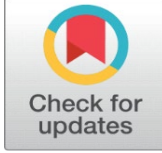
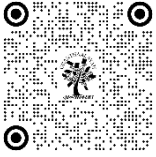


# THE CONCEPT OF GUNA IN SANSKRIT POETICS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the evolution and significance of the concept of Guṇa in Sanskrit poetics, tracing its development from early foundational texts to its philosophical reorientation in later aesthetic theory. Guṇa, often translated as “quality” or “virtue,” refers to the intrinsic poetic qualities that give literary works emotional depth, stylistic beauty, and expressive power. Through a detailed examination of classical sources - including Bharata’s Nāṭyaśāstra, Daṇḍin’s Kāvyaadarśa, Vāmana’s Kāvyaalāṅkārasūtravṛtti, and Ānandavardhana’s Dhvanyāloka - the paper outlines the shifting interpretations of Guṇa, from its initial classification as a technical aspect of style to its ultimate subordination to Rasa - aesthetic emotion in the Dhvani school. The study also distinguishes Guṇa from Alaṅkāra – ornamentation and analyzes its relationship to other poetic elements such as śabda - sound, artha - meaning, and rīti - style. Ultimately, the paper argues that Guṇa serves not merely as a marker of rhetorical excellence but as an integral component of the poetic experience, valued most when it enhances emotional suggestion and artistic unity.

**Keywords:** Guṇa, Sanskrit Poetics, Rasa, Alaṅkāra, Kāvya, Bharata, Daṇḍin, Vāmana, Ānandavardhana

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sanskrit poetics – Kāvyaśāstra is one of the most refined and comprehensive traditions of literary theory in the world. It brings together deep reflections on language, art, emotion and human experience. As its core, it seeks to answer a timeless question: What makes poetry beautiful or meaningful? One of the key concepts that helps address this question is Guṇa. Often translated as “quality” or virtue, Guṇa in Sanskrit poetics refers to the essential characteristics that give poetry its emotional resonance, grace and artistic depth.

Guṇa is distinct from Alaṅkāra, or ornamentation. Alaṅkāra refers to the use of literary devices like simile, metaphor, and alliteration. While alaṅkāra decorates the poem externally, guṇa works from within. It shapes the tone, emotional texture, and expressive strength of a poem. In this way, guṇa contributes to the poem’s overall impact and helps it create a lasting connection with the reader or listener.

Over time, various schools of thought or sampradāyas have emerged within Indian poetics. Each of them offering their own understanding of how poetry should be interpreted and valued. Thinkers like Bhāmaha, Daṇḍin, Vāmana,

Ānandavardhana, and Abhinavagupta made significant contributions, often responding to or building upon each other's ideas. Despite their differing perspectives, most agreed on the central importance of three foundational concepts:

- 1) Rasa - aesthetic emotion or mood,
- 2) Alaṅkāra - figures of speech.
- 3) Guṇa - the inner quality or excellence of expression.

These three ideas form the core of almost every major theory in Sanskrit poetics and are essential tools for both the creation and analysis of poetic works.

Importantly, Sanskrit poetics does not stand in isolation. It is a part of a larger system of Indian aesthetics that includes drama (nāṭya), dance (nṛtya), music (saṅgīta), sculpture (mūrti-kalā), and painting (citra-kalā). All these forms of art share common principles regarding beauty, emotional expression, and artistic communication. The concept of guṇa, for instance, is relevant not only in poetry but also in how a dance is choreographed, a melody is composed, or a painting is brought to life. Seen in this broader context, guṇa is not merely a technical term in literary theory. It represents a deeper vision of how art speaks, touches, and transforms. It reflects the Indian aesthetic worldview, in which beauty is not only about outward ornamentation but also about the harmony of inner qualities. Whether in a verse, a song, a dance, or an image, guṇa helps shape the emotional and artistic core of the work. Its presence ensures that poetry is not only pleasing to the ear but also rich in meaning and feeling. In exploring guṇa, one also encounters a broader cultural and philosophical perspective, where one sees art as a reflection of life, capable of revealing truth, evoking emotion, and connecting people through shared human experience.

## 2. DEFINITION OF GUṆA

In classical Sanskrit poetics, Guṇa denotes the refined and aesthetically pleasing way in which śabda - words and Artha - ideas are combined within a literary work. It transcends mere mechanical or arbitrary arrangement. Instead, it represents a deliberate, harmonious, and artistic synthesis that blends poetic language and meaning to create literary beauty. This artistic collocation is not simply about joining words and ideas; it must embody several key features to achieve its full effect, including:

- 1) Doṣa - Freedom from literary flaws
- 2) Clarity, brilliance, and expressive power
- 3) Rīti - A distinctive literary style
- 4) Guṇa - Intrinsic poetic qualities
- 5) Alaṅkāra- Ornamentation, such as metaphors, similes, and other figures of speech.

Together, these elements form the essence of literary expression, often referred to as kāvyarūpa or literary form. This concept of beauty - chārutva in poetry is traditionally understood as twofold, as expressed in the following Sanskrit verse:

Dvidvidham chārutvam - svarūpamātra-niṣṭham, saṅghaṭanāśritaṁ ca |

Tatra śabdānām svarūpamātrakṛtaṁ chārutvaṁ śabdālaṅkārebhyaḥ,  
saṅghaṭanāśritaṁ tu śabdaguṇebhyaḥ |

Evam arthānām chārutvaṁ svarūpamātra-niṣṭham upamādibhyaḥ,

saṅghaṭanāparyavasitaṁ tu arthaguṇebhyaḥ || - S. Kuppuswami Sastri, 1993, p. 52 This passage elucidates that chārutva - aesthetic beauty or charm in poetry arises from two sources:

- 1) **Svarūpamātra-niṣṭha** - Inherent or form- based beauty.
- 2) **Saṅghaṭanāśrita** - Composition or arrangement dependent beauty.

In the case of śabda, or words, beauty that stems solely from the inherent form, such as the sound, rhythm, or phonetic qualities of words, is attributed to śabda alaṅkāras, which are figures of speech related to sound, like alliteration and rhyme. In contrast, beauty that arises from the skillful arrangement of words depends on śabda guṇas, which are qualities like clarity (prasāda), vigor (ojas), and sweetness (mādhurya).

Similarly, for artha, or meaning, beauty is inherent in the idea itself. It is manifested through poetic figures like simile (upamā), metaphor (rūpaka), and other semantic ornaments, which are credited to arthālaṅkāras. However, beauty that

emerges from the artful organization and coherence of ideas is due to artha guṇas, which include qualities such as emotional depth, unity, and clarity. Thus, poetic beauty is derived both from the nature of words and ideas themselves and from their artistic collocation, with both dimensions playing an essential role in generating literary charm.

It is crucial to distinguish between guṇas and alaṅkāras in this context. While guṇas are qualities that arise specifically from the collocation or combination of words and ideas, alaṅkāras apply to individual words or concepts, not to their combinations. Both guṇas and alaṅkāras contribute significantly to the aesthetic appeal of a literary work. However, their effectiveness depends fundamentally on the preservation of the artistic process of vyañjanā, which is the subtle poetic suggestion or evocative power that underlies classical Sanskrit poetry. Without this vital element of vyañjanā, neither guṇas nor alaṅkāras can fully realize their intended literary impact.

### 3. EVOLUTION OF THE THEORY OF GUṆA

The concept of Guṇa in Sanskrit poetics has evolved significantly over time, beginning with its early mention in Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra and finding fuller development in the works of later theorists such as Bhāmaha, Daṇḍin, Vāmana, and Ānandavardhana. While Bharata introduces several key poetic concepts like Guṇa, Doṣa (flaw), Rīti (style), Alaṅkāra (ornament), and Rasa (aesthetic emotion), his definitions are brief and often abstract. Later scholars expanded and clarified these ideas, providing more concrete frameworks for literary analysis.

#### 3.1. BHARATA'S EARLY CONTRIBUTION

In the Nāṭyaśāstra, Bharata refers to Guṇas in the context of drama, poetry, and performance, associating them with actors, spectators, and compositions. However, he does not clearly define the term. He emphasizes that Guṇas and Alaṅkāras are closely related, noting:

*"Where Alaṅkāras and Guṇas are similar to each other and adorn each other, their positions are alike, and their similarity is acknowledged."* - (CEC-UGE-NME-ICT PROJECT 2017, n.d.) - This suggests a complementary relationship between the two, where both contribute to literary beauty.

Bharata outlines ten Guṇas, which include both śabda guṇas - word-based qualities and artha guṇas - meaning-based qualities:

- 1) **Śleṣa** - Coalescence or compactness. Bharata defines śleṣa as a poetic quality with a twofold character:
  - **Śleṣa as coalescence** - It is the harmonious fusion of words that are semantically connected. This union is not arbitrary but guided by the poet's intention and the deeper meaning the poet wishes to convey. In this sense, śleṣa represents the organic integration of expression and content.
  - **Śleṣa as structural unity** - Bharata further emphasizes that this coalescence should appear effortless and natural. The composition must feel unified and coherent, with no trace of forced or artificial construction. A well-composed verse, therefore, achieves śleṣa when its form and meaning blend seamlessly, resulting in an aesthetically pleasing and cohesive whole.
- 2) **Prasāda** - Clarity. Bharata characterizes it as a poetic excellence where meaning becomes easily accessible, even if it is not explicitly stated. This ease of comprehension arises from the smooth relationship between śabda and artha. Even when a thought is only implied or subtly hinted at, the reader or listener can effortlessly grasp the intended sense because the language flows with natural clarity and elegance. Thus, prasāda involves not just the beauty of sound, but the lucidity of meaning- making it both a stylistic and semantic virtue.

However, Bharata's description of prasāda lacks a rigid classification. It is Abhinavagupta, the eminent philosopher and commentator, who later interprets Bharata's prasāda as an artha-guṇa - a quality of meaning, aligning it with Vāmana's system of poetic analysis. Abhinava provides a key remark:

*"sārthaḥ vaimalyasya api vaimalyam upacārat"* - Concepts of Riti and Guṇa in

Sanskrit Poetics: Lahiri, P.c.: Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming: Internet

Archive, 1937, p. 31

Abhinavagupta is pointing out that when we talk about "clarity of meaning," we are speaking metaphorically, since meaning is not a visible object that can literally be "clear" or "unclear." Instead, we use "clarity" to refer to how easily and naturally the meaning reveals itself to the reader or listener. This interpretation resonates with Vāmana's concept of

prasāda, which he defines as "artha-vaimalya" - the purity or transparency of meaning. For Vāmana, prasāda is an artha-guṇa because it concerns the effectiveness with which the intended idea is conveyed. A composition with prasāda doesn't burden the reader with complexity or ambiguity; rather, it communicates its essence with grace, fluency, and intuitive intelligibility. Thus, Abhinavagupta bridges Bharata's poetic insight with the analytical framework of later theorists, showing that the concept of prasāda, though expressed differently, maintains a consistent focus on the lucid transmission of meaning across poetic traditions.

Prasāda guṇa is the poetic quality of clarity, simplicity, and immediate emotional impact, which allows a poem to touch the reader's heart effortlessly. Just as fire quickly burns dry wood, prasāda guṇa enables the meaning and emotion of a poem to spread rapidly and clearly in the mind of the reader or listener. This quality is found across all rasas and literary compositions, as it depends not on the type of emotion but on the transparent and graceful expression of it. The clarity in syllables and choice of words becomes the key to expressing rasa effectively. An example of this can be seen in the verse

*"Suchimukhenāsakṛd eva kṛtāvraṇasattvaṁ muktākalāpaluthasiṣṭatanayoḥ priyāyāḥ, bāṇaiḥ smarasya śataśo vinikṛtamarma svapne 'pi tām kathamaham na vilokayāmi"* - (Sanskrit Sahitya, 248 C.E.)

Here the expression is emotionally powerful yet so clear and vivid that the scene naturally enters the heart and imagination of the reader. Despite the intensity of emotion, the words are arranged in a way that makes the meaning immediately accessible, making this a perfect example of prasāda guṇa.

- 3) Sāmatā** - Evenness or balance. It refers to a sense of uniformity, balance, and harmony in poetic expression. It is free from redundancy, obscurity, or awkwardness. A verse exhibiting Sāmatā is smooth, symmetrical, and composed in such a way that no part appears disproportionately elaborate or too simplistic compared to the rest. One of the key aspects in achieving Sāmatā is the avoidance of excessive cūrṇa-padas.

The term cūrṇa-pada literally translates to "scattered words" or "fragmented phrases." It denotes a style marked by loose, disjointed, or overly simple word constructions that hinder the flow of poetic expression. Vāmana characterizes cūrṇa-pada as expressions that are composed of short compounds (adīrgha-samāsa), and that which use mild, soft-sounding words (anuddhatta-pada) rather than elevated or forceful diction. Such constructions often lack the compactness and force that mark high poetic style. They make a composition appear fragmented or diluted, thereby disturbing the desired poetic rhythm and balance. Bharata contrasts well-composed, metrical language with expressions that are prosaic, unrefined, and lacking in poetic density - the latter being referred to as cūrṇa-pada. These expressions are to be avoided in serious poetic composition because they undermine Sāmatā by introducing irregularity and weakening the aesthetic cohesion of the verse.

- 4) Samādhi** - Depth or composure. It refers to the harmonious integration of meaning - a depth or unity of thought where all components of an idea converge to create a powerful, singular impression on the reader or listener. It represents a kind of mental absorption, both for the poet who composes with focused intent and for the audience who receives the thought in its full richness.

According to Bharata Samādhi occurs when various poetic elements, such as clarity, sweetness, vigor, or beauty come together to support and elevate the central meaning or emotion that is being conveyed. This idea is further developed by Vāmana, who describes Samādhi as the quality that results from the effective coordination of all poetic elements. Building on this, Abhinavagupta provides a deeper philosophical and aesthetic explanation. According to Abhinavagupta when a particular idea or meaning is illuminated with exceptional creative brilliance, and carries a special emotional or intellectual weight, making it glow with its own inner light, it captures and holds the mind in complete absorption. Such meaning, capable of producing this unified aesthetic experience, is what qualifies as possessing Samādhi.

- 5) Mādhurya** - Sweetness. Where a sentence, even when heard or repeated many times, does not cause weariness or boredom. Instead, it continues to please the listener or reader due to its harmonious and graceful expression.

Abhinavagupta, while commenting on Bharata's treatment of mādhurya, interprets it through the lens of Vāmana's poetics. He presents mādhurya from two perspectives - as śabda-guṇa (quality of sound or expression) and as artha-guṇa (quality of meaning). When a sentence, because of its structure and sound, avoids creating confusion or ambiguity, and retains its pleasantness even when repeated, it is considered mādhurya. This sweetness is especially present in well-formed long compounds and Abhinavagupta interprets this as Bharata's version of mādhurya as a śabda-guṇa, similar to what Vāmana describes. Abhinavagupta also interprets mādhurya as an artha-guṇa, which he links to expressive

novelty. When a statement expresses an idea so gracefully and vividly that even on repeated hearing, it continues to reveal new layers of meaning or delight, this is called mād̥hurya as an artha-guṇa. It arises not just from the choice of words, but from the distinctive style of expression that enhances the beauty of the thought itself.

Mād̥hurya guṇa is the poetic quality of emotional sweetness and melodious expression that deeply touches the heart of a sensitive reader or listener, known as a sāhr̥daya. It is marked by the use of soft and pleasant sounds, gentle rhythm, and themes that evoke tender emotions, especially those related to romantic love in union, love in separation, compassion, and peace. This quality appears prominently in the works of classical poets like Vālmiki and Kālidāsa. Technically, mād̥hurya is brought out through the use of soft consonants such as 'ga', avoidance of harsh or bitter sounds, simple and light compounds, and compositions free from heavy grammatical endings. A beautiful example of this is seen in the verse

*"Anaṅga-maṅgala-bhuvas tad-bhaṅgasya bhaṅgāyaḥ, janyanty amuhur yānām antaḥ-santāpa-santatim,"* - (Sanskrit Sahitya, 248 C.E.)

Here the use of gentle letters and the natural flow of words create a musical and emotionally rich effect. The verse subtly expresses the emotional intensity of love through sweetness in sound and elegance in composition, making it a clear illustration of mād̥hurya guṇa.

- 6) Ojas** - Strength or vigor. A verse is said to possess Ojas when it uses strong and impressive language, especially long and well-formed compound words, that create a sense of power and intensity. This quality gives poetry a bold and forceful character, making the expression feel energetic and impactful.

Bharata describes Ojas as a result of words that are rich in both their sound and sense, where even a simple or humble subject can be made to appear noble or elevated. He also notes that this quality arises when the letters used in the words are arranged in a way that is pleasant and naturally supportive of one another. Abhinavagupta, while commenting on Bharata's view, clarifies this idea further. He explains that Ojas is present when the sounds of the letters within words rely on and enhance each other in a coordinated manner. Where the phonetic elements flow together with a sense of mutual connection, creating unity and intensity in the sound.

Ojas is also connected to meaning. Abhinavagupta points out that this quality appears in the content of poetry when the poet conveys significant or powerful ideas using concise and compact expressions. When profound thoughts are expressed using short and tightly arranged compounds, the result is an intense and forceful impact on the reader or listener. This explanation aligns with Vamana's definition of Ojas as boldness and assertiveness in meaning. According to Vamana, when the primary idea is conveyed through rich and elaborate expressions, and supporting ideas are communicated through brief and purposeful words, the resulting strength and clarity together give rise to Ojas.

- 7) Saukumārya** - Smoothness or delicacy. It is present in a composition where the words are used gracefully and the overall sense or meaning is pleasant, refined, and gentle. This quality brings a sense of elegance and emotional subtlety to the poem, making it appealing to the listener or reader.

Bharata defines Saukumārya as the quality that arises when words are pleasing in sound and meaning, and when their combinations are smooth and well connected. This includes the use of gentle syllables, harmonious word formations, and meanings that are soothing and emotionally agreeable. The quality lies in avoiding harsh, jarring, or discordant expressions, both in sound and in content. Abhinavagupta, while commenting on this idea, aligns Bharata's definition of Saukumārya with Vamana's interpretation. He identifies Saukumārya as both a quality of sound and a quality of meaning. On the level of sound, it involves the use of soft syllables and fluid constructions, as also suggested by Daṇḍin's idea of avoiding rough or harsh consonants. On the level of meaning, it connects with Vamana's concept of apārushya, which means the avoidance of unpleasant or inauspicious subjects and expressions.

According to both Bharata and Vamana, the essence of Saukumārya lies in the pleasantness of both word and meaning. According to Bharata, Saukumārya consists of pleasing words and meanings, while Vamana emphasizes the same idea by stating that it is the pleasantness of words alone that defines Saukumārya. While their focus may differ slightly, Bharata gives equal attention to sound and sense, and Vamana emphasizes on sound more. But both scholars agree that this quality contributes to the gracefulness of poetic expression.

- 8) Arthavyakti** - Explicitness of meaning. It refers to the poetic quality where the intended meaning becomes immediately clear as soon as the words are heard or read. This clarity arises from the use of familiar, widely accepted expressions that describe things in a way that aligns with how they naturally appear in the world.

Bharata defines Arthavyakti as a quality wherein, even if the object described does not exist in reality, the expression used in the verse makes it seem real and believable. This imaginative yet convincing portrayal of meaning is what constitutes Arthavyakti. In other words, when something not truly present is made to appear convincingly real through language, the resulting clarity of meaning is recognized as the poetic excellence called Arthavyakti.

This concept aligns closely with Vāmana's theory, where Arthavyakti is classified as both - śabda guṇa and artha guṇa. Vāmana defines the śabda guṇa Arthavyakti as the quality that enables the immediate comprehension of meaning. Where the form and structure of words themselves aid understanding. Conversely, the artha guṇa Arthavyakti is the clarity that emerges when the nature or essence of the subject is vividly conveyed through carefully chosen, meaningful words.

- 9) Udāratā** - Exaltedness or nobility. It is where the expression in a composition rises above the ordinary. It is characterized by a sense of grandeur, emotional richness, and elevated tone. This excellence is marked by the portrayal of superhuman experiences or feelings, often associated with deep emotions such as love (śṛṅgāra) and wonder (adbhuta), in a way that feels elevated and impressive.

According to Abhinavagupta, Udāratā occurs when something typically seen as ordinary or mundane is described with a divine or extraordinary tone. For example, when a human action is portrayed with divine qualities, or when something not usually considered surprising is presented with a sense of wonder. If even something harsh or unfeeling is made emotionally moving through the lens of love or heroism, the resulting effect is what qualifies as Udāratā. In such cases, the use of emotional elements like vibhāvas (causes), anubhāvas (effects), and vyabhicāri bhāvas (transient emotions) contributes to this sense of nobility. Abhinava classifies this as an artha guṇa, or a quality rooted in the meaning.

Bharata defines Udāratā in a similar light, explaining it as a quality found in compositions that are enriched with numerous subtle and distinguished characteristics. This suggests that Udāratā arises from refined expression and a poetic construction that displays depth, beauty, and emotional elevation.

- 10) Kānti** - Charm or radiance. It refers to a kind of luminous charm in expression where the beauty of language or gesture captivates the audience. According to Bharata, this quality may arise through the pleasing sound of the words or through the meaning conveyed by graceful physical expressions, especially in performance contexts like drama.

Abhinavagupta interprets this delight as being primarily the result of the vibrant and expressive presence of aesthetic emotions or Rasas, especially those like śṛṅgāra. In this view, Kānti is not just about surface beauty, but about the radiance that emerges when rasa is fully and vividly expressed. This aligns with Vāmana's classification of Kānti as an artha guṇa, a quality of meaning. According to Vāmana it is the brilliance or intensity of rasa in a composition. Thus, Kānti is understood as the expressive glow that results from powerful emotional suggestion, making the work aesthetically appealing and emotionally stirring.

### 3.2. DAṆḌIN'S REFINEMENT

Daṇḍin, in his treatise Kāvyaadarśa, elaborates the idea of Guṇa further. Unlike Bharata, he does not draw a rigid line between Guṇas and Alaṅkāras, instead placing both under the broader category of style (rīti). He considers Guṇas essential to poetic expression and lists six key Guṇas:

- 1) Śleṣa - compactness
- 2) Prasāda - lucidity
- 3) Sāmatā - uniformity
- 4) Mādhurya - sweetness
- 5) Arthavyakti - clarity of meaning
- 6) Ojas - force or energy

According to Daṇḍin, these qualities bring out the poetic essence and are inseparable from an effective literary composition. He also illustrates how Guṇas can sometimes coexist with Doṣas, noting that even apparent imperfections may enhance expression if used contextually and purposefully. Just as kohl, though not inherently beautiful, enhances

the charm and expressiveness of the eyes when applied thoughtfully, so too can a poetic flaw, when used with artistic intent, heighten the emotional or aesthetic appeal of a composition.

### 3.3. VĀMANA'S SYSTEMATIZATION

While Bharata identified ten poetic excellences (Guṇas) as the standard, Vāmana expanded upon this framework by classifying each Guṇa under two distinct aspects - śabda and artha. This division effectively doubled the number to twenty, marking a significant development in Sanskrit poetics.

#### 1) Śabda Guṇas - Qualities of Sound and Expression:

- **Ojas** - strength and compactness in sound structure.
- **Prasāda** - fluidity and smoothness in verbal expression.
- **Śleṣa** - harmonious blending of sounds.
- **Sāmatā** - consistency and uniformity in diction.
- **Samādhi** - balance achieved through alternating soft and ornate expressions.
- **Mādhurya** - pleasantness created by avoiding long, heavy compounds.
- **Saukumārya** - softness and absence of harsh or jarring phonetics.
- **Udāratā** - liveliness and energy in sound patterns.
- **Arthavyakti** - clarity of meaning conveyed through well-chosen words.
- **Kānti** - brilliance, elegance, and richness in verbal expression.

#### 2) Artha Guṇas - Qualities of Meaning and Thought:

- **Ojas** - maturity and strength of conceptual insight.
- **Prasāda** - clarity and ease of understanding due to simplicity and precision.
- **Śleṣa** - integration of multiple layers of meaning within a single expression.
- **Sāmatā** - logical progression and coherence of ideas.
- **Samādhi** - focus and intellectual grasp of the core idea.
- **Mādhurya** - emotional charm and striking quality of expression.
- **Saukumārya** - refinement and avoidance of unpleasant or crude ideas.
- **Udāratā** - nobility and elevation of thought, free from vulgarity
- **Arthavyakti** - clear, vivid expression that reveals the essential nature of things.
- **Kānti** - radiance of emotions, especially through the effective expression of Rasa.

According to Vāmana, these twenty Guṇas are essential components of poetic excellence. The greater the number of Guṇas present in a poem, the higher its literary merit. Importantly, Vāmana stressed that Guṇas and Doṣas are context-dependent, not fixed. A quality that may be a flaw in one context could serve as a merit in another, depending on how well it aligns with the poet's intention and the emotion being conveyed. This leads to the principle of aucitya, or contextual appropriateness, as a critical standard in evaluating poetic expression.

### 3.4. ĀNANDAVARDHANA'S PHILOSOPHICAL REORIENTATION OF GUṆA

A pivotal transformation in the conceptualization of Guṇa emerged with Ānandavardhana's seminal work, Dhvanyāloka. Departing from earlier rhetorical frameworks, Ānandavardhana repositioned Guṇa within the broader aesthetic paradigm shaped by his theory of Dhvani. In his view, the essence of kāvya lies not in ornamentation or linguistic embellishment alone, but in the evocation of Rasa - the aesthetic experience or emotional flavour. Accordingly, Guṇa and Alaṅkāra assume value only insofar as they serve this higher poetic goal.

Ānandavardhana contended that Guṇa is not to be regarded as discrete stylistic traits, but rather as aesthetic and emotional qualities that organically emerge in the process of meaning vyañjanā - suggestion. They derive their

significance from their capacity to enhance the evocation of Rasa, thereby aligning them closely with the inner, suggestive layer of poetic meaning. Crucially, Ānandavardhana introduced a nuanced distinction between:

- **Abhidhā (explicit meaning)** – the direct, surface-level meaning of a word or expression
- **Vyañjanā (implicit meaning)** – the subtle, suggested, and often unspoken dimension that underlies poetic expression

He emphasized that it is the implicit, suggestive meaning that constitutes the true depth and soul of poetry. Within this framework, Guṇa must contribute to this deeper level of meaning to be considered aesthetically effective. Thus, the evaluation of Guṇa becomes inseparable from their role in facilitating Dhvani and, ultimately, the realization of Rasa. This reorientation marks a significant philosophical shift in Sanskrit poetics, moving the discourse on Guṇa away from mere formalism towards an integrated aesthetic theory grounded in psychological and emotional resonance.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The concept of Guṇa has long served as a key tool in Sanskrit poetics for evaluating the beauty and effectiveness of poetic expression. It highlights the qualities that give poetry clarity, vigor, sweetness, and emotional resonance. While early theorists focused on the technical and stylistic dimensions of Guṇa, later thinkers, especially Ānandavardhana, brought a deeper aesthetic perspective to the discussion.

The Dhvani theorists shifted the emphasis from surface - level excellence to the suggestive power of poetry, where meaning goes beyond what is explicitly stated. Within this framework, Guṇa is no longer seen as an isolated feature but as something that must serve a higher poetic purpose - the evocation of Rasa, the emotional and aesthetic core of poetry.

Even though word structure and stylistic features remain important, their value is measured by how well they support the deeper experience of poetic suggestion. In this view, Guṇa contributes to poetic excellence only when it enhances the emotional impact and artistic unity of the work. This aligns with the intuitive understanding that style should suit content, and that beauty in poetry arises not just from how something is said, but from the feeling it evokes. Thus, the evolution of the theory of Guṇa reflects the broader movement in Sanskrit poetics - from form to essence, from ornamentation to emotional truth, and from structure to soul.

#### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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