

An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory

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Lecture - 36

Aucitya and Anandvardhana

Hello everyone, in the previous lecture, we saw the observations of literary theoreticians from Bhāmaha to Rudraṭa. In this lecture we are going to look at Ānandavardhana's thoughts on the notion of *aucitya*. I have already told you Ānandavardhana deserves a special mention because he is the first literary theoretician to systematically reflect upon the notion of *aucitya*.

Ānandavardhana

We have seen that Ānandavardhana is the first literary critic in Sanskrit poetics to systematically meditate on the idea of *aucitya*, although Rudraṭa was the first one to introduce the term in his *Kāvyaḷaṅkara*. In *Dhvanyāloka*, Ānandavardhana specifically talks about the importance of poetic genius or *pratibhā* and *aucitya* arising from it. It is significant to note that in his discussion, he interchangeably uses terms like *anaucitya* and *doṣa*. So, one can undoubtedly consider his discussion of *doṣa* as a discussion on *anaucitya* as well. He divides *anaucitya* committed by a poet into two, namely the one that happens due to the poet's lack of mature judgment or *avyutpatti* or the one that happens due to his lack of skill. Ānandavardhana says that *anaucitya* that is due to lack of mature judgment may be concealed by the poet's skill, so that it never gets noticed. But a fault that is due to the poet's lack of skill will appear immediately. An example that Ānandavardha cites in this regard is a scene from the eighth sarga of Kālidasa's *Kumārasambhava* where the poet presents the śṛṅgāra *rasa* of Siva and Parvati. This scene is generally considered to be an example of *anaucitya*, since a poet is not supposed to present the love-making of gods on stage, considering that fact that it can put to the readers to shame. But in *Kumārasambhava*, Kālidasa with the help of his *pratibha* or poetic genius presents this scene in such a manner that we do not feel any impropriety.

Ānanda also gives some standing instructions to the poets with respect to the representation of heroes. According to Ānanda, if the hero of a *kavya* is a human, it is improper on the part of the poets to present that human-hero doing things which a man cannot otherwise do. For

example, if a poet portrays a human hero leaping across the seven seas, it will sound really inappropriate. The same is the case with ascription of some base human qualities to divine entities. We should not ascribe qualities that we see exclusively in humans to divine characters. He says that “If one describes the energy or *utsaha* or the like of a god as belonging to a mere human, or that of a mere human as belonging to a god, the emotion will be inappropriate. For example, in a passage dealing with a king who is a mere human, if one describes activities in which he leaps across the seven seas, one’s description, even if beautiful in itself, will as a rule be without *rasa* and tasteless.” Abhinava’s comment on this passage is also worth exploring in this context. According to Abhinava, “if a poet portrays a mere human being leaping over the seven seas, it will definitely arouse suspicion in the minds of readers and the whole content of the story may appear to be false and unbelievable to him”.

In such a scenario, *kāvya* may fail to serve its dharmic function, that is as a mechanism that can teach us the four goals of life. If suspicion arises in the minds of the readers about the very feasibility of the actions portrayed in the plot, how can it teach people something? I will quote Abhinava’s words in this respect for your reference. Abhinava notes that “That a mere mortal should leap over the seven seas in a single stride is quite impossible and would strike the hearer’s heart as a falsehood. Hence, it would instill into his judgment a suspicion that the poem’s teaching concerning the means to all the four goals of man was also untrue. A similar feat, however, if told of Rāma, would not strike the audience as untrue, for it would have acquired conviction from a long line of ancient tradition.”

But, Ānanda reminds us that if the character in a narrative is partly divine and partly human, there is no impropriety in ascribing extraordinary deeds to that character. An example that Ānanda cites to explain this point is the story of King Sātavāhana. King Sātavāhana, although a human, had a divine touch to his character. So, in *kāvya*s, he is described to have visited the heaven. Ananda says, “But now we hear of such adventures as journeys to the nether world taken by King Sātavāhana and others. So what impropriety is there in describing the extraordinary and superhuman power of kings who ruled over all the earth? The objection is not to the point. We do not say that descriptions of the extraordinary power of kings are inappropriate; rather, that in a narrative which has been invented and is based on purely human characters, matters that are appropriate to gods are unfitting. If the character in a

narrative is partly divine and partly human, there is no contradiction in introducing matters appropriate to both, as in the narrative of Pāndu and his sons”.

After saying this, Ānanda quotes his famous dictum about *aucitya*. He opines, “For the spoiling of rasa there is no cause/ other than impropriety. On the other hand, /composing a work within recognized propriety/ is the very Upanishad of rasa”.

Quoting Bharata, Ānanda says that if *nāṭaka* is the genre in which the poet is going to present a story, the hero should be noble and the plot of the story should be famous. If the story is well-known to all, it will be easier for the poets to conform to *aucitya*. A poet, Ānanda observes, who sets out to compose a *nāṭaka* with a not-so-well-known or invented plot and a hero is likely to commit a mistake in terms of *aucitya*.

Although the idea of *aucitya* is applicable to all emotions, Ānanda pays particular attention to *śṛṅgāra* rasa in his discussion of *aucitya*. The primary reason for this, Ānanda says, is that *śṛṅgāra* is the most delicate of all the *rasas*. According to Ānanda, the kind of *śṛṅgāra* or the aesthetic emotion that is appropriate to one category should not be applied to another category. Ānanda asks, “Thus, if we assign a type of love to characters of the upper class by recourse to what is appropriate to the lower class, how ridiculous will be the result! Even in India what is appropriate in love differs according to the three classes of men”. According to Ānanda, there is no special set of rules for the representation of *śṛṅgāra* rasa in the case of divine characters. For him, the representation of the *śṛṅgāra* rasa of the upper-class characters can be emulated in the case of divine beings as well. He warns the poets that what is recognized *as vulgar love* should not be attached to kings and gods in plays of the *nāṭaka* type and the like.

Let us take a look at the words of Ānanda in this respect. He observes, “Accordingly, whether in the literature of performance or in poetry which is not performed, the description of vulgar sexual enjoyment between characters of the upper classes, kings and ladies, is highly indecent, just like a description of the sexual enjoyment of our parents. Precisely the same charge appears within the sphere of the gods”

He also tells the poets that *sambhogasṛṅgāraṃ* or the love in the union is not the only way in which the aesthetic emotion of the erotic can be portrayed. It can be portrayed implicitly by

presenting the interchange of glances and the like. This indirect representation of love is more appropriate in the case of characters belonging to the noble and divine category.

Ānandavardhana's example is further elaborated in detail by Abhinavagupta. Abhinava says that the most important point in producing *rasa* is to avoid any disturbance of delight to those who are relishing it. Now treating the sexual enjoyment of the highest gods is almost like treating that of our parents. This will cause shame and horror and will leave us no room for delight. So, poets usually avoid scenes depicting the sexual enjoyment of gods.

Ānandavardhana says that if poets have any doubts about the notion of *aucitya* that they have to follow in *kāvya*, they should definitely refer to the dictums mentioned by critics like Bharata. Ānandavardhana declares that, "A poet who follows the system of Bharata and others, who studies the work of great poets of the past, and who gives rein to his own genius, must still be attentive and exert the greatest care not to relax or depart from the proprieties of the *vibhāvas* and the other factors of *rasa*." Ānanda is of the view that if a poet is planning to add an invented plot or episode to an already existing well-known story, he should pay more attention to the newly invented plot, because the existing plot is already well scrutinized by scholars. But, a poet is more likely to make mistakes with respect to *aucitya* in the new plot. He notes that "A plot consisting of invented matter should be so made that every portion of it may appear full of *rasa*."

Ānanda is particularly careful when it comes to the incorporation of new episodes "in the case of stories like the *Rāmāyaṇa* which are famous for perfected *rasa*". His observation is particularly noteworthy in this context. He says, "Into these stories one must not add matter of one's own choice. As has been said: "not the slightest departure from the story's path." Even if one should add matter of one's own choice, one must not add anything that contradicts the *rasa*."

Ānanda also suggests poets should remove any element of impropriety that is against the *rasa* of the text. Ānandavardhana says that poets like Kālidāsa and Sarvasena have done this in their works. "A poet, Ananda says, when writing a poem must concentrate with all his soul on the *rasa*. If he observes a pattern in the story that goes against the *rasa*, he should eliminate it and bring in some other story appropriate to the *rasa* by his invention. A poet has no need to carry out a mere chronicle of events. That is a task accomplished by the historian".

Ānanda is also very particular about the way in which independent couplets are to be incorporated into the body of kāvya. He says that the couplets that are introduced into the body of kāvya should go well with the aesthetic emotion of the whole work. Abhinavagupta's analogy of a soldier's presence in an army explains this matter further. In his commentary on Dhvanyāloka, Abhinava observes, "And just as a man who enters a social aggregate such as the army, even if he should be individually a coward, adapts himself to the character appropriate to an army, just so a poetic sentence introduced into a particular aggregate such as a couplet, must become appropriate thereto."

Ānandavardhana also says that the poet should follow aesthetic propriety in the construction of *sandhis* or the successive stages of plot development. There are primarily five *sandhis* in a play namely *mukha* or beginning, *pratimukha* or development, *garbha* or the center, *avamarṣa* or dubiety and *nirvahaṇa* or conclusion. Here, *avamarṣa* is also called *vimarṣa* or "the struggle." Ānandavardhana says that these five *sandhis* are to be presented in a socially acceptable manner towards the revelation of *rasa*. A text which Ānandavardhana cites as the perfect example of the conjoining of all the *sandhis* in a proper manner in order to achieve the final goal of *rasa* is *Ratnāvali* by Harṣa. Ānandavardhana also criticizes the work *Veṅṣamhāra* where the author follows these divisions simply out of a desire to fulfill the prescriptions of a textbook and to follow the dictates of Bharata, although this component is inharmonious with the *rasa*. Here, Ānandavardhana is only concerned about the notions concerning the *aucitya* of aesthetics. But, his commentator Abhinavagupta sees it from the perspective of social decorum as well. He observes that poets should also follow the social propriety of the period in presenting the actions that are appropriate for each stage. He explains his point with the help of the Sanskrit drama *Ratnāvali*. In *Ratnāvali*, the hero's primary aim is to obtain a maiden. But this aim is closely associated with a greater aim which is the achievement of universal sovereignty. It has been foretold that the king will gain such sovereignty if he marries the Princess of Ceylon, *Sāgarikā*. The other two elements that Ānandavardhana talks about in connection with the concept of *aucitya* are already discussed in my lectures on *rasa* and *alaṅkāra*. So, I do not intend to elaborate on them here. He says that the poets should pay attention to both intensify and relax *rasas* whenever they are needed. He also points out that the predominant *rasa* has to be revived whenever it begins to decline. He also points out that we should use *alaṅkāras* in such a manner that they suit the *rasa* under consideration.

Now, we can do a revision of the major points that Ānandavardhana mentions in his *Dhvanyāloka*. Ānanda himself summarizes these points in the chapter three of *Dhvanyāloka*. They include:

- 1) The forming of a plot, either traditional or imagined, according to the appropriateness of its vibhāvas, sthāyibhāvas, anubhāvas, and sancārins.
- (2) The abandoning of a pattern traditionally imposed on a story if it fails to harmonize [with the intended rasa]; and the introduction, by invention, if need be, of incidental narrative appropriate to that rasa.
- (3) The construction of sandhis and sandhyaigas designed to reveal the rasa and not brought in merely out of a desire to fulfill the requirements of a textbook system.
- (4) Intensifying and relaxing of the rasa at the appropriate occasions within the work; and the revival of the predominant rasa whenever it begins to fail.
- (5) The application of figures of speech in conformity with the rasa even in conformity with the rasa even though one may have the ability to construct more elaborate figures.

Kuntaka

In the third chapter of *Vakroktijīvitā*, Kuntaka observes that that the spoiling of *rasa* is caused solely by the breach of propriety. So he opines that, “Composing a work in conformity with propriety is the very *Upaniṣad* of *rasa*.” In *Vakroktijīvitā*, Kuntaka sees *aucitya* as a poetic merit and insists that a poet should pay due attention to it during the course of writing. Kuntaka’s discussion of the idea of *aucitya* is primarily in connection with his criticism of Udbhaṭa’s argument that *ūrjasvin* is a figure of speech. *Urjasvin* is the indecorous representation of *rasas* and *bhāvas* in a work or art or literature. According to Udbhaṭa, *ūrjasvin* is “the composition of sentiments [*rasas*] and feelings [*bhāvas*] wherein an action transgresses propriety (*anaucityapravarttānām*) because of anger, desire and so on”. The example given by Udbhaṭa for *ūrjasvin* is Śiva’s indecorous advance towards Pārvatī before their marriage. Kuntaka does not subscribe to Udbhaṭa’s view that *ūrjasvin* is an *alaṅkāra*, since it tampers with the propriety of the period. Kuntaka observes that *rasa*, *bhāvas*, etc. that

are bound together in an improper or *anaucitya* fashion not only impede the improvement of *rasa*, but also spoil it altogether. He asks how a *rasa* marred by impropriety can shine forth as an ornament?