

RITI - vamaana

Acharya Vamana who lived during the latter half of the 8th century A. D., was one of the most brilliant thinkers whose contribution to Indian literary criticism was unique and of lasting value. His philosophy-oriented investigation into the constitution and nature of a Kavya revealed certain strikingly new facts and factors. His analysis of a Kavya and treatment of its elements were highly imaginative and refreshingly original.

Vamana's *Kavyalankara* Sutra rises much above the routine treatises on the science of poetics, and justly claims to be regarded as the first attempt at evolving a philosophy of literary aesthetics. His contemplative mind regarded the Kavya as living human being, a charming young lady, and penetrated deeper and deeper into it until it could catch a glimpse of its Soul. Unlike his predecessors and most of his successors he presented his findings in the form of Sutras following the tradition of the Darsanas which sought to discover the Soul of things—the ultimate principle of the Universe.

He was the first poetician who perceived clearly and stated categorically that the differentia of a Kavya as a literary species was Beauty. He was also the first to make a distinction between the natural beauty and artificial beauty of a Kavya, and to trace the two forms of beauty to distinctly different causes. Again it was he that suggested for the first time that a Kavya had two bodies—the gross and the subtle—the *Sabda Sarira* and the *Artha Sarira*. Moreover, Vamana was the first critic to discover, define and designate the Soul of a Kavya.

He opened his treatise with the famous dictum:

Kaavyam graahya malankaaraat; Soundarya malankaarah

A Kavya becomes agreeable on account of Alankara and Alankara means Beauty. At the very outset Vamana struck a brilliantly original note by drawing a sharp distinction between Alankara as Beauty and Alankara as a figure of speech. Regarding the relation between Beauty and figures of speech, his views were at variance with those of his predecessors. Dandin maintained:

Kaavya sobhaakaraan dharmaan Alankaaraan Prachakshate

The factors that produced the Beauty of a Kavya were Alankaras. Vamana disagreed with Dandin and explained that Gunas produced the beauty of Kavya and that the Alankaras only brightened it.

Kaavya sobhaayaah kartaaro dharmah gunaah; Tadatisayaheetavas-tvalankaaraah

It is here that Vamana introduced the idea of two kinds of beauty—the natural beauty which proceeded from the Gunas and the artificial beauty caused by the Alankaras. Vamana denoted natural beauty as Sobha and its heightened form as Soundarya.

Sobha, Kanti, Deepti, Madhurya, Sukumarata, etc., were mentioned by Bharata as the natural graces—Sahajalankaras—of a youthful lady. The Gunas, Madhurya, etc., which are constitutional to the Kavya should be regarded as its natural graces of Sahajalankaras. Alankaras like Yamaka, Upama, etc., are external and artificial and can at best be structural to the Kavya. Hence Vamana stated that the Gunas were compulsory to the Kavya while the Alankaras were optional. This view influenced the later poeticians so profoundly that the Alankaras gradually came to be relegated to a subordinate position in the scheme of a Kavya.

Earlier writers on poetics were not clear as to where the Gunas belonged and what their function was. Taking Dandin's metaphorical statement that the Gunas were the Pranas of the Vaidarbhi marga, Vamana assumed that they should belong to the Atman of the Kavya and that their function should be to manifest the Beauty aspect of the Soul. Since the Gunas made their appearance in the texture of the *Kavya Sarira*, Vamana thought it necessary to examine the texture very carefully. His microscopic examination revealed something very important, which his predecessors missed.

According to Bhamaba *Sabda* and *Artha* together constituted the Kavya. Resorting to a metaphor, Dandin stated that a collection of Padas conveying the desired *Artha* formed the *Sarira* of a Kavya. Vamana split the *Pada* into its components—*Sabda* and *Artha*, the gross and subtle materials of the *Pada*. This led him to the conclusion that the Kavya had two bodies—the gross body consisting of *Sabda* enclosing the subtle body consisting of *Artha*. While the *Sabda* formed the physical body the *Artha* provided the psychical body. The two bodies may be identified with the *Sthula* and *Sukshma Sariras* of the Darsanas. This discovery prompted Vamana to explain the nature and function of the Gunas with reference to the two bodies of the Kavya. At this stage we may hazard a conjecture that Vamana assumed the presence of a third body—the *Karana Sarira* or the Soul vitally functioning within the *Sukshma Sarira*.

Though Vamana treated the Gunas separately with reference to Sabdas and Arthas, he did not consider them as inherent to Sabdas or Arthas. He expressly stated that the Gunas pertained to the *Bandha*.

*Ojah prasaada slesha samata samaadhi maadhurya soukumaarya
udaarata arthavyakti kantayo bandhagunaah*

The Gunas pertained to the Sahdabandhas and the Arthabandhas. A particular Guna appeared in a particular Bandha or organization of the material, and disappeared the moment the organization was disturbed. The appearance and disappearance of the Gunas led him to assume the existence of a permanent source from which they evolved and into which they involved. The Gunas have their potential being in this permanent source which Vamana regarded as the Atman of the Kavya and called it 'Riti.' Hence the thesis "Riti is the Soul of a Kavya."

Riti roatmaa Kaavyasya Sareerasyeva

Riti is to the Kavya what Atman is to the Sarira. It is necessary here to study the etymology of the terms Atman and Riti in order to realise the significance of Vamana's conception of the Soul of a Kavya. The word Atman is believed to have been derived from the root 'At' meaning to move constantly or from the root 'An' meaning to live, or perhaps from both. The term Riti is derived from the root 'Ri' meaning to move. The identity of Riti with Atman becomes complete when we take Dandin's metaphor of Gunas as Pranas. Just as the Atman is the *Karana Sarira* of a person, Riti is the *Karana Sarira* of a Kavya. The natural beauty or Sobha of a Kavya depends on the Gunas of its Soul which is Riti.

Having installed Riti as the Soul of the Kavya Vamana set out to explain his conception of Riti.

Visishta padarachanaa Ritih; Visishta gunaatma

An excellent organisation of the Padas is Riti and the excellences are of the nature of Gunas. The statement is to be taken with great care. Riti should not be taken to be identical with Padarachana. Padarachana is the structure of the body while Riti is the Soul inhabiting it, and the two should not be confused. Visishta Padarachana is Vyanjaka and Riti is Vyangya. That is to say that, through the medium of Visishta Padarachana the Gunas become manifest and reveal the presence of Riti, the Atman.

Out of Riti arise the Gunas, the Pranas or directional forces round which the subtle and gross materials organize themselves. Since Riti, like the Atman, is a having and moving principle, it imparts life and movement to the subtle and gross bodies of the Kavya. Thus Riti determines the character of a Kavya as the Atman determines the character of an individual.

Corresponding to the two bodies of the Kavya Vamana conceived of two Ritis—the Sadba Riti and the Artha Riti—which are but reflections of the vital principle, the Soul of the Kavya. It is by virtue of the reflection of the Soul in them that the *Sabda Sarira* and *Artha Sarira* become lively, and each acquires a loveliness of its own resulting in the natural beauty or Sobha of the Kavya. As Vamana employed the term, Sobha is nothing but the manifested form of Riti.

‘Paka’ is another term introduced by Vamana to denote Sobha in its aspect of relishability. When the Gunas, arising out of Riti, appear in the texture of the subtle and gross bodies and blend into a single property, the Kavya attains Paka or maturity. It is this Paka that the Sahridayaenjoys.

*Udayati hi sa taadrik kvaapi vaidarbha reetou sahridaya hridayaanaam
ranjakah koopi paakah.*

The expression *Koopi Paakah* suggests that like Riti and Sobha this Paka also is an inexplicable entity. As a natural corollary to the existence of two bodies and two sets of Gunas, Vamana envisaged two Pakas—the Sabda Paka and the Artha Paka. Kavya Paka is the result of a perfect blending of these two kinds of Pakas and affords the highest relish to the Sahridaya.

The appeal of a Kavya depends on the maturity of its Soul—Riti. The Vaidarbhi Riti, abounding in all the Gunas in their full development, was regarded as the ideal Riti as it was found, unlike the other Ritis, to satisfy the literary taste of the nation as a whole. A Kavya enrouled by the Vaidarbhi Riti was found to possess maximum beauty and maturity. Vamana likened such a Kavya to a charming young lady. He thus completed the anthropomorphic analogy of the Kavya and conveyed to posterity a finished and polished metaphor.

Yuvete riva rupa manga kaavyan swadatee suddhagunam.

The concept of Riti is Vamana’s greatest contribution to literary theory. He coined the term Riti to denote the soul of a Kavya. His preference for the term Riti to its apparent synonym Gati is significant. Gati indicates a movement which can be perceived, analysed and explained. Riti, on the contrary, defies all analysis and lends itself to nothing but direct experience. In Riti the parts are not discernible as they are lost in the whole which is a Unity—a Form. This Form is Beauty or Sobha which accounts for the lovability of the Kavya. It is the maturity or Paka which accounts for the relishability of the Kavya. It may be noted here that the English equivalent of Riti is Rhythm and not Style as most critics believe. ‘Rhythm’ is derived from the Greek root *Rheo* to move or flow and provides an exact equivalent to Riti etymologically and semantically.

The Riti school of Vamana appears to have enjoyed un-rivalled popularity for over a century. It is remarkable that it should have continued to enjoy almost the same amount of favour with the poets and lovers of poetry even after the rise of a formidable rival like the Dhvani school. The great Anandavardhana himself was compelled to pay a tribute to the concept of Riti and through it to its father, Vamana.

Asphuta sphuritam kaavya

Tatva metad yathoditam
Asaknuvadbhir vyaakartum
Reetayah sampravartitaah

If, as Anandavardhana said, Vamana failed to grasp Dhvani clearly, Anandavardhana may be said to have failed to appreciate the significance of Riti fully. While Dhvani is the essence of the meaning of a Kavya, Riti is the essence of its very being. A Kavya cannot exist without Riti, while it can without Dhvani. Thus one can argue that Riti has greater claims over Dhvani to be the soul of the Kavya.

Nothing can be a more eloquent testimony to the genius of Vamana than Rajasekhara's references to the votaries of the Riti school as 'Vamaniyas.' One may say that as long as there are Vamaniyas the Riti school continues to be a living literary trend reminding us of its founder, Vamana.