An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory
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Lecture- 05
Sanskrit Kāvyaśāstra in the Medieval Period

Hello everyone, so far, we have been talking about the early phase of Sanskrit literary theory. In this lecture, we are going to understand the state of Sanskrit poetics in the medieval phase. From around the 13th century C.E. onwards, the second phase in the history of Sanskrit kāvyaśāstra, which we can call 'the medieval phase' begins. We can safely consider the 17th century as the point at which the medieval phase of Sanskrit poetics ends.

The 17th century is considered the closing period of the medieval period precisely because it marks the beginning of colonialism, thereby inaugurating a new phase for literary theory. It is important to note that despite the strong influence of vernacular literature, during this phase, Sanskrit kāvyaśāstra continued to produce new treatises, thereby ensuring the continuum of its great lineage dating back to the 7th century C.E.

Some of the major kāvyaśāstra texts that were composed in this phase include Singabhūpāla's Rasārṇavasudhākara, Bhānudatta's Alaṅkāratilaka, Rasamañjari, and Rasataraṅgiṇi; Rūpa Gosvāmi's Nāṭakacandrika, Prabhākara Bhaṭṭa's Rasapradīpa; Keśavamiśra's Alaṅkāraśekhara; Appayya Dīkṣita's Vṛttivārttika, Kuvalayānanda, and Citramīmāṃsa; Jagannātha's Rasagaṅgādhara and Viśveśvara Pandita's Alaṅkārakaustubha, Rasacandrika, Alaṅkārapradīpa, and Alaṅkāramuktāvali.

The criticism that was conventionally directed against Sanskrit poetics in the medieval phase was that there was nothing worth mentioning happening in Sanskrit literary theory during the medieval period. For scholars like S.K De, the Medieval phase was a period of mere imitation and restatement of the old critical idioms. But, scholars like Yigal Bronner shows us that Sanskrit poetics in the medieval phase was equally innovative and powerful. Bronner, in his article "What is New and What is Navya: Sanskrit Poetics on the Eve of Colonialsim," says that medieval phase is particularly characterized by two events—one, a methodological change in the approach of Sanskrit kāvyaśāstra, and the other, the emergence of vernacular literature and poetics. First, let us see what this change in methodology means.

According to Bronner, the literary theoreticians in the medieval phase attempted to constitute a new relationship with their past. That is to say, instead of inventing any radically new critical concept like dhvani or vakrokti, they directed their energy mainly to critically examine the views of their predecessors and to answer the old questions in new ways. To mark their departure from their predecessors in terms of their mode of operation and views, these new poeticians identified themselves as navya or 'neo-intellectuals in contrast to their predecessors who they called prācīna.

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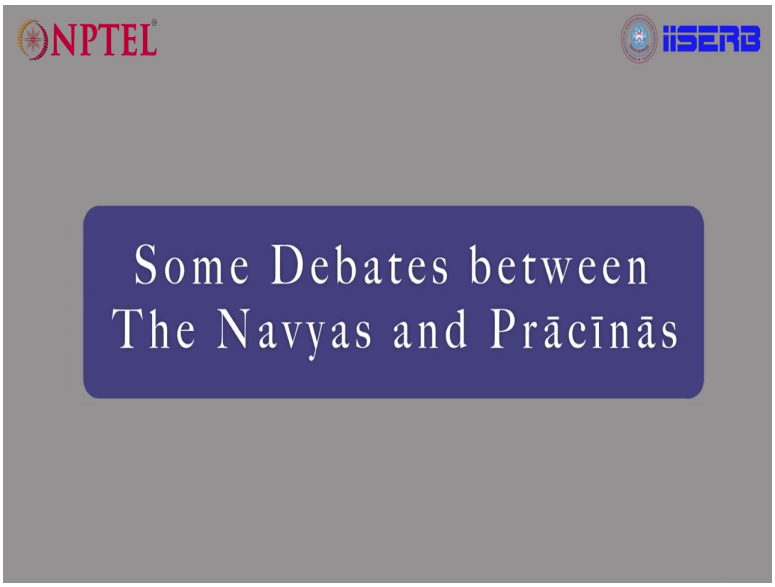

A case in point is Jagannātha's debate on the causes of rasābhāsa or the semblance of rasa in kāvya in Rasagaṅgādhara. According to the prācīnas or ancients, a woman having multiple male partners is not a case of rasābhāsa, if she is married to them. But for navyas like Jagannātha, this is a clear case of rasābhāsa. Therefore, he says that Draupadī's love for her five husbands, unlike what his predecessors think, is a clear case of rasābhāsa.

If you do not understand this concept rasabhasa, you don't need to worry now. We will take this up in a separate video.

Jagannātha's Rasagaṅgādhara is in fact replete with such refutations and reconsiderations of the theory of his predecessors. One such instance of critical dissent in Rasagaṅgādhara revolves around the question of whether bhakti should be considered a tenth rasa. Rejecting the position of his Vaishnavite predecessors like Rūpā Gosvāmi, Kavi Karṇapura, and many others, Jagannātha says that bhakti cannot be considered a rasa, as it is against the dictum of

writers like Bharata. In Rasagaṅgādhara, Jagannātha also takes his predecessor Appayya Dikṣita to task for introducing a new subspecies of the figure of speech: 'denial' (apahnuti) in Kuvalayānanda. According to Jagannātha, the proposed subtype cannot be considered a subcategory of apahnuti or 'denial,' as it is not covered by the definition of the category given in Kāvyaprakāśa, Alaṅkārasarvasva, and Appayya's own Citramīmāṃsa .

The other predecessors with whom Jagannātha expresses his difference of opinion in Rasagaṅgādhara include Ānandavardhana, Vidyānātha, Śobhākaramitra, Jayaratha, Ruyyaka, and Mammaṭa.

Siddicandra's Kāvyaprakāśa-khaṇḍana, Appayya Dīkṣita's Citramīmāṃsa and Kuvalayānanda and Jagannātha's Citramīmāṃsa-khaṇḍana are a few other remarkable treatises from the medieval phase, which aims to constitute this new relation with the past either by questioning the claims of the predecessors or by trying to answer questions which the pracinas have left unanswered. Siddicandra's Kāvyaprakāśa-khaṇḍana and Jagannātha's Citramīmāṃsa-khaṇḍana are self-evidently the criticisms of Mammaṭa's Kāvyaprakāśa and Appayya Dīkṣita's Citramīmāṃsa.

In Citramīmāṃsa, Appayya Dīkṣita innovatively redefines the figure of speech called upamā or simile. Appayya sees simile as the archetypal alaṅkāra that functions as the base of all figures of speech. He envisions simile 'as the one and only actress on the stage of kāvya'. Although Appayya is not the first critic to grant such a status to simile, the way he conceives simile is something distinct from his predecessors. Acknowledging the potency of simile to generate other alaṅkāras, Appayya compares simile to the concept of Brahman in the phenomenal world. Just as Brahman takes on various shapes, so also upamā in the figurative realm assumes the shape of different figures of speech. The way he presents upamā in Citramīmāṃsa is also in conjunction with his Vedantic disposition of the same.

Until Appayya's intervention, there had been an unwritten rule in literary science that while presenting a figure of speech, one should necessarily define it. Appayya departs from this age-old practice by not defining what upamā is. This is to send a message that just as the essence of Brahman defies all ontological specificities, so also upamā refuses to be reduced to one particular definition.

In his introduction, Appayya states that his definitions and illustrations are mostly drawn from the works of the ancients or pracīnas such as Mammaṭa, Vidyānātha, Bhoja, and Ruyyaka. But as soon as his discussion begins we learn that his invocation of the views of the ancients is not to blindly follow them but to challenge and modify them. These instances of disagreements clearly show that the Sanskrit literary theoreticians were attempting constitute a new relation with their predecessors by questioning the latter's views or by building upon what they have already said.

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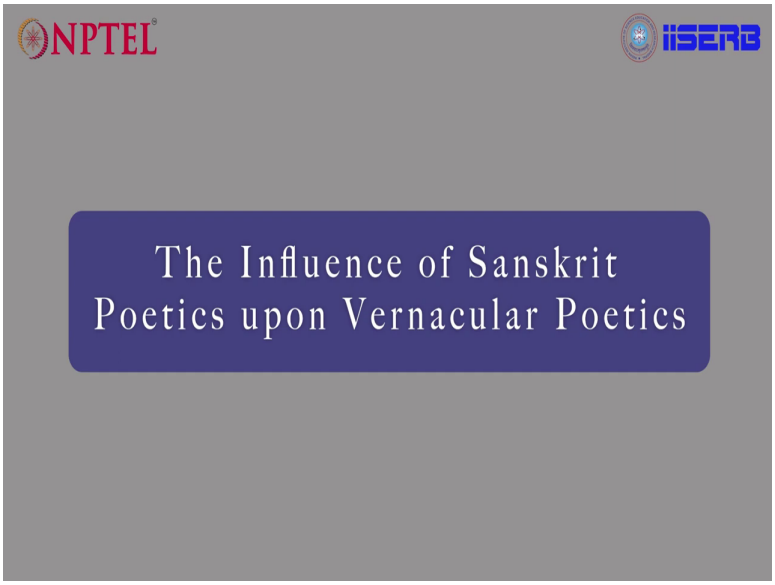

Another significant characteristic underpinning this phase is the great influence that Sanskrit kāvyaśāstra exercised upon vernacular poetics. Almost all bhāṣas that produced treatises on literary science in the medieval phase drew considerable inspiration from Sanskrit kāvyaśāstra. G.N Devy's observation in his *After Amnesia* is noteworthy in this context. According to Devy, the impact of Sanskrit poetics upon vernacular poetics was so strong that the vernacular languages failed to produce an indigenous tradition of kāvyaśāstra independent of their Sanskritic counterpart.

According to Devy "The temporal sequence of events in the process of transition ought to have been this: first, the decline of Sanskrit as a literary language, then, the emergence of the bhāṣas, and then, the decline of Sanskrit poetics and finally, the emergence of bhāṣa criticism." But this logical sequence of events was defied completely, when bhāṣa literatures did not produce a literary theory on their own. The two most important deviations from this logical sequence that Devy notes are these: first, Sanskrit poetics does not show signs of

decline several centuries after the emergence of bhāṣas criticism, and second, no significant criticism in the bhāṣas traditions is in evidence.

One of the many vernacular traditions of poetics which inclined towards Sanskrit poetics was the earliest form of Malayalam literary language known as Maṇipravāḷam. Līlātilakam, the lakṣaṇagrantha or the treatise that sets down the rules of Maṇipravāḷam, is very much modelled on the tradition of Sanskrit poetics.

Like Sanskrit poetics which aims to create a trans-local language for kāvya, Līlātilakam also generates a trans-regional literary language by mixing Sanskrit and Keralabhāṣa. Līlātilakam defines the literary language of Maṇipravāḷam as "a blending of Sanskrit and Keralabhāṣa. Bhāṣā samskṛta yogo maṇipravāḷam." This tendency of standardizing a specific language for literary production is something that Līlātilakam directly derives from Sanskrit poetics. According to Bhāmaha, the author of Kāvyālaṅkāra, Sanskrit, Prākrit, and Apabhramśa are the only three languages fit for literary production.

The same is the opinion of Daṇḍin, the author of Kāvyaprakāśa, who further elaborates on this topic. According to Daṇḍin, among the various regional dialects of Prākrit, only Mahārāṣtri Prākrit is suitable for literary production. Although the term Apabhramśa denotes any usage that deviates from the standard variety of Sanskrit, the variety of Apabhramśa that Daṇḍin prescribes for composing kāvya is the Apabhramśa variety used by cowherds and others. Through this process of reserving certain languages for the production of literature, Sanskrit poetics not only standardized the language of literary production but also made the literary production a very unique "trans-local phenomenon for a trans-local public". The same tendency can be seen in Līlātilakam which reserves a hybrid language for literature through the rule-based mixture of bhāṣa and Sanskrit.

There is evidently a stamp of Sanskrit literary theory in every aspect of kāvya that Līlātilakam deals with. Rich Freeman, in his article "Genre and Society: The Literary Culture of Premodern Kerala", observes, "Līlātilakam applies all of the technical apparatus of Sanskrit literary treatise that processes mundane language into poetry (kāvya)." A quick glance at the observation of the unknown author of Līlātilakam about the body of literature

will show the influence of Sanskrit literary upon the vernacular poetics. The unknown author of Maṇipravāḷam observes that:

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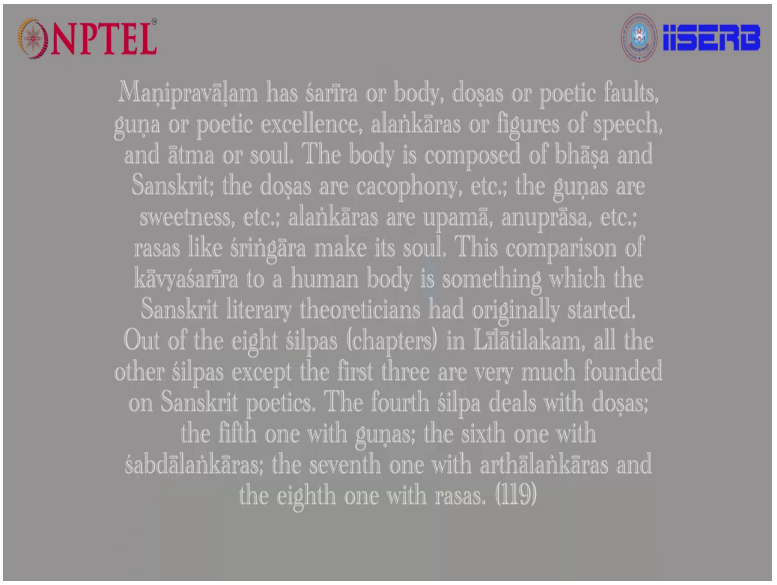

“Maṇipravāḷam has śarīra or body, doṣas or poetic faults, guṇa or poetic excellence, alaṅkāras or figures of speech, and ātma or soul. The body is composed of bhāṣas and Sanskrit; the doṣas are cacophony, etc.; the guṇas are sweetness, etc.; alaṅkāras are upamā, anuprāsa, etc.; rasas like śriṅgāra make its soul.” This comparison of kāvyaśarīra to a human body is something which the Sanskrit literary theoreticians had originally started.

Out of the eight śilpas (chapters) in Līlātilakam, all the other śilpas except the first three are very much founded on Sanskrit poetics. The fourth śilpa deals with doṣas; the fifth one with guṇas; the sixth one with śabdālaṅkāras; the seventh one with arthālaṅkāras and the eighth one with rasas. Malayalam is not an exception in this respect. About the influence of Sanskrit literary theory upon the production of kāvya in classical Kannada, Dr Nagaraja in his article “Critical Tensions in the History of Kannada Literature” observes that

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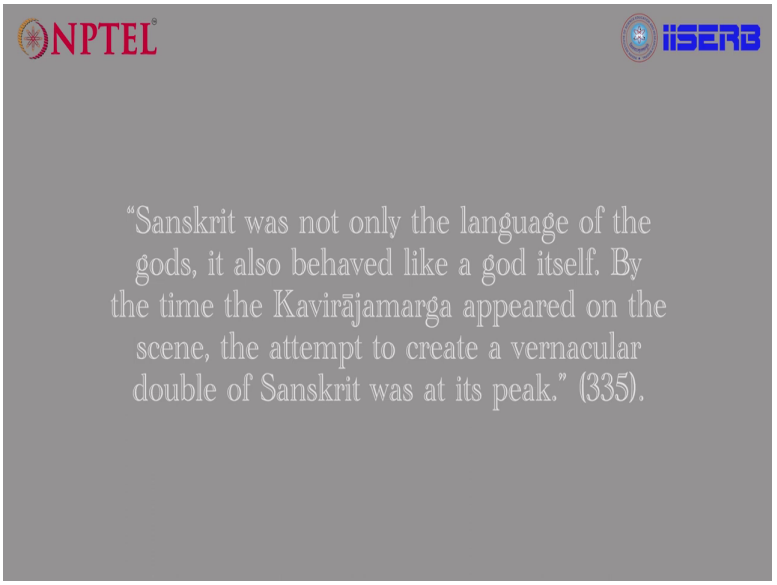

"Sanskrit was not only the language of the gods, it also behaved like a god itself. By the time the Kavirājamarga appeared on the scene, the attempt to create a vernacular double of Sanskrit was at its peak."

The same was the case with languages like Brajbhāṣa which imbibed considerably from Sanskrit poetics to form its vernacular counterpart. Alison Busch in her article " The Anxiety of Innovation:The Practice of Literary Science in the Hindi/ Riti Tradition" says,

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"For all their apparent radicalism in eschewing the time-honoured language of courtly intellectual life, and the trumpeting of their vernacular works as new theorizations, many early Brajbhāṣa scholars insist that they have not departed from existing Sanskrit tradition" (49).

According to Busch,
one of the primary sources of inspiration for Keśavdās's Kavipriya, his manual for poets in Brajbhāṣa, is undoubtedly Daṇḍin's Kāvyādarśa. His Rasikpriya, yet another work of literary science, is modelled on Rudra Bhaṭṭa's Śriṅgāratilaka. Busch further says, "At first glance the Rasikpriya appears to be a very close adaptation of the Śriṅgāratilaka or The Ornament of Passion by the Sanskrit rhetorician Rudra Bhaṭṭa. Keśavdās follows virtually the same order of treatment of the subject matter as his source, and significant lexical borrowings in the definition of verses show his reliance on Rudra Bhaṭṭa to be beyond doubt.

Cintāmaṇi Tripathi, one of the major intellectuals to emerge after Keśavdās, in his Kavikulkalptaru, openly proclaims his indebtedness to Sanskrit poetics for serving as a model for his own treatise on poetics in Brajbhāṣa. He says,
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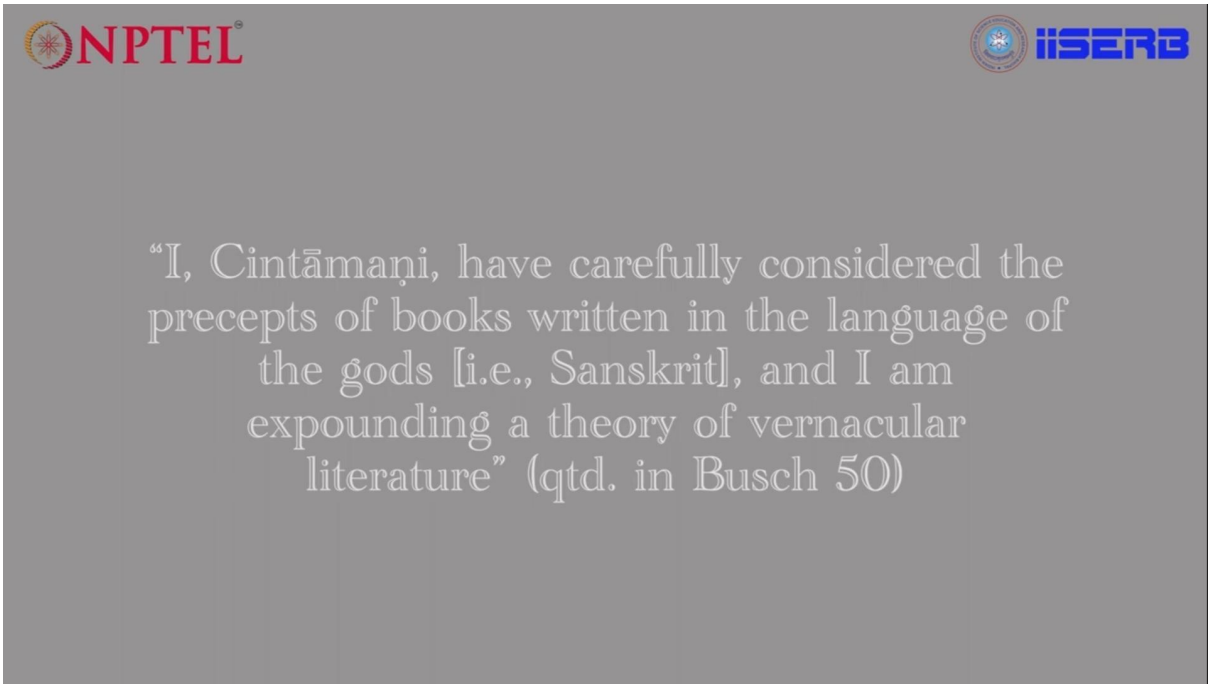

"I, Cintāmaṇi, have carefully considered the precepts of books written in the language of the gods [i.e., Sanskrit], and I am expounding a theory of vernacular literature." Similar is the observation of Bhikaridas, another great rhetorician in Braj bhāṣa.
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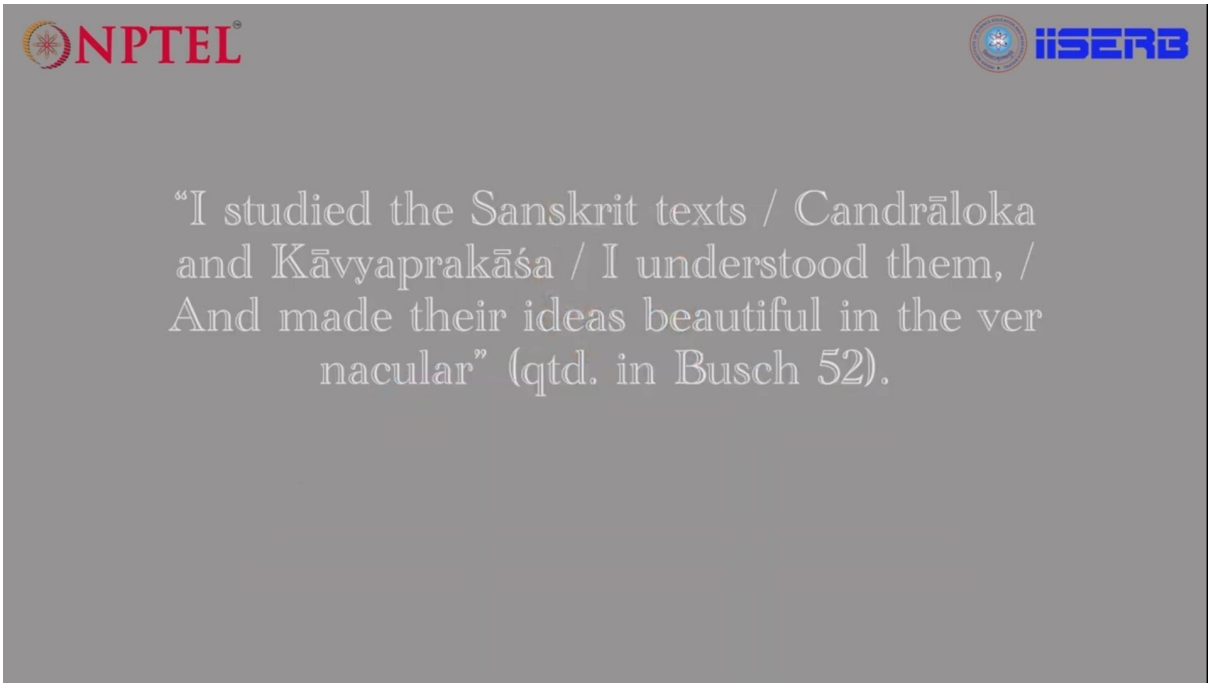

He says, "I studied the Sanskrit texts / Candrāloka and Kāvyaprakāśa / I understood them, / And made their ideas beautiful in the vernacular" (qtd. in Busch 52).

These examples corroborate the argument that the literary theorists of vernacular poetics always looked up to Sanskrit poetics as a model. This does not imply that vernacular traditions of poetics did not introduce anything new on their own. On the other hand, the point I want to emphasise here is that Sanskrit literary science was indeed a great source of influence and inspiration for the treatises of literary science in vernacular languages.

An important Sanskrit literary theoretician who we need to mention before we close this lecture on the state of Sanskrit poetics in the medieval period is Jagannātha Pandita.

Jagannātha holds an important position in Sanskrit poetics as the last literary theoretician to be celebrated across the the Sanskrit cosmopolis. According to scholars like Pollock,
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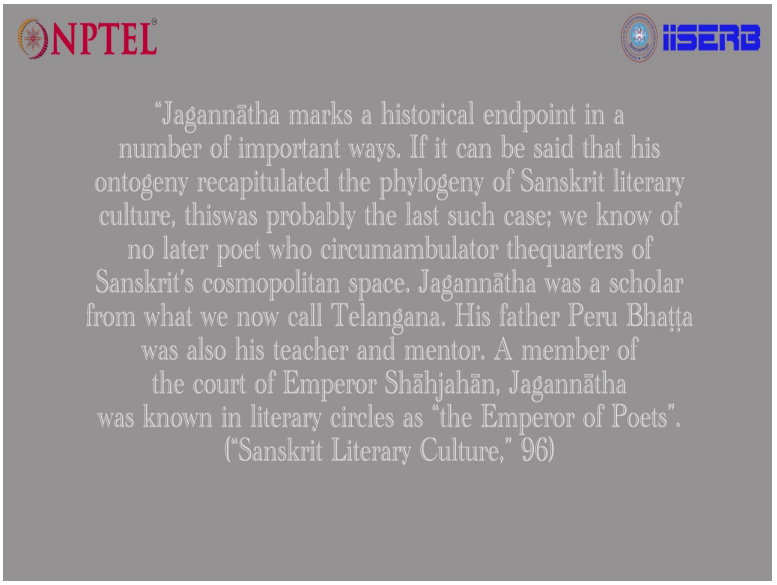

"Jagannātha marks a historical endpoint in a number of important ways. If it can be said that his ontogeny recapitulated the phylogeny of Sanskrit literary culture, this was probably the last such case; we know of no later poet who circumambulator the quarters of Sanskrit's cosmopolitan Space."

Jagannātha was a scholar from what we now call Telangana. His father Peru Bhaṭṭa was also his teacher and mentor. A member of the court of Emperor Shāhjahān, Jagannātha was known in literary circles as "the Emperor of Poets." He is believed to have received the title "King of Scholars" (paṇḍitarāja) from the emperor himself. Along with the strong patronage of the emperor, he was also supported by many other princely houses for whom he often wrote praśastis or eulogies. He could also be viewed as an example of the cultural syncretism of the times, having married a Muslim woman and becoming an integral part of the Mughal courts.

His most famous literary work is Bhāminīvilāsa or The Games of Beautiful Women. In many of his treatises on poetics, Jagannātha quotes from this work to illustrate the literary concepts that he was discussing. Rasagaṅgādhara, his magnum opus in the field of literary theory, is often considered a "curious mixture of modernity, and tradition." In Rasagaṅgādhara, Jagannātha effectively employed the framework of Vedanta to understand literary categories. Unlike many of his contemporaries, such as Jīva Gosvamin, who invented a new rasa called bhakti, Jagannātha was a thorough traditionalist.

In this lecture, we were trying to understand the state of Sanskrit poetics in the medieval phase. The phase which we call the medieval phase of Sanskrit poetics spans from the 13th century to 17th century. We can safely consider the 17th century as the point at which the medieval phase of Sanskrit poetics ends.

The 17th century is considered the closing period of the medieval period precisely because it marks the beginning of colonialism, thereby inaugurating a new phase for literary theory. The criticism that was conventionally directed again as Sanskrit poetics in the medieval phase was that there was nothing worth mentioning in Sanskrit literary theory during the medieval period. But scholars like Yigal Bronner we have seen shows us that Sanskrit poetics in the medieval phase was innovative and really powerful.

It is important to note that at this juncture, despite the strong influence of vernacular literature during this space Sanskrit kavyasastra in fact, continued to produce new treatises, thereby ensuring the continuum of its great lineage dating back to the 7th century CE. Sanskrit poetics during the medieval phase is particularly characterized by two events. One a methodological change in the approach of Sanskrit kavyasastra and the second one the emergence of vernacular literature and poetics.

The literary theoreticians in the medieval phase attempted to constitute a new relation with their past that is to say, instead of inventing any radically new critical concept like dhvani or vakrokti in the previous era they directed their energy mainly to critically examine the views of their predecessors and to answer the old questions in new ways. To mark their departure from their predecessors in terms of their mode of operation and views, these new politicians often identified themselves as navyas or new intellectuals. In contrast to their predecessors, who they often called pracinas**.**

The second major point that we discussed in this connection was the emergence of vernacular poetics and the influence that Sanskrit poetics exercised upon vernacular literary theory. Here the important observation that we need to remember is that of G.N. Devy. According to the Devy, the impact of Sanskrit poetics upon vernacular poetics was so strong that the vernacular languages failed to produce an indigenous tradition of kavyasastra independent of their Sanskritic counterpart.

Devy observes that the ideal temporal sequence of events in the medieval phase should have been the decline of Sanskrit as a literary language and the emergence of the bhashas and consequently, the decline of Sanskrit poetics and then the emergence of bhasha's criticism. But Devy observes that this logical sequence of events did not, in fact, happen. The two most important deviations from this logical sequence that Devy notes are these:

First, Sanskrit poetics does not show signs of decline several centuries after the emergence of Bhasha criticism, and second, no significant criticism in the Bhasha tradition is in evidence. In this context, I also like to point out that I do not mean to argue that vernacular traditions of poetics did not introduce anything new on their own. On the other hand, the point I want to emphasize here is that Sanskrit literary science was indeed a great source of influence and inspiration for the treatises of literary science in vernacular languages.

In this lecture, we also discussed Jagannatha and his importance in Sanskrit poetics. We saw that Jagannatha Pandita holds an important position in Sanskrit poetics as the last literary theoretician to be discussed and celebrated all over the Sanskrit cosmopolis.

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