Poetics is a branch of study concerned with the fundamental theories of poetry. But poetics is not an end in itself. It is to serve as a guide to educate good taste and promote good criticism. The greatest function of criticism is to evaluate the works of master poets. Practical criticism is nothing but the application of poetic theory to the existing literary works. It is the conscious evaluation and sensitive appreciation of poetry. Thus practical criticism proceeds within the height of poetics. In other words, poetics provides the criteria for criticism to estimate a literary work and to determine its place and magnitude in the galaxy of literature. Thus, practical criticism is an important aspect of poetics. Theoretical and practical aspects are the two faces of the same coin. Without applied criticism poetic theory will be meaningless.

Therefore, poetic theory and practical criticism are complementary to each other.

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1 The word 'Criticism' has been used in the sense of Poetics in English literature only since seventeenth century. It was used in the sense of evaluation of a literary work in Greek and Roman books of Poetics. Here, the word 'criticism' is used in its old sense, i.e., evaluation of a literary work or practical criticism.
In Indian literary context, the discipline called *Alaṅkāraśāstra* was developed which signifies a harmonious blend of aesthetics, poetics and rhetorics. In its long history over thousand and five hundred years various poetic theories were established. It is accepted that Sanskrit poetics gave much emphasis to theoretical aspects of poetry rather than its practical analysis. But in Western poetics, practical criticism was predominantly developed. In ancient India though comprehensive poetic theories were established, applied criticism could not developed in a remarkable way. Early works on Sanskrit poetics lay emphasis on the stereotyped nature of its critical rules and canons. No attempt has been made to give a full integration of the concepts into a working methodology of critical criteria.

Though in ancient India full-fledged criticisms of whole works are not prominent, significant attempts have been made by Ānandavardhana and Kuntaka. Ānandavardhana, for the first time, supplemented practical criticism to the theoretical portions. He examines the two great epics viz., *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* from the total perspective. But he did not extend his literary analysis to the classics of Sanskrit literature. Working on the cues of Ānandavardhana Kuntaka gave a full-fledged criticism. Dr.K.Krishnamoorthy rightly observes:

"In the whole range of Sanskrit poetical theory, we do not have any one who can be termed a practical literary critic in the modern sense of the term except Kuntaka. Most of the early rhetoricians like Bhāmaha and Daṉḍin are so interested in rules and definitions that they offer examples of their own authorship for the points in question and they do not even select examples from masterpoets. Even those
who do select examples from literature, like Vāmana, are satisfied with illustrating petty details noted by them and their works reveal but partial glimpses of literary beauty in individual bits. None of them even attempt the task of reviewing or appreciating a literary work as a whole, analysing the various elements that work up to a unity of impression. Bharata's rules regarding dramatic plot-construction, characters and rasa are simply taken for granted but never illustrated in detail with reference to any specific work. Though Ānandavardhana subjected the two major epics to an examination revealing a total perspective, he too did not extend his literary analysis to the Sanskrit classics of poetry and drama. Kuntaka indeed is the only writer who attempted this task of literary analysis, critical appreciation and appraisal from a total perspective, of almost all the major poets and playwrights in classical Sanskrit literature."

Kuntaka thus shows remarkable critical imagination in writing about a given piece of poetry. He selects very apt and beautiful examples to establish his theory. When he is writing about even an individual verse, he has the context of the whole poem in view and what it aims at and evaluates every words and phrases in so far as they promote the central meaning of the poem. His greatness is further seen in the amendments suggested for avoiding defects. For instance:

\[ \text{सद्यः पुरीपरिसरे} \text{रिप निनिममृ} \]
\[ \text{गत्वा जवात्त्रिचतुराणि पदाणि सीता} \]
\[ \text{गत्त्वन्नमद्व क्वयदित्यसक्रूद्व चुवाणा} \]
\[ \text{रामाणुर्ण्णः कृतवत्री प्रथमावतारम} \]

2 Dr K. Krishnamoorthy, *Vakroktijivita, Intro.*, PP.XXXV-XXXVI
3 Vide, *Supra*, Ch III, pp 13-16
4 Bālārāmāyaṇa of Rājaśekhara, VI 34
Kuntaka feels that the word *asakṛt* in the verse is very much disgraceful as it degrades the personality of both Rāma and Sītā. To quote his critical analysis: "Here the idea 'more than once' is to be regretted as it does not redound to the nobility of Sītā's personality. Nor does it add to the appeal of the sentiment in question. For, Sītā's undertaking the journey is voluntary and worthy of her nobility. Even if we concede that because of extreme physical tenderness, some such thought came to her mind, no sensitive reader can imagine that it would find verbal expression. Again, it is difficult to believe that repeated assertions on the part of Sītā were required to draw the first tears from Rāma, because even at her first utterance, Rāma is much more likely to break into tears. Thus we see here a very lovely idea spoilt altogether by the poet's concentration straying away for the moment from its object. Therefore, we suggest that the phrase 'more than once' is emended into 'unwittingly.'\(^5\) Here one can see the real literary criticism, sensitive appreciation and critical judgement. Kuntaka's criticism is positive and constructive.

In the fourth chapter of his *Vakroktijīvita*, Kuntaka subjects almost all the major works of Sanskrit literature to an examination from the total perspective. Let us see few specimens of practical criticism of Kuntaka. While dealing with *Prakarāṇa-vakratā*, Kuntaka views Kālidāsa's masterpiece the *Abhijñāna-śākuntalā* which is based on

\(^5\) अश्रास्कृतः प्रतिक्रण किवद्वाय गतव्यात्मिकविधानलक्षणः परिसमते न स्वभावबहुतामुभारऽलयः, न च स्वंपरिपरकाप्तः प्रतिपिपते। यस्मात् तीताया सहजेन केनाच्योचिते गन्तुभववसिताया। सौकुमारदिव्यविविष्य वक्तु हद्द्वये परिसमते वचनमरोहतीति सहवदः सम्भावनिते न पार्यते। न च प्रतिक्रणमित्वायमानमभियो राजवावृत्तमवदारस्य सम्भूक सहुद्विते भजते, सक्रदयांगनादेव तस्योपत्तिः। पूतवच्चायानि तपस्वियमनि मनात्माप्राप्तिविभावनेन कविवेन कवित्तिसः। तत्सादू अवशाूम् इत्यत्र पाठः कर्त्यद।
the well-known source i.e. *Mahābhārata*. The reason why Duṣyanta is unable to recognize Śakuntalā is left unexplained in the original *Mahābhārata*. For explaining it adequately Kālidāsa has invented the episode of the curse of sage Durvāsa. This episode shines forth as the vital essence of the work as a whole. Kuntaka says that, 'such an art of plot-construction may surely be regarded as the best repository of literary sentiments.'

Kuntaka further explains Duṣyanta's inability to recognize Śakuntalā inspite of a hundred chances provided to him to recognize her on psychological grounds. He did not take the curse motif mechanically. The curse is only an external motif and it cannot change the inmost nature of a man. Hence Kuntaka shows penetratingly the genius of Kālidāsa in delineating the character of Duṣyanta in such a novel way. Duṣyanta is not forgetful of his deep attachments in love. That is why the fifth Act of the drama begins with the song of Hamsapadikā which stirs the hidden springs of memory in Duṣyanta. Kuntaka comments that though Duṣyanta's memory has been very temporarily blacked out by the power of the curse, the traces are still left of the old love. He cites the verse of *Abhijñāna-śākuntala* (V.2) and comments:

"Here the beauty of such a recollection of Śakuntalā (so deep down in the layers of his subconscious), at once guileless and charming, appeals very much to the hearts of connoisseurs. What is more, she is...

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6 *विविध सत्विधानक्षरसनिधानकलशायनस्य माहात्म्यादिखिलस्यापि नाटकस्य कापि (विचित्रिति) IBid., p 250*
turned down later, her story and ring of recognition are dismissed as false; the account of her marriage with him and pregnancy given by sage Kaṇva's disciple is discredited and the king is seen in a fit of anger. Then, even transgressing the limits of natural shyness, her veil is removed from her face suddenly. Yet the king is under the illusion that she is another's wife. Though her bubbling youthful charm, superior to that of all the women seen by him so far, impress him very much as much as her narration, sweet like the strains from a lyre, of intimate incidents of her association to bring back his memory, incidents such as excursions in the forest grove, still he shows the rudeness of rejecting Śakuntalā. Such rudeness too becomes understandable only by the intensity of his later repentance at the termination of the curse, a repentance which is indicative of the depth of his unmitigated love for her in his heart. And it is most appealing to the connoisseurs. And in devising the end of the curse, the poet prefaces it with a description of the intense wretchedness of the king's mental state who is suffering feverishly the pangs of unbearable separtion after the dawn of his memory of the forgotten incidents. Synchronizing with it comes the recovery of the lost ring too which again delights the readers very much.*7

Further, Kuntaka quotes three more verses from the VI Act and shows how this Act internally concerned with intense self-censure and repentance of Duṣyanta for his unpardonable mistake, Kuntaka finally observes that, if this curse episode was not incorporated in the

7 रम्याणवीक्ष्य मश्तुराश्च निश्च्यम शब्दानु-पर्भुत्तुकाभवित्य वसुरंगिताः र्यो जनूः।
drama, it would have been a source of blemish as in the original story.'

This psychological study of a character by Kuntaka is profound and far-reaching.

In his assessment of the *Raghuvaṃśa* Kuntaka brings out one more fundamental aspect of criticism, viz., significance of parts in relation to the whole. He analyses that the description of Daśaratha's hunting expedition seems to be irrelevant at the outset. But it becomes in fact the seed of a curse which acts almost as a boon to the sonless Daśaratha; and prepares the ground for the birth of his sons. Kuntaka illustrates the importance and beauty of this portion in detail. He also explains the importance and charmingness of *Raghu-Kautsa* episode and Kuśa's water-sport of *Raghuvaṃśa* from the total perspective.

In respect of the *Kumārasambhava* Kuntaka shows another point of criticism. In a literary work each preceding part should be connected intimately with each of the succeeding ones. In *Kumārasambhava*,

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8 *Ibid*, pp 250-51


10 *Ibid*, pp. 246-48

11 *Ibid*, pp 263-65
the incidents viz., the initial description of the divine beauty of Pārvatī, her worshipful service to Śiva, Creator's advice to gods regarding the destruction of demon Tāraka, Cupid's appointment for shaking the self-restraint of Śiva and his death, the lament of the widowed Rati, Pārvatī's observance of austerities and so on are mutually connected together into a most enchanting sequential synthesis and possessing the highest possible beauty.\(^{12}\)

The *Mudrārākṣasa* is another excellent work undertaken for analysis by Kuntaka. He says that the title of the drama is most significant as it highlights the important and interesting aspect of the plot itself. In the beginning of the VI Act a man who is in fact a secret agent of Kauṭilya, entering with a rope to commit suicide. Meanwhile Amātya-Rākṣasa enters there and he is informed about the supposed execution of Candandāsa. This episode is a minor incident. But it ultimately contributes significance to the plot as a whole. Kuntaka quotes this portion from the play and comments: "The story of the man is so effective that even Rākṣasa, who deemed himself an expert in the very complex and confusing art of diplomacy, is easily deluded and made to fell the agony of a friend's death for his sake that he then and there sets out to free the body of Candanadāsa by sacrificing his own body as exchange."\(^{13}\)
It is indeed the real office of a critic to bring out both the merits and demerits of a literary work and to give a definitive judgement. Kuntaka did not ignore about the demerits of literary works. Even masterpoets would make mistakes. He does not hesitate to criticize even great poets like Kālidāsa. He daringly shows the defect of impropriety in the works of Kālidāsa.\(^{14}\) For instance.

\[ \text{पूर्व नियादाधिकप्रेस्तदेव्यम्या मौलिमण्यि विहाृय।} \]

\[ \text{जटासु वद्यास्ववद्यसुप्रृत्तः कैकेयिन कामाः फलितास्तवः।} \] \(^{15}\)

This is the verse taken from the *Raghuvaṃśa* wherein Rāma remembers the words of Sumantra and tells them to Sītā. Kuntaka observes that the words 'Kaikeyi, be content, now that your desires are fulfilled' in the mouth of Rāma, a hero endowed with all virtues are highly improper. That such a great Rāma not only remembers the meanest incident but also states it. This suggests the narrow out-look of Rāma and hence it is full of impropriety.\(^{16}\)

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14. Two other instances are II.54 of *Raghuvaṃśa* and III 7 of *Kumārasambhava*

\[ \text{Vide, Vakroktiāvita, pp 71-72} \]

We might ask why Kuntaka chooses Kālidāsa himself even for the examples of literary blemishes Kuntaka himself says, एतत्वैतत्वैव कवः सहजसङ्क्रमार्यमुद्रितयुक्तियपरिप्रेक्ष्यनसौन्दर्यं पर्यायोऽच्छते, न पुनःद्वापार्यमार्यमात्रकाव्यकरणकौशल्याधिनाम्। *Ibid.*, pp.72

15 *Raghuvaṃśa*, XIII 59

16 अप्रवृत्तोत्तरमहापुरुषसमुपैतृलेन वर्ण्यमानस्य कैकेयि कामाः फलितास्तव इत्येकवविक्षुदातवावर्तस्वरुपः तदन्निशायात्रायंतरनौचित्यमाबहित।

\[ \text{Op cit, p 71} \]

Dr Mallikarjuna Paraddi does not agree with the views of Kuntaka. He discusses the three instances in detail which are cited as examples of impropriety, and concludes that 'Kuntaka's remarks are farfetched or rather unwarranted' Vide, *Three Incidents in Kālidāsa’s Poetry-Assessment by Kuntaka*, Proceedings of the fifth World Sanskrit Conference, Varanasi, 1981, pp.255-60
On the other hand, Kuntaka condemns the attitude of few poets that excessive craze for observing the rules even when they are improper. He cites the example of the second Act of *Veṇīsamhāra* wherein Duryodhana overhears the incident of Bhānumati's dream. At the juncture of grave battle, the desire of a hero like Duryodhana for amorous indulgence is highly improper.17

These are the few specimens of Kuntaka's literary analysis. The fourth chapter of *Vakroktijīvita* is devoted for the literary analysis of well-known works of Kālidāsa, Māgha, Bhavabhūti, Bhāravi, Viśākhadatta, Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa as well as the less known works like *Abhijnāna-Jānakī* and *Puṣpadūtikā*. Kuntaka thus endeavours to develop his theory and practice on the basis of the achievement of great poets and tries to systematize classical practice and critical ideas into a theory for the guidance of future poets. He has given us a full-fledged criticism of a large number of classical works. His aesthetic insights are everfresh and everlasting. His critical and creative analysis both informs and transforms the readers. His theory of *Vakrokti* gives us a working methodology of critical criteria which

17 वषा वेणीसहरे प्रतिमुखसम्प्रदायमाणिनिर्विशेषः भानुमति मः स्वप्नवत्तानांवरणसमुद्भुविवरणयुक्तदृढशीर्षश� विविधविपक्षवैश्वर्यवेदायी समस्मृत्य समुद्धरस, शरणायामानिनि मन्दकिनीनन्दने, निहयमानेः च कुमारसोमसम्प्रत्यायुस, तथाविपक्षवैश्वर्यवेदायानिन्न्मण्डलस्मयविद्विद्युचिता किं पुन्विद्विद्यायपूचिताः, तत्रांश वेणीवालिनिम विलासः महाराजस्य महिष्यो विचारस्मरणेऽतुधितचित्तपरिचितिः विना च दुविनिद्रायाःः सकतिमदसम्भवसतमाजनमुपेक्षनेवेत।

_Vakroktijīvita_, p 274
is applicable to any literature.\textsuperscript{18} "Kuntaka may not be as great a philosopher as Ānandavardhana; he may not be as good a logician as Bhāmaha or as fervent a dialectician as Mahimabhaṭṭa; but as a literary critic in the true sense of the term, Kuntaka stands unrivalled. He was a very sensitive critic with genuine literary taste. His literary criticism itself often rises to the level of good literature."\textsuperscript{19} But it is indeed a dismal feature of Sanskrit poetics that later theorists completely neglected this important aspect of literary criticism.

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18. Prof C N Ramachandran and Prof C.N Srnath have made attempt to analyse English poetry within the frame work of \textit{Vakrokti} theory of Kuntaka.
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19 Dr K Krishnamoorthy, \textit{Vakroktivista, Intro.}, P.XXXVI
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