PART TWO

CULTURAL ENCODING
The notion that Sanskrit poetics, *alamkāraśāstra*, functions as a kind of grammar to the language of its accompanying literature, *kāvya*, should not come as a total surprise to the students of this tradition. As Sheldon Pollock has recently put it, the discipline’s premise is that “what makes *kāvya* different from everything else has essentially to do with language itself,” and that, hence, it focuses on exploring how “*kāvya* works as a specific language system.”¹ Still, our understanding of the precise nature of this linguistic analysis and its internal logic is far from satisfactory, and many basic questions remain to be addressed.² For instance, if Sanskrit poeticians are grammarians of sorts, what aspects of the poetic language do they set out to describe? The analysis of any language system may expand to include anything from phonology and morphology to syntax, semantics and pragmatics. It may also examine the way a specific culture interprets or makes reality. What of all these phenomena is the scope of *alamkāraśāstra*? Moreover, the specific language system of poetry is defined by its ability to please the readers. How does the linguistic analysis of *alamkāraśāstra* account for poetry’s aesthetic effect?

Speaking of a grammatical analysis of poetry, one has to bear in mind that we are dealing with a culture where grammar is a dominant intellectual tradition, if not the most paradigmatic of all systems of knowledge. This gives rise to another subset of questions. What exactly is the relationship between *alamkāraśāstra* and Panini’s Grammar? Does it

¹ Pollock 2003, 46–47.
² Thus while Arjunwadker (1996, 23) claims that “no serious student of Sanskrit poetics can deny that in the absence of the foundations the Vaiyakaranas and the Mimamsakas have laid, Sanskrit theory of poetry would not have scaled the heights it undoubtedly has, particularly since Anandavardhana,” he hardly addresses the question of the grammatical nature of the poetic analysis.