

Ques. Explain the relationship between *vācya*, *lakṣya*, and *vyāṅgya* meanings in *Dhvanyāloka*.

Ans. In Anandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka*, the relationship between **vācya** (literal meaning), **lakṣya** (indicated meaning), and **vyāṅgya** (suggested meaning) constitutes the semantic foundation of his revolutionary theory of dhvani. These three layers of meaning correspond to three powers of language—*abhidhā*, *lakṣaṇā*, and *vyāñjanā*—and together they explain how poetic language transcends ordinary communication to produce aesthetic experience.

1. Vācya: The Literal Meaning (Abhidhā)

The **vācya** is the primary, denotative meaning conveyed through *abhidhā*, the conventional power of words. It is the meaning directly signified by linguistic usage. For example, when a poet writes, "The lotus blooms at dawn," the immediate sense refers to the physical act of a flower opening at sunrise. This level of meaning is essential, for without it communication cannot occur. In both everyday speech and literary discourse, *vācya* provides the semantic ground.

However, Anandavardhana argues that *vācya* alone does not constitute poetry. A composition confined to literal meaning may be informative or decorative, but it lacks aesthetic depth. The literal sense functions as the vehicle (*vāhana*) upon which deeper resonances travel. Thus, while indispensable, *vācya* is only the outer layer of poetic expression.

2. Lakṣya: The Indicated Meaning (Lakṣaṇā)

The second level, **lakṣya**, arises through *lakṣaṇā*, or secondary indication. This occurs when the literal meaning is either impossible, inconsistent, or contextually inadequate, prompting the reader to infer a related meaning. A classical example is the statement, "The village is on the Ganges." Literally (*vācya*), the sentence suggests that the village is situated on the flowing river—an impossibility. Therefore, through *lakṣaṇā*, we interpret the intended meaning: the village lies on the bank of the Ganges.

Lakṣaṇā thus operates when the primary meaning is sublated or modified to yield coherence. It is still a semantic process within the domain of communication, not yet distinctively poetic. In fact,

both *vācya* and *lakṣya* are operative in ordinary discourse. They ensure intelligibility and contextual appropriateness.

Anandavardhana acknowledges the importance of *lakṣaṇā* but distinguishes it carefully from suggestion. While *lakṣaṇā* transfers meaning from one referent to another through association, it does not necessarily evoke aesthetic experience. It remains tied to pragmatic or logical necessity.

3. Vyaṅgya: The Suggested Meaning (Vyañjanā)

The third level, **vyaṅgya**, is the heart of *Dhvanyāloka*. It arises through *vyañjanā*, the power of suggestion. Unlike *lakṣaṇā*, *vyañjanā* does not depend on the impossibility of the literal meaning. Instead, it emerges when the literal and indicated meanings remain intact yet point beyond themselves to a subtler, unspoken significance.

For example, if a heroine says to her departing lover, “The night is very cold,” the *vācya* simply describes temperature. The *lakṣya* may involve contextual implication. But the *vyaṅgya* suggests longing, emotional vulnerability, or a plea for intimacy. This suggested meaning is not directly stated; it resonates within the sensitive reader (*sahrdaya*). Here language becomes evocative rather than merely informative.

Anandavardhana insists that *vyaṅgya* is not reducible to either *vācya* or *lakṣya*. It constitutes an independent semantic function. Through *vyañjanā*, poetry communicates moods, values, and aesthetic emotions (*rasa*) that cannot be paraphrased without loss. This is why he declares *dhvani*—the predominance of *vyaṅgya* meaning—to be the soul (*ātman*) of poetry.

The Hierarchical yet Organic Relationship

The relationship among *vācya*, *lakṣya*, and *vyaṅgya* is both hierarchical and organic. *Vācya* provides the base; *lakṣya* refines or extends it when required; *vyaṅgya* transcends both while depending upon them. Suggested meaning does not negate literal meaning; rather, it shines through it, just as light shines through a translucent surface. The expressed sense becomes a medium for evocation.

In the highest form of poetry—*rasa-dhvani*—the literal narrative and indicated meanings serve merely as supports for the revelation of aesthetic emotion. Drawing upon the *rasa* theory of Bharata Muni in the *Natyashastra*, Anandavardhana explains that *rasa* is not explicitly stated but suggested. When the reader moves beyond the surface meaning and intuits a universalized emotional state, *vyaᅅgya* reaches its culmination.

Critical Significance

Anandavardhana's triadic model of meaning redefines poetic language as multilayered and dynamic. Unlike earlier theorists who privileged ornament or style, he locates poetic essence in semantic depth. The interaction of *vācya*, *lakᅣya*, and *vyaᅅgya* reveals that meaning in poetry is not exhausted by denotation or logical implication. Instead, it unfolds through resonance.

Later elaborated philosophically by Abhinavagupta, this theory underscores the experiential dimension of literature. The suggested meaning becomes the site where language and consciousness meet.

In conclusion, *vācya*, *lakᅣya*, and *vyaᅅgya* represent successive but interrelated layers of meaning in *Dhvanyāloka*. While literal and indicated meanings secure communicative clarity, it is suggested meaning that produces aesthetic illumination. Through this subtle semantic hierarchy, Anandavardhana demonstrates how poetry moves from statement to resonance, from information to aesthetic revelation.