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An analysis of the Guna doctrine in Indian poetics

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The progress of epigraphic reseaych during last quarter of a century has begun to shed considerable light on the History of court poetry during the daring the darkage embracing the first five centuries of our era.

The langhage of the drama consider the characteristics laksanas of that language, the figures of speech alankaras and the qualities gunas of style as well as plays. On the other hand even matters which might seem to have beenspecific to the drama and may very likely have been so in arigin, such as the rasa theory and the theory of the conjunctions sandlnis in the presentation of a story, were widely recognized, at least in later times, as being in principle applicable to any form of literature, There are ten qualities gunas in kavyas according to the Natyasastra and these number and the names remained standard for most later writers despite developments of meaning.

The concept of poetry in Indian poetics differs from time to time and the ancient theorists have defined poetry as combination of word and sense. If the word and sense form the poetic texture, then this combination on of word and sense must be of special kind, because in ordinary usage we also use words and they convey some sense also. Such combination of word and sense does not go to constitute the body of poetry.

Therefore, when a combination of word and sense expresses a poetic imagination appropriately, it forms the poetic texture. The ancient theoreticians belonging to the Alamkara-School were busy to furnish a technical definition of the body of poetry. They were only concerned with the outward form of poetry and naturally they thinkthat poetic embellishments (Alamjaras) and poetic excellences (Gunasare the only properties which beautify the body of poetry.

But with the advent of Devrani-School the concept of poetry takes a new turn. According to dhvanikara, Rass (emotion) is the soul of property, and poetic excellences or Gunqas are the properties of Rasa residing invariably in it. Though panditaraja Jagannatha is a follower of Dhvani School and shows great respect to Anandavardhana, he differs considerably in formulating the concept of Guna-doctrine. Now a short survey of this Guna-doctrine will reveal its various aspects in various periods.

Acarya Bharata does not treat the Guna-doctrine systematically and does not state categorically whether they belong to Sabda or Artha, or in what relation they stand in poetry. He states merely that ten Gunas are the mere negation of dosa ;but this cannot be a general definition of Gunas. For an example, use of harsh words in depicting erotic sentiments is certainly a fault. But in the case of heroic sentiments of Raudrarasa it will not be considered as fault at all. On the otherhand, it will be a positive excellence.

“Ete dosastu vijneyah suribhirnatakasrayah /
Eta eva viparyastah gunah kavyesu kirtitah” //

- Natyasastra (XVII.95)

The author of Natyasastra enjmerates ten Gunas along with the treatment of Laksana; Alamkaras and Dosas in the 17th chapter of the Natyasastra, but they lack systematic characterisation.

“Slesah prasadah samata samadhirmadhuryamojah Padasaukumaryam/
Arthasya Ca vyaktirudarata Ca kantisca kavyasya Gunah dasaite”//

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Slesa Guna is formed by the close association of words conveying subtle meaning. Use of easy word forms Prasada, use of nice word charming to the ears creates Madhurya Guna and so on.

Acarya Bhamaha and Dandin do not show much perfection in the treatment of Guna doctrine. Bhamaha mentions three Gunas - Prasada, Ojas and Madhurya in the second chapter of Kavyalamkara makes very little difference between Madhurya and Prasada and says –

“Madhuryamabhibanchanti prasadam Ca samedhasah/
Samasavanti bh; uyanis na padani prajunjate” //
Kavyalamkara, Chap. 11

Again in defining Bhavika Alamkara he uses the term Guna. But the employment of the term betrays no clear idea. Therefore treatment of Gunas by Bhamaha is something vague. And he says that both Gunas and Alamkaras impart beauty to poetry. Dandin, however, is more systematic in treating the Guna-doctrine and the definition of Gunas is in conforming to his definition of poetry. He defines poetry as a combination of words, conveying desirable sense.

“Sariram tavadistartha vyavacchinna padavali”
Kavyadarsa I. Sl.10

He also mentions ten Gunas and tries to divide such Gunas into two categories- designated as Vaidarbhi and Gaudi. Like Acarya Bharata Dandin also does not define Guna and he does not raise the question of Gunas is generally seen in Gaudiya marga-

“Iti vaidarbhamargasya prana dasa gunah smrtah/
Esamviparyah prayo drsyate gaudavartmani”// -
Kavyadarsa I. SL. 42

But in the treatment of Madhurya Guna Dandin remarks that Anuprasas of the use of alliterations make the Madhurya Guna. But it is a confusion of Gunas with Alamkaras.

His worthy successor Vamana is more precise and careful in dealing with the problem of Guna-doctrine. For the first time, Vamana speaks of the soul of poetry and he declares ‘Ritiratma Kavyasya’. And Riti is nothing but the particular kind of arrangement of words. And this arrangements of words and poetic diction is brought into being through the admixture of Gunas. And all the ten Gunas are present in Vaidarbhi or all-india standard poetic diction. But Gaudiya contains only two Gunas – the Ojas and Kanti.

Vamana Names ten Gunas – Ojas, Prasada, Slesa, Samata, Samadhi, Madhurya, Saukumarya, Udarata, Arthaprakriya and Kanti, and explains them from two different points of view – verbal (savda) and ideal (Artha). And he tries to brush away the obscurity of the definition of gunas prevalent in the scheme of his predecessors. Therefore, in the pre-dhvani period 20 gunas have been defined and explained according to their sweet will. Sometimes a particular guna has been identified with a particular figure of speech. The pre-dhvani school lays emphasis on the formal beauty of the poetry and therefore, we find a deliberate attempt to multiply various verbal and ideational figures and poetic excellences (Gunas), which they think, are the causes of creating beauty in the structure of poetry. According to Vamana Riti being the soul of poetry, Gunas must be invariably connected with these three Ritis to bring them into being and so these poetic excellences produce beauty of poetry. The Gunas; being the

essential to Riti they are inseparable property of poetry, whereas the Alamkaras being only external ornamentation to the body of poetry, they cannot be recognised as inseparable property of poetry. Therefore, it may be put in clear words:- the gunas are related to poetry in relation of inherence (Samavaya-samvandha) and the Alamkaras are connected with poetry in relation of conjunction (Samyoga-samyandha). The Riti-school, therefore, goes straight further in formulating the soul of poetry in clear terms. Although Anandavardhana does not support a strange theory of Riti, he pays an indirect tribute in the 3rd chapter of Dhvanyaloka to Vamana for trying to probe into the real Character of poetry-

“Asphutasphuritam kavyatatvametyodhoditam/
Asaknuvadihirvyakartum ritayah sampravartitam//
..... Ritalaksanavidhayinam hi
Kavuatatvameiadasphutataya manaksphuritamasiditi/
Laksyate...”

(Dhvanyaloka III, 46 and Vriti)

Anandavardhana reduces ten Gunas of Vamana into three in the Dhvanyaloka and these three Gunas are practically made equivalent to the three Ritis admitted by Vamana. Anandavardhana does not go further in analyzing the Guna-doctrine formulated by the ancients. Acarya Mammaata following in the footsteps of Anandavardhana discusses in details the doctrine of Guna in his Kavyaprakasa and he comments that the ten Gunas defined by Dandin and Vamana are nothing but some Alamkaras and some of them are reverses of Dosas.

Another exponent of this school Rudrata who probably lived in the 9th century A.D. In his Kavyalankara he dwells at length on alamkaras adding a considerable number to those recognised before him.

Though betraying influence of the Rasa-doctrine Rudrata’s recognition of the alankara as the essential element of poetry is obvious.

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