

An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory
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Lecture- 38
Guna or Poetic Merit: Dandin and Udbhata

Hello everyone,

In the previous lecture, we familiarized ourselves with the theory of *guṇa* conceptualized by Bharata and Bhāmaha. In this context, we also saw how various literary works, written long before the beginning of literary theory, such as the Rāmāyaṇa, anticipated the theory of *guṇa*. We saw that the theory of *guṇa* made its first appearance in Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra. In this context, we discussed the ten *guṇas* mentioned by Bharata. Although Bharata listed the ten *guṇas* and talked about it, this theory was not given much attention by many later theoreticians. The next major theoretician, that is Bhāmaha, hardly paid any attention to the theory of *guṇa*. He reduced the number of *guṇas* from ten to three. This was not because Bhāmaha thought other *guṇas* could be included in these three *guṇas*. It was just because Bhāmaha did not consider *guṇas* as important constituents of a *kāvya*.

The three *guṇas* mentioned by Bhāmaha are *mādhurya*, *ojas* and *prasāda*. In addition to these three *guṇas*, Bhāmaha also mentions what we can call a *prabandha guṇa* or *guṇa* that is applicable to the literary work as whole. The name of this *guṇa* was *bhāvika*. We wrapped up the class by saying that the theory of *guṇa* again gained a rebirth in the theoretical corpus of Daṇḍin who in his Kāvyaḍarśa once again lists and talks about ten *guṇas* or poetic merits.

At this juncture, we need to remember that Daṇḍin's adherence to Bharata is only in listing the names of the *guṇas*. He often redefines Bharata's definitions of many *guṇas*. Daṇḍin observes that the presence of all the ten *guṇas* mentioned by him are absolutely essential in the composition of any good work of literature. We also see the distinction between *guṇas* and *alaṅkāras* first in Daṇḍin's Kāvyaḍarśa. Daṇḍin's discussion of *guṇas* is specifically in connection with his treatment of the idea of style or *mārga* which is equivalent to the theory of *rīti* later propounded by Vāmana. He mentions two *mārgas* or styles in Kāvyaḍarśa, namely *vaidarbhī* and *gaudī*. Daṇḍin is of the view that all the ten *guṇas* are found only in the *vaidarbhī* style, while *gaudī* has only two *guṇas*, viz *ojas* and *kānti*. According to Daṇḍin,

guṇas are the special features of the body of kāvya or kāvyaśarīra. He opines that from a very functional point of view, we can call it an *alaṅkāra*. Here, the word *alaṅkāra* should not be taken to mean an individual figure of speech. He calls *guṇas* *asādhārana-alaṅkāras* or non-ordinary ornaments. Here the word *alaṅkāra* is used in a general sense to mean anything that adds beauty to a poem. If all the *guṇas* can be treated as an *alaṅkāra* or a device decorating the poem, then can we treat all the *guṇas* as an *alaṅkāra*? Daṇḍin does not take up this question. From this, we need to assume that there is a subtle distinction between *guṇas* and *alaṅkāras*, although Daṇḍin does not get into this discussion.

Let us take a look at the ten *guṇas* mentioned by Daṇḍin. These ten *guṇas* mentioned by Daṇḍin include śleṣa, prasāda, samata, mādhyurya, saukumārya, arthavyakti, udāratva, ojas, kānti, and samādhī. Śleṣa is the smooth combination of words. The quality wherein one will be able to understand the meaning of a word without much labor is called prasāda. At this point, Daṇḍin says that the followers of Gaudīya does not favor this style. They reject this merit and often use obsolete words whose meaning is not popular. The followers of the Gaudīya mārga often cojoin various words, often words which are not so popular, to convey a meaning. Daṇḍin does not favor this method. The next quality that Daṇḍin talks about is samata. Samata is the quality which arises out of the employment of using the same style from the beginning to the end of the prabandha or poetic composition. Samata is the absence of unevenness in syllabic structure or bandha -svara -viṣamaṃ. It is the adherence to a particular arrangement of letters or *varṇavinīyāsa*. Daṇḍin observes that there must be an evenness between the beginning and end of a stanza in terms of the arrangement of letters or syllables. That is to say if a passage begins with soft vocables, it must definitely end with the same syllabic structure. Daṇḍin lists three kinds of such structure or bandha, namely, (i) the structure which contains only soft or mṛdu syllables, (ii) structure which contains only harsh or sphuṭa and finally, (iii) the structure which contains temperate or mixed or madhyama syllables.

Mādhyurya is the ability of a word or a group of words to generate rasa. Daṇḍin talks about the two important ways in which mādhyurya *guṇa* can be achieved--first by anuprāsa and secondly by agrāmyatva. It should be noted that here the word anuprāsa does not mean mere alliteration. It is the repetition of words which take the same place of utterance and effort for pronunciation. The second aspect that the poet has to mind to achieve mādhyurya is the absence of grāmyata or cultural unsophistication. How to avoid grāmyata or uncouthness?

Daṇḍin talks about it in detail, using an example. According to Daṇḍin, the expression—“Hey maiden, why don’t you love me who loves you a lot?”—is a grāmya or uncouth or unpolished expression, as it explicitly expresses a man’s desire for a woman. For him this is devoid of rasa or attractiveness. But on the other hand if we say: “‘The God of love, that cruel person, is pitiless to me, but he holds no grudge to you, my pretty-eyed lass,’ then the sense is sophisticated and generates rasa”. This appears striking to the readers and contains mādhyurya guṇa. According to Daṇḍin, this quality will enchant the sympathetic readers in the same way the honey enchants the bees. Here we need to note that Daṇḍin’s definition of mādhyurya is quite distinct from Bharata’s definition of it. According to Bharata, mādhyurya is the quality of a verse to remain sweet even after many repetitions. Daṇḍin connects this with the idea of rasa and says that mādhyurya is the ability of a word to a group of words to generate rasa.

Saukumārya is the quality that is found in compositions which do not have harsh sounding words. According to Daṇḍin, the poets who follows the style called Vaidarbhī accepts sukumārata which contains soft words, while the Gauḍas have a special predilection for the guṇa called ojas. Poets who take the gauda mārga usually do not mind if their poetry consists of words which require much strain for pronunciation. The guṇa called arthavyakti refers to the clarity of meaning. It is the absence of a fault called neyārtha which refers to a word or a sentence whose meaning can only be guessed by the reader. According to Daṇḍin, both the gaudī and vaidarbhī styles do not wish to have neyārtha in their poetic composition. Udāra guṇa inheres in a noble speech. In other words, it is a quality that comes out of the employment of noble speech. Udārata is a quality that is said to be present in all the mārgas. Here also Daṇḍin makes a deviation from the definition of Bharata. According to Bharata, Udārata is the ability to present rasas like śṛṅgāra, and this is achieved by the arrangement of words. For Daṇḍin, udāra is noble speech. Ojas is the compactness of word structure due to the employment of compounds. This is a quality that is present in both mārgas. In the vaidarbha Marga, it is the soul of prose. In Gauda mārga, it serves as the soul of poetry. This particular variety, says Daṇḍin, has many sub-varieties. According to Daṇḍin, this is a quality that one can find in ākhyāyikā and campu. Kānti is the use of well-known words of which the meaning is known to all. It is the presentation of ideas in such a way that it does not transgress the boundary of ordinary possibilities. This excellence, we are told, is generally found in vārtta and varṇana. In this context, the word, vārtā refers to the praise or praśamsa vacana. This use of the word vārta is different from the way in which it is used by Bhāmaha.

Bhamaha uses the term *varṭta* in cases where *vakrokti* is absent, such as the sun has set, the birds are flying back to their nest, etc. The *varṇana* may be taken to mean *vastu-svarūpa nirṇaya* or the description of things as they are in the world. This is a quality favored by the poets following the *vaidarbhi* style, whereas the *Gaudas* who love exaggerated ideas transcending ordinary possibilities do not favor this *guṇa*. Here we will note that *Dandin's* definition of *kanti* differs from that of *Bharata*. For *Bharata*, *kanti* is the ability of a poem to entertain the readers. According to *Bharata*, the quality called *kanti* enchants the heart of the readers, as the moon enchants the heart of people. For *Dandin*, *kānti* is the quality that arises out of the use of well-known words whose meaning is known to all. *Samādhi* is the superimposition of the qualities of one object onto another object which is quite distinct from the former. According to *Daṇḍin*, the quality called *samādhi* lies at the heart of a poem and is followed by all poets. Here also we will note that *Bharata's* definition of the *samādhi* is different. For *Bharata*, the quality called *samādhi* is attained, if the meaning of the verse is so elegant that the scholars find it non-ordinary. When it comes to *Dandin*, *samādhi* turns out to be the superimposition of the qualities of one object onto another object which is quite distinct from the former. In other words, in *Dandin*, it is the metaphorical usage.

After *Daṇḍin*, the next literary theoretician who talks about the idea of *guṇa* is *Udbhaṭa*. As we all know, *Udbhaṭa* in his *Kāvyaḷaṅkārasārasamgraha* does not say anything about the question of *guṇas*, since it is a short work on the idea of *alaṅkāra* or figures speech. If one wants to know what *Udbhaṭa* thinks of *guṇas*, one necessarily needs to take a look at his *Bhāmahāvivarāṇa*. Although it is a lost work, his ideas on *guṇa* in this work are available to us through the citations from this work reproduced by *Ānandavardhana*, *Abhinavagupta*, *Mammaṭa*, *Mānikyacandra* and *Hemacandra*. According to *Udbhaṭa*, there is no essential difference between *guṇas* and *alaṅkāras*, since both of them are elements which add to the beauty of *kāvya*. He is of the view that it is people who follow blind traditionalism who say that both of them are two different entities. He does not see *alaṅkāra* as something external to *kāvya*. He is of the view that *guṇas* and *alaṅkāras* subsist in *kāvya*. This stand is definitely against the dominant view that while *guṇas* are internal, *alaṅkāras* are external to the work. It might have been to refute *Udbhaṭa's* view that there is no difference between *guṇas* and *alaṅkāras* that *Vāmana*, his contemporary, tried to distinguish these two. *Udbhaṭa* also thinks that *guṇas* are *saṅghaṭana dharmas* or the function of style.

Now, it's time to wrap up the class. In this section we primarily saw the views of two literary theoreticians, namely Daṇḍin and Udbhaṭa. In Daṇḍin's Kāvyaḍarśa, we saw a resurrection of the idea of guṇa which was neglected previously by Bhāmaha. We saw that Daṇḍin mentions ten guṇas in his Kāvyaḍarśa. All these ten guṇas are as same as the ones mentioned by Bharata in his Nāṭyaśāstra, although Daṇḍin's definition of these guṇas differs a little. Daṇḍin's discussion of guṇa is associated with his discussion of mārḡa. After Daṇḍin, we saw Bhaṭṭa Udbhaṭa's approach to the question of guṇa. The most important aspect that we need to note in Udbhaṭa's theory is that Udbhaṭa does not make a distinction between guṇas and alaṅkāras. He is of the view that both are elements that add charm to poetic beauty and there is no need to make a distinction between these two. According to him, it is the people who follow the tradition blindly that come up with this distinction. In the next class, we will see Vāmana who made revolutionary contributions to the theory of guṇa. To understand the theory of guṇa by Vāmana, you may please revise all the major points that we discussed so far. Thank you!