

KUNTAKA'S THEORY OF *VAKROKTI* AND RUSSIAN FORMALISM: AFFINITIES AND PARALLELISMS

Abstract: Both Indian and Western aesthetic thinking is impregnated with significant views about the language of literature. However, the Indian theory of *vakrokti* (obliquity) and the Western theory of Russian Formalism deal with the language of literature exhaustively. Kuntaka's theory of *vakrokti* and Russian formalism consider that a certain obliqueness or indirection or defamiliarization is the most distinguishing characteristic of the language of literature. Both theories point out this very aspect of language of literature. In spite of this common ground, there is no onetoone correspondence between the theories. The present paper aims at exploring a significant area of intersection between the two. The basis of the intersection includes the development of both theories in terms of the levels of the language of literature, the role of author and the reader, the role of emotions and the role of sound and meaning.

Key words: language, literature, *Vakrokti* (obliquity), Russian Formalism, defamiliarization.

The language of literature is highly innovative and creative and represents the most delightful and unique expression of human soul. It is a departure from the standard use of words, in order to achieve some special meaning or effect. It is this language which enables poet/writer to transform his basic concept into an effective and meaningful message. It is this very language, which enables reader also to perceive meaning which is an inescapable notion because it is not something simple or simply determined. Hence, it requires assiduous use of linguistic elements to express the sense or sensibility of language. When composing a piece of literature, one may need to be concerned with the phonological, morphological, syntactical, semantic and other components of a language and also all extra linguistic matters like plot, characterization, setting, theme, motif, and imagery.

Both Indian and Western aesthetic thinking is impregnated with significant views about the language of literature. The aestheticians in both the traditions have dealt with the creative use of language of literature assiduously. For most of the modern linguists and theorists like formalists, New Critics, stylisticians, structuralists, poststructuralists, in one way or the other the prime concern is the language of literature. It is remarkable to note that Indian aestheticians are also aware of the language of literature. The language of literature is one of the much discussed issues in Indian poetics. “The whole field of Sanskrit *alamkarśāstra* or poetics may be regarded as one continued attempt to unravel the mystery of beauty of poetic language” (Krishnamoorthy 22). The Indian aestheticians have made several exploratory, but penetrating contributions on many issues, having a distinct bearing on language in literature, that still confront modern scholars. Although Indian aestheticians do not use the terminology of modern criticism, their formulations on the language of literature are seminal. As a whole, the Indian aestheticians hold that it is the literary linguistic presentation that possesses some element of art and represents an object as it figures in literary imagination. It is this language that is capable of arousing the interest of an appreciative reader of fine taste and is sufficient for the aesthetic experience. The Indian aestheticians have examined the language of literature from various standpoints: *rasa* (aesthetic pleasure), *alamkāra* (embellishment), *rīti* (diction), *dhvani* (suggestion), *vakrokti* (oblique expression) and *aucitya* (propriety).

The present paper aims at exploring a significant area of intersection between the Indian theory of *vakrokti* and the Western theory of Russian Formalism from several points of view: the creative use of language of literature, the affinities and parallelisms between the two literary fields/systems. The basis of the intersection includes the development of general theories, levels of the language of literature, the role of author and the reader, the role of emotions and the role of sound and meaning.

Let us have a broad premise upon which theories in both contexts flourish and work. At the very outset of his *Vakroktijīvitam*, Kuntaka, the greatest exponent of the theory of *vakrokti*, states that his objective in writing a fresh treatise on poetics is to “establish the idea of strikingness which causes extraordinary charm in poetry” (VJ, I.2). As the title of his *Vakroktijīvitam* unfolds, according to him, *vakrokti* is the life of poetry. He further defines *vakrokti* as a *vicitraabhidhā* (striking denotation). It is stated in Introduction to

Vakroktijīvitam: “The distinction between poetic and other kinds of expression was to him in practice an empirical distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary, the simple and ornate; and it naturally led him to put greater emphasis on ornamental expression” (De 38). In this sense, *vakrokti* is a striking mode of speech differing from and transcending the established or current mode of speech. Ordinary language gratifies a rational or practical impulse and exhibits the minimum of perception. The language of literature gratifies a perceptual impulse and exhibits the minimum of reason. Kuntaka also conceives of *vakrokti* as a striking mode of expression, as an oblique use of language depending on the peculiar turn given to it by the skill of the poet. To him, poetic function itself is poetry (*kaveḥ karma kāvyam*).

Russian Formalists use defamiliarization for obliqueness. They regard literature first as a specialized mode of language and argue that there is a basic distinction between the language of literature and the ordinary use of it. Clarifying the distinction they inform that ordinary language aims at communicating a message or some information among the auditors by references to the external world, but the language of literature is self-focused as its function is not to have extrinsic references. The literary language, thus, refers to itself and draws the attention to its own linguistic signs. In order to approach or study literature they establish the notion of defamiliarisation (*ostranenie* which means “estrangement” or “making it strange”) i.e. the study of certain aesthetically motivated devices which determine the literariness or artfulness of an object. In Victor Shklovsky’s “Art as Technique”, defamiliarization denotes the capacity of art to counter the deadening effect of habit and convention by investing the familiar with strangeness and thereby de-automatizing perception. To say further it is not simply a question of perception, but rather the essence of literariness. Jakobson formulated this view as: “The object of the science of literature is not literature, but literariness- that is, that which makes a given work a work of literature” (11). It distinguishes literature from other human creations and it is made of certain artistic techniques, or devices (*priemy*), employed in literary works. Victor Shklovsky tackled the issue by looking into the techniques of writing in his essay “Art as Technique”. He observes:

The technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar”, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged (Shklovsky 2).

Thus, like Kuntaka, the Russian formalists also hold that 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. They concentrate on the form but refute the idea that literature is meant only for aesthetic purposes. Boris Eichenbaum states that “formalism is neither an aesthetic theory nor methodology. It is an attempt to create an independent science of literature which studies specifically literary material” (Eichenbaum 103). Victor Shklovsky also considers that human “content” (emotions, ideas and reality) possesses no literary significance in itself, but merely provides a context for the functioning of literary devices. He aims rather to outline abstract model and hypotheses in order to explain how aesthetic effects are produced by literary devices and how the “literary” is distinguished from and related to the “extra-literary”. Thus, they believe that formalism is an isolation from the aesthetic approach and is characterized by a new passion for scientific positivism, which is defined as a rejection of philosophical assumptions, of psychological and aesthetic interpretations, etc. However, Roman Jakobson, member of the Moscow Linguistic Circle assumes that literature is language in its aesthetic function. Boris Tomashevsky also talks about emotions in “Thematisms”. He opines that

the emotion (...) plays a major role in maintaining interest (...). The emotions a work of art excites are its chief means of holding attention. ...the listener must sympathize, must be indignant, joyful, disturbed. Only then does the work become really “real” (...). The theme of a work is usually emotionally coloured; it evokes and develops feelings of hostility or sympathy according to a system of values (Tomashevsky 65).

Vakrokti is recognised as the embellishment of the word and its meaning, the physical constituent of poetry; it facilitates the expression to give a kind of unique pleasure to the *tadvidāhlādakāri* (connoisseur). Kuntaka also thinks that the ultimate test is *tadvidāhalād* or

the pleasure of the appreciating connoisseur, who plays here apparently the same part as he does in the *rasa* (aesthetic pleasure) theory or in poetic theories in general. His definition¹ of poetry stresses on the importance of aesthetic emotions: "Poetry is that word and sense together giving aesthetic delight to the man of taste on the other" (VJ, I.7). Kuntaka's treatment of aesthetic pleasure in the kinds: *prakaraṇavakratā* (episodic obliquity) and *prabhandavakratā* (compositional obliquity) is noteworthy. He states that all the acts are not equally beautiful. Only the truly unique ones serve readers as a sporting ground for the essence of the ruling sentiment, and the artistic beauty of that act strikes the readers the most. Kuntaka also opines that when there is a departure from the enriched "*rasas*" of the source book and a new delightful *rasa* is delineated by the poet at the conclusion of his work, so that the delight of the readers is ensured, we should regard it as the beauty of the whole work. Thus, Kuntaka shows his originality as an aesthetic thinker and a practical literary critic. He not only asserts a new doctrine, but disengages a new essence which a connoisseur can relish from the vast riches of literature. His theory is an inevitable and deliberate departure from the empirical linguistic mode to achieve aesthetic effect. It is a deviation from common parlance dictated by the very necessities of poetic facts and it is not an intellectual, but an imaginative activity. Kuntaka revealed his genius in not merely explaining but exploring the aesthetic essence of poetic appreciation. His *vakrokti* is not an empirical, but an aesthetic concept was never lured away by what is ordinary and ornate since his whole concern was to distil the aesthetic essence in the ordinary as well as extraordinary ingredients of the subject.

The next comparison between the Russian Formalism and *vakrokti* is the distinction between language of literature and ordinary language. Russian formalism defines literature to be an organized violence committed on ordinary speech. It proclaims that most of the patterns of thinking, feeling and perception are programmed and automatic. Poets de-automatize this new frame wherein lies their creativity. To change the 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", Victor 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. The formalists agreed on the

¹"*śabdārthausahitau....tadvidāhlādakārini.*" (My translation)

independent nature of the language of literature and its specificity as an object of study for literary criticism. Their main attempt consisted in defining a set of properties specific to the literary language, recognizable by their “artfulness” and consequently analysing them as such. The theoreticians of OPOJAZ distinguished between practical and the language of literature in an exhaustive way. They claim that practical language is used in day-to-day communication to convey information. Shklovsky explains in “Art as Technique”: “We can define poetry as attenuated, tortuous speech. Poetic speech is formed speech. Prose is ordinary speech - economical, easy and proper (9). Leo Jakobson, in his essay “On the Sounds of Poetic Language”, formulates that in poetic language, the practical goal is hidden into background and linguistic combinations acquire a value in themselves. When this happens, language becomes defamiliarized and utterances become poetic. The language of literature consists in breaking the norms and patterns of standard language, both in sound and in sense, and replacing them with different ones. Roman Jakobson draws a line of demarcation between language of literature and ordinary language: “Literature is language in its aesthetic function, while ordinary language is governed by the communicative function” (Margolin 3). This theory concentrates on a key term to approach or study literature: defamiliarization. Calling attention to its techniques and conventions (“baring the device”), it is rightly said that literature exposes its autonomy and artificiality by foregrounding and defamiliarizing its devices. Defamiliarization is one of the crucial ways in which literary language distinguishes itself from ordinary, communicative language, and is a feature of how art in general works, namely by presenting the world in a strange new way that allows us to see things differently.

In fact, Kuntaka’s theory of *vakrokti* encompasses the language of literature itself. It is *vakrokti* which makes the language of literature different from the current mode of speech as well as the established manner of expression which we find in the sciences (*śāstras*) and the like. Scientific writing frees one from the disease of ignorance, like bitter medicine. But the language of literature removes the same ailment like sweet nectar. The literary language sees the world with a disinterested eye and turns the familiar into unique. It even makes the ugliest appear charming, objectifying the vision of reality in expressive words. *Vakrokti* is a striking mode of speech differing from and transcending the established or current mode of speech. Kuntaka has acknowledged *vakrokti* to be the only medium of externalization of the poetic

vision which differs from the daily experiences because of its ideality and intensity. The language of literature is able to achieve its end chiefly because of its obliqueness.

Another important point of focus is that of the levels of language made by both theories. According to Kuntaka, *vakrokti* operates at six levels: The first is *varṇa-vinyāsa-vakratā* (phonetic obliquity). 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 *vakratā* is *pada-pūrvārdha-vakratā* (lexical obliquity). The third type of *vakratā* is *pada-parārdha-vakratā* (grammatical obliquity) i.e. tense, case, number, person, voice, affix and particle. *Vākya-vakratā* (sentential obliquity) is the fourth type of *vakratā* which has two sub-varities: *sahaja-vakratā* (natural obliquity) and *āhārya-vakratā* (imposed obliquity). The fifth type of *vakratā* is *prakaraṇa-vakratā* (episodic obliquity). The last type of *vakratā* is *prabandha vakratā* (compositional obliquity). The scope of Kuntaka's six types of *vakrokti* is so vast that it subsumes even *rasa* and *dhvani* in its gamut.

Russian formalists do not make a systematic and comprehensive attempt to treat the language of literature at various levels. The concept of defamiliarization is more individualistic. Firstly, defamiliarization occurs at the "phonic texture" of poems, which the formalists believe has a greater import than meaning itself. Sounds (which manifest themselves through rhythm and phonetic figures, i.e. deviations from the normal structures) in Jakobson's term exert an "organized violence" upon the perceiving consciousness. Secondly, defamiliarization operates at the level of syntax. Brik returned to the concept of syntax disdained by the Futurists. "Syntax," he wrote,

is the system of combining words in ordinary language... But a rhythmical- syntactic word combination differs from a purely syntactic one in that it incorporates words into a fixed rhythmical unit (a line); it differs from a purely rhythmical combination in that it links words not only phonetically but semantically. Rhythmical and syntactic requirements may coincide in verse, as when a line is a complete sentence, or they may clash, for example, in caesuras or enjambments. In either case, words in verse are always subject to two sets of combinatory rules (Steiner 147).

Russian Formalists treat plot both at the level of language and as a device in narratives. The first of Shklovsky's works on plot, "The Relation of Devices of Plot Construction to General Devices of Style" is concerned with the demonstration that special devices of plot arrangement exist, a proof supported by the citation of a great number of devices, changed the traditional notion of plot as a group of motifs and made plot as compositional rather than thematic concept. The devices repetitions, parallelism, tautology etc. - defamiliarize the language, which makes it different from ordinary language. Shklovsky notes that the plot arrangement also includes the interpolated digressions, authorial commentaries, typographical games, which all are employed in order to protract or discontinue the narration. According to him, typical categories of plot composition are:

1. the "staircase" based on episodes, in which repetition and parallelism are used),
2. the "hook-like" structure where contrast, opposition prevail and there is a false ending,
3. the double-plotting including heterogeneous components.

There is always a distinction between "plot and "story", as stated by Formalists. Like all narratives, the novel's artfulness lies in the transformation of a lifelike story (*fabula*) into a literary plot (*syuzhet*). A prose work is an intentional construction, whereas the events represented in it are merely the material for this construction. The corresponding terms in the sphere of narratology are "plot" and "story," the two modes in which events "occur" in literature. The Story was understood as the series of events ordered according to their temporal succession (as they would have occurred in reality) and, as Tomashevsky stressed, according to causality. The plot, on the other hand, is the liberation of events from temporal contiguity and causal dependency and their teleological redistribution in the literary text. The story, equated with material, served the artist as a mere pre-text for plot construction, a process governed not by external causes but by internal, formal laws. Tomashevsky also uses the term "motif" to denote the smallest unit of plot and distinguishes between bound and free motifs.

One of the fundamental questions about the language of literature is related to the role of the author – whether he contributes to the production of literary text. Kuntaka is always

concerned with two things: “what” (i.e. what has the poet endeavoured to express?) and “how” (i.e. how has the poet expressed it). He establishes the importance of *kavisvabhāva* (the poet’s temperament), the difference of which makes differences in *kavi karma* (the poetic function), the product of *kavisvabhāva*. R.S. Pathak is of the opinion that “Indian aestheticians before and after Kuntaka were not unaware of the part played by *kavi karma* (poetic function) and *kavisvabhāva* (poetic nature). But no one attached such a great significance to them as Kuntaka did” (145). In *vakrokti*, importance is given to *kavipratibhā* (the creative imagination of a poet). Kuntaka is one of the few Sanskrit theorists who puts clear emphasis on the imaginative power of the poet and considers it to be the source of the characteristic charm of poetic expression. He regards embellished speech as poetry, but holds that the source of this embellishment, even if it consists of figures of speech, is the poetic imagination. He therefore draws a distinction between what may be called speech figure, on the one hand, and poetic figure on the other. In a formal scheme of poetics they may correspond. But in a poetic figure Kuntaka discovers a differentia which consists of *vakratva* (a peculiar turn of expression) resulting in *vicchitti* or *vaicitrya* (a characteristic strikingness) and depends on *kavipratibhānirvartitatva* (the imaginative activity of the poet). The so called tropes of orthodox poetics are admissible only when they possess these characteristics of peculiar charm imparted by the imagination of the poet, the word “charm” apparently meaning nothing but that which gives the expression its poetic peculiarity. Kuntaka maintains, therefore, that embellishments do not “belong” to poetry; that is to say, they are not added externally, but poetry is embellished speech itself, the particular embellishment depending on the poetic imagination. Kuntaka takes *vakra-kavi-vyāpāra* or *vakrokti* itself as the *jivita* (life) or *ātmā* (soul) of poetry. According to him, *kavivyāpāra* in poetry is the direct aesthetic function of the creative poet himself. It is for this reason Ānandavardhana in his *kāraṅkas* and *vṛtti* of *Dhvanyāloka* considers the *paradhanya* (primacy) of only *vyangārtha* as the soul of poetry and is silent about *paradhanya* (primacy) of *vyanjana-vyāpāra*.

Kuntaka maintains that entire poetic creation is essentially an act of imagination on the part of the poet and that it finds a befitting means of communication in an oblique expression which is *vakra-kavi-vyāpāra*. It is neither the idea, nor the mere word, but the manner of expressing that idea in words is the thing that makes for literature. It is the obliquity that is

responsible for effectiveness and charm in literature which is created by creative genius of the poet. He defines *vakrokti* as: “a trite subject which is raised to a unique height of excellence merely by dint of artistic expression; that style, whose life breath is, verily, artistic beauty of expression.” He again describes poetry as *vaidagadhyabhaṅgi- bhaṅiti* (a kind of oblique expression depending on the peculiar turn given to it by the skill of the poet) (VJ, I.20). He opines that words themselves are neutral; it is the action which transforms them into literary tissue. Words in themselves are neither poetic nor un-poetic. They become literary according to the poet’s imaginative energy. And this poet’s evanescent vision and energy can be captured and expressed, if at all, only with the help of obliqueness. Various layers of meaning in poetry necessitate the use of oblique or indirect means of expression. It is the function of poet to reveal the hidden beauty of some special features of the object described. The intense constructiveness of his vision goes beyond objects of physical sight, and as Blake puts it, “can see the world in a grain of sand and Heaven in a wild flower” (1). Poetry attains the qualities of true poetry owing to the poet’s ability to perceive subtle details, his uncommon attitude and his way of presentation. And this is called *kāvya-pratibhā*. It is imagination that distinguishes poetry from scriptures and sciences. “The goddess of speech”, he says, “has two ways of expression: Science and Poetry. The former is born of intellect and the latter of imagination.” And thus, Kuntaka goes to the extent of declaring that whatever charm there is in poetry is due to the power of imagination. The striking activity of poet (*vakra-kavivyāpāra*) is nothing but *kavipratibhā-vyāpāra* (the shaping power of poet) transcending the mundane with imagination. S.K. De explains it as the organic expressive activity of the poetic intuition. Taking the creative imagination of the poet as his starting point, Kuntaka has given a new turn to the whole discussion on the language of literature. He maintains that the entire poetic creation is essentially an act of imagination on the part of the poet, and that it finds a befitting means of communication in an oblique expression. He describes this imaginative activity as mode or manner (*karma*) without which there would be no perceivable difference between the literary language and that of ordinary speech. He believes that obliqueness in language lies “wherein every element of beauty is a result of the poet’s imagination alone and succeeds in conveying flashes of gentle grace” (VJ, I.29). He also says wherein everything is made to acquire altogether new features at his sweet pleasure by a master-poet in his vision by the

power of his inventive genius there lies the strikingness of expression. He also proceeds to define *vakrokti* as “That charming style where fresh words and meanings both blossom forth by virtue of the poet’s undimmed imagination” (VJ, I.25).

Kuntaka’s emphasis is on poetic activity (*kavi-vyāpāra*). Here, the emphasis shifts from external appendages and even from the unexpressed content to the imaginative faculty of the Poet, that gives a new turn to an expression and enables it to bloom into the flower of Poetry: in the whole range of Sanskrit *alaṅkarikas* he is the only critic to give the creative faculty of the poet its due share by including it in the definition of *kāvya*- others only mentioning it, as one of the causal factors of poetic creation. Kuntaka defines *vakrokti* as a mode of expression, to which charm is infused by the skill of the poet. Thus in the theory of *vakrokti*, ultimate emphasis is laid on imaginative faculty of the poet that gives a new turn to expression and arranges language and meaning in unison. He takes the *vyāpāra* involved in poetry as the direct aesthetic function of the creative poet himself. The very etymology of the word *kāvya kavah karma* lends him support. And he therefore sees no difficulty in characterising his many-sided *vakra-kavi-vyāpāra* as the life or soul of all poetry. Thus his theory gives an equal importance to *vastusvabhāva* and *rasādi* which, in his view, are always *alaṅkarya* and or *alaṅkaras*, since both *alaṅkarya* and *alaṅkara* are products of the same creative imagination, each partaking of beauty.

Kuntaka maintains that the entire literary creation is essentially an act of creation on the part of the poet. In all varieties it is the responsibility of the writer to use language in an oblique manner. Kuntaka holds that the arrangement of *varṇas* should not violate propriety and should be in consonance with the feelings conveyed. It should be without extra effort, adorned with syllables which are not harsh. It should be very carefully chosen and should not be tarnished by unattractive *varṇas*. The writer should beautify his work by the repetition of novel *varṇas*. And, finally, lucidity should be maintained at any cost. In defining lexical obliquity Kuntaka repeats the same view focussing on the poetic function. According to him, the writer, with his individual power, employs the common usage in such an oblique manner that it gives a new meaning which may be improbable or exaggerated. In *kāvya*, Kuntaka holds that the consideration of special tense, case, number, person, voice, prefix, suffix and particle, which are the sub-varieties of grammatical obliquity, are also guided by the writer.

Similarly the treatment of *vastu*, replete with innate beauty (*sahajā-vakratā*), described by the writer without heavy embellishment in a simple style, and the expression attaining a heightened beauty due to the use of skill, (*āhāryavakratā*) also falls in the gambit of poetic function. Here, the skill means technical art acquired by the poet. This excels the beauty of individual elements such as words, meaning, attributes and embellishment. The subject-matter is not entirely an imaginative matter, rather it has its own power in it but with no attraction. The writer, by his art, imagines a divine beauty in it and its character becomes potent and prominent, manifesting a new form of beauty. Thus, the subject-matter and the writer's art are complementary to each other to arrive at the same end. Similarly, in episodic obliquity, the art of devising episodes or incidents in such a way that they give maximum consistency to the total effect of the poetry is the act of the poet. Kuntaka says that "when the intended object at the end will remain inscrutable from the beginning (i.e. suspense remains constant till the denouement), the unique and boundless poetic skill underlying it all should be regarded as the poetic beauty of an episode" (VJ, IV.2). Here, he implies that the writer, overwhelmed with the zest of creation, creates an alluring charm in the subject matter by laying down the suspense unabated from the beginning up to the very end of the story. The last function of *kavi-vyāpāra* at the level of poetic language i.e. compositional obliquity, which is said to bear the beauty of the combined complex of the five varieties, phonetic obliquity, lexical obliquity, grammatical obliquity, sentential obliquity, and episodic obliquity is again the result of *kavivyāpāra*.

The Formalists rebel against "the biographical, which interprets a text in terms of its author's life" (Steiner 23). The members of the Russian Formalist School emphasize, first and foremost, on the autonomous nature of literature and consequently, the proper study of literature is neither a reflection of the life of its author, nor a by-product of the historical or cultural milieu in which it is created. They reject the earlier perspectives which regard literature as a mere reflection of biographical, historical or social reality. The Formalists, as their name implies, approach the old and controversial theory of the form and the content in a radical way by advocating the form and neglecting the content of the texts in their critical readings. Thus, the text itself becomes more important than the author and the importance is obvious to "the created" i.e. the form and the structure of the text as compared to "the creator"

i.e. the “intention” of the author. Therefore it is important to note that “moral” themes of the texts do not find place in this approach, and the special usage of the language and the relation between the parts of the whole are fore-grounded instead. They develop several models of literary history, but all share the premises of forces internal to literature itself, rather than as a result of a writer’s unique creative process or the forces of social history. The homespun view of literature tends to see literature as an expression of an author’s personality. And in regarding the literary text as an instrument of expression or representation, the specificity of its literary qualities is likely to be overlooked. Thus, they avoid the proletarian rhetoric of the poets and artists, but maintain a somewhat mechanistic view of the literary process.

As and when social forces or individual vagaries matter, the autonomous discipline of literary studies run out. Indeed, according to formalists, creativity, to the extent that it is truly individual, is by its very nature not amenable to a deterministic analysis in terms of impersonal laws. Russian Formalists look upon the artist as a constructor – a proletarian producer of crafted objects. In his essay, “Russian Formalism”, M.S. Nagarjan observes:

In literature, the author is no more than a craftsman. A work of literature is related to all literature in general and not at all to its author, or his personality. If Columbus had not discovered America, someone else would have discovered it. It would have been discovered without Columbus. There is only poetry, and there are no poets. The object of literary science is an authorless literariness. For the Russian Formalists, Shakespeare would be an anonymous literary figure. (137)

Perhaps the most extreme statement in this respect belongs to Osip Brik, which Steiner quotes in his book *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics*:

OPOJAZ presumes that there are no poets and writers, there is only poetry and literature. Everything written by a poet is significant only as a part of his work in the common enterprise and is absolutely worthless as an expression of his “I” ... The devices of the poetic craft must be studied on a grand scale, along with their differences from contiguous spheres of human work and the laws of their development. Pushkin was not the creator of a school, but only its head. If there were no Pushkin, Eugene Onegin would have been written all the same. America would have been discovered even without Columbus. (56)

The Formalists' believe that "to divert interest from the poet to the poetry is a laudable aim" (Jefferson 25). They, therefore, emphatically lay down that attention should be paid to his technical prowess, to the form he creates. As such, they look upon art as a device, a technique. Tynyanov's concept of the author is influenced by Tomashevsky, probably the first among the Formalists to succeed in separating the authorial subject—for Tomashevsky a legitimate object of literary study—from the author as a concrete psychophysical being, whose locus is outside of literature. Tomashevsky treats the concept of the author from a dual perspective: the production and the reception of the literary text. He says that an author's individuality figures only as an accident. It is a conglomerate of haphazard activities in which some might become relevant for literature but only if required by the developmental needs of the system. All the author's intentions, originality, and so on play no role in literary change. From the systemic point of view, the authorial subject's role in literary production can be studied only within the framework of "literary individuality." This individuality, however, is a transformation of the "author's individuality" (Steiner 115).

As regard to the role of the reader, theories are rather different from one another. The theory of *vakrokti* makes it obligatory for a poetic composition to be capable of pleasing the *tadvidāhlādkāri*. The significance of the responsive reader is realized in *vakrokti*. Kuntaka takes due cognizance of the connoisseur's response and reaction to a piece of literature. The author focuses on the psychological process that a reader undergoes. He/she holds that *vakrokti* evokes feelings, and feelings guide "refamiliarizing" interpretative efforts.

In Russian Formalism, the perceiving subject is virtually ignored. Tynyanov discusses the reader in two contexts. In his discussion of verse language, he employs several basic categories pertaining to the reader's consciousness, such as retention and protention, successivity and simultaneity, or mental attitude. Tynyanov's goal is not the "phenomenology of reading" but the nature of poetic rhythm. Therefore, he does not treat these categories in a systemic fashion: they served him rather as heuristic devices to demarcate verse language from prose. Tynyanov also includes the reader in his studies of literary change, as an accessory to the literary system, or more precisely, as the very self-consciousness of this system that prompts it to seek a new principle of construction. The reader is purged of all

possible subjectivity and accidentality. Readers are first reduced to the inter-subjective basis of human consciousness. In the service of the system, moreover, they are as much present at the birth of a literary work as are the authors, and the readers' acceptance or rejection of the work as literary is an externalization of the current state of the literary system. At the time the work is produced there seems to be no doubt regarding its literariness—every contemporary can point his finger at what is a *literary fact*. Yet at the moment the readers cease to be a part of the context from which the work arose, Tynyanov loses interest in them.

The last aspect to be covered is the role of sound and meaning in the language of literature. In the history of Indian poetics, sound and meaning of the language of literature has also been an important issue. As far as Kuntaka's theory is concerned, there is an assimilation of both sound and meaning. Kuntaka has shown the role of *varṇa* (sound) at the level of *varṇa-vinyāsa* (phoneme) which is the "art in the arrangement of syllables". This arrangement gives texture and beauty to the language and makes it oblique. Here, syllable stands for consonantal sound and it is three fold:

1. Only one consonant closely repeated – repetition of one *varṇa*.
2. Two consonants closely repeated – repetition of two *varṇas*
3. Many consonants closely repeated – repetition of more than two *varṇas*.

In *vakrokti*, meaning is also given equal importance. Kuntaka affirms it in his definition of poetry itself, when he says that poetry is that word and sense together enshrined in a style revealing the artistic creativity of the poet on the one hand and giving aesthetic delight to the man of taste on the other. The artistic creativity is *vakrokti*, which is an oblique expression made up of embellished word and meaning that constitutes the creative process and is a source of aesthetic delight to the connoisseur. Kuntaka makes Bhāmaha's conception of poetry his starting point where sound and meaning constitute poetry. He defines it as a combination of sound and sense, arranged in a composition, shining with strikingness of expression, effected by the skill of the poet – a composition that causes delight to the connoisseurs of poetic art. Kuntaka reiterates that *salamkṛtaśabdārtha* (the embellished word and its sense) together constitutes poetry. According to him, "Both words and meanings are to be embellished and their embellishment lies in their obliqueness" (VJ, I.8).

Kuntaka states that what makes word and meaning into poetry is the presence of strikingness originating from vakrokti. “Both these are the adorned. Their adornment consists in the poetic process known as artistic turn of speech” (VJ, I.10). He adds

“that unique expression which alone can fully convey the poets’ intended meaning out of a hundred alternatives before him is to be regarded as word. Similarly, that alone which possesses such refreshing natural beauty as to draw the appreciation of delighted readers is to be reckoned as meaning” (VJ, I.9).

Kuntaka clearly denotes poetic meaning as the actual meaning of a word when he opines that the proper definition of signification is that capacity to convey the particular shade of thought intended by the poet and this intended meaning comes from the imaginative faculty of the poet. He asserts that in *kāvya* sound and sense are arranged in perfect harmony – the language going to render the meaning charming and the meaning trying to make the language attractive.

Viktor Shklovsky, one of the most powerful voices of the Russian Formalists, advocates the exclusion of semantics from verbal art and attempts to establish a new science of literature which, according to Eichenbaum, would turn to the facts and push aside general systems and problems. In this “new fervour of scientific positivism,” sound is considered the only concrete reality of verbal art, for meaning, in its ephemerality, is only a subjective mental construct that could not be pinned down with any certitude. Thus, in the Russian Formalism, the semantic aspect of the word is not more prominent than its sound aspect. The Moscow Linguistic formalists insist particularly on the “phonic texture” of poems, which they believe have a greater import than meaning itself. Sounds manifest themselves through rhythm and phonetic figures, i.e. deviations from the normal structures). Leo Jakubinsky believes that in practical language

the semantic aspect of the word (its meaning) is more prominent than its sound aspect... details of pronunciation reach our consciousness only if they serve to differentiate the meaning of words... Thus, various considerations compel us to recognize that in practical language sounds do not

attract our attention. It is the other way around in verse language. There, one can claim that sounds enter the bright field of consciousness and do attract our attention (Steiner 127).

The conclusion that can very easily be drawn from the above discussion is that both Kuntaka's theory of *vakrokti* and Russian formalism consider that a certain obliqueness or indirection or defamiliarization is the most distinguishing characteristic of the language of literature. Both theories point out this very aspect of the language of literature. Viewed together, the two concepts seem to attain greater relevance for the analysis of the language of literature. They all point out this very central aspect of poetic language. They treat a literary work as a self-contained or systematic entity, or as a part of a larger "textual" structure. They tend to be impersonal and a historical in their approach. The Indian theory of *vakrokti* and the Russian Formalism's pronouncements are viewed as complementary. But in spite of these common grounds, there is no one-to-one correspondence between Kuntaka's *vakrokti* and Russian Formalists' defamiliarization. However, the Indian concept of *vakrokti* is far more comprehensive and convincing than the assertions of Russian Formalism. Russian formalists concentrate only on the language of literature technically, but Kuntaka goes far ahead by taking into account the goals of life. His *Vakroktijivitam* opens with an invocation to Goddess Saraswati, seeking a fulfilment of worldly desires and suprawordly happiness. All worldly and spiritual pursuits are measured by their role/contribution in the attainment of *puruṣārtha*, the four ends of life- *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (worldly prosperity), *kāma* (satisfaction of desires) and *mokṣa* (liberation from sorrows).

By taking due cognizance of the connoisseur's reaction to a piece of literature and by basing their theoretical edifice on the firm foundation of poetic activity (*kavi-vyāpāra*), Kuntaka has been able to give a more plausible account of linguistic creativity and the nature and role of obliquity in literature. The poetic function is the basis of all literary activity. Kuntaka makes no distinction between the poet and his creative activity and holds that differentiations of *ritis* and *mārgas* should be based on poetic function. The poet's temperament alone, says he, can furnish a reliable criterion for their differences: "A classification of Styles can be justifiable only when it is based on the temperamental differences amongst poets themselves. For example, a poet gentle by temperament is gifted

with an innate poetic power of the same order, since the poetic creativity and the creator are inseparable from each other” (I.24). Thus *vakrokti* is *bhaṇiti-prakāra* which rests entirely on the genius of the poet. Therefore, Kuntaka holds that this *pratibhā* of a poet or *vakra-kavi-vyāpāra* is responsible for all the poetic lapses. This is also known as *vyāpāra-prādhānya-vāda*, Kuntaka’s theory of *vakrokti* is older and wider in its practical nature of application. It has a more comprehensive and plausible account of the creative use of the language of literature as it operates at the six levels of literary expression. His classification is on scientific lines as he begins with the minimal unit of analysis, i.e. phones and goes on to describe *vakrokti* operating at higher levels, culminating at the level of discourse. It is this six fold *vakratā* that distinguishes literary language from scientific discourse.

Russian Formalism appears rather superficial when placed besides the treatment of Kuntaka’s theory of *vakrokti*. It suffers from theoretical limitations. It mainly focuses on the sound (Phonic) aspect of the language, which consists of patterns of speech sounds or alliteration, rhythm, rhyme, grammatical constructions, words, images and plot. Victor Shklovsky, in the process of locating and understanding the literariness of literature, demystified literature, in the process also de-mystifying the creator/writer. It also does not talk directly about the reader’s reaction. The meaning of the language of literature is completely ignored and the aesthetic emotion is only considered important in the theme of the narratives:

Kuntaka and the Formalists agreed on the fundamental principle of poetics lying in the distinction between language of literature and everyday language. This distinction could be seen in the opposition between *svabhāvokti* (statement) and *vakrokti* (obliquity), between the language of familiarization and that of defamiliarization. *Svabhāvokti* (scientific treatise), imparts knowledge and information, it removes ignorance but does not enhance perception, which is the work of language of literature. Similarly, Russian formalists believe that language of literature glorifies and enhances perception, whereas scientific language enhances recognition. (Singh 70-71)

Despite all the contradictions and similarities, both theories asserted the significance of the creative use of the language of literature. But as Warburg affirms, “the peculiar mode of

saying constitutes, in fact, a peculiar mode of apprehension” (59) and no one has realised the truth of this fact better than Kuntaka writing on *vakrokti*.

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