

INDIAN SANSKRIT POETICS: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract: *The Indian classical tradition is very rich and consists of perception and insight which serves as a best alternative to the western critical theories. Indian poetics has assimilative and complementary nature impregnated with insights and responsible pronouncements of new theories each time. They have validity, applicability and help reader understand and appreciate a text. The present paper is an effort to present an overview of this rich Literary culture.*

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Much work has been done on Indian Literature in English based on its analyses through the tools of Western critical methods. The 'Indian classical tradition' is very rich and consists of perception and insight which serves as a best alternative to the western critical theories; but due to colonial hangover we fail to appreciate and recognize our age old critical tradition.

In Indian context, aesthetics means "science and philosophy of fine art." The works, wherein the philosophy of art is discussed, are primarily concerned with technique; and philosophy is closely related to it. It is philosophy of fine art because because the experience that a work of art arouses in an aesthete is accounted for in terms of different schools of philosophic thought in India and also because the authorities on three arts, poetry, music and architecture, hold that art presents the Absolute as conceived by them, Thus there are three schools of philosophy of art: 1) *Rasa-Brahma-vada* 2) *Nad-Brahma- vada* 3) *Vastu- Brahma-Vada*. And fine art is the art which present the absolute in sensuous garb and aesthetical relation, as distinct from the utilitarian, with a work of which gives rise or leads to experience of the absolute (pandey 01)

The theory of *rasa*, which has been interpreted in many ways, has been claimed to be ancient India's chief contribution to the world of Literary Criticism. It has been shown by the theorists how *rasa* can bring aesthetic experience into close relation with the peace of *moksha* or self- perfection, Literary criticism, too, was born out of essential philosophical outlook dominated and governed by the Indian conception of four *purusarthas* of life leading to the realization of the absolute. All the human pursuits were valued only in so far as they served as means of attainment of bliss that surpassed understanding and in this regard Literature was no exception.

Poetics in ancient India India was known as *alamkara sastra*, meaning the science of poetry or the study of beauty in poetry. The principle of *alamkara* which is supposed to be one of the most important contributions of Sanskrit Criticism approximates to the modern conception of imagery in poetry. *Alamkara* which literally means ornament or embellishment was originally the synonym of *saundarya*. And for the poets and philosophers beauty only led to transcendence. Prof Hiriyana explains relationship between beauty and reality, Aesthetics and Metaphysics in following words, "the pursuit of the beautiful may help the attainment of ideal, by carrying us to the ideal, by carrying us to the threshold, as it were, of the ideal and giving us the glimpse of it, art but inspires us with the desire for realizing it"(Hiriyanna 58-59)

Poetry in ancient India has been the result of *dhyamantra*, the meditation. The attitude of the poet towards his poetry was that of devotee towards his god. The *kavi* (poet) in the *Rig Veda* means, a *darshanika* (one who shows the way). In this respect a critic is not very different from a poet, for a critic who undergoes the process of generalization/universalization. Hence a critic is regarded as much as a creator as a poet.

It is interesting to note that the difference between the aesthetic enjoyment and the bliss of Brahman is only one of degree and not of kind. The *Rasa-dhvani* theory of poetry is thus related to the main *Vedantic* tradition in Indian philosophy and also account for the constant mingling of aesthetic and spiritual values in Indian literature. The *Dhvani*, considered separately, remains characteristically Indian.

When Sanskrit Poetics is talked about, the name of Bharata as a founder of Indian Poetics comes in the mind itself. Bharata is considered father of Indian criticism. His monumental work *The Natyashastra* which has been the

cause of innumerable subsequent critical works and commentaries has shaped the critical sensibilities of our people and their mental and emotional make-up in most vital and significant way. It should be surprising that this encyclopedic work which runs through the whole gamut of the art of drama discussing the last conceivable aspect of stage-acting with minute details has been considered as fifth Veda and quite characteristically attributed to Brahma, a traditional Indian gesture.

It astonishes us that as far back as 3rd century B.C. Bharata not only pointed as to what constitutes the soul of poetry but also defined clearly the existence and characteristics of all the mental states (*bhavas*) in man and their role in genesis of *rasa*. His enumeration of eight *rasas* and *bhavas* and further classification of *bhavas* into *sthayibhavas*, thirty-three *vyabharibhavas* and eight *satvika bhavas* is so satisfying that even today they form an important critical framework in the judgement of Sanskrit Literature.

After Bharata comes the foremost representative of the *alamkara* School of poetry- Bhamah. With Bhamah the emphasis shifted from *rasa* to *alamkara*. While Bharata confined himself to drama, Bhamah includes whole literature, as evident in his very title *Kavyalamkara*. By making use of concrete and homely examples drawn from everyday life Bhamah makes a plea for making *alamkara* primary in a work of art. He uses the word *alamkara* in a broad sense, meaning not only external embellishment in a work but the inherent beauty of the whole. Whatever contributes to the beauty of the entire work is *alamkara*.

Like Bhamah, Dandin is also justifiably preoccupied with the correctness or otherwise of the word used in literature, for the word, as he puts it is the source of all worldly transactions. Unlike Bhamah who listed three *gunas*, *mudhurya*, *Prasad* and *ojas*, Dandin enumerates ten. He demonstrate with examples how some of the *gunas* like *madhurya* and *sukumarya* are achieved in poetry, and picks out crudely worded sentences to show how the same can be transformed into a refined one.

Like his predecessors Anandvardhana also speaks about *alamkara* but by making it subservient to *rasa* he breaks new ground in the history of Sanskrit criticism. This shift in emphasis from *alamkara* to *rasa* came at a crucial time when even notable writer of poetics after Bharata, Vamana, Rudrata and Dandin had made *alamkara* the supreme end in poetry and had gone on multiplying the number of *alamkaras* which threatened to become unwieldy. At this point Anandvardhana departed from well established tradition and looked *alamkara* from a totally different angle, the passage where advises the poet to exercise discrimination in the employment of figures is most striking for its critical incisiveness.

The sole consideration that it (figures) is only a means to the delineation of sentiment and never an end in itself, the necessity of employing it at the right time and of abandoning it at the right time; the absence of over-enthusiasm on the poet's part in pressing it too far, and finally, his keen watchfulness in making sure that it remains a secondary element only- these are the various means by which figures like metaphors become accessories (of suggested sentiments) (Krishnamoorthy63)

After a due consideration of *rasa* and *alamkara*, Anandavardana offers a very subtle analysis of the concept of *dhvani*. He has classified it into three kinds in ascending order of importance, (1) *vastu dhvani* (2) *alamkara dhvani* (3) *rasa dhvani*. This kind of classification makes the application of *dhvani* not merely feasible but also very adequate and satisfying in the judgement of poetry.

Rajashekhara devotes a whole chapter to discuss ways and means of attaining poetical excellence which is said to be a new thing in the history of Sanskrit poetics. It has been pointed out that this is similar to what Kautilya did in his *Arthashastra* and Vatsyayana did in his *Kamasutra*. The object of all these must have been the same in view- namely *prayojana* (utility). Such exercises undoubtedly enhance the utilitarian value of the works beside revealing the amazing practicality of the Indian mind when occasion demands it. Rajashekhara's advice to the poets to mingle freely with the common life in order to fully understand their life and emotion should bring home the absurdity of invoking Wordsworth as the only propagator of the idea of infusing rustic life and idiom into poetry. In his insistence on a good knowledge of the *sastras* for a poet or *bahugnatha*- also described as *vyutpatti* meaning many spheres of knowledge and representing subjects such as *vyutpatti* meaning many spheres of knowledge and representing subjects such as *lokavidyaprakirna* Rajashekhara resembles early writers on poetics like Dandin, Vamana and others who acknowledged *vayutpatti* as an essential factor in the composition of poetry. In fact he calls the second chapter of his *kavyamimamsa*, for he states here the names of different *sastra* which should first be studied by a poet beginning to compose anything.

While Anandavardhana thought *pratibha* was more important to a poet than *vyutpatti*, *Mangala*, another expert on poetics, is supposed to have held *vyutpatti* more important than *pratibha*. However, Rajshekhara thinks that a poet who possesses both the faculties is the best, thus striking a fine balance between seemingly conflicting qualities.

The intimate relationship between poetry and poetics in very interesting developed in Rajashekhara's conception of marriage of *kavyapurusa*, the spirit of poetry with *sahityavidya* or science of poetics. That a critics should have envisaged the idea of a close alliance between these two branches of learning several hundred years ago is a tribute to the maturity if Indian Criticism.

The next acharya who inaugurated a new school of poetics called vakrokti, is Kuntaka. He attempts a special treatment of the first variety of vakrokti, namely “art in the arrangement of syllables.” His remarks on alliteration reveal amazingly modern and sophisticated sensibility. Alliteration should be achieved effortlessly, without extra effort decorated with syllables which are not harsh, and it should not suggest any unnecessary craze on the part of the poet, otherwise there will be loss of harmony which will destroy the organic unity of the work which under all conditions should be maintained.

Next he deals with the art of beautifying in conventional sense, for Kuntaka draws our attention to several revealing examples from classical plays where the playwrights have conveyed the intended emotion with great power and force by resorting to the use of a mere proper name. In his view a critic should be sensitive to all these delicate shades of poetry and dwell at length on the beauty of various aspects like metaphor, gender, number, person, action, time, etc. with examples. Kuntaka’s own justification for discussing the various figures is based on the assumption that they help in the promotion of aesthetic effect. Such discovery startles us into a recognition that all intricate aspects of poetry that engage a modern critic’s mind had already come within the ambit of early Indian critic. That he should, for instance have thought necessary to point out that in a *kavya*, the meaning should be “undimmed”, “original” and not “trite” or “worn-out” by repeated usage, reflects in large measure his inwardness with poetry. Yet with humility he could confess on occasions: “the infinite forms of poetic expression arising from the creative genius of the poet baffle enumeration even like the infinite graces of one’s own beloved (*Vakroktijivita* 85.)

This excessive importance given to the artistic merit of the word should not mislead us into thinking that the critics of the past were not concerned with other aspects like construction of plot etc, for Kuntaka gives a whole chapter of his *Vakroktijivita* to a consideration of beauty of *prakarana*, that is incident or episode in a composition. In the first place, “a poet should select only such themes as are capable of evoking sentiments and moods and generating a sense of wonders in the readers. He should also see that the theme so selected will give full scope for the exquisitely aesthetic, original and matchless inventive power of his genius.” In the next step Kuntaka discusses the role of a poet’s originality in building up of a plot, “when a poet is constructing a plot of his own, based though it might be on a well-known source, if he succeeds in infusing even a small streak of originality the beauty gained thereby will be singular”(*Vakroktijivita* 228.)

Next important name to be mentioned in Sanskrit Criticism is that of Mammata whose *Kavyaprakasha* has enjoyed immense popularity judging by the number of commentaries and glossaries it has caused to be written. It is established that Mammata helped to establish the doctrine of *Dhvani* school of Anandavardhana. Mammata presented no new theory or concept but only summarized in concise and lucid way all the previous ideas put forward by his predecessors and yet his distinction consist in this lucid and clear presentation of some already discussed, but vital ideas. The survey of Sanskrit criticism cannot be complete without including the names of Udbhata, Rudrata, Mahimabhata, Bhattanayaka, Sankuka, Bhatta Lollata, Abhinavagupta, Ksemendra and Jagannatha Pandita. Mahimabhata, Abhinavagupta and Ksemendra were chiefly responsible for the systematic development of the theories of *anumana*, *santha* and *auchitya* against the background of *rasa* and *dhvani* contrary to the existing practice of some to view it independently of *rasa* and *dhvani* makes him major critical force.

Thus Sanskrit criticism with its beginnings in the Vedic period, kept amazingly alive till the 17th century, presents a remarkable picture of continuity notwithstanding its diverse currents. The diversity itself is a part of its spectacular richness, depth and complexity. A body of criticism that offers such vitally important theories as *rasa*, *alamkara*, *riti*, *dhvani*, *vakrokti* and *auchitya* should not be allowed to become obsolete and antiquarian.

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