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*Review Article*

**Where is the Romarāji?\***

SREERAMULA RAJESWARA SARMA

This volume (bound together with vol. IX: *Rules and Remedies in Classical Indian Law*, ed. Julia Leslie) contains six of the articles presented in the Workshop No. 19 during the Seventh World Sanskrit Conference at Leiden in 1987.

Written by well known authorities, these papers offer fascinating glimpses of inter-relationships between the medical literatures of India, Sri Lanka and Tibet. Three of the contributions are devoted to Indian medical literature. P. V. Sharma, who is currently editing Niścalakara's *Ratnaprabhā* commentary on Cakrapāṇidatta's *Cikitsāsaṅgraha*, offers much new information on this commentary (pp. 107-112). In 'Aṣṭāṅga-saṅgraha, Kalpasthāna I: Translation and Notes' (pp. 113-137), Kenneth G. Zysk provides a preliminary translation with annotations on the basis of all the available editions and parallel versions; the translations of the remaining chapters of the *Kalpsthāna* of this text are, incidentally, appearing in regular succession on the pages of this journal. G. Jan Meulenbeld argues that blood occupied a more prominent position in the nosological theory prior to the *tridoṣavāda* (pp. 91-106). Jinadasa Liyanaratane surveys 'Sinhalese Medical Manuscripts in Paris' (pp. 73-90) as part of a research project on the history of medical literature in Sri Lanka. Of the six manuscripts discussed here, three are related to northern Indian classical Āyurveda and the other three contain both Āyurveda and Siddha elements; the latter probably composed by Tamils settled in Sri Lanka. Indian classical medicine did not know pulse reading (*Nāḍīparikṣā*), but this is said to be one of the pillars of Tibetan medicine. The standard Tibetan treatise entitled *Rgyud bzi* or 'Four Tantras' deals with this subject in the first chapter of the last book. In 'Some Remarks on Sphygmology' (pp. 66-72), R.E. Emmerick discusses

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\* A Review of: *Medical Literature From India, Sri Lanka and Tibet*. Edited by G. Jan Meulenbeld. E.J. Brill: Leiden/New York/København/Köln 1991. (Panels of the VIIth World Sanskrit Conference, Kern Institute, Leiden: August 23—29, 1987, Vol. VIII.) ISBN 90-04-09522-5. 137 pp. Hfl. 120.00.

the problems in translating some of these verses.

The first paper, by Rahul Peter Das, entitled 'The *romarāji*- in Indian Kāvya and Āyurvedic Literature', is also the longest: it occupies nearly half of this volume (pp. 1-65). If the review concentrates on this paper for a detailed discussion, this is not to minimise the importance of other contributions. Das's paper spans two disciplines and raises an important issue about the conventions in Sanskrit poetry which deserves to be widely noticed.

One of the several signs of puberty in both boys and girls is that a thin line of hair grows from the pubic region towards the navel. In the case of men it even extends upwards beyond the navel and appears prominently in hirsute men. But not so in women. There it stops at the navel, and even if it extends above this, it is so faint that it is rarely visible. Nor is the line ever invested with any special significance in practical life. But in Sanskrit poetry, attention is paid to this line of hair on the female body, which is called *romarāji*. On examining a number of Sanskrit Kāvya, Das found that a majority of them place this line of hair above the navel. In this highly thought-provoking paper, Das first draws our attention to the dichotomy between the reality (below the navel) and the poetic convention (above the navel), and then tries to understand why Sanskrit poetry locates it at the wrong place.

For this purpose, Das has collected from various anthologies some sixty-two passages that describe the *romarāji* (pp.10f.) and analysed some of these in great detail. In order to find a rationale for the anomaly in the poetic convention, Das drew into consideration a formidable array of texts on Āyurveda, Sāmudrikaśāstra, Śilpaśāstra, lexicography, Buddhist and Jaina hagiographies and so on. This material shows that the *romarāji* we are here concerned with first appears in the descriptions of the Mahāpuruṣa, i.e. ideal male, in Jaina texts. In these descriptions the *romarāji* is said to have a certain ideal form and is placed below the navel. Later on the *romarāji* is gradually transferred to the description of females.

The medical texts also speak of the *romarāji* primarily in connection with the male body as the line of hair below the navel (p.34), but 'whether they presuppose such a growth on the female body too ... is a matter of speculation' (p.40). These texts, however, mention the *romarāji* on the female body as one of the several signs of pregnancy. But here too problems occur. Some texts, like *Aṣṭāṅghaḍaya*, *Sārirasthāna*

1.51, enumerate *romarājyāḥ prakāśanam*<sup>1</sup> 'the *romarāji* becoming very distinct' as one of the signs of pregnancy. As against this, some texts speak of *romarājyudgama* '[sudden] growth of the *romarāji*'. Das rightly observes that if this is something newly produced by pregnancy, it cannot be the line of hair we have been talking of so far. What is meant is possibly the *linea nigra*, a dark pigmentation said to occur in the case of pregnancy (§§ 71f.).

But none of these texts offers any justification for the *romarāji* running from the navel up to the breasts and the author is forced to conclude that this is 'a particularly glaring example of how a poetic tradition divorced from reality may not only develop, but also be transmitted blindly over the centuries' (p.52).

Das must be congratulated for this pioneering study. But I feel that there is still more to be extracted from the Kāvya passages cited by him. This will not ultimately alter his deductions on the *romarāji* in different literary genres in general, but it will help us gain a better focus on the poetic conventions. The problem I would particularly like to tackle here is that of descriptions of the *romarāji* situated *below* the navel in Kāvya literature. According to Das, only Kālidāsa describes such a *romarāji*. In my opinion, however, at least two other of the poets cited by Das, as well as another poet he has not cited, do so too.

At the outset, Das states (p.9) that he has collected most of the Kāvya passages from anthologies. I am quite aware of the difficulty of searching through the haystack of Sanskrit poetry for the needle of the *romarāji*. However, anthologies arrange the verses topic-wise but torn from the context. And this had the unfortunate effect of making Das in most, though not all, cases neglect the common convention in Sanskrit poetry of describing the female body in a linear sequence from the feet up to the hair (*padādikeśāntavarṇana*) or in the reverse order (*keśādi-padānta*)<sup>2</sup>. In his study of Jaina texts, however, Das has taken the

<sup>1</sup> On *Raghuvaṃśa* 3.2, Mallinātha cites a similar stanza from Vāhaṭa:  
*śarīrasādādigarbhalaḥṣaṇe vāhaṭaḥ.*

*kṣāmatā garimā kukṣer mūrccā chardir arocakam  
jymbhā prasekaḥ sadanaṃ romarājyāḥ prakāśanam.*

<sup>2</sup> In his *Alaṅkāraśekhara* (ed. Anantarāma Śāstri Vetāl, Benares 1927), Keśava Miśra on p.60 quotes an anonymous authority to the effect that humans should be described from the head downwards and gods from the feet upwards (*mānavā maulito varṇyā devāś caranataḥ punaḥ*), but this rule is observed only in its breach. Thus in the

sequence of description into account (pp.46f.)

While celebrating the female body, poets take a slow excursion, as it were, over its whole length, stopping at each station to admire the sights. Whether ascending or descending, the poets rarely deviate from the sequence. In such linear descriptions, the *romarāji* is one of the stations which the poet utilises for the employment of his wit and poetic flourish. We do not know precisely when this convention started, but soon it seems to have become almost the only mode of describing a woman.<sup>3</sup> Handbooks on poetry supplied the stock phrases to be used and lesser poets completed the obligatory *strīvarṇana* in a mechanical fashion. The convention reached its culmination in the Hindi poetry of the Rīti-school (between approximately A.D. 1643 and 1857), where a new genre developed under the designation *Nakh-sikh*. A parallel style in Urdu is called *Sar-ā-pā*.<sup>4</sup> These poems just consist of some witty or clever sayings on each of the successive stations without any connecting link.

It should also be stressed that the poets usually describe the *romarāji* only as one of the several steps in the linear description, but never the *romarāji* alone.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, if one is looking in a Kāvya for a statement about the absolute or relative location of the *romarāji*, one must read the entire linear description, and not just the verses on the *romarāji*; verses culled from anthologies, bereft of the context, may not

*Saundaryalaharī*, attributed to the great Śaṅkara, the goddess is described from the head downwards (vv.1-47), whereas Bilhaṇa employs the reverse order for the heroine in his *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* (8.6ff.).

<sup>3</sup> At the VIIIth World Sanskrit Conference held in Vienna in 1991, this reviewer had occasion to hear a highly interesting paper by Alois Wurm on the physical description of a beautiful woman: 'Sundarīnakhaśikhavarṇana — A Sanskrit Literary Motif. Preliminaries to a Typological Demarcation in a Universal Perspective'

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Iqbāl Ah'mad (ed), *Mūzā abdurrah'mān 'premi' kṛt nakh-sikh*, Bombay 1972. In the introduction, pp.4f., the editor mentions that Balabhadra (V.S. 1630), his brother Keśava (V.S. 1657), and a host of others composed texts all called *Nakh-Sikh*. Keśava provides for 39 "stops" while Lakṣmīnārāyan "Safiq" Awrangābādī in his *Taṣwīr-e-ḡānān* (composed in 1774) employs a *Sar-ā-pā* with as many as 169 headings.

<sup>5</sup> Except for one Parvatīya Viśveśvara who wrote a hundred verses exclusively on this line under the title *Romāvalīśataka*, but he is an eighteenth century writer obviously working under the influence of the Rīti-school. Das (p.9) announces a forthcoming German translation of this work.

always answer "geographical" queries.

Thus, in order fully to understand the poetic conventions regarding the *romarāji*, one must: (i) study it as part of a linear description of the entire body, and not as an isolated description, (ii) pay attention to the sequential context, and (iii) read the Kāvya chronologically.

Of the sixty-two Kāvya passages studied, Das found only one that favours the *romarāji* below the navel. This is also the oldest available text. The verse in question is Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava* 1.31 (Das, § 25, pp.12f.). Because of the overwhelming number of passages holding the contrary view, Das, though he finally does take this verse to refer to the *romarāji* below the navel (pp.22f.;40), is very cautious in accepting what I consider to be an unambiguous statement about the location of the *romarāji*. I construe the verse as follows: *tasyāḥ tanvī navaromarājiḥ nīvim atikramya natanābhirandhram praviṣṭā* 'Her thin and new[ly sprouted] *romarāji*, having crossed the knot of the nether garment, entered the opening of the deep navel.' What Kālidāsa means is this. The lower part of the *romarāji* is not visible because it is covered by the garment. It becomes visible only after it crosses the *nīvi*. The poet then continues to say that the *romarāji* 'shone like the lustre of the dark gem in the middle of the hip girdle.' Where is this girdle? As is evident from Indian sculpture, women tied the nether garment well below the navel, and to keep it in position wore a girdle just on the upper fringe of the garment. Thus the *mekhalā* is always below the navel. Consequently the *romarāji*, when it is said to emerge from below the garment and the girdle and enter the navel, lies unquestionably below the navel.

The context also shows that Kālidāsa is describing each station in a regular sequence in the following ascending order (1.33-48): toe-nails, feet; gait, anklets; calves; thighs; girdle; *romarāji* reaching up to the navel; waist, three folds; breasts; arms; throat; face; lips; voice; eyes; eye-brows; hair. Das too has drawn attention to these facts, but in a manner far more cautious than necessary.

Similarly, the anonymous verse 15 (Das, § 28, pp.15f.) locates the *romarāji* below the navel in a successive enumeration of thighs, hips, *romarāji*, navel, waist, breasts, and face. Here too Das is extremely cautious (also on p.22), but I think there can be no doubt in this regard. It is a pity we do not know the source of this verse, because, as we shall see later (see n.16), its chronology is of crucial importance in the discussion.

Subandhu is perhaps the next poet to mention the *romarāji* in the

course of a linear description in his *Vāsavadattā*.<sup>6</sup> In the text as it is current today, there are three passages where the *romarāji* is described and these create complications. The first passage reads *romarājilatālavālavālayena ... mekhalādāmnā ... parikalitajaghanasthalā* (pp.40f.). Here *Vāsavadattā*'s hip-region (*jaghanasthala*) is said to be encircled by a girdle (*mekhalādāman*<sup>7</sup>). The poet uses a number of images to describe the girdle, one of which is *romarājilatālavālavālayena*. That is to say, if the *romarāji* is imagined to be a creeper (*latā*), the girdle then becomes its *ālavālavālaya*, the circular trench or basin which is dug around the root of a plant and which is filled with water. Thus the *romarāji* is identified/compared with the *latā* and the *mekhalādāman* with the *ālavālavālaya*. To use the terminology of *Alaṅkāraśāstra*, the *romarāji* and the *mekhalādāman* are *upameyas* (subjects of comparison) and the *latā* and the *ālavālavālaya* are *upamānas* (objects of comparison). Therefore, what the poet intends to say is this: just as a creeper rises from the round trench and goes upwards, so does the *romarāji* rise from the girdle and go upwards [towards the navel]. Das avers (n.75 on p.55) that "The *ālavāla*- "basin of water round the root of a plant" of the *romarāji*- mentioned here is in all probability the navel" (cf. n.8). Syntax does not support this probability for *romarājilatālavālavālayena* and the seven other expressions, all in the instrumental, are connected with the immediately following *mekhalādāmnā*, also in the instrumental.

In Subandhu's second passage (*romāvalilatāphalabhūtābhyām ... payodharābhyām*, p.43) the *romarāji* is a creeper and the breasts are the fruit. This would mean that the *romarāji* is above the navel and reaches up to the breasts.<sup>8</sup>

In the third passage (*hāralatāromarājivyājagaṅgāyamunāsāṅgama-*

<sup>6</sup> Ed. with the *Prabodhinī* Sanskrit and Hindi commentaries by Śaṅkaradeva Śāstrī, Varanasi 1954. The text is heavily inflated and needs a proper critical edition.

<sup>7</sup> *mekhalādāman* (PW, s.v. *dāman*), *kāñciguna*, etc. are common expressions for a string-girdle, or girdle made of a single strand in contradistinction to broader girdles or those made of multiple strands. For the former, cf. *Rāmāyaṇa* (critical edition) 2.72.6:

*līptā candanasāreṇa rājvasatrāṇi bibhratī  
mekhalādāmabhiś citrai rajjubaddheva vānarī.*

For the latter, cf. *Kumārasambhava* 1.37 etc.

<sup>8</sup> Combining the imagery in these two passages, the author of the *Lalitāsahasranāmastotra* (ed. Vasant Anant Gāḍgil, Puṇyapattana 1977, p.7) wrote at a later period: *nābhyālavālaromālatāphalakucadvayī*. Here navel and *ālavāla* are equated.

*prayāgataṭābhyām ... payodharābhyām*, pp.43-45) the *romarāji* goes even higher and passes through the narrow channel between the breasts. Here the dark *romarāji* is the river Yamunā, the white pearl necklace the Gaṅgā, and the breasts the two steep banks at Prayāga where these two rivers meet. As Das pertinently observes elsewhere in connection with *Kālidāsa* (p.17), Subandhu could not have written all the three passages, placing the *romarāji* sometimes below and sometimes above the navel. Either the first one is genuine and the next two interpolations, or the other way round.

We are faced with a similar problem also with the other great prose writer Bāṇa. He seems to be the only poet who mentions the *romarāji* in connection with a masculine body. Describing the onset of puberty in prince Candrāpiḍa in his *Kādambarī*,<sup>9</sup> the poet remarks that his *romarāji* ascended high along with his valour (*pratāpena saḥāuroha romarājīh*, pp. 266f.), without however specifying where this *romarāji* grew. Elsewhere in the same work (p.478), he describes, among others, the navel, *romarāji*, girdle, and so on of Puṇḍarika in a descending order, implying clearly that the *romarāji* is below the navel. The same location is suggested in connection with a female as well in the next passage, where a tribal girl is described in the following words literally borrowed from Subandhu's first passage cited above: *romarājilatālavālakena rasanādāmnā parikalitajaghanasthalām* (p. 38). A fourth mention of the *romarāji* occurs in connection with the heroine *Kādambarī* (p.615), and this contradicts the previous statements. Here in an ascending enumeration the description of the *romarāji* is placed between those of the navel and the breasts, implying that it lies between these, though the description itself does not make a statement about the location (*tribhuvanavijayaprasastivarnāvalīm iva likhitām manmathena romarājīmañjarīm bibhrāṇām*). If this phrase were shifted and placed before the description of the navel, the contradiction would disappear.

There is one more poet who places the *romarāji* correctly below the navel, namely Bilhaṇa. In the *Vikramāṅkadevacarita*, he describes Candrālekḥā in an ascending order in some eighty verses (8.6-86). Verses 17-23 are devoted to *nitamba/śronī/jaghana*. These are followed by vv.24-28 on the *romarāji*. Thereafter the navel is described in 29-33,

<sup>9</sup> Ed. with the commentary of Bhānucandra and Siddhacandra and Hariścandra Vidyālakāra's Hindi translation by Mohanadeva Panta, reprint Dilli 1976.



then the three folds, breasts and so on. This sequence shows that Bilhaṇa locates the *romarāji* below the navel. It is not necessary that each stanza on the *romarāji* should invariably supply the anatomical-geographical coordinates, but many of these, in fact, do.

Das does not consider the description of the *romarāji* in the context of the whole passage (8.6-86), nor does he read the verses on the *romarāji* (8.24-28, 31) in their proper sequence (cf. p.209 above). Consequently he finds most of these verses problematic. Nevertheless, he concludes 'that the problematic verses ... too fit into the patterns of other verses of Bilhaṇa discussed and thus into that of the majority of other verses' (§ 38, p.21), i.e. that Bilhaṇa's verses locate the *romarāji* above the navel like the majority of the verses considered in Das's study. This conclusion goes against the sequence of description which I mentioned just above. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss these verses successively in somewhat greater detail and see what the poet states or implies about the position of the *romarāji*.

Verse 24 (Das, § 33, p.20): The *romarāji* enters the navel, as if it were a streak of darkness running away from the lustre of the gems on the girdle and trying to hide in the deep cavern of the navel. This is a clear statement that the *romarāji* runs from the girdle to the navel. Das wonders from which side the line enters the navel.<sup>10</sup> But if the *romarāji* runs away from the lustre, then it must be from below because the girdle is worn below the navel. There cannot be a more explicit statement in poetry. Moreover, note also the echo of *Kumārasambhava* 1.38 here:

*Ku* 1.38: *tasyāḥ praviṣṭā natanābhīrandhraṃ ... tanvī navaromarājih.*

*VC* 8.24: *nābhīrandhraṃ praviṣṭāsyāḥ śyāmalā romavallārī.*

Verse 25 (Das, §32, pp.19f.): For a correct appreciation of this verse, it is necessary to know that it echoes *Kumārasambhava* 1.24:<sup>11</sup>

*Ku* 1.24: *vidūrabhūmir navameghaśabdād udbhinnayā ratnaśalākayeva.*

*VC* 8.25: *bhātī romāvalī tasyāḥ payodharabharonnatau*

<sup>10</sup> P.20: 'One could say ... that the *romarāji*- flees, so to say, away from the vicinity of the jewel. However, it may also be that it is on the other side of the navel, in which case it would, so to say, hide in this after descending from above and refrain from advancing further on its course.'

<sup>11</sup> Sures Chandra Banerji and Amal Kumar Gupta ignore this fact and make a mess of their translation in *Bilhaṇa's Vikramāṅkadeva Caritam. Glimpses of the History of the Cātukyas of Kalyāna*. First English Rendering. Calcutta 1965, p.128.

*jātā ratnaśalākeva śronivaidūryabhūmitaḥ.*

Kālidāsa gives expression here to an old belief: when new water-bearing clouds come thundering, columns of beryl stone sprout from the earth. Bilhaṇa plays on the theme through the double meaning of the word *payodhara*. Therefore, I shall modify Das's translation as follows: 'Her *romāvalī* shines like a jewel-rod, produced from the *vaidūrya*-ground of the hips, with the increase of the heavy clouds/breasts.' Here also the implication is that the *romarāji* rises upwards from the pelvic region (*śroni*).<sup>12</sup>

Verse 26 (Das, § 31, pp.17f.): In this verse the poet sees a parallel between the navel and the *romarāji* on the one hand, and the golden bracelet (usual meaning of *kaṭaka*) and the lac oozing from it on the other hand. I cannot visualise why the lac should be oozing from a golden bracelet, but if it does, then it goes downwards, and this is implied by the word *dhārā*.<sup>13</sup>

Verse 27 (Das, § 37, p.21): Another parallelism between the ensemble of the navel and the *romarāji* on the one hand, and a ring and a chain on the other, the latter to tie the elephant which is/belongs to Kāma (*smaradantinaḥ*). A chain normally hangs downwards.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Assuming that the jewel-rod is meant for the in my opinion impossible purpose of elevating/buttressing/raising the breasts (*unnatau* does not generate such a meaning), Das concludes 'that at its upper end the *romarāji*- extends up to the breasts'. But here Bilhaṇa is just playing upon a variation of Kālidāsa's original theme. There are two parallel images. The first is of the linear *romarāji* that sprung up from the pelvic region as soon as the breasts rose/grew, both breasts and the *romarāji* being signs of puberty. The second image is that of longish crystals of beryl sprouting from the earth as soon as clouds rise in the sky. Neither do the beryl crystals reach up to the clouds nor the *romarāji* up to the breasts.

<sup>13</sup> Das wishes to locate the *kaṭaka* also on the woman's body and therefore tries various permutations with the different meanings of *kaṭaka*. But the poet says clearly that the *kaṭaka* belongs to Kandarpa or Kāma, and this in my opinion precludes its being on the woman's body too. As an ornament, the word can mean (usually) a bracelet or (very rarely) a girdle. In either case, the lac flowing from it will flow downwards. And with this is compared the *romarāji* attached to the navel.

<sup>14</sup> Again Das indulges in what to me is over-interpretation. Though there is no mention of breasts in the verse, he refers vaguely to other verses with clearer statements and insists that the elephant implies breasts ('actually, the breasts are elephant's frontal lobes'), and that therefore the *romarāji* connects the navel and breasts. In this verse, as in others, two parallel images are presented. One is the subject of comparison (*upa-*

Verse 28 (Das, § 34, p.20): The *romarāji* enters the navel to see how deep it is. There is no explicit statement about the location of the *romarāji*, but Das thinks that 'since however a sounding line would fall downwards, the implication ....seems to be that the *romarāji* is above the navel'. Perhaps. But note his comment on the following verse.<sup>15</sup>

Verse 29 (Das, § 37, p.21): As I have said earlier, the *romarāji* is described in vv.24-28. After this, the navel is described in vv.29-31. Verse 29 states that the navel looks like a pit produced in the ground by the tip of the bow, when Kāma used it as a climbing pole to reach up to the breasts. In this bow, Das wishes to see the *romarāji* stretching from the navel to the breasts. I do not, because (i) the verse makes sense without this identification, (ii) this identification goes against the statement of all the other verses, and (iii) when Kāma has climbed up, he must have taken away the bow, so that all one can see is just the pit.

Verse 31 (Das, § 35, p.20): As in 26 and 27, here is a parallelism between the navel-*romarāji* combination and the ink-pot (actually a clump of dried ink) and the stream of ink, which naturally flows downwards. Das acknowledges this, but also adds (p.21): 'However, it may well be that the simile here is not meant so literally, in which case what would matter is merely that the flow is *away* from the navel, i.e. the *romarāji*- could be taken to be *above* this.' Sure, but does that supersede the possibility that the *romarāji* is below, which is the normal

*meva*) and also the topic under discussion (*prastuta*), and the other is the object of comparison (*upamāna*) and extraneous to the discussion (*aprastuta*). The various elements of these two images should be independent of one another in order to produce a clear parallelism, whether this is presented in the form of *upamā*, *rūpaka* or any other figure of speech based on comparison. Therefore, in the present verse, the elephant which belongs to or is identical with Kāma need not, and must not, be sought in the limbs of the woman who is being described. Pertinent is just the fact that the navel and the *romarāji* together resemble a ring and a chain. Since a chain normally hangs downwards from the ring, the implication is that the *romarāji* is below the navel. Das thinks of some other possibilities too, but in that case even more possibilities present themselves. Thus, if you hold the other end of the chain and drop it from a very great height, you will see for some minutes the heavier ring below the chain. Again, if you clasp the ring around the elephant's foot and fasten the other end of the chain to a post, both the ring and the chain will lie in a horizontal plane. But poetry should not be subjected to this kind of analysis.

<sup>15</sup> 'It may however be that the picture is not to be taken so literally, i.e. that what is significant here is the mere fact that the line enters the opening.'

direction of flow?

Thus in each of these verses (with the possible exception of 28) Bilhaṇa makes a clear enough statement that the *romarāji* lies below the navel.

But there is no denying the fact that there exists a large body of examples where the *romarāji* is clearly above the navel and is reaching up to the breasts. This shows that at some point of time there occurred a shift in the position of the *romarāji*, not in the female anatomy, but in poetic imagination. Once the *romarāji* had gone above the navel, it was firmly made to remain there by the subsequent poets. Perhaps a chronological study of Sanskrit literary works might reveal when this shift took place.<sup>16</sup>

At least one Sanskrit writer appears to be aware that the *romarāji* is wrongly located. In the sixteenth century, Keśava Miśra states that the *romarāji* and the *trivali* in women are artificial poetic conventions (*kavi-sampradāya* or *kavisamāya*) of the kind where things that do not exist are mentioned. This does not, of course, mean that these two do not exist at all: only that they do not exist in the manner described in conventional poetry.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, adds Keśava, it is highly desirable to follow these conventions (*kavisampradāyasya sarvāpekṣābhya-arhitattvam*). Therefore, he teaches how to describe the female body in a descending linear sequence, where he places the *romarāji* between the breasts and the navel.<sup>18</sup>

However, the *romarāji* above the navel cannot be put in the same

<sup>16</sup> As we have seen, Kālidāsa, the anonymous author of verse 15, Subandhu (if the second and third passages are interpolations), and Bāṇa depict the *romarāji* below the navel. On the other hand, Māgha (*Śiśupālavadhā* 9.22) and Śrīharṣa (*Naiṣadhiyacarita* 7.83-87) see it above the navel. Thus two seventh century writers Bāṇa and Māgha have contradictory views on the location of the *romarāji*. Does this warrant the conclusion that the shift began to occur in the seventh century and that poets like Bilhaṇa (in the eleventh) still adhered to the older tradition?

<sup>17</sup> *Alaṅkāraśekhara*, p.59: *vastugatyā yan na bhavati tad api kavibhir nibadhyate. yathā. ...*

*kesarāśokayoḥ satstrigaṇḍūsāt pādaghātataḥ  
māsāntare 'pi puṣpāni romālis trivaliḥ striyām.*

<sup>18</sup> Keśava enumerates the stock phrases to describe the *romarāji* thus (*ibid.*, p.48):  
*rekḥākārālisuśyāmā romālis tena tādrśaiḥ  
śaivāladhūmabhṛṅgānilatādyair upamiyate.*

class of poetic conventions as lotuses in flowing waters and the like. Lotus flowers in flowing waters, even if they cannot grow there in reality, would add to the beauty of the waters. The notion of Aśoka trees blooming when kicked by pretty women, though quite impossible, has some charm of its own. But a dark line of hair reaching up to the breasts or even passing through the cleavage, should it occur in reality, would indeed be revolting to Indian sensibilities. That such a poetic convention persisted all the same, that too without any religious or ideological compulsions, is an enigma.

Prof. Rahul Peter Das deserves all credit for drawing our attention to this enigma. This long critique is, in fact, meant to be a tribute to his stimulating article. One looks forward with eager anticipation to his German translation on this "hair-raising" theme.<sup>19</sup>

#### Editors' Note

On the *romarāji*- see now also: RAHUL PETER DAS, "The *romarāji*- in Indian Kāvya and Āyurvedic Literature — Paralipomena", *Festschrift Klaus Bruhn zur Vollendung des 65. Lebensjahres dargebracht von Schülern, Freunden und Kollegen*[,] herausgegeben von Nalini Balbir und Joachim K. Bautze. Reinbek 1994, pp.267-294.

On p.292 of the article mentioned please insert the following:

BRONKHORST JOHANNES BRONKHORST: "Studies on Bhartṛhari, 5: Bhartṛhari and Vaiśeṣika." *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques* 47.1993, pp.75-94.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. n.5 above.