

## **An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory**

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**Lecture- 33**

**Aucitya and Kavisiksa**

In the previous video lecture, we saw the two crucial ways in which the idea of *aucitya* functioned in literary theory. I am sure you will be now wondering whether Sanskrit poetry actually conformed to these notions of *aucitya* set by literary theory.

According to Pollock, Sanskrit *kāvya* tradition for the most part did not veer away from the generally accepted representation of character-types and situation. It encouraged typicality, and did not usually pose resistance to the dominant worldview of the society. Pollock, in his introduction to Bhānudatta's *Bouquet of Ras* observes, "Sanskrit poets were interested in exploring typicality and, accordingly, needed to master it across the whole universe of emotion. How were women expected to act when first falling in love, when confronted by an act of infidelity on the part of their lovers, when desiring someone other than their husband? To answer such questions a discourse arose that aimed to construct a typology of character."

This typicality in the representation of character-types and situations was maintained throughout the history of Sanskrit *kāvya* tradition primarily through the process of *kavisikṣa* or the formal training of poets. Formal education in the art of composing literature was absolutely compulsory in the *kāvyaśāstra* tradition in Sanskrit. The exponents of *kāvyaśāstra* propagated the view that a *kavi*, even if he was naturally endowed with the talent of composing poems, would remain incomplete as a creative writer in the absence of a proper training (*śikṣa*). Thus *kavi* was made to undergo a conditioning process before the production of *kāvya*. It is a truism that *pratibha* or inborn genius was often privileged over *vyutppatti* or training. But, *vyutppatti* was indeed an unavoidable element in the making of a poet. Writers from Bhāmaha onwards talk about the importance of formal training in *kāvya*. Bhāmaha opines that the desire to compose *kāvyas* could be entertained only after mastering all *śāstras* necessary for the composition of literature. Daṇḍin is of the view that just as a blind person is incapable of differentiating between different colours, so also a poet devoid of training cannot distinguish

between poetic merits and excellence. He observes that even if a person falls short of *pratibha*, she/he can excel in the art of composing *kāvya* through sheer training.

Vāmana is of the view that an aspiring poet should get trained in literary science to distinguish between poetic merits and poetic faults. As far as he is concerned, even if one is naturally endowed with poetic genius, he should definitely undergo a formal training before writing *kāvya*s.

According to Mammaṭa, *kāvya* is the result of “knowledge born of a study of the world, of sciences and of poems, and the teachings of those versed in writing poetry.” Jayadeva compares *pratibha* to a seed, and training in composing poetry, to the soil where the seed of *pratibha* grows. In his *Kāvyaṃīmāṃsa*, Rājaśekhara says, “The prior knowledge of *śāstra* is essential for an appreciation of *kāvya*. Just as nothing is visible in the dark without the aid of light, so also no poet can create without knowledge of *śāstra*”.

In *Sāhityaṃīmāṃsa*, Mañkha says that a *kavi* should be endowed with three essential prerequisites such as instruction or *śruta*, practice or *abhiyoga* and poetic genius or *pratibhāśakti* (118). All these testify that one was not born a poet, but made a poet.

It should be noted that although learning of rhetoric and prosody was very important, it was only one of the many aspects of *kaviśikṣa*. *Kaviśikṣa* also meant learning of other arts and sciences such as *kāmasāstra* or theory of erotics, *arthasāstra* or the theory of politics, *mokṣasāstra* or the theory of salvation, etc. These texts codified the idea of ‘propriety’ in various fields of knowledge in day to day life.

*Kāvyaśāstra* borrowed the norms of social propriety relating to various fields from these allied scholastic disciplines, and used them as a tool of indoctrination for the poet. Leinhard observes, “Since they [that is poets] were expected to deal with things in a factual matter, the sciences that were closely allied in a narrow sense were not enough and a knowledge of numerous other fields was required, above all of erotics (*kāmasāstra*), logic (*nyāya*), the arts (*kalā*), political science (*arthasāstra*) and familiarity with such important sources of literary material as the epics the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* as well as with Purāṇas”. It is no wonder, then, that a poet who underwent *kaviśikṣa* did not produce anything that challenged the propriety of the period.

Vāmana's observation about the importance of a poet conforming to the normalised truth claims of the society, recoded in *śāstras*, typifies how *kaviśikṣa* functioned in preconditioning a poet in 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 dominant moral and social view.

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 *dharmaśāstra*, kings conquer the world to restore justice. 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 *Daṇḍaśāstranīti*, 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 *catuṣvargaśāstra*.

He gives another example which is at war with *Kāmaśāstra*. According to *Kāmaśāstra*, lower lip (*adhara*) is the right place to kiss, not the upper lip (*uttaroṣṭha*). Contrary to this dictum in *Kāmaśāstra*, 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 these *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 way the *aucitya* preferred. 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.

To put it in contemporary sociological terminology, *kaviśikṣa* functioned as a soft-power which aimed to “affect others to obtain preferred outcome by co-option and attraction rather than coercion”. By propagating the idea that conformity to *aucitya* or propriety is necessary to compose an excellent *kāvya* and to become a creative writer par excellence, the dominant class in the society won over the creative writers to produce literary works in tune with its interest. The poets who were under the sway of the soft-power of the dominant class willingly self-censored themselves, and conformed to the stereotypical notions of representation prevalent in the society.

The theory of *aucitya* preconditioned the representation of character-types and situations in *kāvya* in compliance with the interest of the dominant groups because *kāvya* functioned as a tool to socially condition the readers in accordance with the rules of *puruṣārtha*. The term *puruṣārtha* refers to the teachings of the four goals in life, which are, *dharma* or righteousness, *artha* or wealth, *kāma* or pleasure and *mokṣa* or salvation. *Dharma* aims to teach duties, rights, laws, code of conduct and the right way of living; *artha* is concerned with the proper pursuit of wealth; *kāma* relates to the right way of indulging in pleasure, both sensual and sexual, and *mokṣa* takes up the question of activities that a person should necessarily perform to attain liberation.

Sanskrit literary theorists as early as Bharata have entrusted *kāvya* with a deontic function, apart from its primary function of aesthetic pleasure. Bharata’s reference to the context in which Brahma asked him to compose *Nāṭyaśāstra* is a pointer to Bharata’s didactic philosophy of art. In response to the sage’s query regarding the origin of drama, Bharata says that he composed *Nāṭyaśāstra* to enlighten the morally degenerate people of *tretāyuga*. Bharata says that when *tretāyuga* began, the entire world became corrupt, and people started following what he calls *grāmya-dharma* or indecorous lifestyle. At this juncture, gods approached Brahma and asked him to create a new *Veda* so that people of all castes could become righteous. Thus, at the behest of gods, Brahma created *nāṭya* as a tool of didacticism. Brahma’s declaration about the function of *nāṭya*, reported by Bharata in *Nāṭyaśāstra*, is worth exploring here. Brahma says that *nāṭya* which is based on the actions of three kinds of human beings, namely *uttama*,

*madhyama*, and *adhama*, aims to instruct the spectators of all time about everything in the world. Quoting Brahma's words, Bharata says that *nāṭya* came into being to instruct men. To show the didactic function implicit in art, Bhaṭṭa Tauta, as recorded by Abhinavagupta in his *Locana*, draws an interesting analogy between *rasa*, drama and the Veda. According to Tauta: "Rasa is the delight; delight is the drama; and drama is the Veda".

Bhāmaha, who is considered the founding father of *kāvyaśāstra* in Sanskrit, shares the opinion of Bharata. According to Bhāmaha, "Composition of good poetry, produces ability in *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*. In his commentary upon Udbhata's *Kāvyaḷaṅkāra-sāra-saṃgraha*, Pratiharendurāja opines that *rasa* is indeed a source of instruction.

Rudraṭa in *Kāvyaḷaṅkāra*, in fact, privileges the deontic function of *kāvya* over its aesthetic function. He says, "Does not the knowledge of *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa* reach sensitive minds easily and pleasingly through poetry? People are always weary of *śāstras*. Therefore poetry contains *rasa* to serve the purpose of *śāstras* in a joyous manner".

Abhinavagupta in his *Locana* on Ānanda's *Dhvanyāloka* says that the study of good poetry gives readers skill in *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*. In *Vakroktijīvita*, Kuntaka also sees *rasa* as a means to instruct readers about the four ends of life in a way that is conspicuously distinct from *śāstra*, *purāṇas* and the *Veda*.

Kuntaka's position is that while the *śāstra* and the other allied disciplines talk about the moral duties incumbent upon men in an insipid way, *kāvya* performs the same function in a pleasurable manner. Kuntaka says,

"Literary artefacts such as *mahākāvya* create pleasure in the nobles. The noble persons like princes are supposed to learn the ends of life such as *dharma*. But being fickle and joyous by nature, they are reluctant to take an effort to learn them. *Kāvya* will be like a toy to them. Therefore they can learn *dharma* of life in a pleasurable way."

In *Kāvyaḷaṅkāra* Mammaṭa also holds the same opinion: "Poetry brings fame and riches, *knowledge of the ways of the world* and relief from evils, and counsel sweet as from the lips of a beloved consort." Although Mammaṭa privileges deontic function over the aesthetic pleasure, he believes that *kāvya* has indeed a deontic function.

According to Abhinavagupta, what lies beneath the pleasing veneer of aesthetic emotion is undoubtedly a desire to instruct. For him, *rasa* is a sugar coated pill for the young princes who are neither educated in Scripture nor have received any instruction from history. Abhinava observes: "Princes who are not educated in Scripture—those words of *sruti* and *smṛti* which consists in commands like those of a master to do this or that—and who have not received instruction from history, which like a friend reveals to us the connection of cause and effect with such persuasive instances like 'this result came from such an act,' and who are therefore in pressing need of instruction for they, given the power to accomplish the wants of their subjects, can be given instruction in the four goals of man only by our entering into their hearts. And what enters into the heart is the relish of *rasa* (*rasasvada*, the imaginative experience of emotion). Now since this *rasa* is brought about by the union of the *vibhāvas* and their related factors, a union which is invariably connected with instruction in the four goals of man, it follows that the subjection of a man to the relishing of the *rasas* by a literary construction of the *vibhāvas*, etc., appropriate to *rasa*, serves at the same time for the instruction (*vyutpatti*) that naturally results. In this way [literary] delight (*pratiti*) is an aid to instruction."

In *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, Viśvanātha opines that even a dumb-head will be morally enlightened through their consumption of *kāvya*. He says, "Since the attainment of the fruits consisting of the class of four i.e. *the four great objects of human desire-viz., Merit, Wealth, Enjoyment and Liberation*—is pleasantly possible even in the case of those of slender capacity, by means of poetry only, therefore its nature shall be now set forth."

In *Śrīṅgāraprakāśa*, Bhoja also declares, "A literary artefact should be understood as a combination of sentences that informs us as to what we should do and we should not do."