

An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory
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Lecture- 54
Vakrokti: Pada-pūrvārtha-vakrata II

Hello everyone,

In the previous class we saw the first two varieties of *pada-pūrvārtha-vakrata*, namely *rūḍhi-vaicitrya-vakratā* and *paryāya-vakratā*. In this class, we are going to familiarize ourselves with the other two varieties of *pada-pūrvārtha- vakratā* namely *upacāravakratā*, *viśeṣaṇa vakratā* and *saṃvṛti vakratā*. First let us take a look at *upacāravakratā*.

Upacāravakratā

In this form of *vakrokti*, two dissimilar things are put together employing a metaphorical usage. Kuntaka says that in this form of *vakrokti*, “even when the two objects are far apart from each other, a common attribute, however slight, is metaphorically superimposed in order to indicate that the resemblance is very close” (381). In this context, the expression ‘far apart from each other’ does not signify distance in terms of time or space, but the difference in terms of their nature or ontology. This difference can be of various kinds. For example, the difference between a concrete object and an abstract object, or the difference between a sentient entity and a non-sentient entity, or the difference between a solid object and a liquid. In this form of *vakrokti*, two objects having different characters are brought together with the help of a metaphorical usage. The following is an example of *upacāravakratā* that Kuntaka cites in *Vakroktijīva*:

“When on the king’s highway all sight is blocked by darkness so dense that has to be pierced by a needle, wantons you will see hurrying at night to the abodes of their lovers. Do show them their way by the flash of your lighting, as bright as the gold-streak on the touch stone. Don’t you by any chance get noisy by your thunders pouring rain, because they are very timid indeed.”

In this example, taken from *Meghadūta*, the darkness which is an abstract entity is first conceived of as a concrete entity. The author says that the darkness is very dense. This is a quality that we will find only in a concrete entity. In other words, only a concrete entity can become thick. Here the word ‘dense’ is metaphorically used to refer to the intensity of the darkness. Then the author says that it needs to be pierced by a needle. Again, only a concrete thing can be pierced. It is impossible to pierce an abstract thing like darkness. So, in this context the word ‘pierce’ is metaphorically used to mean the idea, ‘to remove.’ We know that darkness is an abstract entity, but it is presented in this context as a concrete entity. Here the distance between the qualities of the abstract and the concrete are bridged over by a metaphorical usage.

Similarly, the author also considers ‘darkness’ as a sentient entity, although that is not the case in reality. The poet says that, ‘Do show them their way by the flash of your lighting.’ Only a sentient entity can be shown the way. How can a non-sentient entity like darkness be shown its way? Here the expression, ‘to show the way’ means to ‘drive them away.’ Here also the gap between the qualities of being sentient and non-sentient are removed by the metaphorical usage. Here goes one more example in this respect:

"Though the sky is filled with drunken [*matta*] clouds
and the woods with *arjunas* thrashing in the downpour
these black nights too when the moon has lost its *pride* [*ahaṅkāra*]
carry off my heart." (my emphasis; 211)

According to Kuntaka, this Prākṛit verse which describes a monsoon night incorporates *vakratā* in two words, namely “drunken” or *matta* and “pride” or *ahaṅkāra*. The word ‘drunken’ or *matta* means ‘a state of inebriation due to the use of some intoxicant.’ Since the condition of inebriation is applicable only to a sentient entity, the conventional meaning of the word ‘drunken’ (*matta*) is impossible in this context because a cloud, being a non-sentient thing, cannot get intoxicated. So the word “drunken” gets extended to mean one of the characteristics associated with a drunkard, which is ‘the act of wandering around aimlessly.’ Thus the word ‘drunken’ undergoes an incorporeal transformation, i.e. the physicality of the signifier does not change, but it takes on a new signification which is not conventionally associated with it. The same process happens in the case of the signifier “pride” (*ahaṅkāra*). The word “pride” literally means “A feeling of pleasure or satisfaction that you get when you

or people who are connected with you have done something well or own something that other people admire”. This is a quality typical of a sentient creature, especially a human being. But this quality is attributed to the moon which is a non-sentient thing. Hence, the literal meaning of the term “pride” (*ahaṅkāra*) gets blocked and then the signifier deterritorializes its conventional semantic ambit to incorporate another meaning, i.e. ‘charm’ (a positive quality which people can pride on). So the sentence means that the moon has lost its charm.

After describing this variety, Kuntaka goes on to describe another variety of padaparatha vakratā which is called viśeṣaṇa vakratā.

Viśeṣaṇa vakratā

What is a viśeṣaṇa vakratā? Viśeṣaṇa vakratā is the kind of vakratā that is achieved by the excellence of the epithet that is added to a verb or a noun. This variety is of two kinds, namely that which reveals the special grace of natural objects or actions described, and that which endows a new shade of beauty to even recognized figures of speech. Let us take a look at the first variety, that is the epithet which reveals the special grace of natural objects or action. The following example will explain the first variety:

“Flooded by moonlight, white and cool, and lovely in the reigning silence for long, the quarters of the sky become generators of either quietude or love even in the heart.”

In this line, expressions like, 'flooded by moonlight', 'white and cool', 'lovely in the reigning silence', etc. are epithets used to describe the quarters of the sky. Here these epithets enhance the beauty of a natural object which is the sky. Here goes one more example for this variety where a verb is decorated with an epithet:

“With eyes closed [vinītavimalākṣa], the lordly elephant recalled old memories of free sports and mighty pleasures in the forest.”

In this line taken from *Śisupālavadhā*, the expression such as vinītavimalākṣa meaning ‘with eyes closed’ adds beauty to the verb ‘to recall.’

The following is an example of the second variety of viśeṣaṇa vakratā which adds beauty to a recognized figure of speech:

“. . . which puts to shame even the beauty of the moon.”

Finally, Kuntaka concludes his discussion on this variety by saying the following words:

“To infuse an extraordinary charm into literary relish, natural objects and actions as well as figures of speech, the significant epithet should be properly utilized by the poet.”

The next of padapurvardha vakratā variety that we are going to see is saṃvṛti vakratā.

Saṃvṛti vakratā

Saṃvṛti vakratā is the use of pronouns to hide the actual object that is being described. According to Kuntaka, there are six kinds of *saṃvṛti vakratās*. Kuntaka says,

“In order to achieve excellence of expression, when the subject of description is screened by the use of pronouns and so forth, we have what is designated as *saṃvṛti vakratā*” (386). Among these six varieties, the first variety is employed, when the poet feels that the infinite specialty of the object might get lost, if he directly states what he wants to present. To prevent such an eventuality, he will cover it up with a pronoun which is general in significance.”

The following is an example of this variety of *saṃvṛti vakratā*:

“Seeing his father intent on marriage, *he* performed just a minor task indeed; which made cupid himself to rest his cheek on the tip of his flower-bow, immersed in thought.”

In this example, the pronoun ‘he’ is used to cover the person Bhīṣma. Kuntaka explains the *saṃvṛti vakratā* found in this line, in the following words:

“In this example, it was certainly possible for the poet to state that Śantanu’s son Bhīṣma displayed incredible self-restraint in forswearing all sensual allurements because of his extraordinary magnanimity, his devout good behavior and boundless regard for elders. But the poet has avoided this straightforward statement. The poet allowed it to be concealed by a pronoun ‘he’ with general significance” (388).

Now let us take a look at the second variety. This variety is used when the speaker or the poet feels that the phenomenon that he is describing has reached the pinnacle of the function that it

is performing, and now it is inexplicable or beyond words. The following example will explicate this variety further:

“O Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā cried that way. Hearing her cry, it seemed that any women would ever think of marriage in at least once in their hundred births.”

This line talks about the grief of Rādhā who is pining for Kṛṣṇa who went to Dvārakā. Here the intensity of Rādhā’s weeping cannot be expressed through words. The poet fears that if he tries to recreate this feeling through words, he will not be able to achieve it. So, he concealed it by using the word ‘that way’ so that the readers can imagine. But then, in the next line, he reveals it for the readers. Kuntaka notes, “Here, the way in which she sang is concealed by the pronoun ‘that way’ and at the same time the concealed idea is revealed by another clause which wins the heart of the critics with taste.”

Now the next variety of *saṃvṛti vakratā* under padapurvardha vakratā. In this form of variety, an exceedingly tender emotion restricts any elaborate description of character's actions around it. Therefore, a concealment is employed. The following is an example of this variety:

“Seeing the marks of endearment on her person in the mirror and at the same time catching sight of her lover’s sitting behind beside her, what reactions did Pārvatī not show out of bashfulness.”

This verse describes the bashfulness of Pārvatī. Since the emotion is very tender, the poet does not want to describe her actions in detail. So, he conceals the details of her action using the expression what reactions did Pārvatī not show. Here the exact Sanskrit expression which does the function of concealment is *kāni kāni*.

Now the fourth variety of *saṃvṛti vakratā*. This variety is employed when the speaker feels that a particular experience cannot be explained, but to be experienced alone. Kuntaka says, "this particular variety is employed in order to indicate that it is something that can be merely experienced within oneself and is impossible of verbal description" (387).

Here is an example:

“Those sweet expressions still suggest something in my heart.”

Here the expressions that the speaker is experiencing need to be experienced and enjoyed first hand. They cannot be explained in words. So, the poet conceals the exact nature of the expressions using the pronoun ‘those.’

Now the fifth variety of *samvṛti vakratā*. This variety is employed when the concealment suggests the speaker’s inability to describe verbally what has been experienced by another person. The following example will elucidate this variety further:

“Seeing this, the cupid thought something in meditation.”

Here the speaker does not know that the cupid had actually thought in meditation. The speaker is not in a position to understand and describe what Cupid had thought about. Hence, the poet had used the word ‘something’ thereby, concealing what Cupid had exactly thought. Now the last variety in this section. In this variety, the speaker conceals something that can potentially turn out to be a slander or profanity. The following example will illustrate it further:

“Stop him, O maid! This urchin talking something; His upper lip is throbbing already. He is not only someone who slanders the great, he is also the one who is capable of turning whoever listens to him into a sinner” (388).

In this example, the thing that the urchin is talking is a slander. But the slander is concealed by the word ‘something.’ Here by using the word ‘something’ or ‘kim api’ the poet is covering the slander. Here goes one more example that Kuntaka cites:

“This one, a false custodian of pledges is out to do something, O dear!”

Here also, the poet is sure that the action that is going to be performed will be a grave sin. But he does not want to talk about it. Therefore, the details or the specificities of the action are concealed by the word ‘something.’ Kuntaka winds up this discussion by saying that there is one more variety of *samvṛti vakratā* where the concealment can happen with the help of an affix that has to be placed in the middle of the sentence. Kuntaka says, “The affix in the middle of a word often adds to the beauty of decorum in the subject described, by virtue of its own excellence. This may be treated as another type of poetic beauty” (388). Kuntaka further

notes, some affixes like कृत् occurring in the middle of words are seen enhancing the unique poetic beauty in the passage. They serve to increase the beauty of decorum in respect of the subject described.

Now let us wrap up our discussion for the time being. We saw three kinds of vakratās in this class, namely *upacāravakratā*, *viśeṣaṇa vakratā* and *saṃvṛti vakratā*. In *upacāravakratā*, two dissimilar things are put together using a metaphorical usage. *Viśeṣaṇa vakratā* is the kind of vakratā that is achieved by the excellence of the epithet that is added to a verb or a noun. *Saṃvṛti vakratā* is the use of pronouns to hide the actual object that is being described. According to Kuntaka there are six kinds of *saṃvṛti vakratās*. Among these six varieties, the first variety is employed, when the poet feels that the infinite specialty of the object might get lost, if he directly states what he wants to present. To prevent such an eventuality, he will cover it up with a pronoun which is general in significance. In the second variety, the speaker or the poet feels that the phenomenon that he is describing has reached the pinnacle of the function that it is performing, and now it is inexplicable or beyond words. So, he uses a pronoun, etc. to talk about it. In the third variety, an exceedingly tender subject does not permit any elaborate description of its actions. Therefore, a concealment is employed. In the fourth variety of *saṃvṛti vakratā*, the concealment is employed since, the speaker feels that a particular experience cannot be explained, but it needs to be experienced alone. Now the fifth variety of *saṃvṛti vakratā*. This variety is employed when the concealment suggests the speaker's inability to describe verbally what has been experienced by another person.