



VIDHYAYANA

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Greek Orators on Rhetoric



Author:

Jagruti B Bheda

Assistant Professor (Humanities)

L. E. College, Morbi



VIDHYAYANA

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

Abstract:

Since the human existence, the spoken word rules the human trajectory of language even before written word, as human learns to speak first rather than to write. Thus considering the oratory first, Greek writers like Plato, Aristotle and Isocrates thought to consider spoken language of more importance.

In modern time Rhetoric, as a word stands for negative connotation or as fancy language, used to distort the truth. But as a tradition, in west, it stands as a way of persuasiveness and choice of word to arouse emotions was the centre of language.

The journey of the word *rhetoric* first started with Sophists. Among the Athenians of the fifth century B.C., the term Sophists carried no invidious or negative connotation. It was rather neutral term applied to professors who lectured on “new learning” in literature, science and philosophy and specially ORATORY. But gradually it turned in lucrative business to earn money. That attracted a number of charlatans into teaching profession and it was men like these who eventually gave Sophists an unsavory reputation and made “sophistry” a synonym for deceitful reasoning. Perhaps this was the reason that leads Isocrates to write his educational work like ‘Against the Sophists’

For teachers like Aristotle or practitioners like the Roman orator Cicero, rhetoric helped people to choose the best course of action when they disagreed about important political, religious, or social issues. In fact, the study of rhetoric was equivalent to the study of citizenship. Under the best ancient teachers, Greek and Roman students composed discourse about moral and political questions that daily confronted their communities. Its use by Plato and Aristotle established it as a distinct area of study and eventually part of the curriculum of the liberal arts.

Present paper is an effort to put rhetoric from Greek point of view.



VIDHYAYANA

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

Greek Orators on Rhetoric

“Pleasant speech increases persuasiveness.... Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.”

- Psalm 16: The Old Testament

Rhetoric is characterized as "empty words" or as fancy language, used to distort the truth or tell lies. But that isn't the way rhetoricians defined their art in ancient Athens and Rome. In ancient times, people used rhetoric to make decisions, resolve disputes, and to mediate public discussion of important issues. Aristotle defined rhetoric as the power of finding the available arguments suited to a given situation. For teachers like Aristotle or practitioners like the Roman orator Cicero, rhetoric helped people to choose the best course of action when they disagreed about important political, religious, or social issues. In fact, the study of rhetoric was equivalent to the study of citizenship. Under the best ancient teachers, Greek and Roman students composed discourse about moral and political questions that daily confronted their communities.

Ancient teachers of rhetoric thought that disagreement among human beings was inevitable, since individuals perceive the world differently from one another. They also assumed that since people communicate their perceptions through language—which is an entirely different medium than thoughts or perceptions—there was no guarantee that any person's perceptions would be accurately conveyed to others. Even more important, the ancient teachers knew that people differ in their opinions about how the world works, so that it was often hard to tell whose opinion was the best. They invented rhetoric so that they would have means of judging whose opinion was most accurate, useful, or valuable.

Its use by Plato and Aristotle established it as a distinct area of study and eventually part of the curriculum of the liberal arts. Before and after “rhetoric” came into use there were other terms current. One was *peitho*, which means “persuasion”; more common was use of the word *logos*, meaning word or speech, in combination with other words: a *demiourgoslogon* was a “worker of words,” and thus an orator; *tekhne logon*, “art of words,” was used to describe the technique or art of speech and became the common title for a handbook of public speaking.

The journey of the word *rhetoric* first started with Sophists. Among the Athenians of the fifth century B.C., the term Sophists carried no invidious or negative connotation. It was rather neutral term applied to professors who lectured on “new learning” in literature, science and philosophy and specially ORATORY. The Sophists set up small private schools and charged their pupils a fee for tutoring. These schools



VIDHYAYANA

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

eventually proved to be so lucrative that they attracted a number of charlatans into teaching profession and it was men like these who eventually gave Sophists an unsavory reputation and made "sophistry" a synonym for deceitful reasoning.

Perhaps this was the reason that leads Isocrates to write his educational work like 'Against the Sophists'. Here his criticism is centered upon two classes of sophists, the *Eristics*, who devoted themselves to theorizing in the field of ethics, and the sophists of the rhetorical school, who taught oratory as an instrument of practical success. Of these latter he singles out, finally, for special rebuke the authors of "the so-called arts" (of oratory).

Oratory is good only if it has the qualities of fitness for the occasion, propriety of style, and originality of treatment.

According to him, the elements out of which we make and compose all discourses should be employed for each subject, to join them together, to arrange them properly, and also, not to miss what the occasion demands but appropriately to adorn the whole speech with striking thoughts and to clothe it in flowing and melodious phrase and thus this requires utmost formal training.

One of his major contributions was his development of an artistic prose style. He took rather the artificial style of Gorgias (under whom he studied) and modified it for both written and spoken discourse. He preached that the whole man must be brought to bear in the persuasive process and thus he puts emphasis on learning of liberal arts and on moral habits. In all his discourses, he stressed on the Greek ideals of freedom and autonomy and also the value of supreme Greek virtue- *sophrosyne* (Self-control).

Aristotle was perhaps the first person to recognize clearly that rhetoric as an art of communication was morally neutral, that it could be used for either good or ill. In the second chapter of 'On Rhetoric' he says that persuasion depends on three things: the truth and logical validity of what is being argued, the speaker's success in conveying to the audience a perception that he or she can be trusted, and the emotions that a speaker is able to awaken in an audience to accept the views advanced and act in accordance with them. Modern rhetoricians use terms derived from Aristotle to refer to these three means of persuasion, though they have somewhat broadened his definitions:

1. Logical argument is called logos;
2. The projection of the speaker's character is called ethos;
3. Awakening the emotions of the audience is called pathos.



VIDHYAYANA

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

Aristotle composed his treatise *On Rhetoric* in the third quarter of the fourth century B.C.E. as a text for lectures he planned to give in his philosophical school. Although it influenced the view of rhetoric of Cicero, Quintilian, and other teachers in Rome and became known in the western middle Ages in a Latin translation, it has been more studied in modern times than ever before. Most teachers of composition, communication, and speech regard it as a seminal work that organizes its subject into essential parts, provides insight into the nature of speech acts, creates categories and terminology for discussing discourse, and illustrates and applies its teachings so that they can be used in society.

Although Aristotle largely limited the province of rhetoric to public address, he took a broader view of what that entails than do most modern writers on communication. This may surprise and interest readers today. In Aristotle's view, speakers need to understand how the minds of their listeners work, and in the process we come to understand something of who we are and why we do what we do.

On Rhetoric can be a difficult work for modern readers, and many need help to understand it. Aristotle seems to have written different portions of the work at different times, he sometimes changed his views, and he never made a complete revision of the whole, nor did he add as many illustrations and examples as we would like. The group of teachers of English composition and speech communication, whose primary interest is in the rhetorical theory found in the work, they are understandably inclined to use it as the basis of developing a comprehensive system of rhetoric, following out the implications of the text or imaging what Aristotle ought to have said but didn't. They are especially interested in argumentation and in problems involving Aristotle understand of the enthymeme and its implications.

Finally, his attitude toward rhetoric was ambivalent. He wanted his students to understand the dangers of sophistic rhetoric as dramatically portrayed by Plato, and at the same time to be able to defend them and be effective if they engaged in public life. The differing views found in the text, especially when taken in conjunction with Plato's criticism or Isocrates' celebration of rhetoric, can provide a good starting point for discussions by modern students about the nature and functions of rhetoric in society.



VIDHYAYANA

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

References:

Abrams M. H. A Glossary of Literary Terms, Bangalore: Prism Books, 7th ed.: 1999

Culler, Jonathan.). Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction. New York: Oxford University Press: 2000

Dixion, Peter. Rhetoric: The Critical Idiom. London: Methuen & Co Ltd. 1971

Blair, Hugh. The Origin & Nature of Figurative Language in Essays on Rhetorics. Eds. Dudley Bailey. New York: Oxford Uni. Press: 1965

Isocrates, Antidosis, 353 B.C., translated by George Norlin

Aristotle, On Rhetoric, late 4th century B.C.; translated by George A. Kennedy, New York: Oxford University press, 2007, 2nd Ed.

Plato, Gorgias (one translation from library of liberal arts, another by Devin Stauffer)



VIDHYAYANA