



# ĀNANDAVARDHANA'S THEORY OF *DHVANI*: AN INTRODUCTION

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## ABSTRACT

This research study focuses on the concept of Ānandavardhana's *Dhvani* theory (Theory of Suggestion). In the theory of *Dhvani*, we see a change from literary excellence or poetic figure to the inner content of poetry in the history of Indian literary theories. And that inner content or implicit meaning is regarded to be the soul of poetry. Ānandavardhana was the first to recognize and highlight the importance of meaning or suggestion, which he referred to as the soul of poetry. This research paper analyzes Ānandavardhana's *Dhvani* theory and how it approaches the meaning or suggestive sense of language. Unlike his predecessors Bharata, Bhāmaha, Udbhata, and Vāmana, who emphasized the external appearance of poetry, Ānandavardhana integrates both the internal and external factors of literature and distinguishes between two kinds of meaning – the explicit and the implicit – and attempts to estimate the worth of literature by giving preference to the implicit rather than the explicit, claiming that implicit meaning is the true essence of literature and called *Dhvani*. He identifies three levels of meaning *Abhidhā* (denotation), *Laksanā* (implication), and *Vyanjanā* (suggestion).

**KEYWORDS:** Suggestive Sense, Implicit Meaning, *Dhvani*, Denotative Sense.

The attempt to shed some light on the *Dhvani* Theorists' critical activity must obviously begin with an analysis of the literary traditions passed down from the generations before them. Whether we presume that the *Dhvani* theory was predicted in earlier works or that it was originally proposed in the *Dhvanyāloka*, we must look to the works of earlier writers to get a sense of the poetic traditions that were prevalent at the time. When understood, the insufficiency and lopsidedness of previous theories will be sufficient to explain the rise of a new theory that attempted to correct the flaws.

Scholars have attempted to locate indications of a system of rhetoric similar to that of a later age in India's Vedic literature, which dates back to antiquity. Although there are some beautiful examples of genuine poetry in the Vedas, there is no solid evidence to support the conclusion that there was a full-fledged poetic tradition at the time. When we get to the purely classical Sanskrit period, about the sixth century A.D., we find poetics works that indicate to a lengthy and continuous tradition of criticism. Both the *Kāvyaalankāra* of Bhāmaha and the *Kāvyaadarsa* of Dandin mention various forerunners in the field. The conclusion that the oldest texts cited by these authors are now gone to the world becomes overwhelming. Even so, the material in the existing works is sufficient to reflect the current tendency.

All of the early writers attempted to define the province of literature, describe the numerous literary forms in vogue, find the elements of beauty, point out the traps to avoid, and provide a thorough explanation of the methods and means to master the poetics art. Posterity has designated Bharata, the famed author

of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, as a hoary sage, and his authority is unchallenged in later discussions regarding play, poetry, and fine arts. The *Dhvani* theory arose from the foundations laid down by the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, hence Bharata's contribution to literary theory is worth noting. The scientific approach of analysis, logical definition, division, and classification of the numerous parts of beauty is fully mastered in the presentation of rhetorical principles in the literature from Bharata to Rudrata. Bharata, in particular, demonstrates an understanding of the fundamentals of aesthetic experience, using it as a springboard for all of his comments on poetry, theatre, and fine art.

The majority of these early thinkers value formality and meticulous attention to detail. We miss a philosophical perspective in their treatment of individual greatness. They are comfortable with enunciating rhetorical rules and showing them with random examples. They rarely describe crucial concepts like intuition, creative imagination, the critic's function, and principles of literary judgment in a systematic way, save from a few hints and concise summaries. They rarely seek to evaluate literary works as a whole, and comparison evaluations of poets are uncommon. They are uninterested in the crucial question of semantics, and they have inadequately expressed the intricate relationship between the categories of *Rasa*, *Guna*, and *Alankāra*. We can't claim they lacked literary insight, but we do see a lack of depth in their formal categories. The importance of these ideas lies in the positive hope they offered for a future writer, the author of the *Dhvanyāloka*, to stand on their shoulders and perfect a theory free of their flaws. Their



performance provided a perfect backdrop for Ānandavardhana's arrival (9th century A.D.)

The theory of *Dhvani* was expounded as the most important premise in literary criticism by the new school of critics headed by Ānandavardhana. Ānandavardhana's *Dhvani* theory considers suggestion, or implicitly elicited meaning, as a distinguishing feature of literary discourse. "As articulated in *Dhvanyāloka*, *Dhvani* becomes an all-encompassing principle that explains the structure and function of the other major element of literature – aesthetic effect (*rasa*), figural mode and devices (*Alamkāra*), stylistic values (*Rīti*), and excellence and defects (*Guna* and *dosa*)" (Kapoor, Comparative Literary Theory : An Overview ). The combination of *rasa* and *Dhvani* theories was judged to be both enough and sufficient by all later literary theorists in the tradition to analyse the structure of meaning in literature. Ānandavardhana gave a structural study of indirect literary meaning in *Dhvanyāloka*. He has classified and identified many types of suggestion by identifying the nature of suggestion in each. *Dhvani* is a phrase used by Ānandavardhana to describe the universe of suggestion – *kāvyaśya ātmā dhvani* (*Dhvanyāloka* 1.1). "*Dhvani* theory is a philosophy of meaning, of symbolism," says Kapil Kapoor, "and this concept leads to the acceptance of poetry of suggestion as the highest sort of poetry" (Kapoor, Comparative Literary Theory : An Overview ).

The *Dhvani* school claimed that the aesthetic experience of the *Sahridayas* (the cultured reader or listener) is at the heart of all art forms, whether theatre, poetry, music, or art. Although Vāmana claimed that *Rīti* is the soul of poetry, the *Dhvani* School claimed that it does not reach into the profound depths of *Kāvya*. *Alamkāra* – the figure of speech – and *Rīti* – the particular verbal composition – are thought to have an enchantment on *Kāvya*. However, that represents body of *Kāvya*, but *Rasa* is its essence or soul. And the main purpose of *Kāvya* is *Rasa*, the experience of the *Sahridaya*. *Kāvya* was made for the enjoyment of *Sahridaya*.

Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka* elaborated on the object (*phala*) of poetry and how it is achieved (*vyāpara*). It is said that the *Rasa* is the ultimate satisfaction of the reader, and that this joy is the object of poetry. *Rasa*, according to Ānandavardhana, is revealed rather than created, and the greatest way to show it is through *Dhvani*, the power of suggestion. As a result, words and meanings must be changed into suggestion of *Rasa* (*dhvani*). There can be no poetry without words; poetry elicits emotional responses, which are followed by knowledge of the poem's emotive language and the reader's recognition of the poet's genuine significance. Ānandavardhana combines *rasa* theory and *Dhvani* theory in his *Dhvani* theory. *Dhvani* is a technique for achieving or evoking *rasa*, which is the result of suggestion.

The Grammarians coined the term '*Dhvani*' to describe some qualities of speech and meaning. And it appears that *Sahridayas*, who held grammarians in great regard, took this expression from the discipline of grammar. In other words, when the *Sahridayas* were faced with the challenge of precisely identifying the essence of poetry, the grammarians provided

light and guidance. They came up with the hypothesis on their own, and they found a suitable name for it in grammar books.

To what extent were the literary critics inspired by the grammarians are the next point which may bring up for consideration. There is little doubt that these critics were confronted with the phenomenon of suggestion in their assessment of literary beauty. They must have come to the opinion that the core principle of poetry is something that cannot be defined in terms of its exterior features such as *Alamkāra* or *Guna* through frequent perusals of great literature specimens. Even though it was merely through the method of outer symbols, such as words and their meaning in poetry, it was still something out topping them, giving them a new lease on life. In the course of their analysis of the problem of meaning the literary critics naturally looked up to logic and grammar for light and guidance. They sought to discover if previous writers had scientifically described a comparable experience. How can a word have a meaning that is completely different from the usual one, and how can this inner meaning be explained as the source of all aesthetic pleasure? These were the two issues that literary critics were grappling with and hoping to find a satisfying answer to. The first question was an important topic of study in both Grammar and Logic. When literary critics realized that the identical problem had been successfully addressed in Grammar, they quickly copied not just their conclusion but also their nomenclature. The term '*dhvani*,' which was used by grammarians to explain their *sphota* concept, was later applied to the realm of literary criticism.

*Dhvani* is a Hindi word that signifies 'tone' or 'sound.' However, it was given a more technical meaning in a treatise on grammar. The *Vākyapadiya* of Bharathari demonstrates its use in three different ways. The grammarians proposed the *sphota* hypothesis as a solution to the dilemma of 'how do words express meaning?' Words are nothing more than a collection of letters, and it's common to believe that the letters are the ultimate source of meaning. It is a reverberation of a sound, similar to the ringing of a bell, in the conventional meaning. It also has a strong resemblance to the genuine feeling. *Sphota* arose from the necessity to explain how individual letters from a meaningful word work together. When uttered, the letters are merely sounds, and when written, they are representations of sounds. They are meaningless in and of themselves. However, they communicate meaning when spoken or written in a specific order to make a word. The fundamental problem with the dilemma is that the letters, whether spoken or written, arrive one after another, and we only get the whole meaning when we get to the last letter. According to grammarians, the only answer to the problem is to ensure that there is already a unity underlying the letters of a word. The essence of the word is unity. It lies beneath the individual letters of the word and serves as a symbol for the meaning of word. It's known as *sphota* and *śabda*. The meaning of the word is presented to the hearer or reader through this hidden symbol, the *sphota*, rather than the letters themselves. This unified substance of the word, *sphota*, is thus found halfway between the letters and the meaning. In the same



way that grammarians used the term *Dhvani* to refer to letters that are suggestive (*vyanjaka*) of *sphota*, literary critics used the same expression to refer to words and senses that are suggestive of other senses in the field of literature.

Similarly, literary critics believed that the term *Dhvani* could be applied to a process of signification that existed independently of the commonly accepted processes of *Abhidā*, *Laksanā*, and *Tātparya*. *Abhidā* is the process of comprehending all primary meanings; *Laksanā* is the word given to a secondary signification process. *Tātparya*, or drift, is considered to be the third phase by which knowledge of a passage's drift is received. Thus, the term *Dhvani*, which was discovered to be utilized in three different ways by Grammarians, was adopted into the sphere of poetics. It could be applied to all aspects of suggestiveness of poetry at the same time. The phrase *Dhvani* has been utilized in the *Kārikas* of *Dhvanyāloka* to stand for *Kāvya*, recommended meaning, and so on. As a result, we can see how *Dhvani* could be used in a variety of contexts.

On the basis of etymology, Abhinavagupta also attempts to justify the use of the term *Dhvani* in all of the above connotations. *Dhvani* can be generated in a variety of ways:

1. 'That which suggest' (both the word and meaning can be *Dhvani* in this sense).
2. 'That which is suggested' (sense only comes under this category).
3. 'The process of suggestion'.
4. 'The whole, viz., Work of literature, formed out of these elements of *Dhvani*'.

Ānandavardhana's contributions went well beyond philosophical and linguistic considerations. For the first time in Indian thought, he asked, focusing on aesthetics and semantics, what was the difference between the two well-known usages of language, namely, the use of language outside of literature and the unique usage exclusive to literature? Attempts were made in practically all schools of Indian philosophy to arrive at an acceptable explanation of the meaning problem. Though they differed in small points, they all agreed that words have a conventional meaning first and an inferred meaning second. They called the former type of sense, which is immediate, fundamental, and conventional, *Abhidheya*, as opposed to the latter, which is secondary in nature *Laksya*. It was also believed that the words *Abhidā* and *Laksanā* had two distinct roles (*Vrttis*) that corresponded to the two senses indicated above. Ānandavardhana views language and its meaning on two levels – explicit and implicit – and focuses his attention on the implicit meaning, which he believes is the true essence of literature. Ānandavardhana tries to show that the suggested sense isn't explicit, that it can't be classified under any of these recognized senses, and that a third function of words should be proposed to explain it. He claims that the richness of literary language is created more by suggestion than by the aspect of description. His argument is that in the realm of poetry, it is implied sense alone that counts. "There is not a single specimen of good poetry appealing to men of taste, which does not owe all its beauty to the play of suggestion," he writes in the third *Uddyota*. And this

should be regarded as highest secret of poetry" (*Dhvanyāloka*). Ānandavardhana defines *Dhvani* to make the notion more understandable:

Any reference to a great poet is sufficient to demonstrate that the indicated sense exists and that it is wonderfully delightful. The beauty of the suggested sense is not the same as the beauty of its constituents, but it is something more. This one-of-a-kind phenomenon is comparable to the alluring beauty of lovely women that pervades their entire physical frame while surpassing the symmetry or harmony of their various limbs (Krishnamoorthy).

Ānandavardhana's *Dhvani* theory is based on the belief that what we might call the literary ultimate is incomprehensible and can only be suggested. It is this *Dhvani* that is an examination of the suggestive potentiality of literary language. Apart from literal meaning, there is also socio-cultural meaning that is influenced by context and emotion. *Vācaka* (expressive) and *bodhaka* (signs) are the words (indicatory). Words, sentences, discourse, contextual factors, intonation, gestures, and even sounds can all communicate this *Vyanjanā* (tertiary meaning or suggested sense). It should be noted that the *Dhvani* theorists broadened the definition of meaning to encompass everything a poem could mean or suggest, including cognitive, emotive, and socio-cultural meanings based on a variety of factors other than the denotative sense. This also leads to a classification of poetry, with *Dhvani Kāvya*, or suggestion poetry, being regarded as supreme: The best kind of poetry is called *Dhvani* by the learned, and it is poetry in which the implied meaning dominates the expressed. (Kapoor, Comparative Literary Theory : An Overview )

According to Ānandavardhana, the suggested or implicit sense can be divided into three categories: (i) idea (*vāstu*), (ii) figures of speech (*Alamkāra*), and (iii) *Rasas*. *Vastu Dhvani* alludes to a unique truth or concept. Some *Alamkāra* or figure of speech is suggested in *Alamkāra Dhvani*. In *rasa Dhvani* rasa is elicited. *Vāstu Dhvani* and *Alamkāra Dhvani* can be expressed in two ways: directly (*vācyarta*) or indirectly (*vyangārtha*). The third types of implicit meaning of *Rasa Dhvani*, on the other hand, can never be stated in the direct meaning of the word. In other words, poetry does not express the straight literal and obvious meaning, but rather the implied. But, regardless of the type, it will be discovered that it has a separate existence in and of itself, independent of the explicit sense. Let's look at a few examples. First, we'll compare and contrast the suggested 'idea' with the explicit idea (*Vāstu*): -

Bhrama dharmika viśrabdhaḥ sa śunako 'dya maritas tena /  
Godāvaritaṭavikaṭakuñjavāsinā daryasimhena //  
(Ramble confidently, o hermit; that dog was killed today  
By the ferocious lion that prowls the thickets, yonder  
On the banks of the river Godā!) (Krishnamoorthy)



If we consider only the primary sense of the verse, we can see that it contains an idea that encourages the traveler to ramble without fear, because the source of his anxiety, namely, the dog, has been conveniently killed. However, the implied meaning, which is the polar opposite of what is clearly articulated, is unmistakable. Will a dog-phobic man risk his life in lion-infested territory? In other words, the traveler is slyly warned that if he ventures any further into these grounds, his life will be in greater danger than before. 'Do not frequent this location in the future,' is the suggested notion, stated frankly. The relation between the explicit idea and the idea suggested is in this instance one of the direct opposition.

The following is an instance where the position is reversed. While the explicit idea is that of prohibition, the suggested idea is positive invitation:-

Here lies my mother-in-law, a heavy sleeper;  
And here I, stretch: Mark well  
While yet it is day.  
O traveler, night-blinded.  
Don't you tumble into one of our beds!  
(Krishnamoorthy)

When it is discovered that the verse is addressed to a visitor seeking lodging for the night by a woman of questionable morality, the indicated meaning will be obvious. It's nothing more than a veiled invitation for the stranger to join her in bed at night, because the mother-in-law will be too engrossed in her slumber to notice anything.

While the explicit sense is commendatory in force, the suggested may be neither commendatory nor prohibition as in the following instance:-

Get away hence;  
Let sighs and sobs be mine alone,  
And not yours too  
By missing one you really love  
Though making love to me for show!  
(Krishnamoorthy)

In this verse, a faithful wife addresses her adulterous husband. The notion is explicitly stated that he should hurry to his mistress. However, the proposed concept is not very clear. She doesn't want her husband to leave, nor is his stay for mere courtesy sake.

It is true that poets focus their attention first and foremost on the explicit sense. However, this fact does not imply that Dhvani is unimportant or undervalued. A man eager to view things (at night) is seen looking for a torch first as a means of achieving his goal. The torch isn't an end in itself; it's only a tool for achieving another goal. Poets, likewise, are interested in the explicit sense as a means of communicating their other ideas in a suggestive manner. The suggested concepts are the goals that the poets use to drive their selection of other objects. And, just as comprehension of a phrase is dependent on comprehension of its constituent words, comprehension of the suggested sense is dependent on comprehension of the explicit sense

(Krishnamoorthy). The proposed sense is provided solely through the primary sense. Suggestion cannot be carried out without additionally taking into account the usual connotation.

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