

## Delectation of Dramatic Delight-Revisiting Bharata's *Rasa*- Theory

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Every theatre-going person has a specific purpose to attain while going to a theatre. He/She may get some sort of pastime, restfulness, entertainment, pleasure, instruction, relaxation, etc. getting rid of pain, misery, fatigue, sorrow, fear, anguish, etc. This can also be done by singing, reading a book of interest, gossiping, walking on a landscape, painting, dancing, playing, etc. but, truly speaking, the enjoyment cultivated by viewing a play on stage is unique and unparalleled. This paper aims at fathoming the sublimity and subtlety of this dramatic delight keeping, especially, in view the *Rasa*-Theory propounded by Bharata (200 B.C.).

Both Bharata in our Indian tradition and Aristotle in the Greek tradition have the same view on drama as the best among performing arts. Why is it so? It is because, as Bharata says, "There is hardly any knowledge, any actor's craft, any love, any fine art, any design, in which art, love of emotion are interconnected, any activity, that will not be seen in this *nāṭya*." (cf. Devy, 2011: p.5). Aristotle also recognizes the importance of drama as the best poetic form: "In drama, the poetic imitation of life attains its perfect form – the idea of imitation in its more rudimentary sense is at once apparent" (Butcher, 1895).

A treatise on dramaturgy, "The *Nāṭyashāstra* is a compendium of performed arts: drama, music, and dance. It presents in a great wealth of detail descriptions of the prevalent modes of these art performances, and the extraordinary precision with which the multiple facets of these arts have been defined and analysed is indicative of the sophistication of the art-practices as well as art-criticism of Bharata's age. The *Nāṭyashāstra* was used through the fifteen hundred years of Sanskrit Literary thought as the bedrock of literary theory. Whether it was Abhinavagupta, Mammata, or Vishwanath, discussing poetry and literature during the subsequent centuries, they inevitably turned to Bharata's formulations as the polar star of Indian aesthetics (cf. Devy, 2011: p.3)

In dealing with various aspects of drama, namely *rasa* (rapture, delight), *bhāva* (being), *abhinaya*(acting), *dharmi*(actor), *vṛtti*(mode), *pravṛtti*( local/regional/conventional mode of appearance), *siddhi*(accomplishment), *svara*(tones, notes), *ātyodya*(musical instruments), *gaṇa*(accompanists), *raṅga* (stage, theatre), Bharata assumes *rasa* as the most prominent and dominant factor and announces the theory( known as the *Rasa*-Theory) as follows:

“*tatra rasāneva tāvadādāvābhivyākhyāmaḥ.*  
*na hi rasādṛṭe kashchidarthāḥ pravartate.*  
*tatra ibhāvānubhāvavyabhichārisamyogādrasanishpattiḥ”.*

i.e. first and foremost we will elucidate *rasa*, (since) there is no meaning bereft of *rasa*. There (in the spectator/ reader/ hearer) *rasa* is aroused after the harmonious relationships of the determinant(s) with the accompanying constituents and the inconsistent states of mind. Thus, the term *rasa* has a twofold significance: it means the ‘aesthetic content; of the art-form and also ‘aesthetic relish’ that the spectator enjoys (Bhatt, G.K. *Bharata Nāṭya-Manjari* 1975). Hence the genesis of the *rasa-sūtra* may be three-fold:

- i. What is *rasa*? (What is it that is transformed into *rasa*?)
- ii. How is *rasa* created?
- iii. Who enjoys *rasa*?

The first question is concerned with the meaning and nature of *rasa*. Bharata himself raises this question as:

“*rasa iti kaḥ padārthaḥ? uchyate- āsvādyamānatvāt,*”  
(i.e. What is *rasa*? It is said: What is tasted is *rasa*.)

Abhinavagupta, a commentator of Bharata’s *Nāṭyashāstra*, clearly explains as the ‘poetic meaning’ is *rasa*: “*tatkāvyārtho rasaḥ.*”

The poetic meaning which is suggestive in nature ultimately evokes aesthetic pleasure in the spectator. By ‘aesthetic’ is meant the beautiful in the mind, but “...in Indian theories of art and literature, the states of mind, the emotional states, *bhāvas* constitute the core aesthetic experience ... if the art/ literary composition succeeds in giving enjoyment by evoking some state(s) of mind, then the work is aesthetically satisfactory. Beauty in fact is secondary- the evocation and communication of a state of mind is judged successful if it *moves* the reader/hearer and affects him deeply, in which case the work of art is beautiful”(Kapoor : P.96-97).

What is it that is transformed into an aesthetic pleasure? There are basically eight permanent emotional states inherent in all humans. It is this permanent emotion that gets transformed into *rasa*. The permanent or foundational/emotional states are as follows:

Emotions

*rati* (passion)-

*utsāha* (energy)-

*jugupsā* (revulsion)-

*krodha* (anger)-

*hāsa* (fun, humour)-

*vismay* (wonder)-

*bhaya* (fear)-

*śoka* (grief)-

Rasa

*śṛṅgāra* (erotic),

*veera* (heroic),

*beevasa* (disgust),

*raudra* (wrathful),

*hāsya* (comic),

*adbhuta* (amazing),

*bhayānaka* (fearful)

*karuṇa* (compassionate)

In addition to these eight, there is one more *rasa* known as *śānta* (quietist).

The second question is very pertinent and is two- dimensional: One, from the viewpoint of the actor(s) and two, from that of the spectator(s). Not only in both the actor and the spectator is it created and relished but also by the poet himself/herself while creating the work of art. Bharata explains it as the *vibhāva* (determinant, stimulant, instrument, cause)-- the main component carries on as well as arouses (stirs) the *sthāyi bhāva* (permanent emotion) in the actor by means of the consequents *anubhāvas* (*sāttvika*- mental, *vāchika*- verbal, *kāyika*-

physical, and *āhārya*- attiral) i.e. the realization of the specific emotions. The *vibhāva* and the *anubhāvas* are accompanied by the transient emotions (*vyabhichāribhāvas*).<sup>1</sup>

“The *vyabhichārins* are so called because they (the transient emotional states) move (*charanti*) prominently towards (*abhi* : *abhimukhyena*) creating the poetic sentiments in a variety of ways (*vi* : *vividham*). Equipped with the acting based on speech, body and concentrated mind, these lead or carry the spectator, in actual dramatic performance, to the poetic sentiments; hence they are called *vyabhichārins*.” (cf. Devy, P.12).

The emotional process of decontextualisation of the *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, and *vyabhichāribhāva* combined with the *sthāyi bhāva* can be illustrated with an example from the *Abhijñānashakuntalam* by Kalidasa. The king Dushyanta, in Act III, (Vasudeva, 2006) sees the damsel Shakuntala with her companions Anusuya and Priyamvada in the hermitage of Kanva. She is watering the plants and all of a sudden a bee assails her. Dushyanta steps forward for her rescue and both getting tempted towards each other fall in love (*sthāyibhāva*) Dushyanta and Shakuntala are the *ālambana* and *āśraya vibhāva* (determinants) vice-versa because they carry the permanent emotions; the beautiful garden in solitude is the *uddipanavibhāva*, (stimulant) because it stimulates and favours the emotions to accelerate. The amorous conversations taking place between Dushyanta and Shakuntala and also between her companions, body gestures-- reddening of eyes, smile, shyness, feigning anger, pretext, and the attires-- are all the *anubhāvas*; (consequents) and *chapatatā* (unsteadiness), *austukya* (impatience), *moha* (delusion of mind) in both Dushyanta and Shakuntala merging with love are the *vyabhichāribhāvas* (transients).

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<sup>1</sup> The *vyabhichāribhāvas* or the transient/inconsistent emotional states of mind are 33 in number, viz. *nirved* (indifference), *glāni*(debility), *śankā* (apprehension), *asūyā* (envy), *mada*(intoxication of pride). *śrama*(weariness), *ālasya*(indolence), *dainya*(depression), *chintā* (painful reflection), *moha*( delusion of mind), *smṛti*(recollection), *dhṛti*(contentment, steadiness), *vriḍā*(shame), *chapatatā*(unsteadiness), *harsha*(joy), *āvega*(agitation), *jaḍatā*(immobility), *garva*(arrogance), *vishāda*(despondency), *austukya*(impatience) *nidrā*(sleep, drowsiness), *apasmāra*(dementedness), *supta*(dreaming), *vibodha*(awakening), *amarsha*(animosity), *avahittha*(constraint), *ugratā*(ferocity), *mati*(resolve), *vyādhi*(sickness), *unmāda*(madness), *maraṇa*(demise), *trāsa*(alarm), *vitarka*(trepidation), (Kapoor, P.105).

Now the question arises how it is possible for the actors and spectators to relish the same pleasure as the fictional characters Dushyanta and Shakuntala might have done (in the poet's mind). Usually the audience is of variegated classes-high, middle, low with different tastes. The solution to this question is that everybody relishes this pleasure according to his/her capacity and interest as well as his/her relations and experiences of real life the traces (*samskāras*) of which are undoubtedly in their minds. It is blissful experience of delight as the outcome of harmonization in all the components mentioned in the *Rasa*-Theory.

Bhattanayaka, a commentator of Bharata's *Rasa-Sūtra*, says that the proper use of language in drama is responsible for the delectation of *rasa* (rapture, delight) through *sādhāraṇikaraṇa* (generalization, impersonalisation, transpersonalisation, or harmonization) which gives the same taste to experience the pleasure as did the author and the actor. According to Ananda K. Coomarswamy "The concept of *sādhāraṇikaraṇa* results in sublimation and extension of consciousness" (cf. Pathak, p.70)

The process of generalization is thus an attempt of objectification of a subjective experience for which all the three subjects – the author, the actor, and the spectator – are equally responsible. In our Indian tradition (although less important in the Greek tradition), the spectator is an integral part of theatre. (No doubt, this is a film era where impossible things can be shown in a better way, but what is more important in theatre is that there is reciprocity between the actors and the audience which is not possible in a film.) This is attested by the mention of 'tatra' in the *rasa-sūtra* as well as 'sumanasa' (Bharata's term), 'sahṛdaya' (Rajashekhara's term), and 'rasika' (Bhoja's term). Thus, the answer to the third question as who tastes or relishes the pleasure is the responsive spectator/reader/hearer.

In conclusion, in real life whatever experiences of love, worries, anger, disgust, ridicule, humour, fear, pity, etc. one undergoes, the traces or predispositions (*samskāras*) are left in the unconscious mind. These traces become manifest when they come in contact with pertinent experience (of an actor on stage, for example), then the viewer's individuality weakens and his/her consciousness merges in the universal experience (a state of sublimity resulting in *rasalānanda*-delight (cf. Kapoor, p.114). This reminds us of Aristotle's *catharsis* which is nothing but purgation or purification of human mind. (cf. Blamires, p.9).

## **References**

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