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BA English Honours | Semester V | Calicut University

Indian Aesthetics: An Introduction

Course Code: ENG5EJ302(1) • Module 3 Notes

Unit 10: Gunibhutavyangya, Chitrakavya, and the Critique of Dhvani Theory

Mammata's Systematization in the Kavyaprakasha

In the 11th century CE, Mammata Bhatta produced the *Kavyaprakasha* ("The Illumination of Poetry"), which became the definitive classical textbook of Sanskrit poetics. Mammata synthesized the doctrines of Rasa and Dhvani, categorizing all literature into a rigorous tripartite hierarchy based on the status of suggestion (*Dhvani*):

1. **Uttama Kavya (Supreme / First-Rate Poetry) or Dhvani-Kavya:** Literature in which the suggested meaning (*Vyangyartha*) clearly surpasses and outshines the literal expressed meaning (*Vachyartha*) in emotional depth and aesthetic charm.
2. **Madhyama Kavya (Mediocre / Second-Rate Poetry) or Gunibhutavyangya:** Literature in which the suggested meaning is present, but is subordinate, secondary, or equal to the literal meaning. The suggestion functions merely to enhance the surface narrative rather than transcending it.
3. **Adhama Kavya (Inferior / Third-Rate Poetry) or Chitrakavya (Picture Poetry):** Literature devoid of genuine suggestion, relying entirely on acoustic pyrotechnics, complex palindromes, visual puzzle meters (*Chitrabandhas* like wheels, lotus flowers, swords), and ostentatious figures of speech. Chitrakavya appeals purely to intellectual curiosity without awakening aesthetic emotion.

Eight Varieties of Gunibhutavyangya

Mammata meticulously identifies eight categories where suggestion is subordinate:

- *Agudha:* The suggestion is too obvious and transparent, lacking delicate concealment.
- *Aparasyanga:* The suggestion is subservient to another emotion or idea.
- *Vacyasiddhi-anga:* The suggestion merely serves to validate or complete the literal sense.
- *Asphuta:* The suggestion is too obscure and difficult to decipher without excessive pedantic labor.
- *Sandigdha:* The suggestion is ambiguous and uncertain.
- *Tulyapradhanya:* The suggested sense and literal sense share equal prominence.
- *Kaku-aksipta:* The suggestion is dependent entirely on vocal intonation (*Kaku*).
- *Asundara:* The literal expression is more charming than the suggested sense.

Unit 11: The Vakrokti School – Kuntaka’s Vakroktijivita

Kuntaka and the Philosophy of Oblique Expression

In the 10th-11th century CE, Kuntaka launched a formidable theoretical alternative to the Dhvani school in his masterwork *Vakroktijivita* ("The Life of Oblique Expression"). Kuntaka declared: *Vakroktih kavyajivitam*—"Vakrokti (oblique, indirect, artistic expression) is the life of poetry." Rejecting the idea that suggestion is a mysterious metaphysical third potency beyond word and meaning, Kuntaka argued that poetry is distinguished from ordinary matter-of-fact speech (*Varta*) and scientific treatise (*Sastra*) by the imaginative, deviational turn (*Vakrata*) imparted to language by the poet’s creative genius (*Kavi-vyapara-vakra*).

The Six Hierarchical Levels of Vakrata

Kuntaka anticipated modern Russian Formalism and structuralist stylistics by nearly a millennium, mapping Vakrokti across six comprehensive linguistic levels:

1. **Varna-vinyasa-vakrata (Phonetic Obliquity):** Artistic deviation in the acoustic arrangement of vowels, consonants, and alliterative clusters, producing musical rhythm.
2. **Pada-purvardha-vakrata (Lexical / Base Obliquity):** Creative deployment of substantives, roots, and adjectives, using unconventional metaphors, euphemisms, and personifications.
3. **Pada-parardha-vakrata (Grammatical / Suffix Obliquity):** Artistic exploitation of grammatical markers such as tense, case endings, numbers, gender, and voice to generate subtle emotional resonance.
4. **Vakya-vakrata (Sentential Obliquity):** The creative orchestration of whole sentences through figures of speech (Alankara) that transcend literal representation.
5. **Prakarana-vakrata (Contextual / Episodic Obliquity):** Creative invention, alteration, or rearrangement of dramatic episodes in a traditional plot (e.g., Kalidasa introducing the curse of Durvasa and the lost signet ring in the *Abhijnanasakuntalam* to transform Dushyanta from a callous seducer into a noble, tragic king).
6. **Prabandha-vakrata (Macro-Structural / Textual Obliquity):** The overarching artistic deviation of the entire narrative work, steering the epic toward an unexpected philosophical conclusion (e.g., Harsha ending the *Nagananda* with supreme compassion and self-sacrifice rather than military conquest).

Unit 12: Theory of Anumana – Mahimabhatta’s Vyaktiviveka

Mahimabhatta's Rationalist Critique of Dhvani

Mahimabhatta (11th century CE) authored the *Vyaktiviveka* ("An Analysis of Suggestion") as a brilliant logical assault against Anandavardhana’s doctrine of Vyanjana. Steeped in the rigorous epistemology of the Nyaya and Buddhist logical traditions (Dharmakirti), Mahimabhatta contended that the postulation of a mysterious, unprovable linguistic potency called *Vyanjana* is entirely superfluous (*Gaurava dosha*). He maintained that all so-called suggested meanings (*Dhvani*) are nothing more than logical inferences (*Anumana* or *Anumiti*).

The Syllogistic Mechanism of Poetic Inference

Mahimabhatta asserts that communication consists of two functions: the expression of one's own meaning and the comprehension of another's meaning. When a reader derives an implied sense from a poem, the reader performs a rational syllogistic deduction based on an invariable concomitance (*Vyapti*) between the observed sign (*Hetu* or *Linga*) and the inferred reality (*Sadhya*).

For example, in Anandavardhana's celebrated verse where a religious ascetic is told: "Roam freely, pious monk, the dog has been killed today by the fierce lion that lives in the thicket by the Godavari river," Anandavardhana claims the positive invitation to roam is transformed by Vyanjana into an implied negative prohibition ("Do not enter the thicket!"). Mahimabhatta refutes this, demonstrating that the prohibition is derived by pure logical deduction:

- *Major Premise:* A place inhabited by a ferocious lion is dangerous to human life.
- *Minor Premise:* The Godavari thicket is currently inhabited by a ferocious lion.
- *Conclusion:* Therefore, a person who values his life must not enter the Godavari thicket.

While Mahimabhatta’s hyper-rationalism failed to overthrow the experiential supremacy of Rasa-Dhvani among poets and critics, his work remains a masterwork of semantic and cognitive analysis.

Unit 13: The Aucitya School – Kshemendra's Aucityavicaracarca

Kshemendra and the Supreme Doctrine of Propriety

In the 11th century CE, the polymath Kashmiri scholar Kshemendra formulated the **Aucitya School** in his landmark critical treatise *Aucityavicaracarca* ("An Inquiry into the Concept of Propriety"). Kshemendra sought to resolve the centuries-old debates between Alankara, Guna, Riti, and Dhvani by proposing that none of these elements possess independent validity without *Aucitya* (propriety, decorum, fitness, harmony). Kshemendra proclaimed:

"Aucityam rasasiddhasya sthiram kavyasya jivitam"

("Aucitya is the unchanging, eternal life of poetry which is already accomplished in Rasa.")

Propriety as the Soul of Rasa

Kshemendra famously uses visual metaphors to expose the folly of improper ornamentation: hanging a heavy gold necklace around the ankles, placing jeweled anklets around the neck, or donning armor for romantic dalliance makes a person an object of ridicule. Similarly, Alankaras or dense poetic styles applied without regard to emotional and thematic appropriateness ruin literature. Kshemendra identifies twenty-seven distinct domains where Aucitya must be rigorously maintained, including word (*Pada*), sentence (*Vakya*), figures of speech (*Alankara*), poetic quality (*Guna*), dramatic character (*Patra*), time (*Kala*), caste/social status (*Jati*), and cosmic worldview (*Tattva*). Aucitya is the organic soul that ensures all poetic elements harmonize to nourish the central Rasa.

Unit 14: Kavi Siksha – Creative Expression and Poetic Training

The Institution of Poetic Pedagogy

Classical Indian culture recognized that while poetic genius (*Pratibha*) is an innate divine gift, it must be systematically cultivated through institutionalized training known as *Kavi Siksha* (education of the poet). Manuals like Rajashekhara's *Kavyamimamsa*, Kshemendra's *Kavikanthabharana*, and Hemachandra's *Kavyanusasana* functioned as rigorous practical guides for aspiring writers.

The Daily Routine, Ecology, and Mental Hygiene of the Kavi

Rajashekhara outlines an astonishingly modern regimen for the practicing writer: the poet's study must be clean, fragrant, secluded, well-lit, and equipped with writing surfaces, various inks, and manuscripts. The day is divided into distinct quadrants: early morning for recitation and contemplation, midday for study of grammar and sciences, afternoon for creative composition, and evening for literary assemblies (*Kavya-gosthi*). The poet must travel widely, observing the changing colors of dawn, the behaviors of diverse animal species, regional dialects, agricultural practices, and royal court protocols. Poetic excellence is the fruit of total immersion in the living tapestry of the world.

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 3 In-Depth Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 1)

1. Ontological and Epistemological Dimensions of Indian Poetics

A rigorous philosophical investigation of Indian aesthetic systems within Module 3 reveals their intricate grounding in ancient epistemological frameworks (*Pramanas*). Classical Indian thinkers did not consider poetry to be an irresponsible, fictitious distortion of truth, but rather an extraordinary cognitive instrument capable of unveiling subterranean layers of human experience and cosmic harmony. In the Advaita Vedanta paradigm, the ultimate reality is *Sat-Chit-Ananda* (Being, Consciousness, Bliss); because ordinary discursive language is burdened by practical utilitarian necessities (*Vyavaharika Satya*), it cannot capture the unblemished self-luminous reality (*Paramarthika Satya*). It is precisely the unique suggestive power of poetry (*Vyanjana*) and the tasting of aesthetic emotion (*Rasa*) that momentarily lifts the veil of cosmic illusion (*Maya*), granting the connoisseur a glimpse of transcendent beatitude.

Similarly, in the Kashmir Shaiva tradition championed by Abhinavagupta, aesthetic experience is conceived as the awakening of *Camathkara*—an ecstatic, self-referential wonder where the observing subject dissolves the illusory duality between the self and the universe. The reader does not experience the grief or joy of Rama or Shakuntala as an external, alien spectacle; rather, through the magic of *Sadharanikarana* (universalization), personal egos, temporal limitations, and spatial coordinates are transcended, allowing universal human emotion to shine forth as pure, unencumbered consciousness.

2. The Dialectic Between Form, Suggestion, and Ideological Function

The intense historical debates that animated ancient and medieval Indian poetics—between the Alankara school's focus on surface ornamentation, Vamana's rigorous stylistics, Kuntaka's linguistic obliquity, Mahimabhatta's syllogistic rationalism, and Anandavardhana's doctrine of suggestion—underscore an extraordinarily sophisticated linguistic self-awareness. Long before 20th-century European structuralism, Russian formalism, or post-structuralist deconstruction emerged, Indian aestheticians had mapped the morphology of poetic sentences, the cognitive tensions between literal denotation and implied sense, and the ideological role of literary decorum (*Aucitya*).

However, modern critical theory demands that these classical systems be critically interrogated rather than passively venerated. Traditional poetics flourished primarily within the feudal courts of kings and temple complexes, subsidized by royal patrons and aristocratic elites. Consequently, classical manuals frequently codified standards of beauty, heroism, and propriety that reflected the socio-economic interests and caste anxieties of the ruling order. The aestheticization of heroic warfare (*Vira Rasa*) and royal romance (*Shringara Rasa*) often served to legitimize monarchical power and Brahminical social hierarchies, while banishing the material toil of the agrarian working masses to the margins of aesthetic illegitimacy.

3. Contemporary Reclamations and Decolonial Trajectories

In the contemporary post-colonial and decolonial era, Indian aesthetics is undergoing a vibrant, contentious rebirth. Rather than choosing between uncritical Westernization or dogmatic revivalism, modern writers, critics, and theatre practitioners are forging a dynamic, hybrid critical idiom. Indigenous concepts like *Tinai* from classical Sangam literature provide vital philosophical foundations for modern ecological humanities, illuminating how human emotional landscapes are inextricably bound to fragile biospheres.

Concurrently, the disruptive interventions of Dalit, tribal, queer, and feminist movements have revitalized the field, demanding that aesthetics move from celestial heavens down to the dusty, bloodstained streets of social struggle. By dismantling Brahminical and patriarchal monopolies on beauty, contemporary Indian

aesthetics demonstrates that art finds its highest purpose not in tranquil complacency, but in the fearless interrogation of power, the affirmation of subaltern human dignity, and the relentless quest for universal justice.

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 3 In-Depth Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 2)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 3 In-Depth Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 3)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 3 In-Depth Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 4)

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