

Female Adolescence in Indian Lyric Poetry

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Abstract

While the hero (*nāyaka*) of classical Sanskrit lyric poetry is, as a rule, an adult and a consummate lover, that is not the case with the heroine (*nāyikā*). Poets, anthologists and theoreticians of literature distinguish the various types, which differ, among other things, in their age and experience in love matters. They include the adolescent heroine, who is depicted during the process of her transformation from a little girl into a young maiden. This motif, referred to as *vayaḥsaṃdhi*, was also introduced into the medieval lyric poetry of north-eastern India, thanks to the famous Maithili poet Vidyāpati (14th–15th centuries CE), who used it in his songs on the adolescence of Kṛṣṇa's beloved Rādhā. The paper analyses in detail selected instances of the use of the motif in Sanskrit and Maithili sources, with a particular focus on metaphors employed to explain the liminal period of adolescence to the poems' listeners or readers.

Keywords: *nāyikā*; adolescent heroine; *vayaḥsaṃdhi* motif; Rādhā; classical Sanskrit literature; *kāvya*; Vidyāpati.

1. *Female Adolescence in Classical Sanskrit Literature and Classical Indian Literary Theory: Viśvanātha's Sāhityadarpaṇa*

In classical Sanskrit literature (*kāvya*), as well as in classical Indian literary theory (*alaṃkāraśāstra*), the adolescent heroine does not seem to have her own separate, traditionally established name. Let us consult, for example, Viśvanātha's *Sāhityadarpaṇa* (SD), which is a good source to refer to for information on the subject. In this 14th-century comprehensive *alaṃkāraśāstra* treatise from north-eastern

India¹, which develops the earlier tradition of the discipline, the author distinguishes, names, defines and illustrates in his own or other poets' exemplary stanzas, as many as 384 types of *nāyikā*. However, the literary representation of an adolescent female is not one of them. This does not mean that such a heroine is absent from Viśvanātha's work.

The first of the stanzas illustrating the *mugdā nāyikā*, i.e. 'naïve' heroine, is the following one, in the *śārdūlavikrīḍita* metre, by the theoretician's father:

*madhyasya prathimānam eti jaghanaṃ vakṣojayor mandatā
dūraṃ yāty udaraṃ ca romalatikā netrārjvaṃ dhāvati /
kandarpaṃ parivikṣya nūtanamanorājyābhiṣiktaṃ kṣaṇād
arigānīva parasparaṃ vidadhate nirluṅṭhanaṃ subhruvaḥ // SD 3. 58 //*

Her buttocks come to acquire the ampleness of her waist,
the smallness of her breasts passes to her distant belly,
and the line of her abdominal hair
hastens to assume the straightness of her gaze.
It is as if, on seeing that Kandarpa has been newly inaugurated
as a ruler in the kingdom of her mind,
among the parts of the body of the fair-browed one
mutual plunder instantly began².

Although the heroine is referred to above just as 'the fair-browed one' (*subhrū*), without specifying her age, the stanza clearly depicts an adolescent girl. Most of the noticeable physical changes which happen during female puberty are duly indicated here – our heroine's breasts develop, her waist becomes slimmer, she loses the protruding belly of a child, while she gains fat in the area of her buttocks; a small line of hair appears on her abdomen.

A certain change in the girl's behaviour is also pointed out in the stanza – she no longer looks other people straight in the eye but begins casting oblique glances at them. Obviously, this has to be comprehended as a symptom of psychological changes in the heroine – as a result of her increased self-awareness, as well as awareness of others and their judgements, characteristic of the period of adolescence, she becomes diffident, shy and easily embarrassed, while doing her best to preserve decorum at all times.

1. Gerow 1977, 281: «the first quarter of the 14th century»; *ibid.*, 282: «hailing from Orisa».

2. Translation mine; cf. Mitra–Ballantyne 1865, 68.

However, sideways glances may also be interpreted as a display of the girl's new-found coquettishness, together with the playful movements of her eyebrows, to which the above-mentioned epithet *subhrū* possibly refers. In its turn, coquettish behaviour reflects emotional changes in our heroine – «Kandarpa has been newly inaugurated as a ruler in the kingdom of her mind», after all; in other words, she starts being curious about love matters, or perhaps even experiences the first stirrings of love in her heart, which, interestingly, is perceived by the poet not as a consequence of the onset of adolescence but, on the contrary, as its cause.

To emphasise how fundamental this transformation of the heroine is, and how critical the period of adolescence is in her life, the author skilfully uses contrast and an apt metaphor in the stanza.

The individual parts of the body of the adolescent girl, he demonstrates, are stripped of their childhood characteristics, which are then transferred to other body parts; eventually, each body part will acquire new, adult traits, opposite to the previous ones; in this process, it is as if our heroine were first deconstructed and then reconstructed from the same elements as before, but distributed very differently.

Metaphorically, adolescence is conceptualised here in terms of another liminal situation, namely interregnum, or rather the beginning of a king's reign – the new ruler has already been inaugurated but has not been able to assert his authority yet. This results in the instability of his kingdom, internal strife and the collapse of the old economic and political order; a new order will finally emerge and the situation will normalise, but with a great shift of wealth and power in the state.

2. *Female Adolescence in Classical Sanskrit Literature and Classical Indian Literary Theory: Classical Sanskrit Anthologies*

Stanzas depicting the adolescent heroine found their way into classical Sanskrit anthologies (*kośa* / *koṣa*) as well. The topic must have been quite popular, as in three well-known collections, namely Vidyākara's *Subhāṣitaratnaḥkośa* (SRK) (probably 11th or 12th century CE)³, Śrīdharadāsa's *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* (SKA) (1205 CE)⁴ and

3. Sternbach 1974, 15. Cf. Ingalls 1965, 30: «the latter half of the eleventh century A.D.»; Kosambi 1957, vii: «The first edition was compiled about A.D. 1100, the expanded edition about A.D. 1130»; Sternbach 1978–1980, I, 3: «cca 1100–1130»; Warder 2004, 1: «the beginning of the +12».

4. Sternbach 1974, 16.

Jalhaṇa's *Sūktimuktāvalī* (SMĀ) (1258 CE)⁵, it is given a separate chapter, invariably titled *vayaḥsaṃdhi* / *vayassaṃdhi* 'life-juncture' (Monier-Williams 2002: 920). The *vayaḥsaṃdhi* chapter (*vrajyā*) of the *Subhāṣitaratnaḥ* is by far the largest – it contains 50 stanzas⁶; the *vayassaṃdhipaddhati* of the *Sūktimuktāvalī* contains 17 stanzas, while the *vayaḥsaṃdhi* section (*vīcī*) of the *Saduktikarṇāmaṃṛta* has only 5 stanzas, but they are followed by a further 5 stanzas gathered in a section titled *kiṃcidupārūḍhayauvanā* / *kiṃcidupoḍhayauvanā* '[the heroine] whose youth has slightly grown / has come a little closer', which I will also take into account in this paper.

Let us begin with a brief overview of the poems' content⁷. As noted above, in classical Sanskrit literature, the adolescent heroine does not seem to have a separate name. Thus, in some of our stanzas, she is referred to as 'a girl' (*bālā*)⁸, and elsewhere, as 'a young maiden' / 'a young women' (*taruṇī*⁹ / *yuvatī*¹⁰), or even as 'a woman' (*strī*)¹¹.

The period of adolescence is here usually referred to periphrastically, e.g. as the time 'when childhood is gone' (*gate bālye*, SKA 2. 2. 5), 'when childhood perishes' (*glāyati śaiśave*, SRK 335; *sīdati śaiśave*, SRK 348; SMĀ 51. 5), 'between childhood and youth' (*śīśutātāruṇyayor antare*, SRK 344; SMĀ 51. 9), 'when youth has slightly grown' (*stokārohiṇī yauvane*, SRK 346) or 'when youth comes closer' (*pratyaśīdati yauvane*, SRK 342); as 'the beginning of youth' (*taruṇī-masamārambha*, SRK 334; 360; SKA 2. 2. 2; *yauvana* [...] *ārambha*, SRK 338; 339), 'first youth' (*tāruṇyaṃ prathamam*, SRK 345) or 'fresh youth' (*navayauvana*, SRK 337; 340; *navīnayauvana*, SRK 359; SKA 2. 1. 5). Some authors simply speak of 'youth' (*taruṇabhāva*, SRK 357; *taruṇiman*, SRK 336; 349; 375; SMĀ 51. 7; *tāruṇya*, SRK 341; 361; *yauvana*, SRK 363; 371; 380; SMĀ 51. 4). The term *vayaḥsaṃdhi*, given by the compilers of our three anthologies in the titles of their relevant sections, itself rather periphrastic and generic, is almost never used by the poets¹².

5. Sternbach 1974, 17.

6. One of them (SRK 353), however, depicts an adolescent boy.

7. Cf. Ingalls's introduction to his translation of the *vayaḥsaṃdhi* chapter of the *Subhāṣitaratnaḥ* (Ingalls 1965, 153-154).

8. SRK 334; 354; 358; 368; 369; 372; SKA 2. 1. 3; 2. 1. 4; SMĀ 51. 7; 51. 16.

9. SRK 356.

10. SRK 363; 357; 374.

11. SRK 335.

12. The only exception being, interestingly, SRK 353, mentioned above, where it refers to male adolescence.

Just like Viśvanātha's father in *Sāhityadarpaṇa* 3. 58 discussed above, the authors of our poems keep track of, and describe in detail, the gradual transformation of their heroines' bodies occurring during puberty. The onset of menses, rather understandably, is never mentioned or even alluded to here; however, of the noticeable major physical pubertal changes, only rapid growth is omitted – the development of the secondary sex characteristics, namely enlarged breasts¹³, wider and curvier hips¹⁴, as well as a slimmer waist¹⁵ and plumper buttocks¹⁶ due to the redistribution of body fat, are all duly taken care of.

The appearance of abdominal hair is also a recurrent motif¹⁷, while underarm hair is not depicted. Additionally, the authors point out the pale cheeks of the pubescent girls¹⁸ and three folds of skin forming on their bellies¹⁹.

However, once again similarly to Viśvanātha's father in SD 3. 58, the poets are perceptive and sensitive enough to observe changes in the behaviour of their adolescent heroines as well, which are indicative of a psychological transformation.

The heroines, they point out, are no longer little children in loose garments, with unbound hair²⁰, who used to look others straight in the eye²¹, laugh without restraint, run and skip around²², play with dolls²³. Modest and bashful now²⁴, they cover their blossoming bodies²⁵ and restrain their laughter²⁶. They become curious about love²⁷; when their older, more experienced female friends discuss erotic matters, they listen attentively²⁸, while feigning indifference²⁹. Day by day they

13. SRK 334; 337; 340; 342; 345; 347; 349; 351; 352; 355; 356; 361; 363; 364; 365; 371; 372; 375; 376; 377; 378; 379; 380; SKA 2. 1. 4; 2. 1. 5; 2. 2. 2; 2. 2. 3; 2. 2. 5; SMĀ 51. 4; 51. 6; 51. 7; 51. 8; 51. 10; 51. 11; 51. 17.

14. SRK 352; 355; SKA 2. 2. 5; SMĀ 51. 11.

15. SRK 355; 379; 380; SKA 2. 2. 5; SMĀ 51. 4.

16. SRK 341; 343; 345; 347; 351; 360; 373; 375; 376; 379; 380; SKA 2. 2. 2; 2. 2. 3; SMĀ 51. 4; 51. 6; 51. 8; 51. 10.

17. SRK 338; 363.

18. SRK 341; 342.

19. SRK 352; 356; 361; 363; 364; 371; SKA 2. 2. 5; SMĀ 51. 8; 51. 11.

20. SRK 335.

21. SRK 383.

22. SRK 355; 383.

23. SRK 348; SMĀ 51. 5.

24. SRK 339; 352; 372; 373; SKA 2. 1. 3; SMĀ 51. 11.

25. SRK 335; 348; SMĀ 51. 5.

26. SRK 348; 383; SMĀ 51. 5.

27. SRK 339.

28. SRK 369; SKA 2. 1. 3; 2. 1. 4.

29. SKA 2. 1. 3.

advance in the art of coquetry – they learn how to gracefully move their eyebrows³⁰, cast oblique glances³¹, walk slowly³² with a slight smile on their lips³³; they constantly check themselves out in a mirror³⁴ and practise binding their hair³⁵. They do not speak much³⁶, but their words are imbued with double meanings and hints (*chekokti*)³⁷.

Let us now discuss selected examples in more detail.

When I was reading our poems for the first time, what struck me most was that adolescent girls were frequently seen in them as somewhat vague, difficult to grasp, and thus hard to depict.

The best example of such conceptualisation of the heroine is probably the very first stanza of the *vayaḥsaṃdhi* section of the *Subhāṣitaratnaśoṣa* (SRK 334), in the *śikhariṇī* metre, ascribed to Vīryamitra³⁸, which was popular enough to be also included, anonymously, with only a few minor different readings, in the *Sūktimuktāvalī* (SMĀ 51. 7); its first half is also included in the *Saduktikarṇāmrta*, where it is combined with a completely different second half to form a stanza ascribed to a certain Rājoka (SKA 2. 2. 2).

bhruvoḥ kācil līlā pariṇatir apūrvā nayanayoḥ
stanābhogo 'vyaktas³⁹ taruṇīmasamārambhasamayē⁴⁰ /
idānīm bālāyāḥ kim amṛtamayaḥ kim madhumayaḥ⁴¹

30. SRK 334; 335; 339; 349; 358; 360; 372; 376; 380; 383; SKA 2. 2. 2; 2. 2. 5; SMĀ 51. 4; 51. 7; 51. 8.

31. SRK 335; 345; 348; 349; 351; 352; 355; 358; 360; 361; 362; 367; 372; 375; 376; 383; SKA 2. 2. 3; 2. 2. 5; SMĀ 51. 5; 51. 7; 51. 10; 51. 11.

32. SRK 355; 358; 376; 383.

33. SRK 360; 367.

34. SRK 346.

35. SRK 335.

36. SRK 376.

37. SRK 335; 346; 348; 349; SMĀ 51. 5.

38. A Bengali, or at least an easterner, of the time of the Pāla Dynasty, 900–1100 CE (Ingalls 1965, 32; cf. Kosambi 1957, c: «A Pāla author, [...] courtier»; Sternbach 1978–1980, II, 473: «Court poet of Pāla kings. [...] Must have lived in the beginning of the 12th century or earlier [...] but probably earlier»).

39. SMĀ 51.7: *vyaktas*; SKA (1) 2. 2. 2 = SKA (2) 2. 2. 2: *vyaktas*.

40. SMĀ 51. 7: *taruṇīmani saṃrambhasamayē*.

41. SMĀ 51. 7: *viśamayaḥ*.

*kim ānandaḥ sāksād dhvanati madhuraḥ pañcamalayaḥ*⁴² // SRK 334 //

Now comes a certain grace of eyebrow,
a new development of eye,
and the curve of breast appears
at youth's commencement;
while in the child's voice
the note of love sounds clear,
composed, one knows not which to say,
of nectar, honey, or of bliss. (Ingalls 1965, 154).

In the first half of the poem, the adolescent girl's eyebrows acquire 'a certain grace' (*kācil līlā*, an indefinite article is used here⁴³), the new-found maturity of her eyes is called *apūrva* 'unprecedented, unprecedented, not having existed before, quite new, unparalleled, incomparable' (Monier-Williams 2002, 96), and her developing curved breasts are referred to as *avyakta*. Ingalls chooses the reading *vyakta* (against the editors of the original Sanskrit text of the *Subhāṣitaratnaḥ* but supported by the readings adopted in the edition of the *Sūktimuktāvalī* and in both our editions of the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta*), and hence his translation. However, I would argue that the reading *avyakta*, understood as 'indistinct' (Monier-Williams 2002, 111), suits the overall meaning of the poem much better.

In the second half of the stanza, the voice of the heroine, imbued with her eagerness to love and be loved, and thus as if attuned to the erotic *pañcama rāga*, is considered to be simply indescribable, even if as many as three standards of comparison – nectar (*amṛta*), honey / sweet wine (*madhu*)⁴⁴ and bliss (*ānanda*) – are proposed.

Another poetic device easily observable when reading our poems, once more similarly to *Sāhityadarpaṇa* 3. 58, is the frequent use of contrast to depict changes occurring in the adolescent heroine's outward appearance and behaviour, and to emphasise how radical they are. The best exemplification of this practice can be found in the 22nd stanza of the *vayaḥsaṃdhi* section of the *Subhāṣitaratnaḥ*

42. SMĀ 51. 7: *dhvanitamadhuraḥ pañcamaravaḥ*. Ingalls 1965, 494: «*pañcamalayaḥ* [...] can scarcely be right, for *pañcama* is the name of a note or key and *laya* means tempo. Read *pañcamakalaḥ* [...] (*pañcamaravaḥ* [...] gives equally good sense)».

43. Cf. the use of indefinite articles in SRK 335; 336; 339; 344; 346; 348; 349; 368; 372; 383; SMĀ 51. 5; 51. 9.

44. Or poison (*viṣa*) according to the *Sūktimuktāvalī*.

(SRK 355), by the famous Rājaśekhara⁴⁵, which is also included in the *Saduk-tikarṇāmṛta* (SKA 2. 2. 4):

*padbhyāṃ muktās taralagatayaḥ saṃśritā locanābhyāṃ
śroṇībimbaṃ tyajati tanutāṃ sevate madhyabhāgaḥ /
dhatte vakṣaḥ kucasacivatām advitīyatvam āsyaṃ⁴⁶
tadgātrānām guṇavinimayaḥ kalpito yauvanena // SRK 355 //*

Liveliness, abandoned by her feet,
passes to her eyes;
her hips reject the slenderness
that now her waist assumes;
her torso wins companions in her breasts;
her face, however, stands alone without compare.
Thus adolescence brings about
exchange of attributes in all her limbs. (Ingalls 1965, 158).

The stanza resembles SD 3. 58 to the point that it might well have been its model, so after all the previous discussion there is no need to explain it in detail.

However, let me point out the skilful employment here of the *mandākrāntā* metre. With its two contrasting consecutive series of syllables – four long (*guru*, lit. ‘heavy’) syllables and five short (*laghu*, lit. ‘light’) syllables at the beginning of each *pāda*, this metre is indeed most suitable to express the contrasting characteristics of the transforming heroine.

This is especially visible in the first and in the second *pāda*, where short syllables render the quick steps of a little girl, running and skipping around (*taralagatayaḥ*) and the slimness of her delicate hips (*tyajati tanutāṃ*), while long syllables represent the graceful slow gait of a young maiden (*padbhyāṃ muktās*), whose hips have become much wider, curvier and heavier now (*śroṇībimbaṃ*).

The metaphor used by Rājaśekhara is, admittedly, not that striking; it might have been drawn from the conceptual domain of the market, which is also a liminal sphere, «with its implications of choice, variation, contract» (Turner 1974, 71).

45. 9th–10th centuries CE. (Kosambi 1957, xciv: «He speaks of himself as the *guru* of King Mahendrapāla, and under the patronage of his son and successor Mahīpāla. This refers to the Pratihāra kings of Kanauj who are known from inscriptions to have ruled *circa* A.D. 890–920»; Ingalls 1965, 32: «900»; Sternbach 1978–1980, II, 305: «End of the 9th, beginning of the 10th century»).

46. SKA (1) 2. 2. 4 = SKA (2) 2. 2. 4: *advitīyaṃ ca vaktraṃ*.

Let us now have a look, then, at the last stanza of the *kiñcidupārūdhayauvanā* section of the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* (SKA 2. 2. 5), in the *śikharīṇī* metre, ascribed to Śatānanda⁴⁷, in which a much more vivid metaphor is employed:

gate bālye cetaḥ kusumadhanuṣā sāyakahataṃ
bhayād vīkṣyaivāsyāḥ stanayugam abhūn nirjigamiṣu /
sakampā bhrūvallī calati nayanam karṇakuharam
kṛśam madhyam bhugnā valir alasitaḥ śronīphalakaḥ // SKA (1) 2. 2. 5 =
 SKA (2) 2. 2. 5 //

Childhood gone, on seeing her mind wounded
 by an arrow of the god whose bow is made of flowers,
 fearful, her breasts wish to spring forth,
 her eyebrows tremble,
 her eye flies to the cavity of her ear,
 her waist grows thin,
 the skin on her belly forms folds / becomes depressed,
 and her hips suffer from exhaustion⁴⁸.

Yet again similarly to *Sāhityadarpaṇa* 3. 58, the first awakening of love in the heroine's heart is seen here not as a consequence of the onset of adolescence but as its cause.

This witty poem resembles SD 3. 58 in one more aspect: adolescence, through numerous puns, is presented in the stanza in terms of another liminal experience from the conceptual domain of politics and war, namely a sudden invasion of a country. The previous ruler is gone, and an aggressor enters, causing stress, panic and general confusion in the hapless kingdom.

The image is so violent that its use for the metaphorical conceptualisation of pubertal changes in a girl's body, her new-found coquettishness, and her first love creates a slightly comic effect, while still successfully explaining to the readers the radicalness of her physical and behavioural transformation, as well as her emotional turmoil at this critical moment in her life⁴⁹.

47. A Pāla court poet of the first half of the 9th century CE. (Kosambi 1957, ci; Sternbach 1978–1980, II, 505).

48. Translation mine.

49. For other metaphorical conceptualisations of female adolescence in terms of situations from the conceptual domain of politics and war, see SRK 338 by a certain Laḍahacandra (a king founds a new city), SRK 362 (a country prepares for an invasion), SRK 382 (a king is defeated by a

3. *Rādhā's Adolescence in the Maithili Songs of Vidyāpati*

As already mentioned, the *vayaḥsaṃdhi* motif was also introduced into the medieval lyric poetry of north-eastern India, thanks to the famous Maithili poet Vidyāpati (V) (14th–15th centuries CE)⁵⁰, who used it in his songs on the adolescence of Kṛṣṇa's beloved Rādhā.

The present paper does not aim to investigate this broad topic in depth; however, it might be worthwhile to analyse here just one among Vidyāpati's numerous *vayaḥsaṃdhi* songs, as an example of the influence of the classical Sanskrit literary tradition on vernacular Indian literatures:

*śaiśava yauvana daraśana bhela /
duhu patha heraita manasija gela //
madanaka bhāva pahila paracāra /
bhina jane dela bhina adhikāra //
kaṭika gaurava pāola nitamba /
ekaka khīna aoke avalamba //
prakāṣa hāsa aba gopata bhela /
uraja prakāṣa aba tanhika lela //
carana capala gati locana pāba /
locanaka dhairaja padatale yāba //
navakaviśekhara ki kahaṭa pāra /
bhina bhina rāja bhina vevahāra // V 5 //*

There was an encounter between childhood and youth;
the mind-born god of love went to see the two paths.
The first display of Madana's power⁵¹ –
he has given his different subjects different rights.
The buttocks have acquired the heaviness / dignity of the waist;
the thinness / weakness of the latter is now supported by the former.
Laughter, previously unconcealed, stays concealed now;
the breasts have come out of concealment in its place.
The gaze will assume the restlessness of the gait;
the calmness of the eyes will pass to the feet.

rival), SMĀ 51. 8 (when two claimants vie for the throne, a third pretender plans to conquer the kingdom).

50. Jha 1972, 5; 10. Under the patronage of King Śivasiṃha and other rulers of the Oinavāra dynasty of Mithilā (Majumdar 1960, 404-407).

51. Kapūr 1968, 11: *bhāva = sattā, prabhutva*.

What can Vidyāpati say? –
‘Different kings, different customs’⁵².

As we can see, Vidyāpati, in a structurally very different poetic text in another language, depicts physical changes happening to his adolescent heroine, as well as changes in her behaviour, indicative of a psychological transformation, in a way that is quite similar to Sanskrit authors. The song mentions the pubescent girl’s heavier buttocks, thinner waist and enlarged breasts; it also points out the heroine’s slower gait, restrained laughter and oblique glances, all three showing her heightened sense of decorum and her progress in mastering the art of coquetry. The onset of adolescence is presented here, just as in the Sanskrit *vayaḥsaṁdhi* poems analysed above (SD 3. 58 and SKA 2. 2. 5), as caused by the first stirrings of love in the girl’s heart.

To help his listeners or readers better understand adolescence as a critical period in a woman’s life, Vidyāpati – once again similarly to Sanskrit poets – employs contrast (in a manner already familiar to us after discussing SD 3. 58 and SRK 355) and a political metaphor, resembling those used in SKA 2. 2. 5 and SD 3. 58⁵³, but with a new twist.

The heroine’s adolescence is conceived of in terms of a whole series of dramatic events taking place in a kingdom. When the previous monarch (childhood) is engaged in a battle with a rival (youth), yet another pretender (love) makes use of this opportunity to seize the throne himself.

Next, he immediately asserts his authority – some of his new subjects are stripped of their office, which is then offered to others; some, filled with fear, go into hiding, while some, on the contrary, come out of hiding after receiving convincing assurances. Thus, the old political order of the state, completely rearranged, gives way to a new one, more conducive to the new king’s successful reign.

4. Conclusions

Summing up, in Classical Sanskrit literature, female adolescence appears to have been quite a popular topic, since in three well-known anthologies, namely Vidyākara’s *Subhāṣitaratnaḥ* (11th or 12th century CE), Śrīdharaḍāsa’s *Saduktikarṇāṁṛta* (1205 CE) and Jalhaṇa’s *Sāktimuktāvalī* (1258 CE), it is given a

52. Translation is mine.

53. Cf. also SMĀ 51. 8, as well as SRK 362 and 382 (see footnote 49).

separate chapter, titled *vayaḥsaṃdhi* / *vayassaṃdhi* ‘life-juncture’. However, the authors of the poems included therein (and in another section of the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta*, titled *kiṃcidupārūḍhayauvanā* / *kiṃcidupoḍhayauvanā* ‘[the heroine] whose youth has slightly grown / has come a little closer’, which has also been taken into account in this paper) almost never employ this term and, usually, refer to adolescence using various periphrastic expressions instead.

The adolescent heroine, captured during the process of her transformation from a little girl into a young maiden, does not seem to have her own, traditionally established name. The authors frequently view her as vague, difficult to grasp, and thus hard to depict.

Still, they duly describe most of the noticeable major physical changes which occur during female puberty. They are also perceptive and sensitive enough to accurately observe and point out fundamental changes in the behaviour of adolescent girls, which are obviously to be interpreted as symptoms of a radical psychological transformation. Interestingly, the onset of adolescence is often considered by the poets to be caused by the first awakening of love in the heroine’s heart.

To help the readers better comprehend how critical this period is in a women’s life, the authors frequently resort to the skilful use of contrast and apt metaphors. Unsurprisingly, adolescence is often metaphorically conceptualised in terms of other liminal experiences. The poets have a special predilection for metaphors drawn from the conceptual domain of politics and war, which is also easily understandable. Even though the depictions of events such as an invasion, the fight of pretenders to the throne or the beginning of a new king’s reign, with the ensuing general confusion and instability of the state, may sometimes create a slightly comic effect, they generally emphasise the turmoil of female adolescence quite convincingly.

Moreover, happenings of this kind would surely have been well-known to at least a part of the original – predominantly courtly – literary *milieu*. For them, the explanatory value of these metaphors must have been great indeed⁵⁴.

The last part of the paper discusses one of the numerous songs on the adolescence of Kṛṣṇa’s beloved Rādhā by the famous Maithili poet Vidyāpati (14th–15th centuries CE) as an example of the influence of the classical Sanskrit literary

54. Additionally, it is perhaps not unreasonable to suggest that some of our authors (many of whom were court poets, see footnotes 38; 45; 47) may allude to real-life events in their stanzas through the use of political and military metaphors. Thus, while depicting adolescent girls, they may also give indirect praise or advice to their kingly patrons.

tradition on vernacular Indian literatures. As a detailed analysis demonstrates, in a structurally very different poetic text in another language, Vidyāpati treats the *vayaḥsāndhi* motif quite similarly to Sanskrit authors.

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