Where Upside Down is Right Side Up:

A Study of Kṣemendra's Narmamālā and His Theory of *Aucitya*

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Abstract:

This thesis explores the relationship between the 11th century Sanskrit author Kṣemendra's theory of literary *propriety* and his satire the *Narmamālā*. I examine the way *propriety* operates on a rhetorical and social level in the *Narmamālā* and how the implicit application of the concept in the *Narmamālā* is used to produce both humor and social value judgment. I demonstrate that Kṣemendra's concept of *propriety* serves as a regulator for the intended sentiment of a work. In satire, however, this sentiment must be destroyed by means of impropriety in order to convey humor. I propose that humor is produced by incongruity between what appears on the surface and what lays beneath, hence the title "Where Upside Down is Right Side Up." Through my research I found that the application of Kṣemendra's conception of *propriety* is not only evident in his satires, but that his satires and his literary theory actually utilize the same function of negation to engender social critique, which emerges as a dominant literary theme in 11th and 12th century Kashmir.

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Introduction

The 11th century Kashmiri satirist and literary theorist Kṣemendra is often referenced by scholars of South Asia, but never comprehensively attended to. Historians mine his social satires for insight into medieval Kashmiri society; scholars of Sanskrit literature cannot discuss the progress of Sanskrit literary theory without mentioning the author's theory of propriety, *aucitya.* The term polymath is frequently applied to Kṣemendra as he is the author of a daunting and varied corpus. Yet this flattering title might conceal as much as it reveals, indicating a need to schematically arrange his works into separate and isolated categories that are immune to mutual dialogue, interaction, and removed from their socio-historical context. In what follows, I will argue that Kṣemendra's works do not belong singularly to one specific field of study, or necessarily to mutually isolated ones; rather they are in dialogue with each other and their world. More specifically, I seek to illuminate the relationship between Kṣemendra's satire, the *Narmamālā*, and his theory of *aucitya* as presented in his treatise the *Aucityavicāracarcā*. I will examine the way *aucitya* operates on a rhetorical and social level in the *Narmamālā* and how the implicit application of the concept in the *Narmamālā* is used to produce both humor and social value judgment. I propose that the application of the author's unique take on the concept of propriety is not only evident in his satires, but that his satires and his literary theory actually utilize the same function of negation and incongruity to engender social critique.

Before delving into an investigation of the relationship between *aucitya* and the *Narmamālā* it would be beneficial to think about Kṣemendra as a historical figure, briefly outline his theory of *aucitya* and recapitulate the subject matter of one of his most provocative and perplexing literary works, the *Narmamālā*.

Kṣemendra: A Man of Propriety

Kṣemendra composed most of his works during the reign of King Ananta of Kashmir (1028-1063 CE).[1] Like other Sanskrit authors, he reveals few personal details, but he claimed that his father was a wealthy Śaiva and we know he studied rhetoric under Abhinavagupta, a philosopher of the Kaula Śaiva tradition.[2] This is especially intriguing considering Kṣemendra's critique of Tantric practitioners in the *Narmamālā*. He also studied under the Vaiṣnava teacher Somapāda and some scholars suggest that Kṣemendra may have eventually converted to Vaiṣnavism.[3] Kṣemendra's fraught relationship with religion, however, is a matter I will discuss in a later section. Sūryakānta argues that Kṣemendra's later work, the Daśavatāracarita, extols Viṣṇu, while the Narmamālā and Deśopadeśa ridicule Śaivism. However, as Baldissera points out, Kṣemendra does not ridicule the principles of Śavism, but its hypocritical practitioners. I think a thorough investigation of Kṣemendra's works indicates that his concern is not so much religion itself but the social implications of religious affiliations.[4] This distinction is important in order to preclude a simplistic reading of the *Narmamālā* as a singularly didactic work warning against moral degradation caused by Śaivite institutions.

[1] (Sūryakānta 1954, 6-7) The Daśāvatāracarita (1066 CE) is the only known work by Kṣemendra written during the reign of King Ananta's succesor King Kalaśa.
[2] (Sūryakānta 1954, 10-11)
[3] (Sūryakānta 1954, 15)
[4] (Baldissera 2005, XXXIII)

***Aucitya*: What is Proper**

In his work the *Aucityavicāracarcā,* Kṣemendra outlines his theory of *aucitya,* propriety, as the "life-force" of poetry.[5] He stresses the fundamental necessity for propriety in poetry, saying, "*Aucitya*, whose definition will be given further on, is the permanent, eternal life-force of poetry, without which it is lifeless even though filled with *guṇas* and *alaṃkāras*."[6] Kṣemendra gives precedence to the presence of *aucitya* over all other aspects of *kāvya*, which is a significant departure from previous *alaṃkāraśastra* discourse. Although *aucitya* comes into a certain level of prominence in Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka*, it is only discussed in its capacity to support *rasa*. Kṣemendra, however, asserts that propriety must permeate every aspect of a composition, from the overarching categories of *rasa*, plot, and character development all the way down to mundane rhetorical aspects such as gender, number, particles, prefixes, and individual phonemes. His treatise on poetics maps out how *aucitya* can be identified through examples of *aucitya* or *anaucitya* in verses from his own corpus and from the works of other poets. The examples given in his treatise also demonstrate the circumstantial nature of determining whether or not *aucitya* is present.

Although Kṣemendra is not a liminal figure in the world of Sanskrit literature, he is scantly studied; earlier scholars have dismissed his satires such as the *Narmamālā* as distasteful and sometimes even "improper" due to their vulgarity and at times, obscenity. In reference to the *Narmamālā* and its counterpart, the *Deśopadeśa*, Sūryakānta says of Kṣemendra, "He descends to low vulgarity in these works. One can hardly appreciate the minute details in which he indulges and everything points to the

[5] (Sūryakānta 1954, 118-119) Sūryakānta translates *jīvitam* sometimes as both "life" and "soul." I wil take it as "life-force" (as suggested by Pollock's "The Social Aesthetic and Sanskrit Literary Theory) to try and bring out both meanings.

[6] (Kṣemendra 1961, 19) aucityaṃ tvagre vakṣyamāṇalakṣaṇaṃ sthiram avinaśvaraṃ jīvitaṃ kāvysya, tena vinā 'sya guṇālaṃkārayuktasya 'pi nirjīvatvāt |

author's low taste."[7] The vulgarity of the *Narmamālā* is all the more intriguing in light of Kṣemendra's concern regarding *aucitya* in poetry. Similarly, *aślila* or obscenity is generally considered a fault but clearly this is not the case in the *Narmamālā*. Here, it is humorous, and even seems integral to a literary effect. Evaluating the *Narmamālā* with the principles of *aucitya* in mind is indispensable to understanding the purpose of the text.

The Garland of Fun: *Narmamālā*

The *Narmamālā* is framed by a mythological account of the incarnation of a demon in the form of a Kāyastha. This demon is sent to earth to pillage and plunder through writs scribed by pen and ink with the help of other demon-Kāyasthas. The first *parihāsa* details the rise of the low-born Kāyastha from absolute poverty to power and wealth through the obtainment of a government position in which he employs corrupt and deceitful methods. The Kāyastha hides his corrupt ways by pretending to be an extremely pious Śaiva. This first section of the *Narmamālā* is occasionally obscure, and sometimes it is unclear whether the author is describing the same Kāyastha who has had multiple government positions, or whether he is describing several Kāyasthas. While the first *parihāsa* is murky at times, in the second two sections it is clear that the author is referring to a specific Kāyastha.[8] The second *parihāsa* describes the protagonist Kāyastha's wife who sleeps around while her husband is away. When her husband returns, she pretends to be sick so she does not have to be sexually intimate with him. A doctor and an astrologer are summoned and she is diagnosed as being possessed with a spirit who desires to have intercourse with her. In order to expel the spirit from her, a

[7] (Sūryakānta 1954, 12)
[8] (Baldissera 2005, XVII) Baldissera notes that it is not until verse 141 of the first *parihāsa* that a cohesive narrative begins. Before that point it is possible that different characters, who rose from low to high positions, are being described.

Śaiva guru is invited to perform a sacrifice. In the third *parihāsa* the sacrifice begins and evolves into an alcohol-induced orgy of sorts. In the midst of this comes the news that the Kāyastha's superiors have been arrested. The Kāyastha prepares to flee but he is caught and imprisoned. After his imprisonment he is bailed out by his prostitute sister. The protagonist is reduced to a pathetic state and suffocates to death after falling face down in a pile of shit. In addition to the main narrative the text is interspersed with descriptions of various other degenerate characters such as other corrupt government officials, phony gurus and their lowly disciples, a quack doctor and astrologer, as well as a widow and some impotent old-men.

Sequence and Non Sequitur

When thinking about treatises on literary theory we must pose this question: to what extent did poets actually adhere to the codes laid out in these theoretical texts? In the *Aucityavicāracarcā,* Kṣemendra seems to completely ignore some of the most pertinent questions regarding propriety in his own satirical works. While he elaborates on *aucitya* in the *hāsya rasa* and discusses vulgarity in *kāvya*, he never directly addresses the genre of satire or the function of vulgarity in satire. Even so there are several ways we can consider the extent to which Kṣemendra utilized *aucitya* in his satires. A timeline, indicating the order in which Kṣemendra's works were written, can serve as one tool for such an investigation. A very small number of Kṣemendra's works are dated but his three treatises on poetics, the *Suvṛttatilaka*, the *Aucityavicāracarcā* and the *Kavikaṇṭhābharaṇa* quote his literary works, providing us with an idea of when certain groups of works were produced in relation to the others. Unlike many of Kṣemendra's other works, the *Narmamālā* is not quoted in any of his treatises. However, due to the many similarities between the *Narmamālā* and his satire the *Deśopadeśa*, which is quoted in the *Kavikaṇṭhābharaṇa*, scholars frequently associate the two texts with the same time

period.[9] The placement of the *Narmamālā* and the *Deśopadeśa* in relation to the treatises is drastically different in timelines sketched by Kaul and Sūryakānta, but both agree on the order in which the treatises were written: *Suvṛttatilaka*, *Aucityavicāracarcā*, *Kavikaṇṭhābharaṇa*. Kaul places the composition of the *Narmamālā* and the *Deśopadeśa* in the same time period as the *Kavikaṇṭhābharaṇa*.[10] This would mean that these two texts were composed in a much later period of Kṣemendra's career. Sūryakānta on the other hand considers the *Narmamālā* and the *Deśopadeśa* to be the earliest original works of Kṣemendra due to their "low vulgarity," which according to him indicates that Kṣemendra had not yet become a refined poet.[11] His timeline proposes that these two texts were written before any of the three treatises on poetics. While there is no solid evidence to prove or disprove Sūryakānta's theory, his moralistic bias against the *Deśopadeśa* and the *Narmamālā* does not make for a strong argument. Since the Deśopadeśa is only quoted in Kṣemendra's *Kavikaṇṭhābharaṇa*, the latest of his theoretical works, it is much easier to accept Kaul's timeline, which places the *Narmamālā* in a later period of Kṣemendra's career.

The purpose of discussing a possible timeline for the creation of Kṣemendra's compositions is not to establish an exact date but rather to begin thinking the relationship between his literary works and his theoretical works. Although Kaul and Sūryakānta present very different timelines, both scholars indicate that the three treatises were not composed all in the same time period. Instead, they are interspersed throughout Kṣemendra's career. This would indicate that throughout the different stages of his career Kṣemendra was contemplating and developing his understanding of Sanskrit aesthetics. Furthermore, the fact that Kṣemendra critiqued his own literary

[9] (Baldissera 2005, XIV-XV)
[10] (Madhusūdankaulshāstrī 1923, 25)
[11] (Sūryakānta 1954, 11-12)

compositions demonstrates that he was constantly considering the relationship between literary practice and theory. In light of this I would argue that Kṣemendra very self-consciously applied his own theory of *aucitya* to his literary works.

Fun and Propriety

In examining the connection between *aucitya* and the *Narmamālā*, we must consider both the rhetorical and social aspects of the relationship. The rhetorical devices and the style of writing in the *Narmamālā* such as chaste language, meter, puns, bizarre neologisms and epithets unmistakably reflect the principles of *aucitya*—in the sense of "in the sense of" and "a kind of" basically do the same thing – I would get rid of one of them social adequacy or congruity—as defined by Kṣemendra. The theory of *aucitya* outlines what is socially appropriate or inappropriate. Yet in the *Narmamālā,* the transgression of these guidelines, through the characters' incongruous behavior, produces a humorous effect. Here lies the pliability of the category of *aucitya*. What is generally considered inappropriate, such as *aślila* (the obscene) or *grāmya* (the vulgar), can become appropriate merely through context. In a composition, *aucitya* forms a relative category dependent on many variables such as a character's class, the presiding *rasa*, and the overall feel of the work. As a satire, the *Narmamālā* is intended both to induce laughter and at the same time shame the audience into renouncing vice, through the semblance of *Śānta rasa*.[12] In the *Narmamālā, Śānta rasa* appears to be supported by a subservient *Bībhatsa rasa*, which encourages an even deeper disgust with the world and thereby a desire to renounce it or at least a desire to renounce inappropriate behavior. The social reform aspect of satire and the mapping out of the "socially appropriate," which are apparent in the category of *aucitya*, form recurrent themes in Kṣemendra's

[12] (Leavitt 2011, 280)

entire corpus. *Aucitya* and satire are really quite complementary in that they both embody forms of social critique.

Propriety in the Details

Before we examine the broader relationship between *aucitya* and the *Narmamālā* as a satire, let us unravel a more tangible layer of the relationship, which is the practical application of *aucitya* in the *Narmamālā.* A large portion of Kṣemendra's treatise on aesthetics is devoted to lexical and rhetorical facets of a composition. He purports that every aspect of a verse should contribute to its meaning and effect. An author should not use superfluous words merely to fill meter, prefixes empty of meaning, or descriptors that are redundant. Kṣemendra criticizes Dharmakīrti's verse in which the author uses *tanvī* (slender woman), which is more appropriate for a love-sick woman, instead of *sundarī* (beautiful woman), simply for the sake of alliteration.[13] Ānandavardhana also comments on the distraction of *alaṃkāra*s such as alliteration. He points out that alliteration should not be used when *śṛṅgāra* is the dominant rasa. While both Kṣemendra and Ānandavardhana share a similar interest in *aucitya*, Kṣemendra is more concerned with *aucitya* for the sake of *aucitya* rather than *aucitya* for the sake of bringing out *rasa*. For him, even the grammatical case can convey propriety of meaning. Kṣemendra cites a verse by Gauḍakumbhakāra in which the grammatical subjects, which are various attributes of Hanumān, are all in the instrumental case. Kṣemendra explains that this shows propriety because the use of the instrumental conveys humility on the part of Hanumān who is victorious only through his service to Rāma.[14] With regard to impropriety of gender Kṣemendra cites his own verse. In this verse, Rāvaṇa makes prideful speech about how his strong arms cannot be bothered to fight a mortal,

[13] (Sūryakānta 1954, 121)
[14] (Sūryakānta 1954, 144-145)

but the feminine subject of his speech, "My assemblage of arms (*maṇḍalī madbhujānāṃ*)," undermines the ferocity of his words. [15] This same composition of Kṣemendra is cited once again shortly after the previous verse to demonstrate propriety of numbers. No composition can display *aucitya* in every component of every verse but it is clear that Kṣemendra did intend for his works to exemplify *aucitya*. These minute facets of *aucitya* are especially evident in the laconic style of the *Narmamālā*. Kṣemendra generally uses simple verbs without an excess of prefixes; there are rarely stray particles, and his descriptions of characters are very pointed.

The chaste language of the *Narmamālā* is supported by Kṣemendra's choice of meter. Almost all the verses in the *Narmamālā* are *śloka* with the exception of a handful.[16] This meter, because of its restricted syllable count, does not allow as many superfluous figures of speech, words, or particles. The employment of *śloka* in the *Narmamālā* is also reflective of yet another aspect of prescription. In his treatise the *Suvṛttatilaka* Kṣemendra outlines when it is appropriate to use certain meters. On the subject of *śloka* he says, "One well versed in poetry (*Kāvyavit*) should use *Anuṣṭup* metre in all works which are of the type of the *Purāṇa*s or which are didactic in nature and aim at clear exposition."[17] He continues saying, "…where both instruction and story have an equal status, the wise ones like (to use) the *Anuṣṭup*."[18] Like many of Kṣemendra's other satires, which are written in *śloka*, the *Narmamālā* is didactic in nature and mixes both instruction and story, fitting the profile for appropriate meter. One of the three verses from the *Narmamālā*, which departs from the regular *śloka*, is too corrupt to evaluate in this manner, but the other two seem to serve very specific purposes. The very last verse

[15] (Kṣemendra 1961, 41)
[16] (Baldissera 2005, XXV) 2.42 Sragdharā (text is corrupt), 2.112 Śārdūlavikrīḍita, 3.113 Mālinī
[17] (Sūryakānta 1954, 199 3.8-9)
[18] (Sūryakānta 1954, 199-200 3.15)

of the *Narmamālā* is in a *Mālinī* meter which Kṣemendra asserts to be appropriate for the end of a canto because it is "full of racy rhythm."[19] Verse 22 of the second *parihāsa* is in *Śārdūlavikrīḍita*, which should be employed to praise a king's valor.[20] The verse reads:

> Superior in his bulk *(heavy in his bulk)*
> in his voice, in his stupidity and indolence,
> supreme in his penis *(extraordinarily cock-heavy)*
> heavy in his jowls, his moustache,
> his belly and his buttocks,
> supreme in his cheating (*heavy with cheating)*
> prostitutes, libertines and officers,
> and devoid of good conduct—
> strange!
> This guru, who is weighty in everything
> is always light
> in the teachings uttered by Śiva[21]

Here it seems that this meter is intended to enhance the irony in praising the guru for being heavy (superior) in everything except for what he should actually be weighty in. In these examples from the *Narmamālā* we can see the role meter plays in mediating propriety in a composition. Even Ānandavardhana commented on propriety of meter. Of course, as with all other cases of *aucitya* in the *Dhvanyāloka*, propriety of meter is tethered to *rasa*. Ānandavardhana asserts that texture, which is to say meter, compounds, harsh *mātra*s, etc., should be appropriate to the *rasa*.[22] Kṣemendra's theory on meters expands on his predecessor's assertion and broadens our understanding of *aucitya* in a composition, beyond the bounds of *rasa,* as a rhetorical device that stands on its own.

The *Narmamālā* is a satire and thus many of the rhetorical devices are appropriately employed to enhance humor in the composition. One of the more common tropes in the *Narmamālā* is pun, *śleṣa*. In his book on humor, Lee Siegel points

[19] (Sūryakānta 1954, 201)
[20] (Sūryakānta 1954, 202)
[21] (Baldissera 2005, 94 2.112)
[22] (Ingalls, Masson and Patwardhan 1990, 431 3.7a)

out that puns are instrumental to producing "essential incongruity," which he proposes is the key to satire.[23] The opening verse of the *Narmamālā* is a pun, which sets the tone for the rest of the text:

May he be victorious, The invincible, all powerful "Lord who dwells in the body," the Supreme Lord, who at his will holds the whole universe under his spell by his *māyā*.[24]	May he be victorious the invincible, wealthy Kāyastha officer, supreme boss who has cheated the whole universe at will by his deceitfulness

On the one hand this verse is a traditional opening invocation, and on the other it is a mock praise of the corrupt Kāyastha. The pun is functioning on two levels. First there is the "impropriety" of comparing the supreme lord with the degenerate Kāyastha. The incompatibility of the two subjects is humorous because it contradicts the normal social expectation for a subject of comparison, such as a valorous king who is like a god. On a second level, the pun is intended to mock Śiva. Throughout the text there are many jokes and depictions of degenerate Śaiva devotees and gurus. Comparing Śiva to a deceitful Kāyastha reduces him to a lowly level.

The use of epithets is another way that Kṣemendra draws out humor in his works and this is also a topic covered in the *Aucityavicāracarcā*. Kṣemendra reasons that epithets should support the *rasa* of a verse and standards of comparison should be suitable to their subjects of comparison. To illustrate the latter tenet, Kṣemendra indicates the impropriety in Rājaśekhara's verse, of calling the strong arms of Duryodhana, "the stalk of the eminent lotus of bravery." He states that the unsuitability of this comparison makes it seem like a joke. In the *Narmamālā*, Kṣemendra frequently assigns humorous names and epithets to his characters. He calls the Kāyastha, who is

[23] (Siegel 1987, 41)
[24] (Baldissera 2005, 41)

sent to destroy the world through writing fraudulent documents, 'Mr. Brief-case under the armpit.'[25] This epithet implies the self-importance of a government official running here and there with his destructive writs. His servants, who are also incarnate demons are given equally appropriate names, 'Hypocrisy's banner,' 'Honesty,' which is clearly meant to be ironic since his servants are all frauds, 'Grabber,' 'Mine of pens,' 'Needle-mouth,' 'Hidden in parchment,' and 'Scum of the earth.'[26] In addition to epithets, Kṣemendra coins his own punning "technical" terms. Baldissera explains the significance of one such term saying,

> One of the funniest is *raticakra*, 'the wheel of love," (III 84), used to ridicule the tantric technical term *gaṇacakra*, the mystical circle of guru and devotees. Here this particular circle is composed of drunken men and women, and their esoteric practice soon turns into a chaotic orgy.[27]

Kṣemendra also seems partial to onomatopoeic sounds, which are often instrumental in evoking a *Bībhatsa rasa*:

> As he could drink in a second
> a pitcher of liquor,
> while making the noise "*ghaṭaghaṭa*"—
> what could compare with the breadth
> of his sewer-like throat?[28]

In two different verses, Kṣemendra describes the Kāyastha's pen, which is the ultimate source of corruption, with onomatopoeia. In one verse, the pen produces a shrill cīrīcītkāra sound, which one could imagine as something like nails on a chalkboard,[29] and in the other his pen is described again as producing a shrill cītkāra sound like a monkey who has been beaten to the point of screeching.[30] The rhetorical devices evident in the *Narmamālā* are not mere ornamentation, used to show the poets skill. Instead they

[25] (Baldissera 2005, 46 1.25)
[26] (Baldissera 2005, 47 1.34-35)
[27] (Baldissera 2005, XXVII)
[28] (Baldissera 2005, 93 2.107)
[29] (Baldissera 2005, 12 1.132)
[30] (Baldissera 2005, 8 1.79)

serve very specific purposes in demonstrating an overt and self-conscious application of *aucitya*.

Aucitya and *Rasa*

While Kṣemendra expands on the concept of *aucitya* outside the confines of its relationship to *rasa*, the connection between *rasa* and *aucitya* is still a critical point of discussion in the *Aucityavicāracarcā*. This problematic discussion began in the *Dhvanyāloka* of Ānandavardhana, written by Kṣemendra's predecessor of two centuries. It is thus worthwhile to draw attention to what sets apart Kṣemendra's understanding of *aucitya* from Ānandavardhana's. This will serve not only to credit Kṣemendra with an original system of thought, which departs from the dominant school of *rasa* theory, but also to aid us in developing an interpretation of the *Narmamālā* based intimately on Kṣemendra's understanding of *aucitya,* as the fundamental goal of a composition. This will in turn allow us to make important connections between the literary and the social. In the *Dhvanyāloka*, Ānandavardhana enumerates various ways in which a work can convey *rasa* such as: appropriateness of *vibhāva*s, *sthāyibhāva*s, *anubhāva*s and *sañcāribhāva*s, appropriateness of plot whether traditional or invented—intensifying and lessening rasa according to appropriate circumstances—appropriateness of characters and their actions or speech according to their class, as well as appropriateness of 'texture'.[31] While propriety warrants an ample amount of consideration, in the *Locana,* Abhinavagupta explains:

> By the word **Appropriate** he hints at the fact that *rasadhvani* is the real life of a poem because he shows that propriety is always with respect to the *rasa*. For if the *rasa* is absent, with respect to what could one use this word "propriety" that has become so popular?[32]

[31] (Ingalls, Masson and Patwardhan 1990, 427-433)
[32] (Ingalls, Masson and Patwardhan 1990, 71 1.2)

The subordination of propriety to *rasa* is the distinguishing factor in Ānandavardhana's conception of *aucitya*.

In contrast, Kṣemendra maintains that *aucitya* is the true aim of poetry and *rasa* is an ornament, "Essence of poetry [*rasa*], sustained and ornamented through flavors, like the erotic and others, is firmly established, like (the life of a man) sustained and made firm by a preparation of quick-silver."[33] In the *Aucityavicāracarcā*, Kṣemendra elaborates on propriety in each of the *rasas*, but it is the *Hāsya* and *Bībhatsa rasa*, which are especially relevant to understanding the *Narmamālā*. In his explication of *Hāsya rasa*, Kṣemendra demonstrates that humor is supported by a subservient *Śṛṅgāra rasa*. He cites two examples of propriety in *Hāsya rasa* aided by *Śṛṅgāra rasa* and one example of impropriety in the *Hāsya rasa*. The verse exemplifying *anaucitya* is by Śyāmala:

> While kissing her, he, with the coughing sound of 'khāḍ' spat out her tooth,
> which had been loosened from its roots and had reached his very throat.[34]

Kṣemendra argues that in this case humor is overshadowed by the sentiment of disgust and therefore shows impropriety.[35] The sentiment of this verse, however, does not seem so different from some of the verses in the *Narmamālā.* There is a particularly humorous verse in the third *parihāsa* of the *Narmamālā*, which ridicules a wealthy old merchant who desires to copulate with his young wife:

> Eager to make love
> even though his penis
> looks like squashed entrails
> that old man
> places his hand on her pussy,
> and guards it like a treasure[36]

[33] (Sūryakānta 1954, 119) commentary on verse 5
[34] (Sūryakānta 1954, 130)
[35] (Sūryakānta 1954, 130)
[36] (Baldissera 2005, 113 3.67)

Both of the verses are intended to be *Hāsya* rasa with subservient *Śṛṅgāra* and *Bībhatsa rasas*, so what makes the former an example of *anaucitya*? It seems that here, perhaps, the distinguishing factor is the overall intention of the composition, the first being comedy and the second being satire. *Aucitya* is always circumstantial. Satire is certainly humorous but it is not the typical comic relief found in Sanskrit plays and *kāvya*. The classic representation of *Hāsya rasa* seems to be a lighter mode of humor, which is often employed as a subsidiary *rasa* in conjunction with *Śṛṅgāra*.

The mixing of *rasas* is a delicate matter to which both Kṣemendra and Ānandavardhana devote their attention. Ānandavardhana urges, "Even when a figure is intended to be subordinate [or helpful to the *rasa*] it must be taken up at the proper time and not at the wrong time..."[37]A subordinate *rasa*, which obscures the primary *rasa*, results in impropriety. For his part, Kṣemendra's insists, "One should preserve propriety, the very life (of poetry), when putting these [*rasas*] together as constituents and the constituted. Touched with (even a particle of) the dirt of impropriety the mixture of sentiments is not liked by anyone."[38] According to Kṣemendra, Śyāmala's verse, cited previously, shows impropriety due to unsuitable dominance of *Bībhatsa* rasa over *Hāsya* rasa. I would suggest that the dominant sentiment of disgust in the verse from the *Narmamālā*, which is just one among many similar verses, is appropriate to the overall goal of the work. The verse is humorous in that it ridicules the impotent merchant but at the same time the sentiment of disgust, felt by the audience upon reading it, produces a semblance of *Śānta rasa*, which is appropriate to satire.[39] In the

[37] (Ingalls, Masson and Patwardhan 1990, 278 2.18-2.19b)
[38] (Sūryakānta 1954, 137)
[39] (Leavitt 2011, 280) Leavitt theorizes, "Satire, for example—in which the false appearance of the *rasa* of tranquility in particular is generated by hypocritical spiritual aspirants and the like—instruct the audience to renounce impropriety in all four life aims." He supports this statement with a citation from the Abhinavabhāratī of the Nāṭyaśāstra, "*prahasanarūpakeṇānaucityāgaḥ sarvapuruṣārtheṣu vyutpādyaḥ*" (6.40; 1992:290.9-10).

Aucityavicāracarcā, Kṣemendra gives careful consideration to the application of *Bībhatsa* as a subsidiary rasa. He cites an example from his own work the *Bauddhāvadānakalpalatā,* which mixes the repulsive and the erotic. The verse is a pun, which allows the two incongruent *rasa*s to appear side by side. On the dominant side of the pun there is the jackal, which is tearing apart a corpse and on the reverse side of the pun there is the woman engaged in lovemaking. Kṣemendra comments, "The speaker being a Bodhisattva with his mind full of strong (feeling) for renunciation, the mockery of the enjoyment of woman's love, through abominable disgust, carries a charming propriety with it."[40] He goes on to explain that the rasa of the work as a whole is *Śānta rasa*, but the sentiment of disgust mixed with the erotic aids in the production of this overarching *rasa*.[41]

Vulgar imagery plays a very prominent role in the *Narmamālā* since its cast of characters consists of degraded members of society. In the first *parihāsa,* Kṣemendra describes the intoxicated Kāyastha saying:

> He was enthralled by the music
> of the loud *phaḍat* sound
> produced by his thick bark ledgers,
> while both his testicles
> leaped around
> as they protruded from the gaps
> in his loincloth
> The drunken *divira* danced naked
> breaking his seat and his jar,
> his body spattered by [black] dollops
> from his rolling, full inkpot[42]

Aucitya is a very circumstantial category and our understanding of what is appropriate and what is not must be adjusted according to the broader scope of a composition. These disgusting tendencies of the Kāyastha are appropriate to the overall thrust of the

[40] (Sūryakānta 1954, 138)
[41] (Sūryakānta 1954, 139)
[42] (Baldissera 2005, 68-69 1.37-38)

work. The incongruity between the Kāyastha's base behaviors and his status as a high-up government official has a humorous effect. Moreover, as pointed out previously, *Bībhatsa rasa* is effective as a subsidiary to *Śānta rasa*. Although there is a semblance of *Śānta* rasa in the Narmamālā, it is just that: a façade of *Śānta* rasa. Sometimes it seems that satires do not have a "real" *rasa* but instead consist of a continuum of "counterfeit" *rasas* for as Leavitt proposes, *rasābhāsa* is itself the "cause of the sentiment of humor."[43] While unraveling the role of rasa in the *Narmamālā* and satire in general is problematic, it is also important to keep in mind that *aucitya*, not rasa is the life-force of poetry for Kṣemendra.

Sanskrit and the Social

Kṣemendra defines *aucitya*, propriety, as follows, "What befits a particular thing is what the great masters call proper. The state of being proper is *Propriety*."[44] Of course this leaves a gaping problem. How do we know what befits a particular thing and what does not? Kṣemendra's treatise on *aucitya* gives examples of *aucitya* and *anaucitya* under various circumstances, but it never really provides a clear, general set of guidelines for determining the propriety of a particular thing. The layout of his treatise is structured with maxims about *aucitya* under which categories several examples elucidating *aucitya* and *anaucitya* are given. For one such category, Kṣemendra says, "A composition (containing) the propriety of circumstances (described) becomes an object of worship for the world, like the captivating deeds of the wise done after due deliberation."[45] After this, Kṣemendra first gives an example of propriety of circumstances. In this verse a young girl transitions from childhood to young adulthood. The girl gives up her toys and begins to practice amorously moving her creeper-like eyebrows. Kṣemendra

[43] (Leavitt 2011, 280)
[44] (Sūryakānta 1954, 199 vs. 7)
[45] (Sūryakānta 1954, 166 vs. 36)

explains that propriety has been shown in correctly describing the stages of childhood and young adulthood. Now we must ask, how do we know what characterizes the various stages of life for a female or male, or what the proper behavior is for a king, a lowly servant or an ascetic? The *Dhvanyāloka* explains that characters should behave in a manner appropriate to their social status whether they be high class or low class, god or human. It is explained that a king, for example, who is a mere human should not be described as leaping across the sea because this is a godly activity. If a king is part human and part divine however, then there would be no contradiction and this feat would be appropriate.[46] Propriety is grounded in social morals and norms, which are established by the society. While these treatises on poetics provide a few key examples, overall, such social issues are not elaborated upon by the tradition of Sanskrit theorists; instead it is assumed that the reader is already attuned to the social.

The problem of "the social" in Sanskrit literature is a matter, which Pollock discusses at great length with regard to *dhvani*. Ānandavardhana's analysis of *vastudhvani* focuses on how *dhvani* functions on the level of language rather than the underlying "socio-literary conventions."[47] Pollock unravels the issue of the social through a series of examples. The first of those being the first example that Ānandavardhana himself gives:

> You're free to go wandering, holy man.
> The little dog was killed today
> by the fierce lion making its lair
> in the thicket on the banks of the Godā river.[48]

This verse is an implied prohibition disguised as an invitation. Abhinavagupta explains that the verse is spoken by a woman who desires to prevent the mendicant from finding

[46] (Ingalls, Masson and Patwardhan 1990, 428-430)
[47] (Leavitt 2011, 274)
[48] (Pollock, Social Aesthetic 2001, 200)

her rendezvous place. Pollock points out that nowhere in the verse are we informed that the speaker is a woman nor are we told that the thicket is a meeting place for lovers, all evidence of an implicit social context.[49] In another example, a lady chides her friend who has been meeting with a lover, for putting her face too close to a flower and getting stung by a bee. The friend scolds her that her husband will think her lip was bitten by a lover. The commentators explain that the verse is intended to be overheard by the husband so that he will not grow suspicious of his wife.[50] Here again, the commentators explain how the verse is functioning on a linguistic level—whether it is implied prohibition or command etc.—but they do not reveal how they come to their conclusions. Pollock observes,

> It is precisely the embeddedness of these poems in a set of particular conventions and rules of literary communication, their particularity and localization, that constitutes their meaning, but in a way that Ānanda, Mammaṭa, and the rest seem unable to observe. Although they show uncommon acuity in revealing the mechanisms by which implication and suggestion arise, nowhere do they tell us how we come to know what we need to know in order to understand them.[51]

These assumptions about the speaker and circumstances under which the verses are spoken, are drawn from a preconceived understanding of social conventions. Similarly, knowledge of the proper behavior of different characters under various circumstances is central to *aucitya* and by extension, to understanding the *Narmamālā*, which is equally, if not more deeply entrenched in the social.

The phenomenon of the social is not restricted to *vastudhvani*. The social also pervades the category of *rasadhvani* and its counterpart *rasābhāsa*, which I have briefly touched on in terms of the role of "false" *Śānta* rasa in the *Narmamālā*. Essentially, *rasābhāsa* is understood to be an improper emotive response although the cause of this

[49] (Pollock, Social Aesthetic 2001, 203)
[50] (Pollock, Social Aesthetic 2001, 202)
[51] (Pollock, Social Aesthetic 2001 207)

emotive response is subject to a variety of theories. Pollock suggests that a prototype for *rasābhāsa* is found in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* categorizes characters into social classes of high, middle, and low. *Rasa* is only produced when these types of characters are properly depicted.[52] Although there is no mention of *rasābhāsa*, the idea that *rasa* can only occur when the subject of the emotive response is proper resembles the earlier understanding of the cause of *rasābhāsa*. The category of *rasābhāsa* was first conceived by Udbhaṭa in the early ninth century. Udbhaṭa proposed that when the aestheticized emotions of a character are socially inappropriate, real *rasa* cannot arise; instead a semblance of *rasa*, *rasābhāsa* occurs.[53] Abhinava then went on to shift the source of aesthetic experience from the characters to the audience. He suggests that *rasābhāsa* happens when the audience has an invalid emotional response due to false cognition. This is to say, the audience temporarily identifies with socially prohibited behavior on the part of the character.[54] Jagannātha takes *rasābhāsa* another step further and proposes that it is not an unsuitable object of the emotion that causes false *rasa*, rather it is the inappropriateness of the emotion itself.[55] Even amongst these various interpretations of the locus of *rasābhāsa*, the importance of propriety is quite evident. *Aucitya* serves as a regulator for *rasa* and *rasābhāsa*. Pollock accurately sums up the relationship between *rasa*, propriety and the social in saying:

> If propriety lies at the heart of rasa, rasa becomes the heart of a moral economy of literature. It can produce its effects only to the degree that imaginative discourse represents and thereby inevitably serves to reproduce, what is appropriate to a given situation, which is intelligible only in terms of a unified vision of the social order. Thus when one learns what literature is, how it works and the canons, which may be said to represent what is valid or invalid…one is learning what is normative in the everyday world.[56]

[52] (Pollock, Social Aesthetic 2001, 212)
[53] (Leavitt 2011, 275)
[54] (Leavitt 2011, 276-277)
[55] (Pollock, Social Aesthetic 2001, 124)
[56] (Pollock, Social Aesthetic 2001, 215)

If we are to understand *rasābhāsa* as the literary transgression of social norms, then we can also accept *rasābhāsa* as a major component of satire, as well as of the *Narmamālā* in particular. The incongruity between the social status of characters in the *Narmamālā* and their inappropriate behavior is central to the creation of humor.

Humor: Destroying *Rasa*

On a literary level, the role of *rasābhāsa* in satire may actually be the key to understanding why *aucitya* was so important for Kṣemendra. Kṣemendra's predecessors insisted that *rasa* was the soul of poetry, but satire and humor only arise when *rasa* is seriously compromised. Thus, it would be impossible for Kṣemendra to maintain *rasa* as the core literary effect because comical literature involves destroying *rasa*. Since maintaining the dominance of *rasa* requires, to an extent, the maintenance of social normativity, the privileging of *aucitya* seems tied to the exploration of hitherto unacknowledged social potentials.

Pollock observes a social-moral aesthetic that spans from Bharata to Jagannātha, especially as it relates to *rasa*, *rasābhāsa* and *aucitya*.[57] It is no coincidence, that Kṣemendra, the foremost proponent of *aucitya*, chose the morally didactic medium of satire to compose many of his literary works. However, I believe it would be simplistic to view Kṣemendra's works purely as products for moral advocacy. The *Narmamālā* certainly is intended to be a social critique, but this critical spirit is not reductable to didacticism, and critique would seem to become subordinate or at least inseparable from comedy. It is the humorous appeal that draws readers in. Without humor, satire would just be a didactic railing on society or perhaps even a rant about moral degradation. In the beginning of the text Kṣemendra states that he was commissioned to

[57] (Pollock, Social Aesthetic 2001, 215)

produce "a comic account of the activities of Kāyasthas of the past."[58] The patron did not request a didactic composition to warn listeners against partaking in vice. The last verse of the *Narmamālā* also reinforces the way in which social critique and humor mutually reinforce each other in satire:

> This *Narmamālā* has been composed
> as an investigation of the misbehavior
> in the evil actions
> of hordes of *diviras* and *niyogins*
> **For the sake of laughter**
> full of amusement for good people,
> it is told as a teaching for everyone
> that obtains its own reward.[59]

The aesthetic of humor in the *Narmamālā* raises some interesting connections to *aucitya* and perhaps broadens its scope.

Kṣemendra does not directly address the genre of satire in the *Aucityavicāracarcā* but an investigation into the history of *Hāsya rasa* will enable us to develop an understanding of how the principles of propriety are effective in producing satire. In the *Rasādhyāya* of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* Bharata elaborates on the comic sentiment saying,

> It arises from such vibhāvas as wearing clothes and ornaments that belong to someone else or do not fit (vikṛta), shamelessness (dhārṣṭya), greed (laulya), tickling sensitive parts of the body (kuhaka), telling fantastic tales (asatpralāpa), seeing some (comic) deformity (vyaṅga), and describing faults (doṣodāhanaṇa).[60]

The first *vibhāva*, *vikṛta* represents one of the most crucial aspects of humor in the *Narmamālā*. The behavior of a character and his social status are often incompatible. The Kāyastha makes grand displays of piety but simultaneously plunders temples; his wife pretends to be sick to avoid her husband but sleeps around with all the young men in town. Both the Kāyastha and his wife assume a pompous style of dress to flaunt their newly obtained wealth and power, but it is quite evident that they have adopted habits

[58] (Baldissera 2005, 42, 1.5-6)
[59] (Baldissera 2005, 121 3.113)
[60] (Masson and Patwardhan 1970, 50)

which are unsuitable to their past social status as paupers. Kṣemendra describes the Kāyastha as follows:

> …His feet were caked with filth
> and he sported a cap raised on one side
> through a subtle arrangement of its folds
> …With a golden ring
> spiraling three times
> around his finger—
> he was panting
> and his face was grimacing
> from the exhaustion of a long voyage.[61]

The careful arrangement of the folds in his hat indicates a vanity of appearance, and the gold ring shows off his wealth, but his inherent low-caste is evident in his filthy feet, which would be unsuitable for someone who was highborn. This same incongruity is apparent in regards to the Kāyastha's wife:

> The elegant highborn daughters of her neighbors, looking below at the beautiful wife of the Kāyastha in her palace said,
> "She once drank rice-water obtained by begging, in a stone cup pieced together from shards, now she only drinks musk-wine in a silver cup."[62]

There is a subtle irony in this verse. The high-born daughters are "admiring" the Kāyastha's wife in her palace but since they are looking down at her from above, it must be assumed that her palace is in fact much more modest than the tall homes of her neighbors. Her demeanor, however, suggests that she believes herself to be living in the grandest possible palace.[63]

In his article on deformity and humor, Gitomer points out that the word *vikṛta* is commonly used to mean, "deformed, disfigured, mutilated." He proposes that in addition to the way that Bharata defines the term, we should understand *vikṛta* to

[61] (Baldissera 2005, 50-51 1.47-49)
[62] (Baldissera 2005, 14 1.147-8) This is my own translation from Baldissera's critical edition of the Sanskrit text. Baldissera seems to miss the irony in the verse.
[63] (Baldissera 2005, 13) In verse 1.43 the Kāyastha's wife gazes out her window and imagines herself to be the queen waiting for her husband the king to return on the royal highway.

denote the "grotesque."[64] While this may not be what the Sanskrit tradition had in mind in regards to this *vibhāva*, the grotesque plays an unmistakable role in the category of humor. The grotesque, *jugupsā* is the *sthāyibhava* for the *rasa bībhatsa*, which is discussed at some length in the *Aucityavicāracarcā*. In his example of *anaucitya* in the repulsive sentiment, Kṣemendra criticizes the author of the verse for employing repulsive epithets to describe a dog, which by nature is already disgusting. He points out that if the description had been applied to a person it would have been much more effective in producing disgust.[65] Thus, incongruity between subject and object of comparison is central to producing the repulsive sentiment, fitting the original description of *vikṛta. Bībhatsa* is not generally employed as the primary *rasa* of a work; the *Narmamālā* abounds in grotesque descriptions of characters but the sentiment of disgust serves as a subordinate *rasa*. Gitomer suggests that due to the restrictions of propriety in Sanskrit, the disgusting can only appear in a refined manner or as the object of mocking laughter.[66] In the *Narmamālā* vulgar language is most frequently employed to describe an object of laughter:

> The golden
> plump cunt of the widow,
> shorn of hair, could be confused
> with the gilded slopes of mount Meru,
> whose grass was grazed
> by horses of the sun.
> If a man had a long and erect penis
> which he had begged and obtained from a horse
> then he might be able
> to pleasure the widow.
> or perhaps not![67]

[64] (Gitomer 1991, 84)
[65] (Sūryakānta 1954, 135)
[66] (Gitomer 1991, 86)
[67] (Baldissera 2005, 107 3.33-34)

This verse is humorous on more than one level. Widows attract a variety of lustful suitors, including libertines, inexperienced youth, and celibate Brahmin students. On the surface this verse seems to be satirizing the sexually insatiable widow, but it is also mocking the widow's suitors who, despite their naïve confidence, are sexually disappointing. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of a widow's cunt and the sacred Mount Meru establishes the very incongruity that is essential to humor.

This incongruity is closely related to the concept of *vikṛta,* which is further defined by Abhinavagupta as "something that is contrary to time, place, a person's nature, age or state."[68] *Vikṛta* is about knowing what is suitable and what is unsuitable to different characters. In this way we could conceive *vikṛta* to be regulated by *aucitya*. In the *Narmamālā*, the guidelines for *aucitya* allow Kṣemendra to highlight exactly the opposite: the incongruities in his characters, which produce humor. For example, if we know that an ascetic is emaciated and clad in rags, then a fat ascetic wearing elaborate robes would be satirical. The *vibhāva doṣodāhanaṇa*, describing faults, displays a similar relationship to propriety. Abhinavagupta comments that *doṣodāhanaṇa* is the "description of faults such as timidity in the case of a person who is not timid by nature or statements about a person that is doing something which is very odd and unexpected of him."[69] In the *Narmamālā*, a guru, who should be celibate and learned, obtains access to the women of the house by acting like a simpleton:

> Though he understood the language
> used by different women,
> still he asked,
> "What are they saying?"
> constantly moving
> his creeper-like brows
> up and down...[70]

[68] (Masson and Patwardhan 1970, 85 n. 434)
[69] (Masson and Patwardhan 1970, 85 n. 436)
[70] (Baldissera 2005, 82 2.48)

"This illustrious gentleman
does not know anything,
nor does he understand anything"—
so thinking, the women
were not ashamed in his presence,
even when undressed.[71]

This verse exemplifies the pattern of incompatibility, which is a distinct indicator of humor.

Humor: Falling Down the Social Ladder

While *vikṛta* and *doṣodāhanaṇa* are marks of humor, they are more specifically signs of satire. The *Rasādhyāya* classifies *Hāsya rasa* into two different categories: laughter at oneself and laughter at another.[72] Siegel equates laughter at oneself with humor and laughter at another with satire.[73] He suggests that villagers evoke humor and city-dwellers evoke satire. He associates humorous characters with the rustic, *grāmya*. That is to say these characters are unrefined by nature. In contrast, city-dwellers, who are plagued with affectation, represent *anaucitya,* which is the result of incongruity. When their false pretenses are peeled away by the satirist, the contradictions between their outer appearances, their private habits, and their social status give way to laughter.[74] A king who is a coward, a doctor without medical knowledge, and a venerated guru full of lust also remind people that high social stature does not erase human nature. In satire, the more social prominence a character has, the farther he or she can fall due to vice.[75] In the *Narmamālā* for example, a court magistrate, craving wealth, prostrates himself in front of dog shit, which he mistakes for sacred cow dung.[76] This mistake might be brushed off as ignorance if it were a low class character but the

[71] (Baldissera 2005, 82 2.50)
[72] (Masson and Patwardhan 1970, 50)
[73] (Siegel 1987, 51)
[74] (Siegel 1987, 121)
[75] (Siegel 1987, 151)
[76] (Baldissera 2005, 2.126)

folly is all the more striking because a court magistrate's profession is to discriminate between good and bad. Here, he cannot even tell the difference between good shit and bad shit. A character that is already of low caste and prone to vulgarity, such as a bawd does not make a good object of satire. Satire is better suited to people who use their social status to hide their corruption.[77] The crux of satire really is transgression. Just as humor relies on the destruction of *rasa* producing *rasābhāsa, aucitya* exists to be destroyed. Aucitya is really a theory of congruity, the transgression of which produces the incongruity of satire. The circumstance of a satire must be diametrically opposed to the socially appropriate.

Siegel proposes that different types of satires are based on the ultimate social standards, the *puruṣārthas*—"revealing the degradation of love and the arts into vanity and affection [*kāma*]; social satire, divulging the degradation of statecraft and righteousness into corruption [*artha* and *dharma*]; religious satire, disclosing the degradation of piety into hypocrisy and impurity [*mokṣa*]."[78] Kṣemendra manages to enfold all these types of satire in the *Narmamālā*.

The Kāyastha is the main target of satire in the *Narmamālā* but there are numerous other characters, whose presences serve to develop a more complete social critique. The degradation of *kāma* is manifested in the Kāyastha's wife. Due to her rise in social status, she adopts a haughty demeanor and constantly flaunts herself in front of her young male neighbors. Kṣemendra also ironically praises the widow as being beautiful even though unadorned with jewels. This compliment is usually reserved for a youthful woman who has no need of ornaments due to natural beauty. Here, the lack of jewels on the widow is compulsory, since it is socially prescribed that widows must

[77] (Siegel 1987, 111-112)
[78] (Siegel 1987, 73)

cast aside their ornaments. In praising the innate beauty of the widow, Kṣemendra is suggesting that society is so degraded that men mistake widows for respectable young women.[79]

Religious hypocrisy is an eminent theme throughout the *Narmamālā*. Descriptions of the fraudulent Śaivite guru who initiates drunken orgies but rarely utters a teaching about Śiva span both the second and third *parihāsa*. These descriptions satirize a fringe group of Śaivites in Kashmir but Kṣemendra also ridicules religious hypocrisy in general. The Kāyastha employs false piety to veil his corruption. In one scene he makes a great spectacle of reciting the Śaiva stotra, the *Stavacintāmaṇi*, but in-between verses he gives orders to torture the Brahmins in the temple to extort wealth.[80]

The Kāyastha protects himself with false piety just as the doctor hides behind the power of being learned. Medical jargon seems intimidating to unwitting clients and the necessity of patient-clinician contact makes doctoring a perfect cover for sexual misconduct with female patients. Kṣemendra jokes that doctors never abandon patients who are rich and alive. The Kāyastha of the *Narmamālā* is the ultimate symbol of corruption in statecraft but he is not without rivals. The protagonist's drunken father-in-law is always in bed with prostitutes and "killing good people with his fang-like pen dipped in the poison which is ink…"[81] In the *Narmamālā*, even sacred liquids are emblematic of a world where everything is upside down. For example, the vaginal fluid of the widow is compared to the sacred milk of a cow and a holy river. But the most symbolic fluid in the *Narmamālā* is ink. It is explained at the beginning of the *Narmamālā* that long ago *Dharma* became a liquid and pervaded the world in the form of ink. In the

[79] (Baldissera 2005, 106) in verse 3.29, Kṣemendra ironically proclaims, "who cares for dharma/if there isn't the widow?/ To hell with happiness without the widow!/ Let there be no liberation/devoid of the widow"
[80] (Baldissera 2005, 48-49 1.39-44)
[81] (Baldissera 2005, 97 2.129)

Kali age, however, Kali too takes on the form of ink and it is that ink which, "mirrors the kohl tinged teardrops of the ravaged earth."[82] What was once a sacred substance becomes the most powerful tool of corruption.

The Slippage of Sarasvatī

The transposition of ink from a venerable substance into a malevolent poison functions as a metaphorical foreshadowing of the fate of Sanskrit literary culture in Kashmir. Pollock controversially suggests that the 12th century marks the death of Sanskrit in Kashmir. This so-called "death" of Sanskrit was followed by a resurgence of Sanskrit literary culture in the 15th century under the rule of Zain-ul-'ābidīn, but there were no new works demonstrating poetical imagination or originality.[83] Pollock was not the first to notice the disintegration of Sanskrit literary culture or the lack of inspiration from the goddess of learning even after its resurgence. A passage appended to Jonarāja's continuation of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* narrates the story of Zain-ul-'ābidīn's pilgrimage to the shrine of Śāradā, who is a form of Sarasvatī worshiped in Kashmir. At the dawn of the Kali age the goddess abandoned the temple and was no longer seen in the face of the Mūrti. The sultan propitiated the goddess, in hopes that she might reappear in the temple, but she did not manifest herself.[84] For the authors of 11th and 12th century of Kashmir, the Kali Age not only represented social degradation, but also the disintegration of knowledge and more particularly Sanskrit learning and poetic virtuosity. Kṣemendra's *Narmamālā* is framed by a mythological account of Kaliyuga in which ink and by extension writing is the demon Kali. Talking about the "death of Sanskrit" sensationalizes the deterioration of Sanskrit literary culture but there was

[82] (Baldissera 2005 97 2.130)
[83] (Pollock, Death Of Sanskrit 2001, 396)
[84] (Pollock, Death Of Sanskrit 2001, 400)

undoubtedly a decline and this decline is directly related to what was happening in the socio-political world.

The resurgence of Sanskrit literary culture under the rule of Zain-ul-ʻābidīn is attributed to the establishment of political stability after many tumultuous decades and to the reinstatement of royal patronage for Sanskrit poets.[85] The deterioration of Sanskrit learning is credited to the political turmoil in Kashmir marked by a sequence of degenerate rulers spanning the 9th through the 12th centuries. The candid descriptions of social degradation and royal misconduct, unique to 11th and 12th century Kashmir, demarcate the period before the decline of Sanskrit literary works. Critiques of society are, in a sense, criticisms of the sovereign, who is responsible for upholding righteousness. Pollock suggests that the instability of rulership in Kashmir also meant that the "courtly ethos", essential to sustaining Sanskrit learning was therefore also unstable.[86] It is possible these attacks on the sovereign were induced by anxiety about the unreliability of royal patronage. Both Kṣemendra and Kalhaṇa inform us that during these years kings, who should be patrons of temples, plundered them for wealth instead. While the instability of the royal court may have been responsible for the decline of Sanskrit in Kashmir, this also meant that authors were not compelled to depict the realm favorably. Consequentially a new spirit of negativity emerged in Sanskrit literature. One poet who adopted this style, Maṅkha, addressed an assembly of poets saying, "All other poets have debased their language that priceless treasure, by shamelessly putting it up for sale in those cheap shops—royal courts."[87] The room for criticism is also a result of the broken lines of succession in Kashmir. Pollock notes that most kings did not govern Kashmir for more than a couple of decades and power was

[85] (Pollock, Death Of Sanskrit 2001, 396)
[86] (Pollock, Death Of Sanskrit 2001, 398)
[87] (Pollock, Death Of Sanskrit 2001, 399)

acquired by usurping the throne, civil war and family feuds.[88] This means that the kings did not necessarily have any loyalty to a lineage of predecessors, making room for criticism. Kṣemendra's *Narmamālā* was likely composed at the request of King Ananta and the narrative was modeled on the rule of his predecessor.[89] The unfavorable depiction of society under the rule of the previous king reasserts Ananta's authority. Kṣemendra of course, would have been obligated to depict his own patron favorably, but the social criticism, even if locked in the past, is still exceptional in the corpus of Sanskrit literature where praise of past kings is standard.

The Historical Backstage of the *Narmamālā*

Satire, as social critique, is about revealing social truth, which is often concealed by false pretenses. Truth is not just an object of satire, but is also a principle of *aucitya*. In the *Aucityavicāracarcā* Kṣemendra says, "The praise of one, who does not possess the virtue worth praise, is improper."[90] The Narmamālā was composed under the rule of King Ananta (1028-1063). Kṣemendra compares King Ananta to Viṣṇnu and praises him for initiating social reform:

> This discriminating One,
> after removing the troubles of his subjects
> reduced all corrupt officials
> to nothing but a memory.[91]

Kalhaṇa confirms that Ananta tightened the grip on underlings in his administration and applauds his government appointments. He says:

> Wise Anantadeva surpassed even the Munis by his devotion to Śiva, his vows, bathings, liberality, morals and other virtues. During the rule of this kin the light of royal favor passed on from one suitor to the other…"[92]

[88] (Pollock, Death Of Sanskrit 2001, 399)
[89] Baldissera proposes that when Kṣemendra refers to his patron as "A certain literary connoisseur" he is referring to King Ananta (Baldissera 2005, XV)
[90] (Sūryakānta 1954, 161)
[91] (Baldissera 2005, 42)
[92] (Stein 1979, 285 7.201-202)

It seems that King Ananta's reign remedied some of the governmental corruption of his predecessor, but his rule was not long lived. His wife, who was the subject of palace scandals, convinced him to abdicate the thrown to his licentious son Kalaśa.[93]

Kṣemendra never identifies the Kāyastha in his *Narmamālā* with a historical figure but we know that his satire is an account of the activities of Kāyasthas before King Ananta's rule. However, the historical chronicle, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, names a Kāyastha who fits the description of the main character in the Narmamālā. *Bhadreśvara* was a lowborn Kāyastha, who was appointed as head of the *gṛhakṛtya* office (domestic affairs), under the governance of King Saṅgrāmarāja. In the Rājataraṅgiṇī, Bhadreśvara is said to have been a gardener and butcher by caste.[94] This matches the description of the Kāyastha in the Narmamālā who is born to "digger" and butcher, and obtains the position of *gṛhakṛtya*.[95] Bhadreśvara was notorious for plundering the treasuries of temples and restricting the sustenance of Brahmans, cows, the impoverished and even royal servants. Kalhaṇa says:

> Even a fear-inspiring Kāpālika, who lives on corpses, gives maintenance to his own people; but the wicked Bhadreśvara did not allow even his own people to live.[96]

Similarly, plundering temples is a favorite activity of the Kāyastha in the *Narmamālā*. Before the Kāyastha was appointed to the task of looting a temple, an informer reports to his superintendent saying,

> Massacres of Brahmins
> do not worry him,
> so why should he care
> about the slaughtering of cows?
> While engaged in loyalty to his master
> people are thoroughly uprooted.[97]

[93] (Stein 1979, 290-291)
[94] (Stein 1979, 270 7.38-41)
[95] (Baldissera 2005, 44-45 1.19)
[96] (Stein 1979, 270 7.44)

It seems likely that the Kāyastha of the *Narmamālā* is modeled on Bhadreśvara especially since he was a prominent figure who would have been known to Kṣemendra's patron but Bhadreśvara was not the only Kāyastha with a tarnished reputation.

The Social Unraveling

Kāyasthas in general are a favorite subject of ridicule for both Kṣemendra and Kalhaṇa. In Kashmir, the term Kāyastha does not refer to a particular caste but to a particular profession. Kāyasthas were clerks skilled in writing documents, record keeping and accounting.[98] In early medieval Kashmir, rulers became cripplingly reliant on Kāyasthas. Kalhaṇa laments,

> The whales of the ocean and kings are similar. The former consider it a donation when the cloud offers back droplets of their own water, which it had taken away. And alas, the latter considers the hordes of corrupt clerks [Kāyastha] to be working for their benefit when they openly loot everything and return traces of it.[99]

Looting and returning traces of wealth as if it were a favor, is also a matter addressed in the *Narmamālā* [100] but the point is that due to the favor enjoyed by Kāyasthas among royalty, their power remained unchecked and they came to be seen as oppressors of the people.[101] On a certain level, literary attacks on the royal intermediaries are a way to hold rulers responsible for social degradation without committing too much offence to the royals themselves. Kalhaṇa points out, "If the king himself abducts wives of the subjects, who else will there be to punish the transgression of propriety?"[102] Kalhaṇa is sometimes more direct with his political criticisms, but Kṣemendra's jabs, laced with

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[97] (Baldissera 2005, 58)
[98] (Yadava 1973, 53-54)
[99] (Knutson Unpublished, 48 4.630)
[100] (Baldissera 2005, 59-60 1.92-94) "For example, I once took [from the temple] a huge copper vessel and then using a hundredth part of it, with great devotion, I presented a bell to the temple…."
[101] (Yadava 1973, 54)
[102] (Knutson, Fourth Current Unpublished, 3 4.29)

humor and exaggeration, are not so obscure that their seriousness and meaning are completely lost. Sanskrit literature after all, is about being able to read into the social, which is understated and implicit. Knutson points out,

> Perhaps we can identify this power [to grapple with external and internal political enemies] with literature's capacity to say without saying (the capacity which obsessed literary theorists of ninth-century Kashmir, which came to be called vyañjanā and dhvani 'poetic suggestion'). In other words literature could strategically say things and say things without saying them in such a way as to cast a harness on the negative—a kind of latent free associative power to unlock the political unconscious—and always retain the raw authoritarianism of emphasis.[103]

The art of social commentary seems to be embedded on a certain level in the tradition of poetic suggestion.

Religion is another realm for satirical inspiration. As I pointed out earlier, the higher up one is on the social ladder, the farther there is to fall. Gurus are traditionally venerated as masters of self-restraint, but the *Narmamālā* is pervaded by descriptions of religious degeneracy facilitated by materialist (*bhogin)* gurus. Tantric practitioners make especially good prey for satirists because their doctrine prescribes the transcendence of social norms; it is impossible to determine whether practitioners have truly reached this state of mind or whether they are just performing the role. The guru who is summoned to perform an exorcism on the Kayastha's wife, who is supposedly possessed by a *ratikāma* spirit[104], ends up initiating a drunken orgy. As Kṣemendra demonstrates, it is impossible to distinguish between transcendence of duality and an excuse to indulge in socially prohibited behavior. In one episode, Kṣemendra jokes that an inexperienced guru initiated the Kāyastha's wife and her attendants into the practice of nondualism by sleeping with them:

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[103] (Knutson, Courtly Crepescule 2011, 18)
[104] (Baldissera 2005, 90 n. 215) Spirits who posses women as a medium for experiencing sexual intercourse

> These women,
> after obtaining initiation
> from their lover/guru
> started going with anyone,
> as if firm in the observance
> of those who are free of all scruples.[105]

Baldissera points out that this is a reference to a specific exercise in nonduality, *nirvikalpavratam* (freedom from scruples). It is an allusion to a practice promulgated by the Tantric guru Pramadakaṇṭha, who had sexual relations with his daughter.[106] Kalhaṇa also references this guru as the teacher of King Ananta's degenerate son,

> This teacher (*guru*) instructed him, who was evil-disposed by nature, in wicked practices, and made him ignore the distinction between those [women who are approachable and those who are not.
> What more need be said about the unscrupulousness of this teacher? He, without fear lived in incest even with his own daughter.[107]

The mingling of degenerate religion and political power presents a further problem.

As Kṣemendra sees it, Tantric practitioners cloak their immoral behavior in the doctrine of non-duality and dishonest government officials hide their corruption behind feigned religiosity. The Kāyastha changed religious affiliation several times in order to improve his social status. He started out as a Buddhist, perhaps due to the fact that he was of low caste, then he became a Vaiṣṇava, and finally he adopted the Kaula tradition to "protect his wife."[108] Religious affiliation could provide bureaucratic immunity. In one episode the Kāyastha's superior officer does him a favor because they have the same Kaula guru.[109] Evidently, devotion to a guru also provided moral immunity. The Kāyastha's guru is praised for absolving the *gṛhakṛtya* officer, who is infamous for killing Brahmins, of all his crimes, because of his façade of devotion to Śiva:

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[105] (Baldissera 2005, 83 2.54)
[106] (Baldissera 2005, 83 n. 195)
[107] (Stein 1979, 291 7.277-78)
[108] (Baldissera 2005, 92 2.101)
[109] (Baldissera 2005, 59 1.89)

He thinks nothing of the crime
of destroying all,
because your hand
has been placed on his head
like the five-fold head of a snake.
That he, being a devotee of Śiva,
and having obtained through your favor
extraordinary transcendence (an extraordinary position),
stole everything
that was in the temples of Śaṅkara,
…all this is the manifestation of you alone.[110]

The outer display of piety mediates the public appearance of government officials. After the Kāyastha rises to his prominent political position, he adopts the orthodox behavior of ritual bathing, attending temple prayer, reciting hymns, circumambulating cows and bowing before Brahmans. When he travels he always carries with him a caravan of objects for pūjā. Meanwhile, in private, he plunders temples, slaughters cows and prosecutes Brahmans. In this way, insincere religious devotion serves as the impenetrable mask of corruption.

Contextualizing Humor

Incongruity between what appears on the surface and what lies beneath is at the heart of the relationship between *aucitya* and satire. *Aucitya* as social congruity is regulated by commonly shared social norms and moral values. As a literary aesthetic, *aucitya* shapes *rasa*. Humor, on the other hand is the destruction of *rasa* by the negation of congruity. The intentional destruction of *aucitya* is complementary to the spirit of negation in satire, which seeks to reveal the disintegration of social propriety. Satire, aided by the demolition of *aucitya*, reveals a world where upside down appears to be right side up. The people who should be the most righteous are the most corrupt and the publicly pious are privately devout in their irreligiosity.

[110] (Baldissera 2005, 110 3.51-53)

Humor does not always transpose well from one culture to another, especially when the cultures are almost a thousand years removed, but you can contextualize it by evaluating the degree of social incongruity. In the United States, Hollywood is immensely influential. When British comedian Ricky Gervais hosted the Golden Globes, his jokes about this elite, powerful group suggest that these idols are actually products of a corrupt system:

> It was a big year for 3D movies, *Toy Story*, *Despicable Me*, *Tron*. Seems like everything this year was 3-dimensional. Except the characters in *The Tourist*…But no, it must be good cause it's nominated so shut up, okay. And I'd like to crush this ridiculous rumor going around that the only reason *The Tourist* was nominated was so that the Hollywood foreign press could hang out with Johnny Depp and Angelina Jolie. That is, that is rubbish. That is not the only reason, they also accepted bribes. No, all that happened was some of them were taken to see Cher in concert. How the hell is that a bribe? Really? Do you want to go see Cher? No. Why not? Cause its not 1975![111]

This satirical remark by Gervais is packed full of laughs. First we are invited to laugh at the high-powered stars who have attended the Golden Globes to celebrate their own achievements, which—as suggested by Gervais—are rigged by the academy and are unrelated to their actual accomplishments. On another level, this comment critiques the corruption of the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, which as an organization, should be objective. While Gervais jokes that the association was accepting bribes, it might not be too far off to speculate that they were favoring "friends." The last line, however, trumps all the other jokes. Not only is the Hollywood Foreign Press Association—an organization of journalists and movie critics—incompetent at distinguishing between simple and complex characters but they also don't know the difference between a good bribe and bad bribe. In this sense, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, as described by comedian Gervais, is no different from the court magistrate in the *Narmamālā* who could not discriminate between good shit and bad shit.

[111] (Gervais 2012)

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