

An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory

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Lecture- 59

Vakrokti: Prabandha vakrata

Hello everyone,

In the previous video lecture, we saw prakaraṇa vakratā or the deviant utterance with respect to the episode. The next category of vakrokti that we are going to see is prabandha vakratā. This is the vakrata related to the plot. According to Kuntaka, prabandha vakrata has got seven varieties namely, rasāntara-vinyāsa-vakratā, nāyakotkkaṛṣa-nibandhana-vakratā, prāsaṃgika-kathārasa-nibandhana-vakratā, aneka-phala-sambatti-vakratā, kāvya-nāma-vakratā, anyonya-vailakṣaṇya-vakratā, and nayopadeśa-vakratā. Now, let us take a look at these varieties in detail. The first variety of prabandha vakratā that we are going to take a look at is rasāntara-vinyāsa-vakratā.

Rasāntara-vinyāsa-vakratā

Rasāntara-vinyāsa-vakratā is the way in which a story can be made new by changing the generally accepted rasa of a well-known story. Kuntaka defines rasāntara-vinyāsa-vakratā in following words: “When there is a departure from the enriched ‘rasas’ of the source-book and a new delightful rasa is delineated by the poet at the conclusion of his work,” it is called rasāntara-vinyāsa-vakratā.

An example of this form of vakratā is the drama *Veṅṅisamhāra* by Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa. *Veṅṅisamhāra* is based on the *Mahābhārata*. As we all know the dominant rasa of the *Mahābhārata* is *śānta* rasa. But in *Veṅṅisamhāra*, Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa infuses *vīra* rasa, instead of *śānta* rasa of the source text. To achieve *vīra* rasa, the poet stops the story of the *Mahābhārata* at a point where Yudhiṣṭhira wins over his enemies, as opposed to the original ending where pāṇdavas leave their power and prowess and go for the forest-dwelling. This ending of the story in *Veṅṅisamhāra*, where the Yudhiṣṭhira and other pāṇdavas win the battle of Kurukshetra, invokes *vīra* rasa in the readers.

Kuntaka notes:

“He so effects the innovation that the entire lot of their enemies lies slain on the battle field, and Yudhiṣṭhira, the champion of undiluted royal duty is made to be attended with triumphant success at the end. This novel conclusion partakes of beauty in respect of the work as a whole and provides infinite delight to cultured readers. They will indeed think along these lines—'Though victimized by so many untoward calamities, Pāṇdavas could still overthrow their enemies by dint of the steadily increased strength of their side and could ultimately win royal glory.’”

Another example that Kuntaka cites is Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacarita* which is based on the Rāmāyaṇa. The primary rasa of the Rāmāyaṇa is karuṇa rasa. But in *Uttararāmacarita*, the karuṇa rasa of the source text is replaced with śṛṅgāra rasa. How does the poet achieve it? We know that the Rāmāyaṇa ends with the descent of Sītā into the nether world and Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa putting an end to their life by jumping into the river Sarayū. These tragic events invariably instill grief in us, thereby, generating the karuṇa rasa. But in *Uttararāmacarita*, these events are not included. In *Uttararāmacarita*, the Rāmāyaṇa story ends with the reunion of Sītā and Rāma in the hermitage of Vālmīki. This love-in-union is further enhanced by Rama witnessing the valor of his son, Lava who was proficient in using the divine missiles. Kuntaka further observes that, “A delineation of the ultimate success and prosperity of the hero after overcoming all calamities will contribute to extreme delight in spectators.”

The next form of vakrokti that Kuntaka mentions is *nāyakotkkarṣanibandhana-vakratā*.

Nāyakotkkarṣanibandhana-vakratā

What is *nāyakotkkarṣanibandhana-vakratā*? This form of vakrokti is employed when an already existing story is retold by the poet. Here the story is retold in such a way that it enhances the glory of the hero. As opposed to following the actual ending of the story in the source text, the poet, who is employing the *nāyakotkkarṣanibandhana-vakratā*, ends the story at a particular juncture, where the glory of the hero is at its peak. Here, the primary aim of choosing a different juncture to stop the story is to enhance the charm and greatness of the lead-character. Kuntaka notes, “A master poet might begin his work with the story as found in the original sources of the epics; but he should be alert in ending his work only with such an incident in the original source, as it will promote the extraordinary glory of the peerless hero, admired in wonder by all the three worlds. . .” (IV. 19).

A case in point is Bhāravi's epic poem *Kirātārjunīya*, which is based on the *Mahābhārata*. In the introduction of the poem, the poet says that he originally had the intention of portraying

the killing of Duryodhana and the victory of Dharmaputra. But in the story portrayed in Kirātārjunīya, the poet actually does not take up these avowed elements. On the other hand, he stops the story with the fight between Śiva and Arjuna and Arjuna's winning of the divine missile Pāśupata from Śiva. So, the story ends with Arjuna winning the battle against Śiva who is disguised as a tribal.

Kuntaka notes that if the poet had narrated the whole story of *Mahābhārata*, the story would not have been able to portray Arjuna as a noble hero, since Arjuna himself had committed many heinous acts to win the battle of Kurukṣetra. For example, Kuntaka says, Arjuna killed Karṇa, the king of aṅga, while Karṇa was trying to lift up his chariot which had sunk in the mire in the battle field. Though the learned warriors told Arjuna that it is not correct to kill Karṇa, while Karṇa was trying to lift up his chariot stuck in the mire, Arjuna did not pay heed to them. Another instance which can be a blotch on the greatness of Arjuna is his treacherous killing of Bhīṣma by placing Śikhandin in his front. Bhīma had famously proclaimed that he would not fight with Śikhandin. Knowing very well about this decision by Bhīṣma, Arjuna kept Śikhandin in front of Bhīṣma. Seeing Śikhandin in front of him, Bhīṣma stopped fighting. At this point, Arjuna shot arrows at Bhīṣma and killed him. If the whole story of the *Mahābhārata* is narrated, then it is impossible to present Arjuna as a blemishless character and it will adversely affect his greatness. So, the poet Bhāravi does not go on to describe the whole events from the *Mahābhārata* in the poem. He stops the story at a point when the greatness of Arjuna is at its peak. Kuntaka concludes this section by saying that, "Only when the impediments in the way of the hero's performance of mighty and spirited feats of valor are removed properly, the character of the hero will shine at its best."

The next variety of vakrokti that we are going to see under *prabandha-vakrata* is *prāsaṅgika-kathārasa-nibandhana-vakratā*.

Prāsaṅgika-kathārasa-nibandhana-vakratā

Prāsaṅgika-kathārasa-nibandhana-vakratā is the way in which, the author transforms what is generally deemed to be a digression from the main story into an interesting event in the main plot so that this digression becomes inevitable for the main story. Let us see the words of Kuntaka in this regard. Kuntaka says,

"Even when there is a story whose main course is obscured by the intrusion of extraneous incidents, its novelty may be ensured in another way. The slackening of interest in the conclusion of the main story due to the impediment of an incident may be overcome by so

depicting the incident that it will become an inevitable means for bringing about the desired end. Thus, the impediment occurring in the original source might be removed and a smooth flow of the intended sentiment may well be ensured” (573).

Kuntaka continues,

“The substance of it is this:—An incident which might first appear as an intruding obstacle in the progress of the main story may be given an artificial twist by the poet that the seemingly intruding incident itself will contribute directly in bringing about the intended conclusions and promotes the intended rasa to flower out like a lily and attains exquisite charm of originality” (573).

Kuntaka is repeating the same idea over and over again in different words. I just thought of quoting these words just to give you a flair of the source text.

The example that Kuntaka cites to explain this form of vakrokti is a scene from the mahākāvya *Śiśupālavadhā*. In *Śiśupālavadhā*, Nārada requests Kṛṣṇa on behalf of Indra to kill Śiśupāla. When Nārada informs Kṛṣṇa about the atrocities committed by Śiśupāla, Kṛṣṇa gets really enraged. But instead of going to the Mahiṣmati, the city of Śiśupāla, Kṛṣṇa goes to attend the Rājasūya sacrifice conducted by Yudhiṣṭhira. This is an apparent diversion in the smooth flow of the story. But this diversion is turned into a powerful element in the story by the poet.

In the Rājasūya sacrifice, Yudhiṣṭhira offers to Kṛṣṇa the agrapūja. Agrapūja is the name of an honor and attention rendered to the principal man present in the sacrifice. At this point, Śiśupāla also reaches there. Seeing the amount of attention paid to Kṛṣṇa, Śiśupāla gets really enraged and insults Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa had previously forgiven all the mistakes committed by Śiśupāla, because he had given a promise to Śiśupāla’s mother that he would forgive ninety-nine mistakes committed by Śiśupāla. This is the hundredth mistake of Śiśupāla. So, Kṛṣṇa kills him. Thus, the thread which took the story in the opposite direction is turned into an effective way to yield the designated goal.

The next category we are going to see is aneka-phala-sambatti-vakratā.

Aneka-phala-sambatti-vakratā

Aneka-phala-sambatti-vakratā refers to the manipulation of the plot to enhance the glory of a hero by showing him achieving a lot of subsidiary feats besides his ultimate goal (574).

Kuntaka’s observation in this regard is noteworthy. He says,

“The hero may be portrayed as having one sole aim or concern for his activities. But ultimately, he is crowned with numerous or infinite achievements, each as great as the one for which he strove, or each of which flows out of the primary achievement itself. This makes him a recipient of boundless glory, a radiant glory which exceeds the limits of the universe itself. And this glory arises from the extra ordinary greatness on the hero’s part” (575).

According to Kuntaka, the example for this form of vakratā is abundantly found in the play *Nāgānanda* by Harṣa. In *Nāgānanda*, Jīmūtavāhana sacrifices his own life to save a serpent named Śīkhacūda. In this process, Jīmūtavāhana saves not only Śīkhacūda, but the whole race of nāgas. This form of vakratā can be found in the Vikram–Vetal stories, adventures of Sindbad the sailor or Robin Hood, etc.

The next variety that we are going to familiarize ourselves with is kāvya-nāma-vakratā.

Kāvya-nāma-vakratā

Kuntaka thought that titles that convey the gist of the story, like *Abhijñānaśākuntala* or *Mudrārākṣasa* added to the beauty of the work. Kuntaka says,

“The proper name itself reveals the abounding inventive power of the poet, since it significantly highlights the most important and interesting aspect of the whole plot itself, serving as the vital essence as it were of the work as a whole. . . For example, we might cite such titles of plays such as *Abhijñānaśākuntala*, *Mudrārākṣasa*, *Pratimāniruddha*, *Māyāpuṣpaka*, *krtyarāvaṇa*, *Calitarāma*, *Puṣpadūṣitaka*, etc. Such significantly delightful titles given to literary works also appear matchless in so far as they reveal the underlying important threads that go to form a unified connected plot by their interrelation” (576).

But Kuntaka warns that one should definitely avoid such straightforward titles such as *Hayagrīvavadha*, *Śisupālavadha*, *Pāṇdavābhyudaya*, *Rāmānanda*, and *Rāmacarita*, etc. There is no vakratā in them. They very plainly inform the readers what the story of the text is.

The next variety that we are going to see is *anyonya-vailakṣaṇya-vakratā*.

Anyonya-vailakṣaṇya-vakratā

Anyonya-vailakṣaṇya-vakratā is that kind of vakratā which is achieved by the retelling of a familiar story in such a way that it appears new to the readers. Kuntaka says, “Numerous literary works might be composed by several master poets on one and the same delightful original story, and yet each will have an individuality of its own and will prove equally appealing to connoisseurs, without any trace of mutual correspondence” (576). This is called anyonya-vailakṣaṇya-vakratā.

According to Kuntaka, the same story of Rāma was told by different poets. But they all look different. For example, literary works like *Rāmābhyudaya*, *Udāttarāghava*, *Vīracarita*, *Bālarāmāyaṇa*, *Kṛtyārāvaṇa*, *Māyāpuṣpaka*, etc. all tell the story of Rama in different ways. Kuntaka says, “Although these works are based on an identical theme, they embody a rich flow of varied and individual sentiments and each incident radiates a new glow of originality and fills them with brilliance” (576).

Kuntaka’s observation about this re-structuring of a familiar plot is particularly notable here. Kuntaka says that when *vakrokti* is properly used, even literary works which deal with the same story look different, “just as creatures belonging to the same species do not look alike” (577).

The last variety we are going to see is nayopadeśa-vakratā.

Nayopadeśa-vakratā

A writer can make use of the work to convey his ideas on ethics and morality; this constitutes nayopadeśa-vakratā. According to Kuntaka, “When great works which impart instruction in fresh ways of political strategy such as *sāma* or gentle negotiation, the works gain in beauty. The purport is this: Whatever be the work of a great poet, it becomes full of absorbing interest, only when it embodies a new strategy for success in life, set forth along novel lines” (577).

Kuntaka cites *Mudrārākṣasa* as an example of this form of *vakrokti*. The characters in *Mudrārākṣasa* excel in presenting fresh and novel modes of political strategy for the readers to make their intelligence very sharp.

The same is the case with *Tāpasavatsarāja*. In Māyurāja’s *Tāpasavatsarāja*, which is an emendation of Bhāsa’s *Svapnavāsavadatta*, the minister lies to king Udayana that queen Vāsavadattā perished in the fire; this is not to conduct the marriage between Udayana and Padmavatī, but to save the king who is enamored by Vāsavadattā to the point of neglecting his kingly duties.

Finally, Kuntaka wraps up his discussion of the concept of vakrokti with the following words. "Absence of literary beauty may be found only in bad literature. How can it ever have place in the great works of master-poets, works which are the shining shoots of their immortal glory?" (577).

Having seen the last variety of *vakrokti*, let us summarize all the major forms under *prabandha vakratā* once again. The first variety is *rasāntara-vinyāsa-vakratā*. *Rasāntara-vinyāsa-vakratā* is the way in which a story can be made new by changing the generally accepted *rasa* of a well-known story.

The second variety is *nāyakotkkarṣanibandhana-vakratā*. This form of *vakrokti* is employed when an already existing story is retold by the poet. Here the story is retold in such a way that it enhances the glory of the hero. As opposed to following the actual ending of the story in the source text, the poet who is employing the *nāyakotkkarṣanibandhana-vakratā* ends the story at a particular juncture where the glory of the hero is at its peak.

The third variety is *prāsaṅgika-kathārasa-nibandhana-vakratā*. *Prāsaṅgika-kathārasa-nibandhana-vakratā* is the way in which the author transforms what is generally deemed to be a digression from the main story into an interesting event in the main plot so that this digression becomes inevitable for the main story.

The fourth variety, that is *aneka-phala-sambatti-vakratā*, refers to the manipulation of the plot to enhance the glory of a hero by showing him achieving a lot of subsidiary feats besides his ultimate goal.

The fifth variety called *kāvya-nāma-vakratā* is a form of *vakratā* which is achieved by proper naming. A story is named in such a way that it encapsulates the gist of the story.

The sixth variety called *anyonya-vailakṣaṇya-vakratā* is that kind of *vakratā* which is achieved by the retelling of a familiar story in such a way that it appears new to the readers.

The last variety, that is *nayopadeśa-vakratā*, is achieved by instilling some moral values indirectly in the story so that the readers who read the story get some lessons for their lives.

These are the major forms of *vakrata* that Kuntaka had listed under *prabandha vakratā*. If you have any doubts about this, please watch the video once again.

Thank you!