

An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory

Dr. Sreenath VS

Humanities and Social Sciences

Indian Institute of Science Education and Research - Bhopal

Lecture- 39

Guna or Poetic Merit: Vamana's Contribution

Hello everyone,

In the previous video lecture, we saw the theory of guṇa conceptualized by 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 the 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 or style. 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 people who follow the old tradition blindly who come up with this distinction. This view of Udbhaṭa's was later criticized by Vāmana. Not only did Vāmana criticize the views of Udbhaṭa, he also made some original contributions to the theory of guṇa. In this class, we will be going to see the view of Vāmana who made revolutionary contributions to literary theory through his novel conception of the notion of poetic merits.

Like Bharata, Vāmana also considers guṇa as the absence of doṣas. He says, "Qualities or guṇas principally consists in the absence of 'defects.'" Vāmana in Kāvyaālaṅkārasūtravṛtti talked about ten guṇas namely, ojas, prasāda, śleṣa, samatā, samadhi, mādhurya, sukamāratā, udāratva, arthavyakti, and kānti. These are the same guṇas listed by Daṇḍin and Bharata earlier, but Vāmana applied it to śabda or the word and artha or the meaning. So, each guṇa had an application to sound as well as sense. Before we get into a serious discussion about the other aspects related to guṇa, let us take a look at the definition of śabda- guṇas and artha- guṇas furnished by Vāmana. First, we will see śabda- guṇas. The primary śabda- guṇa that Vāmana mentions is ojas.

Ojas is the compactness of word structure, and it results from the maturity of conception. The next guṇa that he refers to is prasāda. What is prasāda? Prasāda is the flexibility of the structure. It is possible for an opponent to argue here that prasāda, which is the flexibility of structure, cannot become a guṇa since it is the opposite of the guṇa Ojas, which is the compactness of word structure. Vāmana says that there is no problem with this conception. And he has an answer to this problem as well. He says, “prasāda in its pure form is definitely a doṣa. But when it is mixed with the quality called ojas, it turns out to be a guṇa. Vāmana says that “Just as the mixture of pain and pleasure in dramatic performances of tragic events gives the readers happiness, so also the mixture of prasāda and ojas gives us pleasure. Sometimes, the degree of ojas will be higher than that of prasāda. At some other times, prasāda will be higher in intensity than ojas. Sometimes, the degree of both these qualities will be the same. In all these forms, the mixture of compactness of structure we find in *ojas* and the flexibility of structure found in *prasada* enlivens the heart of the readers.

The next guṇa that Vamana describes is śleṣa. Śleṣa is the smooth combination of words. Vāmana says by śleṣa is meant that quality whereby a number of words coalesce together and appear to be a single word. As an example of this, Vāmana cites the verse *astyustarasyām diśi devatātmā* from Kumārasambhava of Kālidāsa. Samatā is the next quality that Vāmana is explaining. He says that it is a quality that results from the similarity of word construction. It is the homogeneity of diction. In other words, “When the style of diction employed in the beginning of a verse or of a complete poetical work is continued to the end, we have what is called samatā. Samādhi is the symmetry of words. It consists in the orderly sequence of ‘ascent’ and ‘descent.’ Vāmana further explains this quality in the following words. “A line or verse is said to have the quality of ‘symmetry’ when it is found to be so worded that the heightening effect of the ‘forcible’ style is toned down by a judicious sprinkling of words of the ‘softer’ kind; or when the softening effect of the less vigorous style is heightened by the introduction of words of the forcible kind.’ At this juncture, Vāmana also presents a purvapakṣa criticism against the quality called samādhi. The opponent will now argue that samādhi is not a guṇa per se since it is already found in ojas and prasāda. Vāmana says, “Some critics are of the view that samādhi is not a separate quality by itself, as the ascent and descent are the same as ojas and prasāda respectively.” But Vāmana does not agree with this observation. He says, “It is not right to assert that ‘ascent’ consists in ojas and ‘descent’ in prasāda because it is possible to find ojas without ‘ascent’ and prasāda without ‘descent.’

The next quality that Vāmana mentions is mādhyurya. What is mādhyurya? Mādhyurya is the combination of words without long compounds. In other words, “When in a piece of composition, the words are quite distinct from one another, it is said to have the quality of ‘sweetness.’ That is to say, ‘Sweetness consists in the absence of long compounds’”.

Next is saukumārya. Saukumārya is the lack of harsh sounds. The next guṇa, called *udārata*, is the liveliness of words. Vāmana further exemplifies his position. He says, “It is that quality by virtue of which people feel that the words are dancing. It is called the vikaṭatva of words. In other words, the arrangements of words in such a manner that the number of letters in them gradually increase. The penultimate guṇa that Vāmana mentions is artha-vyakti. It is the explicitness of words. Finally, the last guṇa is kānti. Kānti is the richness of words. For example, if we use the word ‘welkin’ instead of ‘sky’, or ‘evince,’ instead of ‘to show,’ we are trying to attain the richness of words or kānti .

Finally, in a series of sūtras, Vāmana succinctly summarizes all these ten śabdaguṇas. I will reproduce Vāmana’s summary for your reference. Vamana says, "The poets give the name ojas to the ornate style. Words abounding in this quality are very pleasant to the ear. When ojas, which is characterized by the presence of compounds, is accompanied by plainness, it is called prasāda. Without this quality, there is no delectation in a poetical work. Śleṣa is that excellent quality by which words seamlessly merge with each other, in such a manner that they appear as one word. Here conjunctions of letters are not noticed, and the conjunction of words looks smooth and natural. Samatā is the quality consisting in the use of the same style of diction in each foot or verse. Samādhi is the symmetry of words. It consists in the orderly sequence of ‘ascent’ and ‘descent.’ Mādhyurya is the combination of words without long compounds. Saukumārya is the lack of harsh sounds. Udārata is the liveliness of words. Artha-vyakti is the explicitness of words. And finally, kānti is the richness of words.

Vāmana observes that the existence of these qualities cannot be denied since they actually exist. He also says that these qualities are not naturally present in writing. If they were naturally present in writing, then they would have been present in all writings. But that is not the case in reality. So, it can be found only in those writings which are known for their special composition or viśiṣṭapadaracanā rīti.

After explaining the śabdagaṇas, Vāmana goes on to explain the artha gaṇas or the poetic merits of sense. The names that Vāmana gives to the artha gaṇas are as same as the names of śabdagaṇas. The artha gaṇa called ojas is the maturity of conception. According to Vāmana, it is of five kinds: the kind of ojas where a whole sentence is used to express what is expressible by a single word; the variety where a single word is used to express what is expressible by a sentence; the variety where there is brevity, that is one sentence serving the function of many sentences; the variety of ojas where many sentences are used to express what can be stated by a single sentence and finally the type where qualifications are added with a purpose. The second guna that he mentions is prasāda. It is the clarity of meaning achieved from the removal of redundant words. The next arthaguna is śleṣa. What is śleṣa? Śleṣa is the unity or the perfect commingling of many ideas in a poetic composition. The next guna samatā consists in the non-relinquishment of proper sequence or continuity. Samādhi is the comprehension of meaning. This is the quality arising out of the creation of an elegant idea or meaning by keeping the mind concentrated. The meaning that is being created in this manner is of two kinds, namely *ayoni* and *anyacchāyoni*. *Ayoni* is the meaning originally created by the poet, while *anyacchāyoni* is a meaning borrowed from other sources. The original meaning has its source in the collected mind of the poet, while the other kind has its source in the works of other poets. This category called *ayoni* or the original meaning can again be divided into two, namely explicit or *vyakta* and subtle or *sūkṣma*. The meaning that can easily be comprehended is called explicit or *vyakta* and the meaning that can be understood only through proper analysis and reflection is called subtle or *sūkṣma*. The subtle or *sūkṣma* is again of two kinds, namely ॐ (bhavya) and *vāsanīya*. Bhavya variety of meaning is that which can be comprehended by a little thought, while *vāsanīya* is that which can be comprehended through a deep thought.

The next quality is mādhyurya. Mādhyurya is striking expression. Vāmana says that "Where what is said is exceptionally impressive, then we have the quality of 'sweetness'." The next arthaguna that we are going to see is saukumārya. What is this quality called saukumārya? It is the absence of harsh sounds. It is a quality that we find in euphemistic expressions. Vāmana says that, for example, if we say yaśaḥśeṣa, instead of mṛtaḥ, or if we say *devādvitīya*, instead of **ekākina**, we have the quality called saukumārya. This is somewhat similar to *vakrokti*. It arises out of *uktivaicitrya* or deviant expression. The next arthaguna is udārata. Udārata is the absence of vulgarity. The gaṇa called arthavyakti is the clarity of meaning. Finally, the last gaṇa is kānti. Kānti is the ability to generate rasas. Vāmana's

concept of *kānti* as an *artha-guṇa* was a major advancement from the previous theoretical position of *alaṅkāra*, since this brought *rasa* into the remit of a formalistic perception of literary beauty.

Having seen all these ten *arthaguṇas*, let us summarize these *guṇas* once again. *Ojas* is the maturity of conception. *Prasāda*. It is the clarity of meaning achieved from the removal of redundant words. *Śleṣa* is the unity or the perfect commingling of many ideas in a poetic composition. *Mādhurya* is striking expression. *Samatā* consists in the non-relinquishment of proper sequence or continuity. *Samādhi* is the comprehension of meaning. *Saukumārya* is the absence of harsh sounds. *Udārata* is the absence of vulgarity. *Arthavyakti* is the clarity of meaning. And finally, the last *guṇa kānti* is the ability to generate *rasas*.

Finally, *Vāmana* declares that, “It is only when all the qualities are fully manifest that the poetry is said to be fully ripe or developed.” This type of poetry is said to have ripened like a mango. A poetic composition that has reached this state is said to have reached *amra pāka* or the level of a ripened mango. That poetry, where we have only the grammatically correct forms of nouns and verbs and where subject-matter is obscene and is lacking in qualities, is said to have ripened only like a *brinjal*. That means although it has ripened, it is not fit for eating. *Vāmana* sees a *guṇa* or poetic merit as the vital force of literature. According to him, a verbal expression without *guṇa* cannot become a *kāvya*, just as a group of words without syntax cannot make a coherent meaning. *Vāmana*’s observation in this regard deserves a special mention. He observes, “That piece of composition, the meaning whereof is entirely devoid of all qualities, is absolutely worthless; such sentences, for instance, as *ten pomegranates* and the like, do not deserve the slightest consideration”. *Vāmana* borrows this example from *Patañjali*’s *Mahābhāshya*. *Abhinavagupta* also reproduces a fragment of this quotation in his *Locana* on *Ānandavardhana*’s *Dhvanyāloka*, although it is in a different context.

Vāmana did not consider *alaṅkāras* and *guṇas* to be of equal importance. He made a clear-cut distinction between *guṇa* and *alaṅkāra*. This approach was a different from the approach of *Bhāmaha*, *Daṇḍin*, and *Udbhaṭa*. *Vāmana* used the term *alaṅkāra* in its broader sense of beauty. *Vāmana* says that beauty is always a necessary attribute for a poetic work, but that beauty does not need to necessarily arise from poetic figures of speech alone. It has its source

in gunas as well. According to Vāmana, the function of alaṅkāra is only to enhance the beauty of kāvya which is already beautified by the presence of guṇas.

Vāmana's observations about the importance of guṇa are noteworthy here, although they may appear to be politically incorrect. He says, "just as a young woman endowed with beauty looks charming, and the wearing of ornaments enhances this natural charm, so in the case of poetry also if it is endowed with pure qualities, it acquires a peculiar charm, and the presence of the ornaments or figures of speech serves to enhance this charm. On the other hand, if the woman happens to be devoid of youth, the addition of ornaments, even though excellent in themselves, only serves to accentuate the ugliness; so in the case of poetry also, if the words are devoid of the qualities of style, the presence of figures of speech becomes a source of inelegance only." What Vāmana says, is that if a kāvya is devoid of guṇas, it cannot look good with the mere presence of alaṅkāras. The major difference between guṇas and alaṅkāras was that guṇas were permanent while alaṅkāras were not; a poem could be beautiful even without figurative language but it could not do without the guṇas that help to create a good rīti. Vāmana also rejects the conception that guna is the result of a particular kind of reading or pāṭhadharma. The advocates of this theory hold that 'non-stop' reading is ojas, reading with stops here and there is prasāda, reading with rise and fall, perhaps in a sing-song manner is mādhurya. Clear and perfect reading with proper pronunciation is audādyā. And reading in neither too low nor too high a pitch is Sāmya. We will see this theory in detail when we see the theory of guna conceptualized by Hemacandra.

We have discussed quite a lot of points in this class today. I will wrap up the class by summarizing all the major points we have discussed today. We saw that the theory of guna was properly conceptualized by Vamana. Vamana divided gunas into two broad categories namely sabda gunas and artha gunas. Sabdagunas are the poetic merits concerning the sound, while artha gunas are the ones that deal with the sound. He lists ten gunas under each category. According to Vamana, gunas are more important than alankaras. The only function of alankara is to beautify a kavya that is already beautified by gunas. In the next class, we will see the theory of guna conceptualized by Anandavardhana and Pratiharenduraja.