

Application of Vakrokti Theory in Othello's Desdemona: An Enhancing tool to Indian Knowledge System

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Abstract

This research paper is about famous Sanskrit rhetorician, literary theorist Kuntaka and his poetic theory of Vakrokti. He belongs to Vakrokti school of Sanskrit of ancient Indian poetics. This research paper briefly talks about Kuntaka and his poetic beauty in the linguistics and its application of Character of Desdemona, heroin of Othello play. Othello is written by Great English Dramatist William Shakespeare. This paper deals with the all aspect i.e. of Vakrokti and how it estimates to Desdemona. Kuntaka is the originator of the Vakrokti school of Sanskrit literary theory. He came after Anandvardhan of 9th century and before Abhinavagupta of 10th century. In this context, Ganesh Devy says that Vakrokti and the Alamkāra are two Indian schools which are very close to two Western schools of thought formalism and new criticism. Kuntaka says about the Vakrokti

Vakroktireva Vaidaghyabhṅginbhaṇitirucchyate.

Vakroktiḥ, prasiddhabhidhānvyatirekiṇi vicitraivabhidhā. Kidṛisi

Vaidaghyabhaṇibhaditiḥ vaidaghyān vidghaṁ bhāvḥ

Kavikarmakauśalam, tasyabhaṇḍivichittiḥ, tayā sbaṇḍitiḥvicitraivāhidhā vakroktirityuchyate.

We can see the following instances from Othello about Desdemona how her statement inbuilt the vakrokti theory.

Desdemona: Do you know, sirrah, where the lieutenant Cassio lies?

Clown: I dare not say he lies anywhere?

Desdemona: Why Man?

Clown: He is soldier, and for one to say a soldier lies, is stabbing.

(Act III scene IV)

Here in these lines Desdemona asks to Clown that where is great soldier Cassio. Then he says no I don't know about his location and not telling a lie. Desdemona asks why then he again told her that a soldier's address should not be tell right.

Key Words: Kuntaka, Vakrokti, Othello, Desdemona, theory.

Introduction

Kuntaka is the originator of the Vakrokti school of Sanskrit literary theory. He came after Anandvardhan of 9th century and before Abhinavagupta of 10th century. His time was the time of high merit of Indian poetics. Dhananjaya and Rajasékhara were his contemporary theorists. The theorists appeared in the time of Kuntaka contributed a lot what is in different shape is considered as modern theories of literature and language. In this context, Ganesh Devy says that Vakrokti and the Alamkāra are two Indian schools which are very close to two Western schools of thought formalism and new criticism.

Ganesh Devy commented, “Vakrokti is a theory of poetry which perceives poetry essentially as terms of the language of its expression. It sees the poetic language as language of metaphor and suggestive communication”. Hence, Kuntaka’s contribution in poetic thought is not only the matter of poetry or literature but it is about understanding the language, language of poetry and its difference with the language of the common. Kuntaka’s opinions on language of poetry and overall, his study on language makes his position many steps further to the future. He is considered as one of the early language theorists in India.

Kuntaka’s Vakroktijivitaṃ:

Anjalika Mukhopadhyay informs in her Bangla translation of Kuntaka’s Vakroktijivitaṃ that, the manuscript of Kuntaka’s Vakroktijivitaṃ was appeared as final version with the initiative and immense work done by Sushil Kumar Dey in 1922. This manuscript was found as incomplete in four chapters. Some scholars assume this book has its fifth chapter also but it is not proved yet. Scholars assume that Kuntaka was a Kashmiri, because some hints were found in this regard. It is also assumed that Kuntaka was alive in the time between Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta. He appeared before Mahimbhaṭṭa, as Mahimbhaṭṭa mentioned about him in different ślokaś. If Mahimbhaṭṭa came in between 1020-1060 then Kuntaka was there in between 1000-1030. Kuntaka never mentioned about Abhinavagupta and Abhinavagupta also never mentioned about Kuntaka; though he talked about Vakrokti. It means either they were contemporary to each other or Kuntaka came after Abhinavagupta. Mahimbhaṭṭa, Hemachandra and Bhoja told that Kuntaka was the author of the Karika and Vṛtti of his Vakroktijivitaṃ, though some scholars have doubt on this because the style of language found in the Karika and the Vṛtti is completely different.

History of Vakrokti:

The theory of Vakrokti is found even before Kuntaka had made it sophisticated and scientific with his rare talent. Bhamaha among the theorists who talked about Vakrokti is most ancient. Kuntaka primarily adopted Bhamaha’s idea of Vakrokti. Ruḍrat in his Kavyalaṅkāra (9th century) also talked about Vakrokti. Vakrokti was generally perceived as a śabdālaṅkāra only. But it did not have much significance beyond its significance as śabdālaṅkāra in Bhāmaha, Daṇḍini and Bāmana understands.

As an alaṅkāra Vakrokti was very inclusive to Bhāmaha. He included all types of alaṅkāra under the term of Vakrokti. According to Bhāmaha Vakrokti is the soul of poetry. The way words are become different than the daily conversation and gives pleasure to the mind of the rasika or one who accomplishes poetry is vakrokti. Bhāmaha did not accept Swabhāvokti as a type of alaṅkāra. But Daṇḍini accepted both Swabhāvokti and Vakrokti as alaṅkāra. He believed poetry means alaṅkāra. If the daily use of language is reformulated with alaṅkāra it becomes vakrokti and that vakrokti is led by śleṣa. And this is how vakrokti creates beauty in poetry.

Sreenivas Rao in his work on Kuntaka and Indian poetics says that “later, Ruḍrata treats Vakrokti as a mere play of words or pretended speech”, which means that the word is meant for one thing and it is understood by the readers as other thing. It happens because of the voice and modulation of the reader of that particular poem. This difference in voice is known as *Kaku*, which according to Rao is ‘peculiar intonation’ (Rao, Sreenivas;). And this changes the meaning of the word. It also happens for the word having multiple meaning or at least two meanings and each meaning have its logical implications which is known as *śleṣa*. Rao added that Vamana observes Vakrokti as an Arthālaṅkāra where the hinted meaning of the word or lakṣaṇa is replaced by the similarity or sādṛśya and therefore, to Vāmana Vakrokti is nothing but a metaphor. Hence the Vakrokti as an

extended poetic term proposed by Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin appeared as a limited term and a figure of speech only to Ruḍrata and Vāmana. It is Kuntaka who did the historical study of the theory of Vakrokti and placed it in a very significant theory of poetry. He made differences between the language of poetry and the language of everyday life with the reference of Vakrokti. According to him Vakrokti is a distinguishing factor of poetry and it is one of the basic qualities of poetic language, it makes composition of words a poem. He is the true successor of Bhāmaha and established Vakrokti as distinctive characteristics of all alaṃkāras. His concept of Vakrokti also guides the poet to select the words while composing a piece of poem. This idea is peculiar to poetry.

Meaning of Vakrokti:

Sreenivas Rao, a renowned scholar of Sanskrit poetics put his most of the works on poetics in his personal website. In his work on Kuntaka he explains the definition of the term Vakrokti and its genealogical meaning. He mentions that, “the term Vakrokti is composed of Vakra + ukti, where the latter (Ukti) derived from Vāc-śane can easily be taken to mean a poetic expression, a clever speech or a pithy statement. It is however the former component (Vakra) of the term Vakrokti, evoking diverse shades of meanings and suggestions, that is widely discussed and interpreted in various manners” (Rao, Sreenivas;).

Kuntaka like many other theorists also accepted the traditional definition of poetry. And this definition says that the great juxtaposition and interwovenness of the sabda and artha makes a piece poetry. But Kuntaka claimed that this interwoven relation of sabda and artha should have a quality of Vakratā or Vaicitra. According to him the vakratā is the very quality of poetry and it brings pleasure in the mind of the reader after or while one is reading the poem. Vakratā is the very essence of the poetic speech or what is known as Kāv्यukti and it makes the life of a poetry what is known as Jivita. And that is why the title of his book is Vakroktijivita, it is a biography of poetry, the title shows it talks everything of a poetry. It speaks about the being and becoming and after life of a poem.

According to him Vakrokti is a matter of Vaidagdhya or intelligence, but not only that, it depends of the style or how the intelligence will create this matter, therefore he says that the Vakrokti is *Vaidagdhya-bhaṅgi-bhanita* (Rao, Sreenivas;). Therefore, the successful creation of Vakrokti in poetry depends on the talent and skill or craftsmanship of a poet, what is known as Kavi-Koushala (poetic art). This is how, Kuntaka relates the talent, skill or craftsmanship of the poet to create a successful poem which will be very unique in creating meaning and expression.

Kuntaka's Vakrokti:

According to Kuntaka Vakrokti is created by “Vaidagdhya-bhaṅgibhaṇitirucyate”, which means a poetic talent with his own creative power creates such attractive subject which being earthly, sounds heavenly to the rasika or to the readers who has authority to accomplish. Swabhāvukti defines or represents things or objects as it is there in the world of reality. Kuntaka argues there is no credit of creating Swabhāvukti because it does not bring any uniqueness in the poetic thought and alaṃkāra also cannot perform its role here in the Swabhāvukti. Alaṃkāra makes the object beautiful by putting the elements which are not there in the object.

Shabda and the Artha make the body of poetry. It can be beautiful with the vakrokti. The cleverness of words should not cover the beauty of the poem. Tadwidgaṇa, means the group of scholars who understand poetry will evaluate this highest art of creation of poetry in a poet.

Kuntaka defines poetry by saying that it is “word and sense together enshrined in a style revealing the artistic creativity of the poet on the one hand and giving delight to the man of taste on the other” (Devy, Ganesh;).

This definition of poetry shows that Kuntaka carried the lineage of knowledge on Indian poetics. The previous thoughts propagated by different schools are adapted in Kuntaka's theory on poetry.

He mentions that the meaning is signified and word signifies the meaning. He elaborated his idea on word, meaning, style, metaphor and poetic language. And later he describes of the good qualities of a true poetry. A good poetry is what which has unique expression, meaning which delights the readers. Poet can make a mere word unique with his creative talent. Word and meaning are adorned in poetry and they appeared as 'artistic turn of speech'.

There are different types of Vakrokti suggested by Kuntaka in his Vakroktijivita. Those are, Phonetic figurativeness (Varṇavinyāsa Vakratā), Lexical figurativeness (padapūrvārdha Vakratā), Grammatical figurativeness (pratyaya vakratā), Sentential Figurativeness (Vākyavakratā), Contextual figurativeness (Prakaraṇa vakratā), and Compositional figurativeness (Prabandha vakratā).

Marga or Riti or Style and Guna:

According to Kuntaka 'śukumara mārga' is essential condition of Kavya. Beside śukumara mārga' he talks about vicitra mārga' and he explains the characteristics in ten Karikās. There are another Marga which is created by the characteristics of both the above said Margas, and that is Ubhayātmak Mārga.

Interferences in Othello's Desdemona:

Here on these lines Othello blames to Iago that you are saying about Desdemona's mis-character and if you are able to fully prove it then that's good for you but if unable to do this, you will be punishable by me. You will see never do more horrible deeds except my punishment on the earth and pray to God to leave out to all your miseries. And think your punishment i.e. more horrible ever on earth that you would never see. So, here we can see very easily *slander* and *accumulate* words make a kind of *varṇa-vinyāsa-vakratā*.

Othello: If thou dost *slander* her, and torture me

Never pray more, *abandon all remorse*

On horror's head horrors *accumulate*

Do deeds to make heaven weep, all earth *amaz'd*,

For nothing *canst thou* to damnation add

Greater than that

(Act III scene III)

Here in these lines Iago say that *o heavenly God* save me if I am telling a lie about Desdemona. He says to Othello please send on long leave or he want to say you can suspend me from my job profile if I am telling a lie in this matter. Many ways he tells to Othello about the character of Desdemona, his wife but Othello did not agree to then lastly, he say that "I'll love no friend, since love *breeds such offence*" I will never make any friend because all guilt begins in friendship. Here we can see the Kālidāsa quote about *śakuntalā* that is *atisnehaḥ pāpśankī*. So, it is the beautiful example of *varṇa-vinyāsa-vakratā* which was employed in Othello by William Shakespeare:

Iago: O grace, O heaven defends me!

Are you a man, have you a *soul* or *sense*?

God buy you, take mine office, - O *wretched* fool.

That livest to make thine honesty a *vice*

O *monstrous* world, take note, take note, O world,

To be direct and honest, is not safe,
 I think you for this *profit*, and *from hence*
 I'll love no friend, since love *breeds* such *offence*

(Act III scene III)

Here in these lines Desdemona asks to Clown that where is great soldier Cassio. Then he says no I don't know about his location and I am not telling a lie about this Respected Lady. Desdemona asks why you don't know, then he again replies her that a soldier's address should not be tell right because it is like a murder to tell only address of a soldier.

Here in these lines one word *stabbing* is very striking and it creates a kind of *Varṇa-vinyāsa-vakratā*.

Desdemona: Do you know, sirrah, where the lieutenant Cassio lies?

Clown: I dare not say he lies anywhere?

Desdemona: Why Man?

Clown: He is soldier, and for one to say a soldier lies, *is stabbing*.¹

(Act III scene IV)

Conclusion:

Kuntaka after Bhartṛhari, is most brilliant and rare talent who contributed enormously on the discourse of language study and also on the discourse of poetic language or literary language. In his understanding vakrokti is the vaidagdhyaṃ bhaṅgi or it is deviated or alternative to the speech act of the common people. With his study of poetic language, he suggested the how of the birth of beauty. He is that genius in Indian poetics who extends himself from language study to aesthetics to adaptation theory, to translation theory what we deal with now can be rooted in Kuntaka's work also. The different types of Vakrokti what he classified is method of criticism of literature also. It is actually literary discourse proposed by him. He suggested a complete structure of literary study. But not only limited into that he was concerned about the reader's response, though it is the major concern of all the Sanskrit rhetoricians. Vakrokti is Kavi-Kuśalatā, art and talent of the poet and poet's creativity is termed as "Kavi-vyāpāra-vakratā, or art in the poetic process and this is the primary condition of a successful poetry" and therefore raānubhūti comes into the mind of Saḥṛidaya or the readers (Rao, Sreenivas;). Kuntaka has balanced between the poet's role and reader's role in appreciation of poetry. The point of view of the poet and the reader's accomplishment both are necessary for emergence of rasānubhūti, according to Kuntaka.

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