

An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory

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Lecture- 57

Vakrokti: Vakya-vakrata

The third category, that Kuntaka deals with is, *vākya-vakrata* which is deviant utterance at the level of a *vākya* or sentence. To put it in Kuntaka's words, "A sentence means a group of words. It contains indeclinable words, cases, adjectives, verbs and its different forms. It [*vākya-vakrata*] is the deviant utterance of sentences like *śloka*. It is the deviant utterance of speech in a sentence. That is, this variety of deviant utterance depends on the deviant use of a group of words." As far as Kuntaka is considered, the whole conventional category of *alāṅkāra* is subsumed in this category. Kuntaka in the first chapter of *Vakroktijīvita* observes, "The whole section of *alāṅkāra* will fall within this category" (217).

At this point, I would also like to discuss Kuntaka's idea of *alankara*. We have seen that Kuntaka brings all the *alankaras* under the broader ambit of *vakyavakrata*. Kuntaka is reluctant to accept all the *alankaras* in his theoretical framework. For him, there are only 20 *alankaras*. The *alankaras* mentioned by Kuntaka include *dīpaka*, *rūpaka*, *aprastuta-prāśamsa*, *pariyokta*, *vyājastuti*, *ulprekṣa*, *atīśayokti*, *upama*, *śleṣa*, *vyatireka*, *virodha*, *sahokti*, *drṣṭanta*, *arthāntaranyāsa*, *ākṣepa*, *vibhāvana*, *sasandeha*, *apahnūti*, *samsrṣṭi*. Kuntaka also eliminates some commonly accepted *alankaras* from the ambit of *alankara*. These figures of speech include: *rasāvat*, *preyas*, *ūrjsavi*, *udātta*, *samāhita*, *prativastupama*, *upameyopama*, *tulyayogyata*, *ananvaya*, *parivṛtti*, *nidarśana*, *samāsokti*, *sahokti*, *yathāsamkhyā*, *āśis*, *śeṣokti*, *sūkṣma*, *leśa*, *hetu*, *upamārūpaka*.

In his discussion of *vākya-vakrata* in conjunction with *alāṅkāra*, Kuntaka talks in extension about the idea of *svabhāvokti* or the statement of exact nature of things, as well. According to Kuntaka, although many critics before him have given *svabhāvokti* the status of *alāṅkāra*, he does not take this approach. Kuntaka says,

"Well, this natural description which delights connoisseurs has been declared as a figure of speech called 'natural expression' by the ancients, and why are you labouring so hard to pour

ridicule on that idea. For, according to them, merely the general nature of things constitute the subject adorned, while the excessively delicate beauty added constitutes the adornment. So it may be argued by some that considering 'natural expression' as a figure of speech, is quite logical" (412).

Kuntaka does not hold the view that a plain speech is always an alaṅkārya, things that are to be ornamented. *Svabhāvokti* being the plain expression of an idea cannot get elevated to the position of an ornament or alaṅkāra. The description of the natural nature of things in the same way they appear to the world is always an alaṅkārya, something that needs to be ornamented. It cannot be considered an ornament.

At this juncture, Kuntaka poses an important question. Is it necessary that we need to adorn all the natural things with the help of alaṅkāras, when they are being represented in kāvya? Kuntaka answer is in the negative. He says that if the natural thing, that is being portrayed is beautiful in itself, then the poet does not need to use an ornament. Kuntaka explains his point further by citing a verse from *Kumārasambhava*.

"With that slender bride face to face,
Though seated with all beauty aids,
The women commissioned paused awhile,
With eyes bewitched by her natural grace."

In the above example the poet aims to communicate with the readers the exquisite beauty of Pārvaṭī which is naturally present in her delicate features. The poet fears that any addition of ornaments to this natural beauty will obstruct the inherent grace of hers. For Kuntaka, the idea is that when a subject is so described as abounding in natural felicity, any introduction of an adornment will obscure the natural beauty. Here what constitutes the beauty of Pārvaṭī is not the addition of ornaments, but the appropriate use of correct vibhāvas, etc. Kuntaka continues,

"An experience becomes aesthetic only by reason of beauty due to promotion of sentiments through the only means available, viz. a proper mingling of vibhavas, etc. Any other extraneous element therein would become detrimental to its natural beauty. That is why subjects like the budding youth of a maiden, etc. and the advent of delightful spring, its enrichment and close, etc. are never overburdened by good poets with additions of figures of

speech; they are content with the natural artistic beauty resulting from their spontaneous description” (413).

Although that is the case, sometimes the poets add ornaments to things that are beautiful in themselves in such a manner that the addition of ornaments do not tamper with the original beauty.

Kuntaka says that two points are to be kept in mind in this context. First of all, we cannot say that things that are beautiful in themselves are things that are adorned by nature. We cannot say that they are ornaments. They are still *alaṅkāryas* naturally ornamented. By saying so, Kuntaka also rules out the argument that *svabhāvokti* can at times become an *alaṅkāra*.