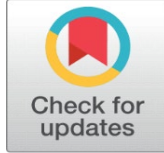
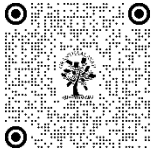


THE CONCEPT OF ALAṆKĀRA IN SANSKRIT POETICS

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ABSTRACT

As ornaments embellish the body, so do figures of speech adorn language. Traditionally and most commonly defined as ornamentation, Alaṅkāra transcends mere decoration, serving as a vital mechanism for evoking rasa - aesthetic experience and enhancing the emotional resonance of poetic works. These ornaments are classified into two main categories: Śabda-alaṅkāra (sound-based ornaments) and Artha-alaṅkāra (meaning-based ornaments). Śabda-alaṅkāra focus on the musicality and rhythmic aspect of language. Artha-alaṅkāra deal with the conceptual and interpretive aspect of language. Alaṅkāra plays an integral role in the poetic process as it bridges the gap between the literal and the figurative. Hence it enables poetry to transcend ordinary language and touch upon the sublime. In this way, alaṅkāra is not just a decorative element but a fundamental aspect of Sanskrit poetics, central to the creation and appreciation of poetic art. Ultimately, this exploration reaffirms alaṅkāra's status as an essential pillar of Sanskrit aesthetics, illuminating the profound connection between artistry and the human experience in the realm of poetry.

Keywords: Indian Poetics, Aesthetics, Kāvya, Śāstra, Alaṅkāra

1. INTRODUCTION

Poetics is classified either as a study of science or philosophy according to our Sanskrit theorists. It is considered to be a study of science because it leads one to appreciate the composition, technique, style and the context of the art. It helps one to analyse art for its meaning and differentiate between the various meanings such as - literal, symbolic, intentional or suggested. It also aids in classifying art into different genres. It is considered to be a study of philosophy because Indian Poetics also aims to understand the emotional and the experiential response that art evokes in the audience - known as the 'aesthetic experience' or 'Rasa'. Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy that explores questions like what defines art, what does beauty mean, what makes something beautiful and how does one experience or perceive that

beauty. This aesthetic philosophy is then looked and further interpreted through the lenses of different philosophical thoughts such as the Advaita Vedanta, Buddhism, Nyaya and Kashmir Shaivism. Therefore poetics also lays a path to question the deeper metaphysical and existential truths.

Indian Poetics includes a wide range of texts written in different languages such as Sanskrit, Prakrit, Tamil and many more. Whether Sanskrit is the oldest language is still a topic of debate. But, it is a historical fact that Sanskrit has been the chosen language for scholarly discourses in India for the longest of time. Some of the greatest magnum opus of Indian poetics have been written in Sanskrit which have been followed by the students of arts to this day. In Sanskrit Poetics kāvya (poetry) is divided into two broad categories - Śravya-kāvya and Dṛśya-kāvya.

- **Śravya-kāvya:** This refers to the literature or poetry that is meant to be heard or recited. The word Śravya finds its roots from the Sanskrit word 'śru' - which means to hear. Therefore Śravya-kāvya literally translates to "audible poetry". The texts that belong under this category give more importance to the sound, rhythm and melody. The beauty is reflected through its phonetic qualities, which helps in chanting and imparting knowledge through oral traditions. Typically there are three forms of Śravya-kāvya - Sloka (Metrical Verse), Gadya (Prose) and Padya (Poetry). This particular category is a testament to the ancient rich oral Indian tradition. It became a medium through which a lot of our texts were preserved and imparted from generation to generation. Whether they were the prayers or the epics- all of it we have access to today, because of Śravya-kāvya.
- **Dṛśya-kāvya:** This refers to works that are primarily meant to be seen or performed. The word "dṛśya" finds its roots from the Sanskrit word "dṛś" - which means to see. Therefore Dṛśya-kāvya literally translates to "visible poetry". This particular category gives more importance to the visual and performative aspects which enhance the poetic or literary experience. It emphasizes on the elements like gestures, costumes, expressions, stage craft and dramatic representations. The dramatic representations include genres like **Nāṭaka** (Drama), **Rupaka** (Dramatic Forms), and **Prabandha** (Narrative Compositions). Along with spoken language Dṛśya-kāvya also incorporates dance and music, which contribute to the overall visual and emotional appeal of the performance. **Nāṭya-śāstra is an example of the text that is foundational to Dṛśya-kāvya. It is a text which lays the foundation for all the performers even today. The text which is an ancient treatise on drama and performance, which is the earliest work available on Indian Poetics, which was written by Bharata Muni between 200 B.C. to 400 A.D., although some scholars suggest that it could also be older.**

The above two categories highlight the different ways in which poetry can be experienced. They reflect the multifaceted nature of Sanskrit literary traditions. Traditionally Indian poetics was known as "Alaṅkāraśāstra" which is deeply connected with the auditory aspects of poetry, therefore confining it to **śravya-kāvya**, where the sound-based elements are appreciated in a holistic manner.

2. DEFINITION OF ALAṅKĀRA

In Sanskrit there are several words that are synonymous or which describe different aspects of "beauty". Such as, - Saundarya (beauty), cārutā (charm), ramaṇiyatā (loveliness), saubhāgya (auspiciousness), śobhā (splendor), lāvaṇya

(grace), kānti (radiance), vicchitti (elegance), and so forth. Although the most widely recognized and frequently used key-term of aesthetics is Alaṅkāra. ***“It’s widest meaning is adequately stressed by Vamāna who aphoristically states: ‘Saundaryam Alaṅkāraḥ’.*** Since alaṅkāra can also mean a ‘means of beauty’ it can denote poetic and artistic device also.” (Indian Literary Theories: A Reappraisal (an Old and Rare Book) / Exotic India Art, n.d.) Therefore, Alaṅkāra-śāstra can be literally translated to the ‘science of beauty’. Later poetics came to be known as Alaṅkāra-śāstra - “the science of poetics”. Kuntaka in his seminal work "Vakrokti Jivita," offers distinct meanings of Alaṅkāra:

- 1) **General Sense** - It is ornaments like rings, necklaces, and other decorative items that beautify and enhance one's appearance.
- 2) **Technical sense** - It is the figures of speech such as metaphors, similes, alliteration, and hyperbole, which contribute to the richness of poetic expression by highlighting the sound and the sense of a poetic composition.
- 3) **Sound and Sense-** It is a means of creating an aesthetic appeal that encompasses the overall sound and sense aspects of poetry. The sound is achieved through the use of the rhythmic patterns, meter, alliteration and assonance. These elements contribute to the musical quality of the poem, making it pleasing to the ear. The beauty of sense involves the meaning conveyed through language. Kuntaka emphasizes on the usage of metaphors, similes, personification, and other figures of speech to deepen the emotional and the intellectual impact of poetry. It is an effective combination of these devices that create a harmonious blend of sound and meaning, leading to a richer and a more engaging poetic experience.
- 4) **Aesthetic Sense** - it is a comprehensive framework for understanding and appreciating that nature of beauty in poetry.

It is the third meaning that forms the basis of Alaṅkāra-śāstra. In its broader sense, alaṅkāra is the concept of ornamentation or embellishment which enhances poetry. It's about adding layers of meaning and aesthetic appeal to the composition, making it more engaging and evocative. The first systematization of alaṅkāra is to be found in the **Nāṭya-śāstra of Bharata (200B.C. - 400 A.D.)**. The treatment of alaṅkāra in the Nāṭya-śāstra is more incidental, as Bharata's main objective is to discuss the principles of drama. However, his work laid the groundwork for the later, more systematic explorations of alaṅkāra by subsequent theorists and poets. The narrow or specialized meaning of **alaṅkāra** as primarily a figure of speech—serving as the hallmark of poetic beauty—is more explicitly developed by early sanskrit poets and theorists Bhāmaha (6th Century A.D.) and Udbhaṭa 8th Century A.D.). According to Bhāmaha, the beauty of poetry lies in the use of various figures of speech that enhance the expression and aesthetic appeal. His focus was primarily on stylistic aspects, and he classified and detailed many of these figures. Udbhaṭa, further developed the alaṅkāra theory and introduced new concepts and classifications of figures of speech. Both Bhāmaha and Udbhaṭa view alaṅkāra as central to the aesthetic value of poetry, focusing on the embellishment of language and the enhancement of poetic expression.

3. CLASSIFICATION OF ALAṅKĀRA

During the time of Bhāmaha and Dandin **kāvya** was often viewed in a way that prioritized the artistic expression over the narrative content. The idea that the plot of the **kāvya** is seen as its "body" suggested that the story or narrative is secondary to the manner in which it is presented. The way a **kāvya** is presented is crucial. It should be engaging and delightful to the audience, emphasizing the importance of aesthetic appeal in poetry. A charming presentation attracts the reader's or listener's attention and enhances their enjoyment of the work. The use of **rhetoical devices** or **figures of speech** is essential in elevating the quality of the poetry. These devices embellish the language and contribute to the overall beauty and expressiveness of the composition. Kuntaka in his Vakroṭi Jivita mentions the following verse:

*“śabdau vivakṣitārthakāvacakau teṣu satsu api
arthāḥ saḥṛdayāhlādakārī svāspanda sundarāḥ”* Sreenivasaraos (n.d.)

The verse suggests that while words (śabda) are essential for conveying meaning (artha), it is ultimately the meaning that creates aesthetic pleasure and resonates with the sensitive or appreciative audience (saḥṛdaya). The beauty of poetry lies not just in the sound of words but in the profound and delightful meanings they express.

Hence in a broader sense alaṅkāra came to be classified into two types:

- **Śabda-alaṅkāra:** Figures of speech that focus on the phonetic qualities of language, such as alliteration and rhyme. They enhance the auditory experience of the poetry.
- **Artha-alaṅkāra:** Figures of speech that emphasize on the meaning or the sense conveyed, such as metaphors and similes. They deepen the emotional and intellectual impact of the poetry.

Over centuries the theory of alaṅkāra evolved. And new attempts in classifying the figures of speech under more precise categories were seen by several theorists that followed. Bhoja lists around 25 types under Śabda-alaṅkāra, but it is not taken into consideration by the neo-theorists. They are satisfied with the broader classification of Śabda-alaṅkāra:

- **Yamaka (Chime):** The term Yamaka means pair or twin. This device involves the repetition of a word or syllable which adds a rhythmic and musical quality to the verse, making it pleasing to recite and hear. The "**chime**" effect in Yamaka comes from this repetition and the rhythmic sound it produces which is similar to the melodious ringing of bells. It also introduces dual meanings of the same word which adds depth and subtlety to the text. For example: "The king is a king among men."
- **Anuprāsa (Alliteration):** The repetition of consonant sounds in close proximity. This creates a musical quality in poetry, enhancing its auditory appeal and rhythm. For Example : "The wild winds wail."

It was Rudraṭa who gave a clear classification of the Artha-alaṅkāra. He classified them into 4 types:

- **Vāstava (Naturalism):** It is as a figure of speech that emphasizes on realistic and unblemished depictions of life. It focuses on the ordinary and the natural world. It strives for authenticity and detail, often reflecting social issues and human experiences without idealization. It highlights both beauty and the harsh realities of existence. For example: The rain poured heavily and the children splashed in the muddy puddles as they played together in glee. Their clothes were soaked and their laughter echoed in the air. Nearby, a stray dog, it too soaked in the rain, its ribs showed through its fur. It was hungry, and was searched for food. When you read this you can truly imagine this to be a scene from reality.
- **Aupamya (Simile):** It is a comparison between two different things using the words "like" or "as." This is used to highlight similarities and create a vivid imagery, enhancing the reader's understanding and emotional engagement. For example: "Her eyes shone like stars."
- **Atiśaya (Exaggeration):** It is used to amplify certain qualities or characteristics in order to create emphasis or evoke strong feelings. This technique is often used for dramatic effect, humor or to highlight a particular aspect of a subject. Exaggeration also enhances the emotional impact of a statement by stretching the truth, making the description more vivid and memorable. For Example: "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse!"
- **Sleśa (Paranomasia/Pun):** where you use of similar-sounding words or phrases to create a play on words. This device often relies on multiple meanings or homophones to add humor, wit, or depth to the expression. Puns can create a clever or humorous effect by exploiting the ambiguity of language. They can also be used to convey deeper meanings or connect disparate ideas through wordplay. For example: "What did the tree say to the flower? I'm rooting for you!"

Ruyyaka introduced a more systematic classification by outlining seven distinct types of Artha-alaṅkāra :

- **Similitude:** This involves the use of similes, which are comparisons between different things, often using 'like' or 'as'. For example : "*My love is like a red, red rose.*" This line compares love with a rose, evoking feelings of beauty and tenderness.
- **Beauty in the use of epithets:** This refers to the use of descriptive phrases that add richness to the nouns they modify. For example: "*The bright sun shone down on the cheerful flowers.*" Here the 'bright' describes the sun, and 'cheerful' describes the flowers, creating a more vivid picture of the scene.
- **Beauty in the suggested overtones:** Focuses on the implied meanings or connotations of words that go beyond their literal interpretations which invites the reader for a deeper reflection. For example: "*The winter's chill whispered secrets to the trees.*" This phrase suggests a mysterious relationship between the season and the trees, implying a deeper connection with nature.
- **Opposition:** It is the use of contrasting ideas or themes within a poem. Oppositions create a kind of a tension which can also highlight the complexities in meaning. For example: "*In the night, the stars shine bright, but*

the darkness looms.” In this line there is a contrast between brightness of the stars and the looming darkness, evoking a sense of hope amid despair.

- **Syntactical chain-construction:** It focuses on the flow and rhythm created by the arrangement of words and phrases. For example: “The wind sang softly, the leaves danced, and the night sighed.” In this line there is a rhythmical flow in its structure which enhances the musical quality.
- **Poetic slant to logical forms of statement:** It blends logical reasoning with poetic expression to convey deeper insights. For example: “Time is a river, flowing endlessly.” This metaphor uses logical reasoning to describe the passage of time, inviting readers to reflect on its nature.
- **Hidden meaning:** These are the subtexts or concealed messages within the poem that require deeper analysis to uncover their significance. For example: “The closed door stood silently, holding back the memories.” In this sentence, the door symbolizes barriers to the past, suggesting feelings of nostalgia and loss without explicitly stating them.

4. ALAṅKĀRA - A LITERARY BEAUTY

With this we can definitely say that alaṅkāra are connected to literary beauty, but so are Guṇas and rasas. The question to ask is, how does one differentiate between these. While guṇas represent stable, foundational qualities of poetic expression, alaṅkāra encompasses the diverse and evolving aspects of poetic imagery. This distinction is crucial in the study of aesthetics and poetry, as it reflects both the consistency and variability inherent in literary art. The idea suggests that while certain qualities of poetry can be universally recognized and categorized, the creative use of imagery allows for endless exploration and innovation. This thought has been very beautifully encapsulated by Paramānanda Cakravartin in his commentary on Kāvyaaprakāśa (I.4):

“The guṇas like ‘sweetness’ and ‘brilliance’ are grounded in style or syntactic structure in relation to rasa and hence their number is fixed and constant, whether three or ten as one chooses to think. Their number cannot go on changing from poem to poem. But not so in the case of alaṅkāra or poetic imagery. They do change often from poet to poet and even from poem to poem composed by the same poet. They are variable and their possibilities are endless’ hence theorists can go on adding to their numbers by discovering fresh shades of figurative beauty in any given specimen of poetry.”

(Indian Literary Theories: A Reappraisal (an Old and Rare Book) | Exotic India Art, n.d.)

5. CONCLUSION

The use of figures of speech - alaṅkāra in poetry is a hallmark of great poets. Alaṅkāra whether in śabda (sound) or artha (idea), is not merely an ornamental addition but it is also an integral tool used to convey deep feelings and ideas within the poetic experience. The true beauty of poetry often stems from the poet's intrinsic desire to create. Just as a masterful artist brings a canvas to life with vibrant colors and intricate details, poetry serves as the poet's own creative canvas, celebrating the delight found in both the act of creation and the essence of life itself. This perspective allows readers to recognize the deep relationship between the elegance of artistic expression and the wonder of the world around them, highlighting how both art and nature weave together to form a rich tapestry of beauty and inspiration.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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