An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory
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Lecture- 13
Dasarupaka: Ten dramatic forms - Part 1

Hello everyone! In this lecture, we are going to familiarize ourselves with ten dramatic forms and their subdivisions that Bharata mentions in his Natyasastra. Bharata calls them rupakas because these are the art forms that are to be enjoyed by seeing. These ten dramatic forms or rupakas that Bharata and his successors mention include nātka, prakaraṇa, bhana, vyayoga, samavakara, dima, ihamrga, anka, vithi, and prahasana. First, let us take a look at the Nataka.

Nataka

Nataka is generally considered to be the highest form of drama. This form of drama is based on a story that is well-known to the readers or spectators, and the hero of a nataka should always be a great king who is the embodiment of all the virtues one can think of. He should be noble, courageous and powerful. In a natka, there will be five to ten ankgas or acts. Although there are different rasas in a nāṭaka, all these rasas should be subordinate to one overarching rasa or aesthetic emotion. Srngāra rasa or the aesthetic emotion of the erotic and vīra rasa or the aesthetic emotion of the heroic are usually the two rasas that dominate a nataka. Although this is the general convention, we should also remember that there are exceptions to this rule, as in Bhavabhūti's Uttararāmacarita where the dominant rasa is karuna rasa or the aesthetic emotion of grief.

In a nataka, there would be four to five characters to help the hero achieve the goal he has set out to accomplish. Even though there are various sub-plots in a nāṭaka, all these subplots come to an end before the completion of the main plot with which the nāṭaka finally ends. Visvanātha, in his Sahitydarpaṇa, compares the position of the subplots in the nāṭaka to the tail of a cow. Just as the tail of a cow narrows down towards its end, so also a nāṭaka will complete other stories in it early, and will finally focus only on the main plot. Bharata also mentions that the playwright should strictly avoid the representation of certain acts in a nataka. These representations that are banned in a nataka include sex, death, cursing, revolution, sleeping, kissing, bathing, application of oil on the body, detention, etc. They are

avoided from the ambit of a nataka precisely because they can cause shame or uneasiness to the spectators or readers.

There are five stages for the hero of a nataka through which he will have to go to accomplish his final goal. These five stages include ārambha or the beginning, yatna or the effort, praptyasa or the possibility of success, niyatapti or certainty of success, and phalāgama or the achievement of the goal. Ārambha marks the desire to achieve the goal, yatana involves the effort for the same, praptyasa deals with the uncertainty on the part of the hero about the possibility of achieving the goal; niyatāpti involves the removal of the doubt about the possibility of the success, and finally phalāgama involves the attainment of the desired goal. All these five stages should be well incorporated within five sandhis or joints. They are called sandhis or "joints" in accordance with their function, since they are the parts of the plot which are joined together to make the play. Scholars like Bharata insist that a nātaka should have five sandhis or joints such as mukha, pratimukha, garbha, vimarsa and nirvahana. Mukha is the opening of the story, pratimukha refers to the development of the story, garbha marks the center of the plot, vimarśa refers to the struggle of the hero to achieve his goal, and finally nirvahana refers to the conclusion where all the conflicts will finally be resolved, and the focus will be exclusively on the main plot.

According to Bharata, there are also five stages for the unfolding of the story in a nāṭaka, namely bija, bindu, kārya, prakari and patākā. Of these, three, namely baja, bindu and kārya are of particular importance. I will explain these with reference to the play Abhijnanasakuntala by Kalidasa. Ingalls has explained these stages in detail in his translation of Ānandavardhana's Dhvanyāloka.

Okay, in the play Sākuntala, the bīja, or seed, first appears in Act I, verse 11, where the ascetic who greets Dusyanta blesses him with the words "May you obtain a son who shall be a universal monarch." In this context, the achieving of such a son becomes the seed of the whole drama. This is actually the real cause of all the action. The bindu which literally means "drop", appears in Act II after verse 7. Bindu is the device by which the flow of the story, which is momentarily interrupted, is restored. Here the primary aim of the drama gets interrupted by the general of the army who plans the king's hunting expedition in the forest. Then the bindu appears in the form of Dusyanta's cancelling of the hunting expedition and his conversation with the clown, where he, in fact, confesses his love for Sakuntala. Thus, the

"drop" sets the main action in motion again. The metaphor of a drop may have arisen by a reference to a drop of oil which spreads out over water, or by reference to the continuous dripping of ghee which keeps a fire burning. The kārya or "result" comes in Act V with Dusyanta's discovery and recognition of his son.

The prakari and pataka are two types of interludes, long and short, respectively, in which the chief characters do not appear. They, too, help the plot move forward by introducing events which the readers cannot discover from the action directly represented by or through the hero and heroine. In prakari, there will be a sub-hero who does not have any individual aim on his own. His sole aim will be to help the hero. The playwrights should pay attention to conclude the prakari incident either in the garbha-sandhi or in the vimarsa-sandhi. The same holds true for the pataka as well. The only difference between prakari and pataka is that the prakari is shorter than the pataka.

Now we can put all these three elements in perspective. Bija and arambha will together make mukha sandhi, bindu and yatna will constitute pratimukha sandhi, garbha is constituted by pataka and praptyasa. Prakari and niyatāpti will make vimarsa and finally, kārya and phalāgama will constitute nirvahana.

The avasthās, sandhis, and arthaprakrtis may be distinguished functionally as follows. The avasthās are the stages of the causal process from onset to denouement. The sandhis are the plot-segments corresponding to these stages. The arthaprakrtis are five factors which stimulate the action through the course of these stages and segments.

At the end of a drama, a celestial character or a character of great stature will appear on stage and bless the other characters. Sometimes, this will be done by the hero. This concluding remark of wisdom is called bharata-vakya or the final remark of the drama. Here the word Bharata in this context refers to this main character.
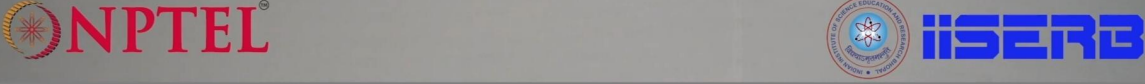
Prakarana
The topic of a prakarana will be commonplace, and the story of a prakaraṇa will be purely the product of the poetic imagination. The dominant rasa of a prakarana would always be srngara. The hero of a prakarana will always be either a minister, a brahmin or a merchant.

The hero of this form of drama will be interested primarily in three purusarthas or goals of life namely, dharma, artha and kama. The heroine of a prakarna would be either a libertine or a noblewoman. Sometimes, both these types will occupy the position of a heroine. If a prakaraṇa has a libertine as the heroine, there will be characters such as a rogue or a gambler. Sudraka's Mrcchakatika is an example of a prakarana. Here the hero is a brahmin and both the libertine and the noble heroines have an equal role to play in the drama.

I think at this juncture, it is also important to distinguish between nataka and prakarana. Doctor Raghavan, in his "The Social Play in Sanskrit", very succinctly distinguishes between nataka and prakarana. According to him,

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"The ideals that lie at the base of these two types, the nataka and the prakarana, are different; the two are distinct in a substantial manner; the aim of the poet in the nataka is to present what has been conceived as the highest type of human personality, the sublime type, called the dhirodatta; this is a heroic ideal. On the other hand, in the prakarana, the poet is out to hold up the mirror to the world, to depict society as it is in its rank and file. As the name signifies, it gives life's medley and a whole train of virtues which the type naturally engenders, find scope here, provided the dramatist is up to the mark, virtues that come in the train of variety of incident and individuality of character."

So, these are the major differences between a nataka and a prakaraṇa. The nataka celebrates the accomplishments of the kings and presents how they establish the Dharma in this process. The prakarana, on the other hand, deals with the affairs of the subjects belonging to the middle rung of the society, such as a Brahmin, a minister, a soldier, a merchant and so on. The story of prakarana need not be well-known to the readers, and it could be a fictitious one invented by the poet. Prakarana always attempts to depict the conditions in the society, as they are. Sreenivasa Rao says that,

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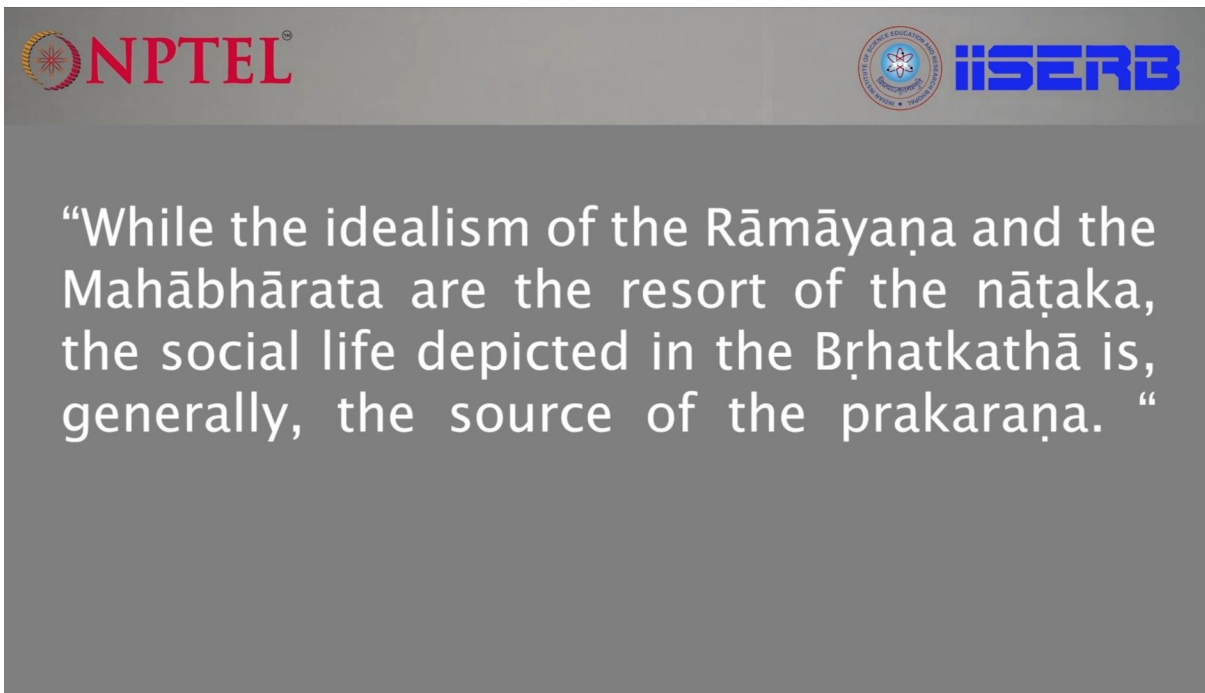
"While the idealism of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are the resort of the nataka, the social life depicted in the Brhatkatha is, generally, the source of the prakarana.

Bhana

It is said that the term bhana is derived from the root 'bhaṇ', which means 'to speak'. Bharata explains Bhana as a monologue narrated by a single actor; and yet its theme is full of various characters and situations. In bhana, the characters do not enter the stage, but are heard indirectly through the mouth of the actor who is out on the stage.

Bhāṇa comprises of only one anka, and the story of a bhana revolves around typically the life of an extravagant person. He will be narrating either his own story or the story of a different person. The style that is mostly used in bhana is bharati vrtti. In bhana, there are only two sandhis, namely mukha or the beginning and nirvahana or the conclusion.

Not many of the ancient bhana scripts have survived. In the early years of the 20th century, M Ramakrishna Kavi and S K Ramanatha Shastri discovered the manuscripts of four bhana plays. They edited and published them. Ubhaya-abhisarika of Vararuci, Padma-prabhrtaka of Sudraka, and Dhurtta-vitta-samvada of Isvaradatta are a few examples of bhāna.

Here I will briefly talk about the Dhurta-vita-samvada, since it gives us a good glimpse into the nature of a bhana. Dhurta- vita-samvada has a narrator who has wasted his wealth in gambling and liquor. He is penniless now, and his clothing is reduced to one garment. The time at which the story is set is a rainy season. Finding the rainy season too depressing for him, the speaker comes out in search of some amusement. He eventually ends up in a street where courtesans actually live. Though he is desirous of spending time with the courtesan, he does not have a single penny left with him. Finally, he reaches the house of the roguish couple, who were then busily engaged in a discussion on certain awkward problems of sex-act, and then he gleefully joins the discussion. And this is how the story actually goes.