

INDIAN THEORIES OF BEAUTY

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Indian Theories of Beauty

By Dr. K. KRISHNAMOORTHY

Though the Indian quest for beauty is at least as old as the Vedas, we see formulation of aesthetic concepts only during historical times. It is a subject which has not received adequate attention by modern scholars in spite of its intrinsic interest. The reason is to be found not in its lack of importance but in the paucity of material to build up a systematic line of thought. To Prof. H. Hiriyanna of Mysore goes the credit of initiating these studies from a philosophical perspective; while Rabindranath Tagore typified in himself not only the best in our classical literature but also the very cream of Indian aesthetic thought. At the outset, I should express my indebtedness to both as my thoughts are influenced by them to a considerable extent, though I shall try to restate the Indian theories of beauty in my own way.

The modern civilization geared to science and technology is no friend of beauty. Way back as 1852, Flaubert expressed his fear that “perhaps beauty will become a sentiment for which mankind has no further use and art will be something half-way between algebra and music” (Correspondence). But Goethe about the same time was far more optimistic. His study of history showed that art was an expression of the inmost human spirit and its victory over matter. He observes —

“Whoever has truly grasped the meaning of history will realise in a thousand examples that the materialization of the spirit or the spiritualization of matter never rests, but always breaks out, among prophets, believers, poets, orators, artists and lovers of art”.

The Indian speculation on beauty confirms the optimism of Goethe. (VII.29.3)

In the Rgveda itself we have the self-conscious use of the word *aramkrti* which is cognate with the later word *alankara* or *alankara* and which gives rise to the Indian name of aesthetics, namely, *Alankarasastra*. The Vedic term has a double connotation — one aesthetic and the other magical. The strength of a thing makes it an amulet and also an ornament. We have an analogy in the English word “charm” wherein both the magical and aesthetic shades are equally blended. In the Vedic usage *Aramkrti* and *Samskrti* are interchangeable terms which connote perfected creations, at once correct, beautiful and magically effective.

Before the age of thinkers who have given us several *darsanas* or well-ordered systems of philosophy, we have the creative period of the *upanisads* and the *Bhagavadgita* who regard beauty as divine in essence. The Absolute Reality is not only *Sat* or Ever-existent and *Cit* or all-knowing but also *Ananda* or Spiritual Bliss. The *Ananda* is characterised as the very joy of life in all beings as they emerge from it and merge again into it.

Anando Brahmeti vyajanat. Anandat
hyeva khalvimani bhutani jayante;
anadena jatani jivanti; anandam
prayantyabhisamvisanti. (Taittiriya Upanisad, III.6.)

What is even more noteworthy, this all-embracing or universal *ananda* is said to be a resultant of *rasa*, the veritable bliss of Brahman.

Raso vai sah. Rasam hyevayam labdhva anandi bhavati (*Ibid.* II.7)

A commentary on another *upanisad* makes it clear that while *ananda* is the absolute source and end of all life, its manifestation as the external world and inner realm of mind is

by way of beauty—

Ya ya prakrtirudara
Yo yo' pyanandasundaro bhavah
Yatkimcid ramaniyam
vastu Sivastattadakarah

(Commentary on Atharvasira Upanisad)

‘Whatever is striking in Nature, whatever feeling or being is charming and joy-giving, in short, whatever object is beautiful—all are so many manifestations of God Himself.’

Sri or Laksmi is the name of beauty in general in Sanskrit and when personified, we have the Goddess of Beauty. Its general use is seen in the Gita which declares —

Yadyad vibhutimat sattvam
srimadurjitameva va
Tattadevavagaccha tvam
mama tejomsa-sambhavam (X.41)

‘Whatever object in the universe is imposing, beautiful or spirited, take it to be a product of my own brilliant aspect!’ —

This theistic concept of beauty is further elaborated in many a stotra or religious hymn of praise. We may note here one or two examples: The great Sankaracarya has called one of his most celebrated hymns by the name Saundaryalahari and the goddess of beauty has such names as Lalita and Tripurasundari besides Laksmi. The beauty of the Goddess is such that it is beyond the imagination of ordinary beings and even Lord Brahma; the Creator should strain himself to comprehend it. Celestial nymphs like Rambha and Urvasi too fail to realise it and imaginatively become one with Siva so that they might catch a glimpse of that universal Beauty —

Tvadlyam saundaryam tuhinagirikanye tulayitum
kavindraha kalpante kathamapi virinciprabhrtayah
yadalokautsukyadamaralalana yanti manasa
Tapobhirdusrapamapi girisasayujyapadavim.

Similarly, in another hymn Srivatsanka Misra states —

‘Whatever glory the Lord enjoys, whatever beauty grace and goodness are manifest in the universe — all that is dependent on you. Hence it is that they are identified with you and called Sri or spoken of as graced with Sri’ —

Aisvaryam yadasesapumsi yadidam
saundarya-lavanyayoh
rupam yacca hi mangalam kimapi
yalloke sadyucyate
tatsarvam tvadadhinameva yadatah
srirityabhedena va
yadva srimaditidsena vacasa
devi prathamasnute

Such is the religio-philosophical theory of beauty reflected in Indian sacred texts.

II

We might now turn to secular beauty. Our classical poets like Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti are seen depicting the beauty of nature in general and of feminine beauty in particular in keeping with the religious background noted above, Bharavi says that beauty is inherent in nature and does not depend upon any imposed feature—

No birds are seen flying about
No clouds limned with rainbow
Yet the sky is most beautiful
Natural beauty needs no adornment

Patanti nasmin visadah patatrino
Dhrtendracapa na payodapanktayah
tathapi pusnati nabhah Sriyam param
na ramyamaharyamapeksate gunam (Kiratarjuniya, IV.23)

Almost all our poets echo this idea that natural beauty is in no need of artistic embellishment. Magha goes even a step further and adds that even a distortion of natural beauty remains beautiful:

ramyanam vikrtirapi sriyam tanoti (sisupalavadha, VII.5)

That is why in the 3 classical convention of poets we have eighteen heads or natural description sea, city, mountain, season, sunrise, sunset, moonrise, water-sport, excursions, etc. Coming to creation of beauty, both Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti agree that a creator should be endowed with a divinely aesthetic temperament. That is why Kalidasa observes that a beauty-queen like Urvashi could have been conceived in the mind of only celestial connoisseurs like the shining moon, the love-god Manmatha, and the god of fresh spring. The poet cannot believe the story that any sage without taste could have brought her forth,

tasyah sargavidhau prajapatirbhut
Candro no kantipradah....(Vik.1.9)

Bhavabhuti echoes this idea in his verse about Malati —

sa ramaniyakavidheradhidevata va
saundaryasarasamudayaniketanam va.. (Malatimadhava; 1.21)

Kalidasa reiterates this in another way when he says that Paravati's beauty must have been fashioned by the Creator with special effort, combining in proper proportion the ideal points of excellence in diverse objects, in order that a specimen of perfect beauty might emerge—

sarvopamadravysamuccayena
yathapradesam vinivesitena
sa nirmitta visvasrja prayatnad
ekasthasaundaryadidrkasayeva (Kumarsambhava, 1.49)

The creative artistic principle of combining the best things in the best order is evidenced here while the ever ravishing nature of beauty and its abiding value are brought out in his description of a hero as an embodiment of handsomeness, appearing fresh at every new look even like the ocean This is echoed by Magha in his oft-quoted saying:

Ksane ksane yannavatamupaiti
tadeva rupam ramaniyatayah (Sisupalavadha, IV. 17)

The Mountain Raivataka renews its charming appeal, the more it is looked at by Krishna. The poet generalises that it is of the very essence of beauty that it appears new each time it is observed and it can never cloy.

III

From poets we might now turn to theorists on poetry. It is often thought that art is difficult to create but easy to discuss. But it is not a fact. Formulation of aesthetic theories took several centuries after our best epics and plays were composed. The poets in the meanwhile were developing as it were a vast repertoire of symbols and myths about beauty. All the mythological associations of Laksmi, the goddess of beauty, with her brothers, namely, the moon and nectar, and her pet flower, the padma or lotus became the standards for judging earthly beauty also. The love-god was armed with five flower arrows — the aravinda, the asoka, the cuta, the navamallika and the nilotpala. The very names have an enchanting association of a world of ideal of beauty. The spring rain-cloud and the southern wind were hailed as excitants of love. The bow of the love god is sugar-cane and a row of bees his bow-string. The flower arrows are shot unfailingly at the hearts of young lovers to cause sweet agony. Birds like the cakravaka, the cakora, the parrot and the swan as well as animals like the deer, the young elephant, are depicted as if giving lessons in love to man. It is all a world of ethereal beauty and love created by the mytho-poeic imagination of our poets.

Our theorists too were steeped in this mytho-poeic background of beauty in their quest for principles underlying artistic creation. Their quest for beauty down the centuries led to them to aesthetic concepts like *alankara*, *rasa*, *guna*, *aucitya*, *dhvani* and *vakrokti* and their analysis of failure on the part of artists brought them to the concept of *dosas* or defects. Broadly, we might say that *gunas* or excellent qualities relate to structural beauty of an artwork, while *alankaras* relate to ornamental beauty. More than these, however, is the principle of *rasa-dhvani* which points to symbolic beauty and is held as the very soul of all poetry and art in India.

Art-creation as well as genuine appreciation or heartfelt response demands an artistic or aesthetic imagination which is designated as *Pratibha*. It is a rare sensibility characterised by insight as well as intuition. The Indian term for an art critic is *sahrdaya* or one with a heart akin to the poets; he is also often called *rasika* or a man of cultivated taste, sometimes he is also called *bhavaka* or one who can easily fall into the mood of contemplating beauty, divesting himself of personal considerations. The creative poet should be impersonal and detached allowing himself to be possessed by a creative upsurge or *afflatus* (*rasavesa*) and the reader at the other end should be capable of totally surrendering himself to the contemplation of beauty embodied by the poet in his work. This self-surrender involving impersonal detachment and freedom from any activity as in the work-a-day world leads him to a state of pure enjoyment or relish of *rasa* because his spirit is freed for the time being from the stresses and strains of an active life, and is characterised by *hrdaya-samvada* or heart-felt kinship with the poet's artistic purport and *tanmayibhavana* or identity as it were with the art object presented to him, brimming with diverse shades of emotions. This state of aesthetic joy is termed *rasa* because it is akin to spiritual delight on the one hand and religious devotion on the other.

In Sanskrit there are several synonyms of 'beauty',—'Saundarya', 'Caruta', 'ramaniyata', 'Saubhagya', 'Sobha', 'lavanya', 'kanti', 'vicchitti', and so forth. But the most frequently adopted keyterm of aesthetics is *alankara*. That is why *Alankara-sastra* should be translated as the science of beauty. Its widest meaning is adequately stressed by Vamana who

aphoristically states — “Saundaryam alankarah.” Since ‘alankara’ can also mean a ‘means of beauty’, it can denote poetic and artistic devices also.

The first accredited philosopher to note that beauty (*sobha*) in poetry is *not* due to mechanical aspects like grammatical accuracy, but to the natural beauty of the thing described is Kumarila Bhatta. He states categorically in his *Taniravarttika* (Benares Edn., p. 205) that good poetry could be composed even in languages without any grammar; and in Sanskrit too, he feels that grammar, far from adding to its beauty (*sobha*) has contributed to its worst defect namely, cacophony (*kastaSabda*).

Again, it is Sahara, the celebrated predecessor of Kumarila and author of *Purvamimamsa-sutrabhasya* that quoted an example from secular poetry and shows how its concern is exaggerated praise (*arthavada*) through the medium of *laksana* or indirect use of language. The verse cited is a lovely *svabhavakti* of black swans singing and moving gaily amidst dark lilies, as if danseuses dressed in black silk —

nilotpalavaneSvadya carantah
carusamsravah nilakauSeyasamvitah
pranrtyantlva kadambah

(*Ibid.* 1.1.24)

From all this it will be seen that Nature may have beauty of its own and it can be faithfully represented or artistically transformed in art, according to Indian thinkers. Now this is not at all different from the views of western thinkers from Plato down to C.E.M. Joad. The artist need not always create beauty. But he has to discover it with his gift of sensitive taste or imagination. Just as in Plato’s theory of forms or ideas, our knowledge of number is *a priori* to our function of counting three apples, five chairs, etc., so too our knowledge of beauty as a perfect value is the precondition for our regarding objects x, y and z in Nature as beautiful or otherwise. The Indians would agree with Joad when he says that an artist has aesthetic insight or vision by which he is enabled to discern the characteristic of beauty even in circumstances in which its presence escapes the ordinary man. He does not create beauty as such; he is the midwife who brings to birth the beauty that is latent in things by giving them a significant form by his skill (*kala*). We might state our finding epigrammatically thus; Alankara is the body of all art whose *guna* or invariable property is beauty discernible to a man of taste. Beauty is a value discovered in Nature or refashioned by a gifted artist. It is a value like truth and goodness because it is an aspect of reality and well worth man’s quest after it and without which his life would be less than perfect.

Faith in man’s ability to attain perfection, emotional as well as intellectual, is a singular characteristic of the Indian mind down the ages. But it was only after a hard battle that, in India too, the artist could wrest an honoured place for himself. Like Plato in Greece, the orthodoxy in India also banned the arts like poetry, music and dance in their *smritis*, or law-books, because they thought these would excite sensuality by pandering to the passions, if they were not harnessed to serve the cause of religion. The ban “*Kavyalapamsca varjayet*” is often alluded to by our men of letters like Mallinatha, and the only way they know of exonerating their favourite poets is by affirming that they are conformists upholding the accepted ethical norms and not sensualists. This stand is by no means a vindication of the autonomy of art; it is a servile submission to the dictates of orthodoxy. It is once again in Kumarila that we are able to trace the origin of this compromising attitude. He observes that even Valmiki and Vyasa deserve to claim our attention only because of their loyalty to Vedic scriptures:

“Vedaprashtanabhyasena hi Valmiki-Dvaipayana
prabhrtibhih tathaiva svavakyani pranitani”.

(Tantravarttika, I.ii.7; Ben.Edn. P. 16)

This is all right so far as religious art or literature is concerned; but what about secular art? Has it no place in the Indian scheme of things? Is not beauty or aesthetic value an end in itself?

Europe had to await the dawn of Renaissance and Reformation before humanism could assert itself in all directions. But in India, even before the Christian era, Kautilya in his Arthashastra and Bharata in his Natyashastra upheld the autonomy of the secular values of *artha* (political power and material possession) and *kama* (sensual pleasure) even like the first framers of the *Kamasashtra* anterior to Vatsyayana. In popular folk-literature represented by Hala's *Gathasaptasati* and Gunadhya's *Brhatkatha*, we have ample room for extra-marital love-affairs and adventurous careerists. a tradition which continued in the later *Dasakumaracarita* of Dandin and the still later *Suka-saptati*. In the field of lyric too, rank eroticism characterises Mayura's *astaka* as well as Amaru's *Sataka*. In the genre of drama, we have bawdy *bhanas* and obscene *prahasanas* produced as late as the 18th century. Though all these may be regarded as exceptions to the general rule of conformity to ethical norms, the question remains whether they deserve to be rated as artistic, exclusively by their aesthetic value. Only two theorists have attempted their defence in all seriousness. One is Rajasekhara whose facetious, or specious argument is that even Vedic texts are tarred with the same brush and hence poetry should not be singled out for attack. The second is Bhatta Tauta, the mentor of Abhinavagupta, who categorically states that passion in life and aesthetic emotion are two different things; and the dross of the former can be wiped out by the latter's healing touch. His words are:

“Just as dust is used to clean up a dusty mirror, the mind of the
connoisseur is purified of passion through passion itself.”

(Yathadarsanmalenaiva malamevopahanyate
tatha ragavabodhena pasyatam sodhyate manah)

(cited by Sridhara in his commentary on Kavyaprakasa)

This purification theory of Tauta rings like an echo as Aristotle's theory of “Katharsis” in tragedy and explained by Milton in homeopathic terms —

“As fire drives out fire, so pity pity.”

Again it was Tauta who vindicated the autonomy of aesthetic relish by declaring that “a state of passion for a woman in life is not srngara of literature” (“Kamavastha na Srngarah”) — cited in Abhinavabharati. (Vol. III.P.199.) This was a much needed corrective to the popular misconception that passionate love is the *leitmotif* of lyrics, a misconception shared even by writers like Rudra- bhatta. He states the hierarchy of values as under:

dharmadarthah, arthatah kamah, kamat sukhahalodayah
sadhyanesa tatsiddhyai srngaro nayako rasah
(Srngaratilaka, 1.20).

This dual attitude to srngara by Indian writers, some holding that it is a stepping stone to hedonistic pleasure, and others declaring that it is symbolic of mystic love of the devotee for his God (as in the schools of Vishnu-bhakti) has its parallels in modern writers on aesthetics who prescribe art like Tolstoy or who advocate it like Rabindranath Tagore. But for a viable *via media* or golden mean, Tauta stands as its best spokesman even like Aristotle

ranged against Plato's banishment of poets from his ideal Republic.

It is against this background that Bharata's theory of *rasa* becomes meaningful, a theory which touches all the problems of aesthetics in its boundless sweep, though it has started more controversies than it has silenced, in ancient as well as modern times. Bharata's *rasa* is primarily beauty in the composite art of *Natya* made up of many elements like music, dance, gesture, poetry and painting. In the art representing natural beauty, *alankara* or decorative skill of the artist as displayed in manipulating his medium or raw-material, — whether spontaneous or stylized — is like the body of art. We should now add that its vital essence or soul is *rasa* or aesthetic emotion or sentiment. We said that beauty was a *guna* or inner quality of the body of nature of art discernible to a sensitive beholder; *rasa* is something even more far-reaching than the *guna* of beauty because it can transform by its magic touch as it were even ugliness into beauty, and endow form even to the formless. This theory of *rasa*, especially as amplified by *Dhvani* philosophers, is a typically Indian contribution to aesthetics; and it has its parallelisms in the most modern thinking on the subject in the West like that of Susanne K. Langer, Cassirer, and T. S. Eliot.

It needs to be reiterated that all Indian aesthetic concepts are inter-related and interfused. They all revolve around the pivotal axis of *rasa*. *Alankara*, *guna*, *riti*, *vrtti*, *dhvani* and *aucitya* are telling instances in point. Some modern studies of these in isolation have resulted in obscuring the issues and their relevance as never before, though they have often been hailed as 'learned research.' Professor Hiriyanna has rightly decried this research mentality which shuts out new thought and prevents right understanding. But we have yet to learn this lesson, it seems! Indian aesthetics underscored the organic unity of these concepts by offering the analogy of a beauty queen. Her natural beauty also adorns her so to say; and is *alankara* which is of the *svatah-sambhavi* type. But she might add to her natural beauty of limbs by adorning herself with multiple ornaments, each one best suited to set off her charms to better advantage. That is the realm of *alankaras* coming under the class of *vakrokti* or *atisayokti* in literature. Both these aspects of her beauty are externally open to view; they are *bahya*. These may excite the beholder's admiration. But they cannot explain the inner springs or character. Her qualities of head and heart like liveliness or sweetness of disposition, grace in movement and speech and pure or spirited feelings — *i.e.*, *madhurya*, *lavanya*, and *prasada* or *ojas* — deserve to be distinguished from external *alankaras*; they are rightly termed *gunas* or qualities of the beautiful damsel. Now all this assemblage of *alankaras* and *gunas* would become purposeless or meaningless if they do not win for her the love a suitable husband, of her choice. As Kalidasa would say — “*priyesu saubhagyaphala hi caruta*”; the end of beauty is the love of a chosen beloved. Parvati had all the *alankaras* and *gunas* of a bewitching beauty and even the maddening lovegod himself on her side when she proudly displayed her charms before Siva. But Siva was unmoved. He did not reciprocate her love. Then Parvati realised the futility of her vaunted beauty “*nininda rupani hrdayena Parvati*”. But she did not give up her mission,; she took to *tapas* to win Siva's love, and triumphed by her changed heart. That is the story.

It is the same story in art also. *Alankaras* and *gunas* are the indispensable accompaniment of the beautiful damsel of art in general and literature in particular. But the end value or culmination of all these consists in *rasa* or aesthetic experience of the connoisseur. Her own emotions and feelings are *bhavas* and these play the key role in eliciting the intended *rasa* from the onlooker. The circumstances of time and place and so on provide the required background or *vibhava*. Her gay movements of limbs and blandishments indicative of her mental disposition might be termed *anubhavas*. Her fleeting or shifting

moods like anxiety, doubt and shyness only serve to emphasize the nucleus of a ruling sentiment like love within her heart and this is crystal-clear to her admirer, however much she might strive to hide them. In other words, the end-value of beauty is witnessed only when the beholder is enraptured by the interplay of passing moods or *vyabhicaribhdvas* illustrated by *anubhavas* and occasioned by *vibhavas* — all suggesting the ruling passion of a *sthayibhava*.

We see thus our aesthetic terminology growing. We started with two-fold *alankara*, viz., the natural and the super-added; which lie on the surface of beauty that are inner still; we finally landed in the inmost or vital centre of *sthayibhava* or *rasa* which can be understood only by way of its attendant accompaniments like *vibhava*, *anubhava* and *vyabhicaribhdva*. A state of mind is termed long-lasting or *sthayin* in contrast to another which is momentary (*vyabhicarin*), not in any absolute sense, but only in a functional or relative sense. For example, love is a *sthayibhava* in the story of Sakuntala; but the same love is a *vyabhicaribhava* in the story of the Buddha or Jimutavahana. When functionally, a *sthayibhava* gets scope for progress in all the recognised five stages of seed, sprout, plant, flower and fruit, it comes to be called *rasa*. It does not get such a scope for full-fledged development, it will remain a mere *bhava* without becoming *rasa*. Such indeed is the theory of *rasa* in a nutshell. Alankara, guna and rasa are the tripods of Indian aesthetics.

Let us now take a look at some other aesthetic terms which are complementary to these. Earlier we referred to the movements, gay or graceful and spirited, of our metaphorical beauty queen of art, which catch the beholder's attention. These partake of beauty in their own way no doubt and they are not *alankaras* or *gunas* or even *anubhavas* because they are typically natural and uniform unlike the latter which vary with every varying mood. These are rightly called *ritis* or styles — 'the sweet' or Vaidarbhi affording a clear contrast from 'the striking' or *Gaudi*. Of course, their mixture can itself be termed a third Pancali, as suggested by some. This is true of poetry alone among the arts.

But the other arts too have to reckon with this phenomenon. The art of dance-drama will talk of *vrttis*, viz., *Kaisiki*, the gay; *arabhati*, the spirited and *sattvati*, the heroic, besides *bharati* or mode of the spoken word, because the spoken word in dramatic prose is again distinct from lyrical poetry.

While some theorists equate *Riti* and *vrtti* in poetry as synonyms, stray writers like Udbhata would restrict the concept of *vrtti* to types of alliteration possible in poetry. In such a case, we could say that they correspond to the rhythmic movements natural to our beauty queen of art.

Such are the fundamental key-terms in Indian aesthetics — Alankara, Guna, bhava, rasa, riti and vrtti — which are all inter-involved since each explains an aspect of beauty in the poetic art and our idea of overall beauty would remain but partial and incomplete if we ignore any of these aspects. That is why almost all attempts at a definition of literature have become instances of so many failures in India as well as in the West. The content of poetry is as wide as nature and human nature or life at all levels. The form of poetry cannot be neatly brought, under any one of the categories already noticed. If we emphasize the body, we might ignore the soul or *vice-versa*. The truth is that literature is an inseparable composite of both as the very term *sahitya* connotes. Even if we agree that the body is made of *alankara* and *guna*, the choice of the soul between *riti* and *rasa* goes difficult, because both are essential each in its own way. All that we can unquestionably accept is that poetry is language suffused with beautiful meaning; but it is too general to be of much use. Indeed it

is the final way Jagannatha found, out of this difficulty. His seemingly simplistic definition is — “ramaniyarthapratipadakah sab-ah kavyam.” But he had to write pages and pages of explanation to make it precise and accurate and all-inclusive. On the other hand, much earlier than Jagannatha, the doyen of our aestheticians, viz., Anandavardhana, and after him, his admirer Kuntaka, had found two sustainable methods of giving an all-inclusive definition by creating a new aesthetic category which could cover all the aspects of beauty. Anandavardhana’s find was *dhvani* while that of Kuntaka was *Vakrokti*. Both these have greater claims on our attention than all the rest.

‘Dhvani’ does full justice to the pivotal place of *rasa* and allows the entry of *alankara* as well as *vastu* in its sweep of *vyangyārtha* or primarily suggested content; hence it can be termed the differentia or *sine qua non* of literature as a whole. Since *dhvani* is defined only as the soul (atman), the referential use of *alankaras* as well as qualities associated with them can be accommodated as the body of *kavya*. *Rasa* will now become the *raison de etre* of *ritis* and *vrttis* too. No wonder the theory of *dhvani* was applauded by posterity as the most adequate and acceptable aesthetic principle.

But to Anandavardhana’s immediate contemporaries and successors it did not appear so. It posited a power of language exclusive to poetry in order to explain *rasa*; and in the same breath allowed almost an equal status to suggested ideas and figures of speech. Its new explanation of *gunas* as properties of *rasa* was riddled with difficulty because *rasa* as such is no concrete object according to Advaita Vedanta and should really be *nirguna*. More than all, the very plea of Ananda - vardhana in accommodating all recognised literature under two heads, viz., *dhvani* or first-grade and *gunibhuta-vyangya* or second-grade depending upon the primacy or otherwise of suggested sense contained the seeds of a self-contradiction in his admission of a category like *rasavad-alankara*. If by definition *rasa* is that which is wholly and solely suggested, how can it be even functionally equated with a stated *alankara*? As literary critics know only too well, wide differences in literary taste do exist; and how can a definition summarily prescribe that ‘x’ category is the best and ‘y’ category is the next best? A really valid definition should only distinguish poetry from non-poetry. It cannot speak of degrees of beauty. Last, but not least important is the need for a new linguistic function like *vyanjana* or *dhvani*. If all meaning other than referential can be explained by logicians and semanticists either as a kind of inference (*anumana*) or as a kind of presumption (*arthapatti*) or as a metaphorical function (*laksana*), why should one be so particular about an exclusively poetic function of language like *vyanjand*?

These and other considerations against *dhvani* prompted Kuntaka to cut the guardian knot of Indian aesthetics by proposing the least controversial and most comprehensive definition of poetry by making his all-embracing principle of *vakrokti* the differentia of *sahitya* or singular unity of form and content. *Vakrokti* in its myriad forms could account for all the aesthetic categories adequately assigning all of them an important place, *vastu* and *rasa* on the content-side (alankarya), *alankaras* on the form-side, and varying *gunas* as rooted in the varied types of poetic temperament, leading to different styles (*margas*). Even this bare sketch of the different Indian concepts is an unavoidable preliminary to understand any one of them in proper perspective. Almost all the modern literary critics in the West who believe in analytico-critical studies of poetic imagery and who accept like I. A. Richards the emotive use of language in poetry, or like William Empson talk of ‘seven types of ambiguity’ or like E.M.W. Tillyard admit types of poetry ‘direct and oblique are anticipated in essence both by Anandavardhana and Kuntaka. We might content ourselves here with a single quotation:

Poetry strives for a conviction begotten of the emotions rather than of the reason. The approach of poetry is indirect. It proceeds by means of suggestion, implication, reflection Its method is largely symbolical. It is more interested in connotations than in denotations. (Harold R. Walley and J. Harold Wilson)

The Anatomy of Literature, New York, 1934, pp. 143-144)

Yet, there is one remarkable difference too. The modern west has not yet found experimental psychology confirming the existence of anything like a soul in man. The very analogy of Indian aestheticians might therefore appear anathema to them.

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