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John D. Smith

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INTRODUCTION

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SECTION A

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL

The list following is restricted specifically to material which has been used in this study and to which reference is therefore made in the pages which follow. It does not, for example, include general literary or linguistic works unless it has been found necessary to cite them in a particular context; nor does it include other Rājasthānī or Gujarātī texts unless they have been found to yield valuable information on particular points. With the exception of the two important grammatical studies by W.S. Allen, articles are not listed: full references are given for these where mention is made of them.

Other editions, etc.

- 1 Tāraknāth Agravāl: *Bīsaladeva Rāso*, Vārānasi 1962.
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A number of these works are referred to in abbreviated form; the list following relates these abbreviations to the numbers of the works as given above:

Agravāl	(1)	Nāinasī	(10)
Bender	(8)	OWR	(27)
Bloch	(20)	Pischel	(25)
CDIAL	(37)	Platts	(34)
Das	(54)	PSM	(35)
Dave	(21)	RSK	(31)
Dholā Mārū	(14)	SHŚ	(38)
Ḍiṅgala Koṣa	(29)	Tod	(51)
Gupta	(2)	Trivedī	(5)
LSI	(23)	WSA	(28)
Macalister	(32)	Varmā	(6)
MW	(33)	Vaudeville	(7)

N.B. the siglum sa^o refers to Varmā (6).

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SECTION B

GENERAL

1. Introductory

It would appear that the earliest reference to the *Vīśaḷadevarāsa* occurs in Syamsundar Das, *Annual Report on the Search for Hindi Manuscripts for the Year 1900*, where a MS of the text is noticed.¹ Certainly the work was unknown to Śivsiṃh Seṅgar, whose *Śivsiṃh-Saroj* appeared in 1878, and who would unquestionably have mentioned it had he known of its existence. Since 1900, and more specifically since the publication in 1925 of Varmā's *Bīśaladeva Rāso*, the first attempt at an edition,² this *rāsa* has received considerable attention from scholars, whose interest was, naturally enough, awakened by the very early date claimed for its composition (see section B7). That the basis on which this claim was made is now totally discredited does not diminish the importance of the text; in any realistic view of Old Rājasthānī literature it must still be considered amongst the earliest works known. If Tessitori's identification of Old Rājasthānī with Old Gujarātī under the cover-name 'Old Western Rājasthānī' were acceptable, a date of *c.* A.D. 1450 would not be very remarkable;³ but it can no longer be maintained that the two languages are one and the same (see section C). The more frequently-made proposal, that the *Vīśaḷadevarāsa* is among the earliest texts known in Hindī, need surely not be taken seriously: neither in language nor in literary genre does comparison with Hindī reveal more than the slight similarity which is only to be expected between neighbouring languages and neighbouring cultures.

2. Earlier Editions

Varmā's edition, unfortunately, has little to commend it, and has succeeded in giving to the many scholars who have been compelled to rely upon it a

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most inaccurate idea of the text. It is said⁴ to be based upon two MSS, both of which would seem to belong to the highly inflated and atypical quadripartite recension. Little care was devoted either to the editing or to the printing, and the edition is not usable. Despite these drawbacks, Varmā's text has twice been accepted as the basis for new editions, in both of which it is accompanied by a Hindī translation:⁵ that of Bhavānīśaṅkar Trivedī, *Saṭīk Bīsaladeva Rāso*, and that of Rājnāth Śarmā, *Bīsaladeva Rāso*.

Mātāprasād Gupta's *Bīsala Deva Rāsa* first appeared in 1953,⁶ and is very much more scholarly, being based on fifteen MSS assembled by Agarcand Nāhtā (hence the latter's name upon the title-page) together with the text as given by Varmā. Variant readings are quoted, and rejected stanzas given in full in a series of appendices (save when they occur only in Varmā's edition, or in that and pra^o, the latter being Gupta's only quadripartite MS).⁷ There is also a complete translation of the accepted text, together with etymological and explanatory notes on difficult words; this part of the work is considerably less sound, but the editor deserves praise for his decision to work on a critically-prepared text, rather than to prefer (or worse, to invent) simpler readings which present no problems of interpretation. All in all, despite the inevitable occurrence of a number of textual cruces where disagreement with Gupta is possible, it is fair to say that his version of the text represents an adequate semi-critical edition in which the evidence of a reasonable number of MSS has been reasonably interpreted, an edition on which, *ceteris paribus*, one would not hesitate to base a linguistic or literary discussion.

Other things, however, are not equal. Comparison of Gupta's text with his apparatus criticus reveals an alarmingly high degree of significant variation, and the frequent occurrence of points at which this variation is so great that a decision can only be made on the basis of the general comparative reliability of the MSS; at such points, Gupta's own text not infrequently contains grammatical or other oddities, which cast yet further suspicion upon it.⁸

From this point of view alone there thus remained room for more work on the text, and it is therefore unfortunate that the only attempt at a fresh edition since Gupta is of a very poor quality. Tāraknāth Agravāl's *Bīsaladeva Rāso* was the result, says its editor,⁹ of a belief that the basis of Gupta's editorial method was unsound and that a different approach was wanted. According to Agravāl, the only scholarly classification of MSS is on the basis of their age, and he therefore divides those he deals with into four groups: (1) those written in the seventeenth century V.S., (2) those written in the eighteenth century V.S., (3) those written in the nineteenth century

V.S. and (4) those of unknown date. This haphazard arrangement is not, in fact, invoked in the ‘editing’ of the text, which consists simply of a reproduction of the version found in the oldest dated MS (Gupta’s paṃ^o): this, says the editor,¹⁰ is the text best considered to be authentic. Variant readings are quoted from a mere four of the 26 other MSS listed in the Introduction; of these one (referred to by Agravāl as 12, by us as tā^o) is unknown to Gupta, being the property of the Asiatic Society of Bengal; the other three, referred to as 2, 6 and 9, answer respectively to Gupta’s sa^o (Varmā’s edition), pra^o and ra^o. On closer inspection, it becomes clear that Agravāl has not consulted these three MSS but has merely copied Gupta’s citations from them, since he reproduces all the latter’s misreadings and misprints (even from sa^o).¹¹ Lastly, both his text and its Glossary contain so many obvious errors that an attempt was made by Mūlcand Prāneś to publish lists of corrections.¹² All in all, then, this edition does little to advance our understanding of the *Viśaladevarāsa*, and it is on Gupta’s edition that the present work is based; reference has been made to the editions of Varmā and Agravāl purely to confirm the correctness of Gupta’s citations from the duplicated sources sa^o and paṃ^o, and also to supply the readings that Agravāl quotes from tā^o.

3. The Metre of the Text

It was clear from the start that the textual problems encountered in the *rāsa* were connected with a somewhat curious fact: that, in every available version, the text was non-metrical. This was no question of occasional hypermetrical interpolation; rather, it was impossible to observe any regular metrical pattern at all. The possibility that the work in its original form had been metrically free could almost certainly be discounted, since any such composition would occupy a unique place in the tradition of Indo-Aryan verse writing; it is significant that writers on the *rāsa* had clearly been puzzled by this feature of it, for none of them except Gupta¹³ have made any attempt whatever at metrical analysis. It seemed much more likely that the high degree of textual degeneration attested in Gupta’s apparatus criticus was, at least in part, the result of the relaxation of metrical rules, and had itself ultimately resulted in the complete obliteration of the original metrical pattern.

An attempt was therefore made to determine the original metre underlying Gupta’s text of the work, an undertaking which proved to be surprisingly simple. The majority of the stanzas as given by Gupta were of the following form:

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1. long line ending	—U	rhyming	A
2. long line ending	—U	”	A
3. short ”	”	U—	B
4. long ”	”	—U	C
5. short ”	”	U—	D
6. long ”	”	—U	C

The short lines seemed to vary in the number of *mātrās* (metrical instants) they contained rather less than the long ones, and a check on those occurring in the first fifty stanzas shewed that, without any modification, 40% adhered to the scheme 4+4+2+U—. The remaining 60% uniformly contained a greater number than the total of 13, thus supporting the view that this scheme was the original one, from which the exceptions to it had come to deviate as a result of the process of interpolation. An examination of these deviant lines to determine the nature of the modifications necessary to reduce them to the proposed norm revealed that all but a few could be made to conform by three processes: (1) the allowance that certain syllables normally metrically long could be scanned short; (2) the modification of certain spelling-forms; (3) the excision of certain words. Most significant was the consistency with which the majority of these operations proved to be necessary; most occurred over and over again, some at every point where it was possible to apply them. For example, a phonologically short vowel followed by a conjunct consonant (or a consonant preceded by *m̐*) was very frequently found to be metrically short; the spelling *-ṛya* was found always to represent a single long vowel, i.e. *-ṛ*; and the word *re* regularly required excision.

It was now possible to examine the long lines for indications of an underlying metrical scheme forearmed with some knowledge of the processes of textual corruption which would probably be found to have obliterated it. A simple *mātrā*-count revealed that the smallest total for any long line was 15. On the provisional assumption that all the long lines adhered to a single metrical scheme, and that that scheme contained 15 *mātrās*, a check was carried out. It was found that the same metrical adjustments, spelling-modifications and excisions, interspersed with preference for forms quoted by Gupta as variant readings, normally produced the scheme 4+4+4+—U; this appeared equally true for all the long lines of the stanza. Emendations of other types were also sometimes found to be necessary, but these were seldom far-reaching in effect.

This investigation made it possible to say with some confidence that the metrical pattern underlying the corrupt text of the *Vīśaladevarāsa* was as follows:

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<i>metre</i>	<i>rhyme</i>
1. 4+4+4+—U	A
2. 4+4+4+—U	A
3. 4+4+2+U—	B
4. 4+4+4+—U	C
5. 4+4+2+U—	D
6. 4+4+4+—U	C

The refrain which follows each stanza proved to be metrically identical with the short lines 3 and 5.

As far as can be seen, there are no formal constraints on the types of *caturmātrās* (4-*mātrā* groups) that can be used; all five possibilities occur in all five positions, as shewn in the table below, although it is certainly true that the type UUUU is rare as the second *caturmātrā* of a short line, and that the type U—U is not common except as the third *caturmātrā* of a long line. We may also note here that the *dvimātrā* (2-*mātrā* group) that precedes the final cadence (U—) of the short line may be represented by UU (e.g. 1.3) or by — (e.g. 2.3).

Table giving instances of the occurrence of the various types of *caturmātrā* in their various positions.

	—	—UU	UU—	UUUU	U—U
long line, 1st <i>caturmātrā</i>	1.1	4.6	6.6	6.2	21.6
long line, 2nd <i>caturmātrā</i>	2.2	1.1	2.1	4.2	27.2
long line, 3rd <i>caturmātrā</i>	1.6	3.3	10.1	1.1	9.4
short line, 1st <i>caturmātrā</i>	4.5	2.5	1.5	8.3	9.3
short line, 2nd <i>caturmātrā</i>	3.2	1.5	6.5	47.8	72.3

Several stanzas are constructed differently, but always out of the same ingredients; the most common variation is the addition of one or more extra pairs of lines (a pair consisting of one short and one long line), the final rhyme being reserved for the last two long lines to occur; other types also are found, of which some certainly result from early damage to the text (e.g. 15, 25, 26, 29, 30, 34 etc.); in yet other cases (especially 3) an entirely different distribution of lines occurs, and is sufficiently well-attested to be certainly authentic. Occasional lapses of rhyme occur (and are noted); occasional non-metrical lines remain, generally containing the normal number of *mātrās* but in an irregular distribution, where only unjustifiable and unsupported tampering with the text would be capable of producing the normal pattern (1.2, 16.3, 19.1, 23.5 etc.). These too are noted where they occur.