

## An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory

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Lecture- 26

Rasa Theory, Ramacandra and Gunacandra

Hello everyone,

In this lecture, we are going to see two theoreticians namely Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra in connection with our on-going discussion of the theory of rasa. Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra are the disciples of the literary theoretician Hemacandra. The duo is best known for their magnum opus *Nāṭyadarpaṇa* or the *Mirror of Drama* which gives the readers a good glimpse into the art of dramaturgy.

Guṇacandra being a playwright, it is often believed that *Nāṭyadarpaṇa* is the first such text composed by a working playwright. *Nāṭyadarpaṇa* is divided into four chapters and each chapter is called a *darpaṇa* or mirror. It is significant that this important and innovative treatise on dramaturgy that they wrote is extant in only four manuscripts. Even more surprising is the fact that not a single commentary on it has been identified. One literary scholar upon whom this text exerted a tremendous influence is Rudra Bhaṭṭa. As for the influence of other critics upon Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra, the impact of their guru Hemacandra is quite apparent, although they do not hesitate in criticizing their preceptor on a variety of matters. The same is their approach to Abhinavagupta who they critique and appreciate.

Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra believe that the experience of rasa is not often pleasurable. For them, rasa can also be an unpleasant experience. This can definitely be considered an innovative approach to the question of *rasa*. Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra emphatically say that it is wrong to say that sensitive viewers take pleasure in such unpleasant depictions as Sītā being abducted by Rāvana, Draupatī being dragged and disrobed in the royal court, Raja Hariścandra being relegated to the position of an untouchable and his son Rohitaśva dying, Lakṣmaṇa being wounded by a lance or Malatī being prepared for slaughter and so on. Since all these events involve tragedy or unpleasant human experience, it is wrong to argue that a sahr̥daya takes pleasure in the depiction of tragic events. The authors say that only those people who take pleasure in self-torture, and who are distressed by the joy of others, can enjoy tragic events. So, they are of the view that rasas produce both pain and pleasure. Thus, they divide all the nine rasas into two broad categories based on the question whether it gives pleasure or not. According to them, Śṛṅgāra, hāsya, vīra, adbhuta and śānta are the rasas that provide spectators with pleasure, while karuṇa, raudra, bībhatsa and bhayānaka produce pain in us.

But Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra particularly point out that although the four rasas, namely karuṇa, raudra, bībhatsa and bhayānaka distress us at the time of our experience of them, we get pleasure after the completion of our savouring of these emotions.

According to them, the pleasure comes not from our experience of these rasa, but from our acknowledgment of the genius of the poet or the skill of the great actors in emulating these rasas in a believable manner. To put it differently, we enjoy *karuṇa rasa* not because of our

savouring of *karuṇa rasa*, but because of our appreciation of the skill of the poet or the actors in reproducing the emotion in such a believable manner.

He compares this situation to a scenario, where people who have an appreciation for courage take pleasure, after watching the martial skills of a hero who decapitated someone. Just like a person who has a bent of mind for courage and adventure, appreciates the martial skill of a soldier who beheads his enemy, so also a spectator gets amazed by the genius and ability of an actor to present incidents as they are in real life.

According to Ramacandra and Guṇacandra, while the cultured spectators are beguiled by the genius of the poets, their whole body gets suffused with a kind of great ecstasy. They note that it is because of the spectators' strong desire or thirst for enjoying this unique experience that they often subject themselves even to spectacles of heart wrenching tragedy. Both Ramacandra and Guṇacandra also emphasize the point that the poets are also well aware of the fact that a painful experience can make a following pleasurable experience all the more pleasurable, just as the sweetness of a drink is enhanced by a touch of bitterness.

But they find an exception in the case of *śṛṅgāra-rasa* or erotic thwarted. According to them, although the *vipralamba-śṛṅgāra* or love-in-separation may apparently look painful, since it emanates from the experience of separation from the loved one, it is not a painful experience per se. The savouring of *vipralamba-śṛṅgāra* or love-in-separation is indeed a pleasurable experience because its very essence lies in dreaming about the erotic enjoyed. It is generally believed that it was the influence of Jain philosophy which inspired them to see *rasa* from a new angle.

Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra are of the view that the experience of *rasa* by a spectator or reader cannot be a direct sense perception since it exists in someone else. So, it should inevitably be a non-sensory experience. According to them, what makes the presence of a particular *rasa* known to the spectators is the reactions of the actors to a particular experience such as perspiration, horripilation, weeping, the play of eyebrows, etc. of the characters. With the help of these, *rasa* is determined to be present by the spectator.

Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra also remind us that the actors simply imitate the *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas* and *vyabhicāribhāvas* that pertain to the characters so as to entertain the spectators. So, the actors' reactions on the stage are not the result of experiencing a particular *rasa*. They are simply imitating these reactions to please the audience. The actors' imitation of the *rasa* of the characters turn out to be the cause of *rasa* for the viewers. The reactions of the viewers such as perspiration, horripilation, weeping, etc. are the result of the effects of their *rasa* that they experience after watching the reactions imitated by the actors on stage. Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra also opine that it is possible for the actors also to experience *rasas*, as they enact them in the play. They observe:

"Singers too are sometimes themselves delighted while they are seeking to delight someone else. In the same way an actor, imitating the *rasa* of the erotic thwarted in Rama, for example, may well on occasion come to identify with him completely. The horripilation and so on in the actor, therefore, can indeed make known a *rasa* in himself".

So the bottom line of the observation of Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra is that *rasa* exists in the principle character, the actor and the spectator. Pollock succinctly summarizes the theory of Ramacandra and Guṇacandra in the following words:

“Thus, in the case of a character, a reaction functions as a consequence of rasa; in the case of the viewer/reader, as a cause of rasa; at the same time, the viewer or reader also has his own reactions and transitory emotions. The authors conclude by covering all their bases: rasa is everywhere, in the principal character, the spectator, the auditor or reader of a poem, and even, on occasion, the actor.”

The authors are of the view that a rasa has a clear and distinct form only in the principle male and female characters precisely because of the fact that they are the original causes of the rasa and their anubhavas and vyabhicāribhāvas are clearly imitated by the actors playing the role of these characters. But in the case of the spectators, rasa exists in an impure form since the *vibhāvas* that cause rasa in them do not actually exist in real life, but are only made to appear via the poem or drama. I will explain the point of Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra with the help of the example of śṛṅgāra ras in Rāma and Sitā. As per the theory of Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra, the śṛṅgāra rasa is more distinct in the case of Rāma the principle character because the *vibhāva* or the cause of śṛṅgāra rasa exists in reality for Rāma in the form of Sitā. Since the spectators watching the reactions of Rāma due to his experience of śṛṅgāra rasa, they will also experience rasa. But their experience of rasa will not be distinct because the *vibhāva* of the śṛṅgāra rasa in this context, that is Sītā, does not really exist in the world of the spectators. She exists in the story world and is only made to appear via the drama. For the same reason, the *vyabhicāribhāvas* and *anubhāvas* in the audience will also be indistinct. This is the reason why it is said that the experience of rasa by the spectators or readers is said to be supernatural.

Now let us wrap up the class by revising all the major points we discussed now. First of all, for Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra, the experience of rasa can be a both pleasant and unpleasant experiences. In the case of emotions like śṛṅgāra, hāsyā vīra adbhuta and śānta, the experience of rasa is pleasurable. But in the case of aesthetic emotions like karuṇa, raudra, bībhatsa and bhayānaka, the savouring of rasa is unpleasant. That said, Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra do not mean to say that the experience of these four rasas, that is karuṇa, raudra, bībhatsa and bhayānaka, is perpetually unpleasant. Once the unpleasant experience of the savouring of these rasas get over, the spectators will get amazed by the ability of the actors to present these emotions, as if they are really experiencing it. This feeling will later provide them with happiness. It is because of their thirst for this great experience that the spectators keep watching the tragedies. The authors also believe that rasa is everywhere. It exists in the characters who actually experience the rasa. It can also be experienced by the actors, while they are imitating the original rasa of the characters. As a result of watching the acting of the actors on stage, the spectators also can enjoy rasa. I hope you have understood all the major points we discussed in today’s class. Thank you!