

Sanskrit Narrative Registers: Vyasa and Pancharatra

Project Victory - Research White Paper

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Purpose	Test whether the Sanskrit styles provisionally labelled KDV and PAN are better explained as chronological literary registers than as individual-author fingerprints.

Executive Summary / Abstract

This paper tests whether the Sanskrit styles provisionally labelled KDV, for Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa, and PAN, for Pancharatra literature, are better understood as chronological literary registers rather than signatures of individual Mahābhārata authors. Five external Sanskrit corpora were sampled using the same broad diagnostic contrast: action-centered, sequential, causally linked and economical narration on the KDV side; and amplificatory, enumerative, descriptive and rhetorically reinforcing organization on the PAN side.

The sampled sequence shows a strong early KDV-like profile in late-Vedic and early narrative material, a mixed or transitional profile in the Rāmāyaṇa, and a pronounced PAN-like profile by the early kāvyā horizon. A much later Bhāgavata sample serves as a control and displays very strong PAN-like amplification.

Together with the internal observation that earlier Mahābhārata strata show little developed awareness of the Rāmāyaṇa, while later strata preserve a compact Rāmopākhyāna, the evidence strongly supports different chronological centres for the two styles: an earlier KDV-like register rooted broadly in the late-Vedic and early post-Vedic world, and a later PAN-like register increasingly visible from the mid-first millennium BCE toward the turn of the Common Era.

The findings support chronological stratification, while not by themselves establishing exact dates or exclusive authorship.

Research Question

Do the Sanskrit narrative patterns labelled KDV-style and PAN-style in Mahābhārata analysis correspond more closely to different historical phases of Sanskrit literary composition—approximately an earlier 800–400 BCE horizon and a later 400 BCE–100 CE horizon—than to the personal styles of two individual authors?

Working Hypothesis

KDV-style Sanskrit preserves an older action-centred narrative register continuous with late-Vedic and early post-Vedic storytelling, while PAN-style Sanskrit reflects a later epic-literary tendency toward amplification, enumeration, rhetorical reinforcement and descriptive expansion. The labels therefore may identify chronological literary strata or compositional schools rather than individual authors. The proposed dates are chronological centres, not hard boundaries: older and newer registers could overlap for centuries.

Evidence Base

The comparison deliberately uses short, identifiable narrative passages rather than whole works. The selected passages are:

- **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa XII.7.3.1–4:** Namuci takes Indra's strength; Indra approaches the Aśvins and Sarasvatī; a bargain is made; foam and twilight solve the oath constraint; Namuci is killed. This is a compact action → problem → response → consequence sequence. Primary text: Eggeling translation, Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa XII.7.3.
- **Brhaddevatā IV.46–48:** Indra encounters the Maruts; he praises them; they answer; Agastya becomes aware of the dialogue and goes to them after preparing an oblation. Macdonell's edition explicitly calls this a purāṇvṛtta/itihāsa narrative. Primary text: A. A. Macdonell, Brhaddevatā, IV.46–48.
- **Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa, Ayodhyākāṇḍa 2.1.1–13:** Daśaratha instructs Bharata; Bharata hears, prepares to depart, takes leave, travels and enters his maternal grandfather's city; the narrative then briefly characterises the brothers and returns to Rāma's duties. Sanskrit sequence includes śrutvā, āprcchya, yayau, prāviśat and other action-bearing forms. Primary text: GRETIL/Tokunaga-Hellwig edition.
- **Aśvaghoṣa, Buddhacarita I.1–8 and I.20–25:** The opening builds Śuddhodana and Māyā through simile and qualification before advancing the birth narrative; the later birth sequence repeatedly enlarges the event through divine guardianship, comparison and auspicious interpretation. Primary text: E. H. Johnston tradition as represented in GRETIL.
- **Bhāgavata Purāṇa 6.10.17–25:** Late control. The battle scene expands through catalogues of divine groups, demon names, ornaments and weapon types before returning to battle action. Verses 6.10.19–22 are especially enumerative. This text is far later than the target period and is not used to date PAN; it tests whether the PAN-like direction becomes strongly developed in later Sanskrit.

Dating is necessarily approximate. Śatapatha belongs to the late Brāhmaṇa period; Macdonell placed the Brhaddevatā before 400 BCE, though its date and recensional history remain debated; the Rāmāyaṇa is layered and scholarly dating varies; Aśvaghoṣa belongs around the turn of the Common Era/early second century CE; and the Bhāgavata is many centuries later. Accordingly, the paper uses chronology as a broad literary horizon rather than a precise year-by-year sequence.

Methodology

Each passage was assessed against the same structural contrast used in the Mahābhārata work, but without assigning Mahābhārata authorship. KDV-like indicators were: verb-driven construction; sequential action-linking; practical causal progression; compact speech; strong referential continuity; verse-to-verse momentum; and structural economy. PAN-like indicators were: amplificatory organisation; parallel or recurrent framing; enumeration; appositional expansion; reiterated characterisation; extended rhetoric; descriptive enrichment; and reduced dependence on forward action.

The result is qualitative rather than statistical. The comparison asks which set of features organises the sampled passage. Genre is treated as a confounder: ritual prose, epic śloka and kāvya are not linguistically identical, so the claim concerns narrative organisation rather than simple vocabulary or grammar.

Findings

Corpus	Passage assessed	Approx. horizon	KDV-like	PAN-like	Result
Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa	XII.7.3.1–4	Late Vedic, broadly c. 8th–6th c. BCE	High	Low	Strongly KDV-like
Bṛhaddevatā	IV.46–48	Early post-Vedic; before 400 BCE in Macdonell's dating, disputed	High	Low–Medium	Strongly KDV-like
Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa	Ayodhyākāṇḍa 2.1.1–13	Layered; broadly mid-1st millennium BCE onward	High–Medium	Medium	KDV-dominant / transitional
Buddhacarita	I.1–8; I.20–25	Turn of CE / early 2nd c. CE	Medium–Low	High	PAN-leaning / early kāvya
Bhāgavata Purāṇa	6.10.17–25	Much later than target period; late control	Low–Medium	Very High	Strongly PAN-like

The table shows a directional progression: early narrative material is organised predominantly by action and causation; the Rāmāyaṇa combines this inherited narrative economy with increased characterisation and literary expansion; by Aśvaghoṣa, description, simile and rhetorical enlargement have become much stronger organising devices. The later Bhāgavata control intensifies the same amplificatory tendencies through sustained catalogues and descriptive accumulation.

A second, independent observation arises inside the Mahābhārata: the earlier KDV-like layer, as presently reconstructed in the project, shows little developed knowledge of the Rāmāyaṇa, whereas later material contains a compact Rāmopākhyāna. External scholarship also recognises the Rāmopākhyāna as a condensed Rāma narrative and treats its relationship to the Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa as an intertextual problem. If the project-wide distribution continues to hold under systematic checking, this provides an intertextual chronological signal independent of Sanskrit style.

Assessment

The external comparison materially strengthens the chronological-register hypothesis. The strongest evidence is not any single resemblance but the convergence of three observations: (1) late-Vedic/early post-Vedic narrative passages already display the action-centred architecture identified as KDV-like; (2) the Rāmāyaṇa occupies a credible middle position, retaining strong forward narrative while showing greater literary enlargement; and (3) early kāvya exhibits a markedly stronger PAN-like organisation. This makes it less likely that the KDV fingerprint is unique to one Mahābhārata individual.

The evidence does not establish a clean replacement of one style by another. Register, genre, oral-formulaic tradition and conscious archaism can preserve older techniques after newer ones arise. The most defensible formulation is therefore that KDV and PAN have different chronological centres: KDV-like narrative is anchored more naturally in an earlier late-Vedic/early post-Vedic environment, while PAN-like amplification becomes increasingly characteristic of later epic-literary composition from roughly the middle of the first millennium BCE toward the turn of the Common Era.

The proposed 800–400 BCE versus 400 BCE–100 CE division is thus a useful working model, not a demonstrated hard boundary. The Buddhacarita lies at or slightly beyond the upper edge depending on Aśvaghoṣa's dating, and the Bhāgavata is intentionally outside the period as a control.

Conclusion

The survey supports the proposition that KDV-style and PAN-style Sanskrit are better treated first as historical narrative registers rather than as personal authorial fingerprints. KDV-like organisation—economical, verb-driven, sequential and causally integrated—has clear external analogues in late-Vedic and early post-Vedic narrative and remains strong in early epic storytelling. PAN-like organisation—amplificatory, enumerative, descriptive and rhetorically reinforcing—becomes substantially more visible in the later epic-to-kāvya environment.

Accordingly, an early KDV-centred horizon of approximately 800–400 BCE and a later PAN-centred horizon of approximately 400 BCE–100 CE are reasonable working chronological hypotheses for further Mahābhārata stratification. The Rāmāyaṇa-awareness pattern provides a potentially independent cross-check: an earlier layer with little developed Rāmāyaṇa knowledge versus later material preserving a concise Rāma narrative. What is established here is a strong chronological correlation; exact dating, exclusive authorship and the precise boundary between the registers remain to be tested on a larger blinded corpus.

Source note. Primary passages were checked against online text repositories/editions including Sacred Texts/Wisdomlib for Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa XII.7.3, Macdonell's Bṛhaddevatā IV.46–48, GRETIL for Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa 2.1 and Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita I, and the Sanskrit text of Bhāgavata Purāṇa 6.10.17–25. Dating references consulted include Oxford Bibliographies on the Rāmāyaṇa, scholarship on Bṛhaddevatā dating, standard late-Brāhmaṇa chronology, and modern scholarship placing Aśvaghoṣa around the turn of the Common Era. The Bhāgavata date is debated but is securely much later than the target window.