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KUNTAKA'S *VAKROKTI SIDDHANTA* AND MAHESH DATTANI'S *TARA:AN*  
APPLICATION OF *PRAKARAṆA VAKRATĀ* OF *VAKROKTI SIDHANTA*

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ABSTRACT

Indian critical theories have been derelicted in preference to western theories for assessment of a text in English. Ironically, some scholars raise objection to applying these theories to a modern or western literature. In fact, there is no point in contending that Indian poetics cannot be applied to modern or western literature simply because it is based on Sanskrit literature or represents a specific literary culture. A literary theory, worth its name, always transcends the time and place of its origin. It is concerned with matters which are common to all literatures. Indian poetics, too, is no exception. It deals with questions of universal significance and can enrich our understanding of works of literature, particularly belonging to modern creed. The realm of poetics presents a most fascinating and exciting area of Indian scholarship and the theories propounded by Indian aestheticians are universally valid. Indian theories deal with each part of the literary text systematically. Thus, these theories have viability and validity in modern situation too. In order to illustrate the relevance of these ancient glorious theories in the modern context, I propose to analyse Mahesh Dattani's play *Tara* in the light of *Ācārya* Kuntaka's *vakrokti-sidhanta* with special reference to *prakaraṇa vakratā* (Episodic Obliquity). Kuntaka's *vakrokti* is very comprehensive in scope. Its framework takes cognizance of a work from phonological level to the textual totality. He does not finish off his analysis at the level of sentence but also deals with obliquity originating from the context and the entire composition and thus can be utilized in the explication of poems, plays and fiction.

**Keywords:** Poetics, Vakrokti, Kuntaka, *vakrokti-sidhanta*, *prakaraṇa vakratā*, Dattani

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INTRODUCTION

The realm of poetics presents a most fascinating and exciting area of Indian scholarship. To a great extent, the scholars hold that the theories propounded by Indian aestheticians are universally valid but have not been applied adequately to make an assessment of a text in English. It is contended that Indian poetics cannot be applied to modern or western literature, simply because it is based on Sanskrit literature or

represents a specific literary culture. But, a literary theory, worth its name, always transcends the time and place of its origin. It is concerned with matters which are common to all literatures. Indian poetics, too, is no exception. It deals with questions of universal significance and can enrich our understanding of works of literature, particularly belonging to modern creed. Indian aestheticians deal with each part of the literary text systematically. Indian Poetics in fact has much to offer specifically to the contemporary drama criticism. Bharata's *Natyasastra* and Kuntaka's *Vakrokti* are far older and far more comprehensive as compared to Aristotle's Poetics. Thus, these theories have viability and validity in modern situation too. All the major theories deal with three topics context, form and meaning-which constitute every work of literature.

Indian *acārya* have examined the literature from various standpoints. The eight famous schools of Indian poetics have been categorized as *rasa sidhanta*, *alamkara sidhanta*, *riti sidhanta*, *dhvani sidhanta*, *guna sidhanta*, *vakrokti sidhanta* and *aucitya sidhanta*. Of all these varied approaches to literature, *vakrokti sidhanta* seems to be the most comprehensive and systematically developed into a complex framework of analysis and understanding. Acarya Kuntaka elevated *vakrokti* to the status of a full-fledged principle, so as to embrace the very essence of literary composition. *Vakrokti sidhanta* (theory of oblique expression) holds that *kavya* is play of the creative use of language. He emphasizes that *vakrokti* consists in the delightful union of word and meaning which is characterized by the infusion of unique poetic art which is capable of affording pleasure to the reader. He defined it as oblique speech or deviant utterance. He held that obliquity operates at six levels in a piece of literature. They are phonetic, lexical, grammatical, sentential, episodic and compositional. This analysis is very precise and systematic as compared to other western models of stylistic analysis. This approach enables us to make comments on solid theoretical grounds and takes cognizance of a composition from its phonological level to the textual totality. The most important is that it allows us to analyse the piece of literature in terms of moral as well as aesthetic values, as *kuntaka* says that the ultimate goal of all works is the attainment of the four-fold values of life.

Kuntaka devotes nearly the whole of his text *Vakroktijivitam* to the definition, classification and illustration of the six varieties of *vakrokti*. He has classified *vakratā* into forty nine sub-varieties under six major heads, such as *varna-vinyāsa-vakratā* (phonetic obliquity) *pada-pūrvārdha-vakratā* (lexical obliquity), *pada-parārdha-vakratā* (grammatical obliquity), *vākya-vakratā* (sentential obliquity), *prakarana-vakratā* (episodic obliquity) and *prabandha-vakratā* (compositional obliquity). In this paper, I have concentrated particularly on *prakarana-vakratā* (episodic obliquity) with passing references to sub-varieties of other *vakratas*, to look at the process of artistic craftsmanship of Dattani in his play *Tara*. It is an attempt to explore the various levels of *prakarana-vakratā* discernible in Dattani's play *Tara* which are used to convey the intense meaning underlying his plays and showcase the plight of this marginalized gender.

I have used obliquity, the translation of *vakrokti*, as given by the scholars like Dr. R.S. Tewari, Dr. R.S. Pathak, Dr. M.S. Khushwaha, Dr. Kapil Kapoor and Dr. Shrawan K. Sharma in their works for this purpose.

*Prakarana-vakratā* deals with the oblique use of *prakarana* (episode). According to Kuntaka, when the projected object of art is capable of maintaining suspense all along and is the product of the unique, boundless skill of the artist underlying it, we have what is called *prakarana-vakratā* (episodic obliquity). This is a condition in which the writer, overwhelmed with the passion of creation, creates an alluring charm in the subject-matter. According to him, this very charm is nothing but *prakarana-vakratā*. Kuntaka further divides *prakarana-vakratā* into nine sub-varieties. These are:

*Bhāvapūrnasthiti vakratā* (obliquity of emotional states), *utapādyā lāvanya vakratā* (obliquity of modified source story), *prakarana upakārya-upakāraka bhāva vakratā* (obliquity of episodic relationship), *viśiṣṭha prakarna vakratā* (obliquity of particular event and episode), *angirasa nisyanandikasavakratā* (obliquity of dominant rasa) *apradhāna prasaṅgavakratā* (obliquity of secondary episodes), *prakaraṇātara vakratā* (obliquity of play within play) and *sandhi viniveśa vakratā* (obliquity of juncture).

Mahesh Dattani, one of the contemporary Indian English playwrights, makes a creative use of episodes and contexts from Indian texts in addressing the questions of gender, sex, religion, communal tension, feminine

identity and homosexuals. These perennial Indian themes can be explicated more effectively in the light of our own classical aesthetics and critical faculty. His play *Tara* under consideration speaks about male chauvinism prevalent in Indian society and portrays the grotesque picture of the helplessness of the women in our society. He forwards the idea of ancient discrimination between son and daughter and makes it timeless and contemporaneous by presenting it in the present context. This biased behaviour has been tagged with rites and rituals of life. Parents are bound by the mythical belief of their ultimate emancipation at the hands of their son. This fact pertaining to illusion of life has been optimally exploited by Dattani in *Tara*. It is a story of Siamese twins – one male and other female, conjoined from the chest down. These twins had to undergo a surgical separation. They had three legs and the third leg could be given either to Chandan or to Tara. Biologically, the leg belonged to Tara but their grandfather and mother made an unjust decision of giving the leg to Chandan. The leg, as expected turns out to be of no use either to the boy or the girl. Both were forced to live a disabled life, with one leg each. The dramatist has made an attempt to convey the intense meaning underlying his play and showcase the socio-cultural predicaments and anguish of the marginalised gender in the context of typical urban middle class Indian family. This Indian narrative can best be appreciated through the Indian concept of *vakrokti*. His characters are rich in emotional quotient and stand for the exploited and repressed gender denominations in the Indian contemporary society. He has employed various linguistic devices in order to create a powerful impact in the presentation of his emotions and impart the aesthetic delight true to a theatrical performance.

*Tara* opens with a typical illustration of *prakaraṇātara vakratā* or obliquity of play within play, a sub-variety of *prakaraṇa vakratā*. Dan is writing the script of a drama known as “*Twinkle Tara: A drama in two acts* by Chandan Patel”(CP) which has comprehensive connotation as Tara is protagonist of the drama under discussion and also the literal meaning of the twinkling star. He recollects his memories to write this tragedy of his twin sister, Tara. The playwright successfully achieves a heightened effect by employing this technique of play within play. The play *Tara* is exposed through the consciousness of Chandan who suffers emotionally after the forced separation and yearns to dedicate the play to his sister. Erin Mee himself points out in A Note on the Play, “Tara and Chandan are two sides of the same self rather than two separate entities and that Dan, in trying to write the story of his own childhood, has to write Tara’s story. Dan writes Tara’s story to rediscover the neglected half of himself, as a means of becoming whole” (CP 320).

*Bhāvapūrnasthiti vakratā* (obliquity of emotional states), another variety of *prakaraṇa vakratā*, is the reaction of emotional utterances, which the dramatist creates in the episodes for aesthetic transport. Dattani creates highly emotional states in the play to lend the element of dramatic and aesthetic sensibility to his context of gender discrimination. His “simple, short and suggestive dialogues create a highly suggestive poetry of its own to record the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions” of his characters. He captures the inner turmoil of his characters at a crucial stage where it is difficult to bridle the pace of emotions. Such emotional states (*bhāvapūrnasthiti vakratā*) abound in his play *Tara*. There are a number of emotional utterances made by Tara, Chandan and their mother Bharati which bring out the pathos of both the victim and the perpetrator of gender discrimination.

The conjoined twins Chandan and Tara share a wonderful relationship having a sense of cohesiveness and emotional closeness. Tara dies after a prolonged physical and mental agony leaving Chandan with a deep sense of isolation and guilt. Dan’s (Chandan) emotional turmoil after her death can be gauged by the presence of *bhāvapūrnasthiti vakratā* (obliquity of emotional state) in his monologue. He utters frenziedly in dejection:

“To masticate my memories in my mind and spit out the result to the world in anger..... I must take something from Tara and give it to myself.

Make capital of my trauma, my anguish and make it my tragedy.

I forget Tara. I forget that I had a sister -with whom I had shared a body in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out and separated.

Forgive me Tara, forgive me for making it my tragedy.”(CP324)

Here itself we can see the variety of artistic beauty known as *varṇa-vinyāsa-vakratā* or phonetic beauty. The repetition of phonemes /m/, /f/, /s/, /t/ at irregular interval brings out the pitiable state of Dan. The repetition of words 'my trauma', 'my anguish' and 'my tragedy' in a form of structure emphasizes his state of mind on being separated from Tara. The repetition of words 'forget' and 'forgive' brings out his state of helplessness on unconsciously being a share of the wrong done to Tara. The decision to give the leg to Chandan which Tara deserved was taken by their mother, her father and Dr. Thakkar but it devastated the life of both Tara and Chandan. He considers himself to be responsible for the death of his sister and seeks apology from Tara.

Tara seems to bear a hatred for the society throughout the play. There is a kind of aversion with the outside world. Her outburst makes us empathize with what she has experienced as a marginalized person. Tara bursts out her anger and resentment at the discriminatory treatment on the part of her father and society. Her vehemence is brought forth through the use of *bhāvapūrnasthiti vakratā* :

Tara: Oh, what a waste! A waste of money. Why spend all the money to keep me alive? It cannot matter whether I live or die....  
How do you expect me to feel anything for anyone if they don't give me any feeling to begin with?  
Why is it wrong for me to be without feeling?  
Why are you asking me to do something that nobody has done for me...  
Selfish? Yes I am. I have the right to be selfish, like everyone else!(CP370)

The repetition of phonemes, words, phrases, sentence structures, questions and broken short sentences brings forth the intensity of the emotional state very effectively. The utterances of Bharati are pregnant with such repetitions. It heightens the conflict between a mother and a woman brought up in Indian patriarchal society. It supports the meaning of play by making emphasis and emotionalizing climax.

Bharati: She... she must take more friends. Chandan is all right, but she..., but  
Tara...she has her talents. I have seen to it that she...more than makes up  
in some ways for what she...doesn't have.(CP340)

The incoherent sentences and multiple conjunctions give an insight into the mind of a mother who realizes the pains her daughter has to face but did not have the audacity to stand against the norms of society. All the utterances are the masterly blend of emotional appeal. They causing aesthetic transport, contribute to the subject of the play.

The emotional state of Tara and her mother is further delineated by the oblique use of particles which is an instance of *nipāta-vakratā* or obliquity of particle, a sub variety of *pada-parārdha-vakratā* (grammatical obliquity). The tone of sarcasm and irony is brought out effectively by the use of obliquity of particles. It gives a special dramatic ambience to the play by adding to it the emotions of horror and pity. Dattani employs this obliquity to carve a greater impact on the presentation of emotions of his characters and enhance the aesthetic quotient which is typical of theatrical performances. The use of *nipāta-vakratā* to express the reaction of Tara : **"And she called me her star!"** elevates the pathos of a daughter who is flabbergasted by the discovery that her mother, whom she loved the most, trusted the most, was responsible for her devastation. This shock was enough to kill her. Her mother who claimed to love her the most, considered her **"Strong. Healthy. Beautiful"** was a perpetrator of the male chauvinistic ideas and did injustice to her daughter Tara.

Bharati, who represents tradition, prefer the male over the female. In the prescribed play, though Bharati dotes on her daughter Tara, she insensitively attributes a piece of her daughter to the son. Affection of mother daughter relationship is suppressed and subjugated to the demands of a patriarchal society. The conflict between illusion and reality is yet again echoed here. What is actually a public display of attention on part of the mother is actually a screen to shield her guilt.

Bharati: Tara! My beautiful baby! You are my most beautiful baby!  
I love you very much. Everything will be all right.

Now that I am giving you a part of me. Everything will be all right.

I will make up for all the things God hasn't given you.(CP355)

The emotional shock and conflict of Tara and her mother could not have achieved the required tragic effect without the use of particles.

The introduction of Roopa is an instance of *apradhāna prasaṅga vakratā* or obliquity of secondary episode, a sub-variety of *prakaraṇā vakratā*. According to Kuntaka, a talented writer inducts a charming small reference or event for the sake of achieving the primary aim. In order to achieve this effect he arranges interesting and meaningful secondary episodes within his main plot. These episodes are implied to thrust the main plot. The episode of Roopa and Tara has been obliquely employed by the dramatist to "counterpoise the burgeoning seriousness and morose mood of the drama." She remains an object of ridicule and provides a comic relief to the reader amid glum and gruesome story of Chandan and Tara. Rupa plays taunts at the deplorable and pathetic plight of Patel's family. She is rationally, intellectually and linguistically weak and deficient as compared to Chandan and Tara but calls them "horrible one legged creatures" and "freaks". Dattani artistically employs her to represent the attitude of the society towards the individuals with such oddities. He views the interactions between Tara and Rupa as:

So those are the places where we get some insight into Tara's inner life and her anger basically. And you know, you, you, you know the idea is so easy to sympathise because sympathy is another way of polarizing as well. You sympathise with someone, and you are saying they are not me you know, No I am in a different location, you know, I am the superior and I am the one to sympathise. So stay there and I will sympathise with you.

*Viśiṣṭha-prakarna-vakratā* is another sub-variety of the same *vakrata* and looks for the presence of allusions and myths which the playwright uses to enhance the context of the composition. The repeated reference to lady Shallot and Brahmo's music runs parallel to the plight of Tara who is bound in the constraints of her own handicap in male chauvinistic society. It enhances the anguish of tara

The obliquity of organic unity lies in the structure of the play. The mutual relationship in episodes is maintained very skillfully by Dattani which is an instance of *prakarana upakārya-upakāraka bhāva vakratā*, another sub-variety of *prakaraṇa vakratā*. The play opens with Dan, an emotionally and physically incomplete personality. The reader's suspense is gripped and one goes on reading impatiently to know the cause of his condition. The writer takes us into the consciousness of Dan where past, present and future merge to present the reality. The curiosity of the reader is very artistically maintained in the events in the life of the twins by employing incomplete sentences, repetitions and clues. The tensions inherent in Patel household are evident from the very beginning of the play. The echoes of some past action can easily be felt in the present of the family. In the very first scene Dan and Tara are shown walking with a limp as both of them do not have one leg. However it is only later in the play that one gets to know the reason for this condition of the twins; Dan and Tara were born as Siamese twins, separated by a surgery. The details of this separation remain a secret for the twins for fifteen years. Throughout the play readers can notice the special bond that exists between the twins. They think of their defect as a natural one. However, the reality emerges to be a bit different. When the knowledge of this biased and unscrupulous separation dawns upon the twins, it finally and permanently tears them apart. Throughout the play, one notices a conflict between the parents of the twins. The root cause of this conflict is revealed in the very end though, when the mother of the twins falls sick. The play ends with Tara and Dan walking without the limp. The two become whole and complete as they embrace and hug each other, recreating and reliving that state when they were one; inside the womb of their mother. Such completeness and totality of being can only be achieved beyond the boundaries of time, in the memory, in the creative mind of an artist like Dattani. All the episodes main and secondary are twined together, thus imparting the play a unity.

Dattani's *Tara* abounds in *karuṇa rasa* as *āngirasa* (principal emotion). Chandan's anxiety, isolation and suffering, Tara's physical and emotional trauma, Bharati's neurosis and hysteria contribute to the delineation of principal emotion. The three hapless victims, crushed under the weight of dead traditions of

patriarchal society evokes karuna rasa. And, finally the rasa is consummated in Chandan's desire to reunite with her dead sister to regain their complete self. He envisages their reconciliation towards the end of the play as they get together in a tight embrace, back to their former fused form.

"May be we still are. Like we've always been. Inseparable. The way we started life. Two lives one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out..." (CP).

This is an illustration of *aṅgīrasa niṣyandanikasa vakratā* (obliquity of dominant *rasa*), another sub-variety of *prakaraṇa-vakratā* in which the writer makes all efforts to concretize the dominant emotion or *aṅgīrasa*.

The final unfolding of the events of the play justifies the title of Dattani's play *Tara*. This is an illustration of *nāmakarana-vakratā*, a sub-variety of *prabandha-vakratā*. Kuntaka says that the title does not have merely a ceremonial purpose. The purpose of a good title is to unlock and underline the soul of the work; it is the skill of writer to impart it strikingness and he calls this art as *nāmakarana-vakratā* (obliquity of title) Dattani's titles are symbolic and thus are replete with meaning and are connotative. The title '*Tara*' is symbolic of a shooting star that shines only for a small fraction of time as our titular protagonist is. The author names the play after the female child whose identity is demoted otherwise; in order to invert the dialectical pair male/female. The title enables the reader to know the main idea of the work – literally it refers to the pivotal character of the play and symbolically it hints at the state of girls like Tara who could dazzle like a star if they are given their share. Thus, the title of the play has obliquity which Kuntaka calls *namakarana-vakrata* (obliquity of title).

#### Conclusion

The application of the Indian theory of *Vakrokti* to examine the plays of Mahesh dattani would be an attempt to prove the universality and relevance of Indian critical theories which are usually taken to be obsolete. *Vakrokti* emphasizes that both the content and form should be equally aesthetic; the emphasis is on their unity. It is the perfect harmony between the expression and the expressed in respect of beauty and promoting aesthetic experience. *Rasa* is the first and foremost aesthetic canon - the governing principle and the vital essence of literary art. It is the relishable quality inherent in artistic work. *Vakrokti* means and the aesthetic experience-*rasa* is the ultimate end. *Rasa* can be manifested by the way of *vakrokti*. Dattani who aims at this ultimate end of aesthetic delight-*rasa* and his plays rooted in Indian context can be better explicated by Indian models.

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