

An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory

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Lecture- 43

Guna or Poetic Merit: Mammata's View

Hello everyone,

In

the previous classes, we saw the theory of guṇa in connection with critics like Bharata, Bhāma, Daṇḍin, Udbhaṭa, Vāmana, Ānandavardhana, Kuntaka and so on. Today, we are going to see the theory of guṇa as conceived by Mammaṭa. Both Mammaṭa and Ānandavardhana are of the same opinion on the question of kāvya guṇas or poetic merits.

Like Ānandavardhana, Mammaṭa also agrees with the view that there are only three guṇas, namely mādhyurya, ojas and prasāda. It is also important to note that Mammaṭa rejects all the arthaguṇas mentioned by Vāmana, citing the reason that they are not guṇas in themselves, rather they are mere negations of some poetic defects or doṣas. For Mammaṭa, mādhyurya is found originally in the *śṛṅgāra*, especially *sambhoga-śṛṅgāra*. It can also be found present in increasing degrees in rasas such as *karuṇa*, *vipralambha śṛṅgāra* and *śānta rasas*. He is of the view that the quality called *ojas* resides generally in the *vīra rasa* or the aesthetic emotion of the heroic. Although it is predominantly found in the *vīra rasa*, it is also found in increasing degrees in *bībhatsa* and *raudra rasas*. According to Mammaṭa, the quality, *ojas*, leads to a glow in the form of an expansion of the heart. The last guṇa that Mammaṭa mentions is prasāda. According to Mammaṭa, this quality called prasāda pervades the mind like fire among dry fuel or like a clear and clean stream of water. Lucidity is the major characteristic of this guṇa and its presence is desirable everywhere. Mammaṭa notes that prasāda guṇa has the ability to bring forth clearly the sense of a passage, as soon as it is read out.

Each of the these three guṇas accepted in the new theory is produced by a particular arrangement of letters or varṇa, compounds or samāsa and style of composition or racanā. To achieve the quality of mādhyurya, Mammaṭa says, the sparśa consonants, with the exception of those of the ṭa-group, need to be combined with the last consonant of their group. Mādhyurya can also be achieved through the employment of consonants r and ṇ, if they are short. And

finally the compounds of medium length and harmonious diction are also used to achieve *mādhurya*. Mammaṭa makes this formula simpler for us. He says that to achieve the quality called *mādhurya* “all consonants from *k* to *m*, except for *ṭ*, *ṭh*, *ḍ*, and *ḍh*, have to be combined with the last letter of their respective groups; it can also be achieved when *r* and *ṛ* are combined with short vowels; and finally expressions devoid of compounds or compounds of medium length are also suggestive of the quality called *mādhurya*.”

Now, how to achieve the quality called *Ojas*? This can also be achieved through a particular combination of letters or *varṇa*, compounds or *samāsa* and style of composition or *racanā*. It can be achieved through the combination of the first and third letters of a group with those following them, i.e, with the second and fourth respectively; through any consonant having *r* either above or below it and finally through the combination of similar consonants, the entire *ṭ* group with the exception of *ṛ* and the consonants *ṣ* and *ś*. As for the compounds, *ojas* can be achieved through long compounds. The writing style that suits this quality is bombastic. Finally, how to achieve *prasāda*? No particular letters or compounds are rigidly reserved for *prasāda*. Any letter or compound can be used to achieve this poetic merit provided the clarity of meaning is not lost. According to Mammaṭa, clarity or perspicuity is the very soul of this quality. So, it has to be rigorously abandoned.

After this, Mammaṭa takes up the crucial question that we are also eager to grapple with: “Why should the number of *guṇa* be three only, and not ten?” Mammaṭa shows three grounds on which he eliminates the other *guṇas*. First—certain *guṇas* can be included under the three *guṇas* namely *mādhurya*, *ojas* and *prasāda*. Secondly, many of the *guṇas* mentioned by scholars like Vāmana are mere absence of *doṣas* and hence, they are not *guṇa* in themselves. Thirdly, some of the *guṇas* mentioned by the predecessors are not *guṇas* at all, rather they are *doṣas*. In other words, they are positive *doṣas*, as Raghavan points out.

Let us take a look at each of these points one by one. We have seen that the first reason for eliminating the other *guṇas* is that many of them can be subsumed under one of these three cardinal *gunas*, namely *mādhurya*, *ojas* and *prasāda*. The first category of *guṇas* that Mammaṭa focuses on is *śabdaguṇa*. Let us see how Mammaṭa limits the number of *śabdaguṇas* to three.

Thus, the qualities namely *ślesha* or coalescence of words, *samādhi* or the adjustment of structural ascent and descent and *udārata* or ‘the magnificence achieved by the fanciful

grouping of words' are all subsumed under the single quality called ojas. The quality called *arthavyakti* or the clarity and clearness of meaning is included under *prasāda*. Now, Mammaṭa eliminates some other *guṇas* on the ground that they are not *guṇas*, rather they are just the opposites of some *doṣas* or faults. The two *guṇas* that Mammaṭa rejects in this fashion include *sukumārata* and *kānti*. Mammaṭa says that since *sukumārata* and *kānti* are the opposites of *pāruṣya* or *hārshness* and *grāmya* or *uncouthness*, they merely indicate the absence of *doṣas*. They cannot be considered *guṇas* per se. Finally, Mammaṭa rejects *samatā* from the category of *guṇa*, citing the reason that it is a poetic fault. For Mammaṭa, *samatā* is a *doṣa*, not a *guṇa* because the quality called *samatā* insists on the poet's adherence to the same combination of letters from the beginning to the end. Mammaṭa is of the opinion that it is imperative that the author should change his style according to the nature of the subject he is treating. So, *samatā* that demands uniformity can adversely impact the poetic excellence.

After this, Mammaṭa goes on to criticize Vāmana's idea of *artha guṇas*. According to Vāmana, many of the *artha guṇas* that Vāmana cites are not *guṇas*. There is nothing positive in them; they are merely the negation of some poetic faults or *doṣas*. First of all, the *artha guṇa* called *ojas* which is the presentation of an idea in such a way that the meaning appears elegant. Vāmana talks about three ways in which this particular elegance or *prauḍhi* can be achieved. First of all, 'through the use of a sentence instead of a word' secondly, 'through the use of a word instead of a sentence that signifies the same idea;' thirdly, through 'the use of words separately;' then 'through the use of compounds or *samasthapada*' and finally through 'the use of effective epithet.' Mammaṭa's criticism against this *artha guṇa* is particular. He says that this cannot be considered a *guṇa* because the second way in which *prauḍhi* can be achieved, that is through the use of a word instead of a sentence that signifies the same idea, is only *vaicitrya* and it is not a *guṇa*. Similarly, *prasāda* or the avoidance of redundant words is the negation of the defect of tautology or *adhika padatva*. The same is the case with *mādhurya* which focuses on *uktivaicityra* or deviant utterance. This is only, says Mammaṭa, a negation of the defect called monotony. According to Mammaṭa, the *guṇa* called *saukumārya*, which is the avoidance of rugged words, is only the negation of the defect called *amaṅgalatva* or cultural unsophistication. *Udārata* is only an absence of the defect called vulgarity or *aślīlata* and *grāmyatā*. So, according to Mammaṭa, there is nothing positive in it. The quality called *arthavyakti* which is the clear representation of an idea or object or entity is already subsumed under the *alaṅkāra svabhāvokti*. The same holds true for *kānti* which is the

quality of suggesting rasas. According to Mammaṭa this is already included under dhvani. Śleṣa is the combination of several circumstances or sequence of several actions. For Mammaṭa, it is only poetic fancy. Samatā is the absence of discontinuity in terms of meaning. It is just the negation of a defect called digression. Mammaṭa says that this cannot be considered a quality because one does not need to strive hard to achieve it. He asks, "Which man, unless he were mad, would ever begin with one thing and then speak of a totally different thing?" The last quality of meaning that Mammaṭa criticizes is samādhī. Samādhī is the true appreciation of the meaning, as being original or imitated. Mammaṭa says that it is not a poetic merit because it is not something that the poet can achieve. It is up to the reader to decide if a poem is original or not.

Like Ānandavardhana, Mammaṭa also sees *guṇas* as the elements simultaneously resulting from and enriching the *rasas*. He says, "Just as bravery and such qualities belong to the soul, not to the body, so also sweetness and other excellences belong to rasas." He is against the opinion that letters are the locus of *guṇas*. The opponent makes his point that letters can produce *guṇas* by referring to an analogy between the human body and the qualities like courage, and *kāvyaśarīra* and qualities of *kāvya*. Mammaṭa says the opponent will now argue that qualities like courage can result from the body. It does not need to come from the atman or soul. For example, in some cases, the opponent argues, it so happens that people find bravery co-existing with the large-sized body and come to speak of the body itself as 'brave.' In the same way, *guṇas* can also belong to letters. It is not necessary that they need to come from the soul. Just as the body can at times reveal the qualities like bravery, so also *guṇas* can result from the parts of *kāvyaśarīra* like *varna* or letters.

But Mammaṭa refutes this position. He is of the view that this position cannot be considered true. He talks in extension about the fundamental problems with this analogy. Some people having a large-sized body are brave. It is true. But it cannot function as a general truth. There are people who have large-sized body, yet not courageous. Similarly, some courageous people are also people with lean body, yet they are brave. So, the qualities like courage have nothing to do with the size of one's body. Similarly, *guṇas* have nothing to do with letters. He is of the view that this analogy, therefore, does not make any sense in this context. According to Mammaṭa, letters only make these qualities perceptible to the readers. He further observes, "It is in view of all this divergent usage that it has been asserted in the text that sweetness and other excellences are properties really belonging to the rasas, and what the properly selected

letters do is only to render such qualities perceptible; and those qualities do not subsist in the letters entirely."

Mammaṭa, then, goes on to criticise two earlier views on the importance and position of *guṇas* and *alaṅkāras*. Some people are of the view that there is no difference between *guṇas* and *alaṅkāras*. The first view is that there is absolutely no difference between *guṇas* and *alaṅkāras*. According to the opponent, some people are of the view that the distinction between *guṇas* and *alaṅkāras* is as same as the difference between qualities like bravery and ornaments like necklace. "While the former subsists by inheritance, the latter is present only by conjunction." The opponent is of the view that any distinction drawn between these two must be regarded as merely based on a blind tradition—a case of sheep blindly following another. So, according to the opponent both these elements, that is *guṇas* and *alaṅkāras* are inherent qualities of *kāvya*. So, what is true in the case of *laukika guṇa* and *alaṅkāra* is not so in the case of *kāvya guṇa* and *kāvya alaṅkāra*, both of which subsist by inherence alone. In other words, there is no distinction between *guṇas* and *alaṅkāras*. Both are the inherent elements in *kāvya* and both add to the beauty of poetic utterance. Mammaṭa rejects this view. He is of the view that the distinction between *guṇas* and *alaṅkāras* is as same as the difference between qualities like bravery and ornaments like necklace. "While the former subsists by inheritance, the latter is present only by conjunction." Mammaṭa is also against the view that *guṇas* are more important than *alaṅkāras* in poetry. Mammaṭa observes, "Then again, some people have stated the distinction in the form that "while excellences serve to produce charm in poetry, ornaments serve to heighten the charm already produced." This is also not right." According to him, the *guṇas* are always more important than *alaṅkāras* in poetry. He also insists that the presence all the *guṇas* are necessary for the real poetic charm.