāḥ sarve bhāsvaramūrtayaḥ /*

*prāvartata mahārāja suhrddyūtam anantaram //*

‘The Hall, oh king, shone with the assembled kings as heaven with the lordly assembled gods. With all these veda-wise champions, all like the sun incarnate, then, great King, the family game began at once. ’

The close symbolism between the sun and the gods in general has been already analysed in my previous paper.<sup>114</sup> It is a very common parallel within the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>115</sup>

Two interesting similes are in *adhyāya* 54, when the game has already started and Yudhiṣṭhira is staking all his possessions. In the first case he bets his chariot, that is victorious and holy, resounding like the clouds or the sea (II.54.5, *meghasāgaranisvannah*). In the second instance he stakes his elephants, resembling clouds or mountains (II.54.10, *nagameghanibhā*), both similes employ the clouds as *upamānas*.

In *adhyāya* 55 we find another kind of simile. The mood in the narration has changed: Vidura asks Dhṛtarāṣṭra to stop Yudhiṣṭhira from betting his riches. He tries to do so, although he knows that his words will not please him, more than a medicine for a moribund man (II.55.1, *mumūrṣor auśadham iva*). It is at this stage that the insults towards Duryodhana start. Vidura, trying to make him change his mind, tells Dhṛtarāṣṭra that the evil-minded Duryodhana was destined to be the killer of the lineage of the Bhāratas since his birth, when he appeared shrieking like a jackal:

II.55.02

*yad vai purā jātamātro rurāva*  
*gomāyuvad visvaram pāpacetāḥ /*  
*duryodhano bhāratānām kulaghnaḥ*  
*so 'yam yukto bhavitā kālahetuḥ //*

‘As soon as he was born he was shrieking like a jackal, the evil-minded Duryodhana, the slayer of the lineage of the Bhāratas, he will be the future cause for (our) Death ’

This short simile is an anticipation of the list of insults with which Vidura will address Duryodhana.

Other instances of very short similes appear in this chapter: some of them are small comparisons added to a short story, such as in II.55.4-5, a short tale about a

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<sup>114</sup> Antonella Cosi, ‘The importance of contextual analysis in studies of similes: the case of the Śīsupāla episode in the Mahābhārata’ presented at the 4<sup>th</sup> Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas (Dubrovnik 2005).

<sup>115</sup> Sharma 1964: 33.

mead-drinker, who, drunk, does not care about his kinsmen and loses everything; the comparison follows the story in II.55.5 (*madhuvat*). A sequence of short similes is in II.55.14-16. The first of them recalls a short story told in II.55.13, where a man strangled his own birds, later repenting. Vidura tells Yudhiṣṭhira not to betray the Pāṇḍavas, as the man did with the birds (II.55.14, *pakṣihā puruṣo yathā*). He also encourages the eldest Pāṇḍava to care about his brothers and not to pluck them, like a garland maker (II.55.15, *mālākāra iva*). He also exhorts him not to burn them, like the charcoal burner with the tree (II.55.16, *vṛkṣāṅgakarīva*).

In *adhyāya* 56 there is the final exhortation, telling him about Duryodhana's plot to take away from Yudhiṣṭhira his possessions:

II.56.3

*duryodhāno madenaiva kṣemaṃ rāṣṭrādapohati /*

*viṣāṇaṃ gaur iva madāt svayam ārujate balāt //*

‘Duryodhana, in folly, robs the kingdom of its safety, like a bull, because of its sexual excitement, breaks his own horn with strength. ’

The insult addressed to Duryodhana again displays an animal as an *upamāna*. The insults continue in the next *adhyāya*, where Duryodhana replies to Vidura's abuse:

II.57.3

*utsaṅgena vyāla ivāhrto 'si*

*mānjāravat poṣakaṃ copahaṃsi /*

*bhartṛghnatvān na hi pāpīya āhus*

*tasmāt kṣattaḥ kiṃ na bibheṣi pāpāt //*

‘Like a snake sitting on one's lap, like a cat who hurts the one who feeds it, they say that fratricide is the worst thing, so why Steward, are you not afraid of (such an) evil act? ’

Verse II.57.15 features Vidura's reply:

*na śreyase nīyate mandabuddhiḥ*



*strī śrotriyasyeva gr̥he pradus̥tā /  
dhruvam̄ na roced bharatar̥ṣabhasya  
patiḥ kumāryā iva ṣaṣṭivar̥ṣaḥ //*

‘A stupid man leads to no good, like a corrupt woman in the house of a scholar. He does not suit the bull of the Bharatas like a sexagenarian does not suit a girl.’

*Adhyāya* 58 contains mostly very short similes, several of them in *triṣṭubh* verses. The similes are not decorative: in II.58.14, Yudhiṣṭhira staking Sahadeva tells Śakuni to play against him like an enemy (*apriyavat*). In II.58.17, sure of being the victim of adharmic deeds, he argues with his opponent, who wants to pluck them like flowers (*sumanasām*).

Then Śakuni tells Yudhiṣṭhira that he prattles like mad-men (II.58.19, *utkaṭā iva*). When the Pāṇḍavas’ elder brother stakes Arjuna, he compares him to a boat that carried everyone in battle (II.58.20, *naur iva*).

The first longer comparison of *adhyāya* 58 occurs in II.58.23, when Yudhiṣṭhira stakes Bhīmasena, comparing him to the thunderbolt-wielder, Dānava’s foe (*yathā vajrī dānavaśatrur ekaḥ*).

A sequence of short comparisons refers to Draupadī when Yudhiṣṭhira bets her: in II.58.33 she is compared to the goddess Śrī (*Śrīsamānayā*), in II.58.36 she is described as having a lotus-like face (*padmavat*) that shines like the jasmine (*mallikeva*). When Yudhiṣṭhira stakes Draupadī, the assembly raises its voice, and in the midst of the general confusion, Vidura, fearing bad consequences, seizes his face in despair, annihilated, hissing like a snake (II.58.40, *niḥśvasan pannago yathā*).

After the final stake, in which Draupadī has been lost, Vidura warns Duryodhana of the dangerousness of his misdeeds. He tells him that he is like a bamboo that comes into flower only to kill itself (II.59.5, *veṇur ivātmaghātī*). He also adds that the ones who speak neither good nor bad of the householder, speak ill of the wiser ascetic, barking like dogs (II.59.9, *śvanarāḥ sadaiva*).

Within the Dyūtaparvan, two types of abusive similes can be identified. The first type employs animals as *upamānas*. The insults perpetrated towards Duryodhana

very often compare him to animals, such as cats, snakes<sup>116</sup> and bulls.<sup>117</sup> Generally, animals as *upamānas* are a common feature of similes within the Epics, although they can be employed in different ways: the bull, for instance, within the Epic literature is generally a symbol of strength and power, but the image of a ‘bull that because of its sexual excitement, breaks his own horn with strength’<sup>118</sup> obviously conveys a completely different meaning.

A second type, curiously occurring in longer verses, employs a range of *upamānas* including gurus, old men, and improbable situations in general.

The range of *upamānas* employed within the set of similes expressing contempt within the Dyūtaparvan is very important: as the examination of similes within the abduction of Sītā and in the dialogue between Karṇa and Śalya suggests, abusive similes tend to employ these two types of *upamānas*.

### 3.2b The Abduction of Sītā

The abduction of Sītā is one of the most famous episodes within the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the crucial moment in which the fate of Rāvaṇa as a victim of Rāma's wrath, is decided.

In the Araṇyakāṇḍa, Sītā, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa reach Pañcavaṭī, where they establish an ashram. After the encounter with the *rākṣasī* Śūrpaṇakhā (III.16-17), whom Lakṣmaṇa badly mutilates and the fight against Khara, the *rākṣasī*'s brother (III.21-29), Rāvaṇa, the king of Laṅkā and brother of the *rākṣasī*, decides to seek revenge against Rāma. In order to abduct Sītā, he draws the two princes away from the ashram: with the help of the reluctant *rākṣasa* Mārīca, disguised as a golden deer, he manages to make the two princes leave Sītā alone in the ashram. Disguised himself as a beggar, Rāvaṇa approaches Sītā, only to reveal himself a few moments later and seize her. As the king of Laṅkā tries to leave on his chariot Sītā rebukes him. Her words, basically a series of insults, feature a number of similes:

III.45.40-44

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<sup>116</sup> Rm, II.57a-b.

<sup>117</sup> Rm, II.56.3

<sup>118</sup> Rm, II.56.3

*yad antaraṃ siṃhaśṛgālayor vane*  
*yad antaraṃ syandanikāsamudrayoḥ /*  
*surāgryasauvīrakayor yad antaraṃ*  
*tad antaraṃ dāśarathes tavaiva ca //*  
*yad antaraṃ kāñcanasīsalohayor*  
*yad antaraṃ candanavāripankayoḥ /*  
*yad antaraṃ hastibiḍālayor vane*  
*tad antaraṃ daśarathes tavaiva ca //*  
*yad antaraṃ vāyasavainateyayor*  
*yad antaraṃ madgumayūrayor api /*  
*yad antaraṃ sārasagrḍhrayor vane*  
*tad antaraṃ dāśarathes tavaiva ca //*

'The same difference between a lion and a jackal in the forest, the difference between the ocean and a small pond, the difference between good wine and vinegar, such is the difference between the son of Dāśaratha and you.'

‘ The same difference between gold and lead, the difference between sandal paste and mud, the difference between an elephant and a cat in the forest, such is the difference between the son of Dāśaratha and you.’

‘The same difference between a crow and Garuḍa, the difference between a sea-gull and a peacock, the difference between a crane and a vulture, such is the difference between the son of Dāśaratha and you.’

In this type of simile, which we could define as 'simile of difference', the insult is expressed in a basic comparison between two *upameyas*, stating in the inferiority of one of the *upameyas*.

The most interesting element of this type of simile is its structure: it is the difference between the two *upamānas* which makes the comparison possible. As will be shown, this peculiar structure occurs also in the *Mahābhārata*, where the structure of the similes occurring within the kidnapping of Sītā and the range of *upamānas* of abusive similes occurring within dialogues in the Dyūtaparvan are combined, marking a step in the evolution of the abusive simile.

### 3.1c The dialogue between Karṇa and Śalya

The Karṇaparvan features one of the most famous word-exchanges of the Epics: the verbal fight between Karṇa and Śalya. Similes occurring in the passage employ similar *upamānas*, such as animals, but in far more elaborated images. The first instance occurs when Śalya begins his attempt to destroy Karṇa's energy,<sup>119</sup> and employs a mythological image:

VIII.27.19

*bālyād iva tvam tyajasi vasu vaiśravaṇo yathā /  
ayatnenaiva rādheya draṣṭāsy adya dhanamjayam //*

‘From foolishness you are giving away wealth like Vaiśravaṇa, without any effort, oh son of Rādha, you will behold Dhanamjaya today.’

The absurdity of the situation is emphasized with two more images, one of which occurs in a longer verse:

VIII.27.25

*samudrataraṇam dorbhyaṁ kaṇthe baddhvā yathā śilām /  
giryagrād vā nipatanam tāḍṛk tava cikīrṣitam //*

‘Your purpose is like someone wishing to cross the ocean with his arms after attaching a stone to his neck, or to someone leaping from a mountain summit.’

VIII.27.33

*bālaś candram mātur anke śayāno  
yathā kaś cit prārthayate 'pahartum /  
tadvan mohād yatamāno rathasthas  
tvam prārthayasy arjunam adya jetum //*

‘Similar to a child trying to seize the moon while sitting on his mother's lap, in the same way, out of folly, fighting from your chariot, you seek to vanquish Arjuna today.’

The animal *upamāna* reappears a few verses later, but, unlike most similes occurring in the Dyūtaparvan, displays a double *upamāna* in order to emphasise differences between two characters:

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<sup>119</sup> Hildebeitel 1976: 242.

VIII.27.35-6

*siddham śimham kesariṇam bṛhantam*

*bālo mūḍhaḥ kṣudramṛgas tarasvī /*

*samāhvayet tadvad etat tavādya*

*samāhvānam sūtaputrārjunasya //*

*mā sūtaputrāhvaya rājaputraṁ*

*mahāvīryam kesariṇam yathaiiva /*

*vane sṛgālaḥ piśitasya tṛpto*

*mā pārtham āsādya vinaṅkṣyasi tvam //*

‘Your challenge of Arjuna today, oh sūta’s son, is like a young, foolish little deer would challenge a huge maned lion excited with wrath.’

‘Do not challenge that great hero of a prince, oh sūta’s son, like the jackal gratified by meat in the forest challenging the lion. Do not be destroyed encountering Pārtha.’

Again, the lion and the jackal appear, along with the snake and Garuḍa:

VIII.27.39-40

*śimham kesariṇam kruddham atikramyābhinardasi /*

*sṛgāla iva mūḍhatvān nṛśimham karṇa pāṇḍavam //*

*suparṇam patagaśreṣṭham vainateyam tarasvinam /*

*latvevāhvayase pāte karṇa pārtham dhanamjayam //*

‘Karṇa going too far, you yell at that lion-man of a Pāṇḍava like a jackal, out of foolishness, yells at the angry maned lion.’

‘Karṇa, like a snake for its own destruction challenges that best of birds, Suparṇa, Vinatā’s son, possessed of beautiful plumage and great activity, so you do with Dhanamjaya Pārtha.’

Another short sequence shows a similar wider range of animal *upamānas*:

VIII.27.42-4

*ṛṣabham dundubhigrīvam tīkṣṇaśṛṅgam prahāriṇam /*

*vatsa āhvayase yuddhe karṇa pārtham dhanamjayam //*

*mahāghoṣam mahāmegham darduraḥ pratinarḍasi /*

*kāmatoyapradam loke naraparjanyam arjunam //*

*yathā ca svagr̥hasthaḥ śvā vyāghraṁ vanagatam bhaṣet /  
tathā tvam̐ bhaṣase karṇa naravyāghraṁ dhanam̐jayam //*

‘Karṇa, you challenge Dhanam̐jaya Pārtha (like) a calf challenging a smiting bull with sharp horns and neck thick like a drum.’

‘(Like) a frog (croaking) to a terrible and massive cloud yielding abundant showers of rain, you croak against Arjuna, who is Parjanya among men.’

‘Like a dog standing inside its own house might bark at a tiger in the forest, so you bark at that tiger among men, Dhanam̐jaya.’

A simile describing Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa precedes another short sequence highlighting the differences between the characters, in order to re-inforce Śalya's statements:

VIII.27.47

*vyāghraṁ tvam̐ manyase "tmānam̐ yāvat kṛṣṇau na paśyasi /  
samāsthitāv ekarathe sūryācandramasāv iva //*

‘You consider yourself a tiger, as long as you don't see the two Kṛṣṇas standing on the same chariot like the sun and the moon.’

VIII.27.51-2

*yathākhuḥ syād biḍālaś ca śvā vyāghraś ca balābale /  
yathā srgālaḥ simhaś ca yathā ca śaśakuñjarau //  
yathānṛtam̐ ca satyam̐ ca yathā cāpi viṣāmṛte /  
tathā tvam̐ api pārthaś ca prakhyātāv ātmakarmabhiḥ //*

‘Like a mole would be to a cat, like a dog to a tiger in strength, like a jackal to a lion and like a hare and an elephant, like falsehood and truth, like poison and nectar, so you and Pārtha are known to all for your personal deeds.’

This short sequence confirms one of the main functions of abusive similes: to describe the difference between the evil and the good. In the passages of the abduction of Sītā,<sup>120</sup> previously analysed, a very similar sequence of comparisons is employed in order to underline the distinctions between Rāvaṇa and Rāma.

After Śalya's long discourse aiming to discourage Karṇa, the son of Radhā replies describing his plan of challenging Arjuna with his weapons. A sequence of

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<sup>120</sup> Rm, II.45.40-44.

insults addressed to Śalya features no similes employed with the purpose of verbally abusing the King of Madras. Despite the insults and the threats,<sup>121</sup> Śalya stresses again Arjuna's superiority over Karṇa with a simile employing again the jackal and the lion as *upamānas*:

VIII.28.57

*yatra vyastāḥ samastās ca nirjitāḥ stha kirīṭinā /  
srgālā iva simhena kva te vīryam abhūt tadā //*

‘There you all were defeated by the diadem-decked Arjuna, like jackals by a lion. What became of your prowess?’

The final simile employed by Śalya finally closes the similes of differences, stating the apparent superiority of Arjuna:

VIII.28.63

*kiyantam tatra vakṣyāmi yena yena dhanamjayaḥ /  
tvatto 'tiriktaḥ sarvebhyo bhūtebhyo brāhmaṇo yathā //*

‘Here I will tell you, by which qualities Dhanamjaya is superior to you, like a Brāhmaṇa is superior to all creatures.’

Comparisons within the passage feature two types of similes also employed within the Sabhāparvan: similes displaying animals as *upamānas* and others, featuring improbable situations. Whereas the former show very close features to the ones previously analysed, the latter show some important characteristics. The main aim of Śalya is to make Karṇa lose his temper, hoping that this will affect his ability to fight, and consequently advantage Arjuna in battle. In order to achieve that, he speaks using a sequence of similes whose aim is to insult Karṇa while glorifying Arjuna at the same time. The result is a double simile of difference that will provoke Karṇa’s anger. The similarities with the verses in the Araṇyakāṇḍa clearly shows that this was a well known principle for Epic composers.

Interestingly enough, some of the similes employing animals as *upamānas* carry the features of the improbable type as well: the little deer challenging a

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<sup>121</sup> In VII.27.103 Karṇa threatens Śalya to crush his head with his club.

lion,<sup>122</sup> or the jackal fighting against the lion in the forest<sup>123</sup> clearly show situations that are impossible in real life.

### 3.1d The evolution of abusive similes

The analysis of abusive similes reveals a number of principles followed by the author in order to achieve an insult through comparisons. The main principle is the range of *upamānas* employed within the text, the second is in the similes' structure.

The range of *upamānas* employed within the passages analysed includes animals in particular. The second type generally employs human beings or improbable situations in general.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa* passage describing the abduction of Sītā, a similar range of *upamānas* is employed, displayed in a form of simile of difference. In this type of comparisons there are two *upameyas* and two *upamānas*. The insult is combined with a statement of inferiority of one *upameya* towards the other; in this case, Rāvaṇa's inferiority towards Rāma. As in the passages occurring within the *Dyūtaparvan*, a range of *upamānas*, including animals are employed.

Within the *Karṇaparvan*, the two types of comparisons are combined in some of the instances employing animals as *upamānas*. Similes in the latter passage appear to be an evolution of *upamās* occurring within the *Sabhāparvan* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, expressed in the form of the *upamā* of difference.<sup>124</sup>

The occurrence of similar instances within other passages within the *Sabhāparvan* and similes within the *Araṇyakāṇḍa* show that the composers of the Epics were well aware of the principles behind the abusive similes.

### 3.2 Mythological similes as markers within the narrative

As shown in chapter 1 of this thesis, mythological similes are employed within the *Mahābhārata*, especially in the combat between Karṇa and Arjuna, in

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<sup>122</sup> MBh, VIII.27.35

<sup>123</sup> MBh, VIII.27.36

<sup>124</sup> Brockington, 1998: 150, first pointed out the similarities between Sītā's and Śalya's rebukes.



order to stress an idea of identity between a character and a god. This type of simile, discussed in section 1, occurs within the *Mahābhārata* only in limited contexts and their purpose is well-defined and arises from the need on the authors' part to identify one or more characters with a deity.

There is a second function fulfilled by mythological similes within the Epics, more concerned with the different plans of narrative within the texts. Both Epics feature long descriptions of fighting, most of them enriched with gruesome details. The sequence of images occurring within the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* reveal a closeup of the protagonists of each combat. Mythological similes occurring in the following passages do not actually occur within the description, but in key moments, when the fight draws to a close or pauses in the middle of the battle.

This type of simile is indeed employed with a very specific purpose within both *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*. In order to show how mythological similes are employed in order to mark the presence of different narrative planes, the following passages will be analysed: from the *Mahābhārata*, the fight between Prativindhya and Citra and the duel between Bhīmasena and Aśvatthāman will be considered; from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the final battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa will be taken into account.

This type of mythological simile is employed in both Epics in an identical manner in similar contexts.

### 3.2a Prativindhya against Citra

What makes this type of simile different from other mythological comparisons occurring elsewhere within the Epics is the function of attention switch marker: the function fulfilled within the passage is drawing to a close the event described and marking the passage to another single combat, in this particular case, the fight between Bhīmasena and Aśvatthāman.

At the heart of the battle between the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas, several single combats are singled out in the narrative within the Karṇaparvan. Citra, warrior of the Kauravas, faces off Prativindhya. This minor single combat within the Karṇaparvan features nine similes: two mythological comparisons, five instances describing the spears in battle and two similes displaying atmospheric events:

The first instance of simile within this passage occurs in VIII.10.20-22:

*tataḥ śaktim mahārāja hemadaṇḍāṃ durāsadām /  
prāhiṇot tava putrāya ghorām agniśikhām iva //  
tām āpatantīm sahasā śaktim ulkāṃ ivāambarāt /  
dvidhā ciccheda samare prativindhyo hasann iva //  
sā papāta tadā chinnā prativindhyaśaraiḥ śitaiḥ /  
yugānte sarvabhūtāni trāsayantī yathāsaniḥ //*

‘Then oh great Monarch, he threw a dangerous and powerful gold-shafted spear at your grandson, similar to a dreadful flame.’

‘Prativindhya, as if smiling, in battle cut in half that powerful spear approaching like a meteor from the sky.’

‘Cut by Prativindhya’s sharpened darts, it fell like a thunderbolt terrifying all creatures at the end of a Yuga.’

In the first short sequence of similes occurring within the passage, comparisons appear to be related to atmospheric events and to animals:

VIII.10.27

*samāsadya raṇe sūraṃ prativindhyaṃ mahāprabhā /  
nirbhīdya dakṣiṇaṃ bāhuṃ nipapāta mahītale /  
patitābhāsayaś caiva taṃ deśam aśanir yathā //*

‘ Hitting the valiant Prativindhya in battle, the blazing weapon piercing through his right arm, fell to the ground and, as it fell, it illuminated the region, like lightning. ’

VIII.10.29

*sa tasya dehāvaraṇaṃ bhittvā hṛdayam eva ca /  
jagāma dharaṇīm tūrṇaṃ mahoraga ivāśayam //*

‘The weapon, penetrating through his armour and heart, entered quickly the Earth, like a snake into its hole.’

VIII.10.32-4

*srjanto vividhān bāṇāñ śataghnīś ca sakinīṇiḥ /  
ta cnaṃ chādayāmāsuḥ sūryam abhagaṇā iva //  
tān apāsyā mahābāhuḥ śarajālana saṃyuge /  
vyadrāvayat tava camūṃ vajrahasta ivāsurīm //*

*te vadhyamānāḥ samare tāvakāḥ pāṇḍavair nṛpa/  
viprakīryanta sahasā vātanunnā ghanā iva //*

‘They threw various shafts and śataghnīs, adorned with bells; they covered him (Prativindhya) like masses of clouds cover the sun.’

‘The great-armed one took care of them, with a shower of arrows in that battle, forcing your army to run away, like the thunderbolt-wielder did the hosts of Asuras.’

‘Thus your troops are destroyed in battle by the Pāṇḍavas, o king; they are forcibly dispersed, like clouds driven by the wind.’

In the description of Prativindhya, he is compared to Indra pursuing the Asuras (VIII.10.33), thus providing an image of the whole battlefield. The focus is not on his combat against Citra: in the final instance occurring within the passage, another mythological comparison occurs, drawing the audience's attention to another single combat, the one between Bhīmasena and Aśvatthaman.

VIII.10.36

*tataḥ samāgamo ghorō babhūva sahasā tayoh /  
yathā devāsūre yuddhe vṛtravāsavayorabhūt //*

‘Then a terrible encounter happened, violently, between the two, like the one that happened between Indra and Vṛtra, in the battle between the god and the asura.’

### 3.2b Bhīmasena against Aśvatthaman

The fight between Bhīmasena and Aśvatthaman is probably one of the most interesting instances among the single combats within the Karṇaparvan. Seeking revenge for his father's death, Aśvatthaman attacks Bhīmasena. The passage displays a number of similes, most of them relating to atmospheric events. Only two instances of mythological simile occur within this section, in 11.30-31.

VIII.11.3

*bhīmasenaḥ samākīrṇo drauṇinā nisītaiḥ śaraiḥ /  
rarāja samare rājan rāsmivān iva bhāskaraḥ //*

‘Bhīmasena, pierced by keen arrows by the son of Drona, shone in the battle, oh king, like the sun with its rays.’

VIII.11.5-6

*śaraiḥ śarāms tato drauṇiḥ samvārya yudhi pāṇḍavam /  
lalāṭe 'bhyahanad rājan nārācena smayann iva //  
lalāṭastham tato bāṇam dhārayām āsa pāṇḍavaḥ /  
yathā śṛṅgam vane drptaḥ khaḍgo dhārayate nṛpa //*

‘Then the son of Drona, warding off those arrows with his own arrows in the battle, pierced the Pāṇḍava in the forehead with an arrow, o king, as if smiling.’

‘Then the Pāṇḍava bore that arrow in his forehead, like a proud rhinoceros in the forest bears his horn, o king.’

VIII.11.8

*lalāṭasthais tato bāṇair brāhmaṇaḥ sa vyarocata /  
prāvṛṣīva yathā siktas triśṛṅgaḥ parvatottamaḥ //*

‘Then with those arrows sticking in his forehead, that brāhmaṇa looked beautiful, like a three-peaked mountain sprinkled in the rainy season.’

VIII.11.10

*tathaiva pāṇḍavam yuddhe drauṇiḥ śaraśataiḥ śitaiḥ /  
nākampayata samhr̥ṣṭo vāryogha iva parvatam //*

‘Then the son of Drona hit the Pāṇḍava in that battle with hundreds of sharp arrows, but he failed to make him shake, like the rain (does not shake) a mountain.’

VIII.11.12

*ādityāv iva samdīptau lokakṣayakarāv ubhau /  
svaraśmibhir ivānyonyam tāpayantau śarottamaiḥ //*

‘Then they both looked like two suns, risen for the destruction of the world, scorching each other with excellent arrows, as if their own sun-rays.’

VIII.11.14-17

*vyāghrāv iva ca samgrāme ceratus tau mahārathau /  
śaradamṣtrau durādharṣau cāpavyāttau bhayānakau //  
abhūtām tāv adṛśyau ca śarajālaiḥ samantataḥ /  
meghajālair iva cchannau gagane candrabhāskarau //  
prakāśau ca muhūr tena tatraivāstām arimdamau /  
vimuktau meghajālena śaśisūryau yathā divi //  
apasavyam tataś cakre drauṇis tatra vṛkodaram /  
kirañ śaraśatair ugrair dhārābhir iva parvatam //*

‘They roamed about in battle similar to two tigers, the two of them great car-warriors: their bows agape, having arrows as their fangs, the two brave ones. Fearless, the two of them became invisible, surrounded by clouds of arrows, like the moon and the sun in the sky shrouded by masses of clouds.’

‘And then, all at once the two of them were visible, right there, the two enemy-tamers, like the moon and the sun, freed in the sky from a cloud.’

‘Then the son of Drona, moved to the left there in battle, poured hundreds of fierce arrows upon the Wolf-belly, like a mountain by clouds.’

VIII.11.23

*tato ghoram mahārāja astrayuddham avartata /  
grahayuddham yathā ghoram prajāsamharaṇe abhūt //*

‘Then, o monarch, a terrible encounter of weapons took place, like the terrible battle of planets that took place at the world-dissolution.’

VIII.11.25

*bāṇasamghāvṛtam ghoram ākāśam samapadyata /  
ulkāpātakṛtam yadvat prajānām samkṣaye nṛpa //*

‘Covered with flights of arrows, the sky assumed a terrible appearance, similar to the sky, king, at the time of the dissolution of the creatures, when covered by falling meteors.’

VIII.11.30-31

*aho vīryasya sārātvam aho sauṣṭhavam etayoḥ /  
sthitāv etau hi samare kālāntakayamopamau //  
rudrau dvāv iva sambhūtau yathā dvāv iva bhāskarau /  
yamau vā puruṣavyāghrau ghorarūpāv imau raṇe //*

‘Oh, the firmness of their strength, oh, the superiority of those two! They were standing in battle like two Yamas at the end of a yuga.’

‘They became like two Rudras or two Suns, or two Yamas, those tigers among men endowed with terrible forms in this battle.’

The two mythological similes draw the episode to a close, switching the audience's attention to other descriptions of fighting that occur within the Karnaparvan. In both single combats described in this section, occurring one after the other in the order of

events happening in the book, mythological similes are displayed at the very end of the combat, and they are followed by other single combats.

The function of mythological comparisons featured in the passage appears to be marking a change in the focus, and are indeed a device employed in order to draw the attention to a different event.

### 3.2c The final battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa

The epic battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa is a war between good and evil. The king of *rākṣasas* was granted the boon of invincibility by Brahmā. The story of the boon is related in the Aranyakāṇḍa, where the episode is first mentioned.<sup>125</sup> A second occurrence is featured in the Yuddhakāṇḍa, where a more detailed description of the event that led Brahmā to grant the boon to Rāvaṇa is explained. The boon, as pointed out by Pollock,<sup>126</sup> is a recurrent theme of the Epic. As is first mentioned in the Aranyakāṇḍa, the king of rākṣasas cannot be killed by gods. The king of Lānkā considers himself invincible because of the boon, not knowing that his arrogance which made him ask immunity only from the gods and not from men, whom he considers as mere food, will ultimately be the cause of his death. There is a second aspect to this theme: the divine nature of Rāma. The problem of Rāma's divinity has puzzled scholars since the beginning of studies about the *Rāmāyāṇa*. The first scholar to directly address the issue of Rāma's divine nature was Jacobi, who considered those parts of the *Rāmāyāṇa* in which Rāma is portrayed as a god to be later interpolations, and therefore not part of the original plot.<sup>127</sup> This view is shared by many western scholars such as Winternitz, who pointed out that Rāma's divine nature is apparent only in books 1 and 7 of the Epic, while in books 2-6 of the *Rāmāyāṇa*, with a few exceptions of interpolated passages, his human nature becomes predominant in the portrayal of the character.<sup>128</sup> Even in the

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<sup>125</sup> MBh, III.30.17-18.

<sup>126</sup> Pollock, S.I. 1991: *The Rāmāyāṇa of Vālmīki, an epic of Ancient India. The Aranyakāṇḍa*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 14-54.

<sup>127</sup> Jacobi, H., 1893: *Das Rāmāyāṇa: Geschichte und Inhalt nebst Concordanz der gedruckten Recension*. Bonn: Friedrich Cohen. Reprint Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976. 61-65.

<sup>128</sup> Winternitz, M. 1904-1920: *Geschichte der Indischen Literatur*. 3 vols. Leipzig: C.F. Amelang. English translation (ols 1-2) a history of Indian Literature, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1927-1933. Reprint Delhi, 1972. 478.

Rāmopakhyāna, as pointed out by Scharf, the divine dimension of Rāma conflicts with his human dimension, which appears to be prominent in the story.<sup>129</sup> According to Scharf, in the Rāmopakhyāna, Rāma is essentially human, and his divine nature is seldomly mentioned. As argued by Brockington, who also shares this view, the divine dimension of Rāma within the narrative appears to be the result of the character's qualities, an *ensemble* of kṣatriya and brāhmanic attitude.<sup>130</sup>

According to Pollock, Rāma is indeed both a human being and a god: an intermediate being which he considers the idea of the king in ancient India.<sup>131</sup> But, in spite of this conception of Rāma's incarnation of Viṣṇu, or whether he is an intermediate being which embodies the old concept of Indian king or not, it is the human nature of the character that ultimately leads to the death of Rāvaṇa. The king of *rākṣasas* cannot be killed by gods, and the deities expect Rāma to fulfil his fate and kill the king of Laṅkā. In the Araṇyakāṇḍa, when Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa approach the ashram of Śarabhaṅga, they see Indra floating next to his chariot surrounded by the Maruts (III.4.5-21). When the god sees Rāma he tells Śarabhaṅga that he will meet Rāma when the prince has accomplished his important task (III.4.19). Despite the apparent contradictions about the nature of Rāma, these contradictory aspects appear to suit perfectly the hero: although Rāma is just a man (a status that is essential to achieve his task), he is no ordinary one. His strength and valour make him unique. The gods are aware of his virtues and decide to act so that the prince will finally restore the original order, defeating the evil king of Laṅkā. Similes occurring within this passage (R VI.87-97) are quite revealing: a number of comparisons provide an interesting insight into the way the composer sees Rāma and the battle between Rāvaṇa and him. A special focus on mythological comparisons featured in the final battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa highlights the function of this type of simile within the passage.

The section features a considerable number of similes. The first instance occurs in VI.87.9-10, where Rāvaṇa first spots the two brothers:

*sa dadarśa tato rāmaṃ tiṣṭhantam aparājitam /*

<sup>129</sup>Scharf, P. 2003: *Rāmopakhyānā-The Story of Rāma in the Mahābhārata. An Independent-study Reader in Sanskrit*. London: Routledge Curzon, 2-6.

<sup>130</sup> Brockington, 1998: 464.

<sup>131</sup> Pollock.1991: 43.

*lakṣmaṇena saha bhrātrā viṣṇunā vāsavaṃ yathā //*  
*ālikhantam ivākāśam avaṣṭabhya mahad dhanuḥ /*  
*padmapatraviśālākṣaṃ dīrghabāhum ariṃdamam //*

‘Then he saw the unconquerable Rāma standing, with his brother Lakṣmaṇa, similar to Vāsava with Viṣṇu.’

‘He was grounding his large bow that was as if scraping the sky, with his long arms, tamer of foes, his eyes long like lotus petals.’

VI.87.13

*tayoḥ śarapatham prāpya rāvaṇo rājaputrayoḥ /*  
*sa babhūva yathā rāhuḥ samīpe śaśisūryayoḥ //*

‘Having come within range of the two princes’ arrows, Rāvaṇa became like Rāhu in proximity of the sun and the moon.’

The battle begins with Lakṣmaṇa striking first:

VI.87.15

*tam icchan prathamam yoddhum lakṣmaṇo nisītaiḥ śaraiḥ /*  
*mumoca dhanur āyamyā śarān agniśikhopamān //*

‘Desiring to fight him first with sharpened arrows, Lakṣmaṇa, stretching his bow, released arrows similar to flames.’

But Rāvaṇa reacts quickly:

VI.87.18

*abhyatikramya saumitriṃ rāvaṇaḥ samitiṃjayah /*  
*āsasāda tato rāmaṃ sthitaṃ śailam ivācalam //*

‘Rāvaṇa victorious in battle, having gone past Saumitri, then reached Rāma where he stood, like a rocky mountain.’

VI.87.21

*tāñ śaraughāṃs tato bhallais tīkṣṇaiś ciccheda rāghavaḥ /*  
*dīpyamānān mahāvegān kruddhān āśīviṣān iva //*

‘Then, with sharpened shafts, Rāghava pierced that multitude of very fast, blazing, arrows, enraged like poisonous snakes.’



Among the descriptive similes portraying the battle occurring between Rāghava and Rāvaṇa, also comparisons portraying the reaction of the surroundings occur. Every living creature and even the sky is described while the battle takes place:

VI.87.24

*tayor bhūtāni vitresur yugapat samprayudhyatoḥ /  
raudrayoḥ sāyakamucor yamāntakanikāśayoḥ //*

‘The creatures became terrified at the same time by those two as they fought, similar to two terrifying Yamas releasing arrows.’

VI.87.25

*saṃtataṃ vividhair bāṇair babhūva gaganam tadā /  
ghanair ivātapāpāye vidyunmālāsamakulaiḥ //*

‘Then, the sky was covered by many different arrows, like (the sky) covered by clouds agitated by garlands of lightning at the end of the summer.’

Then similes focus again on the two combatants, emphasising the impact the struggle has on the surrounding:

VI.87.27

*śarāndhakāraṃ tau bhīmaṃ cakratuḥ paramaṃ tadā /  
gate 'staṃ tapane cāpi mahāmeghāv ivotthitau //*

‘Those two created a terrible and extreme darkness with their arrows, like two clouds rising as the sun is setting.’

Then the fight takes mythic proportions in the following simile:

VI.87.28

*babhūva tumulaṃ yuddham anyonyavadhakāṅkṣiṇoḥ /  
anāsādyam acintyaṃ ca vṛtravāsavayor iva //*

‘That battle between the two of them, eager to kill each other, became tumultuous, unparalleled and unthinkable, like that between Vṛtra and Vāsava.’

The portrayal of the impact of the battle is at times enriched by descriptions of the struggle itself:

VI.87.30

*ubhau hi yena vrajatas tena tena śarormayaḥ /  
ūrmayo vāyunā viddhā jagmuḥ sāgarayor iva //*

‘Wherever the two of them moved, there were waves of arrows like waves pushed by the wind of two oceans.’

The two warriors continue to fight discharging arrows at each other:

VI.87.32

*raudracāpaprayuktāṃ tām nīlotpaladalaprabhām /  
śīrasā dhārayan rāmo na vyathāṃ pratyapadyata //*

‘Rāma, receiving on his head that garland discharged by the terrible bow, shining like petals of blue-lotus, he did not tremble.’

VI.87.35

*te mahāmeghasaṃkāśe kavace patitāḥ śarāḥ /  
avadhye rākṣasendrasya na vyathāṃ janayaṃs tadā //*

‘The arrows falling on his impenetrable armour, similar to a large cloud, then did not cause the trembling of the king of rākṣasas.’

VI.87.42

*etāṃś cānyāṃś ca māyābhiḥ sasarja nisītāñ śarān /  
rāmaṃ prati mahātejāḥ kruddhaḥ sarpa iva śvasan //*

‘The mighty one, enraged like a hissing serpent, released at Rāma these and other sharpened arrows with spells.’

VI.87.43

*āsureṇa samāviṣṭaḥ so 'streṇa raghunandanaḥ /  
sasarjāstraṃ mahotsāhaḥ pāvakaṃ pāvakopamaḥ //*

‘The mighty joy of the Raghus, pierced by the Asura divine weapon, released a fire weapon, himself similar to fire.’

VI.87.45

*grahanakṣatravarṇāṃś ca maholkāmukhasaṃsthitān /  
vidyujjihvopamāṃś cānyān sasarja nisītāñ śarān //*

‘He released further sharpened arrows, similar to thunderbolt’s flames, similar to great meteors in the sky with the colours of planets and stars.’

Sarga 88 begins again with a brief description of the battlefield and its surroundings:

VI.88.4

*kūṭamudgarapāśās ca dīptās cāsanayas tathā /  
niṣpetur vividhās tīkṣṇā vātā iva yugakṣaye //*

‘Clubs, hammers, nooses and blazing lightning, variegated and sharp, were streaking like winds at the end of a Yuga.’

VI.88.8

*tair āsīd gaganam dīptam sampatadbhir itas tataḥ /  
patadbhiś ca diśo dīptaiś candrasūryagrahair iva //*

‘Then, because of those (arrows) hurtling to the quarters and landing everywhere, similar to the blazing sun, moon and planets, the sky was ablaze.’

It is at this stage that other characters join the battle to kill Rāvaṇa:

VI.88.16

*tasya bāṇaiś ca ciccheda dhanur gajakaropamam /  
lakṣmaṇo rākṣasendrasya pañcabhir niśitaiḥ śaraiḥ //*

‘Lakṣmaṇa, with five sharpened arrows splintered the bow of the king of rākṣasas, although it was like an elephant’s trunk.’

Vibhīṣaṇa also joins the struggle in order to kill his brother:

VI.88.17

*nīlameghanibhāṃś cāsya sadaśvān parvatopamān /  
jaghānāplutya gadayā rāvaṇasya vibhīṣaṇaḥ //*

‘Vibhīṣaṇa then, sprang forward and with his club hit Rāvaṇa’s mountain-like horses, similar to black clouds’

Rāvaṇa quickly reacts:

VI.88.19

*tataḥ śaktim mahāśaktir dīptam dīptāsanīm iva /  
vibhīṣaṇāya cikṣepa rākṣasendraḥ pratāpavān //*

‘Then the powerful king of rākṣasas hurled at Vibhīṣaṇa a mighty spear, ablaze like a blazing thunderbolt.’

But the spear hurled by Rāvaṇa is cut into three pieces by Lakṣmaṇa:

VI.88.21

*sā papāta tridhā chinnā śaktiḥ kāñcanamālīnī /  
savisphulingā jvalitā maholkeva divaś cyutā //*

‘That spear, garlanded with gold, fell cut into three pieces, flashing and sparkling like a great shooting star, fallen from heaven.’

But Rāvaṇa hurls another, deadlier spear:

VI.88.23

*sā veginā balavatā rāvaṇena durātmanā /  
jajvāla sumahāghorā śakrāśānisamaprabhā //*

‘That very terrible (spear), (handled by) the evil, rapid and mighty Rāvaṇa, shone like Śakra’s thunderbolt.’

Rāvaṇa then addresses Lakṣmaṇa:

VI.88.29

*eṣā te hṛdayaṃ bhittvā śaktir lohitalakṣaṇā /  
madbāhuparihotsṛṣṭā prāṇān ādāya yāsyati //*

‘Sent by my club-like arm, this red-marked spear, once it has pierced your heart, will go through, taking away your life.’

VI.88.32

*sā kṣiptā bhīmavegena śakrāśānisamasvanā /  
śaktir abhyapatad vegāl lakṣmaṇaṃ raṇamūrdhani //*

‘Hurled with terrible impetuosity, roaring like Śakra’s thunderbolt, that spear flew violently towards Lakṣmaṇa in the middle of the battle.’

But the spear pierces Lakṣmaṇa's chest:

VI.88.34

*nyapatat sā mahāvegā lakṣmaṇasya mahorasi /  
jihvevoragarājasya dīpyamānā mahādyutiḥ //*

‘That very impetuous (spear), blazing and brilliant like the snake king’s tongue,

pierced Lakṣmaṇa's chest.'

After seeing his young brother collapsing because of the impact of the spear, Rāma is enraged:

VI.88.37

*sa muhūrtam anudhyāya bāṣpavyākulalocanaḥ /  
babhūva saṃrabdhataro yugānta iva pāvakaḥ //*

'After thinking for a moment, with his eyes full of tears, he became very enraged like the fire at Doomsday.'

A comparison describes Lakṣmaṇa lying on the battlefield:

VI.88.39

*sa dadarśa tato rāmaḥ śaktyā bhinnaṃ mahāhave /  
lakṣmaṇaṃ rudhirādigdhaṃ sapannagam ivācalam //*

'Then Rāma saw Lakṣmaṇa, in that battle, pierced by that shaft, the blood streaming down him like snakes from a mountain.'

Rāma approaches his brother and gives instructions to Hanūman and Sugrīva to take care of Lakṣmaṇa. He then rejoins the battle, eager to slain Rāvaṇa:

VI.88.44

*pāpātmāyaṃ daśagrīvo vadhyatāṃ pāpānīścayaḥ /  
kāṅkṣitaḥ stokakasyeva gharmānte meghadarśanam //*

'I have been longing to kill this evil, malicious Daśagrīva, like a stokaka (longing for) the sight of the clouds at the end of the summer.'

VI.88.47

*prāptaṃ duḥkhaṃ mahad ghoraṃ kleśaṃ ca nirayopamam /  
adya sarvam ahaṃ tyakṣye hatvā taṃ rāvaṇaṃ raṇe //*

'I have obtained great, terrible unhappiness and grief, similar to hell. Today I shall forget all of that by killing that Rāvaṇa in battle.'

Rāma then attacks Rāvaṇa, but the king of rākṣasas reacts:

VI.88.55

*atha pradīptair nārācair musalaiś cāpi rāvaṇaḥ /  
abhyavarṣat tadā rāmaṃ dhārābhir iva toyadaḥ //*

‘Then Rāvaṇa showered Rāma with blazing bolts and pestles, like storms from a cloud.’

The shower of arrows discharged by Rāma's bow causes Rāvaṇa to flee:

VI.88.59

*sa kīryamāṇaḥ śarajālavṛṣṭibhir  
mahātmanā dīptadhanuṣmatārditaḥ /  
bhayāt pradudrāva sametya rāvaṇo  
yathānilenābhihato balāhakaḥ //*

‘Covered by showers and nets of arrows, afflicted by the great blazing bowman, Rāvaṇa, having approached, fled out of fear, like a thunder cloud dispersed by the wind.’

But the sight of Lakṣmaṇa, wounded on the battlefield haunts Rāma, who feels he cannot cope:

VI.89.02

*eṣa rāvaṇavegena lakṣmaṇaḥ patitaḥ kṣitau /  
sarpavad veṣṭate vīro mama śokam udīrayan //*

‘Heroic Lakṣmaṇa, pushed on the ground by Rāvaṇa’s impetuosity, is writhing like a snake, bringing much pain to me.’

The wise Suṣeṇa, Sugrīva's counsellor, encourages Rāma:

VI.89.11

*padmaraktatalau hastau suprasanne ca locane /  
evaṃ na vidyate rūpaṃ gatāsūnāṃ viśāṃ pate /  
mā viśādaṃ kṛthā vīra saprāṇo 'yam ariṃdama //*

‘The palms of his hands are red like lotuses and his eyes are clear, thus, there is not the appearance of somebody who is about to die, your majesty. Do not despair o hero! This conqueror of foes is still alive.’

Then Rāma instructs Hanūman to go and fetch the magical herb previously mentioned by Jāmbavān (sarga 40). The son of the wind brings the magical Viśalyā herb and Lakṣmaṇa's wounds magically heal. Rāma's younger brother encourages his brother:

VI.89.33

*na jīvan yāsyate śatrus tava bāṇapathaṃ gataḥ /  
nardatas tīkṣṇadamṣṭrasya simhasyeva mahāgajaḥ //*

‘When your enemy comes within range of your arrow, he will no longer live, like a great elephant (coming across) a roaring lion with sharp teeth.’

The struggle continues:

VI.90.2

*daśagrīvo rathasthas tu rāmaṃ vajropamaiḥ śaraiḥ /  
ājaghāna mahāghorair dhārābhir iva toyadaḥ //*

‘Standing on his chariot, Daśagrīva assailed Rāma with very terrible arrows similar to thunderbolts, like a cloud with floods.’

VI.90.3

*dīptapāvakaṣaṃkāśaiḥ śaraiḥ kāñcanabhūṣanaiḥ /  
nirbībheda raṇe rāmo daśagrīvaṃ samāhitaḥ //*

‘Rāma, focused in that battle, pierced Daśagrīva with golden-decorated arrows, blazing like fire.’

During the struggle, Rāvaṇa mounts his chariot. Rāma, still on the ground, is clearly at a disadvantage. Then Indra's chariot, driven by the divine charioteer Mātali appears:

VI.90.5

*tataḥ kāñcanacitrāṅgaḥ kiṃkiṇīśatabhūṣitaḥ /  
taruṇādityasaṃkāśo vaidūryamayakūbaraḥ //*

‘Then, with its parts inlaid in gold it was similar to the rising sun, decorated with hundreds of small bells, with a pole resembling cat’s eyes.’

VI.90.6

*sadaśvaiḥ kāñcanāpīḍair yuktaḥ śvetaparakīrṇakaiḥ /*

*haribhiḥ sūryasaṃkāśair hemajālavibhūṣitaiḥ //*

‘(The chariot was) yoked with bay horses covered in gold, with white plumes,<sup>132</sup>  
decorated with golden webs, bright like the sun.’

VI.90.10

*idam aindraṃ mahaccāpaṃ kavacaṃ cāgnisaṃnibham /*

*śarās cādityasaṃkāśāḥ śaktiś ca vimalā śītāḥ //*

‘(The thousand-eyed sends you) Indra’s great bow, fire-like armour, arrows similar  
to the sun and a sharp, untarnished spear.’

The charioteer speaks to Rāma:

VI.90.11

*āruhyemaṃ rathaṃ vīra rākṣasaṃ jahi rāvaṇam /*

*mayā sārathinā rāma mahendra iva dānavān //*

‘Mount this chariot, o heroic Rāma, and slay the rākṣasa Rāvaṇa, with me as your  
charioteer, like the Great Indra did the Dānavas.’

After mounting the divine chariot, Rāma continues to fight against Rāvaṇa:

VI.90.20

*te rāghavadhanurmuktā rukmapuṅkhāḥ śikhiprabhāḥ /*

*suparṇāḥ kāñcanā bhūtvā viceruḥ sarpaśatravaḥ //*

‘Those feathered arrows, released by Rāghava’s bow, shining like flames, becoming  
golden garuḍas, roamed among those enemy-snakes.’

VI.90.31

*daśāsyo viṃśatibhujāḥ pragrhītaśarāsanaḥ /*

*adṛśyata daśagrīvo maināka iva parvataḥ //*

‘With ten mouths and twenty arms, seizing his bow, Daśagrīva looked like Maināka  
mountain.’

VI.91.10-11

*vajrasāraṃ mahānādaṃ sarvaśatrūnibarhaṇam /*

*śailaśṛṅganibhaiḥ kūṭaiś citaṃ dṛṣṭibhayāvaham //*

*sadhūmam iva tīkṣṇāgraṃ yugāntāgnicayopamam /*

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<sup>132</sup> The word prakīṛṇaka occurs only here in the Rāmāyaṇa.



*atiraudram anāsādyam kālenāpi durāsadam //*

‘(Rāvaṇa, subject in the previous verse), with shafts whose points were similar to mountain peaks, aimed at the roaring destroyer of every enemy (Rāma, object in previous verse), sharp like a diamond, fearful to watch.’

‘(subject is : Rāvaṇa seized) A sharp-pointed weapon as if smoking, similar to the fire at the end of a Yuga, extremely dreadful, unattainable and difficult to endure even for Yama.’

VI.91.21

*āpatantaṃ śaraugheṇa vārayām āsa rāghavaḥ /  
utpatantaṃ yugāntāgniṃ jalaughair iva vāsavaḥ //*

‘Rāghava warded him off, attacked with a multitude of arrows, like Vāsava <would> the raging fire at the end of a Yuga with a mass of water.’

VI.91.22

*nirdadāha sa tām bāṇān rāmakārmukaniḥṣṭān /  
rāvaṇasya mahāsūlaḥ patamgān iva pāvakaḥ //*

‘Rāvaṇa’s huge shaft burned up those arrows issued from Rāma’s bow, like a fire burning flies.’

VI.91.25

*sā tolitā balavatā śaktir ghaṇṭākṛtasvanā /  
nabhaḥ prajvālayām āsa yugāntolkeva saprabhā //*

‘That shaft, with the noise of its bells, waved vigorously, set the sky ablaze like a meteor at the end of a Yuga with its brightness.’

VI.91.27

*nirbibheda tato bāṇair hayān asya mahājavān /  
rāmas tīkṣṇair mahāvegair vajrakalpaiḥ śitaiḥ śaraiḥ //*

‘Then Rāma, with sharp, extremely impetuous, thunderbolt-like whetted shafts, with arrows, pierced his very fast horses.’

Both combatants appear to be smeared in blood:

VI.91.29

*sa śarair bhinnasarvāṅgo gātraprasrutaśoṇitaḥ /  
rākṣasendraḥ samūhasthaḥ phullāśoka ivābabhau //*

‘The king of rākṣasas, with all his body pierced and his limbs smeared in blood, standing there shone like a flowering aśoka tree.’

VI.92.3-4

*bāṇadhārāsahasrais tu sa toyada ivāambarāt /  
rāghavaṃ rāvaṇo bāṇais tatākam iva pūrayat //  
pūritaḥ śarajālena dhanurmuktena saṃyuge /  
mahāgirir ivākampyaḥ kākustho na prakampate //*

‘Similar to a cloud from the sky, with a thousand showers of arrows, Rāvaṇa filled Rāghava with those arrows, like a pond.’

‘Filled by that net of arrows, released by that bow in the battle, Kākustha did not shake, like an immovable mountain.’

VI.92.7

*sa soṇitasamādigdhaḥ samare lakṣmaṇāgrajaḥ /  
dṛṣṭaḥ phulla ivāraṇye sumahān kiṃśukadrumaḥ //*

‘Smeared in blood, in that battle, Lakṣmaṇa’s elder brother was visible like a very large, flowering kiṃśuka tree.’

VI.92.8

*śarābhighātasamrabdhaḥ so 'pi jagrāha sāyakān /  
kākutsthaḥ sumahātejā yugāntādityavarcasaḥ //*

‘Infuriated by the impact of those arrows, Kākutstha also seized his shafts, radiating power, with the radiance of the sun at the end of a Yuga.’

Rāma then addresses Rāvaṇa:

VI.92.17

*śūro' ham iti cātmānam avagacchasi durmate /  
naiva lajjāsti te sītāṃ coravad vyapakaṣataḥ //*

‘I am a hero!’ you think about yourself, you evil-minded (wretch). And yet you are not ashamed of dragging away Sītā like a thief.’

VI.92.22

*adya madbāṇābhinnasya gatāsoḥ patitasya te /  
karṣantv antrāṇi patagā garutmanta ivoragān //*

‘Today, once you fall lifeless, pierced by my arrows, let the birds devour your

entrails like Garuḍas tearing snakes apart.’

As Rāvaṇa is nearly killed in the struggle with Rāma, the rākṣasa king's charioteer turns the chariot away from the battle, in order to save the king's life. Rāvaṇa accuses the charioteer of betraying him, but the *sūta* explains his action:

VI.93.13-14

*nāsminn arthe mahārāja tvaṃ mām priyahite ratam /  
kaś cil laghur ivānāryo doṣato gantum arhasi //  
śrūyatām abhidhāsyāmi yannimittam mayā rathaḥ /  
nadīvega ivāmbhobhiḥ saṃyuge vinivartitaḥ //*

‘O Great King, my intent was for the sake of your well-being, by no means ought you to accuse me of defect, like a light-hearted scum.’

‘Hear me out and I shall explain the reason why the chariot has been diverted by me in that battle, like the tide checking the flow of a river.’

VI.93.16

*rathodvahanakhinnās ca ta ime rathavājinaḥ /  
dīnā gharmapariśrāntā gāvo varṣahatā iva //*

‘These chariot steeds, worn-out with pulling the chariot, are miserable and wearied by the heat like cows drenched by downpours.’

As Rāvaṇa's chariot turns again towards the battlefield, Rāma admires it:

VI.94.2

*kṛṣṇavājīsamāyuktaṃ yuktaṃ raudreṇa varcasā /  
taḍitpatākāgahanaṃ darśitendrāyudhāyudham /  
śaradhārā vimuñcantaṃ dhārāsāram ivāmbudam //*

‘(The chariot) was yoked to black horses, endued with dreadful brilliance, decorated by lightning-like banners, displaying weapons resembling Indra's, releasing showers of arrows like a cloud made of streams.’

VI.94.3

*taṃ dr̥ṣṭvā meghasaṃkāśam āpatantaṃ rathaṃ ripoḥ /  
gīrer vajrābhimṛṣṭasya dīryataḥ sadṛśasvanam /  
uvāca mātaliṃ rāmaḥ sahasrākṣasya sārathim //*

‘Having seen the cloud-like, approaching chariot of his enemy, with a noise similar to that of a mountain split by the impact of a thunderbolt, Rāma told Mātali, the charioteer of the thousand-eyed (Indra).’

Then Rāma addresses Mātali, giving him instructions about the imminent struggle:

VI.94.5

*tad apramādam ātiṣṭha pratyudgaccha ratham ripoḥ /  
vidhvaṃsayitum icchāmi vāyur megham ivotthitam //*

‘Take a vigilant position and approach the chariot of the enemy, I want to tear him asunder like the wind does a rising cloud.’

The struggle begins:

VI.94.11

*dharṣaṇāmarṣito rāmo dhairyaṃ roṣeṇa laṅghayan /  
jagrāha sumahāvegam aindraṃ yudhi śarāsanam /  
śarāṃś ca sumahātejāḥ sūryaraśmisamaprabhān //*

‘Not tolerating the insult, expressing his firmness by his anger, Rāma seized Indra's very impetuous bow in that battle, along with his very powerful arrows similar to the sun's rays in radiance.’

VI.94.12

*tad upoḍham mahad yuddham anyonyavadhakāṅkṣiṇoḥ /  
parasparābhimukhayor dṛptayor iva siṃhayoḥ //*

‘The great battle produced by the two of them squaring up to each other, was like that between two proud lions facing each other.’

VI.94.17

*saṃdhyayā cāvṛtā laṅkā japāpuṣpanikāśayā /  
dṛśyate saṃpradīpteva divase 'pi vasuṃdharā //*

‘Laṅkā was surrounded by a twilight glow similar to a japā flower, and appeared as if the earth was ablaze in daylight.’

VI.94.20

*tāmrāḥ pītāḥ sitāḥ śvetāḥ patitāḥ sūryaraśmayoḥ /  
dṛśyante rāvaṇasyāṅge parvatasyeva dhātavoḥ //*

‘The sun’s rays, red, yellow, cream and white were falling on Rāvaṇa’s body and they were visible like the minerals of a mountain.’

VI.95.5

*rakṣasām rāvaṇam cāpi vānarāṇām ca rāghavam /  
paśyatām vismitākṣāṇām sainyaṃ citram ivābabhau //*

‘The rākṣasas were staring at Rāvaṇa and the vānaras (were looking) at Rāghava with a surprised look; each army was looking like a painting.’

VI.95.11

*rāvaṇadhvajam uddīśya mumoca niśitaṃ śaram /  
mahāsarpam ivāsahyaṃ jvalantaṃ svena tejasā //*

‘Aiming at Rāvaṇa’s standard, he released a sharp arrow, insupportable like a great snake blazing with its own radiance.’

VI.96.5

*kṣipatoḥ śarajālāni tayos tau syandanottamau /  
ceratuḥ saṃyugamahīṃ sāsārau jaladāv iva //*

‘The two supreme chariots of the two of them, who were shooting their nets of arrows, roamed about the battle-field like two rain clouds.’

VI.96.11

*cikṣepa ca punar bāṇān vajrapātasamasvanān /  
sārathiṃ vajrahastasya samuddīśya niśācaraḥ //*

‘ Again the Nightstalker shot shafts whose noise was similar to the fall of a thunderbolt, aiming at the charioteer of the thunderbolt-wielder.’

The battle reaches its acme when Rāma manages to fight close to Rāvaṇa and cut off one of his heads:

VI.96.20

*tataḥ kruddho mahābāhū raghūṇām kīrtivardhanaḥ /  
saṃdhāya dhanuṣā rāmaḥ kṣuram āśīviṣopamam /  
rāvaṇasya śīro 'cchīndac chrīmajjvalitakuṇḍalam //*

‘Then the enraged great-armed Rāma, bestower of the glory of the Raghus, set on his bow a razor-edged arrow similar to a poisonous snake and pierced Rāvaṇa’s head with his majestic blazing earrings.’

VI.96.23

*chinnamātram ca tac chīrṣam punar anyat sma dṛśyate /  
tad apy aśanisamkāśaiś chinnaṃ rāmeṇa sāyakaiḥ //*

‘As soon as that head was cut off, yet another one soon appeared. That also was cut off by Rāma’s lighting-like arrows.’

Then Mātali advises Rāma to use Brahmā's weapon:

VI.97.3

*tataḥ samsmārīto rāmas tena vākyena mātaleḥ /  
jagrāha sa śaraṃ dīptam niśvasantam ivoragam //*

‘Then, Rāma reminded by Mātali’s words, seized a blazing arrow similar to a hissing snake.’

VI.97.8

*sadhūmam iva kālāgniṃ dīptam āśīviṣam yathā /  
rathanāgāśvavṛndānām bhedanam kṣiprakāriṇam //*

‘(that arrow) is smoking like Doomsday Fire, blazing like a venomous snake, fast and capable of shattering troops of chariots, elephants and horses.’

VI.97.10

*vajrasāram mahānādam nānāsamītidāruṇam /  
sarvavitrāsanam bhīmam śvasantam iva pannagam //*

‘It was hard like a diamond, roaring savagely in every conflict terrifying all, fearsome like a hissing snake.’

The powerful missile hits Rāvaṇa’s chest:

VI.97.16

*sa vajra iva durdharṣo vajrabāhuvisarjitaḥ /  
kṛtānta iva cāvāryo nyapatad rāvaṇorasi //*

‘Irresistible like a thunderbolt, released by arms whose power was like that of a thunderbolt, unavoidable like fate, it fell on Rāvaṇa’s chest.’

The death of Rāvaṇa is marked by another mythological comparison:

VI.97.21

*gatāsur bhīmavegas tu nairṛtendro mahādyutiḥ /  
papāta syandanād bhūmau vṛtro vajrahato yathā //*

‘As life left him, the brilliant and terribly impetuous king of rakṣasas fell on the ground from his chariot like Vṛtra hit by the thunderbolt-wielder.’

The section closes with an image portraying a triumphant Rāma:

VI.97.33

*sa tu nihataripuḥ sthirapratijñāḥ  
svajanabalābhivṛto raṇe rarāja /  
raghukulanṛpanandano mahaujās  
tridaśagaṇair abhisamvṛto yathendrah //*

‘Faithful to his promise, his enemy slain, surrounded by his own army in battle, the powerful joy of the Raghu’s dynasty shone, similar to Indra surrounded by the host of thirty(-three) gods.’

There are three types of comparisons, classified according to the nature of the *upamāna* they feature: mythological similes, animal similes, similes portraying atmospheric events, and various similes such as mountains, fire and plants. There are also other mythological similes occur within the passage, usually portraying weapons: spears and arrows are frequently likened to Indra's thunderbolt. It is important to point out that, while similes describing the two combatants appear to have a dual good-evil connotation, (Rāma is Indra, Rāvaṇa is Vṛtra), similes describing arrows normally portray weapons belonging to either of the combatants. Rāvaṇa's magical spear is often compared to Indra's thunderbolt.

The most interesting aspect of similes occurring within this passage is the limited number of comparisons actually portraying Rāma and Rāvaṇa. Out of eighty-six similes occurring within the passage, only twenty-four actually are employed in order to describe the two combatants. Fourteen comparisons describe Rāma, seven portray the king of Laṅkā and three describe both characters within the same simile.

Among similes describing the two combatants, a number of comparisons liken them to clouds and to atmospheric events in general. Rāvaṇa is often compared to a cloud (VI.87.27; 88.55, 59; 90.02; 94.05), while Rāma, in contrast, is the sun

(VI.92.08; 94.11) and the fire (VI.87.43; 88.37). The two combatants appear to be superhuman in one way: they are two forces of nature, rather than two gods. The strength and the valour of the combatants, especially of Rāma, traditionally considered as the incarnation of Viṣṇu, is apparent in their skills in combat.

Among the types of similes occurring within this passage, mythological similes are the most relevant instances. As mentioned before, the divinity of Rāma is an issue that puzzled many scholars because of the apparent contradictory statements within the text. In a battle that is essentially a war between good and evil, whose combatants are not ordinary men, but superhuman (as in the case of Rāma) or monstrous (as in the case of Rāvaṇa) one would expect a large number of mythological comparisons to occur within the passage. As Vassilkov pointed out in his study about *Mahābhārata* similes, *upamā* can often be employed in order to identify a hero with a god. The similarity or even the implicit identity between the hero and the god is stated within the similes, which is employed to compare the two, but ascribing them to two different, separate levels at the same time.

The analysis of this passage does not provide the answer to those who try to find clues to support the theory about Rāma as an incarnation of Viṣṇu: the only time Viṣṇu occurs within this passage, it is to compare him to Lakṣmaṇa (VI.87.9). Rāma is compared to Indra on five occasions (VI.87.9,28; 90.11; 91.21; 97.33), and to Yama in VI.87.24. Another mythological comparison likens him to the sun at the end of a Yuga (VI.92.8). Rāvaṇa, on the other hand, is compared to Vṛtra in two instances (VI.87.28; 97.21).

If the mythological similes cannot be identified as the clue to the issue whether Rāma is, or is not the incarnation of Viṣṇu, there is a second aspect of mythological similes that becomes quite apparent if we analyse at what stage within the narrative they occur.

Mythological similes occur in three key passages within the episode: at the beginning, when Mātali appears riding Indra's chariot and at the end of the episode. At the initial stage of the battle, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa are compared to Indra and Viṣṇu (87.24). When the battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa begins, they are compared to Vāsava and Vṛtra (87.28). The next instance occurs when Rāma is in trouble: without a chariot he is unable to fight against Rāvaṇa. Then Mātali appears,



offering support. In this case, the divine charioteer encourages Rāma to fight like Indra against the Dānavas (90.11). The third instance occurs at the end of the battle, when Rāma kills Rāvaṇa, where the king of rākṣasas is compared to Vṛtra (97.21) and Rāma to Indra (97.33). Mythological similes appear in transitional moments of the episode. There is only one instance of simile comparing Rāma to Vāsava during the battle, in verse 91.21, but the passage, interestingly enough, belongs to a second stage of composition.<sup>133</sup>

What is the role of mythological similes within this episode, then? It appears that mythological similes are employed in important moments of the narrative. Not only as a way of marking a special event within the narrative, but rather to enhance the reciting of the story. When a mythological simile compares the two combatants to a god, something happens in the evolution of the plot. Mythological similes are employed in three important stages of the narrative: the beginning of the battle- the battle coming to a halt- the battle ending.

### 3.2d Mythological similes in the *Mahābhārata* and in the *Rāmāyaṇa*

The analysis of mythological similes in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, reveals an important, common trait between the way the two Epics employ this type of comparison: in both texts, mythological similes are often employed in order to mark the beginning or the end of a combat. In the *Mahābhārata*, this literary device is widely employed with this purpose within minor combats or, as suggested in the analysis of mythological *upamās* within the Karṇaparvan, to mark transitional moments within the combat. Except for the case of similes in the final combat between Arjuna and Karṇa, the ‘identifying’ similes described by Vassilkov, the *Mahābhārata* tends to employ mythological similes with this purpose.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa* the use of mythological comparisons is more similar to the way comparisons are employed in minor combats within the *Mahābhārata*: similes in the final battle between Rāvaṇa and Rāma, for instance, mythological *upamās* appear also in transitional moments. In this particular case it is necessary to point out that, unlike the case of mythological similes within the Karṇaparvan, an external element is introduced in the story: Matali, the charioteer of the gods, appears when the battle

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<sup>133</sup> Brockington, 2000: 353.

between Rāvaṇa and Rāma comes to a halt. The moment in which this particular event takes place is a moment in which Rāma, left without a chariot, cannot fight and risks defeat in battle. The divine intervention in the passage marks another important aspect of this event: the passage, from the more mundane dimension of the combat, to a non-mundane one, the battle between good and evil. The audience sees the bigger picture, thus understanding the real meaning of the battle and it cannot be otherwise: the gods support Rāma. The mythological simile is, in other words, the literary device through which the bard could draw the audience's attention towards another level within the narrative.

But what do the mythological similes occurring within this particular passage have in common with the instances occurring within the *Mahābhārata*, in the combats between Citra and Prativindhya, and Bhīmasena and Aśvatthāman? Similes occurring within these passages share a similar function: they are employed to draw the audience's attention towards the bigger picture. We can imagine a “camera” “zooming out” of the scene of the single combat between Citra and Prativindhya, the audience's gaze wanders about the battlefield and focuses on Bhīmasena and Aśvatthāman, the *upameyas* in the mythological *upamā*. The simile marks a passage, from one single combat to the other, from one narrative level to the other. In the case of the battle between Rāvaṇa and Rāma, the passage is from one dimension of the battle, to another, divine one. In this case, the audience's gaze is still on Rāma, in trouble on the battlefield. But a divine event occurs: the “camera” “zooms out”, an external element is introduced, something unexpected happens and the second level of narrative, marked by a mythological simile, is introduced.

## 4. Conclusions

The contextual analysis of similes within the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* shows several important facts. Similes can fulfil more than one purpose at a time, often only the contextual analysis of passages in which similes occur can reveal a second function. Each Epic displays similes, which are specific to their contexts. When both Epics refer to similar contexts, they tend to employ similes which have similar structure.

Similes tend to follow the mood of the passage in which they accomplish their task: the topic that characterises each passage is the element that conditions most of the similes employed. My research carried out on similes in narrative digressions shows that it is possible to identify a clear relationship between the similes employed and theme in which they appear.

It can be therefore argued that there is a direct connection between the function fulfilled and the predominant theme of the passage in which the comparisons occur, and as a consequence, the range of *upamānas* displayed in the section. The connection between theme and simile is a principle valid for both Epics, although each text employs similes with even more specific functions: in the case of the *Mahābhārata*, the division between similes occurring within dialogues/main narrative is not as obvious as in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, but this is simply because in the *Mahābhārata*, dialogues are often employed in order to introduce narrative digressions. In this case, similes in dialogues, similarly to comparisons occurring within the main narrative, tend to be chosen according to the main theme displayed by the passage; if the section displays a narrative digression, the choice tends to be very specific.

### The Mahābhārata

A step towards our understanding of the way the bards/composers employed similes within the Epics comes with the analysis of narrative digressions. In the section analysing the Mantraparvan in chapter 1 of this thesis, it is explained how, two different types of text, a didactic section and a narrative digression relating the

miraculous birth of Jarāsaṃdha, display two different sets of comparisons. The first sequence is displayed in the speech that the wise Narāda makes to Yudhiṣṭhira in order to question him about the duty of a king, displaying a distinctive type of comparison whose content is didactic/political: all similes are very short and they involve family members, deities and sometimes the relationship guru-pupil. But when the text introduces a narrative digression (the birth of Jarāsaṃdha), the range of *upamānas* employed is modified completely, displaying more decorative features. The analysis of Nalopakhyāna reveals that similes can, indeed, fulfil a specific function which becomes apparent when taking into account the narrative digression *per se*: research carried out on the Nalopakhyāna shows how similes can be employed in such fashion, featuring a wide range of *upamānas*. Similes are employed in order to re-inforce an idea which is present throughout the different narrative planes: the two lovers, separated by fate, call for each other, becoming one the mirror of the other, sharing their state of mind and emotions.

Similes can be employed to fulfil a more subtle purpose: they characterise the role of some of the protagonists of the *Mahābhārata*, such as in the case of the ‘identifying’ simile: the same image occurs referred to the same *upameya* in the same passage or, sometimes even different ones, in order to emphasise a particular feature of the character. In the case explained by Vassilkov in his analysis of similes within the final battle between Karṇa and Arjuna, the battle between the two warriors is identified with that between Indra and Namuci. In this case, the function fulfilled by the simile is even more subtle: the implications of the likening of a hero to a god, which can be interpreted as a possible identity between them, or, as I suggest in 1.4b of this thesis, as a way to compensate for the lack of heroic/divine features on the hero's part, relies on the popularity of such mythological battles. Regardless of the reasons for it, the idea is not within the passage, as in the case of Nala and Damayantī, but belongs to the common knowledge of the audience and provides, as suggested by Vassilkov, a deeper perspective on the combat between the two heroes. In both the Mantraparvan and the Nalopakhyāna, similes are employed so that the audience will become aware, through the use of similes, of elements which might be not apparent otherwise: the supposed identity of feelings between Nala and Damayantī, and the introduction of a new narrative dimension. In the instance of the

battle between Arjuna and Karṇa, the attempt is even more ambitious: the bard is trying to embed the combat between two warriors in a mythological grandeur, which transforms the mundane fight into a mythological one.

In all instances taken into account within the *Mahābhārata*, the composer/bard employs similes to send a message to the audience: the change in the range of similes employed within a passage is a signal to the audience, which is transported to a different narrative plane, different from the main narrative in its core-theme.

### The *Rāmāyaṇa*

The analysis of upamās within the *Rāmāyaṇa* reveals, as anticipated, a basic difference in function when they are encountered in passages featuring speeches than when in narrative passages. While in speeches similes appear to be employed in order to emphasize the words of the speaker, in the main narrative, similes are often employed to emphasize important events occurring within the narrative.

In the case of similes occurring within dialogues, the emphasis can be expressed within the speech-act or either anticipating/following it. On the one hand, similes occurring within passages featuring speech-acts are employed to emphasize what the character has just said or is about to say, or alternatively, they mark something very important that it is about to be said. In the key dialogues of the Ayodhyākāṇḍa, every important request and remark is stressed by similes.

Similes can be employed as markers of important moments within the narrative, but can also be used to mark a character's point of view: in the mutilation of Śūrpaṅkhā, comparisons mark every single important event within the episode, also providing an insight into Śūrpaṅkhā's attraction towards Rāma, often seemingly blurring the thin line between marking a character's point of view and an event within the narrative. The same principle is employed within the section describing Garuḍa's intervention in the Yuddhakāṇḍa.

Every single important event within the passages analysed is marked by a simile: to the point of guiding the audience through the narrative. The bard sends a message to the audience: something important just happened within the narrative, take notice.

Function of similes within the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*:  
parallel features and differences between the two Sanskrit Epics

If the objective of the contextual analysis is to identify the function of a specific simile occurring within a passage, the next step in the research of parallel features in the use of *upamās* within the two texts is the comparing of results achieved in the research carried out on each epic. As shown in chapter 3 of this thesis, similes can be employed in similar contexts, such as in fighting scenes, displaying a similar *upamāna* and fulfilling a similar function, such as in the case of mythological similes analysed in 3.2. But if the occurrence of similes employed with a similar purpose in similar contexts within the two texts is a very interesting realisation, the fact that the two sets of comparisons share a range of *upamāna* and a similar structure is striking. In the case of the abusive similes, the incidence of a type of comparison fulfilling a specific function within similar contexts in the two Epics, also showing the evolution of these similes in more elaborated instances, leads us to the conclusion that, as previously suggested, the bards/composers were aware of certain stylistic rules.

Mythological similes in general are employed within both the Sanskrit Epics in order to introduce a different narrative plane (as suggested by Vassilkov) but in the case of minor combats within the *Kaṇṇaparvan* and in the final battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa, mythological similes appear to be employed in order to mark transitional moments within the episode: at the beginning, at the end and when new, external elements are introduced within the main narrative. The present thesis argues that, in the case of the final combat between Rāma and Rāvaṇa, the external element introduced is the divine intervention of Matali suggests to the audience the divine support for Rāma.

The stylistic similarities between abusive similes within the two Sanskrit Epics and the way mythological comparisons are employed within the two texts suggests that the bards/composers were aware of certain stylistic rules in the way similes were employed within the Sanskrit Epics.

The present thesis suggests a new methodology in the analysis of similes: a close examination of comparisons within the passage in which each comparison

occur by considering the narrative moment, other similes within the passage, and the similes in relation to the main plot. This methodology demonstrates that *upamās* in the Sanskrit Epics are often employed with different functions, but there is one, common trait to all functions fulfilled by similes within every type of context and subject-matter: the non-verbal dialogue between the bard and the audience. the message sent by the bard/composer to the audience through similes can be apparent and clear, such as in the cases of similes within dialogues, where comparisons are employed in order to openly stress speech-acts, or hidden, almost subliminal, such as in the case of the ‘identifying’ similes, where the continuous likening of a particular character to a particular god suggests to the audience a possible relation of identity between the god and the hero.

Whether to guide the audience through the narrative or to draw the audience's attention towards a particular event in the story, similes are the tool through which the bard communicates his message: the non-verbal dialogue between the reciter of the texts and the audience is the *raison d'etre* of similes.

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