Zeitschrift: Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft

Band: 76 (2022)

Heft: 3

Artikel: The application of Mms interpretive concepts in commentaries on plays

Autor: Ollet, Andrew

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1035034

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Mehr erfahren

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. En savoir plus

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. Find out more

Download PDF: 04.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, https://www.e-periodica.ch

Andrew Ollett*

The application of Mīmāṁsā interpretive concepts in commentaries on plays

https://doi.org/10.1515/asia-2022-0029
Received July 31, 2022; accepted November 3, 2022; published online December 22, 2022

Abstract: This article examines a Sanskrit commentary on Śaktibhadra's *Crown Jewel of Amazement* (*Āścaryacūḍāmaṇiḥ*) that systematically uses concepts from Mīmāṁsā to explain the "overall meaning" (*tātparyam* or *paryavasānam*) of specific passages. The anonymous author of this commentary, from early modern Kerala, describes himself as a follower of Kumārila and quotes him several times. After reviewing the model that the commentator borrows from Mīmāṁsā, where the final meaning is derived by the application of interpretive principles to the literal meaning against a discursive context, this article focuses on "additive" strategies (*adhyāhāraḥ* and *anuṣaṅgaḥ*) and "subtractive" strategies (the *grahaikatvanyāyaḥ*).

Keywords: commentary, interpretation, Kerala, Mīmāṃsā, Sanskrit plays

1 Mīmāṁsā and literary analysis

Mīmāṁsā is a collection of rational principles that serve as a means for analyzing the meanings of the sentences of the Vedas.[1] Although Mīmāṁsā's concern with the Vedas has determined both its content and its history, Mīmāṁsakas themselves have always argued that the "rational principles" they employ are more general, and that they can be applied to any other form of discourse. Kumārila observed, for example, that the definition of the sentence offered in the *Mīmāṁsā Sūtras* "is the same for the *mantra*s and the *brāhmaṇa*s of the Veda, as well as everyday life."[2] In the later first millennium CE, Mīmāṁsakas such as Śālikanātha (early 9th c.) had explicitly offered more general theories of language, and Mīmāṁsā was coming to

1 Śālikanātha in his *Introduction to the System* (*Śāstramukham*), the first essay in his *Topic Expositions* (*Prakaraṇapañcikā*), p. 28 (*tasmād adhyayanasyānantaram ēva vēdārthō vicārayitavya iti vicārōpāyabhūtanyāyanibandhanaṁ mīmāṁsāśāstram ārabdhavyam iti siddham*).
2 Kumārila, *Explanation of the System* (*Tantravārttikam*) on 2.1.46, p. 445 (*lōkamantrabrāhmaṇēṣv avyabhicāry ētad ēva vākyalakṣaṇam*).

***Corresponding author: Andrew Ollett**, University of Chicago Division of the Humanities – SALC, 1130 East 59th Street, Chicago, IL 60637-1511, USA, E-mail: andrew.ollett@gmail.com.
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2425-2806

be acknowledged and studied as a general "theory of the sentence."[3] And literary theory in India was revolutionized, over about a century, by the introduction of ideas from Mīmāṁsā: in the late 8th c., Udbhaṭa drew on Kumārila's distinction between nonliteral usages based on similar qualities (*gauṇī vṛttiḥ*) and based on other relations (*lakṣaṇā*) in his theory of metaphorical identification (Bronner 2016: 96); in the mid-9th c., Ānandavardhana drew on the goal-directed quality of discourse as theorized in Mīmāṁsā to establish *rasa* as the overarching goal of literature (McCrea 2009: 118); and in the later 9th c., Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka adapted the Mīmāṁsā concept of "actualization" (*bhāvanā*) to account for the aesthetic response of a spectator or reader (Pollock 2016: 146). Insights from Mīmāṁsā continued to be imported into literary theory up until the tenth and eleventh centuries, with Mukula Bhaṭṭa and Mahima Bhaṭṭa. It is somewhat surprising, then, that the interpretive principles of Mīmāṁsā play almost no role in literary commentaries, with one significant exception known to me: the anonymous commentary on Śaktibhadra's *Crown Jewel of Amazement* (*Āścaryacūḍāmaṇiḥ*).

This commentary is one of a number of Sanskrit commentaries on stage-plays produced in early modern Kerala. This is a remarkably learned and insightful archive of literary scholarship. It appears to begin with a commentary, called *Rasamañjarī* on Bhavabhūti's *Mālatī and Mādhava* (*Mālatīmādhavam*), written by the scholar-renunciant Pūrṇasarasvatī in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century (Unithiri 2004: 25). It extends at least to the later seventeenth century, when a student of the great scholar Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa of Mēlputtūr, also named Nārāyaṇa, wrote commentaries on two plays, *Rāma's Last Act* (*Uttararāmacaritam*) by Bhavabhūti and *The Harlot and the Holy Roller* (*Bhagavadajjukam*) by Mahēndravarman.[4]

The *Crown Jewel of Amazement* (*Āścaryacūḍāmaṇiḥ*) is a staple of the modern Kūṭiyāṭṭam repertoire, and covers the story of the *Rāmāyaṇam* from the beginning of Rāma's exile to Sītā's trial-by-fire after being rescued from Laṅkā.[5] For convenience I refer to the author as "Kaścit" ("Someone"), since he is identified only as *kaścid vipraḥ* ("a certain Brahmin") in the final verse of the commentary. The same

3 Śālikanātha's essays on sentence meaning (*The Fundamentals of Sentence Meaning* [*Vākyārthamātṛkā*]) are probably a watershed in this aspect of Mīmāṁsā's history. Mīmāṁsā is the "theory of the sentence" in the stock phrase *padavākyapramāṇa-*, referring to the subjects (words, sentences, and instruments of knowledge) that an educated person is expected to master. The phrase appears for the first time (to my knowledge) in *Tāpasavatsarājam* (*Udayana the Ascetic*), a play composed by Māyurāja (also known as Mātṛrāja or Anaṅgaharṣa) around the eighth century.

4 For more about this tradition of theatrical commentary in Kerala, see Ollett and Venkatkrishnan 2022.

5 A similar time-span is covered by Māyurāja's *Raghu's Noble Descendants* (*Udāttarāghavam*), which probably inspired Śaktibhadra.

verse notes that he hailed from Bharadvājagrāma, the location of which is unknown to me, and that he was a follower of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa.[6]

It is remarkable that Kaścit cites works of Mīmāṁsā at all. Literary commentators very rarely refer to them, which might give one the impression that Mīmāṁsā was of limited relevance to the project of literary commentary in general. The great commentator Mallinātha, for example, only referred to Mīmāṁsā in order to explain technical terms of Vedic ritual such as *sāṁnāyyam*, an offering of milk and ghee.[7] Yet Mīmāṁsā was more important to the commentarial project than the scarcity of citations would suggest. It was primarily within Mīmāṁsā that meaning *above the level of the word* was theorized. Commentators could draw upon grammar and lexicography to explain the literal meaning of individual words, but they needed other conceptual resources to explain the meaning of phrases and sentences, especially in cases where those phrases and sentences had non-literal or contextual meanings. In many cases, to be sure, commentators did not draw *directly* from Mīmāṁsā works, but rather from the aforementioned works of poetics that selectively utilize Mīmāṁsā's conceptual resources.

2 The Mīmāṁsā model of meaning

Before explaining precisely what these conceptual resources were, and how commentators drew upon them, I will present the overall model of meaning that underlies Mīmāṁsā's interpretive project. As is well known, the Sanskrit word for "meaning," *arthaḥ*, itself has a range of meanings. Two are particularly important within Mīmāṁsā. The first (let us call it $artha_1$) is "what is expressed" by a linguistic expression (*abhidhēyam*), or its "literal meaning," if we are not too troubled by the distinction between literal and non-literal meanings.[8] The second ($artha_2$) is the "purpose" served by a linguistic expression (*prayōjanam*). Meaning and purpose are inextricably linked in Mīmāṁsā. This linkage is not simply an artefact of the polysemy of *arthaḥ*, either. It is possible to distinguish semantic from telic senses of *arthaḥ* in any given context of use, as I have done here, but one of Mīmāṁsā's characteristic and still underappreciated insights is that language is, at some level

6 *bhāradvājagrāmavāsī kumārilamatānugaḥ ~ vipraḥ kaścic chaktibhadrakṛtaṁ vyākṛta nāṭakam* ~~ (pp. 237–238).

7 The verse in question is *Śiśupālavadham* 11.49; see Raghunāthācārya (1978–1979: 83); see also the brief discussion of *ūhaḥ* on 14.23 (Bhattacharya 1990: 55). As Raghunāthācārya's article makes clear, Mallinātha was very well acquainted with Mīmāṁsā, and referred to it often in his *Taralā* commentary on Vidyādhara's *Ēkāvalī*, but hardly at all in his literary commentaries.

8 Recanati 2003.

of analysis, a blueprint for action, and hence the constituents of discourse derive their "meaning" from the "purpose" that is served by the unit of discourse as a whole. My presentation is slightly biased toward the "top-down" model of meaning offered by Prabhākara (called *anvitābhidhānam*, "the expression of relational meanings," by Prabhākara himself), in preference to the "bottom-up" model offered, as a critique of Prabhākara, by the followers of Kumārila (called *abhihitānvayaḥ*, "the relation of expressed meanings").[9] Nevertheless both schools of Mīmāṁsā acknowledge two tiers of meaning.

First there is "literal meaning," technically called *śrutiḥ* or "hearing," which represents the semantic but not telic sense of *arthaḥ*. This results from the application of linguistic principles (including grammatical rules and lexical representations) upon sounds. Mīmāṁsakas sometimes call these sounds a "heap of speech-sounds" (*akṣararāśiḥ*), the sounds of the Vedic texts as they are stored in the student's memory, prior to any awareness of their meaning. But the "literal meaning" itself serves as the input to another set of principles that tell us how to arrive at a "final meaning." "Final meaning" is my rendition of the Sanskrit term *paryavasānam*, literally "culmination." This notion can be, and often is, clarified by reference to the notion of "intention": the final meaning is that which is intended to be expressed (*vivakṣitam*). That is from the perspective of a speaker, who may be merely theoretical; from the perspective of the listener, we can call it an "all things considered" meaning.[10] From a more technical perspective, the final meaning is called *vacanavyaktiḥ*, "statement-particular," or the particular state of affairs that is expressed by a statement.

The principles that take us from the literal to the final meaning can be characterized as "hermeneutical," in the sense that they tell us why one interpretation should be preferred to another. But they might also be characterized as "pragmatic," since they involve the enrichment of the literal meaning against a background of presuppositions and contextual givens.[11] As I discuss below, "enrichment" in this context refers both to "adding" elements of meaning that are not present in the literal meaning, and "subtracting" elements of meaning that *are* there. The "literal meaning" (*śrutiḥ*) can be compared to the *character* of an expression, in the terminology of David Kaplan (1989), and the "final meaning" (*paryavasānam*) can be compared to its *content*. Character is roughly "linguistic meaning," of which we might expect a given expression to have only one, except in cases of true

9 For expositions and appraisals of Śālikanātha's version of Prabhākara's theory, see Prasad 1991, Saxena 2019, and Ollett 2021. I note there that the *abhihitānvayaḥ* theory was not formulated as such by Kumārila himself.

10 On "intention" as a problematic category in Mīmāṁsā see Yoshimizu 2008.

11 The term "enrichment" comes from Recanati 2010.

ambiguity.[12] But linguistic meanings are often assigned to referents in dependence upon context, which is why the "same" expression (i.e., an expression with a single character) might have different contents across different contexts. A typical example from Kaplan are indexical expressions, such as "I," which have a character that invariably designates the speaker of the utterance and a content that refers to the different individuals who occupy that role in each utterance. The context-sensitive final meaning or content, in contrast to the context-insensitive literal meaning or character, includes the telic sense of *arthaḥ* (*artha*$_2$), since only the final meaning is *actionable*, i.e., it represents something that one can *do*, or a purpose that can be served, with a linguistic expression.

It is often the case that there is not much of a difference between "literal meaning" and "final meaning": the hermeneutical principles might apply vacuously to the literal meaning and leave it more or less intact. The hermeneutical principles apply non-vacuously, however, when context-sensitive expressions such as indexicals are used, or when there are significant differences between the literal and final meanings, for instance if sarcasm or irony is involved (e.g., "*Die Hard 2* is a great film"). In poetics and literary theory, there was a long debate about precisely how a final meaning that differed from the literal meaning could be communicated. As I will note below, Kaścit eschews most of the technical terms of this debate (*dhvaniḥ*, *vyañjanā*, *lakṣaṇā*, etc.) in favor of the more fundamental and theory-neutral term "final meaning" (*paryavasānam*).

The model I have described is schematized in Figure 1. The most mysterious part of this process are the "hermeneutic principles." These are, however, none other than the principles articulated in the Mīmāṁsā system. They typically involve labeling different parts of a discourse in order to ascertain their relationship to each other in a single hierarchical structure. Śālikanātha summarizes the interpretive model in an important passage from his *Fundamentals of Sentence Meaning*:[13]

> A group of words does not make one aware of a sentence meaning until rational principles (*nyāyēna*) yield a statement-particular (*vacanavyaktiḥ*). In no case is the meaning of a sentence in the Vedas realized until determinations regarding what is the focus (*vidhēyam*) and what is the topic (*anuvādyam*), what is primary (*pradhānam*) and what is secondary (*guṇabhūtam*), what is intended (*vivakṣitam*) and what is unintended (*avivakṣitam*), and so on have been made on the basis of rational principles that apply in everyday life (*lōkavyavahāra-*).

---

12 Such as the famous *śvētō dhāvati* example given in Patañjali's *Great Commentary* (*Mahābhāṣyaḥ*), vol. III. p. 387 (comm. on 8.2.3), which means "the white [horse] is running" as well as "the dog is running this way."

13 *yāvan nyāyēna vacanavyaktir na sampādyate tāvat padajātaṁ vākyārthasyāvabōdhakaṁ na bhavati, lōkavyavahāravartibhir nyāyair yāvad idaṁ vidhēyam idam anuvādyam idaṁ pradhānam idaṁ guṇabhūtam idaṁ vivakṣitam idam avivakṣitam ityādi na sampradhāryatē tāvan na kvacid vēdavākyārthō 'vabudhyatē* (p. 404). See also Saxena 2019: 500 for a discussion of this passage.

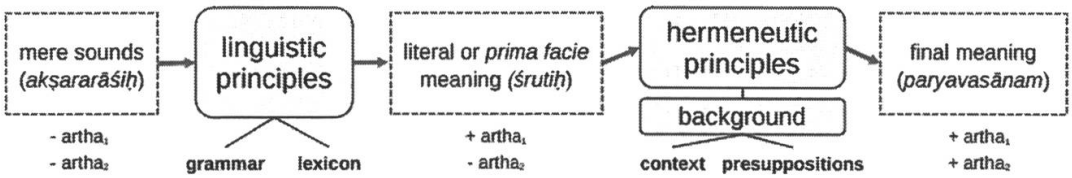

Figure 1: The interpretive model of Mīmāṁsā.

As Śālikanātha says, the determination of the final meaning of a sentence requires a determination as its *information structure*, or its bifurcation into old information (the topic, or what the sentence is about) and new information (the focus, or what is said about the topic). When a sentence is understood, the listener comes to know something that he or she did not previously know, and hence a sentence can be thought of as a way of making incremental additions to a store of information, or "updating the common ground." This is the core meaning of the technical term *vidhiḥ* – variously translated in scholarship as "injunction," "prescription," "predication," and "affirmation" – and hence the focus (*vidhēyam*) means "that which is to be added to the common ground." That which already exists in the common ground is said to be "given" (*prāptam*), and when something given is referred to in a sentence, this is called "reference" (*anuvādaḥ* or *uddēśaḥ*). This model of discourse is particularly important to conversation and to literary genres like the stage-play in which conversation plays a major role. Commentators from Kerala integrate these terms into their commentarial strategies, helping readers to identify what is being said about what and why. I will focus on Kaścit below, but Nārāyaṇa also exhibits attention to information structure in his commentary on *Rāma's Last Act*.[14]

3 Final meaning as a speech act

Our initial example comes from the second act of the *Crown Jewel of Amazement*, right after Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa have mutilated Rāvaṇa's sister Śūrpaṇakhā. Rāma says ominously:

> If Rāvaṇa, the enemy of the entire universe,
> is her older brother, there will certainly be no rest
> anytime soon for this bow of mine.[15]

14 Ollett and Venkatkrishnan 2022.

15 *tribhuvanaripur asyā rāvaṇaḥ pūrvajaś cēd asulabha iti nūnaṁ viśramaḥ kārmukasya* ~ (2.19*ab*, p. 73).

The conditional clause would at first seem to imply that Rāma is uncertain about the identity of the woman he just maimed. Kaścit, however, says that it is already well-known to everyone (*lōkaprasiddha-*) that Śūrpaṇakhā is indeed Rāvaṇa's sister. It is "referred to" (*anuvāda-*) in the conditional clause with the intention (*vivakṣā-*) of expressing the following clause as its consequence, just like Paraśurāma can say "if I am Śiva's disciple, I will rid the world of Kṣatriyas." Now everyone – including Paraśurāma himself – knows that he is Śiva's disciple, so the conditional clause only serves to frame his resolution to destroy all Kṣatriyas as a consequence of his devotion to Śiva.[16] Generally the conditional particle implicates that the speaker is uncertain about whether something is or is not the case, but in both of these examples, this implicature is overridden by a consideration of what already belongs to the common ground.

I mentioned that the final meaning, but not the literal meaning, is *actionable*, and thus can be thought of in telic, as well as semantic, terms, i.e., as something that can be done. We have understood the final meaning of a statement if and when we understand *what we are to do* with it. There was a long debate over what kinds of actions in particular could constitute the final meaning of a sentence, or in other words, whether the arising of certain cognitive or affective states constituted an "action" in the relevant sense.[17] But action enters into the definition of final meaning in a different way. We can characterize a statement's "all things considered" meaning in terms of the action which the speaker intended to accomplish by means of saying it, or to use Austin's terminology, in terms of the associated *speech act*. There is often an internal connection between the action which the speaker intended to perform himself or herself by means of the statement (the *illocutionary* act) and the action that the listener takes as needing to be done as a result of hearing the statement. For example, in the Vedic sentences with which Mīmāṁsā is principally concerned, the ritual act that is understood as needing to be done (e.g., performing the *agnihōtram*) on the part of the listener is almost always the *content* of the illocutionary act of injunction. But there are other illocutionary acts, in which this internal connection is differently configured: prohibition, deliberation, doubt, interrogation, and so on. Commentators often characterize the final meaning in terms of the illocutionary act that it represents, or in other words, what it "culminates in" or "amounts to" (*paryavasānam* or *tātparyam*). (Careful readers will realize that, for Mīmāṁsakas, the Veda does not have a "speaker" *per se*, and accordingly some adjustments to Austin's theory will

16 *cēcchabdō 'tra lōkaprasiddhatatpūrvajatvānuvādēna tatphalabhūtakārmukaviśramāsulabhatvavivakṣayā prayuktaḥ. yathā "yady ahaṁ haraśiṣyō 'smi kurvē niḥkṣatriyāṁ mahīṁ" ityādau.* (p. 73). I do not know where the example is from.

17 See Ollett (forthcoming) on this debate between Maṇḍana and Śālikanātha.

be necessary. We can nevertheless coherently speak, albeit perhaps in an extended sense, about what the Veda "does" when someone understands its sentences, i.e., whether it enjoins, prohibits, or neither.)

One simple example is a statement that turns out to be a question. In the prologue to the third act, a sage says to an ascetic, "I see that you alone are left in this enormous ashram."[18] As Kaścit notes, "left" implies that there were formerly more ascetics there, and hints at the speaker's desire to know the reason for this change, and similarly "enormous" implies that there ought to be a lot of ascetics there. These subtle cues lead us to understand the statement as another illocutionary act entirely, namely, as a question about *why* the ashram is currently so desolate.[19]

The main categories of illocutionary act for Kaścit, like most theorists before him, are injunction and prohibition, that is, of telling people that they should or should not do something. Hence, when Rāvaṇa's charioteer says "this vulture is coming this way," Kaścit notes that this amounts to (*tātparyam*) saying that Rāvaṇa ought to be very careful.[20] A more complex example comes from one of Rāvaṇa's statements. When he arrives on the scene, ready to kill Rāma and abduct Sītā, he is counseled to hold back by Śūrpaṇakhā, who warns him that Sītā will simply die without Rāma. Rāvaṇa agrees, and then says:

> If I were to kill Rāma in battle and take her by force,
> would she not die out of grief for her husband?
> She has hardly ever been apart from him.[21]

Kaścit observes that this question amounts to a prohibition (*niṣēdhaḥ*): Rāma is not to be killed, and Sītā is not to be carried away by force.[22] But Kaścit goes on to observe that this would be an odd conclusion for Rāvaṇa to come to, given that he does end up trying to abduct Sītā. He therefore gives an alternative explanation: this statement is a "reference" (*anuvādaḥ*) to what Śūrpaṇakhā had already said, namely that killing Rāma would end up killing Sītā too; since Rāvaṇa would not have accepted

---

18 *tapōdhana bhavanmātrāvaśēṣaṁ bahvābhōgam āśramam ahaṁ paśyāmi* (p. 80).

19 *avaśēṣaśabdēna pūrvaṁ sannihitānām ēvēdānīṁ nimittāntarād asannidhānaṁ darśitam, tēna tannimittajijñāsā sūcitā. bahvābhōgatvaṁ tasya bahumunijanasadbhāvārhatvaṁ gamayati. ihāśramasyaivaṁbhāvē kiṁ nimittam iti praśnē vākyasya paryavasānam* (p. 81).

20 *ayaṁ gṛdhra ākrāmati asmatprayāṇaṁ nirurutsuḥ kruddhō bhūtvābhimukhyēnāgacchaty ataḥ samyag avahitēna tvayā bhavitavyam iti tātparyam* (p. 136).

21 *yudhi sarabhasaṁ hatvā rāmaṁ balān mayi gṛhṇati ~ svayam anucitā bhartuḥ śōkād asūn na kim ujjhati ~~* (p. 97).

22 *yata ēvaṁ gṛhītā sā prāṇān parityajati atō rāmahananaṁ balādgrahaṇaṁ ca na kartavyam iti vākyaparyavasānam* (p. 97).

Śūrpaṇakhā's reasoning unless he really wanted to abduct Sītā alive, what is finally communicated by this question is his resolution to abduct Sītā.[23]

Topics that might be embarrassing or inappropriate to talk about explicitly are precisely where we might expect what a speaker says to differ systematically from what he or she finally means. And hence Śūrpaṇakhā's attempt to coyly proposition Lakṣmaṇa, and Lakṣmaṇa's equally coy attempts to rebuff her, give Kaścit several opportunities to identify a "final meaning." When Lakṣmaṇa explains that Rāma is not interested in another wife because "duty is the only thing he cares about," Śūrpaṇakhā says, in reference to Sītā, "If that's so, then what does *she* do?" Kaścit says that this is not really a question. What Śūrpaṇakhā really means is Sītā is doing for Rāma precisely what she, Śūrpaṇakhā, is proposing to do for him.[24] When Lakṣmaṇa replies that Sītā is serving Rāma "just as I am," Śūrpaṇakhā says that she, too, could be a servant rather than a sexual partner. To this Lakṣmaṇa appears to express an injunction: "This too is to be asked for" (*idam api prārthanīyam*). But Kaścit uses the nuance of *api*, which can suggest contempt, and either observes or imagines that the line is delivered with a particular intonation (*kākuḥ*), to arrive at a different reading: "You would even ask for *that*?" The final meaning, as he says, is that Śūrpaṇakhā should *not* in fact request to be a mere servant; we might add that the line conveys Lakṣmaṇa's shock at Śūrpaṇakhā's desperation and impertinence.[25]

Later in the play, after the war against Rāvaṇa has been won, Rāma wonders:

> I killed Vālin, labored to bridge the ocean with hundreds
> of mountains, then came to Laṅkā and killed Rāvaṇa
> with his whole family to assist him, and now cherish her
> on Hanumān's trusted word — *she*, the princess, couldn't
> fall into disgrace from living in another man's house.
> Could she?[26]

In commenting on this verse, Kaścit shows us how individual words get their meaning from their context, and in turn contribute to the contextual meaning of the whole. For example, *na syād* literally means "couldn't be," but we here have to take it as a question, "it couldn't be, could it?" This is partly because entertaining a possibility is one of the idiomatic uses of the optative verb here, and partly because

---

23 *atha śūrpaṇakhayā paścāduktasya sītāharaṇaprakārasya prathamam anuvādaḥ sītāharaṇa ēva tātparyam avagamayati* (p. 97).

24 Lakṣmaṇaḥ – […] *ēkam ēva dharmam avalambatē.* Sūrpaṇakhā – *jaï evvaṁ ettha sā kiṁ karōdi*; Kaścit: *yad ahaṁ karōmi sāpi tad ēva nānyad iti vākyaparyavasānam* (p. 26).

25 *atyantagarhaṇīyam idaṁ dāsyaṁ naiva prārthanīyam iti tātparyam* (p. 27).

26 *hatvā vālinam arṇavē giriśatair ābadhya sētuṁ śramāl laṅkām ētya sahāyabandhusahitaṁ kṛtvā hataṁ rāvaṇaṁ ~ yām adya pratipālayāmi vacanaprāmāṇyatō mārutēḥ saṁvāsād api nāma sā nṛpasutā na syād avarṇāspadam ~~* (p. 212).

the particle *api nāma* suggests just such a thought process.[27] But such an interpretation is fraught with danger: why should Rāma even entertain Sītā's "disgrace" (*avarṇa-*) as a possibility? In fact, Kaścit says, a consideration of the context — including both this verse and passages that will come later in the play — leads us to the conclusion that Rāma *himself* was never in any doubt about Sītā's faithfulness. With respect to Sītā, there is nothing at all for Rāma to wonder about. Hence Rāma must be wondering about "the people" (*lōka-*) who might possibly consider Sītā to have been disgraced by staying in Rāvaṇa's house. This is a rather clever move on Kaścit's part, since "the people" are nowhere mentioned in the verse, but are rather implied, on his reading, by the word "disgrace" (*avarṇa-*). The overall meaning of the verse, in his reading, is therefore: "How will I, Rāma, remove the doubts that the people have about Sītā?"[28] Thus Kaścit's extraction of an overall meaning from this verse involves one of the key themes of the play: Sītā's faithfulness and Rāma's trust in her. The importance of this interpretation is underlined by the fact that Kaścit refers to it just a few lines afterwards, when Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa both speak as if they are utterly certain that Sītā is guiltless: "These passages show quite clearly that the worry was about her reputation, not about her guilt, which is why I previously interpreted the word 'disgrace' as referring to a worry about her reputation."[29] It is true that Kaścit's interpretation eliminates some of the ambiguity of Rāma's statement at the point in the play where it occurs. But the fact that he returns to this passage when his interpretation is more secure shows that an interpretation can always be revised, or at least reinforced, in light of subsequent textual material.

Although "final meaning" is generally a property of sentences, Kaścit occasionally refers to the "final meaning" of sub-sentential expressions, namely, words. I point this out because it is in the context of one such example that Kaścit actually quotes the great Mīmāṁsaka Kumārila. At the very beginning of the play, the director says to his wife, "Isn't the road less traveled difficult for the majority to take?"[30] We know from the context that he is not talking about an actual road, but

---

27 *syāt = bhavēn na vā. saṁbhāyanāyāṁ liṅ. nañaḥ pṛthaganvayaḥ. ēvaṁbhūtavitarkadyōtanārthō 'pināmaśabdaḥ* (p. 212).

28 *saṁvāsō lōkasya dōṣānuśaṅkāyām ēva hētuḥ, na rāghavasya, svabhāvaparyālōcanayā mārutivacanaprāmāṇyēna ca nirdōṣatvaniścayasyōktatvāt pratyakṣam apy apramāṇaṁ kṛtvā sītāṁ pratītyādyuparitanagranthavirōdhāc ca. kēnōpāyēna lōkasya dōṣaśaṅkāṁ pariharisyāmīti vitarkaparyavasānaṁ draṣṭavyam* (p. 212). The text the commentator refers to is on p. 220.

29 *kiṁ nu khalu avadhūya ity ābhyām granthābhyām apavādaśaṅkaiva na dōṣaśaṅkēti spaṣṭam avagamyatē. ata ēvāsmābhir na syād avarṇāspadam iti granthō 'pavādaśaṅkaparatayā vyākhyātaḥ* (p. 214).

30 *sundari nanu bahūnām asādhāraṇō durgamaḥ panthāḥ* (p. 6).

rather the performance of a play that is, at least according to this prologue, not commonly performed. Kaścit explains:

> For word "road," as everyone knows, refers by primary reference (*mukhyayā vṛttyā*) to a particular place that has been prepared so as to enable someone to reach a destination. This being the case, it refers by secondary reference (*lakṣayitvā*) to a particular quality, namely, being a means to a desired end, and hence it refers through qualitative reference (*gauṇyā vṛttyā*) to particular forms of knowledge that possess this quality. In this case, because of the context, it finally refers to (*paryavasyati*) a stage play. We see that it is used to refer to other forms of knowledge as well, for instance, "You are the single destination that men reach by various paths straight and winding, like waters reach the ocean" [*Śivamahimnastavaḥ*]. Qualitative reference has been defined as follows by the ancients: "Secondary reference (*lakṣaṇā*) is the awareness of something inseparable from the primary referent (*abhidhēya-*), whereas qualitative reference (*gauṇatā*) is a form of reference based on something's connection with the qualities that are secondarily referred to."[31]

The combination of technical knowledge-systems with a wide range of literary and religious references is characteristic of commentators from Kerala. The definition of qualitative reference is Kumārila's, from his *Explanation of the System* (*Tantravārttikam*) on 1.4.23 (the *tatsiddhipēṭikā*). Kumārila's distinction between secondary reference, where a word is used with reference to something directly connected to its primarily referent, and qualitative reference, where a word is used with reference to something that possesses the same qualities as its primary referent (even though there is no *direct* connection between the two referents), was taken up in Indian poetics since the time of Udbhaṭa around the turn of the ninth century.[32] This verse was widely quoted in works of poetics, including in works such as Mammaṭa's *Illumination of Literature* (*Kāvyaprakāśaḥ*) that we know Kaścit studied.[33] Kaścit may, however, have cited it directly from Kumārila, with whose work he elsewhere displays familiarity (see below).

I noted above that in circumstances where the final meaning of a sentence differs in some significant respect from its literal meaning, for example in circumstances where it represents a different speech act altogether, Kaścit uses the

---

31 *pathiśabdō hi abhimatadēśāntaraprāptisādhanē saṁskṛtē dēśaviśēṣē mukhyayā vṛttyā prasiddhaḥ. tatrābhimatasādhanatvaṁ nāma yō guṇas taṁ lakṣayitvā tadguṇayōgiṣu vidyāviśēṣēṣu gauṇyā vṛttyā vartatē. atra prakaraṇēṇa ayaṁ nāṭakē paryavasyati. vidyāntarēṣv apy asya prayōgaḥ dṛṣṭaḥ yathā — 'ṛjukuṭilanānāpathajuṣāṁ nṛṇām ēkō gamyas tvam asi payasām arṇava iva' iti. gauṇīvṛttiḥ pūrvair ēvaṁ lakṣitā — 'abhidhēyāvinābhūtapratītir lakṣaṇōcyatē ~ lakṣyamāṇaguṇair yōgād vṛttir iṣṭā tu gauṇatā ~~'* (p. 6).

32 *Explanation of the System* p. 353; Bronner 2016: 94–99.

33 *Illumination of Literature* p. 21. He quotes Mammaṭa's definitions of individual literary ornaments consistently, e.g. on pp. 2 (*pūrṇōpamā* from 10.87), 3 (*śabdaślēṣaḥ*, from 10.84, and *utprēkṣā*, from 10.92), and 5 (*arthaślēṣaḥ*, from 10.96).

generic terms "culmination" (*paryavasānam*) or "purport" (*tātparyam*), and the generic term "understand" (*avagam-*), in preference to more specialized terms that evoke one or another of the theories that had been developed to account for those differences, such as "suggest" (*dhvan-* or *vyañj-*), "infer" (*anumā-*), "indicate" (*lakṣ-*), or "intuit" (*pratī-*). Those terms would have put him in the company, respectively, of Ānandavardhana and his followers, Mahima Bhaṭṭa, Mukula Bhaṭṭa, and Bhōja.[34] Kaścit's reticence might at first suggest that he wishes to remain "above the fray" of controversial topics in poetics and the philosophy of language. But that is not the case. He consistently identifies elements of meaning that are "suggested" (*vyajyatē*), and most often, these are affective states. Hence he appears to follow Ānandavardhana, if only implicitly, in his high appraisal of the suggestion of affective states (*rasadhvaniḥ*). This is hardly surprising, given the canonical status of Ānandavardhana's ideas, especially as mediated by Mammaṭa. I would therefore give a different explanation of Kaścit's apparent neutrality. When it comes to specifically *literary* features — a term which is difficult to define, but which we may take, in the first instance, to refer to those features that literary theorists have identified as being important to a work's "literariness," including indirection (*vakrōktiḥ*), resonance (*dhvaniḥ*), affective content (*rasādiḥ*), and strikingness (*camatkāritvam*) — Kaścit is happy to follow Ānandavardhana.[35] But when it comes to the way that language works *in general*, he avoids the technical terminology of poetics and reverts to more generic language, ultimately deriving from Mīmāṁsā's interpretive model. I read this as an implicit disagreement with Ānandavardhana: a sentence might *convey* something that it does not literally *express*, but that in itself is not constitutive of the literary feature of "resonance" (*dhvaniḥ*). I am emboldened to offer this explanation, as tentative as it is in Kaścit's case, because Bhōja had taken a very similar position in his *Illumination of the Erotic* (*Śṛṅgāraprakāśaḥ*). Bhōja maintained that not every meaning that is "understood" (*pratīyamānam*) contains the literary feature of "resonance" (*dhvaniḥ*), and in fact many of the phenomena that Ānandavardhana had classed as "resonance" (*dhvaniḥ*) really ought to be reclassified as cases of simply "understanding" (*pratītiḥ*) of one thing on the basis of the expression (*abhidhā*) of something else.[36]

---

34 The literature on these theories is now quite large. The starting point is now McCrea 2008; for more recent work see Keating 2019 on Mukula.

35 See Pollock 2016: xvii on *rasādiḥ*, which includes the *rasa*s, the *vibhāva*s, the *vyabhicāribhāva*s, the *sāttvikabhāva*s, the *anubhāva*s, and the *sthāyibhāva*s.

36 See Bhōja's *Illumination* vol. 1, pp. 367–375.

4 Addition

To review: for Kaścit, the goal of interpretation is generally the "final meaning" (*tātparyam* or *paryavasānam*), which takes account of context and presuppositions; arriving at the final meaning from the "literal meaning," however, requires the application of hermeneutic principles that are articulated in Mīmāṁsā. Now most often we *add* to the literal meaning in order to arrive at the final meaning. Sometimes, however, we *subtract* from the literal meaning. Addition and subtraction are the two headings under which we will consider some of Kaścit's interpretive maneuvers, some explicitly, and others implicitly, based on Mīmāṁsā principles.

Addition, wherein what is intended (*vivakṣitam*) exceeds what is literally expressed (*śrutam*), is by far the larger category. This is because of a general tendency, on the part of speakers, to convey as much information as possible in a relatively small number of words.[37] This tendency requires the literal meaning to be "enriched" by reference to context in any number of ways, from the fixing of the reference of pronouns (e.g., determining the referent of words like "it") to determining the specific sense of verbs given their agreement patterns.

One kind of additive process that is commonly remarked upon in commentaries is what Mīmāṁsā calls *vākyaparisamāptiḥ* (or just *samāptiḥ*), "sentence completion." The basic idea is that the sentence as it is expressed is incomplete, and requires other words or phrases to be brought in. These additional words or phrases are called "sentence remainders" (*vākyaśēṣāḥ*). The precise conditions under which a sentence ought to be considered incomplete were a regular topic of discussion in and beyond Mīmāṁsā. The most uncontroversial kind of incompleteness can be characterized as "grammatical," namely when one word's grammatical "dependency" (*apēkṣā* or *ākāṅkṣā*) for another word remains unfulfilled, such as an accusative form, which indicates the object of a transitive verb, in the absence of a transitive verb. But Mīmāṁsakas were often willing to admit that a sentence was incomplete so long as it did not make sense, or stated otherwise, so long as it was impossible to arrive at a final meaning on the basis of the constituents that were actually expressed.

Under the general heading of sentence completion there are two major categories. One is *adhyāhāraḥ* or "filling in," wherein the remainder must be supplied by the listener himself or herself, since it is neither present in the sentence itself nor given in the immediate context. Although this sounds like a very open-ended process, Mīmāṁsakas emphasized that which is to be "filled in" is no more and no less than the very thing by virtue of which the sentence is judged to be incomplete. The

37 See Levinson 2000 for this general principle and its far-reaching implications.

common example of this is "the door" (*dvāram*), which is understood in the "all-things-considered" stage to be a request to open or shut the door.[38] Kaścit uses this strategy to fill in the implicit adposition on which a particular case-form depends, e.g., *sahitam* "with" in the presence of *pādapaiḥ* "trees," or to fill in verbal arguments that are missing, e.g., he expands *na bhētavyam* "don't be afraid" with *mattas tvayā* "you [don't be afraid] of me," or to fill in a missing correlative pronoun in the presence of a relative pronoun.[39] But he also uses it to supply missing nouns. Here is one example from the third act, in which Lakṣmaṇa says to Rāma:

> He returned to his natural state when your foot,
> its skin golden as a lotus, picked him up, then he fell
> with great speed from the sky, gathering the clouds
> and taking them with him, to the earth, where his fall
> pulverized the mountains.[40]

I have translated the verse with "he," which would imply a subject that is recoverable from the surrounding discourse, but in fact no pronouns are used in the verse, and a subject is not very easily recoverable. All we know about the subject is that it is masculine and singular. Kaścit supplies "the Rākṣasa's body" as the subject. In my view it is less important *what* we understand as the subject than *that* the subject is omitted to begin with. At this point in the play, Rāma, accompanied by Śūrpaṇakhā, whom he believes to be Sītā, encounters Lakṣmaṇa, accompanied by Mārīca, whom Lakṣmaṇa believes to be Rāma. The appearance of two Rāmas on stage generates confusion, which the real Rāma resolves by showing Lakṣmaṇa his signet-ring. Hence Lakṣmaṇa is shocked (*vismaya-*): to see two Rāmas at the same time; to learn, immediately afterwards, that the one he has been accompanying so far is an impostor; and finally to see the "real" Rāma dispose of the impostor so effortlessly. Kaścit identifies Lakṣmaṇa's shock as the principal affect in the verse quoted above, and we can see the lack of a subject as one of its continued effects.

In other cases, Kaścit uses "filling in" when it is not necessary on grammatical grounds alone, but when an additional word is necessary for the statement to make sense in context. A verse from the fourth act, where Jaṭāyuḥ speaks from offstage, provides two good examples:

---

38 See Keating 2017 for a discussion of this issue in the later followers of Kumārila (including Mēlputtūr Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa, the well-known scholar of sixteenth century Kerala). The example is first given, to my knowledge, by Śabara in his commentary on *sūtra* 4.3.11.

39 *pādapair, sahitam ity adhyāhāryam* (p. 90, he could just as easily have taken this phrase as an *upalakṣaṇatṛtīyā*); *na bhētavyam ity atra mattas tvayēty adhyāhāryam* (p. 135); *atra yacchabdavaśād adhyāhṛtēna tacchabdēna yacchabdayuktōddēśyavākyaprakārō hētutvēna parāmṛśyatē* (p. 27).

40 *prakṛtiṁ prapadya sahajāṁ tavōddhṛtaś caraṇēna tāmarasapāṭalatviṣā ~ nabhasō javēna saha sambhṛtair ghanaiḥ patati kṣitau patanacūrṇitācalaḥ ~~* (p. 122).

It's me, Jaṭāyuḥ, Daśaratha's friend, here to save you.
Stop your chariot! I can put up with it when the foolish do something wrong,
but you, Rāvaṇa, better release the hero's devoted wife.[41]

Here there are two adjectives which we would say are used substantively, "the foolish" (*aviduṣām*) and "devoted" (*anuvratām*; I have added the word "wife" in my translation). But more precisely these adjectives qualify nouns that are not expressed in the verse. Kaścit says that "devoted" clearly refers to Sītā, as we know from the word itself (who else can be described as "devoted to Rāma" in the feminine singular?) and from the context (who else would Jaṭāyuḥ ask Rāvaṇa to release?).[42] As for "the foolish," the reason that a noun needs to be filled in here is that the word would otherwise make no sense in context: is Jaṭāyuḥ really talking about foolish people in general? Kaścit explains that context once again allows us to understand "foolish people like you," i.e., Rākṣasas who are naturally stupid and therefore don't know right from wrong.[43] The implication, as Kaścit elicits for us, is that Jaṭāyuḥ is simultaneously condescending ("*I* can put up with the antics of you stupid Rākṣasas ...") and menacing ("... but *Rāma*, whose wife you have just kidnapped, will not").

Besides "filling in" (*adhyāhāraḥ*), there is another major type of sentence completion theorized in Mīmāṁsā, namely "carrying over" (*anuṣaṅgaḥ*).[44] In "carrying over" the word or phrase that is brought into the incomplete sentence is taken from a nearby sentence. This is a rather more constrained operation than filling in, and in Kaścit's commentary, it is used primarily when a character speaks a fragment of a sentence, the remainder of which (*vākyaśēṣaḥ*) is carried over from the immediately preceding line. One example is from the sixth act, where Hanumān looks for Sītā in the Aśōka grove at Laṅkā after Rāma's victory but does not see her. He immediately suspects the worst, and says, "There is no way that Rāma can live without Sītā, and then Sugrīva, Bharata and Lakṣmaṇa, and the queens."[45] What we understand from the latter part of the sentence, Kaścit tells us, is that "then," i.e., after Rāma's death, "Sugrīva" will not be able to live, and similarly Bharata and Lakṣmaṇa, and similarly the queens. In other words, the phrase "no way that X can live" (*sarvathā na jīvati*) construes as a remainder with each of the following nouns, which serve as its subject. What Kaścit is more concerned to motivate, however, is the fact that "no way X can

41 *śaraṇam asmi jaṭāyur ahaṁ sakhā daśarathasya rathas tava tiṣṭhatu ~ aviduṣām aparādham ahaṁ sahē visṛja rāvaṇa vīram anuvratām ~~* (p. 137).

42 *vīram anuvratām iti viśēṣaṇabalāt prakaraṇabalāc ca sītām iti viśēṣyaṁ sidhyati* (p. 137).

43 *aviduṣām ity atra tvādṛśānām iti viśēṣyam adhyāhāryam. aviduṣām iti bahuvacanēna rākṣasajātīyānām ēvājñānaṁ naisargikam iti darśayati* (p. 137).

44 *Mīmāṁsā Sūtras* 2.1.16–17.

45 *sarvathā dēvīm antarēṇa dēvō na jīvati, tataḥ sugrīvō bharatalakṣmaṇau dēvyaś ca* (pp. 182–183).

live," once it has already been carried over into the sentence about Sugrīva, is further carried over into the sentence about Bharata and Lakṣmaṇa, and from there to the sentence about the queens. Kaścit quotes Kumārila's *Explanation of the System* to license "carrying over what has already been carried over" (*anuṣaktānuṣaṅgaḥ*), since "an element that is connected to something immediately contiguous would itself be immediately contigous to what follows."[46] This is a principle that Kaścit has gotten directly from Kumārila, rather than through the mediation of a work of poetics. For no work of poetics that I know of quotes this principle, and in any case, Kaścit flags it as "an interpretive principle (*nyāya-*) from the second book," referring to the location of the *anuṣaṅgādhikaraṇaḥ* at 2.1.16–2.1.17 in the Mīmāṁsā system.[47]

We saw in the previous example that the verb that is carried over changes its number — from singular to dual to plural — to match each new subject. In fact the discussion of carrying over in the Mīmāṁsā system concludes that this strategy is based on proximity (*saṁnidhiḥ*), a psychological property in which the fulfillment of dependencies figures prominently, rather than on the mere contiguity of textual elements (*ānantaryam*). In other examples the remainder has to be modified even further in order to accord with the syntax of the fragmentary sentence that is actually spoken. For instance, in the fifth act, when Rāvaṇa asks his minister, "Do you know who is the conqueror of the gods?," his minister obtusely says "No." To this Rāvaṇa says, "By me, of course!" In fact we must understand, as a remainder, not "the conqueror of the gods" but "the gods have been conquered."[48]

5 Subtraction

Filling in (*adhyāhāraḥ*) and carrying over (*anuṣaṅgaḥ*), to review, are additive processes, wherein a meaning that is not literally expressed (*aśrutam*) is judged to nevertheless form part of the intended meaning (*vivakṣitam*). By contrast, interpretive processes are subtractive when a meaning that is literally expressed (*śrutam*) is judged to not form a part of the intended meaning (*avivakṣitam*). The most common scenario where subtractive processes come into play is when meaning-bearing

46 *tatō dēvasya jīvanaparityāgāt sugrīvō na jīvatīty anuṣaṅgaḥ. bharatalakṣmaṇāv ity atra na jīvata ity anuṣajyatē. dēvyaś cēty atra na jīvantīti. anantarēṇa sambaddhaḥ syāt parasyāpy anantara iti dvitīyādhyāyōktanyāyēnānuṣaktānuṣaṅgō na dōṣaḥ* (pp. 182–183). The quotation is from *Explanation of the System* p. 455.

47 The learned Kuppuswami Sastri (intro. p. 5) mentioned another piece of evidence of Kaścit's reliance on Kumārila, namely the quotation of the verse *upāyānāṁ tu niyamō nāvaśyam avatiṣṭhatē* on p. 160, but source of this verse is not Kumārila, but rather Bhartṛhari's *On Sentence and Word* (*Vākyapadīyam*), 2.38.

48 Rāvaṇaḥ — *kiṁ na jānāsi jētāraṁ dēvānām.* Amātyaḥ — *na jānē.* Rāvaṇaḥ — *nanu mayā.* Kaścit: *nanu mayēty atra jitā dēvā ity anuṣaṅgēna vākyasamāptiḥ* (p. 156).

elements (most commonly gender-number-case and person-number-tense suffixes, but also occasionally entire words) are *grammatically* required by another element despite not contributing to the intended meaning. One example of this phenomenon is the use of a "dummy subject" with verbs that do not actually express a subject, like "rain" in English and, equivalently, *varṣati* in Sanskrit. In English we have to say "it rains," because English verbs require a subject. In Sanskrit, the idiom is *dēvō varṣati*, "god rains," although the subject is conventional and considered *nityānuvādaḥ*, "always topical." This is a way of saying that it is never a *vidhiḥ*, i.e., it never adds any new information to the common ground.

One of the most important (and controversial) subtractive processes in Indian theories of language is the so-called *grahaikatvanyāyaḥ*, "the principle of the singleness of the goblet," to which a section of the Mīmāṁsā system is dedicated.[49] This principle holds that when a word belongs to the topic — that is, when it is already part of the "common ground" that the listener can take for granted — the grammatical categories expressed by this word, for example its grammatical number, are unintended (*avivakṣitam*) and they can be ignored or overridden if necessary. Thus, if an injunction tells us to "wipe (a/the) goblet" (*grahaṁ saṁmārṣṭi*), we would normally take the singular number of "goblet" literally, and wipe one and only one goblet. But since "goblet" refers to something already known to us (as would be implied by the definite article in English), and since we know from context that there are several goblets involved in this part of the ritual, we can take the phrase "the goblet" as referring to each of the goblets in question. Precisely how such an interpretation is motivated is beyond the scope of this article. I will only note that in categorizing this process as subtractive I am following the traditional understanding, which takes the singular number expressed by *graham* out of the "all-things-considered" meaning of the sentence. It could, however, be understood as the contextually-motivated *addition* of a distributive meaning onto a singular term.

Kaścit invokes the "principle of the singleness of the goblet" at the very beginning of the play. The benediction compares Viṣṇu to the ocean. Both Viṣṇu and the ocean are described in a series of bitextual phrases, one of which is *bibhrāṇaḥ śaṅkham*. In the case of Viṣṇu, he straightforwardly "bears the conch" called Pāñcajanya, which is one of his standard attributes. But it is not quite true of the ocean that it "bears (a/the) conch." We expect the plural, conches, on this reading. Kaścit says, however, that the singular number of the conch is unintended on analogy with the singular number of the word "goblet" in "wipe (a/the)

49 *Mīmāṁsā Sūtra* 3.1.13–14 (see Yoshimizu 2008); the principles elicited in this *adhikaraṇam* prompted responses from opponents of the Mīmāṁsakas, including the grammarian Kauṇḍa Bhaṭṭa.

goblet."[50] This seems like an inappropriate invocation of the principle, however, because the word "conch" does not constitute the topic in this case. Rather, the ocean is the topic, in relation to which the property of "bearing (a/the) conch" is presented as new information. Kaścit then applies the principle to other words in the verse so they can be more felicitously understood in reference to the ocean, such as *caram acaram*, "what moves and what stands still," which in the case of Viṣṇu is a merism referring to the entire universe, and in the case of the ocean refers to moving things (like fish) and unmoving things (like underwater mountains).

Kaścit is slightly more conscientious in applying the principle in another context. When Rāvaṇa sees Sītā in the third act, he exclaims, "my eye finally has a purpose."[51] Rather than explaining *cakṣuḥ* in a slightly broader sense (the faculty of sight, for example), Kaścit says that it is "absolutely clear" that it forms part of the topic, in reference to which the focus ("having a purpose") is expressed, and hence its number is unintended and need not be taken literally.[52] Although it is probably not as clear as he wants us to believe, since the word "eye" itself has not actually been used previously, it is true that the verse as a whole discusses Rāvaṇa's opportunities to see such beauty as Sītā's on various other occasions, whether surveying the world from his aerial vehicle, or catching a glimpse of Pārvatī as he shook Mount Kailāsa. Just before the sentence in question, Rāvaṇa says "such beauty has never been seen."[53] We might assume that the unstated agent of seeing here is Rāvaṇa himself, but it might just as well be his 20 eyes. And hence, having been evoked in the preceding sentence, the "eye" of the following sentence would be topical, and its grammatical number unintended.[54]

6 Conclusions

We might wonder why Kaścit identifies himself (or is perhaps identified by a subsequent copyist) as a "follower of Kumārila," given that he quotes from Kumārila only twice. He certainly quotes the standard works of poetics more often — Mammaṭa is his go-to for literary ornaments (*alaṅkāraḥ*), although he occasionally quotes Daṇḍin and Ruyyaka as well. But it probably would have gone without saying, certainly by Kaścit's time, that a literary commentary *would*

50 *samudraviśēṣaṇapakṣē grahagataikatvavad ēkatvam avivakṣitam* (p. 3).

51 *cakṣuś cirāt sārthakam* (p. 100).

52 *cakṣur ity atraikatvam uddēśyagatatvād avivakṣitam. cakṣur uddiśya sārthakatvasya vidhēyatvād uddēśyatvaṁ spaṣṭam ēva* (p. 100).

53 *dṛṣṭaṁ* [...] *na rūpam īdṛśam* (p. 100).

54 Elsewhere (p. 136) Kaścit says that the singular number of *dṛṣṭi-*, which probably does mean "eye" in this context, is unintended, but it is not topical in this case.

identify literary ornaments and quote their definitions, just as it would gloss difficult words by citing lexicons, or lead readers through their derivation by citing grammatical texts.

What distinguishes Kaścit is that Mīmāṁsā principles of interpretation are built into the very foundations of his commentarial project. He is constantly asking what the "final meaning" (*tātparyam* or *paryavasānam*) of a statement is, and occasionally deploys interpretive processes of addition and subtraction in order to demonstrate how the final meaning is derived from the explicitly-stated meaning. The fact that Kaścit cites Kumārila *at all* is rather surprising. I know of no other literary commentator who does so, although I could be wrong. By contrast, Pūrṇasarasvatī — possibly the most learned of all of Kerala's commentators — rarely uses the technical language of Mīmāṁsā in his commentary on Bhavabhūti's *Mālatī and Mādhava* and never quotes Mīmāṁsā authors.[55] There is one exception, when he refers to the *Mīmāṁsā Sūtra*s to explain the word *prakaraṇam*, but the reference is gratuitous and misleading, and is rather the exception that proves the rule.[56] Hence it does not take much for Kaścit to stand out as a Mīmāṁsaka among literary commentators.

It is true that the interpretive processes that I have discussed in this article — the emphasis on final meaning, and addition and subtraction as means to arrive at a final meaning — belong to the larger domain of everyday language processing rather than the much narrower domain of literary art. As I have noted, Kaścit attends even moreso to the literary and dramatic effects of Śaktibhadra's play than these lower-level questions of sentence meaning. But what makes him a Mīmāṁsaka is his attention to these lower-level, and indeed foundational, phenomena: there can be no question of *literary* interpretation until the meaning of each individual sentence has been determined, and to do that, we often need to have recourse to the principles that Mīmāṁsā articulates, as Śālikanātha said in the passage I quoted earlier. In fact Śālikanātha goes on to justify the Mīmāṁsā project as follows:

> Isn't it the case that in everyday life we understand sentence-meanings immediately? Why do we need this enormous apparatus? — That is quite true when it comes to sentences with which we are already quite familiar. But of course disputes arise, even in everyday life,

---

55 I have not, for example, seen *anuṣaṅgaḥ* or *avivakṣitam*, while *adhyāhāraḥ* and *paryavasānam* are used rarely, and *tātparyam* is used commonly but in a non-technical sense (i.e., referring to "the general idea" rather than the "final meaning," as Kaścit uses it, or "the speaker's intention," as Naiyāyikas after Jayanta used it; for the latter see Graheli 2016). The terms *uddēśyaḥ* and *vidhēyaḥ* are sometimes used, but rarely with reference to the new information contributed by each; rather, they are used to identify the subject and predicate of a nominal sentence (see e.g. *Panicle of Rasa* [*Rasamañjarī*] p. 312, on *Mālatī and Mādhava* 5.30).

56 *Panicle of Rasa* p. 612, where Pūrṇasarasvatī quotes *Mīmāṁsā Sūtra* 3.3.14.

> regarding sentences of the *smṛti*s that pertain to things we cannot observe. You can't possibly say that we understand their meanings immediately.[57]

Śālikanātha is really making two points: on the one hand, there are in fact sentences that we do not immediately understand the meaning of, and in these cases we might have to go about the process with more care and deliberation; on the other hand, when we do readily understand the meaning of a sentence, that is because we are relying on the results of an intepretive process we have gone through in the past, or we go through such a process subconsciously, but in either case the same principles of interpretation are involved. The same can easily be said about stage-plays. Much of them — especially in Śaktibhadra's lively and accessible *Crown Jewel* — can readily be understood, but only because the principles Mīmāṁsā had articulated are working in the background, as it were. If we want to convey our understanding to others, as literary commentators do, we have to bring those principles to the foreground. And there are inevitably passages that require us to attend rather closely to the text and its context, and to bear the principles of interpretation in mind, in order for us to determine their final meaning.

Acknowledgments: I am grateful for the comments of an anonymous reviewer as well as of the editors of this special issue, Daniele Cuneo and Elisa Ganser. In the summer of 2016, David Shulman convened a group to watch the first act of the *Crown Jewel of Amazement* (the *Paṇaśālāṅkam*) performed in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam style by Nepathya in the latter's home village of Moozhikkulam in Kerała. That was where I was first introduced to Kūṭiyāṭṭam, to Śaktibhadra, and to the amazing archive of literary commentary produced in Kerala. Several of the attendees read "Kaścit's" commentary together during that time, including Daniele and Elisa, as well as Yigal Bronner.

References

Primary texts

Crown Jewel of Amazement (*Āścaryacūḍāmaṇiḥ*): S. Kuppuswami Sastri (ed.). 1926. *Ascharyachudamani: A Drama*. Mylapore, Madras [Chennai]: Sri Balamanorama Press.

Explanation of the System (*Tantravārttikam*) of Kumārila: Subbaśāstrī (ed.). 1929. *Śrīmajjaiminipraṇītē Mīmāṁsādarśanē Ādita Ārabhya Dvitīyādhyāyaprathamapādāntaḥ Prathamō Bhāgaḥ*. Pune: Ānandāśramamudraṇālaya. (Part 2a.).

57 *nanu lōkē drāg ēva vākyārthāvagatir nēyatīṁ sāmagrīm apēkṣatē. ucyatē — atyantābhyastēṣu vākyēṣu syād ēvam, adṛṣṭārthēṣu smṛtyādivākyēṣu lōkē 'pi nānāvivādōtthānāt kutō drāg ēvārthaniścayaḥ?* (*Topical Expositions*, p. 404).

Fundamentals of Sentence Meaning (Vākyārthamātṛkā): See Topical Expositions, pp. 375–450.
Great Commentary (*Mahābhāṣyaḥ*) of Patañjali: F. Kielhorn (ed.). 1884. *The Vyâkâraṇa-Mahâbhâshya of Patanjali*. Vol. III. Bombay [Mumbai]: Government Central Book Depôt.
Illumination of Literature (*Kāvyaprakāśaḥ*) of Mammaṭa: Rasiklal C. Parikh (ed.). 1959. *Kāvyaprakāśa of Mammaṭa with the Saṁketa named Kāvyādarśa of Someśvara Bhaṭṭa (Son of Devaka of the Bhāradvāja Family)*. Vol. 1. Jodhpur: Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute.
Illumination of the Erotic (*Śṛṅgāraprakāśaḥ*) of Bhōja: Rewāprasāda Dwivedī (ed.). 2007. *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa [Sāhityaprakāśa] by Bhōjarāja*. Vol. 1. New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts.
Panicle of Rasa (*Rasamañjarī*) of Pūrṇasarasvatī: Kē. Ēs. Mahādēvaśāstrī (ed.). 1953. *Mālatīmādhavam Śrīpūrṇasarasvatīviracitayā Rasamañjaryākhyayā Vyākhyayōpētam*. Anantaśayana [Tiruvanantapuram]: Rājakīyamudraṇayantrālaya [Government Press].
Topical Expositions (Prakaraṇapañcikā) of Śālikanātha: Śrī Subrahmaṇyaśāstrī (ed.). 1961. *Prakaraṇapañcikā Mahāmahōpādhyāyaśrīmacchālikanāthamiśraviracitā (Prabhākaraprasthānānusāri Mīmāṁsādarśanam) Śrījayapurinārāyaṇabhaṭṭaviracita-pratyakṣaparicchēdāntanyāyasiddhyākhyavyākhyāsaṁvalitā*. Varanasi: Kāśī Hindū Viśvavidyālaya.
Mīmāṁsā Sūtras of Jaimini. Subbaśāstrī (ed.). 1929–1934. *Śrīmajjaiminipraṇītē Mīmāṁsādarśanē* … [6 volumes]. Pune: Ānandāśramamudraṇālaya.
On Sentence and Word (*Vākyapadīyam*) of Bhartṛhari: K. V. Abhyankar and V. P. Limaye (eds.). 1965. *Vākyapadīya of Bhartṛhari*. Poona [Pune]: University of Poona.

Secondary sources

Bhattacharya, Jayati (1990): *Studies in Mallinātha's Commentary on Śiśupālavadham*. PhD Thesis, University of Calcutta. http://hdl.handle.net/10603/165788.
Bronner, Yigal (2016): "Understanding Udbhaṭa: The Invention of Kashmiri Poetics in the Jayāpīḍa Moment." In: Eli Franco and Isabelle Ratié (eds.), *Around Abhinavagupta: Aspects of the Intellectual History of Kashmir from the Ninth to the Eleventh Century*. Berlin: Lit, 81–147.
Graheli, Alessandro (2016): "The Force of *Tātparya*: Bhaṭṭa Jayanta and Abhinavagupta." In: Eli Franco and Isabelle Ratié (eds.), *Around Abhinavagupta: Aspects of the Intellectual History of Kashmir from the Ninth to the Eleventh Century*. Berlin: Lit, 231–262.
Kaplan, David (1989): "Demonstratives." In: J. Almog, J. Perry, and H. Wettstein, *Themes from Kaplan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 481–563.
Keating, C. Malcolm (2019): *Language, Meaning and Use in Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Mukula's Fundamentals of the Communicative Function*. London: Bloomsbury.
Keating, C. Malcolm (2017): "(Close) the Door, the King (is Going): The Development of Elliptical Resolution in Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsā." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 45: 911–938.
Levinson, Stephen (2000): *Presumptive Meanings: The Theory of Generalized Conversational Implicature*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
McCrea, Lawrence (2009): *The Teleology of Poetics in Medieval Kashmir*. Cambridge, Mass.: Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University.
Ollett, Andrew (2021): "Śālikanātha's 'Introduction' to His 'Fundamentals of Sentence Meaning.'" In: Alessandro Graheli (ed.), *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Indian Philosophy of Language*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 251–277.

Ollett, Andrew (forthcoming): "Against Vēdānta: Śālikanātha on the Upaniṣads." In: Elisa Freschi (ed.), *Maṇḍana on Commands*.

Ollett, Andrew / Venkatkrishnan, Anand (2022) "Plumbing the depths: reading Bhavabhūti in seventeenth-century Kerala." *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques*. https://doi.org/10.1515/asia-2021-0036.

Prasad, H. S. (1991): "The Context Principle of Meaning in Prābhākara Mīmāṁsā." In: V. N. Jha (ed.), *Kalyāṇa-mitta: Professor Hajime Nakamura Felicitation Volume*. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 283–304.

Pollock, Sheldon (2016): *A Rasa Reader: Classical Indian Aesthetics*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Recanati, François (2010): "Pragmatic Enrichment." In Delia Graff Fara and Gillian Russell (eds.), *Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Language*, 67–78. New York: Routledge.

Recanati, François (2003): *Literal Meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Raghunāthācārya, S. V. (1978–1979): "Mallināthasya Mīmāṁsāśāstrapāṇḍityam." *Sri Venkateswara University Oriental Journal* 21–22: 75–83.

Saxena, Shishir (2019): "Denotation as Complex and Chronologically Extended: *anvitābhidhāna* in Śālikanātha's *Vākyārthamātṛkā-I*." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 47: 489–506.

Unithiri, N. V. P. (2004): *Pūrṇasarasvatī*. Calicut: University of Calicut.

Yoshimizu, Kiyotaka (2008): "The Intention of Expression (*vivakṣā*), the Expounding (*vyākhyā*) of a Text, and the Authorlessness of the Veda." *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 158: 51–71.

Yoshimizu, Kiyotaka (2006): "The Theorem of the Singleness of a Goblet (*graha-ekatva-nyāya*): A Mīmāṃsā Analysis of Meaning and Context." *Acta Asiatica* 90: 15–38.