

## LITERARY THEORY OF *VAKROKTI* AND RUSSIAN FORMALISM

**Dr. Madhu Sharma**

Assistant Professor  
S.B.S., Sharda University,  
Greater Noida

### Abstract

The language of literature has been in the focus in many literary theories. Most of the modern literary theories i.e. Formalism, New Criticism, Stylistics, Structuralism, Post Structuralism, Discourse Analysis, Semiotics and Dialogic Criticism in one or the other way emphasize the study of the language in order to understand the meaning of a piece of literary work. Various theorists have reflected on the question of language and they have made several exploratory contributions on many issues having a distinct bearing on poetry and poetic expression.

**Keywords:** Literary Theories, Theorists, *Vakrokti*, Russian Formalism, *Vkrokti*, Exploratory, Indian language, literature.

**Objectives:** This paper seeks to explore the intersection between the Indian and Russian Formalist thinking about the language of literature and concept of *Vakrokti* therein. *Vakrokti* consists of 'vakra' and 'ukti' which literary means a 'bent' or 'marked' expression in the language of literature. The devices of Foregrounding used by Russian Formalists and the concept of '*vakrata*' originated through Indian Poeticians can be usefully compared.

The Indian theory of *vakrokti* is a viable theory of the language of poetry and Russian Formalism concerns with autonomy and specificity of language.

**Research methodology:** The study was carried out based on existing research and secondary data from various sources.

Language of literature in one way or the other differs from the common day to day language of normal communication. Indian Poeticians declare *svabhavokti* as the traditional and common form of language while *vakrokti* as the marked or literary language. Wordsworth at one hand opines that the language of literature should be simple and easy to understand and believes that a poet is a man speaking to men therefore he must make use of such a language as is used by men. For him such use of language being emotional and passionate comes from the heart and goes direct to the heart. Thus it helps in communicating essential truths about human life and nature more easily and clearly. On the other hand Coleridge, Eliot and others believe that language is a matter of words and their arrangement, vocabulary and syntax and use of imagery and the frequency and use of this imagery. They proclaim that there is a difference between the rustic language and the language used by men in other walks of life. Every man's language varies, according to the extent of his knowledge, the activity of his faculties and the depth of quickness of his feelings. Moreover language is letter moulded which are derived from the reflective acts of the mind and this reflection grows with the advancements of civilization.

The language of literature has been in the focus in many literary theories. Most of the modern literary theories i.e. Formalism, New Criticism, Stylistics, Structuralism, Post Structuralism, Discourse Analysis, Semiotics and Dialogic Criticism in one way or the other emphasize the study of the language in order to understand the meaning of a piece of literary work. Various theorists have reflected on the question of language and they have made several exploratory contributions on many issues having a distinct bearing on poetry and poetic expression. The present study seeks to explore the intersection between the Indian and Russian Formalist thinking about the language of literature and the concept of *Vakrokti* therein. *Vakrokti* consists of ‘vakra’ and ‘ukti’ which literally means a ‘bent’ or ‘marked’ expression in the language of literature. The devices of Foregrounding used by Russian Formalists and the concept of *vakrata* originated through Indian Poeticians can be usefully compared.

The Indian theory of *vakrokti* is a viable theory of the language of poetry. Indian thinking regards poetry primarily as a linguistic organization, and according to it, the language of poetry is based on *vakrokti*. Literally *vakrokti* means a crooked or indirect speech. Raghavan calls it to be a ‘striking, deviating expression’. S.K De refers it to be ‘a kind of heightened expression’. One can find the detailed treatment of this term in Kuntaka’s *Vakroktijivita* besides being introduced in the works of Bhamah, Dandin, and Bhoja. Some scholars are of the view that the earliest traces of theory of *vakrokti* can be found in Bharata’s treatment of *laksanas* in his *Natyasastra*. Bhamaha provides a prominent place to the term and identifies it with *atisayokti* (Hyperbole). Dandin distinguishes literary compositions in terms of *vakrokti* and *svabhavokti* and says that ‘*slesa*’ (paronomasia) adds charm in *vakrokti*. Vamana conceives *vakrokti* as a peculiar mode of metaphorical expression based on similarity. Anandvardhana calls it an expressed figure and supports Bhamaha, while Rajshekara calls it by the name of *auktika* i.e. pertaining to a saying. Abhinavagupta treats *vakrokti* as ‘a delectable singular meaning’, ‘involving hyperbolic expression by virtue of figures and attributes’ (*gunas*). Bhoja defines poetry in terms of *vakrokti* and designates it as ‘an extraordinary, rounded expression’ (*visista bhaniti*).

Kuntaka however is the one who set this *vakrata* or markedness as everything important and explanatory of literature. Unlike Dandin, to him ‘mere word or mere idea does not constitute poetry (*Na sabdasyaiva ramaniyata – visistasya kevalasya kavyatvam, napi arthasyeti*); what makes them into poetry is the presence of strikingness originating from *vakrokti*. An idea insufficiently expressed is ‘dead’ (*mrtakalpa*) says he, and an expression devoid of idea or expressing something other than the intended idea is ‘diseased’ (*vyadhibhuta*). He also maintains that crucial role in poetics is played by an act of imagination on the part of the poet (*kavi-vyapara*). For Kuntaka creativity of a poet lies in his use of language itself; language that has *vakrata* in it.

According to Kuntaka, *vakrokti* operates at six levels: The first is *varna-vinyasa-vakrata* (phonetic obliquity or obliquity in arrangement of phonemes or consonants or syllables). It works at the level of phoneme when similar or identical phonemes or consonants are repeated at varying intervals, when consonants and phonemes are arranged without any interval, when new consonants or phonemes are employed and when stops are combined with their homorganic nasals. It also includes alliteration and chime. The second type of *vakrata* is *pada-purvarddha-vakrata* (lexical obliquity). It is found in the base forms of substantives, i.e. *rudhi-vaicitraya-vakrata* (obliquity of usage), *paryaya vakrata* (obliquity of synonyms), *upacara-vakrata* (obliquity of transference), *visesana-vakrata* (obliquity of adjectives), *samvriti-vakrata*

(obliquity of concealment), *vritti-vakrata* (obliquity of indeclinable), and *kriya-vaicitra-vakrata* (obliquity of verb).

The third type of *vakrata* is *pada-pararddha-vakrata* (grammatical obliquity) i.e. tense, case, number, person, voice, affix and particle, termed as *kala-vaicitrya-vakrata*, *karaka-vakrata*, *samkhyā-vakrata*, *purusa-vakrata*, *upagraha-vakratya*, *upasarga-vakrata* and *nipata-vakrata* respectively. *Vakya-vakrata* (sentential obliquity) is the fourth type of *vakrata* which has two sub-varieties: *sahaja-vakrata* (natural obliquity) and *aharya-vakrata* (imposed obliquity).

The fifth type of *vakrata* is *prakarana-vakrata* (episodic obliquity). It has *bhavapurna-sthiti-vakrata* (obliquity of emotional state), *utapadya-lavanya-vakrata* (obliquity of modified source story), *prakarana upakarya-upkaraka bhava vakrata* (obliquity of episodic relationship), *visitha prakarna vakrata* (obliquity of particular event and episode), *angirasa nisyandanikasa vakrata* (obliquity of dominant rasa), *apradhana prasanga* (obliquity of secondary episode), *prakarantasa vakrata* (device of play within play) and *sandhi vinivesa vakrata* (obliquity of juncture). The last type of *vakrata* is *prabandha vakrata* (compositional obliquity). It is further divided into *rasantara vakrata* (obliquity of changing the rasa), *samapana-vakrata* (obliquity of winding up the story), *katha-viccheda-vakrata* (obliquity of intending end), *anusangika –phal-vakrata* (obliquity of contingent objective), *namakarana vakrata* (obliquity of title) and *tulya-katha-vakrata* (obliquity of identical story).

Russian Formalism, has been expounded by Shklovsky, Mukarovsky, Eichenbaum, Vladimir Prop, Jakobson, Bakhtin etc comes in to play during second and third decade of Twentieth Century. This approach is concerned with specificity and autonomy of poetic language. It provides a framework for a rigorous analysis of literary language. It lays stress on functional roles of literary devices. All the contributors of this group with their individual identity do not follow any unified doctrine but in one way or the other they base their analysis on two principles: a) literature itself is, or rather, those of its features that distinguish it from other human activities, must constitute the object of inquiry of literary theory; b) "literary facts" have to be prioritized over the metaphysical commitments of literary criticism, whether philosophical, aesthetic or psychological. They look upon the artist as a constructor- a proletarian producer of crafted objects. They, therefore, emphatically lay down that the attention should be paid to his technical prowess, to the form he creates. As such they look upon art as a device, a technique. Jakobson focus on the functional speech sounds, or phonemes of language and on the sound relations that characterize phonetic system (Correlations and symmetries). In his work on the Russian nouns, he extends the principles of his phonology to the analysis of grammatical categories, developing a sense of oppositions that could classify verbal and nominal categories. He also lays the groundwork for a theory of literary language by proposing that poetic language is a projection of metaphor onto metonymy. In his essay 'Linguistics and Poetics' he asserts "the poetic function of language projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection on to the axis of combination".

Markedness, according to Russian Formalists, refers to the relationship between two poles of an opposition, the term *marked* and *unmarked* refer to the evaluation of the poles; the simpler more general pole is the unmarked term of the opposition while the more complex and focused pole is the marked term. At the semantic level of language, *markedness* is taken to be a relation between a specific linguistic sign and a sign that is unspecified for the grammatical or conceptual feature in question. It works at various levels including Phonemic: nasal/oral, vocalic/consonantal; Lexical: beauty/ ugliness, trust/ betrayal, truth/ false; and Grammatical: singular/plural, positive/ negative, active/ passive, present/ past, masculine/ feminine. Normally black on

a white background is marked, if we read Roman, Italics are marked; similarly casuals are unmarked while formals are marked, and one's life is marked if it is motivated.

Foregrounding, construct of Formalists, is the device of language such that the use itself attracts attention. It is perceived as uncommon, as deprived of automatization, as deautomatized such as a live poetic metaphor. Mukarovsky observes that 'in poetic language foregrounding achieves maximum intensity to the extent of pushing communication into the background as the objective of expression and of being used for its own sake.' It presupposes some motivation on the part of the writer and some explanation on the part of the reader. According to the Russian Formalists the purpose of art is to make objects unfamiliar, so that a renewed perception of them creates a fresh awareness in the beholder, beyond the stale routines of automatized schemes. Thus for Formalists the devices used by writers are not merely there for ornamental reasons – they serve specific functions. They are of view that literature should be investigated in isolation. They concentrate on the form and refute the idea that literature is meant only for enjoyment. Literature to them is an organized violence committed on ordinary speech. They proclaim that most of our patterns of thinking, feeling and perception are programmed and automatic. Poets deautomatized this new frame where lies their creativity. To change our mode of perception from the automatic and practical to the artistic is the purpose of art according to them. In his essay, "Art as Technique" Shklovsky points out that the purpose of art is to impart the sensations of things as they are perceived, and not as they are known.

**Conclusions:** Western theorists have provided the world the required and acceptable terminology regarding the concept of *vakrokti* and deviation. Russian formalists who were concerned with autonomy and specificity of poetic language analyze the language of literature scientifically. Being artistic they concentrate on the form of literature and introduce the concept of markedness therein. The use of language stated above having a kind of newness and defamiliarity or what can be called strikingness can be studied with various devices. Things are always perceived differently by readers and beholders. This difference, which attracts the attention (foregrounding) can be analyzed with various devices i.e. repetition, place in the sentence, figures of speech, neologism and deviation. Deviation itself acts as a device of foregrounding. Such means of foregrounding and deviation are also to be discussed in this chapter one by one. Russian formalists have touched the markedness in literature up to these levels: Phonemic, Lexical, sentential and Grammatical whereas Indian poetics have taken six levels of *vakrokti*. So this comparison will form the basics of this final chapter.

**Works Cited**

- Anandavardhana. *Dhvanyaloka* .(9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) ed. K. Krishnamoorthy. Dharwar, 1974.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic imagination: Four Essays*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press 1981.
- Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975.
- Battistella, Edwin L. *Markedness: The Evaluative Superstructure of Language*. New York: SUNY Press, 1990.
- Bharata. *Natyasastra*. Trans. Manmohan Ghosh. Calcutta : Asiatic Society, 1950.
- Bennett, Tony. *Formalism and Marxism* .London: Routledge, 1989.
- Devy, G.N. *Indian Literary Criticism. Theory and Interpretation*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman Pvt. Ltd., 2004.
- Dasgupts, S.N. and S.K.De. *History of Sanskrit Literature*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1947.
- Erlich, Victor .*Russian Formalism: History Doctrine*. The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1985.
- Freeman, D.C. ed. *Linguistics and Literary Style*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1970.
- Habib, M .A. R. *Modern literary Criticism and Theory, A History*. New Delhi: Blackwell Publishing, 2008.
- Jakobson, Roman and Morris Halle. *Fundamentals of Language*. Trans. Mouton de Gruyter. Berlin, 2002.
- Jha, Sri Gangadhar. Trans. *Kavya Prakasa*. Allahabad : Indian Book House, 1925.
- Khuswaha, M.S. ed. *Indian poetics and Western Thought*. Lucknow: Argo Publishing House, 1988.
- Ksemendra. *Aucityavicaracarca*. (11<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.) ed. N.S. Choudhuri Varanasi, 1961.
- Kuntaka. *Vakroktijivita* .(11<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.) ed. S.K. De. Calcutta, 1961.
- Mahimabhata. *Vyaktiviveka* (11<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.) ed. R.P. Dwivedi. Varanasi, 1964.
- Mammata. *Kavya Prakasa*. (11<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.) ed. S.P. Bhattacharya. Calcutta, 1961.
- Narsimhaiah, C.D. ed. *Literary Criticism: European & Indian Tradition*. Mysore : N.D., 1994.
- Pathak, R.S. *Oblique Poetry in Indian and Western Poetics*. New Delhi: Creative Books, 1988.
- Raghavan, V.and Nagendra eds. *An Introduction to Indian Poetics*. Bombay: Macmillan Company of India Ltd., 1970.
- Ransom , J.C. *The New Criticism*. Connecticut ,1971.
- Ray, Mohit K. *A Comparative Study of the Indian Poetics and the Western Poetics*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2008.
- Rudrata. *Kavyalamkara*. ( 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) ed. Satyadevo Choudhari. Delhi, 1965.
- Ruyyaka. *Alamkarasarvasva*. Ed. S.S. Janaki. Delhi: Meharchand Lachhmandas, 1965.
- Seturaman, V.S. ed. *Aesthetics*. Madras, 1992.
- Vamana. *Kavyalamkarasutra*. [For English translation, see Jha, Ganganatha (1928).]
- Viswanatha. *Sahityadarpana*. [For English translation, see Ballantyne, J.K., and P.K. Mishra, and also Kane, P.V. (1951 b).]