

THE CONCEPTS OF METAPHOR AND TRUTH : AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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In Indian tradition the phenomenon of metaphor is explained by the term *Rūpaka*, a kind of *alamkāra*. The characteristic features of *Rūpaka* or metaphor are as follows. The imposition of identity (*abhedāropa*) between the object considered as well-standard (*upamāna*) and the subject of description (*upameya*) is called metaphor. Metaphor remains in the representation of the subject of description, which is not concealed, as identified with another (well known standard) ("*Rūpakam rūpitaropād viṣaye nirapahnave*"¹). The subject is an entity on which something is superimposed. When the face is identified with the moon (*mukhacandra*), face is a *viṣaya* or subject upon which *candratva* is superimposed. On the other hand, *Viṣaya* is the subject superimposed upon another i.e. moon which is *viṣayi* as it is superimposed on 'face'. In other words, *Viṣaya* or *Upameya* is 'face' which is identical with the 'moon. In this case the distinction between these is not concealed in spite of having excessive similarity.² In other words, the ascription of identification between two objects inspite of not concealing their difference. (*Atisāmyāt anapahnutabhedayoḥ upamānopameyayoḥ abhedāropaḥ*) is *Rūpaka*.

The phrase '*nirapahnava*' appeared in the definition bears a great significance on account of the fact that it can differentiate metaphor or *Rupaka* from illusion and *Apahnuti*. In the case of *Rupaka* the distinction between *upamāna* and *upameya*, though known, is not concealed but in the case of illusion the distinction between them is not ascertained at all (*bhedāgraha*). In *Apahnuti* an object is denied to be what it really is and something else is ascribed to it. (e.g. This is not face, but the moon-*nedam*

mukham kintu candra) while in *Rupaka* there is no such denial.³ As the *Viṣayī* imposes its form (*rūpa*) on the *Viṣaya*, it is called *Rūpaka*. Though two objects possess different opposite properties and though their distinction is completely known, yet sometimes there is hypothetical ascription of identity in order to show their extreme similarity (*kālapanikabhedāropaḥ*). We may quote here a beautiful example of *Rūpaka* from *Āyurveda*, which runs as follows : "*Vāyupittakaphebhānām . Śarīravanacārinam eka eva nihantāsti lavanādrakakeśarī*". (That is, the lion in the form of salt with wet-ginger is the only killer of the elephants in the forms of wind, bile and cough roaming about the forest in the form of body). In this case we find so many metaphors as body is identified with forest, wind etc. with elephants and salt etc. with lion.

In these cases both the counterparts of the metaphor are mentioned. But there are a few cases of metaphor where there is no mention of either of the counter-parts like *upamāna* or *upameya*. as in the case of implicative and suggestive meaning. Here in most of the cases *Upamāna* is mentioned clearly and *Upameya* is assumed after taking the literal meaning of the term into account.

This assumption may vary from man to man, which entails that *Upamiti* varies from individual to individual though *Upāmana* is the same. When Buddha says to his disciples - "The Sun is set' (*gataḥ astamarkaḥ*) the main import of the sentence which is conveyed here is taken in different ways by three disciples according to their own desire and purpose. In this case the desire and purpose of a disciple which is *Upameya* is identified with the setting of the sun which is *Upamana*. Hence, this may be taken as a case of metaphor. But the problem arises as to the fact that we do not know clearly the object which is metaphorised. Three disciples having different *saṃkāras* may have different desire and purpose which is indicated by the single *Upamāna*. From this it follows that the use of metaphor does not always help in making an accurate or precise statement but instead it may lead us to the world of ambiguity. Hence, the position of those who believe that metaphor is used for better and precise communication is not always true. Such is the case with suggestive meaning. In the case of *Mukhacandra*

the *Upamāna* and *Upameya* are mentioned clearly and hence, there is no ambiguity. The metaphors in the forms of implication and suggestion have got aesthetic value no doubt and hence they may be desirable in literature. But in our everyday life they may not be always desirable as they stand as obstacle to our understanding. In these cases *upameya* is not constant though *upamāna* remains the same. Like other language the metaphorical language is also to be understood from the convention which is described by the Naiyāyikas as *Vṛddhavyavahāra* (i.e. verbal usage of the seniors) in most of the cases, but not in all cases. If someone hears a metaphor for the first time, it will not be able to yield any knowledge to him due to the absence of conventional meaning. It is true that sometimes metaphors are used intentionally only to keep a thing ambiguous. Ambiguity of language may sometimes be virtuous or sometimes vicious depending on the situations or contexts. The use of metaphor does not always communicate in a better way, but it may create misunderstanding also.

Metaphors are used after keeping the characters of the object called *upameya* in view. The identification between *upameya* and *upamana* is possible if there is extreme similarities (*atisāmyāt*) between them. Otherwise the metaphors are not to be taken as healthy. If an argument is able to substantiate the thesis and reject the antithesis, it is called *Sutarka* (good argument). Otherwise it is called *Kutarka* (bad argument). In the same way, if *Upamāna* can adequately explain the extreme similarities with the *Upameya*, it is a good metaphor. Otherwise, it is bad which gives rise to a defect technically called *Dr̥ṣṭānta - dar̥ṣṭāntika-virodha* (i.e. contradiction in respect of *Upamāna* and *Upameya*). We can mention here the Advaita Vedāntin's critique of *Sāṃkhya*. In *Tarkapada* chapter Śaṅkara has criticised the *Sāṃkhya*-view that the world is originated through mutual co-operation between *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa* metaphorised as *Andhapāṅunyāya*. It is the contention of the Advaita that the *Sāṃkhya* philisophers have committed a mistake by using the metaphor mentioned above which cannot substantiate their position due to having the defect called *Dr̥ṣṭānta-dar̥ṣṭāntikavirodha*. Because, to them both blind and lame men are conscious, but both *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa* are not conscious, and hence co-operation is not possible. Here we find a fallacious metaphor which is vicious (not virtuous) which is

otherwise called a bad metaphor. The metaphor in the form of co-operation between lame and blind man is not the same with that existing between *Purusa* and *Prakrti*. In the former both are conscious but no in the latter. Hence, there is no extreme similarity (*atisāmya*) between *Upamāna* and *Upameya*. So it is a case of bad metaphor.

In our day today life there are some usages which give rise to meanings which are completely different from their primary meanings. We come across some writings such as 'we do not smoke here' etc, which indirectly point to 'please do not smoke here'. The latter meaning is derived through the analysis of the primary meaning of the original sentence. Should we call them metaphor? The answer would be in the negative. In these cases there is no identification of *upāmana* and *upameya* and hence they would not come under the purview of metaphor. In the West the 'metaphor' means to go beyond the given'. Hence, any type of extended meaning would be called metaphor, which is not accepted in Indian tradition. When someone says - 'Kalinga is brave' (*Kaliṅgā Sāhasika*), 'Rickshaw', we mean 'The inhabitants of Kalinga are brave', 'Rickshwa-puller' through implication. In such implicative sentences there is no *Upamāna-upameyabhāva*. What is available here through implication is only the extension of meaning, which is not accepted as metaphor in Indian tradition.

Sometimes the *Upameya* is used as *Upamāna* in order to show the incomparability of the object. In other words, sometimes the object metaphorised is used as a metaphor in order to show its incomparability as pointed out by *Bhatṛhari*.⁶ As for example- 'Calcutta is Calcutta' '*Prasāada* is *Prasāada*' etc. In these cases *upameya* is identical with *Upamāna*. In Indian tradition the *Vivakṣa* (desire of saying) of a speaker has got a prominent role. One is allowed to say something according to his will though it is completely necessary. One is allowed to infer the object where truth is established (*Siddhi*), if one strongly desires so (*Siṣādhayiṣā*).⁷ In the same way, due to having strong *vivakṣa* of the speaker *Upamāna* may be assumed as different from *Upameya*, though actually not, and identification between them is shown which is kind of artificial intellectual exercise in order to

show the incomparability of the object. Though there is the imposition of identity (*abhedāropa*), the two objects (*upamāna* and *upameya*) are not bearing the contradictory properties (*parasparavir-uddhadharmavattvena upasthāpita*). Hence, such cases are not called metaphors, but a different type of Alankāra called *Ananvaya*. In case of metaphor here is the ascription of the artificial identity between *upamana* and *upameya* though their difference is completely known. This deliberate artificial identification may be described as *Āhāryābheda*. This imposed identification is possible only between two objects bearing contradictory properties. If the same object is described as both *upamana* and *Upameya* and identification is shown between them, it is not metaphor, because there is identity in the real world bearing no contradictory properties. But the beauty generated by such type of usage is not denied in our tradition and hence, this is called *Ananvaya*.

It is argued by a section of philosophers that metaphor is used to express the Reality which is not capable of being expressed through ordinary language. We may have some experience or feelings which can be expressed through ordinary language. It is too inadequate to express the feeling. Hence, metaphor is taken recourse to for expressing the feeling accurately. But this theory is not applicable to the Reality accepted particularly in *Advāita Vedānta*. It has been stated that as ordinary language fails to express the Reality, (*yato vāco nivartante* etc), metaphors are used to give a picture of the Reality as conceived in *Advāita Vedānta*.

The view is not true. The reality cannot be expressed through language. Even the metaphors cannot give the full picture of Reality. If one realises, the Truth, it is not communicable to others due to its *guhya* or secret character. The use of metaphor can give us some idea which is nearer to Reality, rather for our conceptualisation it can give a rough idea of Reality which is not Reality in the true sense of the term. It is to be noted in this connection that metaphor is also language. In fact, in *Upaniṣads*, *Brahmasūtras* we get metaphors trying to sketch a picture of Reality, which is described as superimposed (*adhyasta*) just after the realisation of Brahman or Reality. All these linguistic exercises through metaphor etc. as found in *Upaniṣads* or in

ordinary life are useful for having a hazy picture of Reality so that one may be inclined to know it. So, this description about Reality has a phenomenal value, (but not ultimate) as these are taken as illusory when the Reality is realised.⁸ Hence, if it is said that the Reality can be expressed through metaphor though it is indescribable, it leads us to contradiction. Because, conceptualisation and realisation is not the same thing. Metaphorical language may lead us to conceptualisation, but not realisation of the Reality.

In Literature Truth is expressed through metaphors. Any abstract thing which is not possible to express through ordinary language is expressed through metaphors. 'Truth' in literature is '*creation of beauty*'. Poets can bring such beauty in literature through the poetic language i.e. metaphorical language. Poetic language is completely different from the nonpoetic one due to its capacity of arousing the aesthetic experience or sentiment in a reader. In ordinary language there is the power of denotation (*abhidha*), the faculty of denoting a given object. Clearly the power to arouse aesthetic experience cannot be reduced to it. Hence, the poetic language needs metaphor to arouse the aesthetic feelings of the *Sahridayas* (connoisseurs).

Metaphor (*Dhvani*) is a unique power acquired by words and meanings in the province of poetry.⁹ In ordinary life words have only two types of meanings : one is conventional and other is implicative. even the second meaning is rarely utilized in life, since it is resorted to only when the surface meaning seems incompatible. But in literature the surface meaning will be found to be totally inadequate since the purpose of literature is not merely intelligibility.

That may be there incidentally, but its main concern is to evoke certain emotions which are universally present in men. To accomplish this purpose, language in literature takes the assistance of a new power which is metaphor (*Dhvani*). A poet's greatness lies only in the best service he can derive from this unique process of suggestion while he composes his work. If a poet fails to make his poetry suggestive of *Rasas*, he stands condemned because *Rasas* cannot be delineated in any manner.¹⁰

Emotions are not communicated by poet through ordinary language. He only suggests them. Poets make us feel the truth through the use of

metaphor which acts as stimulator. The ideal *Saḥradaya* is one who becomes happy after enjoying the scene of happiness, becomes unhappy at the sight of grief and becomes full of pity at the sight of the piteous.¹¹ This is what later writers describe as *hrdayasmvada* i.e. emotional sensitivity. (*Varnaṇiya vāsayatanmāyibhāvanāyogyatā*).

After considering the importance of metaphor Sri Aurobindo has emphasized the metaphorical meaning in his *Sāvitrī*. Through his *Kavya* Sri Aurobindo tries to metaphorise that just *like Savitri* one can be the abode of knowledge, religion, love, emotion, power and yogic experience and can transform oneself into divinity. After bringing down the Supramental Consciousness in oneself one can conquer Death, the king of decay, and can prepare in this world a firm footing of an immortal world, full of bliss. This is the message of Savitri. The epic opens with the description of the first flush of self-consciousness from the sleeps of unconscious, which is metaphorised as Dawn (*uṣā*). The Divine mother comes to this world as an incarnation (in the name of *Sāvitrī*) who conquers Death, the main obstruction for bringing the Supramental power and consciousness in this mortal world. Without the use of metaphor such poetic excellence cannot be made.

According to some scholars, the poetic approach is an irrational approach or 'cold philosophy'. It is correct that there is some sort of 'irrationality' in literature. But this 'irrationality' can be supported through some reason. Behind irrationality of literary art there is some justificatory reason which does not come from the normal mind. It is true that the reason arising from normal mind is not there. The disinterested delight comes out from something deep where there exist the vision, light and power which are the products of overmind. The joy from a *Kāvya* cannot be realised through the mind 'limited by intellectual activity, practical utility and the externals of life.' The beauty in poetry cannot be generated through infra-rational power, but through suprarational power or vision as Sri Aurobindo has observed. This vision does not come from the ordinary mental platform, but from the planes of the overmind. Hence, the poetry is described as *Mantra* or overhead poetry. So, the *Savitri* is described as *Mantra* or the poetry of vision.¹²

That poetry cannot be defined in terms of ordinary human logic has been accepted by *Viśvānath* also. According to him, poetry or *Kāvya* is a peculiar unworldly phenomenon, an extraordinary creation of a supernatural or super-normal genius and hence, it cannot be governed by the rules of ordinary human intellect. In ordinary life, sorrow comes from sorrow and fear follows fear, but in the world of poetry we find pleasure deriving from the painful, horrible and terrible situation.

The aesthetic pleasure (*Rasa*) saturated in an individual's heart leads him to the world of creativity (*Rasāveśavaisadyanirmānakṃ-amatva*). After perceiving the separation of the curlew couple Valmiki became very much moved and out of his grief he composed *Sloka*.¹⁴ He had intense feeling of pathos in which he had lost himself. Due to the complete loss of personality he had a sense of joy out of grief. This joyous experience of pathos provided him with the power of creation. Valmiki's grief was not this-worldly. If it were so, he would have sympathy with the bird from which the creation of *Kāvya* would not have been possible. This worldly grief makes an individual disabled while poetic vision empowers. When a poet's vision becomes deep and clear, he will surely get an inspiration from within, the materials for a *Kāvya* like characters, plots, metaphors etc. follow automatically due to having *Pratibhā* just as water overflows automatically from the jar already filled in water. So, poet's genius depends on the absorption of the aesthetic enjoyment which results in spontaneous creation of a *Kāvya*. If a poet's heart is filled with emotion, it finds a spontaneous outlet in the matrical form spontaneously. Because, creativity can never be suppressed. It should be clearly borne in mind that such spontaneity comes if there are no barriers like absence of contemplation, absence of saturation with *Rasa*, absence of *Pratibhā* etc.¹⁵

In other words, when the vision is clear and deep, the poet will effortlessly achieve the task of marshalling all his materials towards the one goal of *Rasa* and devises his plot etc.

For Sri Aurobindo also poetry is the spontaneous overflow of the powerful feelings. It is not possible for a poet to give a logical account in

respect of using a particular word or phrase to the critical intellect. It should be clearly borne in mind that no purpose is involved in the use of some phrase or some word by a poet, but it is to some extent spontaneous. A critic of *Sāvitrī* once wrote a letter to Sri Aurobindo enquiring about why the word 'great' is repeatedly used in the line about the 'great unsatisfied god-head' (p.19). In reply, Sri Aurobindo says that his poetry is the spontaneous overflow of his feelings. He does not himself deliberately choose or arrange word or rhythm but only sees it as it comes in the very act of inspiration. If there is any purpose of any kind, it also comes by and in the process of inspiration... "This I cannot tell you for what purpose I admitted the repetitions of the word 'great'.¹⁶

It has been accepted by some thinkers that truth in poetry varies from person to person, time to time. This view, I think, is not supportable. Because, there is something in literature which has external value. Any work of literary art may transcend particular time and space. It reminds me a line of Rabindranath Tagore who told that work of art is not bound in the net of history, in space and time (" *yena itihāsajāle vāndhā naha deśakāle* "). From this it follows that the literature has an universal appeal which surpasses particular time and space. Each and every piece of literary work would be universally appreciable if the readers become sahrdaya in the true sense of the term.

From the above discussion we may come to the conclusion that the use of metaphor is highly essential for poetic expression. It is true that we generally use metaphor in our day to day life to achieve certain purpose, which is not of a compulsive nature. In the case of poetry however the use of such language is inevitable. It is to be borne in mind that what makes a poem is 'beauty' and not merely metaphor in the form of suggestion. The key-word is *cārutvāpartiti* i.e. enjoyment of beauty which may otherwise be described as *Viśrāntisthāna* (i.e. a place affording the reader aesthetic repose) by Abhinavagupta.¹⁷ If there is no aesthetic repose, the function of metaphor or suggestion cannot unfold itself. In such case it cannot do the required job and hence, it is confined to its literal meaning.¹⁸ The metaphor is the instrument

through which a poet can provide the reader an aesthetic repose as done by Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo etc. Thus use of metaphor etc. is possible by poet almost spontaneously if he has proper practice (*anusilana*), creative intuition (*Kārayitrī pratibhā*) etc. Hence, metaphor is the essence of literary art which conveys as aesthetic beauty which is the truth in literature. From this it follows that without the help of metaphor the Truth in literature cannot be realised.

NOTES

1. *Sāhityadarpana*, Ch. X.
2. Aproah sādṛśyātiśāyavasat... sāropākhyalaksanayā āropanam rupakam." *Kusumapratimā on Sāhityadarpana*. Ch. X
3. Nirapahnavē upameyē upamānāsyabhedropo rupakam. Sapahnavē tupameyē upamanāsyabhedaropō' pahnutiritianayorapī bhedah." *Ibid*.
4. "Rupāyati upamānopāemeyayorābhedaropanam karotīti rūpakam. *Ibid*.
5. *Śamkarabhāṣya* on Sutra 2/2/7
6. *Vākyapadīya* - III 14.563-566.
7. "Siddhau satyāmpai sisādhayīśāsattve' numitirbhavatyeva." "*Siddhāntamuktāvalī* on verse no. 70.
8. "... Ityādīni sāstrāni atmani varnāśramavayo' vasthādīvisesādhyāśamasritya pravartate." *Adhyāśabhāṣya* of Saṁkara
9. '*Prasiddhātiriktam* vibhāti lāvanyamivangānāsu' Dhvanyāloka 1/4.
10. "Yatra tu rāsadīnāmavisayatvam sa kāvyāprakāro na sambhavatyeva" *Dhvanyāloka*.
11. "Yastuste tustimāyāti, śoke sokamupaiti ca/ Daīnye dīnatvamabhyeti sa nātye prekṣakah smratah/"

12. Sri Aurobindo : Future Poetry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
13. "Hetutvaṃ śokaharṣādergatebhyo lokasaṃśrāyat śokaharsadayo loke jāyantām nāma laukikah, alaukikavibhāvatvam prāptebhyah kāvyasaṃśrayāt, sukham sanjTyāte tebhyah sarvebhyo 'pīti ka kaṣṭiḥ."
14. "Krauṇḍadvandvaviyogotthaḥ 'śokahvamāgataḥ" Dhvānyalokā 1/5.
15. "Sa eva tathābhūtavibhāvatadutthakrandādyanubhā vacarvanaya hrdayasamvādatanmayibhāvanakramadasvādyāmanatām pratipannath karunarasatām laukikasokavyatiriktām ... rasaparipūrṇakumb hoccalanvaccitta vrttinihsyandasvabhāva vāgvilāpādivacca ... samucita chandavrttādiniantritas-lokarūpatām praptah" Locana on Dhvanyaloka - 1/5.
16. Sri Aurobindo : Letters on Savitri pp.839-840, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
17. "Cārutvaṃ viśrāntisthānam"
Locana, Dhvanyāloka, p. 433.
18. "Tadabhāva sa vyanjakātvavyāpāro naivonmilati pratyāvrttya vācyleva viśrānteḥ..." *Ibid.*

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