

Vakrokti: A Comparative Study in Relation to Modern Linguistics

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Abstract

In ancient Indian poetic tradition Vakrokti (obliquity) is considered one of the most important poetic devices which brings about delight in the heart of competent reader. The theorists of alaṃkara tradition included vakrokti among the various types of alaṃkara. Bhāmaha, one of the pioneers of alaṃkara tradition, known for his book Kāvyaṃkārā, considered vakratā being an inevitable part of atīśyokti alaṃkara. Later on, many other critics also talked about vakrokti but merely taking it under the scope of alaṃkara. Rājanak Kuntaka in his book Vakrokti-jīvitā expounded his views on poetic art, and he is of opinion that vakrokti (obliquity) is essential for different kinds of alaṃkara, and said that vakrokti is not a part of alaṃkara but different alaṃkara are parts of vakrokti. In his proposition Kuntaka analyzed poetic language and brought forth division of vakrokti based on linguistic grounds. He minutely observed śabda and artha. His observation in this regard is very much relevant to modern studies in linguistics. He laid emphasis on each and every part of words and meaning. His ideas on poetic language and analysis of morphological and semantic paradigms are quite analogical to linguistics in present time. He has also made some remarkable study in the area of syntax. This paper strives to establish an interdisciplinary approach in evaluating ancient Indian system of poetics from a modern linguistic point of view.

Key word: vakrokti, linguistic, dhvnyāloka, vakroktijivītaṃ, Ācārya Kuntaka.

Introduction

Ancient Sanskrit theoretical tradition has profoundly observed the aesthetic necessity of poetic art, hence, every aspect related to poetics has been minutely analyzed, language being one of the most important parts of literature remains pre-eminent concern of Sanskrit critical tradition. Almost all theorists of Sanskrit poetic tradition regard appropriate use of language to be conducive to poetic art. Kuntaka proposes a remarkable proposition brought forth to establish a unique method of expression based on obliquity or artistic turn of words and meanings. Kuntaka intends that in artistry inception of an ordinary and minimal unit like a letter could be heightened to the limits of universality provided the form and content should be involved in a continuous process of refinement that affords to achieve the most enriched poetic experience. In fact, in the first unmeṣa Kuntaka proposes the purpose of vakrokti as :

Lokottaracamatkāra-kāri-vaicitryasidhdaye Kāvyaśyāyalaṃkaraḥ ko'pyapoorvo vidhīyate
(Kuntaka 7)

To generate unprecedented delight and wonder a unique poetic composition is being written.

The true poetic beauty lies in the fact that it must possess newness as well as should be capable of relishing competent reader. The contention follows that in the beginning phase identification of universality concealed in meaning is very much impossible because the beginning is always in a state of subjectivity hence lacks precision and arrangement, in the latter phase the subjective state is transformed into an objective state of meaningfulness. In order to do so the method of vakrokti is employed therein each unit functions and corresponds with the other unit so as to bring an enriched poetic experience. According to

Kuntaka poetic art reaches perfection when there is correspondence between word and meaning. The intended meaning could only be imparted when there is a suitable word capable of conveying intentional meaning. The word of such nature is unique in itself means it is the only available option having power to bring about delight. In this context Kuntaka writes :

Vivakṣito yo'sau vastuwiṣṭorthos tadekavācakastasyaikaḥ kevala eva vācakaḥ

(Kuntaka 35)

The intended meaning could only be brought by its exact applicable word. One object in a particular context can have only one word to express itself. Hence in a particular context any object according to the need of the situation requires the word that befits the purpose and gets an excellent meaning. In this way, literature as a discourse is characterized by its unique method of representation in which there is complete visualization of word and meaning. The process sets forth when a talented procures an altogether evolution of the functional part of language and experience. Such evolving state of language and experience finds expression after a continuous assessment of the context and the similar process renders in being until the complete idealized meaningfulness is obtained. Such idealization of language and experience in turn brings about complete comprehensibility in artistry. In this way the correspondence of language and experience or vācya or vācak ultimately manifests the refined and enriched form of expression and it establishes literature as a discourse that is second to none. Kuntaka keenly observes the functional aspect of language in the art of writing. Like the Western linguistic theorists he also takes into consideration the significance of heterogeneous linguistic units. His concepts of word and meaning are very close to Western structuralist critics like Saussure, Barthes and Jakobson. These structuralist critics chiefly focus on the different linguistic units in the same way Kuntaka also represents his ideas regarding vakrokti on linguistic grounds. We can easily trace the points that the conceptual formation of vakrokti is based on the same ground like that of structuralism. Meaning, for Kuntaka, must possess newness and should be connotative rather than denotative. In fact, vakrokti is meant to make poetic expression different from ordinary language and it becomes possible when language ceases to be referential and gets suggestivity as much as possible. Hence vakrokti deals with both linguistics and emotive categories in order to make poetic art capable of delighting the competent reader.

Kuntaka arises the question of obtaining universal poetic experience by continuous refinement of words and meanings, and this refinement occurs by undergoing obliquity of both. Kuntaka says that difference between ordinary language and poetic language lies in the fact that poetic language, unlike ordinary language, employs the technique of oblique expression. He is of opinion that harmonious mixing of words and meanings in kavya and vakrokti is the only medium of embellishment. He takes all alamkaras under the scope of vakrokti. According to him alamkaras get elegance and embellishment because of vakrokti and that is why he includes all different alamkaras within the six broad categories of vakrokti. It is noteworthy to know that Kuntaka does not leave any aspect related to the art of poetry. He covers from the smallest unit, śabda to the entire composition namely prabandh vakratā. The methodology employed by Kuntaka is largely based on linguistic devices, for instance, śabdalaṃkara like anuprasa are taken as having Varṇa vinyāsa vakratā. And various other alṃakārakars are included in the sentential obliquity.

Kuntaka is of opinion that embellished words and meanings make poetry worthy of appreciation. He says that alamkaras are something integral to poetic diction and any attempt to separate them from words and meanings is entirely void of sense. In this regard he writes:

Sālaṅkāsyālaṅkāraṇasahitasya sakalasya nirastāvayavasya sataḥ samudāyasya kāvyatā kavikarmatvam. Tenālaṅkratasya kavyatvamiti sthitiḥ, na punaḥ kāvyasyālaṅkārayoga iti. (Kuntaka 16)

It means that the collection (samudāya) of embellished objects (namely word and meaning) is itself poetry and poet ought to opt such words which have elegance in themselves. Therefore, embellished words and meanings are the source of poetry rather than thinking that word and meaning (alaṅkrata) and embellishment (alaṅkāra) are two different thing, poetry springs from the use embellished words and meanings.

Now, if embellished word and meaning are poetry then what is the instrument of figures of speech in poetry, answering the issue Kuntaka writes:

Sālaṅkāsyālaṅkāraṇasahitasya sakalasya nirastāvayavasya sataḥ samudāyasya kāvyatā kavikarmatvam.

Tenālaṅkratasya kavyatvamiti sthitiḥ, na punaḥ kāvyasyālaṅkārayoga iti. (Kuntaka 16)

Kuntaka says that poetry is created by using oblique expression and is characterized by using different words and meanings from their usual usages as well as having well-arranged formation capable of delighting the competent reader.

In this way, it is clear that for Kuntaka figures of speech and parts of speech both are inseparable part of poetry, and obliquity is the only mean of embellishment. To obtain obliquity he insists on having a continuous refinement of words and meanings. For that matter, Kuntaka suggests to prolong the process of selection of the words and convergence of meaning, in this context he writes:

Sahitāvityatrāpi yathāyukti svajāṭīyāpekṣayā śabdasya śabdāntareṇa vācyasya vācyāntareṇa ca sāhityam paraspardhitvalakṣanmeva vivakṣatam. (Kuntaka 27)

In order to create good writing there must happen co-operation between word and meaning and this co-operation must be done by choosing the most appropriate word and arriving at the best possible meaning. Before obtaining such competent word and meaning they must undergo a process of śabdāntara and arthāntara therein every word compete with the other suitable words of the same class similarly there should be competition among all possible meaning.

Kuntaka states with conviction that beauty in artistry could only be found when there is newness of experience, the representation should strictly emerge as something new and such that has not been experienced hitherto. In Vakrokti-jīvita of Kuntaka uses the word nūтана (new) many times. In fact, he admits the fact that true beauty in any creation depends on the matter of being new, something that has not been stated before. The following observation well suits the contention:

Kīdraśam tatsaundaryam – nūतanaucityam nūतanamabhinavamalaulikamaucityamucitabhāvo yasya (Kuntaka 12)

(which kind of beauty- beauty that is new (nūtan) and has appropriateness (aucitya) beauty having these two characteristics is always universal and is admired by all)

Such observations well endorse the contention that poetic charm lies in being new and appropriate. The objects of presentation are always same for all, but what is the duty of the writer is to present these in such a way that perception of the object becomes completely new. Each time the depiction should appear as something which is recently brought into existence. Hence the automacy of perception ceases to be and what reader encounters is a long process of perception where he has to decipher the suggestively of meaning. In case of suggestively and indirectness which springs from obliquity the reader has to infer the underlain meaning which is the intended motif of the writer.

The contentions brought forth by Kuntaka are entirely based upon the grounds of linguistics. Kuntaka derived the idea of vakrokti from alamakra tradition. He, unlike the critics of alamkara tradition, considers vakrokti to be the underlain motif of all alamkaras. He says that a writer must be conscious about the oblique expression embodied in words and meaning. Obliquity caused by language can only bring about a striking expression therefore generates enriched meaning that is indirect and suggestive in nature. Kuntaka considers that kāvya (poetics) is a state of balance of co-operation of both śabda (word) and arthā (meaning) and vakrokti is the only alamkara, in this regard he writes:

Śabdārthau sahitaṁ vakrakavivyaṁ pārsālini

Bandhe vyavasthitaṁ kavyaṁ tadvidālhādakāriṇi (Kuntaka 55)

Through, out the book Kuntaka's concern remains with the word and meaning, in fact his classification of vakrokti into six divisions also tends to show that the selection and arrangement of word/s and the intended meaning carried by words are the basic devices to be embellished by vakrokti. He divides vakrokti into six broad divisions and further classifies them into several subdivisions, these six divisions are varṇavinyās vakratā, padapūrvādhā vakratā, padaparārdhā vakratā, vākya vakratā, prakaraṇa vakratā and prabandha vakratā.

The first three divisions are entirely based on the morphological level in which selection of words brings about obliquity in expression, the latter three divisions chiefly concern with the meaning that comes out of the arrangement of the words. In all six divisions we can notice Kuntaka's preoccupation with semantics as well. In the first varṇavinyās vakratā selection of the letter and its arrangement in the sentence is the chief concern of the writer, like the anuprasa and yamaka alamkara it entirely deals with the phonetic aspect of linguistics where primary emphasis is laid upon the phonemes, syllables and diphthongs. This vakratā may come out of the reiteration of similar letter both vowel and consonant or out of similar word. For instance in this line "Full fathom five, thy father lies" (Shakespeare 1.2) we have repetition the 'f' sound, and by this repetition the expression looks exquisite in nature. When there a word recurring many time there too the same varṇavinyās vakratā occurs.

For example in this Shakespeare's celebrated line, we have varṇavinyās vakratā "tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" (Macbeth 5, 5), here the repetition of the word 'tomorrow' enriches the meaning.

The second division of vakrokti padapūrvādhā vakratā genuinely deals with the morphology. In its classification Kuntaka enumerates various lexica and proposes that there must be lexical obliquity in poetic expression. He divides padapūrvādhā vakratā into these subdivisions, the first is rudivaicitra vakratā, it is obliquity of usage where any word is used in such a way that ceases its usual ordinary meaning and brings

about an unusual and new meaning. The second is paryayavakratā (obliquity of synonym) here poet intentionally uses the other word of the same nature to denote the thing in order to make oblique expression. According to Kuntaka though there may be many words to show one object but each synonym has its distinct feature and characteristic. When a writer is competent enough he knows the value of each word hence knowing the necessity of the context he exerts the synonym of that nature to elevate the situation. The third is upācra vakratā (obliquity of transference).

Upacāra vakratā deals with the transformation of the meaning. Here a writer uses a kind of progression from external to internal to show an imaginative knowledge. It all happens metaphorically where an abstract idea is transformed into a concrete idea by using oblique word of that nature. Here a word carries the idea of an imaginative thing hence this obliquity is embodied in word that results in a different meaning. The fourth type is viśeṣaṇa vakratā (obliquity of adjective). An adjective is a word that enlarges the meaning and narrows the application of noun and pronoun. Kuntaka says that when excellence of adjective heightens the beauty of the other words, we have adjective obliquity. He insists that the adjective must be appropriate and should be aptly used according to reference. The fifth variety is samvrtti vakratā (obliquity of concealment). It operates when intended object is concealed by the use of a pronoun or other words so as to heighten the expression. Here poetic charm lies in the fact that the subject of statement remains unnamed and it is addressed in an indirect and implicit manner. The next sixth type is vratti vakratā (obliquity of indeclinable). Kuntaka is of opinion that a poet must be competent enough that he can create new word using the available word of the vocabulary. Here vakrokti comes out of the art of word formation therein new word is created by compounding or using suffix or prefix. Such words fascinates the reader and imparts striking meaning. Puruṣa vakratā is the next type of padapūrvādha vakratā, it occurs when poet intentionally employs a different gender to express a gender, for example when a neutral gender is presented by a male or female gender. It also occurs when having possibility of describing gender the writer avoids mentioning the gender and uses a different word. The last type of variety of padapūrvādha vakratā is kriyāvaicitraya vakratā (obliquity of verb). In this the oblique use of the verb brings charm in poetic expression. kriyāvaicitraya vakratā is when verb of the sentence becomes conducive to the excellence of the subject, object or adverbial pertaining to the verb.

The third division of vakrokti is padaparārdha vakratā (grammatical obliquity). Grammatical obliquity deals with the all-possible grammatical form of the expression. Its major types are kala-vaicitraya vakratā (Obliquity of tense), kāraṇa vakratā (Obliquity of case), saṅkhyā vakratā (Obliquity of number), puruṣa vakratā (Obliquity of person), upagraha vakratā (Obliquity of voice), upasarga vakratā (Obliquity of prefix), pratyaya vakratā (Obliquity of suffix), nipata vakratā (Obliquity of particle). Padaparārdha vakratā primarily deals with the oblique expression of the words embodied in the grammatical manifestation.

The fourth division is vākya-vakratā (sentential obliquity). In sentential obliquity Kuntaka primarily concerns with the meaning of expression. As sentence is a systematic arrangement of the words, Kuntaka regards that the underlain purpose of the previous two vakratā namely padapūrvādha vakratā and padaparārdha vakratā is to enrich the meaning of a sentence. It is the sentence in which various figures of speech and parts of speech find their expression so it is obvious that different alamkaras related to the embellishment of words and meanings are integral to the sentential obliquity. According to the nature of the writing he divides sentential obliquity into two parts : sahaṅga vakratā (natural obliquity) and aaharya vakratā (imposed obliquity). In the former meaning springs from the naturalness of the expression. There is simplicity in style in natural obliquity.

According to Kuntaka sahaj vakratā comes out of innate power of description in poets. The accuracy of meaning and complete comprehensibility are optimum in natural obliquity. Here poet imparts the meaning and presents the object in such a way that though lacks the decoration and embellishment appears to be fascinating and striking to a reader.

In other words, it could be said that in sahaaja vakratā poet without using heavy diction and decorative language represents his intended meaning in such way that natural expression of subject-matter transports the reader thoroughly. In āharya vakratā, strikingness and charm of the meaning becomes possible due to the use of the embellished language and different figures of speech. In āharya vakratā, subject-matter is represented through the technical skill of the poet, hence meaning is imparted abounded with the capacity of delighting the competent reader. In this way, this division of obliquity minutely takes into account the meaning of the sentence that is carried by the words and their grammatical arrangement.

In this way we can better appreciate the theory of vakrokti and its relevance in modern linguistics. Though Kuntaka's art of systematization of the theory appears to lack organized form but the underlain motif of his contentions obviously tend to signify that he was quite aware of the necessity of having competence in terms of linguistics so that poetic art may be enriched and elevated qua aesthetic need of society. And in this respect, he has analyzed all units and devices pertaining to the structure language, and being subject material of modern linguistics.

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