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**Bhamaha's Kavyalamkara: A Critical Study of Poetry, Poetics and
their Ancillary Issues**

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Finding out the criterion of good poetry and nature of aesthetic delight leads one to think questions such as: What is poetry? What constitutes its body? What is definition of poetry? What is its purpose and what is the nature of delight it imparts to the sympathetic reader? What constitutes the difference between ordinary conversational speech and scientific speech? What are the essential qualities that a poet should possess? Sanskrit literary criticism bears witness to endeavours to arrive at a satisfactory solution to these problems where in Bharata's *Natyashashtra* is the first available critique on aural-visual arts and aesthetic pleasure related to it. He also gives the requisites of *Kavya*, ten gunas, ten doshas and four alamkaras. But his treatment of poetry is considered as a factor auxiliary to drama.

Keeping speculations as regards problems inherent in poetic composition in view, Bhamaha is well-known as the earliest exponent of the Alamkara School of Sanskrit Literary Criticism. His was the first attempt to deal with Poetics separate from dramatic theory and hence his *Kavyalamkara* can be considered as the earliest extent work on Sanskrit Poetics proper. It is the first systematic text to define and classify poetry on various criteria namely:

- ❖ Language: Sanskrit, Prakrta, and Apabhramsha
- ❖ Mode of composition: prose or verse
- ❖ Subject matter: real narratives of God (khyat vastu), fictional account (utpadya vastu), facts relating to arts (kalashrita vastu), and those pertaining to sciences (shastrashrita)
- ❖ Composition based: epic (maha kavya), performative arts (abhineyarth), historical narratives (akhyayika), and fictional narratives (katha), unconnected composition (anibaddha).
- ❖ The text enlists essential qualities of the poet and 38 figures of speech that add to the charm of poetry. The text is divided in six paricchedas composed in karika, which is memorable rendition of formulaic aphorisms. All these paricchedas encompass mainly five broad subjects:

1. Nature and body of poetry
2. Figures of speech
3. Poetic defects
4. Poetic logic
5. The poetical clarity and use of words



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The architectonics of the text inheres in 60 karikas to critique kavya, 160 karikas used figures of speech and thought, 50 karikas for explication of poetic blemishes and merits, 70 karikas for poetic logic, 60 karikas for poetical clarity of words. Thus, Kavyalamkara is constituted in total 400 karikas. In Sanskrit Poetics, the main question for all poeticians was as to what constitutes the body of poetry and what is its soul. For Bhamaha, body of poetry is constituted by togetherness of word and meaning (sabdārtho sahito kavyam- Kavyalamkara: 1.16) but it is alamkara that adds to the charm of this body of poetry. He divides alamkara into two categories as:

1. *Sabdalamkara* -figures of speech that appeals to the sound aspect
2. *Arthalamkara* - figures of speech that appeals to the sense aspect

Apart from the treatment of figures, he also devoted attention to the incorporation of poetic qualities and exclusion of flaws in poetry that contribute to produce appeal. Bhamah gives three gunas namely madhurya (sweetness), Prasad (clarity), and ojas (...) which later on were discussed by Dandin. Like figure of speech, he also divides poetic flaws into two categories namely shabda dosha and artha dosha. The former is shrutidusht (offensive to hear), arthadusta (improper or objectionable meaning) kalpanadusta (objectionable construction) and shrutikasta (cacophony). The latter are neyārtha (forced implication), kalistha (obscurantism), anyārtha (absence of accepted meaning), avacaka (unsaid), ayuktimat (unintelligent), and gudha-sabdabhidhan (esoteric or hidden meaning). Further, in opinion of Bhamaha, all poetic speech is marked by an obliquity or strikingness of speech as opposed to the ordinary speech which is straight forward expression. He terms this strikingness of speech as vakrokti which later on was developed as a separate school of thought viz. vakroktivād. The text also offers a link between vyākaraṇa school and alamkara school as the sixth Parichcheda is devoted to the practical hints to the poet for observing grammatical purity.

Bharata gave four alamkaras namely, upama (simile), rupaka (metaphor), yamaka (pun on meaning), dipaka (illumination) but he did not define poetry. Bhamaha offers a few more alamkaras, Dandin added to it further while Vamana tried to trim down the number. The later alamkara critics concentrated more on arthalamkara and tried to find difference at a subtle level and giving them new names. Thus, the present study aims at studying the significance of the text and to explicate a metasystem it lays down for the nature and end of poetry, constituents of poetry and poetical taxonomy.



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