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Simile in *Gîtâ*: an appraisal.

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Abstract

The *Gîtâ*, an epitome of Indian philosophy is a store house of thought and wisdom of India where the different aspects of treatises of Indian philosophy is amalgamated. Though it is basically a philosophical work, as it is composed with beautiful verses it has a literary aspect too that generates attraction in the mind of the reader. It has its own writing style and get up. The lucidity in language, the metrical resonance, the sentiments, the application of suggestions, the figurative use of expression, the literary qualities and other literary usages best in their use in own sphere. A comprehensive study on these poetical elements can establish it as a fine specimen of poetry. Here, a humble attempt is made for the assessment of the usage of simile, the popular figure of speech which is found to be employed in the verses of the *Gîtâ* with a view to ascertain the purpose of its usage both in philosophical as well as literary domain.

Keywords: *Gîtâ*, philosophy, literary quality, usage of simile

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1. Introduction

A General Note on Figure of Speech: Figure of speech plays an important and impartial role both in Western stylistics as well as in Indian literature. In Sanskrit poetics figure of speech is called *alaṁkâra* which conveys an act of decoration. Sanskrit rhetoricians have divergent views regarding the necessity and peculiarity of figures of speech in a poetical composition. Bharata, the author of *Nâtyaúâstram* has accepted figure of speech as an instrument of ornamentation and it along with poetic excellences embellishes the poetry[1]. Veteran rhetorician Bhâmaha is of the opinion that poetry without figure of speech becomes unappealing just as a beautiful woman does not look attractive without ornaments[2]. According to Viúvanâtha Kavirâja, figure of speech helps in the evocation of the sentiment in a piece of composition[3]. Though the definition of this poetic device varies in the statement of various rhetoricians, it is commonly recognized as a source of enhancement of the literary charm of a piece and thus fascinates the reader just like the ornaments like ear ring, bracelet etc. enrich the beauty of a human being. But it is necessary to mention here that the expressive mention of *alaṁkâra* in poetry is not mandatory and if other requirements are maintained then without the presence of a figure of speech, the unification of word and meaning can also form a literary piece[4]. Therefore, it can be said that in poetry the position of figure of speech stays as a device to intensify the literary beauty and the grace.

The concept of Simile: Simile is regarded as one of the most significant, appealing and popular figures of speech in the literary world. It is quite appealing to

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the general reader for its common features. Almost all the writers of Sanskrit literature have used this figure of speech in their respective compositions. Its equivalent term in Sanskrit language is *upamâ*. The main criterion of this figure of speech is similarity and it is the basis of almost all the figures of speech those are based on similitude like metaphor, allegory, parable etc. In the words of Bhâmaha though different from the object of comparison the standard of comparison is presented as similar to the former for possessing even a little similitude, there arises simile[5]. Daṇḍin defines it as a figure of speech where any kind of similarity can be apprehended[6]. Bhoja explains that all the elements in a comparison may not possess similarity but even one common and single resemblance possessed by them gives rise to the simile[7]. He adds the expression *prasiddhi* with a view to figure out that the connection of the objects compared should be well known to all. Later rhetorician Mammaṭabhaṭṭa simply defines this figure of speech as *sâdharmyamupamâ*[8] which means similitude is *upamâ.* It was Viúvanâtha Kavirâja who specifies that the similarity should be expressive and without any hint of difference between two objects[9]. Thus, it can be said that simile establishes a phenomenon by way of comparison which make the process of understanding easy.

An idea on the *Gîtâ*: The *Úrîmadbhagavadgîtâ*, commonly known as the *Gîtâ* is primarily a work on the ideals of Indian philosophy. It is incorporated into the *Bhîṣmaparva* of the great epic *Mahâbhârata* with Eighteen chapters and Seven hundred verses by the mighty pen of Vedavyâsa. The *Gîtâ* starts there where Arjuna left his bows against the Kauravas in the renowned war of Kurukṣetra afflicted with sorrow and despair. Then to activate Arjuna towards the battle Lord Kṛṣṇa who was there as his charioteer started to teach him. It is true that the basic attraction of the *Gîtâ* is mainly for its philosophical value. Many people could find mental peace by going through the advice of Lord Kṛṣṇa found in the *Gîtâ*. But as it bears the literary attraction a good number of figures of speech are seemed to be used in the verses of the *Gîtâ* to delineate various types of philosophical ideas. Behind the employment of each and every figure of speech, the main motive of the author is to spread the message of Lord Kṛṣṇa primarily to Arjuna and generally to the whole universe. The most commonly used figure of speech is simile here. The verses like 2.22, 2.46, 2.58, 2.67, 2.70, 3.38, 4.37, 5.10, 6.19, 6.34, 6.38, 7.7, 9.6, 11.28, 11.29, 13.32, 15.8, 18.48 etc. can be formulated under the rule of this figure of speech.

2. The treatment of Simile in *Gîtâ*

As it is a part of the great epic *Mahâbhârata*, the predominant sentiment here is the *úânta* i.e. quietistic emotion which has the *nirveda* as its permanent feeling. So, while employing simile in the verses of the *Gîtâ*, the prime aim of the poet is to make use of this figure to evoke the feeling of quietism. Moreover, by using this figure of speech Maharṣi Vedavyâsa makes it possible to interpret some of the great philosophical concepts like *âtmâ, paramâtmâ, karma, jñâna, bhakti* etc. which works as the augmentation to the words of the Lord. This can be justified by the explanation of some verses from the *Gîtâ*.

In the verse *yadâ saṁharate câyaṁ kurmo'ṅgânîva sarvaœaḥ*……etc. (2.58), Lord said that a stable minded person withdraws his senses from sense objects like a tortoise takes out his limbs into his carapace. In this verse the comparison is made between the action of stable minded person with the action of a tortoise. The action of withdrawing the limbs by a tortoise is the standard of comparison (*upamâna*) whereas the withdrawing activity of stable minded is taken to be the object of comparison (*upameya*), the common attribute is the action of withdrawing and the word *iva* remains as the expressive word for similarity. Here in this verse also Lord Kṛṣṇa wants to highlight the difficult task of withdrawing senses from its object in the part of a common man which could only be done by a stable mind person. Lord Kṛṣṇa tries to make this concept easily accessible for Arjuna through the successful use of simile with reference to the activity of a tortoise.

Again with the help of this figure of speech Lord Kṛṣṇa wants to visualize the picture of a *sthitaprajña* in the verse *âpûryamâṇamacalapratiṣṭhaṁ samudramâpaḥ praviœanti yadvat*…..etc. (2.70). Here, the ocean can be taken as the *upamâna*, the stable minded person is *upameya* and in between these two the common quality remains as their

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unaffectedness. It is said that an even tempered person is like an ocean. Just as an unwavering ocean is not affected by the waters flowed into it, in the same manner the stable minded one remains unruffled when desires enter into him. This steadiness of ocean is quite familiar and this may be the reason for using it in this case where Lord Kṛṣṇa describes about the quality of person the mind of whom is unperturbed through the application of simile that make it possible to present a clear view in front of Arjuna who is in restlessness.

One of the basic topics of discussion in the Indian philosophical works is the concept of *jñâna* which acquires a strong place in the many passages of the *Gîtâ* also. According to the *Gîtâ* when one gets the knowledge of the divine, he can realise the truth of the Supreme Being. With this he can feel the sameness towards all being and then he will no more be deluded. A person thus dedicates all his actions to God and becomes unattached by the actions i.e. he is not bound by actions any more. Lord Kṛṣṇa makes this complex philosophy quite easy and clear with the help of simile in the verse *yathaidhâṁsi samiddho'gnirbhasmasât kurute'rjuna*…..etc. (4.37). As the blazing fire burns the fire-wood and everything else to ashes, so also knowledge burns up all actions. So, in this verse also it is appeared that Lord Kṛṣṇa brings some similarity between a common thing and a philosophical concept so that the grave meaning of this philosophical theory comes out to be accessible with poetical embellishment through simile. The unaffectedness by action is well expressed in *brahmaṇyâdhâya karmâṇi saṅgaṁ tyaktvâ karoti yaḥ*…..etc. (5.10) with the help simile where it is said that just like a lotus leaf is not drenched though it remains on the water so a person is not contaminated with sin who offering all his actions to God acts without any attachment.

It is delineated in the *Gîtâ* that a *yogî* who conquering his mind becomes steadfast as well as free from all desire can attain the Supreme Being. In the verse *yathâ dîpo nivâtastho neṅgate sopamâ smṛtâ* ….etc. (6.19) Lord Himself says that this disciplined mind can be resembled to a lamp-flame that never flickers when placed in a windless spot. Wind can put out the flame of a lamp in an open area; but if it is kept on a place where there is no wind then it does not wavers. In the same way a person who has lots of desire cannot control his mind which ultimately leads him to the darkness. But, if he can restrict his mind from urge and desire he becomes unwavering and enlightened. Therefore, in this verse also the application of simile is proved to be successful.

The philosophy of the existence of God is greatly emphasised in the teachings of the *Gîtâ*. It is established through the application of simile that individual souls are the parts of the one greater identity i.e. the supreme soul means the Lord. In the verse *mayi sarvamidaṁ protaṁ sûtre maṇigaṇâ iva* ….etc. (7.7), Lord Kṛṣṇa says that everything is strung to Him like the gems strung on a thread. One single thread is the source of connecting the various gems. After connecting all the gems with the thread, then only it can be named as a chain. Without the thread the gems are of no use and they cannot be called a chain separately. Only the thread can give them their existence as chain of gems. Likewise, God is the one and only from whom all creatures get their identity without whom no one can exist. Being originated from the Supreme God all beings submerge into Him after destruction. Therefore everything is connected to Him without whom there is no separate identity and this ultimately forms the creation. In this way with the help of simile the philosophical thought of God is revealed before Arjuna so that all his doubts can be eradicated and he will able to proceed towards the right path. In all the illustration of this figure of speech applied in the *Gîtâ*, some messages or theories of philosophy like God's essential nature, His cosmic form, the five senses and the nature of work etc. are incorporated. It not only helps the reader to comprehend the intended philosophical meaning but it also adds literary charm and gravity to the delineation of the sentiment as a whole.

3. Conclusion

Thus from the above discussion it is clear that in spite of being recognized as a celebrated philosophical work, the *Gîtâ* can establish its literary eminence from the point of applying the figure of speech called simile. In the verses of the *Gîtâ*, the employment of this figure of speech is seemed to be successful in its fullest way where to convey his ideas the poet uses some common and known facts and brings forth a parallelism between two different things. The main purpose of the simile is to portray

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the idea which the poet wants to articulate in his writings and with the help of this figure of speech he brings similarity between a known thing and a phenomenon that he wants to reveal. The philosophical doctrines of the *Gîtâ* sometimes appear to be complicated for the common mass. In such a case the use of simile is proved to be an effective medium for the successful expression of the idea and thoughts of the composer where some complex dogmas of Indian philosophy are enumerated. The application of this figure of speech makes it possible for all to comprehend the philosophical concepts in an easy and acceptable way. The advice of Lord Kṛṣṇa when remains amalgamated with this literary device, achieves a special attraction which not only deciphers the literary part of the work but it also provides a strong footing to its philosophy.

Footnotes

[1] alaṁkârairguṇaiœcaiva bahubhiḥ samalaṁkṛtam /bhûṣaṇairiva vinyastaistad bhûṣaṇamiti smṛtam // Nâṭyaúâstram, XVII.6

[2] na kântamapi nirbhûṣaṁ vibhâti vanitânanam// Kâvyâlaṁkâraḥ, I.13

[3] utkarṣahetavaḥ proktâ guṇâlaṁkârarîtayaḥ// Sâhityadarpaṇaḥ, I.3

[4] tadadoṣau úabdârthau saguṇâvanalaṁkṛti punaḥ kvâpi / Kâvyaprakâúaḥ, l.4

[5] viruddhenopamânena deúakâlakriyâdibhiḥ /upameyasya yatsâmyaṁ guṇaleúena sopamâ // Kâvyâlaṁkâraḥ, ll.30

[6] yathâ kathañcit sadṛœyaṁ yatrodbhûtaṁ pratîyate / upamâ nâma sâ….//Kâvdyâdarúaḥ, ll.14

[7] prasiddheranurodhena yaḥ parasparamarthayoḥ / bhûyo'vayavasâmânyayogaḥ sehopamâmatâ // Sarasvatîkaṇṭhâbharaṇam, lV.5

[8] Kâvyaprakâúaḥ, X.1

[9] sâmyaṁ vâcyamavaidharmyaṁ vâkyaikya upamâ dvayoḥ // Sâhityadarpaṇaḥ,X.14

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