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Electronic Concordancing for Study of Imagery in the Great Epics of India

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Background:

The project had its origin about half a century ago in the form of a book entitled *Elements of Poetry in the Mahābhārata*, (Berkeley 1964, reprint Delhi 1988). The book was a modest beginning to carry out a suggestion made by Professor Murray Barnson Emeneau that it would be useful to compile an encyclopedia of comparisons in Sanskrit literature. E. W. Hopkins in his *The Great Epic of India* also suggested that "On epic similes and metaphors an interesting essay remains to be written."<sup>1</sup>

About 5,000 passages from parvans 1, 3, and 6 of the *Mahābhārata* were classified and arranged, representing models of similes and metaphors, with special emphasis on the repetitive ones. The relevant passages were classified according to the various mythological, natural, intellectual, spiritual, philosophical, historical, cultural, and miscellaneous areas from which the objects of poetic comparisons were derived, along with the details of the corresponding upamānadharmā (tertia comparationis). On the basis of the repeated metaphoric and other passages of the text, it was shown that the *Mahābhārata* is one of the best models of oral technique of poetic composition.

It is now proposed to expand the scope of that study in two ways. Firstly, the entire *Mahābhārata* will form the corpus for similar studies. Secondly, it is proposed to extend the scope of this study to include the *Rāmāyaṇa* also. The immense size of the two epics taken together makes it necessary to use electronic search methods to achieve our goals. The *Mahābhārata* contains about 100,000 verses, which amount to 159,293 lines in the electronic edition, a total of over 8.6 million characters, including spaces. The *Rāmāyaṇa* traditionally is said to contain 24,000 verses, with 38,083 electronic edition lines, and over 2.5 million characters, including spaces. Thus the two epics taken together require analysis of over 11.1 million characters of data.

The goals of the project are:

1. To create a thorough concordance of the objects of similies and metaphors in the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*.
2. To develop electronic files of grammatical structures that other researchers can use to locate similes and metaphors in other Sanskrit digital texts.
3. To make the results of this work easily available to others in electronic, reusable, form.

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<sup>1</sup> E. W. Hopkins, *The Great Epic of India: Its Character and Origin* (New York, 1901), p. 205.

## Methods

1. Our study of this electronic corpus began in 2005 and is continuing.
2. We are using corpus linguistics electronic search methods to identify grammatical structures associated with specific similies and metaphors.
3. R. K. Sharma classifies the preliminary results identified by electronic searches.
4. The grammatical patterns used to isolate similes and metaphors are placed into simple text files that other researchers can use in conjunction with concordance software to locate specific types of images in other Sanskrit digital texts. Any Unicode digital text can be searched using these grammatical pattern files, not just the epics we are working on.
5. The resulting findings will be disseminated using electronic publication methods that have the best potential for re-use of findings by other researchers.
6. Downloadable version of grammatical pattern files that can be used with concordance software at no charge will be made available at <http://www.mywhatever.com/sanskrit>