

An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory

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Lecture- 35

Aucitya and the Opinions of Literary Theoreticians

In the previous lectures, we have been trying to form an overview of the idea of *aucitya*. We know that the English word that can approximate to the notion of *aucitya* is propriety or decorum. The word *aucitya* referred to two things in poetics. First of all, it meant the discretion of the creative writer about the choice of correct aesthetic components that suits the context. It also meant amalgamation of acceptable social practices in society. We saw that the notion of *aucitya* was central to Sanskrit poetics right from Bharata onwards. A detailed review of the history of the concept of *aucitya* showed us that it was an important concept throughout the history of Sanskrit poetics. We have also seen that the idea of *aucitya* is not a static concept in the sense that what is proper today will be improper tomorrow. We noted that insistence on adherence to propriety did not mean that impropriety should always be removed from the ambit of literature. In the context of presenting *adhama* characters, impropriety was a desirable element.

We discussed that the idea of propriety functioned in literary theory in two ways. First, *kāvyaśāstra* gave the creative writers clear mandates as to how to portray character types and emotions. Sometimes, they even asked the writers to refer to scholarly texts which detail the acceptable practices within a field of knowledge to conform to the notion of *aucitya* in the realm of poetic composition. The second method was the elimination of an improper action, committed by a noble character. This method was generally used when the creative writers were retelling an already existing story with an impropriety.

The next question we discussed was the necessity of insistence on the observation of *aucitya* on the part of the noble characters. Why did literary theoreticians insisted that creative writers should conform to *aucitya*? In this regard, we saw that *kāvya* was also seen as a mechanism to instruct the readers about *dharmavidhi* or the right way of living. But unlike the *Veda* and *śāstras* which explicitly instructed the readers, *kāvya* implicitly instructed the readers. How did it implicitly instruct the readers? *Kāvya* always presented that the noble hero who conforms

to the notion of *aucitya* emerge victorious over the *adhama* villain who rejects propriety. Naturally, a reader who reads a *kāvya*, composed in this manner, will be inspired by the dharmic ways and manners of the noble hero.

In this video lecture, we are going to see the specific observations of various literary theoreticians with respect to the idea of *aucitya*. The first theoretician we are going to discuss in this respect is Bhāmaha.

Bhāmaha

Although Bhāmaha's observations about the concept of *aucitya* are very limited, we cannot completely ignore him. I have already mentioned that Bhāmaha's ideas about *aucitya* are in the form of his reflections about *kāvya-doṣa* or poetic faults or blemishes. We have discussed it in detail, when we talked about *guṇas* and *doṣas*. I do not intend to repeat them here. Here, I will be primarily dealing with some of his observations with respect to the representation of heroes and villains in *kāvya*. It seems that Bhāmaha is generally in favor of the popular method of presenting heroes as the embodiment of all the good qualities. He is not in favor of presenting either the hero or the villain as individuals representing both *guṇas* and *doṣas*.

While describing the genre called *kathā*, Bhāmaha observed that a hero talking about his own qualities and merits will not suit his noble birth. So, the achievements and merits of the hero should be narrated by someone else. But he says that this is acceptable in *akhyāyika*. It seems from this apparent contradiction, that Bhāmaha has not thought much about this in detail. Bhāmaha is also against the practice of a noble hero, with all the qualities, being killed at the end of the story. Bhāmaha observes, "After having first placed a Nāyaka by extolling his ancestry, prowess etc., do not narrate his destruction with the object of enhancing the glory of another." Bhāmaha further asks, "if the hero is not intended to dominate the whole poem and is not to participate in the final success, it is useless to describe him in great glory in the beginning." Bhāmaha also warns the poets against using instances that go against the common sense of the readers. He calls the poet's propensity for incorporating things against common sense as *ayuktimat*. For example, Bhāmaha says that poets should not present the cloud, the wind, the bee, parrot, etc. as messengers. These entities and birds cannot speak legibility and cannot travel for a long distance. That being the case, Bhāmaha asks, how can they act as messengers? Bhāmaha observes that there are exceptions to this rule. For example, if the person who sends the message is intoxicated or mentally deranged, s/he may end up choosing a non-

sentient entity or a bird or an animal as the messenger. When we discussed the concept of *alankāra*, we saw that Bhāmaha gave great importance to *atiśayokti* or hyperbole. Although he gave greater importance to hyperbole, he says that one should not mix hyperbole and the improbable.

We can see Bhāmaha's concern about *aucitya* in poetic faults with respect to *upama* or simile, as well. Since, it is a relatively big section, I will focus only on the idea of impossible and simile. Bhāmaha opines that it is improper to compare a situation to a highly improbable situation that is against the common knowledge of the readers. He gives us an example in this respect. This example comes from a situation where a king is showing his skill in archery. The poet says that "the burning arrows coming from the middle of the king's bended bow looked, as if they issued from the face of the king, just as effulgent streams of rain appear to fall from the noonday sun." Bhāmaha asks "How could an effulgent stream of water issue from the sun? This is an improbable situation." According to Bhāmaha, no man of sense will make a comparison with an improbable thing.

Doṣas such as *deśavirodha* or observations that contradict the facts regarding a place, *kalā-virodha* or the poetic fault arising from the lack of knowledge of art, *nyāya-virodha* observations that go against the set rules pertaining to dharma, *artha* and *kāma*, or *āgama virodha* or the statements that contradict the precepts in *dharmasāstra*, etc. clearly represent his observations about *aucitya*. Bhāmaha compares a poet to a garland maker. While stringing together a garland, a garland-maker selects the sweet-smelling, beautiful looking flowers. He also knows how to identify and reject the ordinary ones. He also has a good knowledge of the shape and color of the flowers. He knows where to place what colored flowers in the garland to enhance its beauty. In a similar manner, while composing a *kāvya*, a poet should take abundant care to select the appropriate words, and place them in their right position, in order to produce a charming *kāvya*.

Daṇḍin

As in Bhāmaha's *Kāvyaalankāra*, Daṇḍin's *Kāvyaadarśa* also contains observations about the notion of *aucitya*, without really using the term *aucitya*. Daṇḍin's observations regarding *aucitya* are expressed through the idea of *kāvya doṣas* or poetic faults. We have already discussed it in detail when we discussed it in the section on *guṇas* and *doṣas*. So, here I will be

dealing with some aspects with respect to the representation of heroes which I have not covered in the previous section.

Daṇḍin observes that a hero should be an embodiment of all the good qualities and the poet should make sure that such a hero emerges victorious at the end of the story. Unlike Bhāmaha, he is not against ascribing courage, education, and nobility to a villain. Daṇḍin thinks that such an approach will enhance the quality of the hero, when the former wins over the latter. Daṇḍin does not find fault with the hero becoming the speaker of the story. According to Bhāmaha, a hero should consciously stay away from describing his own achievements. But, Daṇḍin does not support this view. He says that the hero does not need to shy away from speaking about the actual things that happened in his life. Daṇḍin is also against using rustic and uncouth expressions in *kāvya*. We have already seen this previously. So, I do not intend to speak about this at great length.

Vāmana

Vāmana's observations about *aucitya* are also encoded in *kāvya-doṣa*. We have seen it to a great extent in the section on *kāvya guṇas* and *doṣas*. However, I would like to briefly talk about some of his observations with respect to social propriety here.

Vāmana's observation about the importance of a poet conforming to the normalized truth claims of the society recoded in *śāstras*, typifies how *kaviśikṣa* functioned in preconditioning a poet the way the *aucitya* demanded. The *doṣa* that Vāmana refers to as *vidyāvīrudham* or opposition to dominant knowledge systems, is clearly an attempt to condition the poet according to the social propriety of the period. Vāmana opines that any representation of facts, against what is written in *śāstras*, will be a blotch on *kāvya*.

To demonstrate the poetic blemish called *vidyāvīrudham* and warn the poet against it, Vāmana cites a few examples. According to *dharmasāstra*, it is to restore justice that kings conquer the world. If a poet says that it is to satiate their material desires that kings conquer countries, that will result in a poetic blemish. According to *Daṇḍasāstranīti*, it is because of a person's prudent conduct and diplomacy that others succumb to him/her. But if somebody says that it is a person's aggressiveness that enables him to win over others, then it clashes with the socially

accepted norm of Daṇḍaśāstranīti and consequently results in the poetic blemish of contradicting *caturvarga-śāstra*.

He gives another example which is at war with *Kāmasāstra*. According to *Kāmasāstra*, lower lip or adhara is the right place to kiss, not the upper lip or uttaroṣṭha. Contrary to this dictum in *Kāmasāstra*, if a poet states that the upper lip is the right place to kiss, the poet will court a poetic blemish. Vāmana's injunction, that a poet should always pay heed to the śāstras which draw a neat line between what is acceptable and unacceptable within a social framework, is something which runs through the whole system of Sanskrit poetics.

The poet who got trained in the *kāvyaśāstra* was thus encouraged to produce the cultural artefact in the *aucitya* preferred way. We can undoubtedly say that this pedagogical practice always served as an effective tool in the Sanskrit literary circle to make creative writers compliant, and to suppress any deviant representation of character-types and emotions. This kind of prescriptivism not only suppressed the emergence of alternative ideologies, but it also predetermined the nature of character-types and their actions even before a *kāvya* was actually composed. In other words, even though the name and the local habitation of the characters and the objects changed from *kāvya* to *kāvya*, their representation was predetermined by the laws of propriety. By its insistence on the 'suitability' of all aspects of literature, from the word to character traits, *aucitya* pre-empted any attempt in Sanskrit literary tradition to pose resistance to the truth claims endorsed by the dominant power structure.

Rudraṭa

We have seen the observations of Rudraṭa briefly in the previous lecture in connection with the observation that *anaucitya* is not a *nityadoṣa*. Although Rudraṭa was the first literary theoretician to use the term *aucitya* to refer to impropriety, his engagement with the notion of *aucitya* was very minimal. However, I think that it is good to reflect upon his observations on *aucitya* before we proceed to Ānandavardhana who is considered the first literary theoretician to systematically approach the idea of propriety, using the term '*aucitya*.' It is significant to note that Rudraṭa had used the concept of *aucitya* without using the term *aucitya*. For example, Rudraṭa says that a poet should have what is appropriate and inappropriate by learning poetic meter, grammar, lokasthiti or the ways of the world, vocabulary, etc. What he calls *yuktāyuktaviveka* is *aucitya*. He is of the view that a poet attains this quality through *vyutpatti* or training. The following are some of his suggestions with respect to *aucitya*: A poet should

be careful to choose words with beauty which can brighten up the composition. The poet should also be particular about using words whose meaning suits the context. Rudraṭa also warns the poets against replacing an important *rasa* that suits the context with another *rasa* that is relatively unimportant in the context. Particularly important is his engagement with a poetic fault or *doṣa* called *grāmya*. *Grāmya* is the kind of *doṣa* or poetic blemish that arises out of impropriety with respect to clan, caste, education, brilliance, social position, costume, stature, etc. It seems that with reference to this poetic blemish called *grāmya*, Rudraṭa is invoking Bharata's dictum that a character should wear costumes according to their age, should walk according to their costume, and should speak according to their gait. He is also implicitly stating that one should be attentive to the idea of *aucitya*.

Soon in the next lecture, we will have a detailed engagement with the notion of *aucitya* as we find it in Anandavardhana's *Dhvanyaloka*. Anandavardhana deserves a special mention because he is the first literary theoretician to systematically reflect upon the notion of *aucitya*.