

An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory

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Lecture- 23

Rasa Theory and Bhatta Tauta

Hello everyone, I hope you are all thorough with the theory of Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa and Śrī Śaṅkuka.

The next critic that we are going to see after Śrī Śaṅkuka is Bhaṭṭa Tauta. Bhaṭṭa Tauta is a Kashmiri scholar who is believed to have lived in the latter half of the tenth century. We know of Tauta primarily through the works of Abhinavagupta, especially through Abhinava's Abhinavabhāratī. Abhinavagupta considers Tauta as his master and often addresses him as 'my teacher'. It is believed that Tauta wrote a commentary on Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra which is now lost and we know of it primarily through the citations of his theory from Abhinavabhāratī. The popular assumption is that the last critic who must have had direct access to Kāvyaśāstra was Hemacandra in the twelfth century. And we hardly hear anyone in the tradition talking about Tauta and his theory after the twelfth century. In this class, we are going to discuss the theory of rasa propounded by Tauta. Tauta's theory of rasa comes primarily in the form of a criticism against Śrī Śaṅkuka's observation that rasa is the imitation of the emotion in character. Bhatta Tauta holds that rasa cannot be imitated. Why rasa cannot be imitated? Tauta says that it cannot be imitated because it is a mental state which cannot be perceived with our sensory organs such as eyes, ears, nose and skin. It needs to be experienced internally.

He also says that emotion is one thing and the physical reactions to the emotion are another thing. In other words, the emotion of grief is one thing and the consequent reaction to grief, for example, the shedding of tears, is another thing. Just by showing the shedding of tears, the actor cannot claim that he is imitating the emotion called grief. What he is imitating is a physical reaction to grief, not the emotion called grief. This basic difference that Tauta makes has to be kept in mind while we understand his theory.

We will see this theory in detail soon. I mentioned these aspects at the onset of our discussion only to prep you up to understand the observations of Tauta. Tauta criticizes observation of Śaṅkuka that rasa cannot be imitated from three perspectives, namely from the perspective of

the spectators, the actor and Bharata. A note of warning may be sounded at this juncture. When you try to understand the debate between Śāṅkuka and Tauta, you should always keep your observations, questions and doubts at bay. Try to understand their theory as they are.

The first point is that something can be called an imitation, only if the thing that is being imitated is perceived by the spectator through some valid means of cognition. If the spectator cannot perceive what is being imitated, the spectator will not be in a position to see the imitation. For example, we can only interpret the drinking of water by an actor as the drinking of wine, only if we see, with our eyes, the actor drinking the water. We are in a position to interpret the actor's drinking of water as the drinking of wine because we can see this activity with our eyes. We see the actor drinking water and then we interpret it as the drinking of wine. Here, first, we see the action of drinking water and then we interpret the action of drinking water as the imitation of drinking wine. Here, there is no problem. This process of imitation, where a physical activity is imitated, is very clear to us.

Now, Bhatta Tauta asks another question which is related to the imitation of an emotion. Tauta asks: We understand the imitation of a physical activity. You say that *rasa* is the imitation of the emotion in the character. Then, tell me what do we perceive in the actor that appears as the imitation of a particular emotion, say for example, the emotion of desire. Bhatta Tauta anticipates the answer and says on behalf of his opponent that the actor's body, the headwear that crowns it, his horripilation, his faltering words, the raising of his arms, the waving of them, his frowns, his expressive glances, etc. will be imitating the character's emotion of desire. Bhatt Tauta is not satisfied with this observation. He says this answer involves a lot of problems. According to him, none of these elements you mentioned—that is the actor's body, consume, or his physical actions such as horripilation, glances etc.— can appear to the spectator as the imitation of an emotion. Why cannot we consider these elements and actions of the actor as the imitation of an emotion? Tauta says, first of all, emotion is located *in the mind* and hence, it cannot be perceived by the external senses such as sight, etc. In other words, emotion is not an outward entity and hence cannot be imitated. What the spectator is watching is the action and the outward appearance of the actor, not the emotion. How can one imitate a mental entity like an emotion through physical features that can be perceived by the external senses such as sight, etc.

An emotion is a mental state. It is located in the mind. So, it cannot be perceived as a physical activity with the help of the external senses such as sight, etc. Therefore, it is wrong to argue that spectators will feel that the actors are imitating an emotion which is mental entity through acting which is physical.

Secondly, if the actor needs to appear to the spectator as the imitation of a character, the spectators should have seen the original character. But since none of us have seen the character and the emotion that he feels, the idea that the actor is imitating a character and his emotion can be dismissed as an empty talk.

Now, Bhatta Tauta says that his opponent will change his argument and say that the actor is not imitating the emotion in the character, rather he is imitating his own emotion for the spectator. Now, Tauta asks a question back: If the actor is imitating his own emotion, tell me what does this imitation consists of? The opponent will now say that it consists of all the elements that involve the production of an emotion in real life such as a vibhava, anubhava and vyabhicaribhava. Suppose the actor is imitating his own emotion of desire. In that case, as in real life, there will be a cause, a vibhava, in the form of a beautiful woman, a series of vyabhicaribhavas arising out of the emotion of desire caused by the lady, and finally, there will be an anubhava or reaction to vyabhicāribhāvas in the form of side long glances, etc. If that is the case, Tauta says, this will appear to the spectator as the REAL 'emotion of desire,' not as the IMITATION of desire.

At this juncture also, the opponent will come up with a counter argument. The spectators will not take this 'imitated' emotion as real emotion because the vibhavas, anubhavas and vyabhicāribhāvas which involve the production of rasa are not real. They are just artificial. The vibhavas, etc. are real only in the world of the character. They are artificial in the world of the actor. The vibhavas, etc. in the fictional world are simply invented and imitated by the actors thanks to their skill, training and study of poetry.

Bhatta Tauta says, 'okay, let it be so.' We admit your argument that the vibhavas, etc. are factitious and they are not real vibhava, anubhava and vyabhicaribhava of an emotion, say for example, the emotion of desire. But tell me, if that is case, how will the spectators have the real awareness of the emotion of desire? Now the opponent will retort: This is what we have been saying there is no REAL awareness of desire here. The spectators will very well know that this

is just an IMITATION of the vibhavas, etc. that exist in the fictional world of the character. Since, they know that the vibhavas, etc. are artificial, they will never take the emotion of the actor as the actual emotion of desire. For them, this will appear to be an imitation of desire.

Bhatta Tauta now says that this is not always possible. It is true that the artificial vibhavas, etc. will appear to be artificial to a person who knows the difference between the artificial and the original vibhavas. In other words, only a knowledgeable person will be able to distinguish between what is artificial and what is real. For an ignorant person, even the so-called imitated vibhavas will function as real vibhavas. For such a person, there is no question of imitation here. Here, Bhatta Tauta brings in the analogy of two kinds of scorpions—the scorpion that is born out of cow dung and the scorpion that is born out of another scorpion. Seeing a scorpion born out of dung, an inexperienced person will say that it is the kind of scorpion born out of another scorpion. In the same way, we do not often infer an IMITATION of desire from artificial reactions. We take them for real expression of desire.

Now, the opponent will come up with another proposition. The actor who is angry on stage is not really angry, but only appears to be so for the spectators. In other words, the opponent says that this is an imitation based on similarity, not an exact reproduction or imitation. The spectators who are watching an actor on stage will say that he and his emotions are similar to the character and the character's emotions. Bhatta Tauta says that the actor may be similar to an angry man and this similarity must be coming from his frowning and so on. This similarity is exactly like the resemblance between a real ox and another ox-like species due to the shape of the muzzle etc. That is to say, this is just the physical similarity of the actions of two people who are angry.

We cannot say that the spectators perceive any similarity between the emotion of the actor and the character. In the case of emotions, a physical reproduction is not possible, since emotion is a mental entity. Then, how can the spectators think that there is similarity in terms of the actor's emotion and the character's emotion?

No physical signs may be taken as the imitation of an emotion because feeling is not a physical element. The bottom line of the argument is that emotions cannot be imitated since they are not perceptible to the sensory organs. What is being imitated as the emotion is just physical actions which follow the experience of the emotion, not the emotion per se. One will be able to

reproduce or imitate the similarity between the physical appearance of a character who is angry and the actor who is reproducing the physical features of an angry person. It cannot be called the imitation of an emotion. How can someone imitate something that is not perceptible to the sensory organs.

Also, Tauta points out that while watching the actor reproducing the physical features of angry man, the spectators know that the actor is in a particular mental state. The spectators also share that mental state. But it incorrect to say that this an IMITATION of an emotion.