

Finding Meanings in Ted Hughes' "Thrushes" Through Śabdaśaktyudbhava and Arthaśaktyudbhava Dhvani

Priyamvada C., Maitali Khanna, M. Praphulla

Abstract

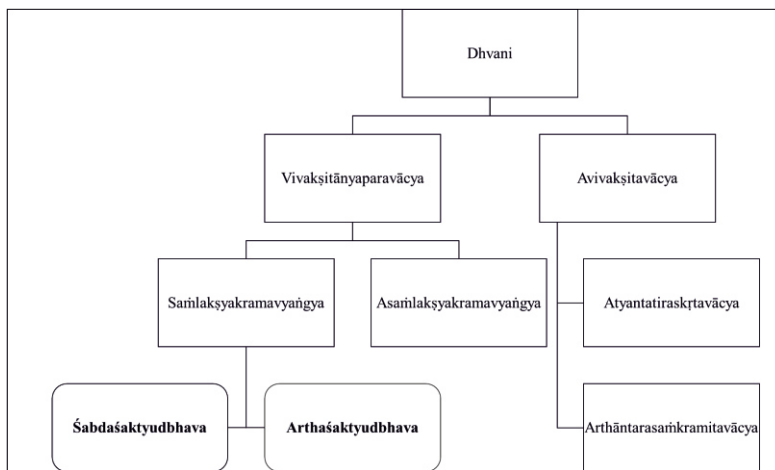
The article tries to get the deeper and fuller meaning of the poem "Thrushes" written by the English poet Ted Hughes by culling out layers of meanings with the application of the Sanskrit concepts śabdaśaktyudbhava and arthaśaktyudbhava. The poem contrasts the tiny bird thrush with human beings and points out the disparity in their qualities. Śabdaśakti with its power to find meanings in words through figures of speech, lexical relations and semantic features, and arthaśakti by suggesting more layers of implicatures in meanings have guided the analysis in this article. Thus a single word takes a sahr̥daya to deeper and inner meanings unseen at the surface level. Hughes has used powerful words to convey his idea and these words are dissected to find suggestions using śabdaśaktyudbhava and arthaśaktyudbhava.

Keywords: Śabdaśaktyudbhava, Arthaśaktyudbhava, Ted Hughes, Thrushes

Introduction

'Dhvani' in Sanskrit Poetics is a theory of suggestion, propounded by the theoretician Ānandavardhana in his treatise *Dhvanyāloka* in the ninth century. In this lakṣaṇagrantha, which has four uddyotās, Ānandavardhana has defined and illustrated various kinds of Dhvani. This theory considers 'text' as a base that evokes multilayered meanings through its various linguistic elements, which makes the theory universal and relevant for all times and contexts. Considering the universality of the theory, "Thrushes", a poem written by the English poet Ted Hughes, is analysed using śabdaśaktyudbhava and arthaśaktyudbhava dhvani out of the many kinds of dhvani. The theory of dhvani is mainly divided into avivakṣitavācya and vivakṣitānyaparavācya. "In *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani*, a word abandons its primary meaning completely and then comes to suggest a new meaning that

is not conventionally associated with it” (Chandran & V. S., 2021). “In *vivakṣitānya-paravācyā dhvani*, the literal meaning, although it is intended, moves on to suggest something which is not explicitly presented” (Chandran & V. S., 2021). *Avivakṣitavācyā dhvani* has two subtypes, *atyantatiraskṛtavācyā* and *arthāntarasamkramitavācyā*. “The category of *atyanta-tiraskṛta-vācyā* is that type of *dhvani* where the literal sense (*abhidhā*) of the word is completely negated. In *arthāntara-samkramita-vācyā*, the literal meaning retains certain elements of its primary sense but suggests a new meaning that is not conventionally attributed to it” (Chandran & V. S., 2021). *Vivakṣitānyaparavācyā* is further divided into two kinds: *samlakṣyakramavyaṅgyā* and *asamlakṣyakramavyaṅgyā*. “In *asamlakṣyakrama-vyaṅgyā*, we are not conscious of the movement from the literal to the suggested meaning” (Chandran & V. S., 2021). In *samlakṣyakrama-vyaṅgyā*, which is also known as *anuraṇana-rūpa-vyaṅgyā-dhvani* (suggested sense appearing like a reverberation), we are conscious of the movement that takes place from the literal meaning to the suggested meaning” (Chandran & V. S., 2021). *Samlakṣyakramavyaṅgyā* is further divided into *śabdaśaktyudbhava* and *arthaśaktyudbhava*. While there are many more categorisations of *dhvani*, for the analysis in this paper only *śabdaśaktyudbhava* and *arthaśaktyudbhava* *dhvani* are employed. Using these two subtypes, this paper aims to render a word-meaning driven analysis of Ted Hughes' poem "Thrushes". The following diagram shows *dhvani* and its sub kinds till *śabdaśaktyudbhava* and *arthaśaktyudbhava*.



Śabdaśaktyudbhava and Arthaśaktyudbhava

In the second uddyotā of *Dhvanyāloka*, in the twenty first and twenty second Kārikas, Ānandavardhana explains śabdaśaktyudbhava/ śabdaśaktimūla and arthaśaktyudbhava/ arthaśaktimūla types of dhvani. Ānandavardhana describes śabdaśaktyudbhava thus:

आक्षीप्त एवालंकारः शब्दाशक्त्या प्रकाशते ।

यस्मिन्ननुक्तः शब्देन शब्दशक्त्यूद्धवो हि सः ॥ (Krishnamoorthy, 1982)

Krishnamoorthy's translation of this verse is, “Only that instance wherein is present a figure that is not expressed directly by any word but conveyed solely by the suggestive power of the word itself, should be regarded as suggestion based on the power of the word” (Krishnamoorthy, 1982).

Here is the definition of arthaśaktyudbhava as given by Ānandavardhana:

अर्थशक्त्यूद्धवस्त्वन्यो यत्रार्थः संप्रकाशते ।

यस्तात्पर्येण वस्त्वन्यद् व्यनक्त्युक्तिं विना स्वतः ॥ (Krishnamoorthy, 1982)

The verse is translated by Krishnamoorthy thus, “The other variety of suggestion is based upon the power of sense and it is instanced in places where the second meaning is conveyed only by way of implication by the first meaning and not by the expressed words at all” (Krishnamoorthy, 1982).

In śabdaśaktyudbhava and arthaśaktyudbhava as the name suggests, implicatures are derived from the power of word and the power of sense. “*Śabda-śakti-mūla* is that variety of *dhvani* where a word or a set of words implies a figure of speech. In *artha-śakti-mūla-dhvani*, the meaning of words acts as suggestor” (Chandran & V. S., 2021). In śabdaśaktyudbhava dhvani, just by observing the lexical and non-lexical morphemes, words and their forms, their lexical roles, their semantic relations with other words and the semantic features of the words, layers of suggestive meanings can be arrived at. Arthaśaktyudbhava gives rise to implicatures from the literal meaning of a word or a sentence or even the explicatures that are based on linguistic and non-linguistic context. The interpretation of the poem “Thrushes” is derived employing the two kinds of dhvani as mentioned earlier, emphasising on the power words and meanings possess, as extolled by Ānandavardhana.

Ted Hughes and Animal Poetry

Ted Hughes is considered as one of the giants of twentieth-century British poetry. Hughes spent most of his childhood catching animals, birds and fish. He is an unrivalled animal poet in English literature. However, 'animals' for Ted Hughes are more than just creatures. They are 'suggestions' that evoke

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multilayered impressions of Hughes' understanding of art, life and culture. He finds many affinities between animals and poems. He says, "In a way, I suppose, I think of poems as a sort of animal. They have their own life, like animals, by which I mean that they seem quite separate from any person, even from their author, and nothing can be added to them or taken away without maiming and perhaps even killing them. And they have a certain wisdom. They know something special... something perhaps which we are very curious to learn" (Hughes, 1975). Hughes believed in universal energy. For him, evoking it was imperative and the world was as good as dead without it. However, this energy, once evoked, needs to be harnessed lest its power should be destructive. He believed that animals and birds have the power to harness the universal energy naturally. Additionally man should indulge in ritualistic acts to cultivate and nurture this cosmic energy. Hence, Hughes engaged in writing poems as a ritual that through the power of words aroused the dynamic energy, vitality and ferocious-violent behaviour of animals. As he extolls animals for their steadfastness, truthfulness and agility, he also hints at the contrasting qualities of human beings, suggesting the values and qualities humans should learn from animals. Thus through the words that he employs literally to describe the animals, he takes the reader through myriad levels of senses. Dhvani with its power to sense suggestions at various levels and cull out varying degrees of significations, is a suitable tool to gauge the depth in Hughes's description of animals.

Employing Śabdaśaktyudbhava and Arthaśaktyudbhava in "Thrushes"

"Thrushes", a poem by Ted Hughes, is taken from his collection of poems called *Lupercal* published in 1960. Though outwardly it reads like a lyric on a thrush, a tiny bird, yet, when dwelled deep we find that in the poem "... the didactic eulogies of animal vitality [are] contrasted with man's self-worshipful activities..." (Faas, 1980). Identifying this didacticism in Hughes' poems E. L. Black expresses that "A problem that is difficult to answer is this – when Hughes writes about a wild animal (or bird) is he really writing about that animal (or bird) or is he using the bird as a symbol for some human characteristic" (Black, 1966)?

The title of the poem "Thrushes" at first indicates a bird, but through śabdaśakti, it becomes a symbol of the qualities of the bird. The word thrush is a name of a bird, a noun, but when read with the associativeness of the other words, one can conclude that the word thrush is not just a mention of who the

bird is, but stands for what a bird is.

In the poem, thrush is described using contrasting words, “terrifying” and “sleek”/ “delicate”. Thrushes are small delicate birds which are not terrifying. However, the antonymy sense relation evoked in the contrasting adjectives redirect reader's perception of thrushes as delicate to what is concealed in the sleek appearance. Through śabdaśaktyudbhava we find that what is terrifying is the attent/ intensive attention of thrushes. The emphasis is on the attention and resolute action of thrushes while attacking the prey and not on its sleekness. The adjectives that are used to describe thrush, basically become the semantic features of the word thrush.

The appearance of thrush is described as that of “coiled steel”. Here inanimate is contrasted to the living. This far-fetched imagery through śabdaśakti evokes another figure of speech, a metaphor, comparing thrush as the coiled steel. The śabdaśakti is that once they determine no one can persuade them to withdraw their decision. Why is it coiled? Is it difficult to straighten or uncoil? The word “coiled” is animate and through collocation we associate the word naturally with the image of a snake. Through arthaśakti, the word “coiled” leads the reader to the comparison of the quick movement of snakes to that of thrushes. Another suggestive meaning gained through arthaśakti is that, as coiled steel cannot be uncoiled, so also the bird's strong determination does not waver. This phrase illustrates śabdaśaktyudbhava eliciting machine imagery. The word “steel” has machinery as one of its semantic features, and machinery draws forth the implications of industrialisation, the mechanical world of human beings. The arthaśakti/ implicature in this imagery further develops the context of contrasting human inertia and ennui with the steadfast dynamism of the thrush. They remain static, looking dead when they wait for the prey with intense attention, while man in perplexity staggers his way. The suggestive sense of industrialisation and the comparison is not found prima facie but is evoked through arthaśaktyudbhava, the power of the meaning.

The words “poised” and “dark”/ “deadly” once again share contrastive associativeness. Something that is poised cannot be deadly. Arthaśakti unravels suggestive meaning that the eyes of thrushes are poised, or their demeanour is poised but their attent is deadly to “bounce” upon the prey when the time is right. The words “terrifying” and “deadly” express the core sense of the poem and are present in many lines. “The stanza is hinged on the double perception of the predatoriness of the thrushes and their delicacy,

brilliantly used in the word “triggered” (Gifford & Roberts, 1981).

The force behind the natural instinctive behaviour of the bird is for humans “stirrings beyond sense”. There is a sudden movement when a thrush attacks its prey. A “start”/ “bounce” and “stab”- all these verbs are not related to the appearance of thrush. Roughness does not go with the delicate physical appearance of the bird. But arthaśaktyudbhava testifies the suggestive use of such violent action words, and we know that the roughness mentioned is related to the bird's dynamic attack. Its action is very determined. Thrushes “Overtake the instant” faster than any movement. It does not compromise. Arthaśaktyudbhava lets us observe the semantic features of every word. “Indolence” is an attribute of humans, not animals. Humans are lazy, they sloth and procrastinate. And machines have contributed much to man's inaction. “Yawning” is what animals do. It shows their boredom and laziness. The word “sighs” indicates regret which is again a human feature. “Head scratchings” is what animals do. It indicates that they are bored, don't understand and are lost. Through the suggestive meaning revealed by arthaśakti we find the distinction between humans and animals that the poet has brought in. Words like “bounce” and “stab” are dynamic words. These are placed in contrast with words like “procrastination” and “yawning” which are inert words. The nature of these words through arthaśaktyudbhava make the reader ready for something to come, “a ravening second” of ferociously hunting for prey. “The thrushes are terrifying not only for their ravening of writhing things, but for the too streamlined efficiency with which they pursue their unwavering purpose – the efficiency of a bullet (whose one path is direct through the bones of the living)” (Sagar, 1978).

The second stanza connects with the first through the power of words. What makes the thrushes “terrifying” is that they have “single-mind-sized skulls”. The suggestive meaning through arthaśakti lets us comprehend that the birds have brains and not minds. Since the brain is single minded, they have one mindedness. The meanings of the contrast words “training”, “conditioned” and “genius” are revealed through the suggestive power of arthaśakti. Training is what humans do. Animals can be “trained”. But they are naturally conditioned as per the environment. “Genius” is again a human quality. Arthaśakti contrasts the qualities of animals and humans to form their character.

The only purpose of these “brats”/ beasts, “days”/ lives is to satisfy their

hunger. “Bullet” is used to indicate the quick passage of time. It evokes visual imagery. Śabdaśaktyudbhava explains that the speed of thrushes is compared to that of a bullet. The words “bullet”, “triggered”, “steel” and “automatic” give more meanings through arthaśakti. These words have a lot to do with industrialisation, machinery and war. While placed in context we understand that these are just the reflection of the period Hughes lived in. Another arthaśakti for “nestful of brats” is that the birds have tiny ones to feed, which is making them precise. They have no time to waste by pecking around.

Then Hughes points out to two other creatures who have the extraordinary qualities of thrushes, Mozart and the shark. “Mozart's mind had it”. Śabdaśakti resonates with an allusion to the life of the great musician of the classic period. "It" is deictic here, making an anaphoric reference to thrushes' one pointedness and single mindedness. Even human beings have these qualities, and were in the possession of men especially in the olden times. Another layer of suggestive meaning takes us to the life and character of Mozart, who created music not for recognition but for the pure sake of it. “Shark” also is single minded. Their target is blood even if it is their own. The efficiency of thrush is streamlined along the allusive illustrations through arthaśaktyudbhava. “A life without doubts or obstructions is either more or less than human. Streamlined efficiency is for angels, animals and machines” (Sagar, 1983). There is no place for doubt in intent. It immediately plucks. All these human-like attributes give rise to paradox as an implicature through śabdaśaktyudbhava. Thrush is shown as a perfect example of steadfastness, determination and meditative focus, which are otherwise human characteristics. Single mindedness is a genius of human beings. It is a meta word that explains all other related characteristics of humans. “In the ordinary man the energies are there, but not available for efficient unified action, creative or destructive” (Sagar, 1983). Paradoxically, Hughes through all suggestions intends to school man in these qualities.

In the third stanza, which is dedicated to human beings, man is described as shallow. He is no hero without a horse. Humans depend on something else to show heroism. The śabdaśakti in the phrase “Outstripping his desk-diary at a broad desk” elicits a visual imagery. The suggestive meaning arrived at through arthaśakti is that men lack surety in whatever they do. The allusion evoked through śabdaśakti here leads us to the life of writers. He says that his lot are always in a dilemma. Men are not sure of what they write. There is a contrast of man's place against his own efficiency. Hughes again contrasts the

bird with humans through arthaśaktyudbhava. A man takes years together to finish a carving. It also shows the efficiency and attention to detail that human beings give to a single work. A tiny carving is itself his worship. Thrush has just one job, to catch its prey. And once it is done, it is satisfied. But man is never satisfied. The facets of the bird and man are perceived and placed in contradiction through suggestive meaning discerned through arthaśaktyudbhava.

Hughes then hints at the solution to all our enticements: prayer. Man bends in prayer. “Bends” is a kinesthetic imagery thus a śabdaśaktyudbhava dhvani. The arthaśakti is that prayer is essential for human beings because of the fear with which we live our lives. The word “bend” also suggests our surrender in front of a higher entity. In the next layer of meaning we are confronted with the disturbing thoughts in the mind of a praying man. “Furious spaces” implies many thoughts in the human mind which distracts him from his goals and God. The next layer of suggestion is that animals don't need to do all these, they are satisfied. Wilderness is pure nature, unaffected by human action. “Orgy” and “hosannah” are ritualistic ceremonies Greeks used to perform to evoke spirits. Through arthaśaktyudbhava, we are taken to Ted Hughes' personal life - Ted Hughes a shaman. His poems are mythopoetic, thus the mention of orgy and hosannah. There is a paradox in the way he puts together the contrasts of science and myths. Humans can't take the energy present in the universe like thrushes because of lack of one pointedness. “Orgy, hosannah and weep are verbs describing the hidden forces in man that distract him from his main purpose” (Black, 1966). Man who is stuck in the modern ideologies, needs a priest or rather a writer to lead him on the right path. “Presumably Hughes believes that his poetry, like the whips of the priests, may help in remedying the barrenness of modern civilisation (Black, 1966). “Nevertheless the capacities hauntingly caught in 'orgy', 'hosannah' and 'weep', belonging not to the conscious man but to the suppressed and ignored 'distracting devils', remind us explicitly of the heart of Hughes's drama: the awakening of that tormenting sense of not being in possession of one's own life and potentialities” (Gifford & Roberts, 1981). The arthaśakti of “black” is the evil qualities present in humans. Arthaśakti also takes us to the next layer of suggestion of shamanism having black figures and black world. Śabdaśaktyudbhava finds a transfer epithet in the phrase “waters weep”. Arthaśakti tells us that what “weep(s)” is not water, but humans. The next level of suggestive meaning reveals the reason for this. Humans live in fear.

We are stuck with beliefs hidden in fearful minds. Another suggestive meaning reached through arthaśakti is the existence of waters under earth which is indicative of pātāla/ netherworld. The final level of suggestive meaning obtained through arthaśakti is that it can also be our deep consciousness. “Black silent waters” are deep within us. To overcome the black energy we should pray. Turmoil and gloominess are present in humans. Though outwardly still, it is turbulent within. The poem ends by a comparison of apprehensive humans and happy thrushes.

Conclusion

Hughes believed in biocentrism. He saw man and other creatures as equal. Man is placed in contrast to thrushes in the poem, “Thrushes”. Thrushes are single minded, dedicated and instinctive. Man is distracted, doubtful and pretentious. While thrushes follow nature, man goes against its rules. “Whichever view we take, we will agree that Hughes' most significant theme is the central opposition between the vital, instinctive impulses of birds and animals, often violent and destructive, and the dulled and tamed consciousness of over-civilised people or passive animals” (Black, 1966).

With the aid of śabdaśaktyudbhava and arthaśaktyudbhava new vistas of meaning of the poem “Thrushes” are revealed. By merely following the power of words that give birth to plethora of suggestions, senses and signification, and by responding to instinctive implicatures that the power in meanings stimulate in readers, the complete interpretation of a poem can be achieved.

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