CHAPTER III

KUNTAKA, HIS NAME, DATE AND WORK

In the range of Bharatiya Kavyamamsa, Kuntaka is considered to be a practical literary critic. He is known by two names as 'Kuntalaka' and 'Kuntaka'. In the colophons of the manuscripts, he is named as 'Kuntalaka'. But earlier scholars and a large number of references mention him as Kuntaka. Therefore, as observed by Dr. K. Krishnamoorthy, Kuntaka is the correct form of his name.

In his work, Kuntaka has quoted the names of Bhavabhuti, Bana, Rajaekhara and others. It indicates that he was later than the seventh or eighth century A.D. Though he did not take the name of Anandavardhana, he has mentioned his theory and has quoted the verses from his works. Hence he must have lived after ninth century A.D. Mahimabhatta who lived in the 11th century A.D. has mentioned the name of Kuntaka in his Vyaktiviveka. By these two earlier and later dates Kuntaka's time falls somewhere in the tenth century A.D. From these evidences we can judge that the time of Kuntaka may be around 950 A.D.

Perhaps, the VakroktiIvita is his single work. Except this no other work has been mentioned anywhere as composed.
by Kuntaka. There are four Unmesas in the Vakroktijīvīta. This contains about five hundred examples. Kālidāsa is profusely quoted by Kuntaka. More than hundred examples are quoted from Kālidāsa's works. Early rhetoricians like Bhāmaha, Daṇḍin and Udbhaṭa have not quoted even a single example from master-poets. Though Vāmana and others have selected examples from earlier literature, they have not quoted literary works as a whole as has been done by Kuntaka. Ānandavardhana had done literary analysis and had cited the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata which are called as great epics, but he did not subject to analysis classical Sanskrit poems or dramas. Kuntaka is the lone critic, who did the literary analysis and quoted from almost all the major poets in classical Sanskrit literature. In the words of Dr. K. Krishna-moorthy: "Kuntaka may not be as great a philosopher as Ānandavardhana, he may not be as good a logician as Bhāmaha or as fervent a dialectician as Mahimabhaṭṭa; but as a literary critic in the true sense of term, Kuntaka stands unrivalled. He was a very sensitive critic with genuine literary taste. His literary criticism itself often rises to the level of good literature. Kuntaka is indeed peerless in his aesthetic sensibility which animates the whole of his work and makes it full of interest to one and all interested in pure literary criticism."
Kuntaka has also said that Kalidāsa is a great poet. He even illustrates Kalidāsa's verses as examples for excellent style like Sukumāra. His Vakroktijīvita is appreciated by Dr. K. Krishnamoorthy: "It is to the credit of Kuntaka that he was the first to formulate it into a systematic aesthetic theory. His Vakrokti 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. These basic postulates of Kuntaka can find many echoes in modern aesthetic theories too." In the words of Sri P.V. Kane: "The Vakroktijīvita is a work of great value and deserves to be rescued from the oblivion into which it has fallen. Whatever one may think of his central theory that Vakrokti is the soul of poetry and of the somewhat quaint nomenclature adopted by the author, the work shows originality, great literary acumen and is full of charming ideas. He is at one with Bhaṭṭatota in saying that it is the poet's own genius that is the source of good poetry. His choice of examples is very judicious and has casts his net over a wide area.... The work contains over five hundred examples. The Kārikas are composed in a smooth, limpid style and the Vṛtti generally shows very high qualities of a grand literary style, which is rhythmic and melodious."
The importance of Kuntaka's work as said by S.K. De:

"The merits of Kuntaka's work are sufficiently obvious to require any further exposition. He writes in his *Vṛtti* in a lucid, concise yet vigorous style, and his choice of examples, testifying to his wide reading in literature, is judicious. He refuses in most cases to move along conventional lines or cite conventional illustrations. Whatever value may be attached to his somewhat extreme theory of *Vakrokti* as the essence of poetry, and of his strange classification and nomenclature, there can be no doubt the originality and freshness of his outlook, about his literary acumen and critical insight into the artistic requirements of poetry and about the many stimulating suggestions with which his work abounds and which have been in many cases developed by later theorists. He is concerned more with the formal requirements of poetry, but his critical analysis of the various forms of speech, which he classifies as *Vakrata* is an important contribution to the study of the subject and could not be ignored by later schools. What Kuntaka really intended to do was, no doubt systematising and extending the *Alāṅkāra*-theory of Bhāmaha and Udbhata and give a longer lease of life to the already doomed *Alāṅkāra* school; but his own system is unique in the sense that he posited *Vakrokti* definitely as the essential principal and systematically analysed its implications as was never done by any of his
predecessors. On the other hand his great admiration for Ānandavardhana made him alive to the speculative aspects of the problem and take cognisance of Rāsa and Dīvāni under some forms of Vakrokti, the scope of which was thus made comprehensive enough to include the results of all previous speculation and practically synonymous with all that constitutes poetry. A new turn was thus given to the old Alankāra-theory, but the views of the older exponents of this theory were not accepted in their entirety; they were systematised and widened in the light of the speculations of other schools of thought."

Thus Kuntaka profusely quotes Kālidāsa's verses. Hereafter those are critically reviewed.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

CHAPTER III

1. "In any case, the form 'Kuntalaka' has to be ignored and 'Kuntaka' must be assumed as the correct form because of the overwhelming testimony of writers like Mahimabhaṭṭa, Hemacandra, Māṇikyacandra, Someśvara, Vidyādhara, Bhaṭṭa Gopāla, Tripurārī etc. which have been noted already by earlier scholars."


2. V.J. op.cit., Introduction, pp.xxxvi.

3. "ये ज्ञान सत्काळः कालिदासप्रभुतमो गता: प्रयात्ता: ..."

- V.J. op.cit., p.xi

4. V.J. op.cit., Introduction, p.xxxix

5. History of Sanskrit Poetics, by P.V. Kane, op.cit., p.234.