CHAPTER I

TRADITIONAL AND LINGUISTIC DEFINITIONS OF A RHETORIC FIGURE
AND THE EFFICACY OF RHETORIC FIGURES.

"apaaree kaavya samsaare kavireeka: prajaapati:
yathaasmi roocate viévam tattheedam parivartate"

[The place of a poet is unique. He is the king of the
universe. He can lead the world the way he wishes.]

Anandavardhanan (Dhwanyaalooka)

"Elevation of the style is the echoe of a great soul"

Longinus

Dr. Johnson once said about the Elegy in a Country Church
yard, "It abounds in images which find a mirror in every
mind".

The same can be true of Andrew Marvell's poem 'To His Coy
Mistress' also. A conglomeration of telling figures like
"I would love you ten years before the flood"; "refuse till
the conversion of the Jews"; "My vegetable love"; "An hundred
years should go to praise thine eyes"; "two hundred to adore each
breast"; "but thirty thousand to the rest"; "An age atleast to
every part"; "time's winged chariot"; "deserts of vast eternity";
"nor in thy marble vault"; "thy youthful hue sits on thy skin like
morning dew"; "like amorous birds of prey"; "through the iron
gates of life", etc. testify to the idea expounded by Bhamaha in
the following sloka:

Svaadukaavya rasoonmiéram
Šaastramapyupayuñjyate
Prathamaalliha maadhava:

Pibanthl kaṭūbheeṣajam.¹

[ Even dry scientific facts become delectable if it is mixed with kaavyarasa (aesthetic pleasure). Bitter medicines are taken after tasting a bit of honey. ]

Poems like 'To His Coy Mistress' (given as Appendix 1) remind us of the 'Rasa - Dhwany' theory upheld by ancient Indian aestheticians like Anandavardhanan and others. Anandavardhanan, the author of 'Dhwanyaalooka' and a good number of his followers pointed out that suggested or implied meaning would always be more gratifying than directly conveyed meaning. Dhwany was regarded as the soul of poetry. ("Kaavyasyaatmaa dhwani"). According to the Italian Sanskrit Scholar R. Noll, the Rasa - Dhwany thesis is "the greatest contribution of Indians to the study of art".²

Lascelles Abercrombie also held the same opinion. In his Principles of Literary Criticism he writes:

"Literary art, therefore, will always be in the same degree suggestions; and the height of literary art is to make the power of suggestions as commanding, as far-reaching, as vivid, as subtle as possible."³

¹ Bhamahan. Kaavyalamkaara. V. 3.
If sound and meaning constitute the elements of kaavya sarira (body of poetry), then rhetoric figures can make its blood vessels. No one can question the importance of alamkaaras in providing aananda or pleasure which is the immediate end of poetry. Ancient Indian critics like Mamadan considered aananda as "sakalaprayoojanamauli bhootam"

[ the be-all and end-all of poetry ].

"A discussion of the word Style", said John Middleton Murry, "if it were pursued with only a fraction of the vigour of a scientific investigation, would inevitably cover the whole of literary aesthetics and the theory of criticism ".

The above statement shows how difficult it is to analyse any aspect of literary style and it becomes an uphill task when discussion centres on such subtle micro-linguistic features that embrace the field of rhetoric figures or literary figures.

Before defining a rhetoric figure, it has to be deciphered what rhetoric itself is. A wonderful account of "Rhetoric" from the Encyclopaedia of Martianus Capella, is given below. The work presents an allegorical marriage between Mercury and Philosophy. At this ceremony the seven liberal arts are present. And this is how Rhetoric arrives -

Behold a woman of loftiest stature and great assurance, with countenance of radiant splendour, made

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her solemn entry. Helmeted and crowned with royal majesty, she held ready for defence or attack, weapons that gleaned with the flash of lightning. Beneath her armour the vesture draped Roman-wise about her shoulders glittered with the various light of all figure, all schemata; and she was cinctured with most precious colores for jewels. The clatter of her weapons as she moved was as if thunder in the crash of a cloud a flame broke with leaping echoes. Nay, it seemed as if like Jove, she herself could hurl the thunderbolt. For as a queen in control of all things she has shown power to move men whither she pleased, or whence, to bow them to tears, to incite them to rage, to transform the mind and feeling as well of cities as of embattled armies and all the hosts of people.5

In his essay "Rhetoric and Poetic Drama", T.S.Eliot says that "Rhetoric is one of those words which it is the business of criticism to dissect and re-assemble".6

Etymologically this word rhetor (ῥήτωρ) meant a public speaker who specialised in addressing courts of law and popular assemblies.

Viewing rhetoric in a historical perspective, Peter Dixon writes as follows:-

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"Finally as a literary critical term, rhetoric in this sense will cover all the techniques by which a writer establishes rapport with his readers, and by which he elicits and guides their response to his work".\(^7\)

and he goes on to prescribe a working definition for rhetoric as "the art of speaking well, of using words to their best advantage".\(^8\)

Dixon emphatically states about the links between rhetoric and poetry thus:

Since poetry has automatically been regarded as the field in which words are handled with their maximum force and expressiveness, we find that the links between rhetoric and poetry have been numerous and firm at least until the conception of poetry as a verbal craft began to fall into discredit. Indeed the two arts of language have sometimes been treated as though they were one.\(^9\)


\(^8\) Peter Dixon, p. 3.

"The elements of artifice and ingenuity of language polished or heightened beyond what we loosely call our 'normal' habits of speech. By emphasising this element we arrive at a new meaning of rhetoric: the art of speaking well, of using words to their best advantage".

\(^9\) Peter Dixon, p. 3.
S. K. De has pointed out that in India the AlamKaara Sastra grew as a branch of Dramaaturgy. It is in the 17th Chapter of NaatyadaastrA that we find the very first reference to the use of alamkaaras:

alamkaaraigunaiscalva
bahubhiriyalalamkritam
bhuuganairiva vinyaathai -
stad bhuuganamiti smritam

[ As one adorns his body with so many decorative equipments, the kaavya sarira or the body of poetry must also be adorned with decorative devices such as alamkaaras and gugas. ]

But in the west it evolved as part of rhetoric and that is the reason why figures of speech came to be named as rhetoric figures. It is essential to recall how important a field of study rhetoric was in the past. University students used to spend the first four years of their education studying Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric, three of the Seven Liberal Arts.

What was the traditional understanding of a figure of speech? The following dictum by Vamanan makes it very clear that beauty and figures of speech had almost become synonymous in his time. In Kaavyalamkaara Sutravritti, he says "beauty is alamkaara" (Soundaryamalamkaara:)

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Henry Peacham, author of the 'Garden of Eloquence' defined a 'figure' as "a fashion of words, dictions or sentences made new by art, turning from the common manner and custom of writing or speaking".  

The general understanding of the 'figure' must be the same as Quintilllan meant when he used the term 'Figura':  

Any deviation, either in thought or expression, from the ordinary and simple method of speaking, a change analogous to the different positions our bodies assume when we sit down, lie down or look back. . . . Let the definition of a figure, therefore, be a form of speech artfully varied from common usage. (Ergo figura sit arte aliqua morata forma discendi :)

The Definition given by Edward P.J Corbet in his 'Classical Rhetoric' is not at all different from Quintilllan's dictum quoted above. Corbet writes:  

"We will use "figure of speech" as the generic term for any artful deviation from the ordinary mode of speaking or writing".

13 Quintilllan, Institutio Oratoria. Chapter 9. I, II  
This list of definitions can be prolonged to any extent. But before venturing into a linguistic understanding of the Rhetoric Figures, it would be advisable to take a note of the warning given by some great critics against the abuse of the figures of speech in poetry.

Edward P.J. Corbet cautions poets against a possible mistake in their assessment of this most effective tool of communication:

It is fair enough to regard figures of speech as the "graces of language", as "the dressing of thought", as "embellishments", for indeed they do decorate our prose and give it "style" in the courtier's sense. But it would be a mistake to regard embellishment as the chief or soul function of figures.15

In the same work Corbet goes on stating how the classical rhetoricians rated the importance of the figures and with what purpose they resorted to their use.16

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16 The classical rhetoricians did not look upon them as decorative device primarily. Metaphor, according to Aristotle, did give "charm and distinction" to our expression; but even more than that, metaphor was another way to give "clearness" and liveliness to the expression of our thoughts. Figures, in his view, provided one of the best ways to strike that happy balance between "the obvious and the obscure", so that our audience could grasp our ideas promptly and thereby be disposed to accept our arguments.

The ancient Indian poetician Kshemendran, proponent of the 'Aucitya' theory (theory of Propriety in Literature) also expresses the same sentiments in his celebrated work 'Aucityavivaaracararcca':

"kanthée, meekhalaya, nitambaphalake taareena haareena vaa paanau nuupurabandheena carañe keeyuurapaaśéna vaa ūauryena prañatorivau karuñayaa nayaantike hasyataa - maucityeena vinaa rucim pratanute nalamkritir no guna: " 17

This sloka underlines the importance of aucitya in the use of alankaras. It states that figures of speech used in inappropriate places will be as disgusting as wearing different ornaments in undesirable organs of the body like waistband in the neck, necklace on the buttocks, anklet on the wrist and so on.

Kshemendran repeats this warning in the ensuing sloka too:

" alaüskaarastvalamkaraa: guña ùeva guna: sadaa aucityam rasa sidhasya sthitam kaavyasyajiivitam " 18

How does the linguist understand a rhetoric figure? Is it contradictory or complementary to the cognizance of the literary critic?

Here it would be useful to bear in mind a remark made by Louis H. Gray. In his 'Foundations of Language' he argues, Stylistics is not something opposed to literary criticism, for between true literature and linguistics


18 T. Bhaskaran, 325.
there is no conflict. The real linguist is at least half a litterateur and the real litterateur at least half a linguist.19

While conducting the ninth International Congress of the Linguists, Roman Jacobson made the following observation:

For the first time a special section of a Linguistic Congress has dealt with stylistics and poetics; the study of poetry has been conceived as inseparable from linguistics and its pertinent task.20

From these remarks, we come to understand that literary criticism and linguistic stylistics are two sides of the same coin. Literary criticism itself is applied linguistics and there is no point in viewing Criticism and Stylistics as separate entities. What the stylistician is attempting to do is exactly the same as what a critic is intending to do, perhaps in a better and systematical manner.

In 'Sound and Sense' Lawrence Perrine has made a penetrating study on figurative language :

It might seem absurd", he writes, "to say one thing and mean another. But we all do it and with good reason. We do it because we can say what we want to say more vividly and forcefully by figures than we can by saying

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it directly. And we can say more by figurative statement than we can by literal statement. Figures of speech are another way of adding extra dimensions to language. 21

This technique of "Saying one thing and meaning another" - which is the soul of figurative language - can be explained with scientific precisions by the application of stylistic standards. Geoffrey N. Leech calls the figurative device "transference of meaning". His book *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* elaborates this aspect explicitly. He argues that all ambiguities and obscurities in usages can be resolved by stylistic analysis and hence stylistics becomes only complementary to literary criticism.

Poets resort to metaphorical representations because they are conscious of the immense scope of imagery embedded in its being. The famous Malayalam lullaby composed by Irayimman Thampi, where an infant is compared to fifty different objects in nature, is a classic example to prove how imagery can prove to be an unending source of aesthetic enjoyment. The full text of the poem is given as Appendix 2.

In his poem 'The World is too much with us', William Wordsworth has the following line -

"The Sea that bares her bosom to the moon".

How many impressions will a sensitive reader receive in his mind from this luscious pen picture?

1. Here the sea is compared to a lady who is willing to surrender all that she considers precious to her lover, the moon.

2. The moon is visualised as a lover who is reluctant to take away his eyes, at least for a second, from his sweetheart, the sea.

3. A lady will not "bare her bosom" to any man in the street, unless she is a whore. Here she is willing because their relationship is so intense and so special. How many times she has tried to climb up the skies and how many times he has tried to reach up to her, but both attempts in vain.

4. The moon is a Romeo who is waiting for the next opportunity to jump down to his Juliet, who has become impatient of waiting. Will they ever meet at any point? Are there not many similar lovers in this world, who are also on the same boat?

The polly-semantic shades of this image can be interpreted as far as one's imagination takes him. How many meanings can an image connote in a situation like this? There can be no end. This is the kind of 'dhwani' or suggestiveness that a potential image can afford.

A gifted poet can employ any number of forceful images without much effort. It is in this context that Anandavardhanan says that images will be competing with each other to serve a talented poet:
I, alamkaaramantaraani hi nirupyamaanaa -
durghatataamaanya pi rasasamaahiteetasa :    
pratibhaanavaata: kave: aham puurvikaya paraavatanti.22

Many critics and stylisticians have tried to analyse the reasons for the puissance of rhetoric figures. Robert Millar and Ian Currie stress two important aspects in this regard:

Broadly speaking, figures of speech can serve two main purposes, they can have a logical or clarifying function or they can enhance the emotive impact, even if the emotion is one of laughter.23

Emotions and imagery are corollary components as elucidated by Norman Callan in his work 'Poetry in Practice'. There he speaks of the creations of a new synthesis with the help of "imaged statements".24

22 Anandavardhanan, Dhwnyalooka, as quoted in T. Bhaskaran, Bharateeyakaavyasasttram (Trivandrum: State Institute of Languages, 1978) 357.


24 Norman Callan, Poetry in Practice (London: Earnest Benn, 1938) 120.

"The poet integrates his thought with the emotions by means of an "imaged statement" thus creating a synthesis. For example, King John's thought might be expressed scientifically as "I am oppressed by the wrong I have done"; emotionally, however, this is lame and requires images of the thought to complete it: "For I am stifled with this smell of sin"
Lawrence Perrine analyses the core of a figure and enumerates four reasons for the remarkable effectiveness of the figures of speech:

1. Figurative language affords us imaginative pleasure.
2. Figures of speech are a way of bringing additional imagery into verse, of making the abstract concrete, of making poetry more sensuous.
3. Figures of speech are a way of adding emotional intensity to otherwise merely informative statements and of conveying attitudes along with information.
4. Figures of speech are a means of concentration, a way of saying much in brief compass.

There are ever so many other critics and linguists who have deliberated on the efficacy and communicative cogency of rhetoric figures. This chapter can be aptly concluded with a sharp statement made by P.W.K Stone:

A word used figuratively has the effect to present two objects, one signified by the figurative sense, which may be termed the principal object, and one signified by the proper sense which may be termed accessory; the principal makes a part of the thought, the accessory is merely ornamental. In this respect, a figure of speech is precisely similar to concordant sounds in music, which, without contributing to the melody, makes it harmonious.

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