

**An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory**  
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**Lecture- 45**  
**Theory of Dosa or Poetic Blemish: Bharata's View**

Hello everyone,

In the previous lectures, we were dealing with the theory of *guṇa*. In this lecture, we are going to deal with the opposite of *guṇa* which is *doṣa* or poetic faults. What is a *doṣa* or a poetic fault? A *doṣa* or a poetic fault is a blemish that a poet should never commit, while composing a work of literature. In other words, if there are qualities that enhance the beauty of a literary work, there should be contrarian aspects that affect it adversely. These are called *doṣas* or flaws that have to be avoided. In what is perhaps a departure from Western classical tradition, most of the Indian literary theorists, starting with Bharata, paid a lot of attention to this negative aspect of poetic creation. In other words, Sanskrit literary theoreticians believed in identifying pitfalls and warning potential authors against them. Faults can occur in a literary work in many ways. Anything that adversely affects the meaning and hinders the proper enjoyment of the work can be counted as a fault. It can prevent, delay, or destroy aesthetic appreciation.

Like many other concepts that we saw earlier, the history of the concept of *doṣa* can also be traced back to Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Bharata defined *guṇa* as the absence of *doṣas*. But, we can see this basic definition undergoing a drastic change down the century. While Bharata considered *doṣa* as the absence of *guṇas*, many other theorists after Bharata enhanced the scope of the theory of *doṣa*, and incorporated many other elements that were not just the opposites of the *guṇas* they were listing.

An important turning point in the intellectual history of the idea of *doṣa* is its relation with the notion of *aucitya*. We saw this idea briefly in our discussion of *aucitya*. Now we will see this aspect in detail in our forthcoming lectures on *doṣa*. Many later theorists maintained that the concept of *doṣa* could not be determined outside the overarching domain of *aucitya*. It is also important to note that *doṣa* is often contextual. For instance, double entendre, bordering on obscenity, can be seen as a flaw in the language of Falstaff, but it is really appropriate in a

character like him. Thus, a precise definition of what is a merit or a flaw is a problem. Flaws appear to be contextual and contingent on the character who is being represented on stage. Keeping this idea in mind, many later literary theoreticians came up with a new category called *vaiśeṣika guṇas*. Literary theoreticians as early as Bhāmaha has spoken about this special character of *doṣa*.

Bhāmaha's discussion in this respect happens in chapter 4 of his *Kāvyaḷaṅkāra* when he discusses the *kāvyaḷoṣa* called *punarukti*. *Punarukti* or tautology is the saying of the same thing over and over again in different words. Considering the fact that it results in boredom, creative writers and literary theoreticians unanimously opined that *punarukti* is a *doṣa* and it should be avoided from poetry. But, Bhāmaha points out that although *punarukti* is usually considered a poetic fault, it is very much acceptable in the representation of emotions such as fear, jealousy, etc. Daṇḍin also holds the same view. In the fourth chapter of his *Kāvyaḷarṣa*, Daṇḍin says that *apārtha* or incoherent argument is generally considered a poetic fault. But it becomes a *guṇa* or poetic merit in portraying the raving of a madman, or a child's prattle or the speech of person who is sick. Similarly, Daṇḍin shows the *vyabhicāra* or exception to all *doṣas*. He is fully aware that in the realm of poetry a certain thing is not a *doṣa* by its very nature.

Rudraṭa even goes to the extent of saying that almost all kinds of poetic flaws become poetic merits when occasions demand the imitation of these flaws. While representing the character of a mentally deranged person, the use of nonsense becomes inevitable. Nāmasadhu, the commentator of Rudraṭa's *Kāvyaḷaṅkāra* explains this point further. He says that when one portrays a character who is not good at speaking, all the poetic faults turn out to be poetic merits. To explain his point, he cites the instance of the funny description of the illiterate husband of the poetess, Vikaṭanitambā who is unable to pronounce words properly. Ānandavardhana also holds that the idea of *anaucitya* or impropriety is *anitya* or impermanent. For example, Ānandavardhana opines that the *doṣa* called *śrutiduṣṭa*, or the employment of harsh words, will become a *guṇa* in the case of emotions like *raudra rasa* or the aesthetic emotion of rage. Bhoja calls these kinds of *doṣas*, that is *doṣas* that can turn out to be *guṇas*, *doṣaguṇas*, or *vaiśeṣika guṇas*. It is also important to note that what is considered a *dosa* can turn out to be a *guna* later. And today's poetic merit can possibly turn out to be a *dosa* in the future. We will see this idea in detail later. In today's lecture, we are primarily going to see the idea of *doṣas*, as conceived by Bharata.

Bharata mentions ten doṣas or poetic faults in his Nāṭyaśāstra. These ten defects doṣas mentioned by Bharata include gūḍārtha, arthāntara, arthahīna, bhinnārtha, ekārtha, abhiblutārtha, nyāyāpeta, viṣama, visandhi and śabdacyuta. Let us take a look at these doṣas in detail. The first defect that we are going to take a look at is gūḍārtha. What is a gūḍārtha? Gūḍārtha, is the employment of an uncommon word, or a roundabout way to describe a common idea. Bharata opines that periphrastic or circumlocutory words often baffle the readers and delay the process of enjoyment. The next doṣa is arthāntara. arthāntara is an unnecessary description. The next poetic fault arthahīna is the use of absurd words. After arthahīna, Bharata goes on to describe the poetic fault bhinnārtha. Bhinnārtha, that Bharata mentions, is very much related to the idea of social propriety or aucitya. According to Bharata, bhinnārtha is the use of obscene and crude words. According to Bharata, bhinnārtha has got a variety. Bharata is of the view that that if what is stated by the speaker generates a new meaning that is not intended by the speaker, then also the doṣa called bhinnārtha will arise. The fifth doṣa mentioned by Bharata is ekārtha. What is ekārtha? ekārtha is punarukti or tautology. In other words, it is the repetition of the same word or idea over and over again. The next defect that Bharata lists is abhiblutārtha. If there is no connection between words or phrases in a sentence, then it will result in a doṣa called abhiblutārtha. The next doṣa is called nyāyāpeta. What is nyāyāpeta? nyāyāpeta is the use of statements that go against the well-known facts about places, time, etc. If one makes a statement that is against the facts codified in śāstras, that can also be considered a doṣa called nyāyāpeta. The eighth doṣa that Bharata talks about is viṣama. Viṣama occurs in poetry when poetical meters are mixed up. The next doṣa that Bharata elaborates on is visandhi. Visandhi occurs when syllables or words that cannot be joined together are put adjacent to each other. Finally, the last doṣa is śabdacyuta. Śabdacyuta is the cacophony resulting from the combination of dissimilar sounds.

Let us wrap up the class by seeing all these doṣas in a nutshell. Gūḍārtha, is the employment of an uncommon word, or a roundabout way to describe a common idea. Arthāntara is an unnecessary description. The next poetic fault arthahīna is the use of absurd words. Bhinnārtha denotes the use of obscene and crude words. Bhinnārtha has got a variety where if what is stated by the speaker generates a new meaning that is not intended by the speaker. Ekārtha is punarukti or tautology. Abhiblutārtha is the poetic fault resulting from the absence of connection between words or phrases in a sentence. Nyāyāpeta is the use of statements that

go against the well-known facts and the statements codified in śāstras. Viṣama occurs in poetry when poetical meters are mixed up. The doṣa called visandhi occurs when syllables or words that cannot be joined together are juxtaposed. Sabdacyuta is the cacophony resulting from the combination of dissimilar sounds. With this, I am concluding my first lecture on the concept of the concept of dosa. Soon, in the following lectures we will see how the idea of dosa was conceptualized by later theoreticians like Bhāmaha, Daṇḍin, Vāmana, Ānandavardhana and so on.