

VAMANA'S PHILOSOPHY OF POETRY

Vāmana is one of the very early writers on the philosophy of poetry. He seems to have lived after Bharata and Bhāmaha, but was definitely earlier than Abhinavagupta, Ānanda-Vardhana and Mammata and may be roughly assigned to 8th century A.D.¹ Though some of the recent writers try to bring him under the influence of *Rasa Theory*, on account of his aphorism, '*dīpta rasa-tyam kāntiḥ*', he seems to be far away from such an influence. Tradition regards him as an advocate of *Rīti* theory and makes him a follower of Bhāmaha so far as his views on *Alaṅkāra* are concerned. But such a view also is based on certain superficial consideration of words like *Guṇa*, *Rīti* and *Alaṅkāra* which appear in his writing as also in the writing of Bhāmaha. I, however, think that these words have a different significance for Vāmana. In this paper, I shall try to bring out the peculiar significance of these words in the writings of Vāmana and shall, thereby, try to show that Vāmana's philosophy of poetry is very different from what tradition ascribes to him.

For this end, we should contrast his views with those of his predecessors. Bhāmaha, one of his predecessors, defined poetry (or literature) as a whole consisting of words and meanings. *śabdārthau sahītau kāvyam*.² Bhāmaha himself seems to be aware of the limitations of this definition. So he adds that mere composition of words should not be sufficient for poetry. It should also be beautified or made attractive with figures of speech. 'A composition', he writes, 'is like the face of a woman who may be herself beautiful but who does not become attractive without ornaments'.³ 'Figures of speech' are embellishments of literature. Though Vāmana also gives explanation of 'these embellishments of literature' in his work, he does not seem to agree with Bhāmaha in defining poetry in these terms. According to him, Bhāmaha's definition of poetry is too wide. Poetry is not a whole,⁴ composed of words and meanings. It is a whole where *Guṇas* (qualities) and *Alaṅkāra* (beauty) also enter as components.⁵ It is only by secondary usage that one speaks of literature or poetry as made of words and meanings alone. Vāmana is aware that if the value or beauty⁶ factor is omitted from the definition of

poetry, certain rules of grammar and logic will also come under the definition of poetry or literature.⁷ Thus Vāmana was aware of the two dimensions of literature; (i) The stuff of which it is made and (ii) the value or the beauty for which it is made. The second provides the definition or lakṣaṇa of poetry. Literature, however, is not the only art which has these two dimensions. It is a common characteristic which literature shares with other arts. Almost every art ought to be studied in these two dimensions. We may take, for instance, the case of sculpture. When one observes and appreciates a statue as a piece of art the appreciation can be expressed in one word, 'beautiful or ugly'. But the statue is also made out of some material like stone. In a training school for sculpture if some person is to be trained in making a statue it should not be irrelevant to consider such questions as : (1) what should be the kind of stone used for making such a statue ? (2) what should be the necessary proportion between one limb and the other ? All such questions become relevant when we are concerned with the making of a statue. But a statue will not become a piece of art unless the statue also becomes beautiful 'somehow'. The cases can be multiplied. But the crux of the problem is that the study of this element, 'Beautiful' cannot be neglected in any philosophy of Art or Poetry. It is this principle of beauty which is clearly emphasised by Vāmana in his first sūtra or aphorism in his work *kāvyaślokaśāstravṛttiḥ*. The value of his theory lies in co-ordinating this principle with the other dimension of art. He writes, *kāvyaṃ grāhyam alaṅkāraḥ*; a poetry becomes acceptable as poetry on account of 'Alaṅkāra'. It should not be irrelevant to emphasise that the word *Alaṅkāra* does not mean here a 'figure of speech' like simile or metaphor. The word *Alaṅkāra* as used in the philosophy of poetry is rather ambiguous; it is used in two different senses. In common usage it stands for 'figure of speech'. And this common usage makes men turn a deaf ear to the fact that unlike Bhāmaha Vāmana does not use it here for 'figure of speech'. In his second sūtra Vāmana clearly defines the word *Alaṅkāra* as *saundaryam alaṅkāraḥ*—In this context *Alaṅkāra* means beauty.

That the word, *Alaṅkāra* used in the first and second aphorisms does not denote the 'figure of speech' becomes clear from

the third one. There he again uses the word '*Alaṅkāra*'; but now it signifies the traditional meaning. It is a means for the attainment of Beauty. He uses the pronoun 'Sa' for denoting *Alaṅkāra* which is identical with beauty. Thus, the two uses of the word *Alaṅkāra* are obvious in one aphorism. The sense in which it is a synonym of 'figure of speech' is a means, the sense in which it is synonymous with beauty is the end. Vāmana writes : this beauty can be attained through avoiding poetic faults and through the introduction of *guṇas* and 'figure of speech'.⁸ The figure of speech, is not an essential characteristic of poetry; nevertheless it adds to the beauty of poetry. The *guṇas*, on the other hand, are essential characteristics of poetry because it is in and through them that the beauty in poetry becomes manifest. Vāmana clearly writes that *guṇas* are absolutely necessary; for, without them the beauty in poetry cannot emerge. On the other hand, though "figure of speech" adds to the beauty, there can be a beautiful poetry without a figure of speech. Therefore, whereas in the philosophy of poetry a discussion of beauty and quality becomes necessary, a discussion about figures of speech is not necessary. Vāmana writes; just as a beautiful lady looks beautiful even if she is without ornaments so also pure poetry becomes agreeable to the appreciators.⁹

It ought to be clearly understood that for Vāmana, poetry or literature is a kind of a whole made up of parts. The two parts of this whole again are wholes in their own way viz., a (sub)-whole made up of words and a (sub)-whole made up of meanings. The whole thus formed out of these two, so to say, is the body of the poetry. Just as a substance or a thing has got qualities so also the two wholes have got *guṇas* like *Ojas*, *Prasāda*, *Mādhurya* etc. (Perhaps for the sake of brevity Vāmana gives identical names to qualities of words and meanings.) Thus though the poetry seems to be formed out of the two wholes, the whole of words and the whole of meanings, a more critical analysis will reveal that it is composed of four parts; (1) words, (2) the qualities of the words, (3) the meanings and (4) the qualities of meanings. When a whole is formed out of these four parts, it becomes a poetic whole and poetic beauty or value emerges out of it as its effect, quality or fifth part.

As stated earlier, Vāmana clearly distinguished the two dimensions of poetry, (1) the physical and (2) the value. If a person is to be trained in composing poetry and if he is to be taught the different elements that make poetry then certainly not the value, but the composition aspect will have to be emphasised. I have made a reference to this point earlier. But let me substantiate my point in greater detail. An illustration will make my point clear.

We grow flower plants because we are interested in beautiful flowers. But it is not the beauty that we plant. We have to plant a seed or a seedling and when we plant it we have to know what soil and climatic conditions are required for its growth; we should also like to know the quantity of water that will be required for watering and things like this. When the plant shapes properly it flowers and results in splendour. So also is the case with poetry. If the general conditions of 'poetry making' are to be taught one cannot start with beauty. One must be acquainted with the 'seeds' or 'seedlings', the 'soil' 'water' and 'manure'; for poetry the seed or seedling, water or manure consists of words. A person will have to be trained in making a whole of words or words and meanings. The meanings, so to say, would depend on words or sounds, and the beauty of the poetry would depend on these both. The beauty-factor in poetry will, thus, depend on word-factors. Being aware of this fact, while emphasising the element of value in poetry, Vāmana equally emphasised the positive or structural aspect of poetry, and named it as *Rīti*. He says, that poetry becomes poetry on account of beauty and still asserts that *Rīti* is the "Soul" of poetry—it is that without which the poetic substratum (composition) would not come into existence. It is very clear from Vāmana's writing that he regards the *guṇas*, which emerge from patterns of sounds and patterns of meanings, as the cause of the value element, beauty. He defines *guṇas* as the causes of poetic beauty. He does not define them as the cause of poetry. The cause of poetry ought to be distinguished from the cause of the beauty of poetry. These *guṇas* are the effects of the two sub-wholes which lead to a poetic composition. Thus both the *guṇas* and the poetic composition are the effects of the sub-wholes of sound and meaning, though one of

them is a quality and the other the substance. This poetic composition and the *guṇas* give rise to poetic beauty. Thus, the poetic beauty has two causes; (1) the poetry itself and (2) the poetic *guṇas*. This reminds one of the *Samavāyī* and *Asamavāyī* causes of the Nyāya system. In order to understand this particular tenet in Vāmana's philosophy of poetry it is necessary to say more about the theory of causation as presented by Indian Logic.

According to this theory something that is an effect is jointly caused by (1) *Samavāyī* cause and (2) *Asamavāyī* cause which itself is of the nature of effect. Let us take an instance of a cloth or paṭa. Cloth or paṭa has two causes amongst others. The thread is supposed to be one such cause of a piece of cloth. But if thread alone were to be there, a piece of cloth would not be made. The conjunction of threads must also enter as another cause in the making of cloth. The threads are supposed to be the material or *Samavāyī* cause and the conjunction of threads the *Asamavāyī* cause. Now, according to the theory put forward by Vāmana sound-patterns and meaning-patterns which make a poetic whole are the causes of the *poetic whole*, in the same way as thread is the cause of a cloth or as two halves of the pot are causes of a pot. The combination or conjunction of threads cannot be the material cause because (according to Indian Logic) it is a quality and quality cannot be a material cause. It can either be an effect, e.g., the colour of the cloth is the effect of cloth, or it can be an *Asamavāyī* cause, e.g., the colour of the threads is the cause of the colour of the cloth. On the other hand, a substance alone can be a material cause whether of a quality or of a substance. From this, it is clear that the sound qualities and the meaning qualities of Vāmana cannot be the material cause of a poetic whole though the sound and meaning patterns are. They cannot also be the *Samavāyī* or material cause of the poetic beauty. Just as the cloth itself is the *Samavāyī* cause of the colour of the cloth, so also the poetic composition is the *Samavāyī* cause of the poetic beauty. But just as the colour of the threads is the *Asamavāyī* cause of the colour of the cloth so also the poetic qualities of the sound and meaning are the *Asamavāyī* cause of the poetic beauty.

Since a poetic whole, for Vāmana, is a real entity, the parts of which it is made are also real entities. The qualities of sound and meaning exist only in these parts. Therefore, these parts are also entities. Thus, in the world of poetry sounds should be regarded as substance. Otherwise, there would be a danger of a quality inhering a quality. Though it may be doubted as to whether sound is a substance or a quality, as Indian Logicians do, no study of poetry can be made unless a status of substance is given to sounds. Sound or *Śabda* is the basis or substratum of any literary piece. Again, in the context of poetics the word *Artha* which is another part of the poetic whole, is to be understood in the sense of meaning and not in the sense of object. But meaning is a kind of knowledge and this again is a quality of the self (*Ātman*) according to Naiyāyikas. So the poetic whole is likely to be thought as made of qualities, pure and simple. But as has been stated above, in the context of poetics both the sounds and meanings jointly and separately should be understood as a substance and not as qualities. Otherwise, the study of poetics would become impossible or would lead to the violation of the rule of logic, namely, qualities cannot inhere qualities. There will be again another difficulty. If these are the qualities then the beauty—poetic beauty cannot arise; for it would require some substratum. Hence, though poetic whole cannot be regarded as a substance in the ordinary sense of the term, it will be desirable to regard it as a substance—a whole made up of parts and exhibiting the nature of effects. As has been pointed out sounds and their meanings would be the material cause of such a poetic whole. From this point of view, I feel that though Vāmana has used the terminology of Indian Logic he must have accepted like the Sāṅkhya and grammar philosophers that sound was a kind of substance. Similarly he must have accepted meaning also as a substance in a way the grammarians accept it as a cause or effect of sound. Though in the context of poetics, the words and meanings have to be considered separately still the meanings do not have an existence, separate and independent from sounds. In the ordinary usage meaning cannot be regarded as things. Sound alone is their substratum. So a poetic whole is made up of parts some of which are perceptible while the others are unmanifest or *Avyakta*. The poetic whole, therefore, is to be

regarded as an unusual, peculiar kind of entity. Since a poetic whole is an extra-ordinary kind of thing, beauty, the final part of this whole also cannot be regarded as 'quality' in the ordinary sense of the term. Beauty, therefore, cannot be regarded as a quality like yellow or green. It can be felt but it cannot be perceived. Its causes can be known but it cannot be described. It is, therefore, to be regarded as a second order quality. I feel it is this kind of thinking which was in the mind of Vāmana when he wrote aphorisms III.1.26, III.1.27 and III.1.28. At the end of the chapter on *Śabdagūṇa*, Vāmana, asks for the proof of the existence of the *Guṇas* of sound and in the last three aphorisms he gives that proof. These qualities, he writes, are "not non-existing like the son of a barren woman, nor illusory like shell-silver. That they exist can be inferred from the fact that they are felt". I feel that the argument of Vāmana can be extended to the qualities of meaning and also to the poetic value or beauty.

It has already been pointed out that though a poetic whole comprises of sound, meaning, qualities of sound and meaning and beauty as parts still all these depend upon sound alone for their existence. Neither meanings nor beauty can have an independent existence apart from the substratum which, in this case, is sound. The poetic whole is like a twin engined jet plane, where one engine is dependent on the other for its being put into action and control. The engines, however, act simultaneously and independently and pass out the jet gases which eventually mix up and form one long tail. To an outside observer, it is not the plane alone, but the plane along with the gaseous tail which is the object. However, if the plane is to be controlled, it will have to be controlled by controlling the engine which has a control switch. Similarly, in the case of the poetic whole if any refinement or *saṁskāra* is to be made, it will have to be done on sound or śabda alone. For, sound alone is the vehicle of meaning, which in itself is without form and cannot be physically felt. Thus sound becomes of primary importance in any theory of poetics. This, however, requires an *arrangement* of sound or words which can be of different varieties; each arrangement for example, may represent its own peculiarity or *viśeṣa*. It is this very special arrangement or peculiarity of arrangements which is called *Rīti* by Vāmana. According to him this arrangement or

Rīti is of three kinds. But whether it is of three kinds or of less or more is a matter of details and not a matter of principle. The 'peculiarity' of arrangement in composition is identical with what Vāmana calls *Guṇas*. This is clear from his aphorism, I.2.8. It is because of this that a discussion of *Rīti* (or style) and *Guṇas* become significant in a thesis on poetics. Having all this in his mind he must have written the aphorism I.2.6. The arrangement of composition (*padaracanā*) is the body of poetry and its peculiarity (*viśiṣṭatva*) the style. This again could be analysed in terms of *Guṇas*. Thus the aphorism I.2.6 should not be studied in isolation but ought to be studied with I.1.1 and I.1.2. If the relation of the aphorism I.2.6 with I.1.1 and I.1.2 is not taken into consideration, the whole thesis of Vāmana will be misunderstood as he has been generally misunderstood now. It goes without saying that Vāmana's being dubbed as a philosopher of style or of figure of speech is due to such misunderstanding. But as a matter of fact, he is neither an advocate of style for its own sake, nor of figure of speech or *Guṇa* for its own sake. He is not just the advocate of figure of speech alone as Bhāmaha perhaps was. He does in fact, talk about them. But that is because they are means to the attainment of poetic value or beauty and because there is no direct way of creating poetic beauty. *Guṇa* and *Rīti* (and *Alaṅkāra*, i.e. figure of speech) are, for him, only the causes which progressively lead to poetic beauty. To dub Vāmana as a fanatic advocate of *Rīti*, *Alaṅkāra*, *Rasa* or *Guṇa* is to do a great injustice to this great philosopher of poetry.

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NOTES

1. His date is immaterial for the present purpose.
2. *Kāvyaālaṅkāra*, I. 1.6.
3. *Ibid*, I. 13, na kāntam api nirbhūṣaṃ vibhāti vanitānanam.
4. *K.A.S.V.*, III.1.4.
5. Cf. *kāvya śabdo yam guṇālaṅkāra sanskṛtayoh śabdārthayoh vartate. Kavipriyavṛtti* on *K.A.S.V.*, I.1.1.

6. It may be noted that he uses *Alaṅkāra* in the sense of beauty. See *ibid.*, I.1.2.

7. E.g. ko yañci; yathā gauḥ tathā gavayaḥ.

7. *K.A.S.V.*, I.1.1.

8. This is clear from Vāmana's sūtra III.1.3 and his own commentary on it. There Vāmana clearly points out that it is the *guṇas* (poetic qualities) which necessarily produce poetic beauty. His own commentary on the sūtra, *pūrve nityāḥ*, III.1.3 makes the point still clearer. He writes : *purve guṇāḥ nityāḥ; tairvinā kāvyaśobhānupapattiḥ*. Also see III.1.1. and III.1.2.

9. Vide commentary on *ibid.*, III.1.2, *yuvateriva rūpamidaṁ kāvyaṁ svadate śuddhaguṇam tadapyatīva*.