

An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory
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Lecture- 06
Sanskrit Literary Theoreticians--Early Period

Hello everyone! In this lecture, we are going to familiarize ourselves with some of the major literary theoreticians from the early period in Sanskrit poetics. We have heard their names in the previous lectures. In this lecture, we are going to take a glance at their life and major works.

The major literary theoreticians from the early period who we are going to familiarize ourselves with include Bhamaha, Daṇḍin, Udbhaṭa, Ānandavardhana, Abhinavagupta, Kuntka, Kṣemendra, Mahimabhaṭṭa, Bhoja and Mammaṭa. At this point, I would also like to point out that most of these literary theoreticians left very little evidence of their personal lives. This fact coupled with the loss of significant texts like Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka's Hṛdayadarpaṇa makes it very difficult for us to trace the intellectual history of literary theory in India.

Before the beginning of this lecture, I would also like to mention that we will be seeing only important literary theoreticians from the early period. We will deal with the exponents of dramaturgy like Bharata, Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka and so on in a separate lecture, when we discuss the theory of rasa.

Bhāmaha

The first literary theoretician we are going to take a look at is Bhāmaha. He is believed to have lived in Kashmir around the 7th century. We know almost nothing about Bhāmaha other than the fact that he could have been a Buddhist and a contemporary of Daṇḍin. Bhāmaha's magnum opus is Kavyalankara. In Kavyalankara, Bhāmaha primarily focused on the various categories of alankaras or figures of speech to understand the nature of poetic language. Other than Kāvyaḷaṅkāra, he is believed to have written Prākṛitmanorama, a commentary on Vararuci's Prākṛit work. Bhāmaha is often considered the founding father of Sanskrit poetics, and the fact that later theoreticians like Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta quote him with respect is evidence enough of his stature in the field of poetics.

Daṇḍin

Another most important critic after Bhamaha is Daṇḍin. Daṇḍin's Kāvyaḍarśa, or the Mirror of Poetry is one of the most influential literary treatises for the vernacular poetics. We have seen this aspect in our previous lecture. Scholars believe he was from South India and was a court poet of the Pallava kings. Daśakumāracarita and Avantisundarīkathā are the other works attributed to Daṇḍin. Both these works are incomplete prose texts. In his Avantisundarīkathā, Daṇḍin gives us ample information about himself and his surroundings. According to the description given in Avantisundarīkathā, Daṇḍin's great great grandfather Dāmodara was a court poet in the palace of King Siṃhaviṣṇu in Kāñci. Dāmodara had three sons and his middle-born, Manoratha, was the great grandfather of Daṇḍin's. Manoratha had four sons; Manoratha's youngest son, Viradatta, married a Brahmin woman named Gaurī. They had several daughters, and eventually, a son was born to them. His name was Daṇḍin. Daṇḍin lost his mother at the age of seven and his father shortly thereafter. As an orphan, Daṇḍin had to flee Kāñci because of an enemy invasion. He was finally able to return to Kāñci only once peace was restored. According to scholars like Yigal Bronner, although these biographical details of Daṇḍin in Avantisundarīkathā was initially greeted with some suspicion, there is now a wide consensus that a single Daṇḍin authored all these works at the Pallava court in Kāñci around the end of the seventh century.

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Bhāmaha's Kavyalamkara or Ornamenting Poetry and Dandin's Kavyadarsa have a lot in common. First of all, both share a common analytical framework and similar organizational structure. Second, both these texts often use the same style of language and imagery when they are defining and exemplifying literary concepts and figures of speech. Also, they show

highly specific disagreements with each other's views regarding the nature and aesthetic value of a literary work. This means that both these theoreticians were in conversation with one another. But the questions--Was Bhamaha responding to Dandin's *Kavyadarsa*? Or Was Dandin making a rejoinder to Bhamaha's *Kavyalamkara*?—continued to remain unanswered. Now Yigal Bronner, in his article “A Question of Priority: Revisiting the Bhamaha-Dandin Debate” convincingly argues that Bhamaha is undoubtedly a predecessor of Dandin.

Udbhata

Udbhata is another major figure in the line of critics who devoted their attention to figurative language in poetry. He was the chief poet in the court of King Jayapīḍa of Kashmir. Udbhata's major contribution was the *Kāvyaḷaṅkārasārasamgraha*, or A Compendium of the Most Important Figures of Speech in Poetry. It is believed that he wrote a commentary to Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, and also a commentary to Bhamaha's work titled *Bhāmahavivaraṇa*. Unfortunately, both these works were lost beyond recovery. Scholars like Jacobi think that he was the first to elevate the concept of *rasa* to the soul of poetry. We will discuss this point in detail later when we discuss the idea of *rasa*.

Vāmana

It is believed that Vāmana, who lived in the 7th century, was a contemporary of Ānandavardhana. Vāmana is often associated with the idea of *rīti* in Sanskrit poetics. Vāmana's magnum opus is *Kāvyaḷaṅkārasūtravṛtti*. In Sanskrit literary theory, he was the first literary theoretician to talk about the idea of *kāvyaśyātmā* or the soul of poetry. Ānandavardhana, in his criticism against *Dhvānyaloka*, criticises Vāmana by saying that it was people incapable of understanding the true nature of poetic language who said that *rīti* or poetic style is the soul of *kāvya*.

Ruyyaka

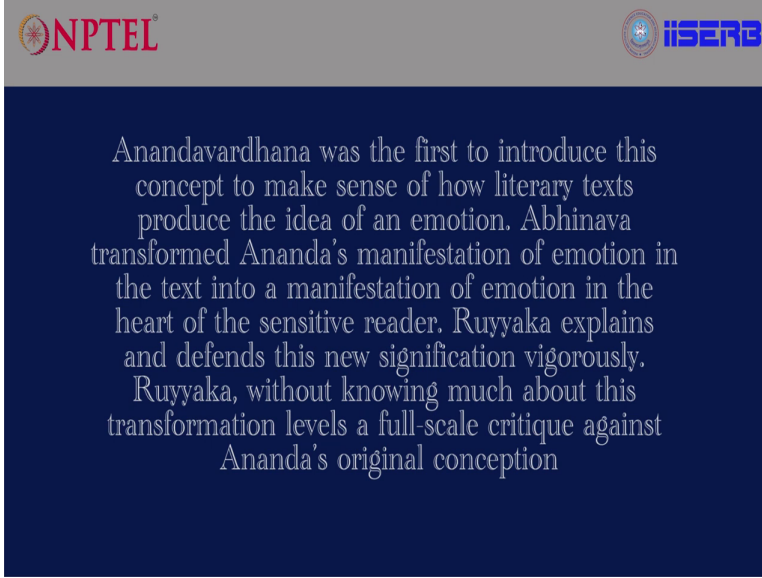
Ruyyaka was a leading intellectual in Kashmir in the first half of the 12th century. Ruyyaka's father Tilaka was also a literary theoretician. His magnum opus is *Alaṅkārasarvasva*, which earned him the reputation as the greatest authority on tropology in the century since Mammata wrote his famous textbook *Kavyaprakāśa*.

Ruyyaka had also written a treatise on Mammaṭas *Kāvyaḷaṅkāśa* and also on Mahima Bhaṭṭa's *Vyaktiviveka*. It is also believed that he is the teacher of Maṅkha, the author of

Alaṅkārasarvasva. In his Rasa Reader, Pollock succinctly summarizes the contribution of Ruyyaka in poetics. According to Pollock,

“Ruyyaka’s significance for the history of aesthetics lies in part in being an early witness of the emergent consensus on some key elements of the rasa discourse. One is the basic outline of Abhinavagupta’s theory of rasa, which Ruyyaka offers in his commentary on Mammata.” Another is the recording of the notion of vyakti or manifestation. He is the first to reflect systematically on Mahima Bhaṭṭa’s idea of vyakti. Pollock observes:

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“Anandavardhana was the first to introduce this concept to make sense of how literary texts produce the idea of an emotion. Abhinava transformed Ananda’s manifestation of emotion in the text into a manifestation of emotion in the heart of the sensitive reader. Ruyyaka explains and defends this new signification vigorously. Ruyyaka, without knowing much about this transformation levels a full-scale critique against Ananda’s original conception.

Ānandavardhana

Ānandavardhana, the author of Dhvanyāloka, was the next important person in literary history. Ānandavardhana was a philosopher, literary theoretician and a poet all rolled into one. He is considered to have forged a new path in Sanskrit poetics by conceptualizing the idea of dhvani, which became the most important theoretical concept after rasa in Sanskrit poetics. He too was a native of Kashmir and was fortunate to have lived during the rule of King Avantivarman in the 9th century, and it is considered the best of days of literature. Kalhaṇa’s Rājatarāṅgiṇī

considers Ānandavardhana as one among the four stalwarts in the court of king Avantivarman in Kashmir.

Nothing much is known about his personal life except that he was the son of Noṇa, who perhaps was the recipient of a stipend from the King. Ānandavardhana's other major works include the Viṣamabāṇalīlā, Arjunacarita and Devīśataka. The Viṣamabāṇalīlā was in the form of a play written in Mahārāshtri Prākṛit, and Arjunacarita was a mahākāvya in Sanskrit. According to the author himself, the play was written to instruct writers on poetry. This must have been an accepted practice in those days because we also have Bhaṭṭi in the 7th century composing the Bhaṭṭikāvya like an instruction manual for aspiring writers. Ānanda used verses from his own compositions to exemplify varieties of dhvani in Dhvanyāloka.

Devīśataka which means "Godesses' Century" is a verbally intricate poem full of puns and twisted forms of speech. It comprises hundred verses in praise of Goddess, prefaced by a few remarks on how the author could have come to write such a work.

Abhinavagupta

The name that is often associated with Ānandavardhana is Abhinavagupta. Abhinavagupta was a multi-faceted genius who lived during the second wave of intellectual glory that Kashmir saw in the latter half of the 10th century. He was a Śaivite philosopher, poet, and literary critic. He has written on a wide range of subjects and has numerous works to his credit. His major works are Tantrāloka and Tantrasāra besides devotional hymns and the critical commentaries, he wrote for two important works on aesthetics, namely the Abhinavabhāratī, a commentary on the Nāṭyaśāstra and the Locana, a commentary on Ānandavardhana's Dhvanyāloka. His greatest contribution was that he was able to merge the concepts of rasa and dhvani in a manner that had not been attempted until then. Abhinavagupta's major area of interest was philosophy and we can often clearly see how his philosophical principles impacted his perception of literature and literary appreciation. Pollock points out that "Abhinavagupta's theory of aesthetic consciousness shares many traits with his theory of liberated consciousness." He was undoubtedly a multi-faceted genius, an embodiment of the qualities that would much later occasion the term 'Renaissance man'. Unfortunately, this philosopher-aesthete remains somewhat obscure compared to other figures like Ādi Śaṅkara.

Kuntaka

The next critic we need to talk about is Kuntka. Kuntka, who lived in Kashmir in the 10th

refuted the idea of his eminent predecessors like Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta that dhvani is the primary component of good poetry. His defiance of his formidable predecessors by coming up with an intellectually sound theory of anumāna is an index of the scholarship of Mahimabhaṭṭa.

Bhoja

Bhoja is an exception in this line of scholars and critics because he was a king who had the administrative responsibility of a kingdom. Bhoja belonged to the Paramāra dynasty and ruled over the Malwa region, with Dhara as the capital city. His court was somewhat similar to that of the legendary Vikramāditya, as it attracted poets and scholars from around India. His significant contribution to Sanskrit poetics is his Śṛṅgāraprakāśa. Śṛṅgāraprakāśa is significant because this work reduces all the rasas to just one, which is that of śṛṅgāra. Bhoja's theory was that this was the basic emotion that motivated all other emotions, and all the human emotions were derivatives of śṛṅgāra. This was a radical departure from the catalogue of eight rasas that was drawn up by the pioneer Bharata. It is no wonder that the work was controversial and not readily accepted by later scholars like Mallinātha in the 15th century. Another important work of Bhoja is Sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharana.

Mammaṭa

Mammaṭa was a Kashmiri pandit who lived in the 12th century. Next to nothing is available about his personal life. The legend has it that he had travelled from Kashmir to Benares for studies. Bhīmasena Dīkṣita gives us some glimpses into the life of Mammaṭa in the introductory verses of his commentary on Mammaṭa's Kāvya prakāśa. According to Dīkṣita, Mammaṭa was the son of Jaiyaṭa. His younger brothers Kaiyaṭa and Uvaṭa were also great scholars. Kāvya prakāśa, the magnum opus of Mammaṭa, is divided into ten chapters called ullāsas. Kāvya prakāśa opens with a definition of literature and then discusses the linguistic modalities underpinning a kāvya, the ontology of aesthetic emotion, different powers of a śabda, including the idea of dhvani, poetic merits and flaws, and figures of sound and sense. It is important to note that thousands of manuscript copies of Kāvya prakāśa were available all over India. It also attracted many commentaries from scholars from different parts of the country. This was a trend which began in the mid-12th century and went on till the 18th century. Considering the impact that Mammaṭa's Kāvya prakāśa exercised upon people in the education of Sanskrit poetics, Bhīmasena Dīkṣita,

in his commentary on Kāvya prakāśa with all sincerity, calls Mammaṭa an ‘incarnation of Sarasvatī, the goddess of language’