

**An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory**  
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**Lecture- 30**  
**The Concept of Aucitya and Ksmendra**

It was Kṣemendra, the eleventh century Sanskrit theoretician, who made the concept of *aucitya* a separate body of knowledge in literary science, through his famous treatise titled *Aucityavicāracarā*. In *Aucityavicāracarā*, Kṣemendra sees *aucitya* as the eternal life force of *kāvya*. He compares a poem that does not conform to the standards of propriety to an unruly person who has worn ornaments in improper places, and has consequently become a butt of ridicule. Kṣemendra says, “An embellishment is a real embellishment if applied at the proper place; merits are always real merits when they are not divested of propriety. Put at a proper place, ornaments could beautify, otherwise they do not even deserve to be called ornaments. Similarly merits, if they do not fall short of propriety, are merits, otherwise they are blemishes. Who does not suffer mockery by putting on the girdle-string around the neck, the radiant necklace around the waist, the anklets on hands, the bracelets on feet, and by showing might against the prostrated and compassion towards foes? Similarly neither figures of speech nor the merits look charming without propriety.

Bhānūdatta in his *Rasatarāṅgiṇi* states that “impropriety must by all means be carefully avoided.” According to him, “There is nothing that destroys *rasa* more than impropriety. He sees one’s adherence to the canons of propriety as “the priceless secret of *rasa*”. All these observations show that in the tradition of Sanskrit *kāvyaśāstra*, the notion of *aucitya* was a central concern.

It should also be borne in mind that *anaucitya* or impropriety was not absolutely unacceptable in *kāvya*. In the case of degenerate characters (*adhama*) like Rāvaṇa, impropriety was very much acceptable. Creative writers often employed the impropriety of the inferior characters (*adhama*) as a way to juxtapose them against the law-abiding noble characters (*uttama*). Pollock in his article 'The Social Aesthetics of Sanskrit Literary Theory' points out that the presence of impropriety “as such does not enfeeble literature, as if, since ‘the sole aim of literature’ is *rasa*, when ‘real *rasa*’ is not present, the true aim of literature is not attained. How, after all, could one have the *Rāmāyaṇa* without Rāvaṇa?”

An important thing that we need to keep in our mind is that *anaucitya* or impropriety is not a *nityadoṣa* or eternal fault. Scholars as early as Bhāmaha had pointed out that *anaucitya* is not something that is totally undesirable in poetry. Bhāmaha’s discussion in this respect takes place in chapter 4 of his *Kāvyaḷaṅkāra* when he discusses the *kāvya*doṣa called *punarukti*. *Punarukti* or tautology is the saying of the same thing over and over again in different words. Considering the fact that it results in boredom, creative writers and literary theoreticians opine that *punarukti* is a doṣa and should be avoided from poetry. But Bhāmaha points out that although *punarukti* is usually considered a poetic fault, it is very much acceptable in the representation of emotions such as fear, jealousy, etc. He says:

"ഭയശോകാഭ്യാസൂയാസു  
ഹർഷ വിസ്മയോരപി  
യാതാഹാ ഗച്ഛ ഗച്ഛപി  
ന തത് വിദ്യുഃ"

Daṇḍin also holds the same view. In the fourth chapter of his *Kāvyaḷarṣa*, Daṇḍin says that *apārtha* or incoherent argument is generally considered a poetic fault. But it becomes a *guṇa* or poetic merit in portraying the raving of a madman, or a child’s prattle or the speech of

person who is sick. Similarly Daṇḍin shows the vyabhicāra or exception to all doṣas. He is fully aware that in the realm of poetry a certain thing is not a doṣa by its very nature.

Daṇḍin's observation in this respect is very interesting.

Rudraṭa even goes to the extent of saying that almost all kinds of poetic flaws become poetic merits when occasions need the imitation of these flaws. While representing the character of a mentally deranged person, the use of nonsense becomes inevitable. Nāmasadhu, the commentator of Rudraṭa's *Kāvyaṅkārā* explains this point further. He says that when one portrays the character of a speaker who is not good at speaking, all the poetic faults turn out to be poetic merits. To explain his point, he cites the instance of the funny description of the illiterate husband of the poetess Vikaṭanitambā who is unable to pronounce properly.

Ānandavardhana also holds that the idea of *anaucitya* or impropriety is *anitya* or impermanent.

"ശ്രുതി ദുഷ്ടാ ദയോ ദോഷാ  
അനിത്യം യെ ച സൂചിതാഃ  
ധാന്യാത്മന്യേവ ശൃംഗാരേ തേ  
ഹേയ ഇത്യുദീരിരിതാ"

For example, he opines that the doṣa called śrutiduṣṭa, or the employment of harsh words, will become a guṇa in the case of emotions like raudra rasa or the aesthetic emotion of rage. Bhoja calls these kinds of doṣas, that is, doṣas that can turn out to be guṇas, as doṣaguṇas, or vaiśeṣika guṇas.

The literary critic J.E Spingern's observations in his essay 'Seven Arts and the Seven Confusions' about the relative status of poetic or literary demerits is worth quoting here. "It is inconceivable that a modern thinker should still adhere to the abstract tests of good expression, when it is obvious that we can only tell whether it is good or bad when we see it

in its natural context. Is any word artistically bad in itself? Is not “ ain’t ” an excellent expression when placed in the mouth of an illiterate character in a play or story? ”

It is also significant to note that what is considered *aucitya* today can become *anaucitya* tomorrow. A case in point is the observation of Jagannatha about Draupadi having five husbands. 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*. Distancing himself from the old school and calling himself *navya* or new, Jagannātha declares: “Here Draupadī’s love for her husbands is an instance of *rasābhāsa* or semblance of *rasa*.” This is the view of the new intelligentsia. But the ancient scholars do not see this instance of a heroine feeling love for her multiple partners as a case of *rasābhāsa*.

Another case in point is the observation of Ānandavardhana about the scene in the eighth sarga of Kālidasa’s *Kumārasambhava* which was considered by many critics to be obscene because it portrayed the physical intimacy between Śiva and Parvati. But Ānandavardhana exonerates Kālidasa of this charge since this scene, Ānanda argues, does not appear as vulgarity because the elements of vulgarity are concealed by his skill. A modern example would be D.H Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterly’s Lover*. It was thought to be unfit for respectable society because of the profusion of the four-letter words, and was considered culpable obscenity in England in the 1920s when the novel was published. But now the novel is read with much enthusiasm by the modern readers.

So, in this lecture, we have been seeing the opinion of various Sanskrit literary theoreticians about the importance of the idea of *aucitya* or propriety in creation of a good *kāvya*. It shows that the notion of propriety was an overarching concept in Sanskrit poetics and literary

theoreticians always insisted that creative writers should adhere to the rules of propriety. We should note that it was not only literary critics but poets also expressed this view. For instance, Magha in his *Sisupalavadha*, compared the wisdom of a king choosing the right policy to that of a poet choosing the right style for his work. This is the essence of the literary concept of *aucitya*. In the next video lecture, we will look at the various ways in which *aucitya* functioned. I hope you have understood this lesson. Thank you!