

An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory

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Lecture- 20

Rasa Discourse and Anandvardhana

Hello everyone,

In the previous lecture, we were primarily seeing the development of the theory of rasa in the field of Sanskrit literary theory. We saw that although Bharata laid the foundation for the theory of rasa through his Nāṭyaśāstra, this enquiry was not initially taken up well in the field of literary theory. Instead of attempting to take up the questions left unanswered by Bharata, literary theoreticians from Bhamaha to Udbhata primarily reduced the scope of rasa to three figures of speech namely, preyas or affectionate utterance, rasavat or rasa-laden and ūrjasvin or haughty declaration. We see a slight change in the conceptualization of the theory of rasa in Udbhata's *Kāvyaṅkārāsārasamgraha*. Although Udbhata limits the scope of rasa to three aesthetic emotions, he brings in some innovations by radically redefining them and also by introducing a new trope called samāhita or quiescence. In this class, we are going to take a look at a contemporary of Udbhata who played a vital role in taking forward this tradition of discussion on rasa. The name of this scholar is Ānandavardhana. The most important contribution of Ānandavardhana in the field of rasa is his observation that rasa is suggested or manifested. We will not deal with this idea in this module. We will take up this observation of Ānandavardhana in detail in a separate session on dhvani later. In this session, we are primarily going to focus on the factors that he finds responsible for the obstruction of a rasa that the poet is trying to develop in a passage.

Ānandavardhana opines that an intelligent author, who intends to infuse rasa in an extended work or in a single work, should make sure there is nothing that obstructs the rasas. If not, the author will not be successful in producing the intended rasa. These obstructions that Ānandavardhana mentions include:

- (1) Incorporation of *vibhāvas*, etc., that belong to an obstructive rasa;
- (2) the description at great length of something alien, even though it may be connected with the subject in hand;
- (3) Breaking off the rasa too suddenly;
- (4) Revealing the rasa at an importune moment.
- (5) Flashing the rasa again and again after it has reached full maturity;
- (6) and finally impropriety of style (*vṛtṭyanaucitya*).

Let us take a look at each of these points one by one. First of all, Ānandavardhana opines that if a poet incorporates a *vibhāva* or *anubhāva* or *vyabhicāribhāvas* that belong to a rasa which is obstructive to the rasa the poet wants to develop in the work, he/she will fail to develop the intended rasa. Ānandavardhana says that the *vibhāvas* of *srngara* and *hāsya* are not mutually incompatible. The same is the case with those of *vīra* and *atbhuta*, *raudra* and *karuṇa*, and finally *bībhatsa* and *bhayānaka*. But if someone breaks these pairs, which are conventionally accepted by poets and then literary theoreticians, then the obstruction of rasa will happen.

Ānandavardhana shows how a rasa can mar the beauty of another rasa which the poet wants to infuse in his work.

For example, Ānandavardhana says that the vibhavas of śṛṅgāra rasa are at war with those of raudra. Ānandavardhana cites an example for this. He says when a woman meets her lover after a long separation, she may sulk with him by refusing to talk to him. In this situation, the lover should ideally use *hāsya* rasa to appease her. But if the male lover shouts at his lady love for not talking to him, this will become a vibhava for raudra rasa and the whole śṛṅgāra rasa that the poet is developing in this context will get ruined. Here the raudra will spoil the main śṛṅgāra rasa that is being developed. This is an example of a particular rasa spoiling the beauty of another rasa that the poet wants to develop.

Abhinavagupta in his commentary on this section gives one more example, citing a verse. Here Abhinava shows how the śṛṅgāra rasa gets spoiled by nirveda or the total detachment from everything. The verse goes as follows:

"Turn to forgiveness.
Show happiness and leave your anger
Sweet lady, the antelope of time does not run backward"

In this example, the lady who meets her lover refuses to talk to her lover. She is sulking with him. The lover requests her to show happiness and leave her anger. But the lady does not budge an inch. Finding that the lady love is not ready to listen to his pleas for love-making, the lover finally gives her a philosophical advice: "Sweet lady, the antelope of time does not run backward." Abhinava here observes that these words of the lover about the momentous nature of life will be a vibhava for nirveda. Thus the poet will spoil the śṛṅgāra in this context by making the male lover remind his sweetheart of the mortality of human existence. So, the philosophical discussions of life and death are inappropriate vibhavas in lovers' conversations which aim to generate śṛṅgāra rasa. Imagine lines like, "Life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" coming from Romeo, when he meets Juliet in the balcony on a moonlit night! It would destroy the śṛṅgāra rasa.

Now the second element which can ruin a dominant rasa is the description, at great length, about something which is either remotely related or not related to the subject-matter in hand. For example, Ānandavardhana says, if a poet in his desire to use ornaments such as yamakas describes the great mountains or the like in a long passage, while presenting the state of love-in-separation, it will spoil the intended śṛṅgāra rasa. I will explain this matter further with the help of a modern example. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton describes the fallen angels thronging towards their new-built palace of Pandemonium by an elaborate comparison to the swarming of bees. Here if Milton leaves aside his primary goal and then keeps on describing the swarming of bees, this will spoil the major rasa in this context. Similarly, if the poet discourses on something completely unrelated to the topic under consideration, rasa will slowly ebb away.

The third thing that he considers as an obstruction to the development of rasa is the sudden breaking-off of the rasa. Let us take a look at this situation where a particular rasa which should have been otherwise developed breaks-off quickly. Ānanda gives us an example of this, citing an imaginary situation. The chief character has arrived at the highest pitch of love or *śṛṅgāra* for a certain lady with whom he longs to have a rendezvous. Then the lover realizes that this love is mutual. Here the *śṛṅgāra* rasa is slowly developing and it will

definitely reach its peak when they meet each other . But suddenly the male lover abandons the *śṛṅgāra* and gets engaged in an activity that is completely unrelated to his original plan of having a rendezvous with the lover. This is a perfect example of the sudden breaking-off of a dominant rasa.

The fourth obstruction to the development of a dominant rasa is the inopportune revelation of a rasa that does not suit the context. Ānanda proceeds to give an example for an inopportune revelation of rasa. A battle has begun in which many great heroes are dying. And now we have a hero who is experiencing love-in-separation. This is an example of the revelation of a rasa at an inopportune moment. Abhinavagupta further elaborates on this example given by Ānandavardhana. Abhinava says that the example that Ānanda had in his mind, while giving this example was a the second act of *Veṅiṣaṃhāra* where Duryodhana is enjoying himself with his wife *Bhānumatī*, while the war is going on and the heroes on his side are dying. Ānanda says that in such a case one cannot use the excuse that the character in the tale has been driven out of his senses by fate, because the chief reason for a poet's writing is to produce rasa. If the poet finds anything that is marring the rasa, he will have to eliminate it.

But Ānanda reminds us that there is no fault in presenting an obstructive rasa, if it remains subordinate to the intended rasa which is already well established. Ānanda says, "when the intended rasa has been firmly established, there is no fault in mentioning these obstructive factors if they are stopped short, or if they are brought into a subordinate role". For example, in *vipralamba-śṛṅgāra* or love-in-separation, the mention of such states as physical illness, etc. caused by the separation from the lover are not a problem, if they remain subordinate to the main rasa *vipralamba-śṛṅgāra* or love-in separation. But if this becomes predominant this will ruin the rasa. Just imagine a lover, who is pining for her lover, going on and on about her physical illness caused by her separation from him. Finally, *śṛṅgāra* rasa will become a description about the illness of the lady love. This should not happen. The lady-love can only briefly talk about the physical illness caused by her separation from her lover so that this remains subordinate to the main *vipralamba-śṛṅgāra*.

This rule is applicable only in the case of *bhāvas* which can function as the transient feeling or *vyabhicāribhava* of that particular dominant rasa the poet wants to develop. For example, physical illness is a transient emotion of *vipralambaśṛṅgāra*. Therefore, if a poet keeps this apparently obtrusive rasa subordinate to the main rasa of *vipralamba-śṛṅgāra*, it does not harm. But if the poet incorporates *vybhicāribhāvas* that do not belong to the *vipralamba-śṛṅgāra*, they will definitely ruin the dominant rasa, even if the former remains subordinate to the main rasa.

The fifth obstruction to rasa is presenting the same rasa, even after it has reached a state of maturity or perfection. According to Ānanda, if a poet works on a rasa over and over again even after it reaches a state of perfection, it will wilt like a flower. Emotions in excess can be counterproductive; for example, a long-drawn-out lament over a death can turn an otherwise tragic scene into an extremely tedious one.

Now the last point that he cites as the reason for the obstruction of rasa is *anaucitya* of behaviour or *vṛtṭyanaucitya*. Ānanda opines that any impropriety with respect to the behaviour of characters will ruin the presence of rasa. As an example, Ānanda observes that if a woman of noble birth explicitly expresses her sexual desires, that would be against the decorum of the period and would disturb the aesthetic relish of the readers. This example might seem politically incorrect to readers today, but we have to keep in mind that

Ānandavardhana was writing according to the sociocultural values of his times. However, this was one of the criticisms against D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, where the aristocratic Constance Chatterley uses four-letter words that were not in keeping with her upbringing and social position. We will discuss these aspect in detail when we talk about the concept of *aucitya*. Ānandavardhana also opines that the kind of *śṛṅgāra* or the aesthetic emotion that is appropriate to one category should not be applied to another. We will discuss all these aspects in detail soon when we discuss the idea of *aucitya*.

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The next topic that Ānanda deals with in his discussion of *rasa* is the incorporation of different *rasas* in a long single work. The first thing that Ānanda says is that "while it is well known that larger works contain a variety of *rasas*, a poet who seeks the excellence of his works will make just one of them predominant. Ānanda says, "In larger works, such as *mahākāvya*s or *nātakas*, many *rasas* are found dispersed in major and minor functions. While this is well known, an author who aims at a high degree of beauty for his works will make just one of these *rasas* predominant over the others. This is the more proper way.

Ānanda further emphasises the importance of following the proper procedure for developing the *rasa* by quoting a verse that presents *rasa* as the vital force in *kāvya*. He says, "The principal object of the work of poets are the *rasas*, and the like. In constructing them he must be constantly on guard. A work that lacks *rasa* is a deep reproach to a poet. By it he ceases to be a poet and is forgotten by others. It is true that the ancient poets gained fame without chaining their language to rules. But a wise man will not abandon our system in reliance on them." Ānanda held that a poetic composition would be able to evoke *rasa* only if the poet who produces it experiences that *rasa* to the maximum extent possible. Emphasizing this point, Ānandavardhana in his *Dhvanyāloka* referred to the first *kāvya*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* where *kāvya* issued forth from the author's intense grief at the death of a pair of mating birds at the hands of a hunter. *Vālmiki*, who happens to see a hunter kill a mating bird, curses the hunter out of his intense grief. The intensity of this sorrow makes him spontaneously utter a verse, a form that is outside the realm of ordinary speech. Summing up his observations, Ānanda said that if a poet brims over with *rasa*, poetry will also be laden with *rasa*; if not, it will remain bereft of *rasa* (*Dhvanyāloka* 3.41–42aA). *Rasa* here is conceptualized as the passionate intensity with which a writer feels about an incident or person. This is somewhat reminiscent of Wordsworth's definition of poetry as the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings."

It is interesting however that Ānandavardhana also considered *rasa* as a figure of speech. According to Ānanda, there can be situations where *rasa* remains subordinate to a *vākyārtha*. In that situation, then that *rasa* is called *rasavat*. Ānanda says, "But where a *rasa*, or the like, is subordinate and the main purport of the sentence lies elsewhere, then it is my opinion that in that poem the *rasa*, or the like, is only a figure of speech." As an example of this, Ānanda cites a passage of flattery. In a passage of flattery, Ānanda says, a figure of complimentary address is the main purport of the sentence, while a *rasa*, or the like, will remain subordinate to the complimentary address which is the main purport of the sentence. Ānanda cites the following verse as an example of *rasavat alankara*:

"Why do you laugh? You will not get away again
now that I have finally caught you.
Pitiless man, what is this strange love of travel
that drove you from me?
So, speak your enemies wives,

clinging to the necks of their husbands in their dreams,
only to weep aloud
when they wake to the empty circle of their arms."

This is a verse where the poet presents the lament of a wife to her husband who is desired by even the wives of his enemies. After spending time with other women, the husband has finally come to her. She, with profound grief, says that, "you, desired by all women in the world, will not be allowed to go away from me. "

According to Ānandavardhana, this is clearly an example of *rasāvāt alāṅkāra*. Ānanda says that the main purport of the sentence is the eulogy of the husband. But this eulogy is not baldly stated here. Rather the purport of the sentence is beautified due to the experience of the *karuṇa* rasa here.

In this context, Ānandavardhana takes up the observation of some critics that *rasavat* occurs only when a sentient entity is portrayed. The detractors opine that if the purport of the sentence concerns a sentient creature, we have *rasavadalāṅkāra*; if it concerns anything else, we have simile, etc. Ānanda replies that we can always show some connection between the purport of the sentence (even if it is not explicitly related to the sentient entities) and sentient creatures. Great passages of poetry, which everyone recognizes as the paradigms of *rasa*, such as the description of the oncoming season of rain in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, or Purūravas' apostrophes to nature in the mad scene of the *Vikramorvaśīya*, etc. always have some connection to a sentient entity. In that case, all these descriptions will turn out to instances of *rasavadalankaras* and there will not be any scope for *alankaras* like *rasavat*. I will explain this once again for you. As per the theory of the objector, a description is said to have *rasavadalankara*, if the *rasa* is subordinate to another element, say for example a message, and the description is related to a sentient entity. If the description is not related to a sentient entity, then it will not become an instance of *rasavadalankara*. Then Ananda says that, if that is the case, then all descriptions can potentially become an instance of *rasavad-alankara* since we can always find a connection between what is described and a sentient entity. In this case, everything will have to be considered an example of *rasavad-alankara* and there will not be any scope for other *alankara*.

Now you will ask a question. How do we find if the *rasa* is subordinate to another element in a poem? Here we need to remember that Ānandavardhana does not give us any parameter to judge if a particular *rasa* is subordinate to the *vākyārtha*. So, I feel that this finding if *rasa* is in a subordinate or not in a poem is completely a subjective endeavour.

According to Ānandavardhana, the most delicate of all *rasas* is *śṛṅgāra* *rasa* or the aesthetic emotion of the erotic. It is the most predominant of all *rasas* because it is more pleasing than the others. He was of the view that poets had to be cautious while dealing with this *rasa*; since desire is an integral element of human life, even a slight flaw could jeopardize the poet's position and destroy the emotion. I will discuss his thoughts in connection with *śṛṅgāra* *rasa* later in the theory of *aucitya*.

So, these are the major observations of Anandavardhana in the field of *rasa*. I hope you have understood the lessons. Thank you!