

RASA IN SANSKRIT DRAMA

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Sanskrit rhetoricians distinguish Kavya into two kinds: Drsyā (that which can be seen) and Sravyā (that which can be heard). In drama, Drsyā takes a predominance over Sravyā. It is because of its capacity to afford a two-fold pleasure that drama is considered as the best form of literature. Kalidasa, the veteran of Sanskrit drama, says:

"Sages declare it to be a charming sacrificial feast for the eyes of the Gods. Siva bisected it in his own person which is made one with Uma. Here are seen actions of the world arising from the three qualities (Satva, Rajas and Tamas) and distinguished by various sentiments. Drama, though single, is a manifold entertainment for people of diverse tastes". (Kalidasa, Malavikāgnimitram, I.4). According to Bharata, Brahma created a fifth Veda called Natya for the benefit of all classes of people. For the composition of his work, he took Pāṭhya from the Rig-Veda, Pathya Gīta from the Sama-Veda, Abhinayas from the Yajur-Veda and Rasas from the Atharva -Veda.

'Rasa' is one of those words in Sanskrit whose precise significance is as indefinite as its usage is widespread. In the history of Sanskrit Poetics, perhaps no other concept has given rise to so much controversy. According to the renowned poet-critic Anandavardhana, poetic creation is an expression of the aesthetic experience of the poet, and in this, Rasa represents the ultimate emotive experience evoked by the literary work. Bharata served to compile the meaning of the multifaceted word 'Rasa' in a single sentence.

"RASATE ANENA ITI RASAH (ASVADYATVA)" (Bharata, Natya Sastra, 28). (That which is relished is Rasa)

Thus, we use this word in association with the palate, or the transcendental experience of the saint, the delight afforded by art and so on, and in all this, the word indicates the pleasure that each class of people receive from their respective experience.

Rasa could be said to be a two-fold experience felt by the creator and his expression through his art and the experience of the reader (Sahridayas) who receive the art. The creator undergoes an emotion and is so overwhelmed by it that he seeks a medium for the expression of his feelings. The reader receives this emotion through the creator's medium and thus undergoes the emotion felt by the creator. Thus the word 'Rasa' is once again created by the creator and then is re-created by the reader. The extent to which the reader undergoes the emotion felt by the creator depends upon the intelligence of the creator in presenting it. The nature of our existence, which is a curious mixture of happiness and unhappiness is sought to be exactly represented in art media. For Lollota, Indian aesthetics is interminably based on the word 'Rasa'. According to Bharata, "NAHI RASADATE KASCIDAPYARTHAH PRAVARTATE". (NS VI. 31). (No meaning can proceed from speech in the absence of Rasa)

This proves the importance of Rasa in the aesthetics and literary criticism of India. Bharata, the first exponent of Rasa theory, is the well-known author of Natya

Sastra, the first Sanskrit book on drama, dance and music. According to him, Rasa is the essence of art. The Rasa - sutra occurs in the sixth chapter of the Natya Sastra: "VIBHANUBHAVA VYABICARI SAYOGADA RASANISPATTIH" (N.S. VI. 33).

This means the realisation of Rasa results from the union of Vibhava, Anubhava and Vyabharibhava, and its alignment with the permanent mood known as Sthayibhava. Bharata says that there are eight Sthayins or the basic mental states, thirty three Vyabharins or accessories and eight Sattvika bhavas or involuntary physical reflexes. These forty-nine, taken together, make for Kavya Rasabivakti. Rasas are born of these, when they are represented in a universalised state. He says, "It may be noted that these forty nine emotions in their generalised form are the source of Rasa". (N.S.348).

The union of the Vibhava, Anubhava and Vyabharibhava results in the awakening of the Sthayibhavas, which in turn results in the emergence of Rasa. Vibhavas are the determinants, anubhavas, the consequents and Vyabharibhavas, stand for the transitory mental states, which is a necessity for the realisation of Sthayibhava or the basic disposition. Thus, we may say that, the Sthayibhava or the permanent mood in a piece of literature is the basis of Rasa, the essence of which lies in Asvada.

Vibhavas and Anubhavas: Emotions felt by the creator are communicated to the readers only through Vibhavas and Anubhavas. In Mahibatta's Vyativiveka, poetry is defined as the description of Anubhavas and Vibhavas. Thus only through non-subjective elements can aesthetic emotion be communicated. Krishna Chaitanya summarises thus :

The emotion here is the Rasa of Sanskrit poetics. The set of objects, the Vibhavas, the situation, their patterned organised presentation and the chain of events include not only the episodic stream, but also the stream of the emotive reactions of the characters to them, the Anubhavas and the Sancaribhavas. (Krishna Chaitanya, Indian poetics, 43).

The means by which an emotion is activated is termed Vibhava. Vibhavas are essentially of two kinds-the Alambhana Vibhava and the Uddipana Vibhava. Alambhana Vibhava refers to the person or the object in respect of whom the emotion is experienced and whose appearance, ideal or perceptual, is directly responsible for the evocation of the emotion: Uddipana Vibhava refers to the situation or the environment in which that person or object is placed and which is helpful in intensifying the emotional experience. The Alambhana Vibhava is otherwise called the basic stimulus and the Uddipana Vibhava, the outside stimulus; for example, in the case of Rati Sthayibhava, the beloved is the Alambhana Vibhava, environment, such as the spring season, the moonlit night, the soft breezes, the fragrance of flowers and so on, come under the Uddipana Vibhava.

The external manifestations brought out as a result of the emotions evoked by the Vibhavas are termed, the Anubhavas. These, according to Bharata, are divisible into Vacika or those that are expressed by words and Angika or bodily expressions, that result from some internal organic changes. The effect of the emotion on the character is suggested by the Anubhavas. Again, the emotion felt by the spectator as a result of the external expression of the characters on stage, such as gestures, words and so on are termed Anubhava. Thus the Anubhava communicates to the audience or spectators, the emotion being experienced by the

characters. For example, we can quote the passionate outburst of the Moor in "Othello", when stricken with remorse and anguish and weighed down by the death of his innocent wife at his hands, he cries out: "Whip me, ye devils, From the possessions of this heavenly sight Blow me about in winds! Roast me in Sulphur! Wash me in steep down gulfs of liquid fire! O Desdemona ! Desdemon, dead!" (Shakespeare, Othello, V.II. 280-285).

These words that come forth from an anguished soul, roasting in the aftermath of a misguided deed that cannot be redeemed, plunge into the minds of the spectators and wring their heart. This is grief or pathos made marvelously expressive. This is Anubhava, operating through Vacika - Abinaya. These emotions when portrayed by the characters are voluntary as the characters themselves feel the intensity of the emotions. There also exist certain involuntary emotions like perspiration, change of breathing, colour, trembling and so on. And these are known as Sattvika Bhavans. There are eight such bhavas namely - Stamba (Paralysis), Sveda (Perspiration), Romanca (Horripilation), SvaRasada (Change of voice), Vepathu (Trembling), Vaivarnya (Change of colour), Asru (tears), and Pralaya (Fainting).

These bhavas are the innate emotions of the mind and if the characters are able to achieve these, they reach the peak of success. These make representations, life-like; for example, in the play "Abhijnana - Sakuntalam", when Sakuntala is being sent to her husband, her foster-father, the sage Kanva, distressed by the thought of the separation exclaims: "This day my loved one leaves me, and my heart Is heavy with its grief; the streams of sorrow, Choked at the source, repress my faltering voice. I have no words to speak; mine eyes are dimmed, By the dark shadows of the thoughts that rise Within any soul. If such the force of grief. In an old hermit parted from his nursling, What anguish must the stricken, parent feel Bereft for ever of an only daughter. (Kalidasa, Shakuntalam, Act. IV, Sl.5).

In the above paragraph, we perceive the sattvika bhavas or svara-sada. Vyabharibhavas:

The permanent mood or the Sthayibhava is a major emotion which is developed by a number of minor feelings called Vyabharibhavas or Sancaribhavas. There are thirty three such minor feelings recorded by Bharata: Nirveda (Despondency), Glani (Weakness), Sanka (Apprehension), Asuya (Envy), Mada (Intoxication), Srama (Weariness), Alasya (Indolence), Dainya (Depression), Cinta (Anxiety), Moha (Distraction), Smrti (Recollection), Dhrti (Contentment), Vrida (Shame), Capalata (Inconstancy), Harsa (Joy), Avega (Agitation), Jadata (Stupor), Garva (Arrogance), Visada (Despair), Autsukya (Longing), Nidra (Sleep) Apasmara (Epilepsy), Supta (Dreaming), Vibodha (Awakening), Amarsa (Indignation), Avahittha (Dissimulation), Ugrata (Cruelty), Mati (Assurance), Vyadhi (Sickness), Unmadd (Insanity), Marana (Death), TRasa (Fright, Vitarka (Deliberation).

The genesis of these minor emotions takes place in the major emotions. Krishna Chaitanya analyses the word Vyabharibhava in the following way: The action of the drama is not over in one situation or episode. It is necessary that the basic emotion should persist throughout all the stages and it is equally necessary that it should modulate responsively to each change in the situation. This modulation takes colour from the features of the changed situation but what primarily determines it, is the persisting basic emotion. (Krisna Chaitanya, Indian Poetics, 58).

The two main ideas that spring up from this ideology of Bharata, in his Rasa - sutra, are the Samyoga and Nispatti. Samyoga or unity refers to the unity between the bhavas, anubhavas and the Vyabicaribhavas. Nispatti, on the other hand, is the realisation of the emotion conveyed by the artist, in the minds of the readers. Thus we could summarise that Samyoga, is the poet's endeavour to put his idea across and Nispatti, the culmination of the poet's endeavour. Arts, according to I.A.Richards: "... spring from and perpetuate hours in the lives of exceptional people... hours when habitual narrowness of interests or confused bewilderment are replaced by an intricately wrought composure". (I.A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism, 32).

Sthayibhavas: The presence of some permanent, innate faculty or impulses in the human nature is termed sthayibhava. According to Bharata, the mental faculty in a human being is the combination of eight permanent instincts and this is called sthayibhavas. "RATIR - HASAS - CA SOKAS - CA, KRODHOTSAHU BHAYAM TATHAJUGUPSA VISMAHAS - CETI STHAYIBHAVAN PRAKIRTITAH" (Jagannatha, Rasa Gangadara, 37) (Love, laughter, grief, anger, fortitude, fear, disgust and wonder - these are known as Sthayibhavas).

These Sthayibhavas when backed by other bhavas emerge as Rasas. Thus Sthayibhavas emerge as a principle theme in a composition. This is asserted by Mac Dougall:

Take away these instinctive dispositions with their powerful impulses and the organism would become incapable of activity of any kind, it would lie inert and motionless like a wonderful clockwork, whose main spring had been removed or steam engine whose fires had been drawn. These impulses are the mental forces that maintain and shape all the life of individuals and societies and in them we are confronted with the central mystery of life and mind and will. Mc Dougall, Social Psychology 38).

The endeavour lies in making these hours come to life in the minds other than those of the artists. Thus we could say that the subjectivity of the aesthetic experience remains unaltered; the creator and the audience becoming the beginning and the end respectively. Thus according to E.F. Carritt: And the aesthetic experience is not the expression of thought, nor the communication of such expression, nor that of sensation, nor yet that of acts of choice. It is the expression of an emotion in an individual mind: and the communication of this expression to other minds is the work of art, and this needs technique: (E.F. Carritt, Introduction to Aesthetics 112).

For an art to reach its culmination, which takes place in the mind of the Sahrdaya, the heart and mind of the Sahrdaya should stay attuned to the innate feelings and emotions represented in the work of art, by the artist. A Sahrdaya, who possess a latent Vasana, is only capable of intaking the basic emotions represented in the work of art. It is this Vasana which binds the listener to the artist, whether in the field of music, painting or drama. Thus, it could be said that art, to reach its final realisation, should have an audience with a mind attuned to Rasas and bhavas and these bhavas should coincide with the Vasanas in the hearts of the audience.

Most scholars claim that Bharata's Natya sastra is the first book written on the Rasas. He is the oldest known exponent of the concept, though it can be seen from Bharata's own work, that there were works written on Rasa even before the Natyasastra. Bharata himself has quoted a number of verses from books, thus

proving that the concepts of Rasa had long been in existence before Bharata. One of them had been through the sisya parampara (tradition of disciples). Dr. S.K. Dey observes that:

The idea of Rasa, apart from any theory thereon, was naturally not unknown to old writers and Bharata's treatment would indicate that some system of Rasa, however undeveloped, or even a Rasa school, particularly in connection with the drama, must have been in existence in his time. (S.K.Dey, History of Sanskrit Poetics, vol. II, 17).

Abhinavagupta says that the traditional verses that are found in the Natyasastra have been composed by the earlier scholars to define Rasa and Bharata, in order to strengthen his views, had incorporated them into his treatise. Stalwarts such as Bhatta Lollata, Samkuka and Bhatta Nayaka wrote learned commentaries on Bharata's Rasa-Sutra, and thus enriched and strengthened the views of Bharata along with the doctrine of Rasa: Their views have reached posterity through Abhinavagupta.

According to Lollota, who lived in the ninth century A.D., Rasa was simply the permanent emotion that was raised to its climax by the combination of determinants, consequents and transitory emotions. He maintained that Rasa resided both in the character, who was represented and in the actor, who represented him. But Lollota had not made it clear as to how a mental state which belonged to the hero, can be transferred to the actor and how the spectator can be charmed by the feeling which does not exist in him.

According to Samkuka, who lived a little later than Lollota, Rasa is not produced as an effect as propounded by Lollota, but is an inference by the spectator and this inferred feeling which is relished by him, is Rasa. He maintained that the permanent mood of the hero seemingly exists in the actor, through Vibhavas and this is exhibited by him through his acting, thus producing an illusionary identity with the feelings of the hero. This feeling is inferred by the spectator and is called Rasa. Thus Samkuka adds to Lollota's views by enjoining the feelings felt by the spectator to that of the character and the actor.

In the middle of the ninth century flourished Anandhavardhana, the author of Dhvanyaloka, propounder of the theory of Dhvani. According to him, words have two distinct meanings, the expressed (Vacya) and the suggested (Pratiyamana). He says: "PRATIYAMANAM PUNAR - ANYAD-EVA VASTUVASTI VANISU MAHA-KAVINAM YATTAT PRASIDDHAVAYAVATIRIKTAM VIBHATI LAVANYAM-IVANGANASU" (Anandhavardhana, Dhavanyaloka 16). (There is something unique, suggested in the utterances of the great poets, which is different from the apparent meaning. It is like a grace of woman (that captivates the hearts of lovers) which is different from and outshines, the beauty of the individual limbs). We understand that by dhvani, Anandhavardhana refers to Rasa, as he says that: "KAVIN PRABANDHAM-UPANIBADHNATA SARVATMANA RASA - PARATANTRE NA BHAVITAVYAM" (Dhvanyaloka, 183). (While writing poetry, a poet should completely subordinate himself to Rasa).

Bhatta Nayaka is one of the most important thinkers who belong to the first half of the tenth century. His famous critique Hridayadarpana on Bharata's Rasa-sutra is not available to the posterity but his views are available to us through Abhinavagupta. According to his famous doctrine of Sadharanikarana, Rasa lies in

bhavana. Bhavana is the generalisation or universalisation of the things represented or described.

The essence of Rasa is a pleasure which has no relationship with any particular ego. The aesthetic state of consciousness, whether its material is anger, pain, love and so on does not insert itself into the texture of everyday life, but is seen and lived in complete independence of any individual interest. The images contemplated on the stage or read in the poetry are seen by the spectator independent of any relationship with the ordinary life of the actor or of the hero of the play or poem and appear, therefore, in a generalised (Sadaranikrta) way, that is to say, universally and freed of individuality". (Raniero Gnoli, "The Aesthetic Experience According To Abhinavagupta", 20).

The following words, effectively sum up Nayaka's reasoning:

Aesthetic Experience, being characterised by disinterested and impersonal pleasure, is a modality sui generis of the unbounded beatitude that appears to the Yogin in his ecstasy and, in his eyes, transforms Samsara into Nirvana. The mysterious conversion of pain into pleasure, which accompanies the full realisation of one's own self, is to be found equally in aesthetic experience, which possesses the magical power of transfiguring the greatest sadness into the disinterested pleasure of contemplation" (Gnoli, The Aesthetic Experience 23).

These views of Bhatta Nayaka are enriched by Bhatta Tauta through his concept. According to him, the actor, the poet and the spectator all share the same thought.

"NAYAKASYAKAVEH SROTUH SAMANO NUBHAVASTATAH" (Quoted By Abhinavagupta In His Locana Dhvanyaloka 34)

Rejasekhara is a well known dramatist and rhetorician whose "Kavya Mimamsa" is a well-known treatise on poetics. He establishes himself as one of the prominent adherents of the Rasa - doctrine through the following line:

"SABDARTHAU TE SARRIRAM.. RASA AIMA: (Rajasekhara, Kavya - Mimamsa, iii 6) (The word and meaning are the body and Rasa is the soul). Mahimabatta was another prominent scholar of this period. According to his view, Rasa alone is the soul of poetry: "KAVYASYATMANI SANJNINI RASADI-RUPE NA KASYACID VIMATI" (Mahimabatta, Vyaktiviveka, I. 118). (Nobody can dispute that the soul of poetry is Rasa).

In the second half of the tenth century, emerged Abhinavagupta whose two works, the Abhinavabharati and Dhvanyalokalocana have given posterity a deep insight into the concept of Rasa. The first is a commentary on Bharata's Natya sastra and the second is a commentary on Anandavardhana's Dhvanyaloka. In these works Abhinavagupta has not only endeavoured to give a learned exposition of the works of Bharata and Anandavardhana and a number of acaryas like Lollata, Samkuka, Nayaka and Tauta but has also unified the theories of the earlier thinkers into a masterful synthesis. The following lines from, Dhvanyaloka give us an insight as to the importance given by Abhinavagupta to Rasa.

"RASA EVA VASTUTA ATMA VASTVALAMKARA DHVANI TU SARVATHA RASAM PRATI PARYAVASYETE" (Locana 85). (Rasa basically is the soul, the two other elements of

suggestion, those of 'astu and alamkara' become poetry only when they remove themselves into the suggestion of Rasa).

Abhinavagupta calls Kavya Rasa, "Brahmasvadanahasahodarah" (Locana, 85) (Rasa is akin to the realisation of Brahma). He states that Rasa is an aesthetic state of consciousness which resides in the poet and through the medium of his poetry manifests it in the actor's performance thus agreeing with the theory of Bhatta Tauta.

After Abhinavagupta, the study of Rasa has lost its creativity in the hands of posterity. Though many books were still written on Rasa, they chiefly dealt with the theories propounded by the earlier thinkers or were concise forms of the earlier text. Thus Raniero Gnoli observes that:

Anandavardhana, Bhatta Nayaka, Bhatta Tauta and Abhinava are still the most characteristic exponents of this subject and their thought, although at times uncertain and ingenious, reaches with Abhinavagupta's conclusions which are still valid today and even relatively novel to Western thought. The conception of art as an activity and an independent spiritual experience, freed of practical interest which the intuition of Kant perceived for the West, was already in tenth century India, an object of study and controversy (Gnoli 22).

Mammata, Visvanatha, Rajasekhara were some of the later writers who dwelt on the concept of Rasa. Mammata's Kavyaprakasa sum up the main theories of the earlier acaryas and is the most popular and influential book. Visvanatha, in his book, Sahityadarpana supports the views of Abhinavagupta and Rajasekhara and defines poetry as:

"VAKYAM RASATMAKAM KAVYAM" (VISVANTHA, SAHITYA-DARPANA, I.23). (A sentence, the soul of which is Rasa).

The last important name, in the order of Sanskrit poetics, is that of Pandit Raja Jagannatha who belonged to the middle of the seventeenth century. He harps on the importance of Rasa in poetry as, according to him, Rasa-dhvani is the most important among its five divisions, thus making Rasa the soul of poetry.

Thus, we find that Rasa is recognised as the most important ingredient since the time of Bharata. Rajasekhara was the first to mention the word 'Atma' in connection with Rasa. Following his views were Abhinavagupta, Mahimabatta and Visvanatha. Anandhavardhana, Mammata and Jagannatha, too, indirectly supported this view though with an accent on Dhvani. Thus, though the first mentioned called it Rasa, the rest called it Rasa dhvani.

Natyasastra also deals with Rasa which is India's peerless heritage, given to posterity by Bharata. Rasa is not only the soul of poetry and drama, but also of Music, dance and painting. It is considered to be a yardstick to measure the excellence of Art. In drama, when the spectators experience Rasa, emotions lose their usual worldly characteristics. The Rasa, in a play, is realized in detached contemplative mood. The Spectator's egoistic self gets submerged and his emotions become universalized. This universalization explains the paradox of participation and detachment. Though the spectators take part in the pains or pleasures of the hero, they do not undergo the emotions to the extent that they would have done in real life.

In sum, Rasa, being an aesthetic experience of both the creator and audience, comes alive only when truth join hands with the emotions of the heart and passes through the alchemy of imagination.

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