

An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory

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Lecture- 18

Bharata and the Idea of Rasa

Hello everyone,

In the previous lectures, we were trying to familiarize ourselves with various aspects of Sanskrit poetics. From this week onwards, we are going to discuss the crucial concepts that constituted the very corpus of Sanskrit literary theory. The first theoretical concept that comes to our mind when we think about Sanskrit poetics is obviously the theory of *rasa*. Before we discuss the various nuances of this theoretical concept, we need to keep in our mind a few things. First of all, the theory of *rasa* is not a monolithic concept. It has been discussed differently by different theoreticians. So, it is impossible to give a single answer to the question ‘what is *rasa* theory?’ When someone asks you ‘what is *rasa* theory,’ you necessarily need to ask the question ‘whose *rasa* theory are you referring to?’ What I am driving at is that the theory of *rasa* was conceptualized differently by different theoreticians down the line.

So, *rasa* theory is a vast field of knowledge that we cannot cover in one week. So, I am going to be very selective in my discussion here. In this class, we will see only some of the major theoreticians who conceptualized the theory of *rasa*. These theoreticians who I will be introducing through a series of lectures in this week include Bharata, Bhāmaha, Daṇḍin, Udbhata, Śaṅkuka, Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa, Ānandavardhana, Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka and Abhinavagupta. In addition to these nine theorists, we will also briefly discuss the views of Bhoja, Viśvanātha, and Jagannātha. We will also take a glance at the question of number of *rasas* and the connection of *rasa* theory and the theory of affect.

Before we talk about specific literary theoreticians and their views on *rasa*, it is important to know the very meaning of the word *rasa*. What does the word *rasa* mean? The word *rasa* has many meanings in Sanskrit. The meaning of the word *rasa* ranges from ‘juice,’ ‘sap,’ ‘taste,’ ‘water’ to ‘aroma,’ and ‘sentiment.’ In Rig Veda, the word ‘*rasa*’ is often used to mean water. Atharvaveda uses the term *rasa* to denote the juice or the sap of grains. Although the existence of the word *rasa* can be found in many works from as early as the Vedic period, we can undoubtedly say that the use of the word *rasa* to refer to aesthetic emotion came much later. As per the historical evidence that is available to us to date, we can conclude that Bharata’s *Nāṭyasāstra* is the first treatise to talk about the theory of *rasa* or aesthetic emotion.

Before we talk about the theory of *rasa* propounded by Bharata, I think it is important to make a distinction between *rasa* or aesthetic emotion and *sthayibhava* or the real-life emotion. Aesthetic emotion is the emotion that a spectator or a reader experiences, while watching a performance or reading a work of art. The unique factor that characterises the aesthetic emotion is the fact that the experience of “aesthetic emotion” or *rasa* always gives us pleasure or Ānanda, no matter what impact the counterpart of these particular emotions has on us in real life. I will explain this point with the help of an example. Suppose, you are watching a tragedy on the stage. Ultimately at the end of the tragedy, you experience happiness. If that were not the case, no one would have gone to watch a tragedy. But this is

not the case in real life. Imagine you are watching a noble person dying in front of your eyes. Will you be able to elicit pleasure from that experience? In normal case, you will not love to watch it. So, this is the basic difference between aesthetic emotion or *rasa* and real-life emotion or *sthayibhava*.

I know you must be curious to know why only aesthetic emotions are capable of making us happy, while certain real life emotions or *sthayibhavas* can make us sad or depressed. We will take up this particular point soon, when the time comes. Now you just need to keep this in your mind: While real-life emotions can arouse negative and unpleasant experience in us, aesthetic emotions are always capable of giving rise to pleasure in us. There is one more point that you need to keep in your mind. While real life emotions are experienced by a real person in real life, aesthetic emotions are the imitations of certain real life emotions by an actor on stage with the accompaniment of four registers of acting namely verbal, physical, psychophysical and make-up.

I already told you according to the available historical evidence, Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* is the first work to systematically reflect upon the concept of *rasa*. Bharata explains his concept of *rasa* in the sixth chapter of his *Nāṭyaśāstra*. According to Bharata, the real-life emotions or *sthāyibhāvas* are eight number, namely *rati* or desire, *hāsa* or amusement, *śoka* or grief, *krodha* or anger, *utsāh* or determination, *bhaya* or fear, *jugupsā* or revulsion, and *vismaya* or amazement. I will quote Bharata's dictum in this respect, since it might be of interest to some of you.

"ratir hāsaśca śokaśca
krodhotsāhau bhayam tathā
jugupsā vismayaśceti
sthāyi bhāvāha prakīrtitāḥ"

The eight aesthetic emotions or *rasas* that arise out of these *sthāyibhāvas* include *śṛṅgāra* or the erotic, *hāsyā* or the comic, *karuṇa* or the tragic, *raudra* or the violent, *vīra* or the heroic, *bhayānaka* or the fearful, *bībhatsā* or the macabre, and *adbhuta* or wonder. Bharata's dictum in this regard goes like this:

"śṛṅgārahāsyākaruṇā
raudra vīrabhayānakāha
bibhatsādbhutasamajñau
cetyaṣṭau nāṭye rasāha smṛtāḥ"

Now you may wonder what about the ninth *rasa*? We often say *nava-rasas*. Here we need to note that Bharata mentions only eight *rasas* in his *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Yes, this is true. The ninth *rasa* of *śānta* was added later.

According to Bharata, *śṛṅgāra*, *raudra*, *vīra* and *bhībatsa* are the four basic *rasas*. *Hāsyā* originates from *śṛṅgāra*, *karuṇa* originates from *raudra*, *adbhuta* from *vīra* and finally *bhayānaka* originates from *bhībatsa*.

Bharata also mentions that *rasas* have different forms. The *śṛṅgāra* *rasa* has three forms, depending upon whether it is in essence a matter of language, acting or costume. *Śṛṅgāra* *rasa* has got two varieties namely , *vīpralambha-śṛṅgāra* and *sambhoga-śṛṅgāra*.

Sambhoga-śṛṅgāra is love in union, while vipralambha-śṛṅgāra is love in separation. In other words, if the hero and the heroine come together and express their erotic feeling for each other, it will be called Sambhoga-śṛṅgāra. If the heroine or the hero is pining for love from his or her partner who is away from him or her, then it called vipralambha-śṛṅgāra.

The same is the case with hāsya and karuṇa rasas. Hāsya is occasioned by the improper arrangement of ornaments, improper costume, and improper language. On the basis of the costume, hāsya is further divided into two ātmastha and parastha. If one is laughing out seeing the improper costume, it is called ātmastha. If one intends to make others laugh through his or her costume, it is called parastha.

According to Nāṭyaśāstra, this sentiment is predominant in women and characters of inferior nature. To express, hāsya rasa an actor can employ six varieties of smile, namely smita or smile, hasita or laughter, vihasita or open laughter, upahasita or boisterous laughter and apahasita or laughter of ridicule. Smita or smile and hasita or laughter are reserved for the noble characters, while *vihasita* or open laughter is meant for the middling character. Only the inferior characters resort to *upahasita* or boisterous laughter and *apahasita* or laughter of ridicule.

Karuṇa rasa has three forms on the basis of whether it is produced by the violation of morality, or loss of one's wealth, or by grief.

Brahma has proclaimed that the vīra rasa is also similarly three fold, namely vīra rasa occasioned by a great act of generosity, by an act of morality and one's heroic action in a battle.

The three forms of bhayanaka are occasioned by a criminal act or by anything that a timid person finds frightening. Bībhatsa rasa is of two kind, namely pure and impure. The pure form of bībhatsa is disturbing and is brought about by the sight of blood and the like, while the second one is produced by the sight of excrement, maggots and so on.

Adbhuta rasa is also twofold: it can be heavenly produced by the sight of something heavenly or divine. It can also be blissful produced by joy.

Bharata also associates certain colours with these rasas. The colour of śṛṅgāra- is green and that of hāsya is white. Karuna has grey as its colour. Red is for raudra. Vīra is represented by the golden color and black is for bhayānaka. Bībhatsa has blue and atbhuta has yellow as its colors. These aesthetic emotions also have their presiding deity. The deity of *śṛṅgāra* is viṣṇu and that of hāsya is the goblins of śiva. Karuna has Yama, raudra has Rudra and vīra has Indra as their dieties. Bhayānaka, bibhatsa and atbhuta are presided over by Kala, Mahākāla and Brahma.

Bharata, taking a purvapaksa position asks, why are the emotions portrayed in drama specifically called rasa? To this question, he replies that they are called rasa because they can be savoured or relished. Now the next question arises: How is rasa being relished. It is said that just as well-disposed persons, while eating food cooked with many kinds of spices, enjoy its taste and attain pleasure and satisfaction, so also the cultured people taste *sthayibhavas* or basic emotions while they see them represented with different kinds of bhavas.

So, in total Bharata mentions 49 bhāvas which include 33 vyabhicāribhāvas, eight sthāyibhāvas and finally eight sātṅvika bhavas. So, among these 49 bhavas, why do sthāyibhāvas alone become rasas? Why can't sthāyibhāvas and vyabhicāribhāvas attain the status of rasas?' This is another crucial question that Bharata takes up. He answers this question with the help of an analogy. Although there are so many people in this world, only some people emerge as kings because of their clan, character, education and wealth. While some people ascend to the throne, some others become their servants. Similarly, vyabhicāribhāvas, etc. only depend upon sthāyibhāvas and are incapable of becoming rasas. Since many bhavas are dependent upon sthāyibhāvas, sthāyis are like a master.

Now the most important question emerges 'how does rasa get generated in the drama?: In the sixth chapter of Nāṭyaśāstra, Bharata mentions that "Rasa arises from the combination of vibhāva, anubhāva and vyabhicāribhāvas:

“Vibhāvānubhāva vyabhicāri saṃyogād rasa niṣpattiḥ”

Rasa is the final result of the combination of three elements, namely vibhāva, anubhāva and vyabhicāri bhāvas. Here we need to note that in Natyasastra Bharata is focusing on the way in which the character or the actors on the stage are able to represent the rasa. His focus is not on the way in which the spectators relish the rasas generated on the stage.

This rasasūtra or the “formula” for rasa seems to be quite simple, but it is its very simplicity and cryptic nature that led to the diversity of interpretations that we see down the centuries. Bharata's *rasasutra* leaves many questions unanswered. Questions such as 'How does a spectator experience the rasa? How are the elements responsible for the generation of rasa related to each other?, What is the exact nature or ontology of rasa? What is the exact process through which the conjunction of these three components generate rasa?, etc. are not at all taken up by Bharata. It was the latter theoreticians who took up these questions in their theoretical engagements. We will see these questions soon.

Okay, let us come back to the major point we were discussing. We were talking about the rasa-sutra of Bharata. We saw that according to Bharata, it is the conjunction or cojoining of three components namely vibhāva, anubhāva and vyabhicāri bhāvas that generate rasa in a dramatic performance. Now what are these three components. Let us take a look at them one by one. First let us take a look at vibhāva.

Vibhāva

According to Bharata, the word vibhāva literally means cause. Vibhāva is the stimulant of rasa. In other words, it creates a situation that is congenial for the production of a particular rasa. Vibhāvas are divided into two, namely ālambana vibhāva and uddīpana vibhāva.

Ālambana vibhāva is the object or the person that functions as the cause of a particular emotion. For instance, the ālambana vibhāva for the *atbhuta rasa* of Arjuna in the battle field of Kurukshetra is the gigantic viśvarūpa of Kṛṣṇa. For Daśaratha who is destined to exile his son Rāma to the forest for fourteen years for no fault of the latter, the ālambana vibhāva or the cause of his karuṇa rasa or the aesthetic emotion of the tragic is his son Rāma.

Remember, Bharata mentions the idea of ālambana-vibhāva in relation to the actors on the stage, not in relation to the spectators who are watching the drama. In other words, Bharata

sees the characters as ālambana vibhava for the another character. That is to say, he does not theorize the idea of rasa from the spectators' perspective.

We have seen the first variety of vibhāva, that is ālambana vibhava. Now what about the second variety, that is uddīpana vibhāva. Uddīpana vibhāvas are the external factors or ambience that strengthen a particular emotion. For sṛṅgāra rasa, the stimulative uddīpana vibhāvas are factors such as springtime, the gardens teeming with flowers, the bridal chamber, and so on. I will explain this with the help of an example from a modern text. For example, take the balcony scene from the drama *Romeo and Juliet*. Here Juliet and Romeo function as the ālambana vibhāva or the cause of sṛṅgāra for each other, while the moonlit night is the uddīpana vibhāva for the sṛṅgāra rasa between them. In Nāṭyaśāstra, Bharata mentions in detail the ālambana and uddīpana vibhāvas for all the eight emotions. You can refer to them, mentioned in chapter 7, of *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

I am sure now you know what a vibhāva is.

Anubhava

The next is anubhāva. What is an anubhāva? An anubhāva is the performance of a particular emotion by four registers of acting namely verbal, physical, psychophysical and make-up . In other words, anubhāva is the physical reaction to a particular emotion caused by the vibhāva. The experience of a particular emotion in real life generates multitudinous mental states. An actor on stage is supposed to assume these mental states while playing out the role of a particular character. These mental states assumed by an actor doing the role of a particular character in a drama are called the *vyabhicāribhavas*. For example, let us look at a scene where a heroine is romancing with her lover. Here the actress who is doing the character of the female lover should bring sṛṅgāra rasa into being. For this, the actress concerned should imitate some mental states or *vyabhicāribhāvas* of sṛṅgāra such as *vṛīda* or embarrassment, *harṣa* or happiness, *romanca* or horripilation, etc. These differing mental states that she is supposedly going through then should be then made perceptible or visible to the spectators through some physical reactions. In the case of sṛṅgāra rasa, these mental states, like happiness or embarrassment or shame, that the lover is experiencing is made perceptible through four registers of acting, such as casting side-long glances, sweet-talk, pleasing facial expressions, gleeful eyes, joyous look, etc.

Vyabhicāribhava

A *Vyabhicāribhāva* is called a transient emotion because it does not remain permanent during the expression of a particular aesthetic emotion or rasa. In other words, these are the temporary feelings that come and go when you are under the grip of a larger emotional state. I will explain this concept with the help of the same example we saw earlier. An actor who is performing the sṛṅgāra rasa will emulate a series of mental states in the process of emulating that rasa. She will go through embarrassment, then her embarrassment will give way to happiness, then the happiness and horripilation may happen together. This means that while expressing the sṛṅgāra rasa, the actor is not remaining in one mental state throughout. These mental states flicker through them. The permanent aesthetic emotions are portrayed through the portrayal of these transient feelings.

Bharata also asks some questions with respect to the order of sthayibhavas and rasas. He asks do bhavas come out of the rasas or the rasas come out of the bhavas. Some are of the opinion that they arises from each other, since they are very much inter-related. Bharata refutes this position. He is of the view that it is bhāvas that bring rasas into being, as opposed to rasas generating bhāvas. Just as various condiments are properly put together make a curry, so also

bhāvas are used to make a rasa. Bhāvas are called so because they bring rasas into being. He opines that there can be no rasas prior to bhavas. Bharata also mentions that it is the sthayibhavas that turn out to be rasas. While emotions are experienced in real life they are called sthayibhavas. The imitations of these sthayibhavas in drama will transform them into rasas.

Now let us briefly summarize all the major points that we discussed in this class. We saw the famous rasasūtra of Bharata. The rasasūtra goes like this:

"Vibhāvānubhāva vyabhicāri saṃyogād rasa niṣpattiḥ."

According to Bharata, rasa is the product of the conjunction of vibhāva, anubhāva, and vyabhicāri-bhāvās, Vibhāva is the cause of emotion. They stimulate a particular sthayibhāva in the character. The Vibhāvas are divided into two, namely ālambanavibhāva and uddīpana vibhāva. Ālambana vibhāva is the person who is functioning as the cause of particular bhava in the character. For example, in the balcony scene in Romeo and Juliet, the two lovers function as the ālambana vibhāva or the cause of śṛṅgāra rasa for each other. Uddīpana vibhāvas are the external factors or ambience that strengthen a particular emotion. For śṛṅgāra rasa, the stimulative uddīpana vibhāvas are factors such as springtime, the gardens teeming with flowers, the bridal chamber, and so on. While experiencing a particular bhava or emotion, the character is supposed to go through some mental states. These mental states occasioned by the experience of a particular bhava is called vyabhicāribhavas. For example, a person who is going through the *sthāyibhāva rati* will go through different mental states such as happiness, horripilation, embarrassment, shame, etc. These mental states flicker through the minds of the character. The reaction of a character to these mental states caused by a stimulation of a particular sthāyibhāva are called anubhavas. These reactions come out in the form of certain physical and verbal reactions. For example, the sthāyibhāva of rati gets stimulated in a character. Obviously, this will lead to such vyabhicārībhāvas as happiness, horripilation, embarrassment, shame, etc. Naturally, the character will physically respond to these mental states by casting sidelong glances, talking sweetly, kissing, and hanging her head in embarrassment upon hearing the words of her lover. These physical responses to the vyabhicārībhāvas are called anubhāvas. In other words, anubhāva is the performance of a particular emotion through the four registers of acting. I hope you understood all the major points that we discussed in the class. You need to keep these basic lessons with respect to the rasasūtra of Bharata to understand the next lessons we are going to discuss properly. Thank you.