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***Ucchvāsa, sarga and lambha:***  
**Text divisions in Sanskrit poems (*mahākāvya*s)**

Summary: The article is devoted to the structure of Sanskrit *mahākāvya*s in prose (*kathā* and *ākhyāyikā*) and verse (*sargabandha*). It seems that the origin of *kathā* is connected with the art of storytelling, whereas the roots of *ākhyāyikā* are in the heroic epic tradition, which facts influenced the inner organization of the texts belonging respectively to both genres. One of the main aims of *sargabandha* is to present the events from the past (described earlier also in the *Mahābhārata* or *Rāmāyana*), however in accordance with theory and practice of *kāvya* tradition. Again, it has its impact on the text architecture as will be shown.

Key words: *mahākāvya*, *kathā*, *ākhyāyikā*, *kāvya*, art of storytelling, Indian epic tradition

**Introduction**

Generally speaking, the subject of literary genres was never thoroughly treated by theoreticians of Sanskrit literature. Their definitions were neither exhaustive nor precise. Nevertheless, it was the division of the text which was mentioned almost by all ancient Indian theoreticians while defining the *mahākāvya*s – major poems, as Sigfried Lienhard calls them – falling into three categories, namely: *sargabandhas* – the epic poem in verse; *gadḥakāvya*s or prose poems divided

into *kathās* and *ākhyāyikās*; and finally *campūs*, poems in prose and verse. We leave aside *campū*, which is the story told in mixed prose and verse, “a popular narrative form but admitted to the class of *kāvya* only late and reluctantly, then much cultivated from the 10th century onwards as a medium for epic, historical and fictitious matter.”<sup>1</sup>

Ākhyāyikā, a literary genre relating the life-story of famous persons, is divided into chapters most often named *ucchvāsas* (literally ‘breathing out’), however, it might happen that synonyms may be used as well. The theoreticians very strongly stress the need of the presence of these chapters.

What we learn about *kathā* is that it relates fictitious stories. The representatives of this genre should not be divided into chapters called *ucchvāsas*, usually its internal structure is organised in another way: the plots are boxed within each other. Some theoreticians treat the *kathā* as a subdivision within the frame of a bigger narrative structure.

An epic poem, the *sargabandha*, is also referred to as the *mahākāvya* in its narrow sense. The name *sargabandha* denotes “consisting of chapters or cantos called *sargas*.” Most of the theoreticians presenting the definition (*lakṣaṇa*) of this genre, be it long or concise, start with a piece of information concerning the text division into *sargas*. Thus Bhāmaha (6/7 century AD) begins: “what consists of *sargas* is [called] *mahākāvya*” (*sargabandho mahākāvyaṃ – Kāvyaḥ lakṣaṇaḥ*, 1.18a). Daṇḍin - another early theoretician living at the end of 7<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of 8<sup>th</sup> century AD,<sup>2</sup> the author of the *Kāvyaḍarśa* (The Mirror of Poetry) – is of the same opinion.<sup>3</sup> Almost all later theo-

<sup>1</sup> Warder 1989: 122.

<sup>2</sup> Yigal Bronner in his recently published article sums up all the controversies concerning the dates of Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin and gives 680-720 as the possible dates of the active career of the latter (Bronner 2011: 10).

<sup>3</sup> *Kāvyaḍarśa* 1.14 ab:  
*sargabandho mahākāvyaṃ ucyate tv aśya lakṣaṇam /*  
[Kad. (3) 2002: 161].

reticians remark on this characteristic of the epic poem. Among the definitions lacking in such a statement concerning the division into *sargas*, the one belonging to the *Citrasūtra* portion of the *Viṣṇudharmottara-pūraṇa* and that given in the *Pratāparudrayāsobhuṣaṇa* of Vidyānātha can be mentioned. It seems that Vidyānātha, being aware of other characteristics of the *mahākāvya*, speaks only about the *varṇana*, i.e. the descriptions of place and time and selected events, clearly distinguishing it as a vital feature of this genre, whereas the *Viṣṇudharmottara-pūraṇa*'s definition of the *mahākāvya* names quite different requirements of the genre. This latter definition differs considerably from the rest known to us, however, it would be difficult to imagine that the division into *sargas* as the genre determining factor was not known to its author or compiler. Presumably, the author decided to be silent about a characteristic as obvious as that.

The question arises: Why do the theoreticians so strongly stress the need of a very particular type of text division while defining the above-mentioned genres, insisting on calling the chapters *ucchvāsas* in the case of *ākhyāyikā* and *sargas* in the case of the *sargabandha mahākāvya* or describing the structure of *kathā* as devoid of chapters?

The reason for that may be connected with the origin of these genres.

### Ākhyāyikā and Kathā

As Anthony K. Warder noticed, the *ākhyāyikā* originated as "a branch of Tradition or legendary history *itihāsa* and later was assimilated into the *kāvya* movement."<sup>4</sup> The ancient practice of composing accounts of the deeds of famous men in narrative prose was continued as a branch of *kāvya* composition. Probably the presence of the chapters called *ucchvāsas* ('breathing out') is connected with the oral transmission of the epic poems in the past. Such a huge story had to be divided into parts in order to give the audience a chance to breathe, not to mention the reciter. It should be stressed here that

<sup>4</sup> Warder 1989: 181.

if the *ākhyāyikā* was an orally performed genre, it definitely belonged to a different kind of orally performed poetry than the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana*. According to the definition of the *ākhyāyikā* given by Bhāmaha, the hero narrates his actions himself.<sup>5</sup> There is an interesting passage in the *Kāmasūtra* where the *ākhyāyikās* are spoken of as if they were actually a kind of dramatic performance. One can find them among the 64 *kalās*, i.e. arts and skills: ...*nāṭakākhyāyikādarśanam*...<sup>6</sup> In that respect A.K. Warder reminds us about a pair: *campū* and its performance - *cākkīyar kūttu* or *prabandham kūttu* in Kerala<sup>7</sup> – which is a kind of public recitation, or rather a dramatic monologue delivered by an actor narrating the story with the appropriate intonation, expressions and gestures. It is also worth mentioning that the conventional opening of the *ākhyāyikā* is connected with the author himself, as he narrates his own life-story, and then the story of composing his prose poem. It may also prove the interaction which once took place between the narrator of the story and the audience. Such an introduction presenting the life of the author can be found in the *Harṣacarita* (The Deeds of Harṣa) (ruled 606-648AD). Its author Bāṇa starts with the legendary history of his family but after that he describes his own life – his birth, early education, etc. When he was a boy, he lost his mother and then his father. But soon he was able to find interesting companions to forget about all his worries. He travelled accompanied by young poets, musicians, mendicants, nuns, actors, and even a painter was there, a snake charmer and a magician. As we can imagine, he learnt a lot about life. Luckily, he was able to meet wise people while frequenting learned assemblies. After several years he came back home and lived there with his relatives. At that time he was asked to come to the court of the king, as it was not right to pass one's own life "like a fruitless tree,"

<sup>5</sup> *Kāvyaśāstra* 1  
*vṛttam ākhyāyate tasyām nāyakena svaceṣṭitam /*  
 [BhKĀ (2) 1991: 9]

<sup>6</sup> *Kāmasūtra*, I, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Warder 1989: 187.

far away from the court, not being able to see the great king.<sup>8</sup> Then the panegyric description of king Harṣa's life starts.

Note that in both epics: the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, the poet is also one of the characters and his importance is especially visible at the outset of the main story. This trait, present and especially prominent in the *ākhyāyikā* genre, could be seen as inherited from the epic tradition. The narration of an eyewitness and at the same time one of the participants of the described events definitely makes the story reliable and trustworthy.

According to the definition contained in the *Kāvya-lankāra* (Ornamenting Poetry) of Bhāmaha, the prose composition called *ākhyāyikā*<sup>9</sup> is about exalted matters (*udāttārtha*) and its contents, following the order of what was done, is worth listening to because of its sound and sense (*prakṛtānākulaśra vyaśabdārthapadaḥvytti* – 1.25). Strangely enough, Bhāmaha in chapter III of his treatise describes the *guṇa* called *bhāvikatva*<sup>10</sup> in quite similar categories:

### BhKĀ III

*citrodāntādbhutārthatvam kathāyāḥ svabhinītā /  
śabdānākulatā ceti tasya hetuṃ pracakṣate // 54 //*<sup>11</sup>

The strikingness, exaltedness and marvellousness of the meaning of the stories, their good presentation and clearness of the language – these are its (*bhāvikatva*'s) causes.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Harṣacarita*, II Ucchvāsa, p. 24: (*avakeśivādṛṣṭaparameśvaro bandhumadhyam adhivasann nāsi me bahumataḥ*).

<sup>9</sup> See Bhāmaha's definitions of *ākhyāyikā* and *kathā* given in Appendix.

<sup>10</sup> The history of this concept has been discussed in my article "Canto XII of the *Bhaṭṭikāvya*: the *Bhāvikatva* – a *Guṇa* or a Figure of Speech?" and a book devoted to the *Bhaṭṭikāvya*. In the poem of Bhaṭṭi there is one *sarga* which is according to the commentators an illustration of the *bhāvikatva guṇa*. The subject matter of the *sarga* is a counsel at the court of Rāvaṇa. It consists of several speeches.

<sup>11</sup> BhKĀ (2) 1991: 71.

<sup>12</sup> All translations from Sanskrit are my own unless otherwise stated.

Here the said quality of the whole composition (*prabandha*) is connected with an exalted meaning and good presentation or good enactment of a story (*su-abhinīta*). The story should be presented in such a way that the audience can visualize the objects.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps again we are offered a hint concerning the method of presenting certain compositions, for instance *ākhyāyikās*.

Was the *ākhyāyikā* a kind of autobiography presented as monologue, or a speech recited by an actor or reciter?

Unfortunately, few biographies are extant and those extant ones are mostly unprinted, so a lot has to be done before drawing final conclusions as to the construction of their text.

Also the distinction between the *ākhyāyikā* and *kāthā* creates some misunderstandings and misinterpretations. I am not referring to the well-known Bhāmaha-Daṇḍin debate concerning both genres now. In fact the interpretation of the definitions given by Bhāmaha caused some problems in the differentiation between the requirements proper for both genres. Stanzas I.27 and I.28. of Bhāmaha's *Kāvyaḷaṅkāra* are often treated as describing the *ākhyāyikā*. Sushil Kumar De gives the information<sup>14</sup> that Premacandra in his commentary on the *Kāvyaḷadarśa* connects half-verse I.27ab: *kaver abhiprāyākṛtaiḥ kathaniḥ kaiścid aṅkitā*, (i.e. "marked by certain narrations created by the intention of the poet") with the *kāthā*. S.K. De points out that connecting the next line: *kanyāharaṇasamgrāma-vipralambhodayānvitā* again with the *kāthā* would be hardly possible as the *Agni-purāṇa* says that *ākhyāyikā* describes the abduction of a maiden, fight, separation and other calamities.<sup>15</sup> That is why, he claims, verse 27 should go with the *ākhyāyikā*. P.V. Naganatha Sastry, the editor and translator of Bhāmaha's *Kāvyaḷaṅkāra*, in order to connect half-verse 28ab: *na*

<sup>13</sup> More information about *pratyakṣa* as the direct perception is supplied by Bhāmaha in Chapter V (verses 5 and 6), where he introduces Buddhist logic and epistemology as the tools for analysing poetry.

<sup>14</sup> De 1923: 507, ff. 3.

<sup>15</sup> See the whole definition given in Appendix.

*vakrāparavaktrābhyām yuktā nocchvāsavaty api* with the description of the *ākhyāyikā*, had to add his own interpretation in brackets: “Even if the verses *Vaktra* nad *Aparavaktra* are not employed and there are no divisions into *Ucchvāsas* (it does not matter).”<sup>16</sup>

I do not want to neglect the information provided by the *Agni-purāna*. The passages concerning the *alamkārasāstra* in both *puranic* texts, namely *Agni-purāna* and *Viṣṇudharmottara-purāna*, provide some hints which are very important for deepening our knowledge of the development of Sanskrit poetics, however, on the other hand, their compilers very often seem to say whatever they know or heard, even if the connection with the discussed issue is very distant and feeble.<sup>17</sup> In my opinion there are good reasons to believe that verses I.27 and I.28a do not treat the *ākhyāyikā* at all but they should be connected with the *kathā*. First of all, such reading makes the picture clear and consistent. Why would Bhāmaha, an advocate of logical and grammatical correctness and clearness, be explaining in verse 25 that *ākhyāyikā* consists of *ucchvāsas* and its verses are in *vaktra* and *aparavaktra* metres (26bc) only to add in the next stanzas of his treatise that in fact it is not necessary to fulfil these two requirements. As to I.27b, it seems that the sequence: “abduction of a girl, fight and separation, and success” must be obligatory for love stories, but not necessary and highly important for the “exalted subject matter” of the *ākhyāyikā*. Additionally, it was highlighted by later theoreticians of Sanskrit literature that the main feature of the *kathā* is the fact that it originates from the author’s imagination, touches the themes like the winning of a girl and lacks divisions into *ucchvāsas*.

<sup>16</sup> BhKĀ (2) 1991: 10.

<sup>17</sup> See for instance the definitions of the *mahākāvya* in the AP and VdhP. In the VdhP the disproportionately long remark about the fault (*doṣa*) of *punarukta* is surprising. The compiler(s) of the AP passage definitely quote(s) a different opinion and bring(s) the concept of *guṇa*, *rīti*, *vṛtti*, *bhāva*, *vibhāva* and *rasa* while discussing the *mahākāvya*.

To stress once again, Bhāmaha's definition of the *ākhyāyikā* is encompassed in stanzas 25 and 26, although P.V. Naganatha Sastry, the editor and translator of the *Kāvyaḷaṅkāra*, solves the problem differently. Unfortunately, this edition-cum-translation of Bhāmaha's treatise is the most popular if not the only one obtainable on the Indological book market at the moment.<sup>18</sup>

Also the statements of Daṇḍin, although polemical, somehow support the view that the *ākhyāyikā* contains certain accepted metres and its architecture requires the internal division into chapters called *ucchvāsas*. However, according to Daṇḍin the *kathā* also consists of *āryā* and other metres, and it is divided into *lambhas* and in some other way. Obviously, he is not aware of the origins of two genres which could explain these restrictions in text divisions. For him it is "the same kind of art known under two names" (*tat kathākhyaīketyekā jātiḥ samjñādvayāṅkitā*). The lack of knowledge of historical development of the two genres makes their characteristic features unintelligible and nonsensical to him. With the term *lambha* he refers to the *Bṛhatkathā* tradition. The lost original *Bṛhatkathā* was believed to have chapters named *lambha*<sup>19</sup> or *lambhaka*, and its adaptations continue this line – in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* its author, Somadeva, divided the text into *lambakas*. If we speak about the *Bṛhatkathā* lore, we should remember that the stories are introduced in a manner typical for Indian storytelling practice: many minute narratives enter into the main story. Another important trait is connected with the subject matter of the great number of its stories: these stories deal with love and separation, abduction of a girl and different calamities preventing the happiness of

<sup>18</sup> There is an edition of the *Kāvyaḷaṅkāra* published in the Kashi Sanskrit Series. 61, 1928. Also in 2008 *Bhāmaha's Kāvyaḷaṅkāra. A Critical Study and Edition* by C.R. Subhadra appeared but again without translation. While discussing the definitions of both genres as presented by Bhāmaha, the author seems to see them in the same way as proposed by P.V. Naganatha Sastry [BhKĀ (3) 2008: 72, 73].

<sup>19</sup> A.K. Warder points out that the name *lamb(h)a* means "winning" (*lābha*) of brides by the hero [Warder 1992: 321].

the lovers.<sup>20</sup> In the *Kathāsaritsāgara* the heroine's name very often serves as the title of the *lambaka*. The *kathā* known to us as the exemplary one also uses the heroine's name for its title and speaks about misfortunes of love. This is the *Kādambarī* of Bāṇa (the first half of the seventh century AD). Also the work of Subandhu who most probably lived in the sixth century AD bears the name of its heroine, namely *Vāsavadattā*. The story presented in this novel is fictitious and there is no division into *ucchvāsas* or some other sections. The *Kādambarī* and *Vāsavadattā*, the *kathās* belonging to the orbit of the *Bṛhatkathā*, seem to elaborate on one *lambha*. Therefore these texts cannot be divided into *lambhas* or whatever, because they are actually one *lambha*.<sup>21</sup> The whole consisting of several *lambhas* could be called *bṛhat(mahā)kathā* and in fact what is treated now as the title of the lost work, most probably was a kind of genre designation. The *bṛhatkathā*, a huge narrative structure, which is the meaning of this compound word, required the divisions into sections. Then the *kāvya* poets started to work on one *lambha* only, connected with one particular heroine and that is why the text was not divided into sections, even if these *kathas* were compositions of considerable length.

The *Vāsavadattā* as mentioned above is another exemplary and even earlier than *Kādambarī* specimen of a *kathā*, although so often labelled as *ākhyāyikā*. Now why was and is the *Vāsavadattā* sometimes presented as a representative of the *ākhyāyikā* genre? Kātyāyana in his *vārttika* on Pāṇini's 4.3.87 refers to *ākhyāyikā*, then Patañjali mentions three *ākhyāyikās*: *Vāsavadattā*, *Sumanottarā* and *Bhaimarathī*. He also explains that *vāsavadattika* means 'a student of the *ākhyāyikā* called *Vāsavadattā*.' However, there is not a single hint that one has to understand the term in the technical sense as a type of literary genre. After all the word *ākhyāyikā* can be understood and used in a wide

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<sup>20</sup> The *Kathāsaritsāgara* abounds in love stories. There are a few types of schemes of these stories. The majority of them employ the motif of lovesick lovers separated by unexpected events such as shipwreck or abduction.

<sup>21</sup> I owe this remark to Dr. Herman Tieken.

and general sense – a story. So the information provided by the grammarians proves that there were some well-known stories in the past in which women were prominent characters,<sup>22</sup> among them Vāsavadattā. One cannot be sure if this is Vāsavadattā known from the *Bṛhatkathā* tradition or the heroine of some other renditions.

The other trait of *ākhyāyikā* and *kathā* questioned by Daṇḍin is the prescription that in the former the hero narrates his own exploits, while in the latter he cannot be a narrator himself, for he could run the risk of being self-congratulatory and it does not suit a man of good breeding. S.K. De gives his explanations: "...the word *ṛtita* in connexion with *sva-ceṣṭita* may indicate 'actual history' or 'facts of experience' as opposed to 'invented fiction.'"<sup>23</sup> One can accept such a proposal to look at this particular *ākhyāyikā* genre requirement as connected with the depiction of some actual events, where the relation should be trustworthy. However still, there is no convincing answer why in the *ākhyāyikā* the hero is allowed to narrate his own exploits and there is no danger of self-boasting.

Let us refer to the construction of typical love stories as those inherited within *Bṛhatkathā* tradition. These love stories depict both the hero and heroine as the paragons of beauty and all virtues. It would be really awkward to put all the paeans into the mouth of the main actor or actress. It is the role of the narrator to describe in detail all the personal qualities of the heroes.

If we look at the exemplary case of the *ākhyāyikā*, namely the *Harsacarita*, we notice that the work fulfils almost all the require-

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<sup>22</sup> A.K. Warder suggests that certain *kathās* could be a kind of sequels or supplements to well known older stories. He mentions a lost work entitled the *Citralkhā*. In the story of Uṣā and Aniruddha belonging to the Kṛṣṇa mythology there is a character Citralkhā, a friend of Uṣā, who enabled her to find Aniruddha. As Warder puts it: "Thus a *Citralkhā* might be an invented story of that girl herself" (Warder 1990: 245).

<sup>23</sup> De 1923: 507, 508f. 4.

ments prescribed for the genre<sup>24</sup> but in fact it does not conform to the characteristic laid down by Bhāmaha that the narrator should be the hero himself. Notice that the *Harṣacarita*, although it describes the *udattārtha* matter, being the life story of the great king, at the same time enters the domain of panegyric literature. We have descriptions of the physical and mental qualities of the ruler, so not only his deeds are presented. The restriction concerning the boasting narrator would be valid also in that case. Perhaps the genre, as incorporated into the *kāvya* realm, had to change and comply with its new environment. Now the relation between a poet and his kingly patron became a dominating factor, which was able to give a fresh appearance to the genre: firstly presented to an audience in its autobiographical and at the same time heroic and dramatic form, finally in the hands of the courtly poets turned into a biographical poem living its life at the kings' courts.

Bhāmaha possibly was not acquainted with the *Harṣacarita*, at least there is no proof for that in his treatise. Daṇḍin, who lived after the dates of the composition of the *Harṣacarita*, could confront the theoretical background with reality and in consequence he reasonably stated:

KAd I

*api tv aniyamo dṛṣṭas tatrāpy anyair udīraṇāt/  
anyo vaktā svayaṃ veti kidṛg vā bhedakāraṇam // 25 //*<sup>25</sup>

Let us look at the definition of the *kathā* and the *ākhyāyikā* given by the later theoretician Rudraṭa (9th century AD). He explains in the stanza 16.24 that *ākhyāyikā* should start with salutations to gods and preceptors. A praise to earlier poets should also be offered. Then a poet should

<sup>24</sup> As aforementioned we do not take the *kanyāharaṇa* sequence as belonging to the *ākhyāyikā* genre characteristics.

<sup>25</sup> In Dimitrov's translations: "Da aucht dort [in der *Ākhyāyikā*] andere [als der Held] erzählen, folgt aber doch, dass dies nicht als Regel anerkannt werden kann. Ob ein anderer der Sprecher ist oder man selbst, was ist denn das für ein Grund zur Unterscheidung?" [KAd (3) 2002: 218].

state his devotion to his king and set forth the reasons for commencing his work (RKĀ 16.25). Next he should describe his family and himself. It should be written in prose with the division into *ucchvāsas*, which should begin (except for the first one) with two stanzas in *āryā* metre which employ *śleṣa* to suggest the course of the story (RKĀ 16.26, 27).

As to the *kathā* we learn that it should have a metrical preface offering salutation to gods and preceptors, information about an author and his family. The prose of the *kathā* should be characterized by alliteration and short syllables. It should contain conventional descriptions, for example, of a city, The story should be inset with a sub-story which hints at the main plot. Mostly it should end in the *kanyālābha* and as to the *rasa*, various stages of *śṛṅgāra* should be present in it (RKĀ 16.20-22).

It seems that with this quite detailed definition, most probably based on the existing specimens of both genres, the relations between *kathā* and *ākhyāyikā* should be finally established and put in order. It seems that this systematizing role of Rudraṭa's definitions was accepted by later theoreticians as there was no debate on the subject. However, if we think about modern Indology, as long as there is no deep and clear-sighted analysis of genres development, taking into account different possible nuances, as for instance the change of the meaning of the technical terms or their usage in the broad and general sense, these understudied issues can be and still are misinterpreted.

## Sargabandha

Such doubts and discussions concerning the structure do not take place in the case of the *mahākāvya*s in verse. As was stated above, the division into *sargas* is obligatory here. In old *mahākāvya* manuscripts only the end of the *sarga* is marked. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century editors of Sanskrit texts followed this practice. For instance, the first edition of the *mahākāvya* entitled the *Rāvaṇavadha*, known as the *Bhattikāvya*, published in 1828, does not mark the beginning of the *sarga*. Only later editions of the text, for the sake of readers' convenience, contain the information: *atha prathamah sarga*, etc. "this is the first

*sarga*,” second, and so on. The author very frequently ends the canto with a specific “signature” of his own choice. For Bhāravi (5/6 c. AD) it is the word *lakṣmī*, meaning: sign, mark, good fortune, the consort of god Viṣṇu, the good genius or fortune of the king personified, to mention the most important meanings for that particular case. It is possible to treat the presence of this word as a sign or mark of the poet who is a devotee of Viṣṇu, that is why he mentions the name of his consort.<sup>26</sup> At the same time the word *lakṣmī* can refer to the plot of the epic poem written by Bhāravi. It is a *Mahābhārata*-based poem starting with information that the Paṇḍava brothers have to regain the royal Fortune who is with their enemies. This is the main thread connecting all the events. The term *lakṣmī* can also indicate good fortune. Perhaps both the author and the reader can secure themselves prosperity reviving the story, which belongs to the traditional lore of Indian mythical history.

After Bhāravi the repetition of the word in the final stanza of each *sarga* is quite popular. For instance, in the *Haravijaya* of Ratnākara the word *ratna* – precious stone – a part of a poet’s name is being repeated. In the case of the *Damayantīkathā* of Trivikramabhaṭṭi it is the compound *haracaranasaroja*- “the foot-lotus of Hara,” i.e. Śiva – to mention only a few examples.

To sum up, the division into *sargas* is an indispensable and unquestionable characteristic of the *mahākāvya* genre which can be spotted easily while reading the manuscripts.

Is it a sole text division which can be noticed in the epic poem? According to the theoreticians (Daṇḍin, Rudraṭa and others) each *mahākāvya* should begin with a benediction (*aśis*) or a respectful greeting (*namaskriyā*) or an indication of events (*vastunirdeśa*).<sup>27</sup> Did

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<sup>26</sup> On the other hand the poem is connected very closely with god Śiva and most probably Bhāravi’s kingly patron was a follower of Śaiva religion (Viswanathan Peterson 2003: 23).

<sup>27</sup> More about the incipits of the *sargabandhas* in Boccali 2008.

poets respect the rule? In a great number of epic poems we do have such openings, however, there are exceptions to the rule.

In the above-mentioned poem of Bhaṭṭi, the story starts with the first stanza. The literary critics of the past tried to justify the fact explaining that in this case we deal with the third possibility – an indication of events (*vastunirdeśa*). It is, however, possible to find an epic poem with no opening. That is the instance of the Bhāravi's poem. The commentators draw attention to the fact that the first word of this poem is Śrī – an auspicious word meaning fortune as *lakṣmī* does. It creates the benediction itself.

What else constructs the text of the *mahākāvya*?

Daṇḍin mentions that *muktaka*, *kulaka* and *saṃghāta* are parts of an epic poem.

What is hidden behind these terms? The *muktaka* (which in Sanskrit means 'separate, independent') is a single stanza - an integral whole, the aesthetic goal of which lies in a correspondence and mutual intensification between the meaning of the text (*artha*) and the sound (*śabda*). As is widely accepted, the genesis and development of Sanskrit classical literature (*kāvya*) is connected with the poetics of a single stanza. Existing as an independent entity, it can also serve as a component of a bigger composition, namely:

- a pair of stanzas – *yugmaka*
- a composition consisting of three stanzas – *sandānitaka*,
- a four stanza-long composition *kapālaka*
- 5 to 15 stanzas – *kulaka*

A composition longer than *kulaka* in which all the stanzas are devoted to one and the same subject (for instance the description of the ocean, mountains, the seasons of the year, etc.) is called *saṃghāta*.

One can find all these collections of stanzas in the epic poem.

It can be easily noticed by each reader that the *muktaka* – a single stanza, because of its structure and aesthetic aims, is anti-narrative. Then, how it is possible to build the narrative structure of the epic poem using the anti-narrative units? If we compare *mukta-*

kas to bricks, what is the mortar which joins them causing the edifice of the *mahākāvya* finally to be raised? Some Western scholars argued that the *mahākāvyas* have no structure at all, being actually anthologies with fixed sections, held together by a feeble narrative thread. However, Sanskrit literature possesses a genre named the *kośa*, which is a collection of *muktakas*. *Kośa* means a treasury and can be compared to *florilegium* or anthology. The *mahākāvya* is not a mere anthology. The poet using *muktakas* and aggregates of *muktakas* puts them into the stream of story, week as it can be, but always present, and thus creates *sarga* (the Sanskrit root for create being *syj*), then he binds (the exact meaning of the Sanskrit root *bandh*) the *sargas* together. So *sargabandha* is the term denoting the epic poem. And there are some principles underlying the whole structure – even if it were a structure with strong anti-narrative tendencies as a whole. All the *mahākāvyas* deal with the conflict between gods and anti-gods, or kings and their enemies. The poem ends with the protagonists' victory as the title itself, containing one of the synonyms of the word victory: *vijaya*, *abhyudaya* or *vadha*, very frequently indicates. However, the story already well-known is hardly outlined, sometimes in a strikingly small number of stanzas: in Ratnākara's *Haravijaya*, for instance, the essential narrative occupies 33 stanzas out of the total 4 344.<sup>28</sup> It is but an extreme example. Usually the events fundamental for the plot are presented in the *mahākāvya* even if the narrative line is being continually interrupted by countless descriptions.

One could ask what the purpose of the *mahākāvya* is then if not to narrate the story in detail? In other words, what organizes the whole structure? Is the *mahākāvya* designed for the aesthetic delight of the readers admiring the mutual and unusual combination of sense and sound?

The answer to this question is complex. One can find it in the treatises on the theory of literature. The *mahākāvya* should deal with three or four aims of human life. These are: *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*. *Dhar-*

<sup>28</sup> Smith 1985: 42.

*ma* signifies the code of conduct of the individual or group, *artha* concerns ethics and politics, *kāma* encompasses the sphere of the erotic. The *mahākāvya* has to address the themes connected with these spheres of human life. The obligatory themes to be treated in long series of autonomous *muktakas* or brief compositions of few stanzas are politics and war, love and nature.

So the aim of the *mahākāvya* lies in the sphere of didactics, too. It would be worth mentioning that the *mahākāvya* can be a means of transmitting the knowledge of grammar, poetics and other *śāstras*.

To quote the famous theoretician of literature Bhāmaha

KA 5:

*svādukāvyarasonmiśraṃ śāstram apy upayūñjate /  
prathamālīḍhamadhavaḥ pibanti kaṭu bheṣajam // 3 //*<sup>29</sup>

Even the scientific treatises use the technique of intermingling with agreeable poetry. Those who first tasted honey are able to swallow even the most distasteful medicine.

This tendency is present in *mahākāvya* tradition from the very beginning. Think about Aśvaghōṣa and his way of teaching grammar, presenting the problems concerning *mokṣa*, this fourth goal of human life, namely release from worldly existence. Finally, the *śāstrakāvyas* appear on the scene, but to treat this subgenre of *mahākāvya* is beyond the scope of this paper.

Of course the aesthetic aims of the genre cannot be neglected and they are in accordance with those of *kāvya*. So the structure of the *mahākāvya* is constructed by small units which each have their own value, but put together they construct a bigger entity, that is a *sarga*, which has its own place in the plan of the particular work designed by the author. Finally, the *sargas* combined together form a complete work with its own tasks in the sphere of aesthetics as well as didactics and narrating the story in chronological order without emboxing.

<sup>29</sup> BhKĀ (2) 1991: 89.

However, if we remember what was said about the *ākhyāyikā* and its division into *ucchvāsas*, which can be connected to the origin of this biographical genre and the possible performance technique in its *pre-kāvya* past, traces of which are hidden under the term *ucchvāsa*, the question about the reason for the *sarga* arrangement in the case of *mahākāvya* in verse remains unanswered. The *mahākāvya* in verse was a written composition, aspiring to narrate stories, known for instance from the *Mahābhārata* or *Rāmāyaṇa*, but in a completely new style. Nevertheless, it was still an epic poem, shorter and more refined but following the example of the true epics. The *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* were both divided into sections. So the authors refer to the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition, imitating the division into chapters/books,<sup>30</sup> here named *sargas*,<sup>31</sup> although there was no real need to introduce them and it was definitely not done for the sake of clarity or in connection with the way of performance or transmission. In fact what is clearly recognizable in the inner structure of an epic poem in verse is the division into different descriptive and discursive passages.

## Conclusion

The *mahākāvya*s in prose and verse belong and form *kāvya* although their origins are different.

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<sup>30</sup> The very first, Buddhist, *sargabandhas* have 18 *sargas*, which is a telling fact, corresponding to the *Mahābhārata* text division, which, again, has been brought to my attention by Herman Tieken, to whom I am grateful for his remarks concerning the structure of *kathā*, *ākhyāyikā* and *sarga-bandha*. I regret that I do not know the two forthcoming articles by Dr Tieken devoted to these questions. If I had read them maybe I would not have written this article.

<sup>31</sup> In the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki verses are grouped into individual chapters called *sargas*, wherein a specific event or intent is told, a fact which shows the possibility of close relations between the origin of *sargabandha* genre and the *ādikāvya Rāmāyaṇa*.

The prose *mahākāvya*s, otherwise known as *gadyakāvya*s, consist of two different types: the *ākhyāyikās* and *kathās*. The origins of the first type – *ākhyāyikā* – a prose work presenting the life story of the hero, might be connected to an epic genre incorporated into *kāvya* movement, once performed before an audience. It might happen that the change of the audience and tasks influenced the structure and forced the shift from a kind of autobiography to biography. The second type, namely the *kathā*, which describes a love story and assigns a very important role to a heroine, is connected to the story telling practices and the *Bṛhatkathā* tradition absorbed by *kāvya*. Some traits betraying the origin of both genres survived and this is the structure of respective texts. Some other characteristics were the subject of the Bhāmaha-Daṇḍin debate. This debate is an important testimony to the development of both genres.

The origin of the *sargabandha*, although indebted to the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa tradition as far as the division into *sargas* and the themes are concerned,<sup>32</sup> is strongly connected to the origin and development of *kāvya* literature itself. It is purely “an artificial creation” of the poet, carefully structured according to precise rules and purposes. One little atom generates an array, the arrays of atoms generate solid and orderly structured crystal-like material. All these have certain purposes in the author’s mind, namely: to tell a story, to teach, to serve the kingly patron and last but not least, to provide aesthetic delight to the reader having the poet’s entire “laboratory” at hand, equipped with different sorts of *alaṃkāras* and other tools. Perhaps that is why Rājaśekhara claims that the poets who are able to compose a major poem are so rare.<sup>33</sup> Of course the *ākhyāyikā* and *kathā*

<sup>32</sup> It should be noted that the treatment of time is different in the *sargabandha* in comparison with the true epics tradition. The story is presented in one chronological line without emboxing, although the retardation is caused by different lengthy descriptions.

<sup>33</sup> KM 10

*muktake kavayo 'nantā saṅghāte kavayaḥ śatam/  
mahāprabandhe tu kavir eko dvau durlabhas trayah//*  
[KM 2000: 117]

also had to comply with the rules and meet the requirements of *kāvya*. That is why the statement of Rājaśekhara also encompasses both genres: *ākhyāikā* and *kathā* in their “*kāvya* editions.”

## Appendix

The definitions of *ākhyāyikā* and *kathā* according to Bhāmaha, Daṇḍin, *Agni-purāṇa* and Rudraṭa.

### 1. *Kāvya-lankāra*, Bhāmaha I<sup>34</sup>

*prakṛtānākulāśravyaśabdārthapadaṽṛttinā /*  
*gadyena yuktodāttārthā socchvāsākhyāyikā matā // 25 //*  
*ṽṛttam ākhyāyate tasyām nāyakena svaceṣṭitam /*  
*vaktram cāparavaktram ca kāle bhāvyarthaśamsi ca // 26 //*  
*kaver abhiprāyākṛtaiḥ kathanaḥ kaiścīd ankitā/*  
*kanyāharaṇasamgrāmvipralambhodayānvitā // 27 //*  
*na vaktrāparavaktrābhyaṃ yuktā nocchvāsavatya api /*  
*samskṛte saṃskṛtā ceṣṭā kathāpabramśabhāk tathā // 28 //*  
*anyaiḥ svacaritam tasyām nāyakena tu nocyate /*  
*svaguṇāviṣkṛtiṃ kuryād abhijātaḥ katham janah // 29 //*<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> BhKĀ (2) 1991: 9, 10.

<sup>35</sup> P.V. Naganatha Sastry’s translation: “*Ākhyāyikā* is a prose composition treating of an elevated subject-matters and characterised by agreeable words, meaning and style in harmony with the context. It is divided into parts called *Ucchvāsas*. In it the Hero himself narrates his own exploits. It (*Ākhyāyikā*) should consist of verses in the *Vaktra* and *Aparavaktra* metre. It must contain fore-casts of events on appropriate occasions. It must be marked (distinguished) by some narratives of the poet’s own creation (original stories). It must treat of the abduction of damsels, of war, of separation

## 2. *Kāvyaḍarśa*, Daṇḍin I<sup>36</sup>

*apādaḥ padasamtāno gadyam ākhyāyikā kathā /*  
*iti tasya prabhedau dvau tayor ākhyāyikā kila // 23 //*  
*nāyakenaiva vācyānyā nāyakenetareṇa vā /*  
*svaguṇāviṣkriyā doṣo nātra bhūtārthasamsinah // 24 //*  
*api tv aniyamo dṛṣṭas tatrāpy anyair udīranāt /*  
*anyo vaktā svayaṃ veti kiḍṛg vā bhedakāraṇam // 25 //*  
*vaktraṃ cāparavaktraṃ ca socchvāsavaṃ ca bhedakam /*  
*cihnam ākhyāyikāyāś cet prasaṅgena kathāsv api // 26 //*  
*āryādivat praveśaḥ kiṃ na vaktrāparavaktrayoḥ /*  
*bhedaś ca dṛṣṭo lambhādir ucchvāso vāstu kiṃ tataḥ // 27 //*  
*tat kathākhyāyiketyekā jātiḥ samjñādvayāṅkitā / 28 ab*

## 3. *Agni-purāṇa* I<sup>37</sup>

*kartyvaṃśaprasāṃsā syād yatra gadyena vistarāt /*  
*kanyāharaṇasamgrānavipralambhavipattayah/*  
*bhavanti yatra dīptās ca rītivṛttipravṛttayah // 12 //*  
*ucchvāsaiś ca paricchedo yatra yā cūrṇakottarā /*  
*vaktraṃ cāparavaktraṃ ca yatra sākhyāyikā smṛtā // 13 //*  
*ślokaīḥ svavaṃśaṃ samkṣepāt kavir yatraprasāṃsati /*  
*mukhyārthasyāvātārāya bhaved yatra kathāntaram // 14 //*  
*paricchedo na yatra syād bhaved vā lambhakaiḥ kvacit /*  
*sā kathā nāma tadgarbhaṃ nibadhnīyāc catuspadīm // 15 //*

(of lovers) and of success. Even if the verses *Vaktra* and *Aparavaktra* are not employed and there are no division into *Ucchvāsas* (it does not matter). *Kathā* is acceptable if composed in Sanskrit. It may also be in a dialect. In it, the history of the Hero is narrated by others, not by himself. How could a well-born (person) narrate his own exploits?" [BhKĀ (2) 1991: 9, 10].

<sup>36</sup> KAd. (3) 2002: 164, 166.

<sup>37</sup> AP 1976: 138,139.

4. Kāvyaḷaṅkāra, Rudraṭa 16<sup>38</sup>

*ślokair mahākathāyām iṣṭān devān gurūn namaskṛtya /  
 saṃkṣepeṇa nijaṃ kulam abhidadyāt svam ca kartṛtayā // 20 //*  
*sānuprāsena tato bhūyo laghvakṣareṇa gadyena /  
 racayet kathāsarīraṃ pureva puravarṇakaprabhṛtīn // 21 //*  
*ādau kathāntaraṃ vā tasyām nyasyet prapañcitaṃ samyak /  
 laghu tāvat saṃdhānaṃ prakrāntakathāvatārāya // 22 //*  
*kanyālābhaphalaṃ vā samyagvinyastasakalaśṅgārām /  
 iti saṃskṛtena kuryāt kathām agadyena cānyena // 23 //*  
*pūrvavad eva namaskṛtadevagurur notsahet sthiteṣv eṣu /  
 kāvyam kartum iti kavīn śaṃsed ākhyāyikāyām tu // 24 //*  
*tadanu nṛpe vā bhaktim paraguṇasaṃkīrtena 'thavā vyasanam /  
 anyad vā tat karaṇe kāraṇam akliṣṭam abhidadyāt // 25 //*  
*atha tena kathaiva yathā racanīyākhyāyikāpi gadyena /  
 nijavaṃsam svam cāsyām abhidadyān na tv agadyena // 26 //*  
*kuryād atrocchvāsān sargavad eṣām mukheṣv anādyū[em.ā]nām /  
 dve dve cārye śliṣṭe sāmānyārthe tadarthāya // 27 //*

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<sup>38</sup> RKĀ 1886: 170, 171.

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