

## An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory

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Lecture- 22

Rasa Theory and Sri Sankuka

Hello everyone, in the previous lecture we saw the theory of rasa proposed by Bhatta Lollata. Today we are going to see Śrī Śaṅkuka's theory of rasa and his systematic refutation of Lollata's view. Before that, let us take a look at the life of Śaṅkuka. Like Bhatta Lollata, Śrī Śaṅkuka is also a critic who remains in the darkness. We know about Śaṅkuka and his contribution is primarily through the works of other writers.

Kalhaṇa in his *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* talks about a poet named Śaṅkuka who authored a court poem named *Bhuvanābhyudaya* or *Triumph of the World*. We have all the reasons to believe that this Śaṅkuka who is considered the author of *Bhuvanābhyudaya* is the same person we are dealing with. Kalhaṇa's *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* says that in 850 C.E during the reign of King Ajitapida, a fierce battle took place between two royal factions, and the poet Shankuka composed a poem titled *Bhuvanābhyudaya* about this battle. A few verses preserved in an important fifteenth-century anthology are ascribed to a poet named Śaṅkuka who is described as the son of Mayura. It is possible that this Mayura who is considered the father of Śaṅkuka could be the author of the poem *Sūryaśataka*. But we have no way to ascertain this fact. Pollock says that a late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century dramaturgical work refers to Shri Shankuka as a minister who was also a dramatist. As per this text, this particular Śaṅkuka had also authored a romantic comedy *Citrotpalāvalambitaka* or *The Earring of the Many-Colored Lotus*. So we know practically nothing about Śaṅkuka other than these basic pieces of information. If we piece together all the basic information that we have about Śaṅkuka, we can say that Śaṅkuka lived before Ānandavardhana.

As in the case of Bhatta Lollata, we also lost Śaṅkuka's commentary on Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*. All that we have now to understand the view of Śaṅkuka on the theory of rasa are a few quotations preserved by Abhinavagupta in his *Abhinavabhāratī* and Locana on Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanyaloka*. We need to note here that Abhinava is not simply referencing the views of Śaṅkuka, rather he also opposes him at every point.

Scholars often opine that Shri Shankuka may have been a Buddhist. This observation is worth renewed consideration. There are various pieces of information that reinforce this view. First of all, Shri Shankuka quotes a verse from the work of Dharmakīrti, the great Buddhist philosopher of the seventh century, although other later scholars such as Mahima Bhatta who were not Buddhists quote him too. Secondly the honorific Shri suggest Buddhist affiliation. Finally, Abhinavagupta appears to attribute to Shri Shankuka a new understanding of the tragic rasa, as general compassion rather than grief for the loss of a loved one, which fits with developments in Mahayana Buddhism.

The cynosure of Śaṅkuka's argument in connection with the theory of rasa is his systematic refutation of Lollata. Śaṅkuka argues that *rasa* can only be inferred from what is depicted on

stage. This approach which depends on *anumāna* or inference is described as the *anumiti vāda*. To him, *rasa* was an experience to be inferred by the spectator. He, unlike Lollaṭa, was interested in the manner in which the aesthetic experience evolved from the performance or literary text. Śāṅkuka refutes the theory of Lollaṭa that *rasa* is *sthāyibhāva* intensified, on eight grounds.

First of all, Śāṅkuka holds that if *sthāyibhāvas* were the ones that turned into *rasa* in conjunction with aesthetic elements, *sthāyibhāvas* would have been the subject and *rasas* would have been their predicate. In that case, Bharata would have explained *sthāyibhāva* first and *rasas* later. But Bharata does not follow this order. On the other hand, he explains *sthāyibhāvas* later, after explaining the *rasas* in detail. In addition to this, if *rasas* were *sthāyibhāvas* intensified, then why does sage Bharata describe the *vibhāvas* and *anubhāvas* of the *rasas*, and then once again describe separately the *vibhāvas* and *anubhāvas* of the stable emotions? If *rasas* were mere intensification of *sthāyibhāva*, it would have been sufficient that the *vibhāvas* and *anubhāvas* of only *sthāyibhāvas* needed to be mentioned. But Bharata treats them separately. This means that, Śāṅkuka argues, *rasa* is one thing and *sthāyibhāva* is another.

Another point of contention from Śāṅkuka is that if *rasas* were *sthāyibhāvas* enhanced or intensified, then we would have had numerous *rasas* from the same *sthāyibhāvas*, since a *sthāyibhāva* can be enhanced and intensified at various degrees from dull to duller to dullest, and so on. Then, there could have been innumerable *rasas* from intense, to more intense, to the most intense. The problem that Śāṅkuka anticipates is that there could be numerous *rasas* from the same *sthāyibhāvas* given that the *sthāyibhāva* can get intensified at various degrees does not hold.

Now, Śāṅkuka anticipates an argument from the opponent: It could be argued that *sthāyibhāvas* turn out to be *rasas* only if they reach the highest point of intensity. Śāṅkuka has an argument against this observation, as well. Śāṅkuka has an answer to this argument as well. He says that this position is also equally faulty. Bharata mentions that *hāsyā rasa* has six varieties namely *smīta*, *hasita*, *vīhasita*, *upahasita*, *apahasita* and *atīhasita*. But *hāsyā rasa* has only one *sthāyibhāva* which is *hāsa*. If *rasa* were the *sthāyibhāva* at the highest point of enhancement, then do we get six types of *hāsyā rasas* from the single *sthāyibhāva* called *hāsa*.

The issue is not over here. Bharata mentions that the *sthāyibhāva rati* has ten stages with each later one relatively more intense than the previous. If we accept the position that *rasa* is *sthāyibhāvas* reaching the highest point of enhancement, then we should ideally have ten varieties of *śṛṅgāra rasa*. But that is not the case in reality. So, the theory that it is the *sthāyibhāva* at its highest point of enhancement that becomes the *rasa* stands flawed.

According to Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa, emotions always ‘progressively intensify’ to the highest level where it becomes *rasa*. But according to Śāṅkuka, this is not correct. What happens in reality, says Śāṅkuka, is the opposite. Grief, for example, is powerful at first, and then it gradually weakens, as opposed to getting strengthened. The intensity of emotions tends to decrease once it has reached the pinnacle. So, to say that *rasa* arises out of strengthened *sthāyibhāvas* is again a fallacy.

We saw that Śāṅkuka is against the observation that *rasa* is *sthāyibhāva* intensified. Then what is *rasa* according to Śāṅkuka? According to Śāṅkuka, *rasa* is the imitation of *sthāyibhāva* in the character by the actor. When these emotions actually happen in real life, they are called *sthāyibhāvas*. When the actors imitate the *sthāyibhāvas* experienced by the characters, they are termed *rasas*. He was of the view that *vibhāvas* function as the cause of *sthāyibhāva* in the

character, *anubhāvas* are the effects of a particular *sthāyibhāva* in the character imitated by the actor, and finally *vyabhicāribhāvas* are the mental states an actor is supposed to emulate to represent the mental state of a character experiencing a particular *sthāyibhāva*. *Vyabhicāribhāvas* nourish the *sthāyibhāvas* and hence they are called the auxiliary causes. These aesthetic elements such as *vibhāvas* etc. indicate the presence of the *sthāyibhāva*.

Śaṅkuka also mentions three possibilities, while a spectator is watching an actor playing the role of a character, say for example, the character of Rama, on stage. The first possibility is that the spectator may think this is ‘actually’ Rama. The second possibility is that the actor is not Rama. Thirdly, it could be thought that the actor ‘may or may not be’ Rama and finally the actor is ‘similar’ to Rama. Śaṅkuka opines that an aesthetic experience is different from all the four possibilities, that is the possibility of ‘a true apprehension,’ ‘a false one,’ ‘a doubt,’ and ‘a similitude.’ Śaṅkuka says “There is no appearance of doubt, or indeed of truth or falsehood—we have the thought, ‘This is him,’ and not ‘This is actually him.’ We encounter no antithetical ideas, and so nothing makes us aware of the conflation. It is an experience we actually undergo, and what logical argument can confute such empirical evidence?”

Śaṅkuka’s theory does not allow the spectator to doubt the world of illusion created by the performance. He is famous for his “*citra-turaga-nyāya*” or the theory of the painting of a horse. The viewer who sees the picture of a horse does not mistake it for the real horse. She or he cannot derive the full enjoyment from the picture unless they think this is a horse. During the process of aesthetic enjoyment, the viewer/ reader will be in a peculiar position where he or she neither takes the horse for real nor doubts its actuality. The feelings that this picture is similar to a horse, or the figure in the picture may or may not be a horse will also not appear. The reality of the horse is inferred from the artistic depiction of the horse, and this gives rise to aesthetic pleasure or *rasa* (Locana 2.4 and *Abhinavabhāratī* 1.266–267).

For example, a viewer who watches Amjad Khan act as the villain Gabbar Singh in *Sholay* will hate Gabbar Singh, but not the real-life actor called Amjad Khan. The *rasa* of *bībhatsā* that the spectator feels by watching Gabbar Singh is real in the world of art but s/he does not extend it to the real world by hating Amjad Khan. According to Śaṅkuka, the spectator experiences *rasa* by inferring the emotional aspects of the character through the depiction by the actor. This inference of aesthetic enjoyment, as Śaṅkuka sees it, transcends all doubts about the real existence of the characters, and the spectators accept the world that the characters inhabit. It is important to keep in mind that Śaṅkuka was primarily thinking of *rasa* in the context of the drama, or “*rasa* seen, in the play” (Pollock, *A Rasa Reader*, 6), and so his idea of *rasa* was that which occurred in audio-visual performance.

Another important point that Śaṅkuka takes up is the importance of the presentation of aesthetic elements or *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas* and *vyabhicāribhāvas* in the depiction of *rasa*. He is of the view that aesthetic elements are imperative for the generation of *rasa*. He criticizes Udbhaṭa’s view that *rasa* can be generated by mere reference to the proper name of the *rasa*. Śaṅkuka’s observation is worth quoting in this context. Śaṅkuka observes: “But we have no way of apprehending the stable emotions, not even from the literary narrative. The proper terms for them, “desire,” “grief,” and so on, simply render these things referents, insofar as they denote them; they do not make us understand them as if they were “verbal acting,” or expression (qtd in Pollock’s *A Rasa Reader*.)” What Śaṅkuka says is that *rasa* needs to be “acted out” or “expressed” to be inferred by the spectators or readers. Mere reference to the proper name of the *rasa* will not bring *rasa* into being. To explain this point further, Śaṅkuka cites the following verses.

"Although my grief is distended, profound, endless, and vast,  
it is siphoned off by my anger, like the ocean's water by the submarine fire."

In this line, the aesthetic emotion of grief is not properly acted out or verbally expressed by showing *vibhāvas*, etc. So we cannot have *rasa* here. Here only that particular *rasa* is denoted by mentioning its proper name.

I will explain this point with the help of a modern example. Suppose, I say that "I am suffering from grief," it will not generate *rasa*. In other words, my mere mention of the word 'grief' will not invoke *rasa* in this context. Here to invoke *rasa*, I should bring in appropriate *vibhāvas*, *vyabhicāribhāvas* and *anubāvas*. If I explain in clear terms, in an aesthetically pleasing manner, that I am taking part in a battle where I am surrounded by enemies who shower arrows upon me." Here by presenting the cause of my suffering, I have created a *vibhava* and then if I narrate my mental state at this moment and explain my reaction in a way that is distinctly different from workday language, I will be able to generate *vyabhicāribhāvas* and appropriate *anubhāvas*. In this situation, I will be able to create *rasa*. So, the observation of Śāṅkuka in a nutshell is that mere reference to the proper name of *rasa* is not sufficient to generate *rasas*. We need to introduce the appropriate *vibhas*, *anubhavas* and *vyabhicāribhāvas* to generate *rasa* in a drama or a poem.

One can safely say that there is a lot of similarities between T.S Eliot's idea of objective correlative and Śāṅkuka's observation that *rasa* cannot be produced in the absence of proper *vibhāva*, *anubhāva* and *vyabhicāribhāvas*. In his article, "Rasa and the Objective Correlative", Krishnamoorthy attempts to show this similarity. According to Eliot, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is an artistic failure because it lacks objective correlatives which "is a set of objects situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion" (Rayan:246). Eliot says that emotion cannot be described rather it should be expressed through objective correlatives. According to Krishnamoorthy, *rasa* is the result of the conjunction of *vibhava*, *anubhava* and *vyabhicāribhava* which are similar to Eliot's notion of objective correlative. He says,

"How does a poem present or convey an emotion? Sanskrit theory has an answer that is by no means unique to it: a poem does so through the objective correlatives of the emotion. Images, characters, situations which are the objective correlatives of the emotion are presented descriptively in a poem, and when the reader's mind makes contact with these, they awaken the corresponding *sthayin* within him and raise it to the state of *rasa*."

Through this comparative analysis Krishnamoorthy draws the conclusion that both Bharatha and Eliot have a consensus of opinion that objective correlatives create the locus of any work of art which is *rasa* or aesthetic emotion so that the most significant formalist aspect which needs to be examined to judge a work of art is objective correlative. He says,

"This emotion is the meaning of the poem. Emotion is suggested exactly as any other kind of connotational meaning is by the words, by the denotative or descriptive elements embodied in words. These elements, the correlates of emotion, have existence only within the arrangement of words that the poem is. These objects of emotion—image, 'style', rhythm, story, character—are the only proper study of criticism, and criticism must study them within the verbal organization where—and nowhere else—they occur and belong. It is significant that unwittingly and variously these central assumptions of the *Rasa-dhvani* theory are endorsed and restated in some of the most influential critical work of our time in Britain

and America— that of Richards and Knights, Cleanth Brooks and Wimsatt, and, above all, Eliot."

Okay, now it's time to wind up the class. Let us review all the major points that we discussed today. We know that Śāṅkuka was primarily criticizing the views of his predecessor Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa. Lollaṭa argued that *rasa* is nothing but intensified aesthetic emotions. Śāṅkuka refutes this observation of Lollaṭa on eight grounds. First of all, Śāṅkuka observes that if *rasas* were *sthayibhāvas* in an intensified form, *sthayibhāvas* would have been the subject and *rasas*, its predicate. If this were what Bharata had originally meant, then he would have explained *sthāyibhāvas* first and then later *rasas*. This is not the case in *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Bharata mentions *rasas* first and then *sthāyibhāvās* second. This means that Bharata does not consider *rasa* as *sthayibhāvās* intensified. Secondly, in *Nāṭyaśāstra* Bharata mentions the *vibhāva*, *anubhāva* and *vyabhicāribhāvas* of *sthayibhāvas* and *rasas* separately. If *rasas* were the intensified form of *sthayibhāvās*, Bharata would not have mentioned the *vibhāva*, *anubhāva* and *vyabhicāribhāvas* of *sthayibhāvas* and *rasas* separately. Thirdly, *sthayibhāvas* can get intensified at different degrees from dull to duller to dullest, or from the least intense to more intense and the most intense. In that case, there could be numerous *rasas* from the same *sthāyibhāva*. This is not the case in reality. Fourth: the proponents of this view can also argue that as opposed to Śāṅkuka's claim, it could be argued that *sthayibhāvas* only at their highest point of intensity turn out to be *rasas*. This is also not correct. We have five varieties of *hāsyā* *rasa* and only one corresponding *sthayibhāva* which is *hāsa*. How come we get six varieties of *hāsyā* *rasa* from one *sthāyibhāva*. If Lollaṭa's view is correct when *hāsa* reaches the highest point we will have only one *rasa* which is *hāsyā*. But in reality we have six variants of the same *hāsyā* *rasa*. The fifth point is that if this view that all the *sthāyibhāvas* in their highest point of enhancement turn out to be *rasas*, then we should ideally have ten varieties of *śṛṅgāra* *rasa*, since Bharata mentions ten varieties of the *sthāyibhāva*. This situation does not exist. So how can Lollaṭa say *rasa* is the enhanced *sthāyibhāva*. Finally, according to Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa, emotions always progressively intensify to the highest level at which point it becomes *rasa*. But what happens in reality, said Śāṅkuka, is the opposite. Grief, for example, is powerful at first, and then it gradually weakens, as opposed to getting strengthened. The intensity of emotions tends to decrease once it has reached the pinnacle; to say that *rasa* arises out of strengthened emotions then, is a fallacy.

Then we saw the four possible impediments that can arise in the minds of a spectator while watching an actor playing a role of a particular character in a drama. The actor is really that character he is playing out. The actor may or may not be the character he is representing. The actor is not the character he is presenting and finally, the actor is similar to the character. According to Śāṅkuka, all these four possibilities--the possibility of similitude, doubt, similarity and falsehood--do not arise in the process of aesthetic enjoyment. Finally, we saw Śāṅkukās observation that it is imperative that the aesthetic elements such as the *vibhāvas* are necessary for the production of *rasa* in a work. It is impossible to generate *rasa*, just by mentioning the name of that particular *rasa*. I hope you understood these lessons. Thank you!