CHAPTER-IV

SANSKRITI AUCITYA – CULTURAL PROPRIETY

What is known in general language of literary criticism as local colour, comprising Deśa, Kāla and Vātā varāṇa (Country, time and environment), becomes in the authentic nomenclature of Ācārya Kṣemendra, Sanskriti-aucitya or the Propriety of culture, having the foundation of deṣa (locale), Kula (dynasty) and Vrata (ethos). This tripatriate propriety is reflected in composition, expression and communication incorporating within itself the poet’s vision; attitude and mood. The spontaneity of cultural propriety arises out of a synthesis of the vision and the wise selection of the subject matter, as advised by Horace, “Choose a subject that is suited to your abilities, you who aspire to be writers; give long thought to what you are capable of undertaking, and what is beyond you. A man who chooses a subject within his powers will never be at a loss for words, and his thoughts will be clear and orderly.” (Horace, 80) Such an intelligent choice of subject matter originates a composite style, “determined by the propriety of vision, attitude and mood, as modified by two other requisites – the changes in it demanded by the subject-matter and the culture of the speaker, whether he be the poet himself or a character created by the poet, If in either case, the speaker does not have a vision, attitude or mood of his own, the style will be dominated by the proprieties of
information and subject matter.” (Archana D. Tyagi 192-193) In connection with Sophoclean tragedy the noteworthy factor is that the Deṣa (country) is the Hellenic land with its several insular and city state regions, such as Thebes, Corinth, Troy, Mycenae, Trachis and Colonus; the Kula (dynasty) is of the two Accursed Houses, the first being the House of Cadmus or Labdacus, The second is the House of Atrius; the Vrata (custom) has certain peculiarities in it caused by the superstitions advocating human sacrifices, as Aristotle means “by planning in outline may be illustrated from the Iphigenia, as follows; A young girl was offered as a sacrifice and mysteriously disappeared from the view of her sacrificers; she was set down in another country, where it was the custom to sacrifice strangers to the goddess, and became the priestess of this rite.” (Aristotle 55)

The concept of Deṣa aucitya attains a specific lucidity, when it is kept in mind that in Indian sub-continent the governing ethos is The mother and the motherland are preferable to heaven) and the Greek populace think with Thucydides All the earth is a grave of famous men) hence in a tragedy which imitates men in action in the form of representation, the country propriety should be given top priority, as Ācārya Kṣemendra writes:

(The meaning of a poem becomes bright by means of propriety in the aggregable description of the country,
like the conduct of the virtuous people showing intimacy).

What is implied is that the meaning of poetry becomes resplendent with specific beauty if it is joined with some dialogue. The dramatic poetry is in the form of dialogue at least in the tragedies written by Aeschylus, who had introduced the deuterogonist or the second actor on the stage. When the speech put into the mouth of an excellent actor refers to the place to which the character belongs, there is established a sort of communication based upon mutual introduction. Not only this, Ācārya Kṣemendra aims at a conduct oriented approach when he talks of the behaviour of virtuous people having entered into a propinquity and intimacy.

The Deśa-aucitya or propriety of Country in Greek tragedy becomes easily comprehensible, when Hellenic culture and ethos are kept in mind. The Greek culture has its various aspects out of which the theological aspect is the most important. Starting from Hesiod’s ‘Theogony’ it is established that the Hellenic culture had conception of anthropomorphism of God. In this book, not only the geneology of the gods and heroes is described, but the cosmogony also has been analysed systematically; it is a compendium of various beliefs and myths about the gods. The ‘Theogony’ may be regarded as a religious poem. Hesiod holds that at the beginnings there was Chaos. Out of Chaos emerged the Earth, Tartarus, and Love. Night and Erebos also sprang out of Chaos. From Erebos and Night, came Day and Ether. From Earth sprang the Sky and the Mountains. From the marriage of Earth and Sky were born the Ocean, Kronos, the Cyclops and the Titans. The Titans are the parents of the Sun and
Moon. The Sky was, at first, the king of the gods. But his son Kronos killed him and ascended the throne. He was the father of Erinnys and Aphrodite. In course of time his son Zeus deposed him. That was the beginning of the Olympian Dynasty. The ‘Theogony’ ends with a list of the goddesses who married mortals. The ‘Theogony’ was a compulsory text book for the young boys reading in schools. We have it on the authority of Aeschives that it was extensively read as a manual of mythology in schools, as it dealt with the speculations of the race on the origin of the universe and of the gods. Even the philosophers found it delightful and instructive. Epicurus owed much to it. Besides this hierarchy, there were certain Olympian gods and goddesses associated with literature such as Apollo, Diana, Dionysus, Nine Muses etc. Thus Hellenic, culture provided a theological and religious cultivated soil for the sowing and harvesting of the crop of literature.

Polity is another constituent of the culture of any country and Greece provided several examples thereof; the forms of government were known as monarchy, Tyranny, aristocracy, Oligarchy, Democracy and Anarchy (The corrupt form of democracy turned into mobocracy). The concept of Theocracy was supreme according to which the King was the representative of God on the earth, however he could not superseed the Divine laws. Its example is presented in Sophoclean Tragedy, by Creon’s decree and Antigone’s resistance in the play ‘Antigone’, for Eteocles was to be given splendid burial while Polynices was to be left to eagles and vultures. Monarchy was based upon royal dynasties whereas tyranny quite contrary, to its modern concept was that form of government in which the Monarch was of people’s making or choice as in the case
with Oedipus Tyrannus, for the people of Thebes did not know that Oedipus was the son of Laius; rather they thought him to be the son of Polybus, the Corinthian Monarch. Aristocracy and Oligarchy comprised of the persons belonging to the royal family in group, whereas democracy was the popular form of elected government, yet the administrative representatives deserved to govern as they were highly educated and were called the guardians of the city. It is in this wider sense that in Theban play the chorus comprises the Theban elders.

Culture of a country is the reflection of men and women who form the essential unit. In such a composite and multiethenic society of Greece, though the man held a supreme position yet the woman was in no case inferior to him. Even after the death or disappearance of her husband the role of the Imperial Jointress was reserved for her as is seen in case of Creon, dominated by Jocasta’s will and Aegisthus, in a subsidiary position to Clytemnestra in the house of Atrius.

It is the Ethos that makes the civilized people cultured. Civilization is an external rob but culture is something within that suspasseth show; for certain virtues and their practicabilaty are associated with it. In Indian context, the case of Manu (Manu Smriti) is considered to be the prime book of wisdom to govern the ethos; similarly in ancient Greece it was Hesiod, the author of the ‘Works and Days’, Who is reputed to have sown the seeds of Ethos in Hellenie Land.

‘The ‘Works and Days’ is a poem on ‘Erga’ or ‘Works of Agriculture’ with an appendix on the lucky and unlucky days of
the month, and an intertexture of moral sentences addressed to Perses............ The moral sentences increase in depth in the middle of the poem, and show a true and rather admirable idea of duty. “Hard work is no shame; the shame is idleness.” Help your neighbour and he will help you”. A neighbour matters more than a Kinsman”, “Take fair measure, and give a little over the measure, - if you can”. Give willingly, a willing gift is a pleasure”. Give is a good girl and snatch is a bad girl, a bringer of death!” “It is best to marry a wife; but be very careful, or your neighbours may be merry at your expense. There is no prize like a good wife; nothing that makes you shudder like a bad; she roasts you without fire, and bring you to a raw old age.” At the end these sentences degenerate into the rules popular superstition– “not to put the jug on the mixing bowl when drinking; that means death!” “not to sit on immovable things” and so on. One warning “not to cross a river without washing your hands and your sins,” approaches Orphism.” (Gilbert Murry, 55-56)

The analysis in the above excerpt indicates that the Hellenic land was agricultural and pastoral in its major part and Sophocles also presents most of the tritagonists form this pastoral group, for instance it is the Theban shepherd who is summoned to reveal the identity of Oedipus. The charm of this ethos expressed in a direct expression is due to the simplicity which is possible only in Greek language. Even the instances have been taken not so much from the life of monarchs as from the life of ordinary people. However there are references to polity, temporal justice and divine justice, the concept of a larger welfare of mankind, but the disdain and wrath of divinity as is the case with that of Prometheus, who had stolen fire from heaven and brought it to earth; it might have

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benefitted humanity but it should be punished also, for the prime reason that he committed a theft. So far literature is concerned, it leads to the concept of poetic justice that virtue should be rewarded and vice should be punished.

Usually a writer, or the dramatist has a deep attachment for his native land and whenever he writes either about the place or about the persons who inhabit there, he puts his heart and soul together in describing or representing that locale. The English scholarship is well conversant with the fact that Thomas Hardy is at his best in ‘The Return of the Native’, when he gives a vivid description of Egdon Heath, the novelist’s birth place. Similarly, Sophocles was born at Colonus and when he was writing the play Oedipus at Colonus, the description of that place in the speech of Chorus is not only graphic but makes the place a living entity:

Here in our white Colonus, stranger guest
Of all earth’s lovely lands the loveliest
Fine horses breed, and leaf- enfolded vales
Are thronged with sweetly – singing nightingales
Screened in deep arbours, ivy, dark as wine.
And tangled bowers of berry-clustered vine;
To whose dark avenues and windless courts
The Grape-god with his nursing-nymph resorts
Here chosen crown of goddesses, the fair
Narcissus blooms, bathing his lustrous hair
In dew of morning;............

(Oedipus at Colonus 92)
This is what may be termed as Desa-auicitya or propriety of country, for the land is blessed with the benevolence of Dionysius. The blooming of Narcissus contains the beauty of Dhvani theory for it may refer to the myth of Narcissus and Echo. The impact of the propriety of country is thus established with necessary logical force and the sense of place reflects the Hellenic culture and Ethos also.

So far as literature, whether it is auditory, comprising Epic poetry or spectacular comprising Tragedy or Comedy, one thing is certain that it is a tale of dynasty, barring comedy in Dionysian terra incognita or Bhāña or Prahasana in Indian subcontinent. Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey, belong to the Spartan and Trojan ruling houses; Aeschylean, Sophoclean and Euripidean tragedies are founded upon the royal houses of Atreus and Labdacus; in Sanskrit Valmiki’s Ramayana is based upon Raghukula or dynasty of Raghu, as in Kalidasa’s ‘Raghuvaṁśam; Ved Vyāsa’s The Mahabharata sings of the vicissitudes of Kuru dynasty; Bhasa’s Pratimānātakam is based on Raghu dynasty, so in Bhavbhuti’s Uttar Ramcharitam, Bhasa’s ‘Pancharatnam’, ‘Dūtavakyam’ and ‘Urubhangam’ presents a record of Kuru dynasty, so is Bhatti Narayan’s Venisamharam. Hence the maintenance of Dynastic Propriety also becomes inevitable, if a work is to be successful on the touchstone of popular entertainment. Ācārya Kṣemendra observes:

\[ \text{dqyksifpror} \text{ekSfpR;a fo"ks'kksRd'kZdkj.ke~} \text{A} \text{dkO;L; iq:'kL;so fiz;a izk;% lpsrlke~AA} \]

(Kṣemendra śloka xxviii)

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(The propriety surrounding a family lends special excellence to the charm of the poetry, just as the propriety of the lineage of a person is generally dear to those who have a heart to feel.)

The oriental critic’s thesis is that a person belonging to a noble family has certain virtues, one of which that he knows how to become delighted in the joy of others and how to become melancholic when the fellow being is suffering. In Sanskrit dramaturgi, usually the monarch is accompanied by a clown, who is usually his bosom friend, with whom he can share his feelings. In Kalidasa’s Abhijanan Śakuntalam Madhav the ‘Vidusak’ is such a character to whom Dushyanta confides with all his secrets. So far as the female characters are concerned, there is the concept of ‘Sakhis’, for instance in Abhijanan Śakuntalam there are Priyamvada and Anusuia and in Bhavbhuti’s Uttar Ramcharit, there are Tamsa and Vasanti. Not only this, some other human relationships are also related with Kulā aucitya, for instance the fatherly attitude of Kanva towards Śakuntala and of Valmiki towards Sita. For the sake of ushering in the prime analysis, Sophoclean tragedy also is based upon more or less the same family propriety, such as Oedipus and Antigone, suggesting father and daughter, Ajax and Euryules, father and son, Ajax and Tecmessa, husband and wife, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, mistress and paramour, Electra and Orestes, sister and brother, Ismene and Antigone, sister and sister, Creon and Antigone, maternal uncle and niece, difficult to handle. All these are the instances full of Dynastic propriety or Kula-aucitya.
The Sophoclean tragedy rotates round two royal houses–of Labdacus and of Atrius. Just as Daśratha, the Monarch, had to die on account of filial separation as a result of the curse of the parents of Ṣravaṇ Kumar; similarly Oedipus was accursed to kill his father and marry his mother. The legend of the house of Atrius was not unknown to the Hellenic spectators and it becomes essential to have an acquaintance with the legend in base outline so as to present its analysis with reference to the Dynastic propriety in Sophoclean tragedy, for the concept of aucitya or anaucitya depends upon the exactitude of context. Tantanlus was the son of Zeus and Pluto or Plute. He married Dione. His children were Pelops and Niobe. Pelops was Killed by Tantaulus and served as a meal to the gods. But the gods knew. Only Demeter touched the meal. Pelops was brought back to life. Hermes led him back from the underworld but he was given an ivory shoulder. Pelops married Hippodemeia. The tow sons of Pelops were Atreus and Thyestes who wanted to ascend the throne of Argos. Thyestes wronged the wife of Atreus. Atrius avenged by cooking the flesh of the children of Thyestes and served it to Thyestes. When he come to know he cursed Atreus and his descendents and left the city with his only surviving son Aegisthus. Atreus had two sons-Agamemnon and Menelans. Agamemnon was the king of Agros and Menelaus was the king of Sparta. The house of Atrius was accursed to a chain of incestual relationship and subsequent killings; a woman getting killed her husband with the help of her paramour to satisfy a hidden instinct of revenge. Sometimes the innocent are also crushed on account of the sin or the obstinacy of their parents. Orestes has to commit the sin of matricide and has to suffer the agony inflicted by ‘Furies’. Haemon (128)
dies for no fault of his, but loving Antigone and defending her against his father Creon’s decree. It is in Ajax that not only the kula aucitya but the entire geneology of the Houses of Atrius is analysed and put to an acid test in the speech of Teucer that occurs when Agamemnon condemns Teucer for speaking in favour of the honorable burial given to Ajax, for according to him, Ajax was a blasphemer and abuses Teucer with the epithet ‘slave-born’:

Was not Atreus, your own father,
The perpetrator of that heinous act
The serving of his nephew’s flesh for meat
Upon their father’s table? you yourself
Came of a Cretan mother, and her own father
Condemned her, for adultery, to be thrown
To feed the silent fishes. Such was your origin
And can you mock at me for what I am?
I am the son of Telamon, the man
Who won my mother as a prize for valour
And made her his; and she was royally born
The daughter of Laomedon; my father
Had her from Hercules, Alemena’s son
A gift of special honour. Thus nobly born
From two such noble parents, should I blush
To stand beside another of my blood
Here so unhappily fallen, whose burial
You would forbid and do not blush to say it?

(Ajax 62)

The concept of Kula aucitya in geneology idealism and its deed is reflected in this speech of Teucer who reminds
Agamemnon, how when he was being tortured by Hector, it was Ajax who came to his rescue. At that time Teucer was at the side of Ajax but Agamemnon ironically calls him ‘the slave son of a foreign mother’. This brother of Ajax reminds Agamemnon of his barbarian genealogy by telling him that Pelops, the grandfather of Agamemnon was Phrygian barbarian. It is the demand of Kula aucitya that a barbarian should beget a barbarian. The chieftain again reminded of his father Artius who committed the heinous act of ‘the serving of his nephew’s flesh for meat upon their father’s table’. This cannibalistic attitude was of a primitive nature, whether in India or in Greece. In India, there is the legend of Bhanu Pratap whose Hermit cook took a revenge upon him by serving the Brahmin’s flesh as the meat for the Brahmin guests. The monarch was cursed and he became the ten-headed demon Ravana. In Hellenic land Procne served the flesh of her own son Itylus as a meat on the table of her husband Tereus, as sort of revenge against his raping Philomela and cutting her tongue. Similarly Atrius did the heinous deed and the entire dynasty was cursed with incests and subsequent slaughters. If Teucer was the son of foreign mother, Agamemnon was the son of a Cretan mother and moreover he was born of woman whom her own father condemned for adultery and the woman was ordered “to be thrown to feed the silent fishes”.

This is the negative aspect of Kula aucitya against which Teucer asserts the positive aspect by revealing that his father Telamon won his mother as a prize for valour, the concept of Virya Shulka in case of Sita is not unknown to Indian readers. The royal descent of such an honorable mother is stressed when she is eulogised as royally born ‘the daughter of Laomedon; my father had
her form Hercules, Alemena’s son, a gift of special honour.’ It is thus that the Sophoclean tragedy successfully presents psycho-analysis of Kula-aucitya which echoes in human minds, oriental and western as well.

Another instance of Kula-aucitya in Sophoclean tragedy is related to the house of Labdacus about the accursed misfortune of which three plays namely Oedipus Tyrannus, Oedipus At Colonus and Antigone have been written and have enjoyed a world-wide popularity. What has become reputed as the house of Labdacus, is basically having its start from Cadmus, son of Agenor and brother of that Europa whom Zeus courted in the likeness of a bull. An acquaintance with this legend is necessary for the Theban plays whether by Aeschylus or by Sophocles, are timeless possessions of literature and have given birth to various modern theoreis, such as Oedipus complex popularised by Sigmond Freud, an Austrian psychiatrist, whose epoch-making treatise is ‘The Interpretation of Dreams’. Ironically enough, even Jocasta refers to this complex as the objects of oneiromancy, “Nor need this mother-marrying frighten you, many a man has dreamt as much”. (King Oedipus 52).

Before the establishment of the city of Thebes, misfortune befell on Cadmus, for all the trusty companions who should have been his first citizens were devoured by a fierce dragon which inhabited a neighbouring glen. But Cadmus was a match for the dragon and at one stroke laid him dead. Again the word of Heaven guided him and he was instructed to sow the dragon’s teeth in the ground prepared for his future city; from which seed there
instantly sprang up a tribe of giants so fierce and fully armed that a deadly combat immediately broke out between them. At length but five remained alive, and these offering their submission to Cadmus, became the founders and fathers of the Thebes to be. Even Teirerias in his riddle-like solution to save the city of Thebes from plague says, “The soon seed must die” Cadmus beget Polydorus, and Polydorus beget Labdacus, and Labdacus beget Laius and to Laius and his wife Jocasta a son was born. Before even a name had been given to this infant—indeed by some accounts, before he was born—his life was clouded with the presage of disaster, for Apollo’s Oracle had nothing but ill to foretell of him; he was destined one day to kill his father and to become his own mother’s husband. Could any mortal device be proof against the god’s prediction? Could any mortal be so presumptuous as to try to thwart it? Laius and Jocasta would so presume. One way alone offered any hope—more than hope, certainty. The child should not live. They would not indeed take upon themselves the guilt of infanticide, but they would deliver the child to a servant of theirs, a shepherd, with orders to abandon it on the mountain-side, its feet cruelly pierced with an iron pin, so that it might not even crawl to safety. This was done. But still the word of Apollo—and human compassion—prevailed. For the shepherd had not the heart to leave the child to perish; instead he entrusted it to fellow-labourer, a Corinthian, shepherd, beseeching him to take it away beyond the borders of Thebes and rear it as his own. The Corinthian, a servant of Polybus, King of Corinth, in due course brought the child to his royal master, who being childless, gladly welcomed the infant and adopted it as his own, giving it the name of Oedipus (swollen-foot) in commiseration for its painful treatment.
Oedipus grew to manhood, the honoured prince of Corinth and loved foster-son of those whom he supposed to be his true parents. But by chance, he came to hear, again from the mouth of Apollo’s ministers, the terrible prediction concerning him. Again as his parents had done, he sought to give lie to Oracle. He fled from Corinth, resolved never again to set eyes on his supposed father and mother as long as they lived. His wandering brought him to Thebes, where now all was calamity and confusion. King Laius had been killed by an unknown traveller on a lonely road; the city was in the grip of a deadly monster, the Sphinx, who pitted her ferocity against the wit of man, destroying all who failed to answer her cunning riddle; and none could answer it. But in Oedipus, the creature met her match. He answered her riddle and destroyed her power, and so was received joyfully into Thebes as her king and heir to his house and fortune; a happy man, a wise and resourceful man, and leave for one sharp encounter on his journey from Corinth to Thebes; a man of peace. He married Jocasta and sons and daughters were born to them.

There passed some fifteen years of seeming prosperity, but beneath the deceptive surface, a hideous depth of shame and infamy lay concealed; The gods could no longer brook in silence and infamy lay Oedipus’ unwitting sins. Pestilence and famine brought Thebes once more to the verge of utter extinction. In their despair her citizens cried to their King, for yet more proofs of his infallible resource, and to their gods, chief among them Apollo, for light and healing in their wretchedness. From here the story opens the play Oedipus Tyrannus or King Oedipus. The identity of Oedipus was revealed and Jocasta ended herself to death while
Oedipus blinded himself. He lived a life of exile and died at Colonus in the company of his faithful daughter Antigone.

It is the demand of the propriety of dynasty that the actors of such a drama should be involved in not only one curse, but the series of curses, which might bring catastrophe to the successive generations also. A reference to this has been made by the Chorus comprising Theban elders in Antigone, when Creon orders the servants to take away Ismene under the pretext that she has gone mad and the cruel lot of being confined into a cave where the girl should die of starvation and thirst was reserved for Antigone:

Happy are they who know not the taste of evil
From a house that heaven hath shaken
The curse departs not
But falls upon all of the blood
Like the restless surge of the sea when the
dark storm drives
The back sand hurled form the deeps
and the Thracian gales boom down
On the echoing shore.
In life and in death, is the house of Labdacus stricken;
Generation to generation
With no atonement
It is scourged by the wrath of a god.
And now for the dead dust’s sake is the light of promise
The tree’s last root, crushed out
By pride of heart and the sin
Of presumptuous tongue.
A long chain of displeased divinities and significant personages is involved in bringing out the catastrophe upon this Royal house of Labdacus. At the very outset it was the Delphic Oracle of Apollo that warned Laius and Jocasta of the coming disaster in the form of a son committing the sin of Patricide and heinous act of marriage with his own mother. The parents knew that infanticide is a sin, hence to avoid it they pierced the feet of the child cruelly. This cruelty was against a divine justice and the son of Polybus killed the Theban Monarch to make the prophecy true, though unknown to him. The curse of Sphinx, the blunder of chiding Teiresias, the guilt consciousness of the queen Jocasta, self imposed blindness, mysterious disappearance of the great sinner at Colonus, the death of Eteocles and Polynices followed by the death of a proposed couple (Antigone and Haemon) and Eurydice, all this form a corollary to what evil destiny was reserved for such a dynasty, in accordance with the principle of Kula-aucitya, for the Divinity seldom supports the disintegration of a family in which the members become either Tyrants or disobedient.

The analysis of the Kula-aucitya reveals the significance of certain traditions also comprising adoration, rituals and superstitions, as reflected in various episodes taken from different tragedies written by Sophocles. In the land of Greece Apollo was a significant Deity, resciling over solar orbit and poetry as well. He was worshipped with libations, so that he might exorcise the curse out of the suffering family. It is in the Oedipus Tyrannus that Jocasta having seen that Oedipus was in a state of acute mental
agony, visits the temple of Apollo to request the god that the curse of uncleanliness should be removed and the entire house of Labdacus be saved:

(Enter Jocasta from the palace, carrying a garland branch and incense)

**JOCASTA** : My lords, I am minded to visit the holy temples.

Bringing in my hands these to kens of supplication
And gifts of incense. The king is over – wrought
With fancies, and can no longer sanely judge
The present by the past, listening to every word
That feeds his apprehension. I can do nothing
To comfort him.

To thee, Bright shining Apollo
Who art nearest to my door, is my first prayer,
Save us from the curse of this uncleanness, save!
We are afraid, seeing our master pilot distraught.

(King Oedipus 50)

Such an attitude reveals the essential truth that “more things are wrought by prayer than this world can dream of”.

In theology, ritual is a particular methodology of performing certain sacraments, for the soul gets its salvation only when the rituals are properly performed on the earth under its name. One of such a significant ritual is the Burial of the dead, the importance of which can be realised by the fact that Sophocles has devoted one entire play to this. The rituals must be performed, at any cost. The annual libation bearing on the tomb is also one of the inevitable rituals, as it occurs in Electra. So far as Antigone is
concerned, it becomes obligatory on her part that her brother Polynices should be given proper burial. The daughter of Oedipus is not afraid of anything and does take the risk of burying her brother, even though inculcating the Royal wrath and even at the cost of her life. The Sentry tells Creon how Antigone performed the ritual of giving a proper burial to Polynices and says:

When at last it stopped
There was the girl, screaming like an angry bird,
When it finds its nest left empty and little ones gone,
Just like that she screamed, seeing the body
Naked, crying and cursing the ones that had done it,
Then she picks up the dry earth in her hands.
And pouring out of a fine bronze Urn she’s brought
She makes her offering three times to the dead
Soon as we saw it, down we came and caught her
She wasn’t at all – frightened.

(Antigone 137-138)

It is in the very similitude of Indian Karmakand or ‘Urdhav dahik Pret kriya’ that Sophocles has also made a mention of the detailed ritual of the burial of the dead. Further it appears to be incredibly strange that what Antigone had done centuries ago, has got the religious sanction in the 21st century’ i.e. empowering a woman to perform the last rites of a dead body. This shows that the tragic vision of Sophocles was not only eternal and universal but centuries ahead.

One of the essential sentiment purged by tragedy is fear and it is aroused by superstition also which is a term covering a wider
range, including prognostication, hybridization of mythical creatures, rituals, ethos, and the supernatural appearances. A Sophoclean tragedy provides sufficient examples of such objects. The prophecy of the Delphic Oracle concerning the deeds of Oedipus is an instance of prognostication. The figure of Sphinx, representing woman, animal and bird is based upon mythical superstition and imagination that can conceive of a hybridised creature. Besides the physical feature, Sphinx has its own symbolic significance also. The face of a woman is suggestive of a strange maternal instinct, sometimes is cursed to be carnivorous also. The body of lion is the symbol of the patriarchal supremacy, while the wings of a bird suggest the flight of imagination from earth to heaven. This is what W.B.Yeats means by terming it ‘Spiritus mundi’ in the poem ‘the Second coming’.

Sometimes certain rituals are also practised as an ethos, in relation to superstitious beliefs, for instance the following dialogue between the Chorus and Oedipus reveals the process that should be observed very carefully for the purpose of cleansing the psyche of Oedipus, as it occurs in the play Oedipus At Colonus:

OEDIPUS: Dear Friend,
      Stand by me and I will do all that you advise.
CHORUS: Then make amends at once to the divinities
      On whose ground you trespassed at your first coming here.
OEDIPUS: Instruct me. What are the rites that I must use?
CHORUS: Bring holy water from where a fresh spring flows.
      In clean hands bring it.
OEDIPUS: A pure libation. Then?
CHORUS: There are vessels there, of delicate workmanship.
    Cover their brims and handles on either side.
OEDIPUS: With springs of leaf, or woolen stuffs may be?
CHORUS: With lamb’s wool newly shorn that will be given you.
OEDIPUS: I understand. And then to complete the rite?
CHORUS: Pour the drink-offering, your face towards the dawn.
OEDIPUS: From the vessels you spoke of?
CHORUS: Ay, in three libations.
    Of which only the last you empty wholly.
OEDIPUS: What will this last contain?
CHORUS: Water and honey.
OEDIPUS: I understand
    The sunless earth will drink it up. And then? j
CHORUS: With both hands thrice nine sprays of olive lay
    While you thus pray.

(Oedipus at Colonus 85-86)

It is thus that in a Sophoclean tragedy superstitions and
ritual ethos have been brought together; whether such practices had
their scientific propriety or not; may be dubilated, but one thing is
certain is that they governed the external behaviour and the internal
solace of mind that the performer was expected to get by performing
them.

The most powerful and popular superstition governing
human phantasmagoria, is the appearance of the spirit of a person
when he is dead; it may be the evil spirit and good spirit also, or the
combination of the both, for example the ghost of Julius Caesar is an

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evil genius of Brutus and its purpose is to demoralise the man who had killed Julius Caesar. In Hamlet, the ghost of Hamlet’s father has a double significance, he wants that the revenge should be taken upon Claudius, but the queen Gertrude should be left to her own conscience; that is why in the ‘Closet scene’, when the Prince of Denmark is speaking daggers to his mother, the ghost makes his second appearance to prohibit his son from doing so. In Sophoclean tragedy there are several instances of such appearance, two of which will suffice. In Electra there is a reference to the appearance of the spirit of Agamemnon, as Crysothemis narrates to Electra that Clytemnestra had seen the vision of her first husband. this is also a second hand information for Clytemnestra in some ritual was narrating her dream to the Sun:

I was told she saw our father returned to life,
Standing beside her; and he took the sceptre 
That once was his, which now Aegisthus carries; 
And planted it near the altar, where it sprouted 
Into a leafy bough, casting a shadow 
Over all Mycene. This much I was told 
By someone who heard her telling the 
Sun her dream.

(Electra 81)

The oneiromancy of Chorus interprets the dream of Clytemnestra as a prognostication to some change of fortune:

This omen, If I rightly understand 
Its message, and am not deceived, 
Speaks with the voice of Justice, and ere long

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She will be here and fighting for us
In all her righteous strength
That dream we heard of
Breathes comfort and new courage.
Your royal father has not forgotten you
Nor does the bronze blade sleep
The two-edged axe that struck the impious blow
So long ago, remembers.
The Avenger lies in wait; the feet, the hands
Are doing in, the bronze hoof stamps.

( Electra 83 )

An analysis of the above episode reveals two fundamental aspects of Hellenic superstition, the first is the appearance of a husband, wronged by an adulterous wife and the second is the purpose and meaning of such an appearance in the dream, that is to decide the future course of action. The appearance of Agamemnon with the Royal sceptre appears to be indentical with the appearance of Prince ‘Hamlet’s father’s spirit in arms; the ghost of Agamemnon appears more with a political than with an ethical purpose. What might have pinched Agamemnon was not that his wife had made the royal couch of Mycenea, a couch of incest, but that the sceptre was transferred from his hand to the morally infirm grip of Aegisthus. Further the plantation of the sceptre near the altar and the sprouting of a mighty tree shadowing all Mycenea is symbolic of the fact that the Mycanean people still wanted to enjoy the shade of Agamemnon’s arborem than the golden umbrella wielded by the train of Aegisthus.
The second aspect of the superstition comes from the interpretation of the dream as provided by the Chorus that irrespective of all the corruption, adultery and moral chaos, the voice of justice is not silenced, “this omen, If I rightly understand, its message, and am not deceived, speaks with the voice of justice.”

Further the speech of Chorus has a domestic aspect also that Electra has not been obliterated from the memory of her father, who had not been able as yet to forgive himself from the sin of sacrificing Iphigenia at Aulis. In a family, where the absconding and exiled son is not known one daughter Crysothemis has been brainwashed to have her loyalty towards the immoral Imperial Jointress Clytemnestra, Electra is the only, who, not only of avenging the death of her father, but of keeping the torch of Justice unextinguished. However revenge is a holy duty to be performed as indicated by the supernatural agencies; otherwise the very sanctity of onieromancy may be put to question:

Men may well despair of interpreting
Dreams and the signs of heaven
If this night’s vision does not point the way
To a safe and happy issue.

(Electra 83)

Prior to the analysis of Ācārya Kṣemendra's concept of Vrata-aucitya or the propriety of custom, it is essential that certain ambiguities may also be taken into consideration. In this context there are two sanskrit words ‘Vrata’ and ‘Vritti’, the former means certain custom, ethos ritual etc. that becomes mendatory on the part of the members of certain ethenic group, keeping in view the
humanitarian and anthropological development at a particular time, the latter comprises a certain harmony in diction, design and pattern of written composition. In other words the two concepts suggested therein are of socio-cultural trends and literary trends. In Sanskrit stylistics there are certain ‘ritis’ and ‘Vrittis’, such as ‘Kāśīki’, ‘Arabhati’ ‘Gaudi’ and ‘Panchali’ etc. Certain rhetorical devices, such as the use of ‘Pun’ and ‘Yamak’ the repetition of a word having two meaning, the bi-aliteration or ‘Vrityanupras’ etc. come under this purview. Hence an author who follows these patterns, is said to be observing the vrata, or the literary trend. In western criticism, the element of music and prosody comprising the harmony of sounds is not unknown to the European scholars who are well conversant with the concept of rhythm and harmony as Aristotle has expressed it in his theory of mimesis:

For as there are persons who, by conscious art or mere habit, imitate and represent various objects through the medium of colour and form, or again by the voice, so in the arts above mentioned, taken as a whole, the imitation is produced by rhythm, language or harmony; either singly or combined.

Thus in the music of the flute and of the lyre, ‘harmony’ and rhythm alone are employed; also in other arts, such as that of the shepherd’s pipe, which are essentially similar to these. In dancing, rhythm alone is used without ‘harmony’ for even dancing imitates character, emotion and action, by rhythmical movement.
This viewpoint is applicable not only to the dithyrambic or gnomic poetry, but Dionysian poetry also, of which tragedy and comedy, in their original sense, are two parts. So far as the concept of dance with its rhythmical accessories is concerned, can be traced out very easily in Choric odes in a Sohoclean tragedy, comprising strophe, anti-strophe, parode and epode. The primary meaning of ‘Vrata’ as a socio-cultural and ethnic trend seldom needs any explanation as it deals with the sementics rather than the phonetics of the tradition of dramatic poetry. With reference to the above preamble, it becomes comprehensible to quote Ācārya Kṣemendra’s concept of Vrata-aucitya or propriety of custom:

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\text{(Kṣemendra śloka xxix)}
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(The sense of a composition deserving praise on account of its worthiness due to propriety of a sensible vrata or custom fills the mind of the people with satisfaction by its charm.)

With this eastern scholar aims at laying stress upon is that the Vrata aucitya in both aspects, content and expression becomes capable of sublimating certain inherent instincts deeply rooted in mankind such as ‘Bhakti’ which presents a synthesis of a devotion leading to true beauty and good; ‘Satyam Shivam Sundaram’. It is the observance of such a custom, whether literary or social, that is worthy of making the threefold implication, indicative, imagistic and suggestive of poetry, culminating into proper

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thanksgiving. All this happens in the very similitude of providing popular minds with ‘That content, which sage in meditation found.’

Sophoclean tragedy also provides many examples of the synthesis of harmony in vocal, instrumental and orchestral music, with the sanctity of Bhakti or devotion to gods and goddesses such as Apollo, Artemis, Bacchus (Dionyseus) etc. This song is not only a record of synthesis of music, side by side it reflects the custom of pleasing the Divinity, when some prayer is granted or the intension (Sankalp) is fulfilled. It happens in the play Women of Trachis, when Heracles, the husband of Deineira is coming back to his native land Trachis, in Greece. The Indian audience is also well conversant with the invocation and thanksgiving to certain gods and goddesses when a person sets his foot coming back from a distant land. In this case, usually, goddess Parvathi is pleased when the husband comes back to home. It is a coincidence that the word ‘Parvathi’ used for Lord Shiva’s wife, means ‘one born at mountains’ and another name for Artemis, Diana (the moon-goddess) is Cynthia, so-called because she was born at Mt. Cynthus. Hence there is the relevence of singing hymns to the praise of Artemis:

Now let the house be filled
With maiden voices singing as the hearth
For joy; and let the shouts of men together
Praise the bright arrow-armed
Apollo, our defender!

Sing women, sing to Artemis
Apollo’s sister, huntress of the deer,
The fire-encircled; praise
Her neighbour – nymphs!

O master of my soul,
I float on air, the sweet
Music of flutes would win me now
And twining ivy – tendrils whirl me round
In Bacchanalian dance.
Paean! Paean!

(They dance in joyful abandon, until one of them breaks off, seeing persons approaching)

(Women of Trachis 126)

Apart from the representation of benevolent divinity the Chorus refers to the real vision as the personification of what had already been heard and this signifies how the ‘Vrata’ or custom of waiting for a long time has brought its fruit:

Look, look, my lady!
Here is good news in person
Before your very eyes.

(Women of Trachis 126)

Though the causation of Greek tragedy depended upon a certain antagonism of some divinity such as Zeus, Apollo, Artemis, Nemesis, Euminides (the Furies) Aphrodite etc., yet the analytical approach of Aristotle in his concept of tragic protagonist, as it occurs in ‘The Poetics’, establishes the thesis that, apart from the divine wrath, there is Hamartia or a certain type of error of
judgement that results into the catastrophe. This error of judgement
is said to have occurred when some codes of conduct or laws are
violated by a human being. Yet the suffering of such type may not
bring a tragic impact. The error of judgement is of somewhat
intermediate nature, hence in the analysis of Sophoclean tragedy
also morality should be discussed with a certain balance of logic. A
virtuous man falling from prosperity to adversity shocks the
spectators; a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity is against
the spirit of tragedy. For enliving a tragic impact, the satisfaction of
the moral sense is essential; but this alone would not do:

Nor again, should be the downfall of the cutter villain
be exhibited. A plot of this kind would, doubtless, satisfy the moral sense, but it would inspire neither pity
nor fear; for pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves. Such an
event, therefore, will be neither pitiful nor terrible. There remains then, the character between these two
extremes–that of a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice
or depravity, but by some error or frailty.

(Aristotle 45)

Such an error occurs when a man is governed by
passion rather than by intellect. Not only in case of human beings
but even certain divinities inflicting catastrophe upon human beings
were governed by a passion for revenge.

Aristotle had a very high opinion of Oedipus Tyrannus
which he considers to be an ideal play. Prof. Butcher comes out with
his thesis establishing a balance between morality and the error of judgement when he says: ‘Now Oedipus though of a hasty and impulsive temperament, with something too of proud self-assertion, cannot, broadly speaking, be said to have owed his ruin to any striking moral defect. His character was not the determining factor in his fortunes. He, if any man, was in a genuine sense, the victim of circumstances. In slaying Laius he was probably in some degree morally culpable. But the act was done certainly after provocation, and possibly in self-defence. His life was a chain of errors, the most fatal of all being the marriage with his mother. All minor acts of ignorance culminated here; and yet it was a purely unconscious offence to which no kind of blame attached. If Oedipus is the person who suggested to Aristotle the formula of this chapter, we can hardly limit the word to its moral meaning, as marking either a defect of character or a single passionate or inconsiderate act. \( \alpha \mu \alpha \rho \tau \iota \alpha \) may well include the three meaning above mentioned, which in English cannot be covered by a single term.’

(S.H. Butcher 320)

The scholarly analysis of Prof. Butcher presents a convincing balance of morality and error, yet it highlightens the innocence and ignorance of Oedipus too much. The meeting of Oedipus with Laius on Corinthian avenue might have infuriated him, yet howsoever eslaved by passions, a man of Oedipus-like intellectual calibre cannot be expected to be unaware of the man in chariot was as old as his father might have been. Besides Oedipus might have been crown-prince, yet the man in the chariot was in noway inferior to him. A better course of action might have been to give the aged person path and it would have added further glory to
Oedipus. It was the domineering passion that caused the error of judgement and certainly it was anger as in the case of King Lear, a tragedy by Shakespeare. Similarly, when Jocasta was offered to Oedipus as an imperial Jointress, he was not so intellectually blind as not to understand that the woman was old enough to be his mother. However the sin of marriage was not so detrimental to morality as insemenating the woman with his own seed. Again it is a conscious error of judgement, which cannot be expected from a conscious person. The most significant blunder that was committed by Oedipus was that he did not deem it proper to take the wise and aged counselling of Polybus, his supposed father. Had it been taken, the result would have been different. Hence ‘Hamartia’ in case of Oedipus does not arise simply out of ignorance as out of finding an outlet to the suppressed ‘Libido’, as explained by the Austrian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud.

If morality furnishes the background to the analysis of Oedipus, it is the challenge of passion that forms the foundation stone of what happens is Electra. The sacrifice of Iphigenia, though in the background, has been considered as a challenge of the passion for devotion, yet is something more also. When Clytemnestra defends herself to Electra, Electra refers to some offence committed by Agamemnon against Artemis:

You admit you killed my father;
And that is the most monstrous admission you could make
Whether you had justice on your side or not

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I have heard, how my father, in an idle moment
Walking in a demesne of the goddess, startled a stag
A dappled full-antlered beast, and thoughtlessly,
With a rash triumphant cry he shot it dead.
It was this that provoked the goddess, Leto’s daughter
To detain the Greeks and make my father pay
For the creature’s life by offering up his daughter
So she was sacrificed; there was no other way
To get the ships afloat, either for Troy
Or homeward. This was the reason why he was forced.
Against his will and after much resistance
To make the sacrifice.”

(Electra 85)

Besides this another challenge of passion comes in the middle when Agamemnon is killed by Aegiesthus and Clytemnestra pleads her innocence. In her case it was the passion of revenge blended with incest on the ethos of a maxim that a woman always achieves propinquity with the person nearest to her instantly. At last the most significant challenge of passion is the action of Orestes, for his loyalty is at first towards the slaughtered father, but the fillial passion was also there though it was brain washed and suppressed. He might have killed Clytemnestra but somewhere his conscience must have pricked him that he was committing the sin of matricide, in this way the phantasmagoria of Euminides is nothing but the projection of the suppressed feelings of what Freud calls mother-fixation; in case of Orestes. He has to practice penance to pacify the Furies and to relieve the entire house of Atreus from the curse.
The Sophoclean tragedy, thus analysed in the perspective of cultural propriety or Sanskriti aucitya, does not merely elucidate the subsidiary concepts of the culture and ethos of Greece, the instincts of worship, religious practices and forms of worship popular among the Hellenic people and the supremacy of the feeling of humanity supported by the discriminating faculty of intellect in accepting the challenge of omni-enslaving passion, but it also establishes a region of faith for it is under this purview that the spectacular art of drama becomes as ‘magister vitae’ for European and global spirit of co-existence as well.
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