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## Diction: The Soul of a Literary Composition

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### Abstract:

In Indian tradition, a literary composition has been conceived as *Kāvya-puruṣa* having both body and soul. *Śabdārtha* (sound and sense) form his body and *alaṃkāras* (figures) as the ornaments. Indian aestheticians like Bharata, Bhāmaha, Vāmana, Ānandvardhan, Kuntaka and Ksemendra have dealt with *śabdārtha* respectively in relation to *rasa*, *alaṃkāra*, *rīti*, *dhvani*, *vakrokti* and *aucitya*. In order to accept a literary composition one needs to be equipped with these critical tools, depending upon the perspective. The present paper aims at looking *śabdārtha* from the view point of Vāmana who accepts diction as an special arrangement of words, characterized by the presence of *guṇas* (qualities) which contribute to *kāvya-saundarya* (the beauty of a literary composition) and categorizes diction as *vaidarbhīriti*, *gaudīyārīti* and *pāñcālīriti* based on particular phrasal organizations.

**Keywords:** Kāvya-puruṣa, Śabdārtha, rīti, kāvyasaundarya, aestheticians, saḥṛadaya.

Literature is nothing else, but an aesthetic art aiming at a particular purpose that is of imparting aesthetic pleasure. The things described in literature do not delight the readers directly but it is the creative use of language only which either delights or disturbs. The creative use of language is capable of arousing the interest of an appreciative reader of fine taste and is sufficient for the aesthetic experience. The Indian *aestheticians* also have given a more convincing explanation of the role of the creative use of language in literature and have examined it from its various standpoints as *rasa* (aesthetic pleasure), *alaṃkāra* (embellishment), *rīti* (diction), *dhvani* (suggestion), *vakrokti* (oblique expression) and *aucitya* (propriety).

- All the writers and poets use language creatively impregnated with fine diction which enables them to transform their basic concept into an effective and meaningful message. The selection of diction is, undoubtedly, an important aspect of the creative use of language. Diction i.e. the choice of words

according to the content, context, mood, tone and atmosphere conveys the writer's feelings, emotions and messages to the readers quite naturally because it is only the diction or word that establishes a connection between the writer and the reader i.e. the *sahṛadaya*. As far as the selection of diction for a literary composition, particularly with reference to poetry or poetic excellence is considered, it works as providing soul to it because poetry is basically a verbal icon or verbal structure. One must be fully aware of the potency of words and word-structure in order to apprehend a poetic structure. Poetry is that evokes a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience or a specific emotional response through language chosen and arranged for its meaning, sound and rhythm. Whatever is written in poetic excellence, aims at imparting some *bhāva* and this *bhāva* is revealed in the form of *rasābhivyakti*. In this way *rasa* is the body and the *bhāva* is soul of poetry or *kāvya*. Acharya Vāmana's (8<sup>th</sup>c), *riti* deals with both of these aspects of *kāvya* means body and soul i.e. *shabdārtha*.

Ācārya Vāmana's *Rīti Siddhanta* relates to word-structure in the form of phrasal organization so it can work as a tool for the reader by enabling him with the essential qualities of a layman for the apprehension and analysis of any poetic composition. Vāmana, in his treatise *Kāvya-lamkārasūtrāṇi* explains *rīti* in detail. In fact, a new era ushers in the history of Indian Sanskrit poetics with the introduction of *rīti* in the theory of criticism, because it is Vāmana who for the first time in the history of Indian Sanskrit poetics, deals with the term '*rīti*' saying it '*kāvya-kīātmā*' and commands the credit of founding the *rīti* school. Recognizing the importance of his deed, Keith praises him in these words: ".....We have in him the emergence, however, of a new idea that is of the soul of poetry as opposed merely to the body." The Indian aesthetic thought in the field of '*kāvya-kīātmā*' (soul of poetry) has reached its acme in *Kāvya-lamkārasūtrāṇi*. Vāmana lays down in clear terms: '*rīti-rātmakāvyaśya*' (Vāmana. I. 2. 6) i.e. 'the *rīti* is the soul of poetry' and explains this *sūtra* in the *vṛtti*: '*rītir-nāmeyam ātmakāvyaśya. Śārīrasyevetivākyaśeṣḥ.*' (Vāmana. 1. 2.) (*Rīti* is to the *kāvya* what *ātmān* is to the *śarīra*). It is necessary here to study the etymology of the terms *ātmān* and *rīti* in order to realize the significance of Vāmana's conception of the soul of a *kāvya*. The word *ātmān* is believed to have been derived from the root 'At' meaning to move constantly or from the root 'An' meaning to live, or perhaps from both. The term '*rīti*' is derived from the root 'Ri' meaning to move. The identity of *rīti* with *ātmān* becomes complete when we take Vāmana's metaphor of *guṇasas praṇas*. Just as the *ātmān* is the *kāraṇaśarīra* of a person, *rīti* is the *kāraṇaśarīra* of a *kāvya*. Emphasizing *rīti* as the soul of *kāvya*, next, he defines what

*rīti* is and explains the nature of *rīti* in the *sūtra* and the *vṛtti*: ‘*viśiṣṭāpada-racanārītiḥ*.’ (Vāmana. 1. 2. 7), ‘*viśeṣavatīpadānāmracanārītiḥ*’ (Vāmana. 1. 2. ) (The particular arrangement of words (i.e. inflected nouns, pronouns and adjectives together with conjugated verbs) is called *rīti*. Defining *rīti* as “*viśiṣṭāpadaracanārītiḥ*” or a special arrangement of words, Vāmana seeks to establish that diction has a “higher integrative reality” than figure or image. Vāmana’s *rīti* is of three types according to various combinations of phrasal organizations. The first *rīti* is called *vaidarbhīrīti*, *arīti* based on the use of the *asamāsa* (the phrasal organization, devoid of compounds). It has *mādhurya* (melody) which generates special delight by liquefying the reader’s psyche. It also includes the use of phonemes and syllables to produce rhythmic effect, especially the repetition of same vocal class - nasal, semi vowels and short syllables with a total absence of hard consonants. It is experienced more and more in compositions delineating the *sambhogaśṛṅgāra* (erotic sentiment due to union), the *vipralambha* (erotic sentiment due to separation), the *karuṇa* (sentiment of pathos), and the *śānta rasa* (sentiment of quietitude). The use of diction supporting to *vaidarbhīrīti* is conspicuous in the following lines from “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and explains how the use of appropriate diction is helpful in imparting the meaning and mood:

Fore ever piping songs, forever new,  
More happy love! More happy, happy love!  
For ever warm and still to be enjoy’d  
For ever panting and forever young.

(“Ode on a Grecian Urn” l. 24-27)

The diction used here is replete with same lexical repetition and alliteration and performs an important role in expanding and exhibiting the theme of the poem, “Ode on a Grecian Urn” i.e. the immortality of art contrasted with the mortality of human beings. Human emotions and the human happiness are brief, but art can enshrine them with an ideal beauty that never fades and thus permanent, how simply and beautifully this truth is revealed by the poet with the help of lexical repetitions. The actual men and women represented on the Urn are gone i.e. no more, but art has conferred upon them a permanence which age or time can’t wither. The appropriate word vocabulary and diction used is quite helpful in presenting the theme of the poem. The words “forever” and “happy” in this stanza are repeated almost as a mantra: “forever” is used twice in line 24, once in 26, twice in 27. The word “happy” is used similarly thrice in line 25, but the repetition is used to support the theme of the poem and not unnecessarily. The repetition of “happy” emphasizes Keats’s keen appreciation of the happiness imposed on the trees that cannot shed their leaves so always will celebrate the

spring season and this repetitive excess of joy and pleasure is felt by the lovers as well as the reader with the help of this repetition. The repeated use of “forever” is also very important as it not only imparts rhythm and rhyme to the lines but also supports the theme of the poem i.e. the work of Art is permanent as compared to human life. The second and the fourth line of the passage have the internal repetition of “forever”. The lexical repetition as well as the consonantal repetition of nasal sound /ŋ/ in the words – “piping”, “songs”, “panting” and “young”, assisted with the repetition of /m/, and/n/ helps in enhancing the music and melody of the lines, and thus imparts the *mādhuryagūṇa* (the excellence of sweetness) to the lines. The picture on the Urn serve as *viṣayālamban* and the poet and readers are *āśrayālamban* in whom the feelings and emotions of love generate after viewing the warm and young love making image created here. The language and diction used by the poet is so simple that it does not demand any special effort on the part of the reader to grasp the meaning. Thus, these lines prove that the poetic diction having all the features of Vāmana’s *vaidarbhīrīti* enables the *sahradaya* to grasp the poet’s desired meaning and thus to get the aesthetic pleasure too.

The second *rīti* of Ācārya Vāmanais called the *pāñcālīrīti*, a diction based on use of the *madhyama-samāsa* (phrasal organization, made up of small compounds). It pervades the entire mind of the reader immediately even as fire catches the dry fuel which is called to be *prasādagūṇa* (the excellence of perspicuity). This excellence is produced by the phrases which are easily understandable. It well accords with all the *rasas*. In the following lines from Keats’s well known narrative, The Eve of St. Agnes, the description of morning scene is well elaborated with the use of appropriate diction supporting to the scene, context, mood and atmosphere:

Ah; bitter chill it was!  
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;  
The hare limp’d trembling through the frozen grass,  
And silent was the flock in woolly fold:  
Numb were the Beadsman’s fingers, while he told  
His rosary, and while his frosted breath,  
Like pious incense from a censor old,  
Seem’d taking flight for heaven, without a death,  
Past the sweet Virgin’s picture, while his prayer he saith.

(The Eve of St. Agnes ll. 1-9)

In the very first line, with the phrase “Ah, bitter chill it was”, the reader is made aware of poet’s point of view. The poet uses “Ah”, an interjection, to tell the extremity of cold. The

semantic field of cold is expressed through suitable words and comprehensible phrases like, “bitter chill”, “The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold”, “hare limp’d trembling”, “the frozen grass”, “woolly fold”, “numb”, and “frosted breath” etc., which all convey a sense of cold that surrounds the Beadsman at the start of the poem. Besides these phrases the poet has also used suitable vocabulary in the form of adjectives like, “silent” and “numb” to convey the desired meaning. The striking imagery conveying the suffering of the owl and the hare in the phrases like, “The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold”, and “The hare limp’d trembling through the frozen grass”, easily enables the reader to understand that it is the effect of cold which made the owl unable to fly and the hare to tremble and limp. In the phrase “The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold”, the dramatic sense deepens as the poet tries to catch the owl’s shivering in the cold by using the expression “a-cold” and thus enables the reader to feel the same. Similarly the phrases, “his frosted breath”, and “taking flight for heaven” as well as the use of adjective, “numb” clearly explain that the beadsman is alive but because of the extreme cold his fingers are senseless and his breath is frosted like chilled smoke going upwards to the sky. The use of simile for the frosted breath of the beadsman, “Like pious incense from a censor old” and the phrases, “sweet Virgin’s picture” and “taking flight for heaven” unerringly foreground calm and peaceful moment. The creative use of diphthongs in the words like- “feathers”, “Beadsman”, “breath”, “seem’d”, “heaven” and “death” with the soft sibilant /s/ supports to the calm, silent and chilled environment. The use of literary devices as alliteration, consonance and alternate rhyme is helpful in enhancing the lyrical and musical effect. The interweaving artistic use of vowel patterns as short vowel /i/ in the words as “bitter”, “chill”, “his”, “limp’d”, “fingers”, “picture” etc. and the long vowel /i/ in the words like “silent”, “while”, “like”, “flight” etc. lends the stanza its distinctive music. The assonance “-old”, along with the interlocking rhyme, connects lines 2, 4, 5 and 7 in the words “cold”, “fold”, “told”, and “old”. This assonance is important as it creates an organic whole for the stanza by linking the two quatrains together. Furthermore, two patterns of alliterations, /f/ (except the first and last lines) and /l/ (every line), are interspersed throughout the poem and make the rhythm consistent, regular, and reverberating. Thus the phrasal organization consisting of comprehensible phrases impregnated with *prasādaguṇa* evokes the sentiment of suspense (*adbhutarasa*) here. The use of comprehensible phrasal diction supports Vāmana’s *pāñcālīrīti* and enables the reader to be one with the poet’s thought.

The last type of Vāmana’s *rīti* is *gauḍi*, *arīti* based on the use of the *ḍīrgha-samāsa* (the phrasal organization made up of long compounds). It has *ojas* (elegance) which excites and inflames the psyche. It attains prominence in the delineation of *vīra* (heroic

sentiment), *bībhatsa* (sentiment of disgust) and *raudra* (sentiment of anger) *rasas*. It is generated by the repetition of plosive bilabial /p/, /b/, post- alveolar affricates/tʃ/, /dʒ/, affricate palato-alveolar/tʃ/, /dʒ/, fricative dental /θ/, /ð/ and fricative alveolar/s/, /ʃ/.

The following lines from Keats's *Hyperion* exemplify the use of diction having long compounds and harsh sounds and how this diction is helpful in conveying the meaning imparted by the poet:

He enter'd but he enter'd full of wrath;  
His flaming robes stream'd out beyond his heels,  
And gave a roar, as if of earthly fire,  
That scar'd away the meek ethereal Hours  
And made their dove-wings tremble.

(*Hyperion*, I: ll. 213-217)

These lines are used by the poet to introduce *Hyperion* and the use of long compounds and paronomastic diction is quite apt to depict *Hyperion*'s vigorous nature and character. In the beginning of the description the *vigour* is manifested through long compounds like "He enter'd but he enter'd full of wrath", "His flaming robes stream'd out beyond his heels", "And gave a roar, as if of earthly fire, /That scar'd away the meek ethereal Hours /And made their dove-wings tremble." All the phrases are quite appropriate in describing the strong and angry personality of *Hyperion*. *Hyperion* is full of anger at the unbelievable incident of *Titans*'s defeat and this anger is clearly reflected in all the above mentioned long compounds. The use of harsh phonemes indicative of vigour and anger like the affricate palato-alveolar /tʃ/, /dʒ/, dental fricative /ð/ & /θ/ and labio dental fricative /f/ & /v/ is quite evident here. The use of simile in comparing *Hyperion* to "earthly fire" and the Greek personification of hours who have wings like those of doves, is also quite apt in picturing the true image of *Hyperion*'s anger which has the capacity of scaring away his enemies as well as making them to tremble because of his strength. The repetition of "he entered" along with the conjunction "but" in the phrase "He enter'd but he enter'd full of wrath", is also used purposefully by the poet. The purpose is to enable the reader to be familiar with the angry mood of *Hyperion* through long compounds and paronomastic *upamās*.

All the three types of diction of *Ācārya Vāmana*, no doubt being the soul of any poetic excellence, enable the reader to be one with the mind of the poet. It is well explained with the help of a few examples taken from Keats's poetry. Among the Romantic poets, Keats is an eminent and one of the best creative talents. The important aspect of his poetic genius is his



love of fine and imagination phrases. He in his poetry represents the most delightful and unique expression of human soul. For this particular purpose he uses his language creatively impregnated with fine phrasal organization which enables him to transform his basic concept into an effective and meaningful message. His poetry possessed a unique charm caused by the creative use of language in terms of the phrasal organizations. He is very careful and choosy about the words, epithets and phrases that he uses to present his images. He is basically a pictorial artist in words and all the essential qualities of a painter are present in him. For the very purpose of word-paintings, he fondly employs a series of compounds in his poems to enhance the beauty of the poetic expression. These phrases, either borrowed or coined by him, are like germs studded in the ornaments of his poems and glitter distinctly. In a letter to his friend Bailey, he wrote, "I look upon fine phrases like a lover" (Bate 51). In fact, a beautiful phrase delights him with a sense of intoxication and he had the gift of making what Bridges calls, "imaginative phrases" (Bridges 70) this gift is very real of his poetic birth right. In fact, the word order and phraseology in his poetry is very potent and valuable as it determines the sequence in which the reader apprehends the elements of the complex structure of the meanings embodied in the words. He skilfully employs the device of phraseology to create a clever effect as well as to suggest the meaning that he intends to convey. This remarkable quality of his poetic craftsmanship provides a proper ground for the manifestation of Ācārya Vāmana's view of poetic diction.

To sum up, the use of diction according to Ācārya Vāmana's *rīti* mainly depends upon the fact how the meaning in *kāvya* is imparted in consonance with *rasa*, *guṇa* and *alamkāras* which is consummated by the following aspects of words:

- i) Repetition of words which includes the devices of rhythm, rhyme, and meter facilitated by phonemes and syllables.
- ii) Vocabulary of language or lexical items - usage, synonym, transference, adjective, pronoun, indeclinable or compounds, particle and verb etc.
- iii) Grammatical items – tense, case, number, person, voices, affixes etc.
- iv) Structural items or word powers- denotation, connotation, suggestion.

In a word, the diction employing phrasal organization- without compounds, with short compounds and with long compounds-is variously used in any poetic expression to increase beauty, enhance qualities, depict nature, heighten feelings, delineate action or activities and circumstances, expose internal state, delineate character, exhibit objective, depict scene,



characterize the spontaneous movements and put thoughts in tune with feelings. These aspects of *rīti* also help in producing *rasa* (the aesthetic pleasure), the very purpose of *kāvya*.

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