

## An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory

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Lecture- 53

**Vakrokti: Pada-pūrvārtha-vakrata I**

The next form of vakratā that we are going to see here is *pada-pūrvārtha-vakrata*. *Pada-pūrvārtha-vakrata* is the deviant utterance at the level of words. This has got nine varieties namely rūḍhi-vaicitrya-vakratā, paryāya-vakratā, viśeṣaṇavakratā, saṁvrti-vakratā, vṛtti-vakratā, bhāvavakratā, liṅga-vaicitrya-vakratā, and kriyā-vaicitrya-vakratā. Let us take a look at all these forms of *vakroktis* in detail. The first category under *pada-pūrvārtha-vakrata* that we are going to see is rūḍhi-vaicitrya-vakratā.

### 1. Rūḍhi-vaicitrya-vakratā

Rūḍhi-vaicitrya-vakratā is the use of the word in such a way that it abandons its primary meaning and expresses a new meaning which is not conventionally associated with it. Kuntaka says, “When common denotation of words is seen to expand to include connotation of even impossible attributes imagined by the poet,” (370), it is called rūḍhi-vaicitrya-vakratā. This has got two varieties. In the first type, the word signifies a new meaning that is not otherwise possible for that word to signify. Here the word completely abandons its primary meaning, while denoting the meaning. In the second variety, the existing word shows a hyperbolic excess of the existing meaning. Here the primary meaning of the word is retained, but the word includes a hyperbolic excess of the existing meaning. Let us take a look at the first variety where a word abandons its primary meaning in the given context and denotes a new meaning that is not otherwise possible for that word to signify. The following is an example of the first variety.

"Virtues  
when appreciated by connoisseurs of art. bloom,  
When blessed by the rays of the sun,  
a lotus becomes a lotus"

This verse, taken from Ānandavardhana's *Viṣamabāṇalīla*, refers to the unique point at which a *kāvya* attains perfection. The speaker says that just as a lotus reaches the pinnacle of its beauty, when the sun showers its rays upon it, so also poetic qualities shine forth when they are appreciated by a connoisseur of art or *sahṛdaya*. In the given example, the vakratā is in the word "lotus" (*kamala*) in its second occurrence. The word "lotus" is conventionally used to refer to a tropical flower with white or pink petals which grows on the surface of lakes. In the above mentioned example, if we follow the conventional meaning of the word 'lotus,' the line "a lotus becomes a lotus" does not make any sense. Therefore, the term 'lotus' leaves its conventional meaning to suggest another meaning, i.e. 'the actualization of all qualities that are supposed to be present in a lotus.' In other words, the word 'lotus' here means 'a state of perfection.' Thus, this line comes to mean that 'it is only when graced by the rays of the sun that a lotus reaches a state of perfection.'

Now let us take a look at the second variety where the hyperbolic excess of the existing meaning is superimposed upon the denotative meaning of the word. The following is an example of this variety that Kuntaka cites:

"Then the son of the earthly Lord laughed aloud without any trace of fear and again said to the Lord of heaven. "Take up your missile, if this be your handiwork. You cannot lay claims to success until you have conquered Raghu."

Here the word Raghu is of particular importance. We know that Raghu is Rāma, the son of Daśaratha. But in this context, the word 'Raghu' is not simply standing for Rāma. It also means the ultimate epitome of success. Here it means that if you want to lay claims to success, you need to conquer Raghu, the ultimate embodiment of success and valour. The primary meaning of the word is retained here. But along with the primary meaning, there exists the hyperbolic excess of the existing meaning. Kuntaka says, "The word Raghu here suggests a unique excess of valour in the context of the discomfiture of even the Lord of Heaven, whose prowess was till then unchallenged everywhere" (372).

Let us take look at one more example. Look at this verse take from *Bālarāmāyaṇa*:

"His order loves to dwell on the crest-jewel of Indra; the various branches of learning mastered by him serve as his additional eye. He has devotion to Lord Śiva who wields the bow called Pināka. His capital is the divine city of Lanka. His birth is in the house of Lord

Brahma. Forsooth, such a bridegroom as this can never be found elsewhere. But, oh, if only he were not Ravana! Where indeed do you have a combination of all virtues.”

We know that the primary meaning of the word Rāvaṇa is the king of Laṅkā. But here the word Rāvaṇa does not signify just the king of Laṅkā. It also means the pinnacle of disqualification. In this context, the primary meaning of the word is retained. But going a step further, a new hyperbolic meaning is superimposed on it. Kuntaka’s words merit attention here:

“The word Rāvaṇa here suggests a unique disqualification which is enough to rule him out of consideration as an ideal bridegroom for a woman like Sitā. He has all the merits that can otherwise be considered qualifications to become a bridegroom for Sitā. But just because these qualifications are found in Rāvaṇa, the embodiment of all kinds of vices, they lose their merit.”

I hope these two varieties of rūḍhi-vaicitrya-vakratā are clear to you. Now let us talk about the second variety of *pada-pūrvārtha-vakrata* which is *paryāya-vakratā*.

## 2. Paryāya-vakratā

Paryāya-vakratā is that kind of *vakratā* where the poet chooses the most suitable synonym or epithet from a wide variety of synonyms or epithet for a word to enhance the beauty of the poetic utterance.

According to Kuntaka, paryāya-vakratā has six varieties, namely abhidheyāntaratama, abhidheyātīśayapoṣaka, abhidheyālaṅkaraṇa samardha, svecchayolkarṣa peśala, asambhāvvyārtha pātragarbha, and alaṅkāropaskāra manohāribandhanam. In abhidheyāntaratama vakratā, the poet uses the most suitable synonym that suits the context. Kuntaka says, “Here although other synonyms for that particular word exist, only one among these various synonyms can really achieve the closest approximation with the shade of the meaning that is sought to be conveyed.”

For example, look at the following verse:

“I would not like to fight with you for nothing. And what regard do the arrows of hermits deserve?” I have other arrows of mine in my mountain store and they form the wealth of the thunder-wielding god’s [vajriṇaḥ] prowess.”

According to Kuntaka, here the word vajriṇaḥ or the thunder-wielding god is of particular significance. The word Vajriṇaḥ is the synonym of the god of heaven Indra who has the

thunder-bolt as his weapon. Here Vajriṇaḥ means the one who wields the thunder-bolt. According to Kuntaka, “Although a hundred synonyms are possible to denote Indra, the word vajriṇaḥ is the most suitable synonym in this situation, where Arjuna is speaking to the hunter about the wealth of arrows he has.” Here, in a situation where Arjuna is talking about the prowess of his arrows that he has inherited from Indra, the word Vajriṇaḥ shows the prowess of Indra himself as a warrior.

The second variety we are going to see is abhidheyātiśayapoṣaka. Kuntaka says that even if the subject under consideration is beautiful in itself, the use of appropriate synonyms in the given context will further enhance the beauty of the subject. Kuntaka says, “An object may be endowed with natural grace and beauty, yet when it is qualified by an apt synonym, it will become most appealing to men of taste.” Kuntaka gives the following example to demonstrate this variety of paryāya-vakratā:

“Look at the moon rising yonder, O lovely maid! He is a kinsman of Raghu-kings. He is a professional teacher in the art of love. He is celebrated as a standard of comparison to the face of a spotless white complexioned lady. His lustre is white like that of the teeth of a south Indian belle, just washed. He is the crest-jewel of the lord of Caṇḍī” (375).

These words taken from the Bālarāmāyaṇa are spoken by Rāma to Sitā. According to Kuntaka, The moon no doubt is naturally endowed with abundance of beauty. But the synonyms or epithets used by the poet to describe the moon, such as kinsmen of Raghu-kings, the professional teacher in the art of love, etc. add to the charm of the moon further, thereby winning the heart of the critics.

The next variety under paryāya-vakratā is abhidheyālaṅkaraṇa samardha. Sometimes when we use the synonym of a word, the chosen synonym will create equivocation and add to the beauty of the poetic utterance. It is called abhidheyālaṅkaraṇa samardha. The following is an example of abhidheyālaṅkaraṇa samardha that Kuntaka cites to illustrate this particular variety:

“In such an insensitive world, who else is there with ear so large and hand so long to deserve my musical plea?”—so thinking did the bee approach him. But the elephant at once blotted him out. After all, is he not a mātaṅga! What more need we say!”

Here the description is about a bee who came to a mātaṅga which is a synonym for an elephant. The bee went to a mātaṅga, thinking that the latter would enjoy his music. But mātaṅga who did not have any aesthetic bent of mind killed him. Here the word mātaṅga also means barbarian, the one who does not have any cultural sophistication. The equivocation that arises out of the choice of the synonym mātaṅga adds beauty to the poetic utterance. The elephant could not enjoy the music of the bee because he is a mātaṅga or barbarian.

The next variety is svecchayolkarṣa peśala. In this variety, the invention of an epithet to refer to something or someone will add to the beauty of the poetic utterance. Kuntaka explains this further in the following words: “Though a subject on hand is usually regarded as adding beauty to another, the presentation of the subject [with the help of a newly invented epithet] itself may be so striking that it invites the readers attention towards it. The following is an example of this variety:

“The sorrow of separation from my beloved is thus agitating me rising high, along with the rays of this kinsmen of the five-arrowed cupid or [viṣmabāṅakudumba], rays which are long and lambent and causing the waves of the ocean to give a performance of classical dance” (378).

Here the word *viṣmabāṅakudumba* is a new coinage. It means the kinsmen of the five-arrowed cupid and it is used to denote the moon. Seeing the moon rising high in the sky, a lover who is suffering from love-in-separation, becomes all the more agitated. The moon is compared to a kinsman of Cupid because his very sight reminds the lover of his love for his beloved. It seems that the moon is having the same impact that the cupid can have on a lover. Kuntaka’s observation in this respect is worth quoting. Kuntaka says, “In the above instance, the synonym 'kinsman of the five arrowed cupid' has been coined by the poet to signify the moon. This fits in the mouth of a lover with a heart full of longing due to separation from his beloved. Though it is an unfamiliar or new coinage, it has been made to appear most appropriate in the context by the poet. Because it is an original hit, it, at once, strikes the readers as charming.

The next variety under paryāya-vakratā is called asambhāvyārtha pātragarbha. In asambhāvyārtha pātragarbha, an action that is less likely to happen with respect to the thing that is being described is attributed to that thing. The following is an example of asambhāvyārtha pātragarbha that Kuntaka cites in *Vakroktijivita*:

“Your effort is wasted, o ruler of the earth (mahīpāla). Even were it discharged at me, your missile would be in vain. Though the storm’s speed might be strong enough to uproot a tree, it would fail to shake a rocky hill” (378)

This verse is taken from Kālidasa’s *Raghuvamśa*. Here the king Raghu was unable to save the cow which he was supposed to save. Seeing this, Nandinī says these words to Raghu. According to Kuntaka, the word mahīpāla contains asambhāvyārtha pātragarbha. The word mahīpāla means the ruler of the earth. The word mahīpāla signifies a person who is capable of protecting the whole earth. But here the king is not even able to protect a cow. The inability to protect an animal is less likely to be found in a mahīpāla, the ruler of the earth. But this inability is ascribed to a king. So, this is an example of asambhāvyārtha pātragarbha. Kuntaka notes, “The synonym ‘ruler of the earth’ used here for the king is significant. It emphasizes that he possesses the might to protect the entire earth; and at the same time brings out forcefully by contrast his inability to protect even an animal, his preceptor’s cow which deserved to be saved by him by all means.”

The next variety of paryāya-vakratā is alaṅkāropaskāra manohāribandhanam. In this variety, a statement is embellished with figurative elements like utprekṣā or poetic fancy. The following is an example of alaṅkāropaskāra manohāribandhanam:

“Oh queen! See how the lotuses are suddenly turning pale, conquered as they are, by your face-lotus which puts to shame even the beauty of the moon” (380).

It is a known fact that the lotus fades in the evening. But here, the poet says that the lotus flowers paled and faded because it was shamed by the beauty of his beloved’s face. In this context, the poetic fancy is used to describe the beauty of the lady’s face. Kuntaka observes, “In this example, there is a natural phenomenon of the lotuses fading at the time of the evening. It is fancied by the gallant hero, wooing his beloved, to be the result of the defeat suffered by them while being compared with the beloved’s face in point of beauty. And the poetic fancy is suggestively conveyed. In fact, this is exceedingly effective, for any and every lotus could be supposed to be outshone by the beauty of the moon; but on the other hand, your face-lotus which has positively outshone the moon, has certainly defeated the lotuses. Hence they appear to be losing colour and growing pale” (380).