

An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory

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Lecture- 42

Guna or Poetic Merit: Visvesvara and the author of Agnipurana

Hello everyone,

In the previous video lecture, we saw the theory of guna vis-à-vis Bhoja. We have seen that in Bhoja's theoretical corpus, the number of guṇas have increased from ten to twenty-four. Bhoja also follows the general pattern of sabda guṇas and artha guṇas. A new category of guṇas that we find in Bhoja is the guna called vaiśeṣika guna. As we have seen, vaiśeṣika guṇas are in fact dosas. But these dosas can sometimes turn out to be guṇas in the representation of certain characters. In this class, we are going to see the theory of guṇa conceptualized by two literary theoreticians, namely Viśveśvara and the author of Agnipurāṇa. First, let us see how Viśveśvara conceptualizes guṇa.

We see the exposition of Viśveśvara's idea of guṇa in his famous Camatkāracandrika. Before we discuss Viśveśvara's theory of guṇa, let us briefly talk about Viśveśvara. Viśveśvara was a poet in the court of Saiṅgabhūpāla, the author of Rasāṅghasudhākara. Viśveśvara closely follows Bhoja in his conception of guṇas, except for a few minor deviations. While Bhoja mentions twenty-four guṇas, Viśveśvara accepts only twenty three. He omits Bhoja's prauḍhi. Viśveśvara removes prauḍhi from the section of guṇas and keeps it in the category of alaṅkāra. In Viśveśvara, the guṇa which Bhoja calls sauśabdya is renamed śabdasaṃskāra. Similarly, Bhoja's sammiti is renamed sammitatva. It is also important to note that unlike Bhoja, Viśveśvara does not divide guṇas into śabdaguṇas and arth guṇas. He calls all the guṇas collectively kāvyāguṇas.

Now, let us turn our attention to Agnipurāṇa. In the first week, we have formed an overview of Agnipurāṇa and we know that it is of unknown authorship. The author of Agnipurāṇa also subscribes to the view of Vāmana that a linguistic composition becomes a kāvya when it is embellished by guṇa. The author of Agnipurāṇa notes, "Poetry, even though embellished, does not produce pleasure, if it is devoid of guṇas. A necklace would only be burdensome to women, if their bodies are not beautiful".

Agnipurāna also rejects the conventional notion that guṇas are not mere absence of defects. In other words, guṇas cannot be attained just by keeping certain doṣas at bay. They are qualities with some positive characteristics. The observation of the Agnipurānakāra is worth quoting in this context. The author says, "It cannot be said that excellence would only be the absence of a defect. Excellences such as śleṣa or coalescence and the like and defects such as gudhārtha or obscurity of sense and the like have been distinguished from one another."

The author of Agnipurāna classifies the guṇas first under two heads, namely sāmānya and vaiśeṣika. The sāmānya is further classified into two categories, viz. śabda-guṇa, artha guṇa and ubhayaguṇa. As we all know, the śabda guṇas are poetic merits of sound, the artha guṇas are poetic merits related to sense, and finally ubhayaguṇas are guṇas related both sound and sense. The śabdaguṇas of the poetic merits of the sound, mentioned by the author of Agnipurāna, are seven in number. These include śleṣa, lālitya, gāmbhīrya, sukumārata, audārya, ojas and satyeva yaugikī.

Let us take a look at them in detail. The first guṇa we are going to see is śleṣa. According to Agnipurāna, śleṣa is a quality that arises out of the particular arrangement of words which produces a coalescence or cohesiveness in the structure. To quote Agnipurāna, "that is said to be śleṣa or the coalescence in which there is a closely coalesced arrangement of words". It is not clear what the author means by the guṇa lālitya. In the guṇa called lālitya, the author of Agnipurāna says, the letters are already combined in the words by grammatical conventions and there is hardly any necessity of further euphonic combinations. The next guṇa is gāmbhīrya. The Gāmbhīrya is the quality of containing all concepts of dhvani. Agnipurāna defines gāmbhīrya as follows. "The wise name it as Depth which is a composition chiselled by special characteristics and which contains elevated words". The next śabdaguṇa that we are going to see is sukumārata. Sukumārata consists in words composed mostly of syllables that are not harsh. Audārya is the quality that arises out of clearness of expressions. Ojas is the abundance of compounds. Agnipurāna's definition of ojas is very interesting. It says, "Ojas is the life of prose, etc. From the Highest Being to a clump of grass, manliness comes by ojas alone". The last, that is the seventh, śabda-guṇa that is mentioned in Agnipurāna is satyeva yaugikī. It is not clear what the author means by this particular guṇa.

Now, let us take a look at the artha guṇas. Artha guṇas are also six in number. The artha-guṇas mentioned by the author include mādhyurya, samvidhāna, komalatā, udāratā, prauḍhi and sāmāyikatā. Let us see these six guṇas in detail. The first one we are going to see is mādhyurya. Mādhyurya refers to the process of maintaining tranquil, tolerance and calmness of appearance even under the influence of emotions like anger and malice. Agnipurāṇa defines mādhyurya in the following words, "The gravity of appearance even in anger and deep state of composure is mādhyurya." It should be noted that in this particular context the word mādhyurya is used in the sense of tranquillity, not in the sense of 'sweetness.' Maybe, it could be argued that here the word mādhyurya is used to refer to the 'sweetness' that arise out of this tranquillity of emotions. The next artha guṇa is samvidhāna. What is samvidhāna? Samvidhāna represents the quality that arises out of guṇas finding their proper place. Komalatva is the quality resulting from the special arrangement of words which is devoid of harshness and inelegance. Agnipurāṇa defines komalatā as follows: "An arrangement of words free from rigidity that results from setting aside the laxity of structure" The quality called udāratā is the ability of a word to make its meaning compressible for the readers even at a superficial attempt. Prauḍhi is the mature logical reasoning that help the completion of the subject of discourse. According to Agnipurāṇa, "That is declared prauḍhi in which there are mature reasonings impregnated with logical reasonings bringing about accomplishment of what is intended". We are not sure what the author of Agnipurāṇa means by the guṇa sāmāyikatā. According to Rāghavan, the guṇa called sāmāyikatā may mean the suggestion by the poet of an etymology.

We have seen the first two categories under sāmānya guṇa, namely śabdaguṇa and artha guṇa. Now, the last category under sāmānya guṇa which is none other than ubhayaguṇa. What is an ubhayaguṇa? According to Agnipurāṇa, "That which embellishes both word and sense is known by the name ubhayaguṇa. Ubhaya guṇas are also classified into six subcategories, namely prasāda, saubhāgya, yathāsamkhyā, prāśastya, pāka and rāga. Let us see these guṇas one by one. Prasāda consists of the use of words whose meanings are too well-known. According to Agnipurāṇa, "Prasāda is glorified as consisting of words possessing very well-known sense. The next guṇa is saubhāgya. What is saubhāgya? Saubhāgya is very much related to Daṇḍin's idea of udārata. So saubhāgya is the expression of some high merit. According to Agnipurāṇa, "That which, when expressed, suggests some eminent attribute, is declared by the wise as saubhāgya or loveliness. The next ubhayaguṇa that Agnipurāṇa talks about is yathāsamkhyā. Yathāsamkhyā implies the subsequent mention of things in the order of things previously mentioned. The next poetic merit is prāśastya. Prāśastya is praiseworthiness. It is

the description of even a terrible object by means of a word that is not terrible or objectionable. This poetic merit is very much similar to Vamana's arthaguṇa saukumarya, where inauspicious words like mṛtaḥ etc. are avoided by the use of the more agreeable expressions like yasaḥśesa, etc. This also corresponds to the arthaguna suśabdata of Bhoja. The next poetic merit is pāka. Pāka is the maturity which implies the highest stage of perfection of a poetic composition. There are four kinds of pākas namely amra-pāka (or the poetic composition which is ripened like the mango), nālikera- pāka (or the poetic composition which is ripened like the coconut), mṛdvikā -pāka (or the poetic composition which is ripened like the grape) and finally vṛntāka pāka (or the poetic composition which is ripened like the grape). For the author of Agnipurāṇa, the poetic composition which is ripened like the grape or the mṛdvikā -pāka is the best form of poetic composition. This is very much similar to what Bhoja calls prauḍhi.

Now, the last guṇa which is rāga. Rāga is a particular quality used with a view to attain the beauty of poetry. Agnipurāṇa defines rāga as follows. "It is glorified as tint which is a special characteristic for the purpose of poetic composition. It excels even the natural grace, when put to constant practice. It is again of three varieties : yellow, saffron and indigo. That which is within the range of its own characteristics is to be recognised as the particular ".

Now, the last variety of guṇa, which is called vaiśeṣika guṇa. It is significant to note that the author does not talk much about vaiśeṣika guṇas except for the observation that, "these excellences are based upon the particular characteristic of an individual author and must be defined in terms of his own peculiar ideas for what lies in the power of a particular individual cannot be brought under the scope of hard and fast rules".

The next author we are going to see is Vidyānātha, the author of Pratāparudrīya. Vidyānātha also follows Bhoja to a great extent in his approach to the theory of guṇa. Following Bhoja, Vidyānātha, in the fourth chapter of his Pratāparudrīya, lists twenty-four guṇas, although the order of these guṇas slightly vary. An important observation of Vidyānātha is that out of these twenty-four guṇas only some are actual guṇas, while many others are just the reversal of certain doṣas. The criterion for Vidyānātha to conceptualize the idea of guṇa is very interesting. According to him, guṇas perform two functions. First of all, some guṇas elevate the poetic utterance by their presence, while some others ward-offs doṣas. In other words, some are guṇas, in themselves; while some others attain the status of guṇas by virtue of their ability to ward-off doṣas. According to Vidyānātha, the first category is more important than the second one.

Vidyānātha's observation is worth quoting here. Vidyānātha notes, "Among the above, some are considered qualities as they ward off the blemishes and others become qualities as they become the cause of elevation by nature itself. Here those that elevate the charm by themselves are considered most excellent. A section of the scholars does not accept those that ward off the blemishes as qualities. It is only in the opinion of those who accept that the absence of blemish is the quality, that saukumārya, etc. becomes the qualities".

Vidyānātha also does not accept the division of guṇas into artha guṇas and śabda guṇas. He is of the view that there is no category called artha guṇa. Vidyānātha also thinks that guṇas are identical with samghaṭana. This shows that Vidyānātha's allegiance is with the pre-Ānandavardhana scholars.