An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory
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Lecture- 60
Dhvani: Avivaksita-vacya

Hello everyone,

In these last lectures, we are going to deal with the theory of dhvani propounded by Ānandavardhana. Ānanda's dhvani theory holds an important position in the intellectual history of Sanskrit poetics primarily because this is the first theoretical position in Sanskrit literary theory to incorporate the idea of rasa into its framework. As we saw before, the theory of *dhvani* is also an answer to the age-old question of what constitutes literariness in *kāvya*. We find the exposition of Ānanda's theory of dhvani, in his magnum opus, Dhvanyāloka which was composed in the ninth century in today's Kashmir. At the outset of this discussion, I would also like to mention that none of the manuscripts of Dhvanyāloka gives it the name Dhvanyāloka. The colophons of the manuscript refers to the text as Sahrdayāloka or *the Light for connoisseurs*, *Sahṛdayaloka* or 'A Light for the Hearts of Connoisseurs'; and sometimes as kāvyaloka or 'A Light on Poetry', Abhinavagupta, who is the oldest commentator on the text refers to it in his commentary as *Sahṛdayalokalocana*, 'An Eye for the the world of connoisseurs.' Abhinava refers to this text as *Sahṛdayalokalocana*, in the colophons of the first three chapters of his commentary in the printed editions. The colophon of the fourth chapter, that is based on a totally different manuscript tradition, calls the text by the name *Kāvyaloka*. So, we should assume here that the title Dhvanyaloka is a modern coinage. Although Dhvanyaloka may not be the correct title of this text, it is now popularly known as Dhvanyaloka. So, throughout this lecture, I will be using the name Dhvanyaloka to refer to the text of Anandavardhana

Although Ānanda in Dhvanyāloka comprehensively talks about various aspects concerning poetics, his major thesis statement in *Dhvanyāloka* is that the primary constituent of literariness or the soul of *kāvya* is *dhvani* or poetic suggestion. Ānandavardhana composed *Dhvanyāloka* to oppose his detractors who argued that the entity called *dhvani* does not exist.

By revealing the true nature of *dhvani* in Dhvanyaloka, Ānanda aimed to defend his thesis and oppose his critics. Ananda also says that he composed Dhvanyaloka not only to prove his critics wrong but also to delight the heart of sensitive readers.

At this juncture, I would also like to mention that the mechanism of *dhvani* is not something that Ānandavardhana originally invented. Long before Ānanda wrote *Dhvanyāloka*, explaining the ontology of *dhvani* or poetic suggestion, writers of *kāvya* had already used the possibility of poetic suggestion to its optimum. Even then Ānandavardhana's position in the intellectual history of dhvani is unique because he is the first critic to systematically theorise this concept of *dhvani*. Therefore, we can undoubtedly call his *Dhvanyāloka*, the *lakṣaṇa-grantha* or the rule setting book of *dhvani*.

Having formed an overview of Anandavardhana and his magnum opus Dhvanyaloka, let us now talk about the theory of dhvani in detail. According to Anandavardhana, dhvani in literature is the ability of a poetic composition to suggest something beyond what is explicitly stated. This element that gets suggested, or that goes beyond what is explicitly stated, could be a *vastu*, i.e. a fact or a meaning, an *alaṅkāra* or a figure of speech and a *rasa* or the aesthetic emotion. The element which facilitates the process of suggestion is called a *vyañjaka*. It can be translated into English as 'a suggestor.' According to Anandavardhana, the whole realm of dhvani can be divided into two broad categories, namely *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani* and *vivakṣitānya-paravācya-dhvani*. First let us take a look at *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani*.

Avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani

What is an *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani*? *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani* is that kind of dhvani where a signifier, or a set of signifiers in the form of a sentence, abandons its *abhidh* or the primary meaning and then comes to suggest a new meaning that is not conventionally associated with it. According to Ānandavardhana, the term *avivakṣita-vācya*, literally means "that instance of *dhvani* where the literal meaning is not intended." In the case of *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani*, what functions as a *vyañjaka* or 'suggestor' is a signifier. I hope you are very clear about the definition of *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani*. For the sake of clarity, I can repeat the definition once again. Remember that *avivakṣita-vācya- dhvani* is that kind of dhvani where a signifier abandons *abhidhā* or its primary meaning and then comes to suggest a new meaning that is not conventionally associated with it.

Now, Ānanda further divides *avivakṣita-vācya* into two subcategories, viz. *atyanta-tiraskrta-vācya dhvani* and *arthāntara-saṃkramita-vācya dhvani*. *Atyanta-tiraskrta-vācya* is that type of *dhvani* where *abhidhā* or the literal sense of the signifier, is completely negated to suggest a new meaning that is not conventionally associated with that signifier. This variety is also called *jahatsvārtha lakṣaṇa*. Now we know what *atyanta-tiraskrta-vācya dhvani* is. Okay, then what is *arthāntara-saṃkramita-vācya*? *Arthāntara-saṃkramita-vācya* is that variety of avivaksita vacya dhvani where *abhidhā* or the literal meaning retains certain elements of its primary sense, but it suggests a new meaning that is not conventionally attributed to it. I will explain both these varieties with the help of some examples. First, let us take a look at *atyanta-tiraskrta-vācya*. The following is an example of *atyanta-tiraskrta-vācya* variety of *dhvani* that Anandavardhana cites in Dhvanyaloka:

"Though the sky is filled with drunken [*matta*] clouds   and the woods with *arjunas* thrashing in the downpour
these   black   nights   too   when   the   moon   has   lost   its   *pride*   [*ahaṅkāra*] carry off my heart."

According to Ānandavardhana, this Prākrit verse describing a monsoon night, has *dhvani* in the words "drunken" and "pride." The word 'drunken' or *matta* literally means 'a state of inebriation due to the use of some intoxicant.' Since, the condition of inebriation is applicable only to a sentient entity, the conventional meaning of the word 'drunken' or *matta* is impossible in this context. We know that a cloud, being a non-sentient thing, cannot get intoxicated. So the word, "drunken" leaves its primary meaning and then gets extended to suggest one of the characteristics associated with a drunkard, which is, 'the act of wandering around aimlessly.' Thus, the word 'drunken' undergoes an incorporeal transformation, i.e. the physicality of the signifier does not change, but it takes on a new signification which is not conventionally associated with it. The same process happens in the case of the signifier 'pride' or *ahaṅkāra*. The word 'pride' literally means, "A feeling of pleasure or satisfaction that you get when you or people who are connected with you have done something well or own something that other people admire." This is a quality typical of a sentient creature, especially a human being. But this quality is attributed to the moon which is a non-sentient thing. Hence, the literal meaning of the term, 'pride' (*ahaṅkāra*) gets blocked and then the signifier suggests another new meaning, which is 'charm'. So the sentence means that the moon has lost its charm. Therefore, it is an example of *atyanta-tiraskrta-vācya*.

The following verse is yet another example of this category:

"The sun has stolen our affection for the moon,

whose circle now is dull with frost,

and like a mirror **blinded** by breath,

shines no more."

The verse from the Rāmāyaṇa presents Laksmana's description of wintertime. Here dhvani lies in the word 'blind.' Here the word 'blind' is used to mean that the mirror cannot reflect the image in front of it since its surface is covered with frost. Since, the mirror cannot reflect the image, it is called blind. We know that the word blind literally means the one who is not able to see. The ability to see is a quality that we can associate only with a sentient entity. The mirror is not a sentient entity. So, how can it be blind? In this context, the word 'blind' leaves its primary meaning which is 'inability to see.' And then it suggests a new meaning–'the inability to make a clear representation.' This new meaning is not conventionally associated with the word blind. Here also the word abandons its meaning completely.

Now, let us look at the second variety of *dhvani* under *avivakṣita-vācya,* i.e. *arthāntara-saṃkramita-vācya dhvani. Arthāntara-saṃkramita-vācya* is that kind of *dhvani* where the literal meaning retains certain elements of its primary sense, and then suggests a new meaning that is not conventionally attributed to it. A classic example of this variety of *dhvani* is "*nagaraṃ praveśanti kuntāḥ"* (the spears enter the city). In this example, the word 'spear' does not mean 'a weapon with a pointed tip'; rather it means 'soldiers who wield spears,' i.e. spearmen. Here the word spear retains its primary meaning to some extent to mean that the persons here referred to are 'spearmen,' not 'bowmen.' So, the word *kuntāḥ* maintains certain aspects of its primary meaning, yet shows a new meaning that is not conventionally associated with it. The following is an example of *arthāntara-saṃkramita-vācy*a that Ānandavardhana quotes in *Dhvanyāloka*:

"White herons circle against dark clouds,

that paint the sky with their wet lustre,

Winds carry the small rain.

The peacocks, friends of the clouds, cry out with joy.

Let all this be: my heart is hard; I am Rama and can bear it all.

But Vaidehl, how will she live?

Alas, my queen, alas, be brave!"

In this verse the suggestive word is 'Rama.' We know that the word Rama is a proper noun. But in the sentence "I am Rama and can bear it all. But Vaidehl, how will she live?", the word Rama does not simply mean the name of a person. Here the proper name Rama means the one with the capacity to endure any hardships in life. Here the primary meaning of the word Rama is not completely negated. It is retained to some extent.

It goes without saying that if we completely negate the primary meaning of a term, it is impossible to generate a new meaning out of it. Therefore, Ānanda's division of *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani* into *atyanta-tiraskrta-vācya* and *arthāntara-saṃkramita-vācya* is not on the basis of whether a word completely negates its primary meaning or not. On the contrary, it is based on the degree to which a signifier retains its primary meaning. Although Ānanda divides *avivakṣita vācya* into these two categories, categorically classifying various instances of *avivakṣita-vācya* into *atyanta-tiraskrta-vācya* and *arthāntara-saṃkramita-vācya* is impossible, since, Ānanda does not propose any specific criteria to gauge the degree to which a signifier loses or retains its primary sense. Nevertheless, one thing we can say for certain is that in both these varieties of signifiers transcend their conventional semantic ambits and suggest a new meaning that is not conventionally associated with them.

Okay. Now we are going to deal with another crucial question. Is it possible for us to identify dhvani with its secondary usage? In other words, is it possible for us to argue that all the secondary usages can turn out to be a case of dhvani? According to Ānandavardhana, although both these varieties of *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani* operate with the help of secondary usage of words, it is not possible to identify secondary usage with dhvani. According to Anandavardhana, only fresh and new secondary usages that are suggested can become an instance of dhvani. Ananda eliminates all instances of secondary usages that have become part of convention from the ambit of *dhvani*. According to Ānanda, a secondary usage becomes an instance of *dhvani* only when it is not part of the existing linguistic convention. Ānandavardhana cites a lot of examples where *dhvani* does not occur even in the presence of secondary usage because that secondary usage is a *nirūḍhā lakṣaṇā*.

A case in point is the word, *lāvaṇya*. Ānanda observes that words, such as *lāvaṇya*, which are used idiomatically in a sense other than their proper sense, are never instances of *dhvani*. The word *lāvaṇya* which literally means 'salty' in Sanskrit is also used figuratively, by means of secondary usage, to mean 'charm' or 'beauty.' Even when the word *lāvaṇya* is used in the secondary sense to mean 'charm' or 'beauty,' it cannot be considered an instance of *dhvani* because this secondary usage has lost its newness since it is already a part of the existing linguistic convention.

According to Ānandavardhana, a secondary usage which has become part of convention or popular usage is only as good as literal meaning. Therefore, he eliminates all instances of secondary usages that have become part of convention from the ambit of *dhvani*. Ānanda opines, "To this we reply that here also there is no fault; because while the type of suggestion where the expressed meaning is unintended [*avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani*] relies on the path of secondary usage, it is not itself secondary usage. Secondary usage can also be found [in instances that are entirely] without suggestiveness" (570).

While a secondary usage that has become part of the existing linguistic convention is called *nirūḍhā lakṣaṇā*, the second variety where the speaker invents a new secondary usage based on his/her intention or *tātparya* is called *prayojanavatī-lakṣaṇā*. Kunjunni Raja observes that "In the case of these faded metaphors [*nirūḍhā lakṣaṇā*], the association of the word with the original primary meaning has almost disappeared, and the word becomes an ordinary name for the actual referent without any other cognitive or emotive association" (263). In *Tantravārttika*, Kumārilabhaṭṭa holds that in *nirūḍhā lakṣaṇā*, the presence of secondary usage is forgotten to the point of treating it as the conventional primary sense of the signifier (643). What we call a dead-metaphor or "a metaphor which has been so often used that it has become lifeless and lost its figurative strength" such as 'the leg of a table' is an example of *nirūḍhā lakṣaṇā*.

I hope the concepts that we have discussed so far are clear to you. I will wrap up the class with a revision of all the major concepts that we have discussed so far. We saw that Anandavardha is the first literary theoretician to conceptualize the idea of dhvani. We saw that dhvani is the ability of a element to imply something beyond what is explicitly stated. Dhvani is divided into two broad categories, namely avivaksita-vacya-dhvani and vivaksitanya-paravacya-dhvani. Avivaksita-vacya-dhvani was then divided into two broad categories namely, arthantha-samkramita vacya and atyanta tiraskrita vacya. *Atyanta-tiraskrta-vācya* is that type of *dhvani* where *abhidhā* or the literal sense of the

signifier is completely negated. This variety is also called ജഹത്സ്വാർഥ ലക്ഷണ (jahatsvārtha lakṣaṇa). Now what is *arthāntara-saṃkramita-vācya*. In *arthāntara-saṃkramita-vācya*, *abhidhā* or the literal meaning retains certain elements of its primary sense, but it suggests a new meaning that is not conventionally attributed to it. I hope these points are clear to you.

We also saw that if we completely negate the primary meaning of a term, it is impossible to generate a new meaning out of it. Therefore Ānanda's division of *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani* into *atyanta-tiraskrta-vācya* and *arthāntara-saṃkramita-vācya* is not on the basis of whether a word completely negates its primary meaning or not. It is, on the contrary, based on the degree to which a signifier retains its primary meaning. Although Ānanda divides *avivakṣita vācya* into these two categories, categorically classifying various instances of *avivakṣita-vācya* into *atyanta-tiraskrta-vācya* and *arthāntara-saṃkramita-vācya* is impossible, since Ānanda does not propose any specific criteria to gauge the degree to which a signifier loses or retains its primary sense. Nevertheless, one thing we can say for certain is that in both these varieties signifiers transcend their conventional semantic ambits and suggest a new meaning that is not conventionally associated with them. In the next class, we will see the varieties of vivaksitanya-paravacya-dhvani.