

DHVANI: BEYOND THE BOUND OF LITERAL MEANING

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Dhvani is one of the most enduring concepts in Indian aesthetics. In particular, the definition of poetry revolves around this concept. The central idea that defines dhvani is suggestion. It is about the use of linguistic expressions to suggest and trigger imaginations in the mind of the reader. The suggestive function of language is not limited to poetry; it is used in ordinary communication as well. For instance, the recorded message in the train which says “The train stops here” is to suggest to the commuters to alight. The information is meant to prompt specific action from the commuters. Consider another example: “The sun has set in this city” is a suggestive expression. In an appropriate context, it is used suggestively to inform the death of a renowned personality in a city. Although the above examples are suggestive expressions, they are not poetic expressions for reasons we will explicate in the present work. For one thing, expressions in ordinary language are usually confined to grammatical rules while poetic expressions have meanings beyond the grammatical functions or rules.

In contrast, the use of suggestion in the context of poetry is not intended either towards performing specific action or towards conveying some information. Rather, it is to trigger the imaginative mind with hope to arouse certain feelings. For example, in the verse given below, Kalidas is suggesting the painful and pleasurable emotions, two human natures intertwined in life, through the imagery movements of the moon and the sun. He is not *literally* describing the movements of the moon and the sun.

यात्येकतऽस्तशखरं पतिरोषधीनामाविष्कृतारुणपुरःसर एकतोऽर्कः ।

तेजोद्वयस्य युगपद्वयसनोदयाभ्यां लोको नियम्यत इवात्मदशान्तरेषु ॥

[Trans.: “On one side the lord of the flora (the moon) is going to the peak of the western (lit. the setting) mountain, and on the other is the sun having Aruna

as his precursor. By the simultaneous rising and setting of the two luminaries this world seems to be governed in its transitions.”]

Some important features that characterise poetry can be noted in the given verse: *alamkāras* (metaphors), *guṇas* (poetic qualities), *chandas* (rhymes), and *bhāvas* (emotions). However, what is relished by a reader is its suggested meaning, the overall content of the verse. It is certainly not about the movements of the sun and the moon; it has little to do with either description or explanation of natural phenomena. Here, the poet creates a world of words of his own with his unique poetic genius. This world of the poet is unrestrained from the conventions of language and so the meanings of expressions have a life beyond the literal meanings of the expressions. This world created by the poet is enjoyed by persons of taste or connoisseur (*sahridaya*). The obvious question is this: How do meanings of poetic expressions transcend literal meanings of ordinary language? Much of the subsequent discussions is directed towards addressing this question and consequently, towards characterising literal meaning and suggested meaning.

Delineating literal and suggested meanings

Indian aestheticians of various schools have tried to pin down what exactly is the main element that makes a combination of ordinary words into a poem. Some have postulated that *alamkāras* are the most essential element in poetry while others have stressed on the importance of *vakrokti*, *guṇa*, *rīti*, or *aucitya* etc.¹ It would be right to concur with the proponents of dhvani theory that although all these elements are essential in the creation of a poem, dhvani is the most important feature of poetry. The notion of “suggested meaning” is associated with different terms like *dhvani*, (suggesting), *vyañjanā* (hinting), *pratiyāmāna* (implication), and *avagamana* (giving to understand) etc. As a literary category, dhvani is also familiar among the Grammarians. For instance,

¹ In the history of Indian poetics, beginning from the 6th century CE there have been many attempts to define poetry. Bhāmaha in his text *Kāvyaalamkāra* has enumerated *alamkāras*, Dandin in his celebrated work *Kāvyaadarśa* talks of *mārga*, Vāmana in *Kāvyaalamkārasūtra* established *rīti*, Ksemendra in *Aucitya-vicāra- carcā* maintained that the central element is *aucitya* and Kuntaka in his seminal work on poetics *Vakroktijīvitam* endorsed *vakrokti*.

Patanjali makes a distinction between sphota and dhvani. Sphota is the meaning associated with symbols and dhvani, the articulated audible sounds.

It was Ānandavardhana, who systematically conceptualized dhvani in his treatise Dhvanyāloka in the 9th century AD. It may be pointed out that though the concept of dhvani was known to his predecessors², until he formulated it and gave it a new dimension of interpretation, it was a matter of controversy among scholars. Following Ānandavardhana, Abhinavagupta delved deeper into the concept in his commentary Dhvanyāloka-Lochana and established a view known as *therasa-dhvani*. He argues that *rasa-dhvani* is the essence of poetry (*kāvya-vyāpārāgocaro rasa dhvanirīti*) which is appreciated by the critics and enjoyed by the *sahridayas*.

The question of meaning was the crucial factor that differentiated literary expression into prosaic and poetic genres in ancient India. Conventionally, the two theoretical concepts, namely *śāstra* and *kāvya*, were employed with effect to answer and classify whether a given text was of ordinary expression or poetry.³ On the one side was ordinary expression or matter-of-fact expression named *śāstrokti*, and on the other was poetic expression called *kāvyyokti*. *Śāstrokti* was defined in terms of primary meaning of a word or *abhidhā*, while *kāvyyokti* was characterised by the secondary meaning of a word or *lakṣaṇā*. For long poetry was defined in terms of *lakṣaṇā* or secondary meaning till the end of ninth century when Ānandavardhana's intervention marked significant turn with the introduction of new meaning called *vyañjanā*. Both *vyañjanā* and dhvani are used in the same sense, that is, suggestion. *Vyañjanā* is the general potency of a word

² काव्यस्यात्मा ध्वनिरिति बुधैर्यः समाम्नातपूर्वस्तस्याभावं जगदुरपरे भाक्तमाहुस्तमन्ये ।

केचिद्वाचां स्थितमविषये तत्त्वमूचुस्तदीयं तेन ब्रूमः सहृदयमनःप्रीतये तत्स्वरूपम् ॥ (Dhvanyāloka 1.1)

“Though the learned men of yore have declared time and again that the soul of poetry is suggestion, some would aver its non-existence, some would regard it as something (logically) implied and some others would speak of its essence as lying beyond the scope of words. We propose, therefore, to explain its nature and bring delight to the hearts of perceptive critics.”

The three view points mentioned by Ānandavardhana were prevalent about dhvani among the learned thinkers on poetry. Among them *abhāvavādina*-s denied the very existence of dhvani, *bhāktavādina*-s included dhvani into *lakṣaṇā*; while *anirvacanīyatā-vādina*-s maintained that dhvani is indescribable.

³ Bhāmaha was the first who attempted to define poetry (*śabdārthausāhitaukāvyam*) in terms of *alamkāras*. He made a distinction between *śāstra* and *kāvya* and the basis for this distinction was *alamkāra*-s and this position was later endorsed by almost everyone who attempted to define poetry.

while dhvani is confined only to poetry.

Abhidhā is the verbal power to convey the literal or conventional meaning of an expression. “That which denotes the direct conventional meaning (*sākṣātsāṅketitam*) is the expressive word.”⁴ It is also called the primary function of a word⁵. According to this view, a word or an expression corresponds to something, a fact or an object, in the world. In this sense, meaning of an expression has a denotation. However, when an expression fails to convey conventional or denotational meaning or is incompatible with the primary function of a word and some other meaning is imposed, it is called *lakṣanā* (indication)⁶. In other word, a secondary meaning, *lakṣanā*, is imposed on an expression when its primary meaning fails to make sense. Put it differently, indicative (or indicated) meaning arises only when the denotative meaning of an expression is incompatible or incomprehensible (*mukhyārthabādha*). For instance, the phrase ‘the hamlet on the river *gangā*’ (*gangāyāṁghoṣaḥ*), becomes problematic when read literally because a house cannot be (situated) on a river. Therefore, the meaning of the phrase ‘on the river Ganges’ is understood only through its indicative meaning – that is, the house is located near the bank of river. It is to be noted that though the indicated meaning is different from its literal meaning, yet it is dependent or based on denotative meaning (*abhidhā*) in a given context.

To ask a related question above, “When do we assign *lakṣyārtha* (indicated meaning) to an ordinary expression?” For this, three conditions have been proposed:

1. The first condition is that the primary meaning should be inadequate to convey the real or intended sense.
2. Secondly, there should be a close connection between primary and secondary meaning.

⁴ *Kāvyaṣaṣṭkā* of Mammata, Ganganatha Jha, Bhartiya Vidya Prakashan, Varanasi, India, 1967, Verse, 2.7

⁵ Different translation of *abhidhā* is used such as, denoted, literal, primary, and direct meaning.

⁶ *Lakṣanā* is translated as Indication by Ganganatha Jha in *Kāvyaṣaṣṭkā*. It is also called secondary meaning as *abhidhā* is called primary meaning and some scholars translate *lakṣanā* as metaphorical usage.

3. Thirdly, there should be a particular purpose (*prayojana*) or some linguistic usage (*rūḍhi*) to resort to the secondary meaning.

The above conditions can be elucidated as follows: consider a term “*karmāṇikuśalaḥ*” which means “an expert in one’s work”. However, the primary or literal meaning of the term “*kuśalaḥ*” is “grass-chopper” but this literal meaning is inapplicable if we use it to describe someone in another context, say, archery or music. Thus, from the primary meaning (*kuśalaḥ*), we have derived its indicated meaning: “a person who is generally efficient in his/her work”. Next, with regard to the second condition of *lakṣanā*, we can observe the existence of some definite relation between the primary and secondary meaning. Grass-chopping is an exercise which is accomplished by an expert in cutting a special kind of grass known as ‘*kuśa*’. The notion of expert or expertise or efficient which is there in the term ‘*kuśalaḥ*’ has become the basis of the indicative meaning. Finally, the third condition is also satisfied in that the term ‘*kuśalaḥ*’ is used to denote or describe expertise in doing something; that is, a context or purpose of using this term is available.

In any culture or linguistic community, the notions of primary and secondary meanings exist in one form or the other. However, it is debatable if the secondary (indicated) meaning is sufficient to account for poetic expressions. Traditionally, Mīmāṃsakas and Nyāiyāyikas were convinced that poetry can be explained in terms of *lakṣanā*, the indicated meaning. Against this received traditional stance of the duo, Ānandavardhana advanced his theory of *vyāñjanā* (suggestion) as meaning for poetic expression. Nonetheless, he too agreed with the standard view that *abhidhā* is the basis for *vyāñjanā* as much as it is for *lakṣanā*. Ānandavardhana was inspired by Bhartṛhari’s concept of *sphoṭa* (potentiality of meaning) and extended it to poetry. He is of the view that the potentiality of a word or expression cannot be limited to just primary (denotative) and secondary (indicative) meanings. Accordingly, he directed his focus to what may be termed as the third potency of a word namely *vyāñjanā* (suggestion).

For Ānandavardhana, the understanding of primary meaning is essential to unravel the meaning of a text but reading poetry is more than unravelling the ‘meanings

of words'; it affects the emotions of the readers. Neither the primary meaning nor the secondary meaning has the potential of delineating *rasa* (aesthetic emotions) which is essential to the 'life of poetry'. He realized that poetry is not just about understanding the 'meaning' of a poem but about beauty as much; it is about delighting the readers. In short, poetry has to be seen from a holistic perspective. "This includes everything other than the literal meaning (the primary and the metaphorical sense). And under the term 'meaning' is included not only the information conveyed, but also the emotion induced; this naturally necessitates the assumption of suggestive power for language" (Kunjani Raja 1977: 281). Accordingly, Ānandavardhana established *vyañjanā*, the third potency of word, as a doctrine of aesthetic theory and named it *dhvani*.

"That kind of poetry, wherein the (conventional) meaning renders itself secondary or the (conventional) word renders its meaning secondary and suggests the intended or implied meaning, is designated by the learned as *dhvani* or suggestive poetry" (*Dhvanyāloka* 1.13).

Now the question arises as to how *dhvani*, the suggested meaning, is attributed to poetic words and expressions. Ānandavardhana postulates that it is the special gift of the poet (*pratibhā*) to create the suggestive sense. "The speech of first-rate poets streaming forth that sweet content reveals clearly their extraordinary genius which is as unearthly as it is ever bright" (*Dhvanyāloka* 1.6). This "suggested sense" is like the sweet aroma coming out from the pot of a skillful or gifted cook – the suggested sense is like the sweet aroma which cannot be seen but which can be smelt.⁷ The experience of the sweet aroma is what distinguishes poetry from prose and other ordinary expressions.

In other words, the suggestive sense of poetic expressions cannot be grasped by merely learning grammar or through analysis of words. Otherwise, anybody who has the knowledge of grammar could easily grasp the meaning of a poem. But this is not the

⁷ Since meaning is conventionally defined as denotation, it can be shown in that there is a corresponding picture for a word or expression. But the suggested sense cannot be shown; it can only be felt through the creative imagination of the mind (reader). More on this point will be discussed in the following sections.

case. The suggested sense can be comprehended only by those who have *pratibhā*. Dhvani in a poem comes to life only when both the poet and the reader have *pratibhā* or poetic creativity. “It is not understood by a mere learning in grammar and in dictionary. It is understood only by those who have an insight into the true significance of poetry” (*Dhvanyāloka* 1.7).

Essentializing dhvani

Digging deeper into the concept of dhvani, Ānandavardhana stresses that poetry possesses two levels of meaning, viz., one is literal (*vācya*)⁸ and the other is implied (*pratīyamāna*). The former reveal itself instantly whereas the latter is hidden in layers to be retrieved by a *rasika*. “The meaning which wins the admiration of refined critics is decided to be the soul of poetry. The ‘explicit’ and the ‘implicit’ are regarded as its two aspects” (*Dhvanyāloka* 1.2). He holds that the direct or literal meaning is the foundation of suggested meaning. The poet makes use of the literal meaning purposively so that the suggested sense is achieved. Just as a man who wants to see an object in the dark holds a lamp, as a lamp is the means to achieve the object, in the same way, a poet makes use of literal meaning to achieve the suggested sense. That is the reason the knowledge of primary meaning is important in order to understand the suggested meaning. However, the primary meaning does not remain important once the suggestion is grasped by the connoisseur of poetry. The primary meaning is suppressed and suggested meaning appears like a flash of light to the *rasikas* (connoisseurs).

Since the implicit meaning (*pratīyamānārtha*) is that which is experienced by the appreciative reader or *sahrdaya*, Ānandavardhana compares it with the encounter of a beautiful woman. Just as a woman’s beauty is distinct from the beauty of the individual parts of the body, in the same way while the suggested meaning is present in various elements of poetry, it nevertheless is different from them. The entire experience is totally

⁸ The translation of the term *vācya* as literal, here, is not *abhidhā* or denotation but it is explicit aspect of dhvani which is gross and can be grasped through *alamkāras*, *gṇna* etc. Ānandavardhana himself clarifies the meaning of *vācya*, in the next *Karika*, “...explicit is commonly known and it has been already set forth in many ways through figures of speech such as the simile...” (*Dhvanyāloka* 1.3)

different. The charm in a woman is something which is different from the beauty of particular parts of the body and yet it is revealed by the configuration of the different parts of the body. Beauty is more than the sum of the beautiful body parts and so also the implied meaning is more than the sum of its parts. It is grasped wholly.

Abhinavagupta explains dhvani in a more subtle way. He says that it is with the imagination of an appreciative reader that the meaning of the word emerges. In this sense, it transcends or supersedes the other powers of *abhidhā*, *tātparya* and *lakṣaṇā*. It is something even more than the sum total of these three. Abhinavagupta elaborates:

“The suggestive power is the power to suggest, a power which has its origin in one’s understanding of objects revealed by the first three powers, and which is then assisted by the imagination of the listener which has been prepared by these revelations. This suggestive power, this suggestive operation, overshadows the three operations which proceed it and is the very soul of poetry” (*Locana* on *Dhvanyāloka* 1.4: 88).

Abhinavagupta holds this suggested sense is revealed in the various shades of meaning which is similar to the resonance of a bell. He further says that this fourth kind of meaning is known as dhvani.

Objection to dhvani theory and counter-response

The dhvani theory of meaning did not go unopposed. Mahimabhaṭṭa in his treatise *Vyaktiviveka* criticizes the doctrine of dhvani. He argues that there is no need to accept a new potency of word (i.e. *vyañjanā*) because the suggested sense or *vyañjanā* can be expressed through the process of inference (*anumāna*). For instance, in the following verse the suggested meaning can be understood through inference as well:

भ्रम धार्मिक विस्रब्धः स शुनकोऽद्य मारितस्तेन ।

गोदावरीनदीकूललतागहनवासिना द्रुप्तसिंहेन ॥

[*Trans.*: “Ramble freely, pious man! That dog to-day is killed by the fierce lion that dwells in Godāvarīriver.”]

In the above lines, when the girl says that the lion had killed the dog, she is suggesting (with covert intent) to the pious man that it is now safe for him to wander about in the river. It is assumed that prior to the killing of the dog, the pious man was afraid of the dog which used to trouble him. But there is more to this story: the wondering of the pious man at the river bank, which also happens to be the meeting place of the girl with her lover, is not welcome by the girl. Given this background context, these seemingly assuring words by the girl made him infer the true significance of the words: there is a greater danger – the lion – that awaits him in the river bank. The suggested meaning is obtained as follows from the inference: As the ‘roaming of a fearful person’ is invariably concomitant (*vyāpti*) with the certainty of ‘the absence of all sources of fear’ but since the source of fear (lion) is present on the bank of the Godavari river, therefore, the fearful person should not wander.

In the example *pakṣa* (minor term) is the bank of the Godavari river, *hetu* (middle term) is the lion, and *sādhya* (major term) is prohibition to wander. Hence, the purpose of the girl, i.e., ‘to prohibit that man from wandering from their meeting place’ is arrived at from the process of inference. Therefore, dhvani is not needed to explain indirect communication or suggested meaning.

The supporters of the dhvani counter the argument of Anumānavādins by pointing out that the logical inference is not appropriate in the above example because a fearful person may still go to the place of danger with anticipation of encountering the lion if, for instances, ordered by his employer or teacher, or if he is challenged by his beloved to do so. In such cases, the indirect communication (with suggested meaning) to thwart the pious man from wondering at the river bank will fail. Further analysis of the argument would expose the fallacious nature of this argument. In the above example, it is wrongly presumed that ‘a fearful person wanders only in the places where there is the absence of all sources of fear’. As such, the reason or *hetu* is not fixed in one place but several, and so it commits the fallacy of *savyabhicārahetu* or discrepant reason, which literally means that *hetu* which creates confusion in the concomitance of the textual example of *linga* (smoke) and the *sādhya* (fire). The *linga* coexists with the

sādhya for example ‘smoke’ coexists with ‘fire’. The fallacy occurs when the *hetu* coexists sometimes with the *sādhya* and sometimes with the absence of the *sādhya*. In addition, another fallacy or contradiction (*viruddha*) may result with regard to reason (*hetu*): There is possibility that a person who is brave may not like dogs or does not see any valour in killing a dog, but may still wander about in spite of the presence of the lion because he likes to encounter danger. So this does not prove that a person who is scared of dogs would certainly be scared of lions too. In such a case, *hetu* is contradictory.⁹

Finally, another important component of a valid argument is ignored by the above example which results in committing the fallacy of *asiddhahetu* or unproved reason. In argument, one of the essential tasks is to determine *pakṣadharmatā*, the presence or identification of *hetu* on *pakṣa*. The *hetu* must be present in the subject (*pakṣa*) for establishing *sādhya*. For example, to infer that there is fire on the hill, the *linga (hetu)*, namely, smoke, must be known to be actually present on the hill. If not, the inference would not be possible. It should be noted that smoke alone is considered to be *pakṣadharmatā* although there may be many other things on the mountain such as trees and stones etc. Just as all things on the mountain are not *pakṣadharmatā*, in the same way, all smoke in the world is not *pakṣadharmatā*. Only that particular smoke on the mountain is *pakṣadharmatā* because the knowledge of that alone is capable of giving an inference of fire on the mountain. In short, unless the smoke is seen on the hill, we cannot have the knowledge of the fire. All our previous knowledge about the invariable concomitance of smoke and fire will be of no use if we do not perceive smoke on the mountain. That is why consideration of not only *hetu* but also *parāmarśa* is a must to define the knowledge of *pakṣadharmatā*. The process of inference is possible only when smoke is cognized as a dharma of the *pakṣa*. In view of this important principle of reasoning, a doubt or objection can be raised – it is not certain if there is a lion on the bank of the

⁹ *Viruddhais* defined as that which is pervaded by the negation of the thing proved; a classic example is this: “Sound is eternal because it is created”. Here, ‘*creativity*’, instead of proving the eternity of sound, proves the negation of eternity. (*Tarka-samgraha* 1988: 302)

river as informed by a girl to the pious man. Accordingly, this inference commits the fallacy of *asiddhahetu*.

In keeping with the detection of multiple fallacies that can occur in inference, it has been argued by the supporters of dhvani theory that inference is not a substitute for dhvani. Put it differently, inference is not adequate as a semantic tool to establish a connection between the primary meaning and the suggested meaning of a poetic expression.

The experiential component of dhvani theory

Abhinavagupta provides a more convincing and substantial reason for rejecting inferential account of dhvani. He maintains that word and its meaning are not two different entities and hence, they cannot have a similar relationship that exists between *linga* and *lingī* or *hetu* and *sādhya*. When we say that the suggested sense (*vyañjanā*) is the subject of verbal operation (*śabdavyāpāraviṣayatvam*), we mean to say that the verbal operation does not exist as two different processes, a sequential operation of, first, a word and then its apprehension secondly. The operation of a word and its apprehension is one and the same thing. Therefore, it cannot be a matter of inference. The visualization of dhvani is not like *anumāna*. Rather, it is more like a perceptual experience. It is technically termed as *lokottara* (extraordinary). Suggestion or suggested sense is the outcome of an artistic process. *Lokottara* is understood as that kind of pleasure which is not ordinary, like the birth of a son (*putrastejātaḥ*), but extraordinary which is a detached experience.

As pointed out above, a poetic expression can have meanings at two levels, namely, the expressed sense (*vācyārtha*) and the suggested sense (*pratīyamānārtha*). This suggested sense or *pratīyamānārtha* is further divided into two types. One is *laukika* (ordinary) and other is poetic (*kāvyaavyāpāragocara*). The ordinary meaning is represented either through its subject matter or through *alamkāras* which are called *vastu* and *alamkāradhvani*. However, the other suggested sense is embedded in *rasa* experience. When *rasa* becomes the predominant element (*angin*) in poetry, it is called *rasa-dhvani*. This *rasa-dhvani* is found in the writings of all the great poets. A poet with his creative

imagination or *pratibhā* creates poetry in which *rasa* becomes the predominant element. It is *rasa* that gives life to poetry and delights its readers. It is the soul of poetry. Krishnamoorthy has aptly articulated, “*Dhvani*’ is the quintessence of poetry; and ‘*rasa*’ is the quintessence of ‘*dhvani*’” (*Dhvanyāloka*, Introduction p. xxxi). *Rasa* experience is not created by merely mentioning that this poem is based in that a particular *rasa*. It is rather the enactment of the emotions of various characters that should be enough to generate *rasa*.

Just by sticking the label *śṛṅgāra rasa*, a poem does not generate *śṛṅgāra rasa*. As a matter of fact, to explicitly name specific emotions in poetic expressions would suppress the creative imagination of the reader; it would block the possibility of *rasa experience* because aesthetic experience is heightened through *vibhāvas* and other related concepts. “...*rasadhvani* is *par excellence* the intense relish occasioned by the audience’s (*pratipattuḥ*) tasting of the basic emotional element when their understanding of this basic emotion has arisen from the combination of the *vibhāva-s*, *anubhāva-s*, and *vyabhicāribhāva-s*” (*Locana* on *Dhvanyāloka* 2.4: 218). For example:

यद्विश्रम्य विलोकितेषु बहुशो निःस्थेमनी लोचने

यद्गत्राणिदरिद्रति प्रतिदिनं लूनाब्जिनीनालवत् ।

दूर्वाकाण्डविडम्बककश्च निबिडो यत्पाण्डिमा गण्डयोः

कृष्णे यूनि सयौवनासु वनितास्वेषैव वेषस्थितिः ॥

Trans.: “A tremulousness of the eyes, hesitating in mid-glance;
Limbs daily growing thinner, like severed lotus stems
And cheeks so pale they seemed, to imitate white durva grass:
Such was the costume put on by the gopis, as they and Krishna
came of age.”

In the given verse above, Krishna is at the peak of his youth and so are the *gopis*. The *gopis* look at the young Krishna not *directly*, but catch glimpses of him. Just as a lotus which has been cut off, becomes dry, the *gopis* too have become skinny and lifeless

without Krishna's love. Their lips have become so dry and yellow that even dry and pale grass appears to be more colorful. Throughout the verse, various emotions have been expressed without naming them: *abhilāṣa* (desire), *cintā* (worry), *atsukya* (eagerness), *nidrā* (sleep), *adhṛti* (frailty), *glāni* (drooping), *ālasya* (languor), *śrama* (weariness), *smṛti* (remembrance), *vitarka* (speculation), etc. Suggestion, not denotation or explicit reference, triggers the imaginative mind of the reader not only to make aesthetic experience possible but also to heighten it in other words. The kind of poetry that gives a very high degree of sublime aesthetic pleasure with or without the aid of *alamkāras* etc. is *uttamakāvya*. This is the highest form of poetry according to Abhinavagupta. While experiencing this kind of poetry the reader or the spectator forgets herself and gets totally engrossed in the poetic creation.¹⁰

A poem without *rasa* is like a dish prepared by an inefficient cook. Abhinavagupta writes that one will not get any taste (*rasa*) in a meat dish concocted by a cook ignorant of the culinary art. Here it might be pointed out that there are certain expressions that have a beauty of their own, and their beauty does not depend on the skill of the poet. Just as the dish called *śikhariṇī* would taste sweet whether or not the cook is skillful. (*Śikhariṇī* is a preparation of curdled milk and sugar). The aptness of the simile is that the skill of the cook is important in cooking of a meat dish, as the meat in its natural state is not tasty; but a *śikhariṇī*, since its ingredients are naturally tasty and sweet, cannot easily be spoiled. Therefore, a reader can be amused with the inherent capacity of the literal sense, but there is no skill of a poet.

It is *rasa-dhvani* which is desired by the *rasikas*. To quote Krishnamoorthy, "Rasa indeed is the corner-stone of the arch of *dhvani*" (*Dhvanyāloka*, Introduction: xxx). We have discussed how Ānadaśardhana points out that only a *sahṛdaya* or man of taste who possesses an aesthetic attitude can relish *rasa*. *Rasa* is that which is never used in day-

¹⁰ For the first time, Abhinavagupta evaluates poetry based on the degree of the prominence of *dhvani*: *citrakāvya*, *guṇībhūtavyaṅgyakāvya* and *uttamakāvya*. A poem which is devoid of the suggested sense is *citrakāvya*. When the suggested sense does not go beyond the expressed sense, it is called middle type, *madhyamākāvya* or *guṇībhūtavyaṅgyakāvya*. When the suggested sense is more prominent in a poem than the expressed sense, it is called *uttamakāvya*.

to-day discourse and is never expressed directly in words. Rather, it can be relished only. Or one could say that it gives rise to aesthetic bliss or enjoyment. M. Hiriyana has put it distinctly "...emotions are not communicated at all by the poet; he only suggests them and thereby helps their waking to life in the mind of a competent person, when they will necessarily be inwardly experienced by him" (Hiriyana, M. 1997: 77).

Some comments and perspectives

i. The world as the measure of meaning

In general, primary meaning, with various synonyms such as direct meaning, literal meaning, ordinary meaning, conventional meaning, etc., is associated with denotation. It tells us either what the world is like or how to behave in the world. In short, primary meaning essentially serves informative and directive functions of language. When the primary meaning of a linguistic expression is communicated and understood, we get some idea or picture of the world out there. In other words, primary meaning is about the world out there, the world with structures and objects. Accordingly, the primary meaning of an expression can be defined or fixed one way or the other. It is not subject to unlimited interpretations. For instance, the sentence "The moon keeps changing its shape" is not subject to various interpretations. In some sense, its primary meaning can be spoken of as being objective as well.

In contrast, the meaning of a poetic expression cannot be defined or fixed even by the greatest poet even if we could identify one. Further, a poet herself cannot claim to provide the best interpretation of her work; she cannot exhaust the possible interpretations of her work either. In this sense, the meaning of a poetic expression is open to unlimited interpretations; it cannot be defined conclusively or objectively. For one thing, a poetic expression is not about the world out there. Its primary function is not to give a true or accurate representation of the world though it 'uses' pictures or imageries of the world. These pictorial expressions, for instance, are used to suggest a reality beyond the expressed words. They are directed towards the world of emotions

(bhāvas)– something for which words have no corresponding denotation but which is aroused through the connotative power of words.

ii. Beyond the bound of meaning

The meaning of an ordinary expression is defined in terms of the function of its parts conventionally. There is a way to analyze the meaning of an ordinary expression. However, the meaning of a poetic expression is essentially not a matter of analysis; its meaning is not obtained through analysis. It is grasped spontaneously, instantly and wholly. Its meaning is grasped like a “flash of light” (pratibhā) as maintained by Ānadavardhana. And this flash of light cannot be explained in terms of the function of its parts. The flash of light is something more than what is communicated or expressed in language. The flash of light is the result of creative interpretation on the part of the reader. Metaphorically speaking, the flash of light is the arousal of emotion. However, the emotion that is evoked by a poetic expression is not anything like the world out there. And so, it is impossible to fix the limit of the meaning of a poetic expression. It is in this sense that we can agree with the fundamental position of *dhvanivādins* that a poetic expression can only suggest. We can talk about the suggestion as being either pleasurable or agreeable but not in terms of having this or that fixed meaning. In the light of the above, it is really doubtful if we can use *anumāna* to explain away dhvani since *anumāna* is a special tool to “fix” the relation of concepts and sentences by analyzing the internal structures of sentences. One of its main functions is to limit or minimize multiple interpretations or meanings and this works contrary to the very nature of poetic expressions. If this perspective of dhvani is accepted, then even refutation of *anumāna* by pointing out the fallacious nature of *anumāna* is not necessary at all.

Given the above line of reasoning, it is not sure if we can meaningfully talk about the “meaning” of a poetic expression. Meaning is conventionally associated with either the sound of a linguistic expression or its symbols. Moreover, primary meaning of an ordinary expression, being denotative in nature, refers to something in the world out there. However, in the present context, dhvani is associated with the experience of a certain sort – arousal of pleasurable emotion for instance. It is something which comes

about as a result of communication (sound or symbols) and not with the communication *per se*. Perhaps, the dilemma can be looked at from two angles. First, we can understand “suggested meaning” somewhat like this: a suggestion that is conveyed through the meaning of ordinary expression. It is like a coded language. Its meaning is hidden in the ordinary expression. What is suggested goes beyond the meaning of an ordinary expression. Alternatively, we can drop the word “meaning” altogether and speak of poetic expression as having “suggested sense”¹¹. This suggested sense is more like a feeling, a feeling which is aroused through our encounters with life, say, an encounter with something beautiful or terrible. This feeling can never be fully expressed or defined. Our attempts to express or define it in language will forever remain suggestive in nature. They can only point to something but not at ‘this’ or ‘that’ something.

Conclusion:

What is ‘suggested’ in a poetic expression is distinct from what is ‘shown’ through the expressed words and while primary meaning is associated with the latter, *dhvani* is associated with the former. The locus of the suggested sense is not out there in the world but somewhere in the world of emotions. It is an inherent feature of a poem that it suggests more than it expresses and the suggested sense is what makes it beautiful and captivating. A reader who relishes a poem does so because of the *rasa* that is aroused by the suggestive power of words which is not possible by the primary and other functions of words. Ānandvardhan succinctly puts it: उक्तयन्तरेणाशक्यं यत्तच्चारुत्वं प्रकाशयन् । शब्दो वयञ्जकतां विभ्रद्ध्वन्युक्तेर्विषयी भवेत् ॥ [*Trans.*: “Only that word, which conveys a charm, incapable of communication by any other expression and which is pregnant with suggestive force, becomes a fit instance for the title of “Suggestive” (*Dhvanyāloka* 1.15)].

¹¹ Among the modern writers on *dhvani/vyañjanā*, the earlier philosophers like K. Krishnamoorthy and K. Kunjuanni Raja translated the term *dhvani/vyañjanā* as suggestion. They largely retained the original term and whenever they translated it, they employed the term suggestion with a degree of caution. Later writers disregarded this aspect and stuck to the translation of *dhvani/vyañjanā* as suggested meaning or sometimes suggested sense.

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