“And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless.............”

It is an autoprobational proposition that genius or ‘pratibhā’ is inborn and talent or ‘patratā’ is acquired; this is the implication of Kāvyaprāna aucitya or the propriety of ‘Vates’ (Creative genius). Such capacities are not attained in a sudden flight, rather the person desiring to achieve them has to burn midnight oil and watch from his lonely tower the movement of stars that are to guide his way; it is a life time business that is why in Latin the diction ‘Vita braves ars longa’ and in Greek βίος χρόνος τεχνη μορφος.

Ācārya Kṣemendra’s concept of Kāvyaprāna aucitya or the propriety of creative genius is a synthesis of ten constituents, namely, 1- Tattva-aucitya (propriety of truth) 2- Sattva – aucitya (propriety of disposition) 3- Abhiprāya – aucitya (propriety of motive) 4- Svabhāv –aucitya (propriety of nature) 5- Sāra-Sangraha aucitya (propriety of essence) 6- Pratibhā aucitya ((propriety of genius) 7- Avasthā aucitya (propriety of state) 8- Vicāra aucitya (propriety of thought) 9- Nāma – aucitya (propriety of number) 10- Aṣirvāda – aucitya (propriety of benediction).
Similarly in western poetics, it is Horace who come nearer to the concept of poetic genius, though he uses different words for this purpose such as nature and art, the poet and the poem, what should be shown on the stage and what not etc. It should be noted that even Aristotle leaves it to poetic genius to create poetic effect or to improve on reality, a removal of irrationality or sometimes justification of it, as it occurs in chapter XXV of the Poetics, Aristotle presents five grounds of Criticism and twelve criteria forming the perspective as he concludes:

“There are five sources from which critical objections are drawn. Things are censured either as impossible or irrational or morally hurtful, or contradictory to artistic correctness. The answer should be sought under the twelve heads above mentioned.”

(Aristotle, 107)

The nucleus of the thesis of Horace is an expectation that the poets should be very cautious of giving a publicity to words and should not write even a single sentence that is against the desire of the goodness of wisdom, for the word once said cannot be called back:

You, I am sure, will not say or do anything counter to the will of Minerva; you have judgement and sense enough for that. But if any time you do write anything, submit it to the hearing of the critic Maecius, and your father’s and mine as well; then put the papers away and keep them for nine years. You can always destroy what
you have not published, but once you have let your words go, they cannot be taken back.

(Horace 92)

The modern scholarship is also unaware of such propriety for a creative genius is the prime cause of what Johnson calls “mixing truth with pleasure” – “Creation with Genius, is at expansion, a flowing – forth’, of the soul – when it takes need of nothing but it own promptings, and bounds along without thinking how it goes...................(the mind) is melting all her ideas into one golden stream, which she pours forth with a joy what takes of nothing but itself.”

(Abrams 132)

The prime essential of the creative genius is the quest and expression of truth, which has been called as the Tattva – aucitya or propriety of truth, which arises from internal dialogue between the poet’s soul and self occurring in his heart as Ācārya Kṣemendra writes:

(A poet’s heart – bewitching composition appeals (all the more) by its containing (by the mention of) the proper sense, the truth of which has been ascertained).

The emphasis is upon a sense of ascertaining truth after its proper trial with reference to the pros and cons of what is in the poet’s mind. The depiction of truth depends upon sound
understanding of what a poet has to say; only then the truth becomes eternal and unshakable: “The Fountain and fountain-head of good composition is a sound understanding. The Socratic writings will provide you with material, and if you look after the subject-matter, the words will come readily enough.”

(Horace 90)

Prior to analysing the Propriety of truth in a specific episode from Sophoclean tragedy; it is worthwhile to note what an episode should be, and, what it should not present as a spectacle; such things should be left to narrative skill of an actor:

“An episode is either acted on the stage, or reported as having taken place. However the mind is less actively stimulated by what is takes in through the ear than by what is presented to it through the trustworthy agency of the eyes – something that the spectator can see for himself. But you will not bring on to the stage anything that ought properly to be taking place behind the scenes, and you will keep out of sight many episodes that are to be described later by the eloquent tongue of a narrator. Media must not butcher her children in the presence of the audience, nor the monstrous Atreus cook his dish of human flesh within public view, nor Procne be metamorphosed into a bird, nor Cadmus into a snake. I shall turn in disgust from anything of this kind, that you show me.”

(Horace 85)
Aristotle has another definition to bring forward, for according to him: “The Episode is that entire part of a tragedy which is between complete choric songs. The Exode is that entire part of a tragedy which has no choric song after it. Of the choric part the Parode is the first undivided utterance of the chorus; the stasimon is a Choric ode without anapaests or trochaic tetrameters; the Commos is a joint lamentation of Chorus and actors.”

However it is in Oedipus –Jocasta episode of Oedipus Tyrannus that two truths are referred to not only as a prologue to the Imperial theme, but to the fundamental cause of Catastrophe. The one was uttered in a state of drunkenness and it inspired the Protagonist to make an enquiry concerning it.

One day at table, a fellow who had been drinking deeply
Made bold to say I was not my father’s son.
That hurt me; but for the time I suffered in silence
As well as I could. Next day I approached my parents
And asked them to tell me the truth. They were bitterly
That anyone should dare to put such a story about.

(King Oedipus 47)

Thereafter Oedipus was made to understand that he would kill his father and marry his mother. In order to avoid the situation he fled away and left everything to the stars between him and Corinth. Then the second truth is spoken to Jocasta and it overwhelms the mind of Oedipus with a sense of guilt consciousness;
“My journey brought me into the neighbourhood where
Your late king met his end.
Listen, my wife; this is the truth.”

(King Oedipus 48)

Oedipus makes a confession that he struck the blow in
self defence for the old man in the carriage took the weapon from
the driver’s hand and struck him on the head. Immediately Oedipus
also take the old man in the same coin, but this action would be so
fatal to his own conscience, was not known to him.

And every man of them there I killed but now,
If the blood of Laius ran in this stranger’s veins,
Is there any more wretched mortal than I more hated
By god and man? It is I whom no stranger, no citizen
Must take to his house; I to whom, none may, speak.”

(King Oedipus 48)

This indicates that the ‘Sattva-aucitya’ or the propriety
of truth has a cathartic impact and a cleansing effect on the other
characters also, a feature which is peculiar to the complex plot of a
Sophoclean tragedy. The truth revealed by Tieresias in the riddle
‘the killer you are seeking is yourself’, dealing with the murder of
Laius, and ‘that you are living in sinful union with the one you love,
living in ignorance of your own undoing”, purifies the soul of two
culprits the son and that of the mother, through the penance of
inflicting carnal tortures, the one by extinguishing the light of his
eyes ‘that should see no longer his shame, his guilt”, and Jocasta by
hanging herself, for she lamented over, “The twice confounded issue
of her wifehood-Husband begotten of husband, child of child’. Thus
the Catharsis is achieved through the synthesis of maternal and nuptial lamentation.

The ancient Greeks were highly imaginative and they seldom thought of separating dramatic genius from poetic genius. It was their belief that a poet wrote because he was inspired by Muse and the enthusiasm to write was the result of putting certain things together, which in its Indian counterpart may be considered as Sār-Sangrah aucitya or the propriety of Essence, for the narrative poet enjoys the liberty of describing anything as he likes, and when he likes giving to it the dimension in accordance with his will; whereas the dramatist has to select the essence and it is necessary for him to provide it a proper synthesis. That is why a perfect plot is a synthesis of events. Even at the very outset of Poetics, Aristotle says that his purpose in writing the treatise is to – “inquire into the structure of the plot as requisite to a good poem”, which clearly indicates that good poem is the end of composition while the structure of the plot is a means to it. This means gets its subsistence from the well-known Aristotelian dictum, “The plot, Then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy”. A dramatist, thus becomes a person, who makes a collection of the essence or Sar-Sangrah, as it is expressed by Ācārya Kṣemendra in his treatise Aucitya Vicāra-carcha:

(To whom is not the meaning of a composition dear (when its) sense has been determined by a perorative

(159)
sentence, and resembling thereby a transaction which is promptly carried out?).

In this śloka the very nomenclature is indicative of the dramatic craft vested in the Sutradhar of Indian dramaturgy and the concept of essence is the selection of incidents which have got the thematic propriety. In both the cases it is the elements of surprise or Niśpatti of Adbhut Rasa that is of prime importance. The Greeks went through the process of a Renaissance of wonder when they conceived the role of enthusiasm latent in poetic composition:

The Greeks themselves were accustomed to speak of poetic genius as a form of madness, an inspired enthusiasm. It is the doctrine of Plato in the ‘Ion’ in the Phaedrus’, in the Symposium. Even Aristotle, who sometimes writes as if the faculty of the logician were enough to construct a poem, says, “Poetry is a thing inspired”. Elsewhere he more accurately distinguishes two classes of poets – the man of flexible genius who can take the impress of each character in turn, and the man of fine frenzy, who is lifted out of his proper self, and loses his own personality.

(Butcher 396-397)

In Indian context also, it is the essence of surprise that is a stepping stone to realise and understand the form of spirit and spiritual sublimation, as uttered by Lord Kriṣṇa:

\[ vk; \bar{\mathfrak{R}}'; fr \ \text{df}\overline{\mathfrak{m}}\mathfrak{sA} \]

\[ ek; \bar{\mathfrak{g}}\text{nr} \ \text{r Hs pl}\overline{\mathfrak{y}}\%
\]

(160)
(Vedvyās : Gita śloka 29)

(Hardly anyone perceives this soul as marvellous, scarce another likewise speaks thereof as marvellous and scarce another hears of it as marvellous, while there are some who knows it not even on hearing of it.)

Such is the divinity – oriented logical force underlying the statement, “Ethos divorced from plot is like a daub of beautiful colour, which apart from form gives little pleasure. The plot is the groundwork, the design, through the medium of which ethos derives its meaning and dramatic value.” That make Aristotle prefer a complex plot over the simple plot, as he says; “A perfect tragedy should, as we have seen, be arranged not on the simple, but on the complex plan.” (Aristotle 45) Peripetia (reversal of situation) and Anagnorisis (recognition) are the essential constituents of such a plan. Apart from Oedipus Tyrannus in which the Corinthian shepherd brings the good news but intensifies the tragic effect, in Electra also the Tutor comes and narrates how Orestes died in the chariot race held at Delphi in the honour of Hellas; he says: ‘They saw him now pinned to the ground, now rolled head over heels, till at last the other drivers got his runaway horses under control and extricated the poor mangled body, so bruised and bloody that not one of his friends could have recognised him. They carried him straight to a pyre and burned him; and shortly some men of Phocis will be bringing you a little urn of bronze that contains, alas, the dust of one of the greatest of men..........” (Electra 91)
The situation is reversed and a strange type of anagnorisis has been planned when Orestes is face to face with Electra and asks her if she recognises the man (Tutor) who took the exiled child to Phocis. Electra recognises the man and a joy comes to her. Thus the reversal of situation is from bad to good, for she was under perfect impression that Orestes is dead. Another anagnorisis is also significant when shrouded body is brought before Aegisthus, he is overjoyed to listen to the story of Orestes’ death; and he thinks that the covered body is of Orestes. He orders to uncover the body as “uncover the face for I must mourn my kindred” Orestes in counterfeit says that Aegisthus should lift the shroud. Aegisthus asks Electra to call Clytemnestra there. What follows is the best example of ironical anagnorisis and peripetia combined:

Aegisthus : God, what is this?
Orestes : Afraid?
         Of whom? Strangers?
Aegisthus : Whose trap is this
         that I have fallen into?
Orestes : Are you so blind
         You cannot tell the living from the dead?
Aegisthus : God help me, now I know. You are Orestes.
Orestes : The prophet’s eyes are opened.
Aegisthus : This is the end.........

(Electra 116)

This is how Sophocles structures his plot on a complex plan. Another instance of complex plot is the Women of Trachis.
Deineira is waiting for her husband Heracles’ arrival and dreams of living with him in perfect delight. But when she comes to know that a girl Iole, Eurytus’ daughter is also coming with Heracles, she becomes jealous of the captive girl, thus the joy of being with her husband is eclipsed by the jealousy arising out of her rival mistress’s coming. As she says:

Only a fool
Would try conclusions with the God of Love
Love has his own way with the gods themselves;
Why not with me? why not with another woman,
As much a woman as I? It would be madness
To blame my husband for catching this infections,
Or blame the woman, his partner is a thing
That is no disgrace to them, no offence to me.

(Women of Trachis 134)

Further the reversal of situation becomes pathetic, when she sends the talismanic garment to win her husband’s love back to her, but that garment sticks to the body of Heracles and causes his death, leaving Deineira a widow. Hyllus, her son brings the news of the sad demise of his father, caused by the black magic practised by Deineria herself; “the tunic was seen to cling tightly to every inch of his body, as if moulded to his form by the hand of a modeller; pain racked and gnawed at his bones; and a poison like that of some vicious deadly serpent began to consume him.” Salt is added to injury when Hyllus, in the spirit of Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, blames his mother Deiniera of causing her husband’s death;
This is what you have done, mother to my father
Done it deliberately; and your guilt is known
May avenging Justice and the Furies punish you!
This-God forgive me – is my solemn prayers.

(Women of Trachis 145)

In the art of dramaturgy, character and characterisation are the two most complex words in the interpretation of which complexity arises out of a number of ambiguities and the meanings often overlap one another. It is true in case of Western as well as Eastern legislations; the nucleus of the complexity is that character or ‘Pātra’, essentially means two things – in western criticism character is the substitute for the person about whom the tragedy has been written and the actor; on the other hand in abstract sense, character is the quality of a persons that makes him distinguished from other person involved in the drama of life. In Eastern dramaturgy, there is the ‘Pātra’ or the person and the ‘Pātratā’, the virtue for which a person stands, as is evident from the following proverbial verse:

(Learning imparteth politieness or discipline, from discipline a man marches towards ability; from ability is earned wealth; from wealth, there comes righteousness and then the final delight.)

It is evident that nearly in all the treatises of quality the first chapter prescribed to be followed by a prince is called ‘Vinyādhikārik Prakaraṇ’, then there is the rigorous discipline and
the prince is warned against the misuse of wealth and power vested in him, having restrained himself from such excesses, the prince becomes full of righteousness; that is why the highest monarch in Myth is known as ‘Dharmaraj’, which incidentaly may be associated with a tragic hero, possessed with Dianoeia. Ācārya Kṣemendra also, more or less, echos the same interpretation, when he says:

(By the significant term, conforming to the motive, the merits and demerits of a composition are shown, just as the name worthy of the acts of a person shows his excellences and blemishes.)

The Indian audience is well-aware of the maxim which is the first justification signifying the abstract character of a person. For example ‘Priyamvada’, a friend of Ṣakuntla, signifies a woman who always utters that which pleases the listener; similarly the very name Electra justifies the character of the sister of Orestes as ‘the fiery one’. Even before the emergence of Aristotle the analysis of character was known to Greek people as Heraclitus, the weeping philosopher proclaimed:

“\( \eta\delta\omicron\sigma \neq \nu\theta\rho\omicron\pi\omicron\omega \delta \neq \iota\mu\omicron\omicron\nu \)”

(Man’s character is his destiny),

The concept of character is based upon the abstract interpretation of the term ‘Ethos’. Aristotle is very much particular in emphasising the fact as:
Since the object of imitation are men in action, and these men must be either of higher or a lower type (for moral character mainly answers to these divisions, goodness and badness being the distinguishing marks of moral differences), it follows that we must represent men either as better than in real life, or as worse, or as they are.

(Aristotle 11)

Obviously it means that a person is known by what he does, for which Aristotle uses the word ‘Praxis’. On the initial level he defines character in an aphoristic manner; “By character, I mean that virtue of which we ascribe certain qualities to the agents”. He frames rules for characterisation also when he lays down four essential maxims to be followed by a playwright:

In respect of character there are four things to be aimed at. First and most important, it must be good. Now any speech or action that manifests moral purpose of any kind will be expressive of character; the character will be good if the purpose is good. This rule is relative to each class. Even a woman may be good and also a slave; Though the woman may be said to be an inferior being and the slave quite worthless. The second thing to aim at is propriety. There is a type of manly valour; but valour in a woman, or unscrupulous cleverness, is inappropriate. Thirdly, character must be true to life; for this is a distinct thing from goodness and propriety, as here described. The fourth point is consistency; for
though the subject of the imitation, who suggested the type, be consistent, still he must be consistently inconsistent. As an example of motiveless degradation of character, we have Menelaus in the Orestes; of character indecorous and inappropriate, the lament of Odyssesus in the Scylla, and the speech of Melanippe; of inconsistency, the Iphigenia at Aulis, - for Iphigenia the suppliant in no way resembles her later self.”

(Aristotle 53)

Aristotle’s approach towards characterisation is analytical and he refers to the human agents in conflict with destiny as what he aims by saying “men better than they are”. He follows the rule of golden mean when he presents his concept of tragic hero; his emphasis is on the arousal of pity and fear, which can be achieved by the misfortune, of an intermediate type of person, “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.” What Aristotle means is that the change of fortune from good to bad in case of a virtuous man cannot arouse pity and fear, rather it shocks the spectators. Similarly the downfall of a perfect villain may satisfy the moral sense, but the arousal of pity and fear is again impossible, “for pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves.”

In Greek tragedy, chorus has the most significant part to be played; generally it is conjectured that Chorus is a single character, but it is not so, at least in Sophoclean tragedy. However
Aristotle lays down some interesting maxims and analysis concerning the significance of chorus:

The Chorus, too should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be an integral part of the whole, and share in the action, in the manner not of Euripides but of Sophocles.

(Aristotle 69)

In almost all the tragedies written by Sophocles, Chorus is not a single character, rather it comprises a group of persons belonging to certain classes of society, who are wise enough to narrate what cannot be shown on the stage and to pass a running commentary over the deeds of the agents, whether they are Protagonists, deuteragonists or tritagonists. Thus the chorus in Oedipus Tyrannus comprises the Theban Elders; the Elders of Colonus constitute the chorus of Oedipus At Colonus; in Antigone, the guiding and counselling role is played by the chorus of Theban elders; the crew of sailors constitute the chorus in Ajax; the Mycenean women, as by virtue of being women, they can understand the grief of a maiden, form the chorus of Electra; The Trachinian women with their passionate reactions play the role of chorus in the Women Of Trachis; the mariners accompanied Ulysses (Odysseus) inact the part of chorus in Philoctetes, because they had been the persons who ‘moved heaven and earth’ with the monarch of Ithaka.

In all these seven plays, the chorus apart from performing traditional functions such as singing Choric Odes or providing background information etc; becomes significant by
performing some singular role also. In Oedipus Tyrannus the Chorus aims at preventing the Protagonist from inciting the wrath of Divinity by his consistent blasphemous attitude; this is what is truly expected from the elders of the capital town of Thebes, for their silver hair have much to give than the golden crown of a monarch:

Sir, to our thinking, both of you have spoken
In the heat of anger. Surely this is not well
When all our thoughts should be; how to discharge
The God’s command.

(King Oedipus 37)

‘Oedipus At Colouns is the masterpiece of Sophocles and a sense of love for a native land, preventive welfare and an account of the mysterious disappearance of Oedipus has been assigned to the Chorus comprising the Elders of Colonus. When the land of Colonus is described, there is the emphasis of graphic detail and the finest piece of descriptive poetry constitutes an aesthetic sense of expressionism:

Here Aphrodite rides with golden reins
The Muse here consort...

(Oedipus At Colonus 92)

Further, the entry of Oedipus and Antigone is prevented by the Chorus as it thinks that the duty of letting not the strangers enter the territory of a holy land falls upon the shoulders of the elders. Antigone is told the reason as to why father and daughter should not make their entrance:

Daughter of Oedipus, we pity no less than him
For all you suffer; but we fear what gods may send.

(Oedipus At Colonus 79)
Another preventive role of Chorus becomes manifest when Creon, the Theban Morach after Oedipus is prevented as he has come to aduct the persons, who have taken shelter in the land of Colonus and it is a sacred duty of the elders to provide all sorts of protection to the shelter-seekers; thus they consider Creon’s action as dishonest:

Now, foreigner
You see your error. Coming whence you come
You should be honest, but you acts disapprove it.

(Oedipus At Colonus 100)

The chorus in Philoctetes is meant to provide wise and beneficial counselling to the protagonist, because Philoctetes thinks that he has been cheated, whereas the mariners comprising chorus have seen much of the world and by virtue of their experience which is like ‘an arch where through gleams the untravelled world’, advise him to go with Odysseus and Neoptolemus, but he refuses and thereafter the chorus passes a running commentary over the action by saying:

“Stubborn as ever, Sir; and these stubborn words
Show that he is no mind to accept defeat”

(Philoctetes 198)

The mightiest struggle in the amphitheatre of Sophoclean tragedy is fought by the tragic heroes, who are the men of exceptional heredity and exceptional genius. They are involved in the error of judgement because they are placed in such circumstances that their virtues are obliterated by some vice; for example the prophecy oriented vice about Oedipus eclipses all his
benevolence that it was he who librated the Theban land from the tortures of Sphinx. The Greek tragedy was written by the persons who were gifted with a sublimated poetic genius, that is why the characters created by them performed the action not for nothing, but in accordance with certain noble themes that were pre-concieved before making them appear on the stage:

The freedom of the Greek poet in delineating character was thus restricted by the choice of subject-matter. Add to this another consideration. The Themes usually handled were simple in outline, the main issue were clear and free from the disturbing accidents of individuality. In the legends selected, the working of the eternal laws which govern human life could be visibly discovered. The dramatic characters were of corresponding simplicity. Their personality was seized by the immediate intuition of the poet at same decisive moment of action. A small portion was carved out of their career, illustrating human life in one of its typical aspects... .... ..... .... Sophocles, too, brings rival principles into collision. In the Antigone the divine and the human law stand opposed, and the religious duty towards the family triumphs over the claims of civic obedience. In the Philoctetes, the instincts of natural truthfulness finally carry the day against diplomatic falsehood for the public good.

(Butcher 359-360)
As an ideal tragic hero Philoctetes possesses the valour of wielding the invincible bow and arrows provided by Heracles and on the ground of public welfare; it is but natural for him that such a weapon should not fall into the hands of some ineligible person otherwise it might bring utter chaos. That is why when he is robbed of the weapon by shrewdness of Odysseus and Neoptolemus, he laments like anything:

I shall be
The prey now, carrion food for those I fed on,
The hunted will come hunting for my carcase,
Demanding blood for blood, the price of murder.

(Philoctetes 195)

Women of Trachis is a play dealing with the vicissitude in the life of Deineira, the Octavia of Sophoclean tragedy; Heracles, her Antony “has been a Lydian woman’s slave; This whole year past”, in her case the error of judgement happen when she decides to make use of Talisman to captivate the love of her husband; perhaps she does not know that the black magic would have an adverse impact and be the cause of her husband’s death. In this way she reminds the reader of the lot of Cleopatra also who thought that by playing the trick, she would win the heart of Antony, but the reverse happens. It may be a type of psychoanalytical perversity that if a woman is not successful in taking revenge upon the woman who is her rival, she shoots the arrows of her jealousy and anger upon the person whom she loves, for she considers the lover or husband equally guilty of the deed of betraying her faith and fidelity:
That same black venom in the blood of Nessus
That issued from his wound, will now kill Heracles
It will....it must.......I know it cannot fail
There is only one thing left.......I am resolved
To die, if he must die, in the same swift hour
Can any woman lose the precious name
Of virtue in which she trusted, and still love
Branded with shame?

(Women Of Trachis 143)

The chorus narrating the sad death of Heracles defends Deineira and tells she had not known it before the tragic consequence:

Poor lady, she had not foreseen
This tragedy, she only knew
There was harm to come, with a second wife
Brought into her house, and what she did
She did deliberately; the consequences
Was not her doing.

(Women Of Trachis 146-147)

Thus her character arouses the sentiment of pity in a generalised sense for the Nemesis overtakes the heart of a royal woman also if her husband brings some captive princess to share the same blanket with her. This is the source of conflict, which provides tragic intensity to the character of Deineira. Just as Cleopatra gets her breast stunged by asps, Deineria also puts an end to her life with a mere golden buckle and two-edged sword:
Then silent again, she grasped the golden buckle
Above her breath, loosed it with trembling hands
And stripped her left arm bare and all the side
Nearest her heart. I ran as fast as I could
To tell her son what she was thinking of
In the time it took to fetch him – it was done;
And there we found her, with the two-edged sword
Thurst through the stomach to her heart.

(Women Of Trachis 149)

Such is the tragic end of two characters also, whose
doubt and infidelity brings the catastrophe as the chorus remarks –

Two deaths two sorrows, O
Where shall we weep?
Which is the heaviest to bear,
This one or that, how can we know?

(Women Of Trachis 150)

Ajax is a mighty tragic hero and even in folklore he is a
legendary figure, the wielder of the ‘Sevenfold fence’ or the Shield
covered by the hide of seven bulls. Sophocles has made him suffer
from a temporary fit of insanity during which he slaughters the
innocent beasts, deeming them to be the warriors; thus he has been
blinded by Fury, reminding the Indian readers of the epical character
‘Ashvatthama’, who killed the sons of Draupadi under the
impression that he was killing the ‘Pandavas’. Thus the Hamartia or
error of judgement arises from a strange mania for which the
Protagonist is not responsible. The exceptional virtue possessed by
Ajax, apart from bravery, is the moral courage of a confessional
nature; when he becomes aware of shedding the blood of innocent creatures, he is given to an instinct of repentance; when he says:

Here is the bold, the strong
The fearless laughter in the line!
See his brave handiwork
Among these innocent dumb beasts,
And laugh, laugh at his shame!

(Ajax 30)

Great men are great in life as well as in death, Ajax chooses his death in the most honourable manner, by throwing himself over the sword; the preamble of such a glorious death had been foreseen and foretold by him in the words:

Honour in life
Or honour in death; there is no other thing,
A nobleman can ask for. That is all.

(Ajax 34)

Thus Ajax is a perfect tragic hero on the touchstone provided by Aristotle, for his suffering is underserved suffering for a deed which was not of his intention, planning and purpose.

In the domain of Sophoclean tragedy, Antigone is the only female character who gets a leading role in two plays, depicting two ideologies based upon two faithful concepts of human relationship one as a daughter and the other as a sister; it was as consequence of the first, that Arthur william Verity, the famous, the renowned editor of Shaksepeare, has termed Cordelia, ‘the Antigone of English tragedy’. When her father was banished by Creon, the
option of primerose path was rejected by her and she opted for treading the thorns of life, irrespective of the bleedings.

She might have remained at Thebes with her brother Eteocles, who had been made king her father’s room. But she chose instead to wander forth with the forlorn old man, fallen from his kingly state, and absolutely begging his bread. The Great Athenian poet Sophocles begins his tragedy of Oedipus At Colonus’ with showing the blind old king leaning on Antigone’s arm and asking: ‘Tell me, thou daughter of a blind old man, Antigone, to what land are we come, or to what city? who the inhabitants, who with a slender pittance will relieve, even for a day the wandering Oedipus?’

(Charlotte Yonge 14-15)

Though several other tragedies have been named after women, such as Electra, Medea, Iphigenia in Aulis’ etc., yet the female characters are not so dominating and assertive as Antigone, for she has the moral courage to oppose the royal decree, when Antigone thinks that it is against the divine commandants. This is seen in the play named after her in which her role as a sister has been dignified. Such a belligrant attitude can be accounted for it is in the dramatic career of Sophocles, The earliest dated play is the Antigone; it was prouduced immediately before the author’s appointment as admiral in the Samian war of 440, and constituted in the opinion of wits his chief claim to that office. Her characterisation is based upon the dignity of theme which revolves round the ‘eternally interesting idea of martyrdom, the devotion to a higher
unseen law, resulting in revolt against and destruction by the lower visible law. Though she was the most affianced bride of Haemon, the son of Creon, yet she preferred a dead brother over the living betrothed groom. In Indian context also, as one of the ‘Buddhist Jatak Tales’, reveals when a certain woman was asked to choose between husband and brother, for one was to be executed, the woman’s choice fell on her brother on the ground that she would get a number of husbands, while running in streets, but she could not see a place from where to find out a brother springing from the same maternal womb. Hence the glorification of Antigone has its paramount significance for Indian scholarship and makes one believe that even in the Western world also there has been sisters, who could sacrifice everything on the Philadelphic altar:

‘This was the time for the sister to remember her oath to her dead brother. The more timid Ismene would have dissuaded her, but she answered: To me no suffering have that hideous form which can affright me from a glorious death.’ And she crept forth by night, amid all the horrors of the deserted field of battle, and herself covered with loose earth the corpse of Polynices. The barbarous uncle caused it to be taken up and again exposed, and a watch was set at some little distance. Again Antigone, “was seen, lamenting shrill with plaintive notes like the poor bird that sees her lovely nest, spoil’d of her young.” Again she heaped dry dust with her own hands, over the body, and poured forth the libations of wine that formed an essential part of the ceremony. She was seized by the guard, and led before
Creon. She boldly avowed her deed, and, in spite of the supplications of Ismene she was put to death, a sufferer for her noble and pious deeds; and with this only comfort:

Glowing at my heart,
I feel this hope, that to my father, dear
and dear to thee, my mother, dear to thee
my brother, I shall go.

(Charlotte Young 15-16)

Nowhere in the domain of Sophoclean Tragedy has the theory of parallelism in characterisation been carried out so successfully as in Electra, in which the Philadelphic sister Electra and adulterous mother Clytemnestra have been presented together, the daughter aiming the dart of her ire towards the mother, who justifies the action of getting her husband Agamemnon killed by her paramour Aegisthus, on the ground that her daughter Iphigenia, the elder sister of Electra was sacrificed on the altar of Artemis; this incident is so heart-rending and moving that Arthur William Verity goes to the extent of calling Lady Macbeth, “the Clytemnestra of English Tragedy”, Electra has been glorified by John Milton, who in the sestet of his sonnet ‘When the Assault was Intended upon the city,’ tells that as soon as the recitation of ‘Sad Electra’s poet’ had touched the ears, the invader commanded the troops to cease fire. Electra is a strange spinster in the play, for ever since her father was slaughtered by the infidelity of her mother, and her brother Orestes was banished from the Imperial territory she had been waiting for the return of the brother who could avange the death of her father Agamemnon; though she remained in the palace, yet the life of a
princes was denied to her and she had no husband with whom she could share the joys and griefs of her life:

    Half my life is wasted away
    I have no husband at my side
    To fight for me, I have borne no children
    I am only an alien slave, a menial
    Drudge in the house that was my father’s
    Dressed like a slattern in coarse and ugly garments
    And for my substance
    A beggar’s dole at a hungry table.

    (Electra 74)

As the heroine of a tragedy Clytemnestra is the manifestation of a strange maternal conflict; at first she had to fix her loyalty between her husband and daughter, but her filial affection for the daughter was trampled under the ambition for a husband; then she was under a fix to remain loyal to her paramour Aegisthus or her husband Agamemnon, in this case the lust overpowered marital love and on the equation of love of daughter added to the lust on one side and the dutifulness to husband on the other side, the balance of Justice descended towards the former and the husband was killed. Lastly the mother was put amidst the bars of justice prepared by her daughter investigating, as to what caused the deceived killing of the husband when the theory of Artemis altar was outright rejected:

    The excuse you plead is no excuse; explain
    If you please, what justification you have
    For your present abominable way of life

    (179)
Mistress of the murderer that helped you kill my father.

(Electra 86)

At last even her death is shrouded in a mystery; for Aegisthus thinks that the funeral sheet covers the body of Electra whereas something else is revealed, which makes him exclaim and ask – ‘whose trap is this that I have fallen into?’

There are certain characters which becomes synonymous with their authors; Shakespeare is known for Hamlet, Marlowe reminds of Dr. Faustus, Dickens is known by Mr. Micawber, Virginia woolf for Mrs. Dalloway and D.H. Lawrence had become synonymous with his Lady Chatterley; similarly Sophocles is known for his Oedipus, not only because the author was born, where the Protagonist breathed his last, but because Oedipus has become a great character, in whom every reader, great and small, tries to trace out his own reflection. He is a timeless character, who emphasises the dictum that human nature is the same, and this is proved by the Oedipus Complex theory, propounded by Sigmond Freud, the Austrian psychiatrist. In the play Oedipus Tyrannus he is not an absolute monarch, rather he should be evaluated according to the norms of Greek polity in accordance to which that monarch is called tyrannus, who does not descend from the currents local dynasty but becomes the king under some special circumstances by virtue and sanction of the citizens of a particular city state. In this play Oedipus assumes the Throne of Theban, because he has emancipated the Thebes people from the terrors and torments of Sphinx. He is expected to perform the prime duty of
saving the people from affliction as a king is expected to do. This is what is the implication of the priest:

Under the same bright star that gave us then
Good fortune guide us into good to-day,
If you are to be our king, as now you are
Be king of living men, not emptiness.
Surely there is no strength in wall or ship,
Where men are lacking and no life breathes
within them.

(King Oedipus 27)

It is this second task that has to become the acid-test of the spiritual and moral might of the newly coronated king. The royal commandment had dispatched Creon to the Pythian House of Apollo to find out the cause of overwhelming plague. The royal messenger brings the news that the son of Labdacus was killed and the murderer had not been punished. Pride comes as a Hamartia when Oedipus has a talk with Teiresias who says in an aphoristic manner:

You would so? Then hear this: upon you head
Is the ban your lips have uttered-from this day forth
Never to speak to me or any here.
You are the cursed polluter of this land.

(King Oedipus 35)

To be in the possession of a murdered Monarch’s wife is the guilt that pricks the conscience of Oedipus also, though the fact of maternity is unrevealed; at a prime level. This reminds readers of what Claudius says in Hamlet, defining the course of
divine justice that spares no culprit at all, for it is omniscient and omnipotent; the deed itself is enough evidence, Claudius says:

In the corrupted currents of this world
Offence’s gilded hand may shove by justice
And oft’ ‘tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law: but ‘tis not so above
There is no shuffling, there the action lids
In his true nature; and we ourselves compelled
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults
To give in evidence.

(Hamlet 850)

There is a difference between the character of Oedipus in Oedipus Tyrannus and Oedipus at Colonus. The Monarch in the later play is a father stranger in the land of Athense and a creation of Sophocles as to how he is received in the birth place of the author, just as Clym Yeobright is in Egdon Heath in Hardy’s The Return of the Native. Oedipus has gone blind and is helped by his daughter Antigone. He is forced by Creon to come back to Thebes, but he refused; in which he is helped by the Athenians. It is the success of Sophoclean art of characterisation that Oedipus was born in a mystery and disappears also in a mysterious manner. This factor has made him immortal creature to whom bodily existence is not to serve the purpose of the touchstone of judgement:

In what manner Oedipus passed from this earth, no one can tell. Only Theseus knows. We know he was not destroyed by a thunderbolt from heaven nor tide-wave rising from the sea, for no such thing occurred. Maybe a
guiding spirit from the gods took him or the earth’s foundations gently opened and received him with no pain. Certain it is that he was taken without a pang, without grief or agony- a passing more wonderful than that of any other man.

(Oedipus At Colonus 121)

In Aristotelian terms, tragedy provides pleasure by means of Catharsis or purgation of pity and fear and such emotions. Similarly, according to Bharat every play has some major sentiment as the ‘Mukhya Rasa’ and some other sentiments as the ‘Gaun Rasa’ or subsidiary sentiments. Bhavbhuti in his ‘UttarRamcharitam’ says:

(There is only one Rasa, Karun Rasa, which on account of various causes taken shelter of metamorphosis in a different manner and different forms. There is one water which takes form of whirlpool, bubble, wave and dissolved water)

Seen under this perspective, Sophoclean plays also have one major sentiment. In Ajax the prime sentiment is the sentiment of wrath or Raudra Rasa which has an impact of blinding fury in the mind of Ajax, so as not to make him distinguished as to whether he is killing warriors or innocent beasts. However this
frenzy is a divine frenzy, which Athena had inflicted upon him so that the favourite warriors might be saved. The pathetic sentiment or Karuṇ Rasa comes as a consequence when Ajax is in a repentant mood.

The sentiment of Pathos or Karuṇ Rasa is the domineering sentiment in Philoctetes. The poor warrior had a serpent bite and due to the venom his body was wounded. A man with incurable wound at first sight becomes an object of disgust. Hence the sentiment of disgust or Vibhatsa Rasa appears as a helping sentiment. The intensity of the sentiment of pathos is there because Philoctetes was left alone and yet he had not lost his heroic value because the bow of Heracles was still with him. The heroic sentiment has been presented in an ironic manner because it is in the grab of cowardice that Ulysses and Neoptolemus come to take the bow by cheating. The play shows the triumph of the sentiments of Pathos, it has the capacity of changing the mind and soul of Neoptolemus. Though he runs away with Heraclean how, yet his conscience pricks for he has had committed a heinous crime of deceiving an old man. His heart is purified and he comes back to Philoctetes in order to return the bow. Thus the sentiment of Pathos has a Cathartic impact of cleansing a man’s heart with the help of introspective conscience.

The analysis of Sophoclean tragedy with reference to the establishment and probity of sentiment is not limited to a single sentiment only and Oedipus Rex is a masterpiece, which provides a glaring example for herein we find the Heroic sentiment, Erotic sentiment in its devastated form culminating into lust, the Pathetic
sentiment in a sort of self punishment. At the very outset of the play Oedipus has been referred to as an emancipator of the Theban from a dragon’s torture, i.e., the Sphinx. Governed by the same optimism, the Theban people led by the priest, request the Monarch to redeem them from the clutches of omni-devouring plague.

Now, Oedipus great and glorious, we seek
Your help again. Find some deliverance for us
By any way that god or man can show.

(King Oedipus 26)

With all the glory of heroic sentiment, the King intimates its subject of the attempts made by him in connection with the deliverance from plague: ‘Creon, the son of Menoeceus, has been sent to the Pythian house of Apollo, to learn what act or word of mine could help you. This is the day I reckoned he should return. It troubles me that he is not already here. But when he comes whatever the god requires, upon my honour it shall be done.’ (King Oedipus 27)

The negative aspect of the heroic sentiment is also seen in connection with the misadventure of killing Laius at the Corinthian avenue. The erotic sentiment has been brought is not only as a Hamartia but an impediment to the egotistical heroism of Oedipus. Having known the death of Polybus he thinks that he is free from the curse of killing his father, but he is not so much sure of his marriage. It is here that certain revelations about Jocasta and Jocasta’s consolation open the gateway of lust towards the erotic
sentiment. It is remarkable that the sentiment of fear also is associated with the erotic sentiment when Oedipus tells his mother:

If she were dead, you might have spoken so
With justice; but she lives; and while she lives
Say what you will, I cannot cease to fear.

(King Oedipus 52)

The very mention of the world ‘justice’ indicates a sense of Rasa-aucitya, but it should also be taken into consideration that the sentimental propriety or Rasa-aucitya would have demanded a sort of maternal repentance and lamentation but Jocasta, the well experienced heroine, (Praudha-Nayika) as she is, considers it, nothing worth pricking her conscience.

So far as Oedipus At colonus is concerned, it is the sentiment of tranquility or peace (Shanta Rasa) that dominates the scene, for by this time the king has seen much of the world and is in a position to determine who is his real well-wisher, however the mysterious disappearance intensifies the mystery of death; the tenant of the prison of life has flown away. It is in Electra that the filial sentiment or Vatsalya Rasa has been put to a critical analysis, for, motivated by the erotic hunger, the mother herself wants that the son should be killed and the disobedient daughter should be put to the maximum torture. Ironically it is the divinity that shapes the end and Aegisthus thinking the shrouded body to be of Electra, is stunned to find the body of Clytemnestra. Thus the sentiment of wonder or Adbhut Rasa also gets a domineering position.

Thematic propriety or Vicār aucitya constitutes the nucleus of a tragedy, for it comprises the dramatist’s tragic vision or
what the play has to teach. It serves the didactic purpose and Aristotle terms it as ‘Dianoeia’; ‘Thought on the other hand, is found where something is proved to be or not to be, or a general maxim is enunciated’. (Aristotle 29) Ācārya Kṣemendra also has more or less the same approach in connection with Vicār-aucitya based upon Aphorism or Suktism:

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\text{Kṣemendra śloka xxxvii}
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(The composition becomes beautiful by proper thought just as the education of the wise becomes charming on account of learning what really ought to be learnt)

In a Sophoclean tragedy such maxims are scattered as purple patches that are possessd with sublimity or power of transporting the spectator from temporal self to the spiritual self. Generally it is believed that diamond cuts diamonds but the play Ajax teaches an opposite maxim that ‘Evil cannot be cured by other evil,’ and that ‘What’s done cannot be undone.’ This provides an approbation of Aristotle’s requirement that, ‘Third in order is Thought – that is the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances.’ The belligerent sense of tragic waste occurs in Philoctetes, when it is established that martyrdom in a war is also the result of some divine design, for in accordance with the desire of Mars, “War never picks the worst –men for his victims, But always the best.” Deineira becomes possessed with didacticism in Women Of Trachis, when she pronounces her judgement that, “Today’s success may be tomorrow’s fall,” it should not be treated as an outlet
of her pessimism but the life that she has been experienced and suffered. The essence of this teaching is that one should not be a passion’s slave if one is successful, for who knows when the cup will be dealt in another measure. The propriety of thought takes a pedagogical turn when in reply to Padagogue’s proposal that the false news of Orestes’ death should provide a mask to the entry and safe living of the prince in his own Mycenean land; the theory of ill-omened action is challenged by Orestes, for he assures to arise from his ashes like the mythical bird Phoenix, ‘No matter, if a pretended death will bring me true life and glory. I call no omen bad that leads to advantage in the end. I have heard stories of sages who have been reputed dead and then have come home again to be held in new and greater honour. So I am confident that from this forged death I shall rise again like a new star to dazzle my enemies.’ (Electra 71) The dilemma of the double role that Antigone has to play as a sister and as a beloved is enough to manifest her torn psyche between two extremes, to her brother and father; the tragic vision arises out of the fact that marriage is not her destiny. At the first instance, she tells her sister, “I shall be content to lie beside a brother whom I love. We have only a little time to please the living, but all eternity to love the dead.” (Antigone 128) At the second instance she tells the chorus in a valedictory mood to experience death that is to happen to her, “Going to my rest, where death shall take me, Alive across the silent river. No wedding day; no marriage-music, Death will be all my bridal dower.” (Antigone 148) Sophocles follows the trend of the day that the words of wisdom and the message of the play must constitute the part of the Epilogue also, as is evident from the speech of chorus in Oedipus Tyrannus;
‘.... None can be called happy until that day when he carries,
His happiness down to the grave in peace.’

(King Oedipus 68)

Colonus, the Egdon Heath of Sophocles was destined to be resplendent with the utmost propriety of thought when the dramatist was writing Oedipus At Colonus. In this play the Chorus comprising the Elder men of Colonus with their silver haired wisdom makes them speak the thought in Aristotelian terms ‘to be or not to be’,

Say what you will, the greatest boon is not to be
But, life begun, soonest to end is best
And to that bourne from which our way began
Swiftly return.

(Oedipus At Colonus 109)
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