



# **DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEORIES OF DHVANI**

## **(Academic Script)**

Dhvani is a theory of meaning and symbolisms, and this principle leads to poetry of suggestion being accepted as the highest kind of poetry. Dhvani is the method, the means for achieving or evoking rasa, which is the effect of suggestion.

Anandavardhana made an epoch-making analysis of the functions of language on the one hand and the content of poetry on the other in his monumental work Dhvanyaloka.

Dhvanyaloka is based on the philosophy of "aesthetic suggestion". It is an achievement in the field of Indian aesthetic theory, which was compiled during the 9th C.E., Kashmir.

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### **DHVANI**

Anandavardhana in ninth century was the first exponent of the Dhvani school of literary criticism, further elaborated by Abhinavagupta in 950-1025, whose Locana or 'Eye' is a commentary on Anandavardhana's Dhvanyaloka or 'Light on Dhvani'.



The theory of Dhvani under the research of Anandavardhana elevated to a level where it paved the way for further research and analysis by later scholars.

*"When the poet writes, he creates a resonant field of emotions."*

--Anandavardhana

To appreciate poetry, the reader or hearer must be on the same "wavelength." The method requires sensitivity and compassion on the parts of the writer and the reader.

Tradition of discussions and debates started, which marked a major turn in the onward journey of literary movement, which proclaims Dhvani as the essence of poetry as the medium of literary creation and communication.

The credit for developing the idea of Dhvani into a full-grown system of literary criticism necessarily goes to Dhvanyaloka, Lochana and kavyaprakasha in the order.

The early theories presented by Dandin and Vamana, focused most on beauty in poetics and music as well. It was Alankara that was their major inspiration. But the theory of Dhvani came into prominence with Dhvanyaloka.

Anandavardhana unlike Vamana, refused to accept the process (vyapura) as the soul of poetry. In fact he believed that it is the element which is consummated and communicated through the process of suggestion.

Theory of Dhvani had existed before but the credit of presenting it in a systematic and scientific form goes to Anandavardhana. The words and their sense that are capable of manifesting the suggested senses are called



Dhvani. The additional activity of the speaker involved, imparting the sounds in a manner or shape that reflects the Bhava, such as fast, slow, sorrow, bliss etc, and perfect representation of sound is called Dhvani.

Sound comes to the consciousness, through a succession of sounds and sound waves. In a similar way the suggested meaning comes to the literary critic's consciousness through a succession of meanings, the conventional, the contextual and the secondary.

The meaning suggested by the words is called vyangyartha. The words of Kavya (poetry) have their literary meanings known as vacyaratha or mukhyartha. Here the meaning is directly conveyed by the words. But usually in poetry, primary meaning or Vakyaratha does not stand for the emotion because emotion, feeling, or sentiments cannot be described in words (vakya).

What the primary meaning stands for is only the situation, consisting of the causes and effects of the emotion, which are partly human. It is from the description of the situation that the reader catches the underlying emotion. On reading the poem, one understands in the first instance its primary meaning, representing the situation. The primary meaning then suggests to the mind of the reader, or indicates, or hints to him the presence of the emotion.

Thus the meaning representing the emotion, called vyangyartha or suggested meaning' (from the verb vyanj which means 'to suggest', 'to indicate') arrives indirectly from the words through the medium of the primary meaning. The power in language by which vyangyartha is said to be conveyed is called vyanjana-vrtti. The vyangyartha is called Dhvani.



The expressed meaning is significant; yet the suggested meaning remains the most crucial of all, the primary source of aesthetic appeal in poetry of the first rank. The connectivity of the both meanings is compared to the relation of the meanings of individual words to the meaning of a sentence as a whole.

We cannot acquire the meaning of a sentence without knowing the meaning of the words. It would be a complicated process if form mental images of the meanings of each word of a sentence and then put them together to get the meaning of the sentence. We can only come to a concluded meaning, once a sentence is finished since the meaning as a unit flashes quickly through the psyche of the listener. In the same way, Dhvani, flashes into the mind of the aesthetically sensitive listener the moment he grasps the *prima facie* meaning.

Anandavardhana referred to a verse by Kalidasa from his 'Kumarasambhava', probably composed during 5<sup>th</sup> CE. Through this text Anandavardhana puts emphasis on the presence of *dhvanyartha*, in which a suggested meaning exists and the suggested meaning exceeds the literal meaning.

*“evam vādini devarṣau pārśve pitur adhomukhī /  
līlā-kamala-patrāṇi gaṇayāmāsa pārvatī //”*

It says: "While the seer-deity was telling such (regarding Parvati's marriage proposal), Parvati counted the leaves of the beautiful lotus standing by the side of her father".

The expressed meaning tells that Parvati counting the petals of the beautiful lotus, this meaning fits well with the literal meaning. Yet, there is



a classical presence of suggested meaning in this verse. The context is an event in which Narada, a seer-deity, talks about Parvati's marriage to Shiva. As she hears this discussion about her marriage, she feels shy and tries to hide her bashfulness while getting nervous, which is a typical reaction of young girls, in the guise of counting the leaves of the beautiful lotus as if she hears nothing of the conversation. In this context, the poet conveyed Parvati's shyness through the suggested sense, which has a more significant meaning in the context than the given literal meaning.

Anandavardhana in his Dhvanyaloka cites numerous such instances from Indian poetry to show that suggested meaning exceeds the literal meaning, thus marking the existence of dhvanyartha.

There are various kinds of Dhvani and they are classified in several different ways: according to the way in which the suggested meaning is related to the prima facie meaning; according to the element in the text which effects the suggestion of Dhvani, and according to the nature per se of Dhvani, the suggested meaning itself.

The two divisions of Dhvani are briefed in the following lines:

- The one where the expressed sense, suggests same ideas is called 'avivakshitavachya'
- Second is where the expressed sense (intentionally) suggests ideas that leads to something else other than its literary meaning is termed as 'Vivakshitanyaparavachya'

Different senses of the same word come from the various uses of that word in different situations and conditions. Meaning of a word changes according to the feel of the sentence.



A word's connotation is determined from the perspective in which it is used. The meaning of the word is understood in various contexts through participation in different forms of life. Thus, form of life acts as conditions for the possibility of having different suggested meanings.

It is thus superficial to hold that Dhvani has only one function to perform. It is used in many senses. This point is further amplified in the following statement:

- Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements,
- Constructing an object from a description (a drawing),
- Reporting an event
- Speculating about an event,
- Making up a story; and reading it,
- Play-acting or singing catches
- Guessing riddles
- Making a joke; telling it
- Translating from one language into another
- Asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, and praying.

The avivakshitavachya type of Dhvani is exemplified by the following:

*“Only three type of men can pluck the*

*Golden flowers of this earth, vis., the*

*Brave, the learned and the parasites”*

Here the primary sense of expression ‘golden flowers’ cannot be construed. The ‘earth’ not has any golden sprouts in the true sense. Hence, it goes in favor of the secondary sense. Similarly the word ‘pluck’ also cannot be



taken to express its primary sense, the primary sense being incompatible we have to resort to indication which conveys the idea that only the three types of persons enumerated above can achieve material success in the world.

The vivakshitanyaparavachya type of Dhvani may be illustrated by the following verse:

*“Shikharni kva nu nama kiyachchiram*

*Kimabhidhanamasavakarolta pah.*

*Taruni uena tavadharapatalam.*

*Dashati bimbaphalam Shukashavakah”*

The first category is again subdivided into two: the type where the literal sense is completely set aside (atyantatiraskita-vacya), and the type where the literal meaning is shifted (arthantarasamkramita-vacya). The first of those embraces what we should normally call metaphor; but it is, so to speak, motivated metaphor, where the metaphorically used words are employed with the definite intention of conveying their associations, or producing a striking effect. The second sub-variety is an interesting one, and covers cases where a word is used in an enhanced or diminished sense.

Poetry is classified into three kinds in relation to the suggested sense. The best kind is called dhvanikaoya in which the suggested sense predominates and supersedes the expressed. The second is called gunibhuta-vyangya kaoya wherein the suggested sense is of either equal or inferior prominence. The third is called Chitra or pictorial poetry where the



suggested element is absent; under this is included verse full of poetic figures and rhymes and alliteration.

The Dhvani, in which the suggested meaning has its sequence to the suggestive world clearly perceptible in the manner of a reverberating echo, has been said to of three kinds.

- 1) That arising from the force of the word is called Shabdashaklyydbhava.
- 2) That arising from the force of the meaning is known as Arthashaktyydbhava and third is
- 3) That arising from the force of both Shabdarthobhyashaktudbhav.

Dhvani has various aspects:

1. 'Abhidha' is that which consists in the literal meaning of the expression.
2. 'Laksana' consists in the external characteristic of the expression which are indicative of something deeper. The sound-word which expresses this content is called laksaka.

Apart from the two aspects of words, abhidha and laksana, literary critics have given sanction to one more power, namely vyanjana or the power of suggestion. This power of words to suggest the tertiary meaning is designated by the term vyanjana-vyapara.

3. 'Vyanjana' which means what is suggestive. We arrive at the suggested sense either through 'abhidha' or 'laksana'.



Anandavardhana exemplifies the tertiary meaning with the loveliness of a woman which depends upon the component parts such as limbs, etc., but which also transcends them. The peculiar feature of vyanjana-vyapara is that the suggested or tertiary meaning itself can suggest rasa or Bhava. In other words, meaning denoted by abhidha, or hinted by laksana or suggested by vyanjana finally come to an end into a rasa.

'Abhidha' and 'lakshana' are ways and 'vyanjana' is the end.

A word, as we all know, conveys a lexical sense. It is constructed out of molecular syllables or letters which retain their distinct sounds. We utter a particular word and it evokes a specific meaning. This power of a word to evoke a specific meaning is designated abhidha.

The term vyanjana has been applied in three senses in poetry:

- (1) that which suggests (vyanjaka),
- (2) that which is suggested (vyangya) and
- (3) the process of suggestion (vyanjana).

What these stand for in emotional poetry are:

- (1) That which suggests (vyanjaka) is the poet's description of a situation. The description consists of words (sabda) and their primary meaning (vyancyartha).
- (2) That which is suggested (vyanjana) is an emotion (bhava) either permanent (sthayibhava) or transitory (vyabhicaribhava).



(3) the process of suggestion (vyanjana) consists in how the words and their primary meaning suggest the emotion. It connects the suggester and the suggested.

In Dhvanyaloka, Anandavardhana says:

*"According to the wise, Dhvani is that specific quality of words and meanings which elucidates the explicit meaning overshadowing the implicit meaning"*

He adds:

*"The word power of the poet in a poem has an overall charm just as a young woman has an overall charm not discernible in her limbs taken separately".*

He asserts that,

*"The soul of poetry is Dhvani as the wise have said".*

Anandavardhana, while elaborating did not confine himself only to the words and sentences, but he incorporated all related aspects such as: the tone and gestures, the sound effect produced, or the rhythm.

To create the poetry that comes alive with suggestions or Dhvani, the poet should be filled with emotions and motivation to bring the best in his creation. As the poet is the first reader and receiver of the rasa from his poetry, he is capable of understanding the perfection and aptness of his poetry.

For instance, Adi Kavi Valmiki was so intensely hurt and saddened by the wailing of curlew bird whose mate was shot down by a hunter in the woods



that his grief (Shoka) poured out into a verse (Shloka) filled with pathos that became the Rasa of Ramayana.

Anandavardhana declares his school as different from the famous systems of (prasiddha prasthanavyatireki). The Dhvani theory is an expansion of rasa theory bringing out the rasa from the confines of drama alone. It was left to spell out the roots of charm even in a single piece of literary exercise, say a verse, which by itself could not generate rasa, it thus, discharged two functions at one go:

1. It established that rasa, the acknowledged soul of poetry, is never directly expressed but always aesthetic outcome is all nothing but Dhvani.
2. It includes an element of aesthetic consciousness into our literary appreciation and explained that it is the suggested sense that makes the poetic content meaningful and charming.

Apart from the two ordinary functions of words, primary (abhidha) and secondary (Lakshana) that manifest the suggested sense, there is a third activity inherent in words and different from the two previous ones, and that is called suggestion (vyanjana). This is also called dhvani. But lastly the poetry where all these, the suggestive words and ideas, suggestion and suggested ideas are found is also called Dhvani.

Unlike his predecessors, Anandvardhana was interested only in the aesthetic value of words within the poetic context. Dhvani theory describes the significative range of a word or an utterance, and Anandvardhana understood it as a step beyond both literal and metaphorical meanings.



Various scholars in different time periods have examined the theories of ancient texts or shastras. For instance, the “Dhvanyaloka Lochana” written by Abhinav Gupta, is an elaboration of Anandavardhana’s Dhvanyaloka.

Abhinava Gupta explains the word ‘Dhvani’ in two different ways.

- The first is 'dhvanat iti dhvani' that which sounds or reverberates or implies is dhvani.
- The second is 'dhvanyate iti dhvani' or dhvani is what is sounded or reverberated or implied.

According to Abhinav Gupta, the word Dhvani can stand for five different meanings.

- 1) The suggestive meaning (vyanjakartha)
- 2) The suggestive word (vyanjashabda)
- 3) The function of suggestion (vyanjanavyapara)
- 4) The suggested content (vyangya) and
- 5) Poetry as a whole (samudayakavya)

Abhinava Gupta in his ‘Lochana’ says that:

*“the more a man is attuned to aesthetic impressions from literature by constant exposure to literary works, the more mirror - like his heart becomes”.*

The constant relishing (charvana) of poetry refines the sensibility in such a way that cues can trigger the aesthetic experience. Aesthetic consciousness has no end outside of itself. Aesthetic experience, characterized by the



immersion of the subject in the aesthetic object, is akin to the beatitude of ecstasy or Brahman or the Self.

Whereas Anandavardhana in Dhvanyaloka takes up three main types of implicit senses-

- 'vastu Dhvani',
- 'Alankara Dhvani', and
- 'Rasa Dhvani'.

In 'vastu Dhvani' some rare fact or idea is implied. In 'Alankara Dhvani' some Alankara or figure of speech is suggested. In 'rasa Dhvani' rasa is evoked. Both vastu Dhvani and Alankara Dhvani can be expressed by direct meaning or vakyartha, by suggestion or vyangyaartha. But the third variety of implicit sense of Rasa Dhvani never is expressed in the direct meaning of words.

'Rasa Dhvani' suggests 'Bhava', feelings or sentiments. In rasa dhvani emotion is conveyed through 'vyanjaka'. Rasa is the subject of 'vyanjakaas' as differentiated from abhidha and laksana. Its cognition is almost simultaneous with the expressed.

The ancient principle of Sphota is said to be the reason behind the development of theory of Dhvani. Literary Sphota is that which flashes or bursts forth the meaning. Sphota comes from the root 'sphut', which is used in the sense of manifestation. The term Sphota signifies bursting; opening; expansion; disclosure; the eternal and imperceptible element of sound and words. It is the real medium of the thought which bursts or flashes on the mind when a sound is articulated.



The letters are merely sounds when uttered. They can also be referred to as the symbols of sounds when written and this way they do not present any meaning. They do convey the meaning when written or spoken in a specific sense or order to form the words.

The letters, coming one after another in a specific order manifest the sphota of the word with increasing clarity. Corresponding to each stage in the manifestation of the sphota, there is a revelation of the meaning by the sphota, so that when we reach the last letter, the meaning is fully revealed.

The idea of Sphota seems to go back to the Vedic age when Vak or speech was considered to be a manifestation of the all – pervading Brahman, when Pranava (Aum) was regarded as the ancient speech sound from which all forms of Vak were supposed to have evolved.

Sphota practically manifests from the last sound. It is from the last sound that the cognition of the entire word structure is derived, together with the impression produced by preceding sound. Sphota in this context is 'antima buddhi graahya' or what is known by the last word, Sphota is also 'antima varna graahya', or what is known by the last syllable as even the last alphabet.

Bhatt Mathuranath Shastri wrote extensively on Indian Aesthetics focusing on Dhvani. He was an Indian Sanskrit scholar, poet, philosopher, grammarian, polyglot and expert of Tantra. He lived during the 12th Century In Jaipur, Rajasthan.

The Gathasaptasati or Gaha Sattasai is a collection of poems in Maharashtri Prakrit. The poems mostly have love as a theme. Many of the poems are by women. The collection is attributed to the king Hala (a Satavahana king



who ruled in present-day Deccan region), as are about forty of the poems in it. It is estimated to date from between 200 BCE and 200 CE.

For a traditional illustration of Dhvani, the following example from the second-century Prakrit anthology, the Gathasaptasati, may be considered:

*“Why are you crying  
with your head bent down  
as the rice fields must turn white?  
The hemp field’s like a dancer’s  
face daubed with yellow paint”*

Mathuranath Sastri’s Exemplification Mathuranath Sastri of the twentieth century gives the following head note to exemplify dhvani in his Sanskrit commentary:

“There was a meeting place, a rice field, which was frequented by a certain woman in the company of some man. Then, when the rice ripened, seeing that the spot was ruined, a girlfriend informed the crying woman that another meeting spot was available”.

The idea is that the rice is ready to be harvested, and if the field is cut, the cover for the woman’s amorous meetings is gone. The girlfriend is indicating to her that the hemp field is now a suitable spot for romantic meetings with her lover. The above head note is not at all enough for Mathuranath Sastri who claims that every single word of the Gathasaptasati contains the potential for dhvani. He explains the simile,



then suggests other possible levels of meaning, again paraphrasing and expanding upon Gangadharabhata.

Here are the options that Mathuranath Sastri presents (He first focuses on the phrase *hariāla-mandia-mukhi*-“face adorned with yellow paint”):

(1) The mouth of the hemp field’s entrance path is adorned with a group of yellow monkeys, and because there are no people around, it is indicated, as a meeting place.

(2) A girlfriend suggests to the heroine with the phrase “face which is adorned...” that, “just as the hemp field has a decorated face, so should you... adorn yourself and perform an erotic dance.” *Language in India* [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 14:5 May 2014 Dr. Vijayalaxmi Koppikar *Grammar, Literature and Poetics – An Indian Approach* 353

(3) The act of lifting up the face is indicated by the phrase “head bent down,” that is, “having bent down your face, why do you stand here? Look at my gestures.”

(4) Since the ripened rice field can still be a meeting place (that is, the rice has not yet been harvested), some woman whose meeting place is this rice field is mocked for her crying by some other woman whose habits are derisive.

“This verse exudes an elusive as well as a polysemic Dhvani. Literary conventions in the *rasa* Dhvani approach differ from other approaches in the techniques of reading, depending largely in precisely what a reader has to know to decode specific paradigmatic symbologies in order to make sense out of a poem”.



Dhvani certainly accounts for the shadings of words and the different nuances of resonance for each poetic context.

Dhvani can be seen as semantic activity as well, which is local rather than text wide, textural rather than structural. This would consist of the output of suggested meaning—unstated, indirect, relatively imprecise, highly interpretable, multiple, associative, non-referential—from a single word or utterance, an individual image, or a piece of rhythm. For a given reader, a word can acquire several coats of remembered meaning grown out of his or her own previous encounters with it in its own guises and contexts.

Dhvani theory's basic assumption is that utterances have a literal meaning, and can also express an additional and supplementary meaning.

Hope you find this episode helpful and informative for your understanding of concept of Dhvani in Indian literature and art context.