

An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory
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Lecture - 31
Two ways of implementing Aucitya Part - 1

In *kāvyaśāstra*, the concept of *aucitya* functioned in two ways. Firstly, it set models for the representation of each character-type and emotion, and encouraged the creative writers to follow them intently. Secondly, it instigated the writers to censor situations that go against the accepted practices of the time. The tendency to prescribe the ideal model for the representation of each character-type and emotions starts from Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* onwards.

First, let us take a look at the first mechanism, i.e., setting models for the representation of character-types and emotions. Although many literary theoreticians have talked about this method, today we are going to look at only two representatives, Bharata and Anandavardhana. On the basis of the degree to which characters conformed to the notion of *aucitya*, Bharata divided the characters into three broad categories such as the noble characters or *uttama*, middle class characters or *madhyama* and the inferior characters or *adhama*. Bharata gave clear mandates to creative writers as to how they should present each of these characters.

For example, according to Bharata, an *uttama* female character should always be unperturbed by anything unpleasant. She should not speak harshly to her lover, should not retain her anger for long, and should not conceal the mistakes she has committed. Being compliant with the dominant social order, she is always desired by men. A *madhyama* female character, on the other hand, is always short-tempered, reciprocates the love of whoever loves her. She is jealous of her rivals in love, and is good at the art of love-making. An *adhama* woman's character does not agree with the general conception of how an ideal woman is supposed to behave. She will express her anger without thinking about the propriety of place and time. She will not conform to the code of conduct, and will be harsh and proud. Bharata's dictum is that a creative writer should unfailingly and appropriately ascribe these qualities to each character-type during their representation in an art form. In other words, a creative writer cannot represent an *uttama* character with the qualities of an *adhama* character and vice versa.

Bharata had also given clear instructions as to how a person belonging to a particular social category should express emotions. For instance, Bharata says that, in the expression of *hāsya rasa* or the comic emotion, the noble characters or the *uttama* characters should resort only to an open laughter and a smile. The middling characters (*madhyama*) should express it through the open laughter and laughter of ridicule . It is only the low or *adhama* characters who can resort to obscene and boisterous laughter.

Bharata’s exposition likewise extends to other emotions, paying minute attention to even the movements of eyebrows. In this sense, there is a similarity between *aucitya* and the Greek concept of decorum.

Another case in point is Bharata’s description of eight kinds of heroines or *aṣṭanāyikas* in eight different moods. These eight categories of women that Bharata mentions include *vāsakasajjā* or the heroine who is ready to meet her lover, *virahotkhaṇḍitā* or the heroine whose husband is away from her, *asvādhīnabharṭṛkā* or the heroine whose lover is captivated by another woman, *kalahāntarītā* or the heroine whose lover got separated from her after a quarrel, *khaṇḍitā* or the heroine whose husband is enamoured by another woman, *vipralabdhā* or the heroine whose lover has broken his promise on a tryst, *proṣitabharṭṛkā* or the heroine whose lover is abroad on an important mission and *abhisārikā* or the heroine who goes after her lover. Bharata gives a detailed mandate as to how these heroines should be represented in various situations. For instance, let us see how an *abhisārikā* of libertine, noble, and maid varieties should behave during their tryst with their lovers. Bharata says,

“Whether a courtesan or a noble born, or a maidservant, a woman, when she is an *abhisārikā* should act as follows: If a courtesan, she must deck herself with various ornaments, and she must walk slowly in the company of her servants. If a highborn lady, she could cover herself with a veil and walk timidly and with downcast eyes in a lurking manner. If a maidservant, she should walk with uneven steps, eyes beaming with joy, gesturing and babbling under the influence of intoxication. If the lover is in bed and asleep, she should awaken him in the following manner: A highborn lady should awaken him with the sound of ornaments, a courtesan, by her scents and a maidservant by fanning him with her clothes.

Bharata’s concept of *aṣṭanāyika* was highly influential not only for drama, but also for literature, music, and painting. For instance, Dhanika and Dhanañjaya’s *Daśarūpaka*,

Viśvanātha's *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, Bhoja's *Sringāraprakāśa*, etc. follow this tradition of setting the models of various kinds of heroines for creative writers. Bhānudatta's description of *nāyikas* in *Rasataranṅiṇi* and *Rasamañjari* are obviously inspired by Bharata's description of heroines in *Nāṭyaśāstra*. It also influenced a lot of *Kāmaśāstra* texts such as *Kuṭṭānimat*, *Anaṅgarāṅga*, etc. Keśavadas's *Rasikapriya* in Hindi also draws upon Bharata's notion of *aṣṭanāyikas*. The medieval paintings such as *ragamālika* also got influenced by this description of heroines. Another example that I can cite in this regard is his instructions of propriety with respect to the portrayal of *śringāra-rasa*. In the sixth chapter of *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Bharata opines that the source of *śringāra-rasa* should always be a young heterosexual couple belonging to the noble category.

Ānandavardhana also holds the same view. Ānanda talks about the importance of avoiding the improper representation of *śringāra rasa* in the case of characters belonging to the *uttama* category like kings and gods. Ānandavardhana 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 class, kings and ladies, is highly indecent, just like the description of the sexual enjoyment of our parents. Precisely, the same charge appears within the sphere of the gods."

Furthermore, sexual intercourse or *sambhoga-śringāra* is not the only form of love-in-enjoyment. Other forms such as the interchange of glances and the like are possible and can be used in writing of upper-class characters. Thus that which is appropriate to the character is to be followed in treating of sexual desire (*rati*) just as of energy.

Ānandavardhana is also against interchangeably using the attributes of behaviour ascribed to various character types. He believes that since the ways and manners of degenerate characters are completely antithetical to the propriety of the period, ascription of the character traits of the degenerate characters to the noble characters will ruin the greatness of the noble characters. Ānanda says,

"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 (*uttama*, *madhyama* and *adhama*)".

These directives as to how different character-types should behave are not limited to these eight heroines. It covers a wide range of areas such as ‘how a hero should behave; how a scene of lovemaking should be depicted; how a heroine should behave towards her guilty lover; how male characters of different character traits such as *catura* or clever, *uttama* or noble, *madhyama* or middling character, *adhama* or degenerate or low-born and *sambravrttaka* or a lover who is indifferent to fear and anger should behave in front of a courtesan; how the friend of a lover should act and so on. This tendency of setting appropriate models for the representation of different character-types and aesthetic emotions runs through the length and breadth of the entire *kāvyaśāstra* tradition. Dhanañjaya’s *Daśarūpaka*, Bhānudatta’s *Rasamañjari* and *Rasatarāṅgiṇi*, Vidyānātha’s *Pratāparudriya*, and Bhoja’s *Śringāraprakāśa* are a few other texts that give directives in this manner.

For a detailed reading on these aspects from the texts I just mentioned, you can refer to the second chapter of *Daśarūpaka* where Dhanañjaya talks in details about the qualities of a hero, various categories of hero, the characteristics of the helpers of hero, antagonists, different kinds of heroines, the qualities that are to be attributed to the side-kicks of a heroine, The second chapter (*prakaraṇa*) of Vidyānātha's *Pratāparudrīya* is also concerned with the representation of heroes and heroines; In Bhoja's *Śringāraprakāśa*, you can refer to chapters twenty-one and thirty-two which talk about the representation of heroes and heroines; In *Rasamañjari*, you can see the description on *nāyika* and *nāyaka*; And finally in *Rasatarāṅgiṇi*, Bhānu, in eight chapters, talks about the way in which each emotion has to be represented.