

An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory

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Lecture- 27

Rasa Theory and Vidyadhara

Hello everyone! In the previous video lecture, we saw the observations of Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra vis-à-vis the idea of rasa. The most important observation of Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra in connection with the theory of rasa was that rasa was not always a pleasurable experience. They also pointed out that rasa can have multiple locations. It can be located in the character, the reader or the spectator, and finally in the actor, as well. The next critic who we are going to see in our discussion of *rasa* is Vidyādhara and the text under consideration is his famous *Ekāvali*. Vidyādhara's *Ekāvali* is of particular importance as a text in Sanskrit poetics because he uses the genre of praise poem as a poetic manual. This poetic manual cum praise poem is written in praise of King Narasimha of Utkala for whom he worked as a poet. *Ekāvali* consists of eight chapters. The first chapter deals with *kāvyaśvarūpa* or the ontology of *kāvya* and *kāvyaḥetu* or the purpose of composing a *kāvya*. The second chapter deals with *vākya* or sentence, *vyañjaka* or suggestor, *abhidhā* or the primary meaning, *lakṣaṇa* or the secondary meaning, and *vyañjana* or the suggestive operation. The third chapter focuses on *rasa* and the different varieties of dhvani and the fourth chapter deals with *guṇībhūtavyaṅgya-kāvya*. The fifth chapter deals with guṇa or poetic merit and *rīti* or poetic style, and the sixth chapter is an extensive study of *doṣas* or poetic faults. The seventh chapter focuses on *śabdālankāras* or the ornaments of sound and the eighth one deals with *arthālankāras* or the ornaments of sense. In this class, we are going to primarily focus on the third chapter which deals with the question of *rasa*.

What is of particular significance in Vidyādhara's observations on *rasa* is an old controversy that he is revisiting. Now what is that controversy? It is the status of animals in the generation of *rasa*. Can animals function as the receptacle of *rasa*? Vidyādhara opines that when animals function as the characters in a work of art they can definitely become the "receptacles of *rasa*." This view is in direct contradiction to the views of the earlier authors who argued that the emotions represented by the animals always result in a semblance of *rasa* or *rasābhāsa*. In the case of *rasābhāsa*, a *rasa* fails to come into being despite the presence of all the factors congenial for the production of that *rasa* because that *rasa* is either inappropriately presented or is directed towards an object that one should not desire. An example of *rasābhāsa* is Rāvaṇa's love for Sītā. Even though Rāvaṇa does everything that one needs to do to express *śṛṅgāra* *rasa*, the spectators fail to enjoy *śṛṅgāra* *rasa* because Rāvaṇa is not supposed to direct his love towards Sītā who is another person's wife. While we watch Rāvaṇa's love for Sītā, we get to see all the *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas* and *vybhicāribhāvas* of *śṛṅgāra* *rasa*, but *śṛṅgāra* *rasa* fails to come into being. Metaphorically speaking, all that we get to see in this context is the mere semblance or shadow of *śṛṅgāra* *rasa*. According to literary theoreticians, the noble spectators fail to enjoy an aesthetic emotion feeling that is indecorously represented.

According to the earlier writers, when the animals try to express aesthetic emotions, we will only have the semblance of *rasa*, not *rasa* per se. In other words, we will see all the *vibhāva*, *anubhāva* and *vyabhicāribhāvas* otherwise required for the production of that particular emotion the animal tries to portray, but the *rasa* will not come into being. In other words, animals cannot ever become the receptacles or the locations of *rasa*. There are many writers who uphold this view. Kuntaka, for example, is of the view that the animals lack the

necessary apparatus to develop and represent aesthetic emotions. All that they have are mere impulses.

The same is the opinion of Bhoja who in his *Sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharaṇa* considers the presence of *rasa* in the characters of low status, animals, villains and entities presented in a metaphorical manner as the causes of *rasabhāsa*. In his introduction to *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* also, Bhoja denies that an animal can be the locus of *rasa*. But Abhinavagupta seems to take a different approach to this question. In *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, Viśvanātha also hold the same opinion. According to him, the emotion expressed by animals is indeed a cause of the semblance of *rasa*. In his *Abhinavabhāratī*, Abhinavagupta quotes a verse from Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntala* to talk about the *bhayānaka* *rasa* experienced by a deer, as it was chased by King Duṣyanta. This means that Abhinavagupta considers animals as the receptacle of aesthetic emotions. The same verse is again quoted by Mammaṭa in his *Kāvyaprakāśa*, while explaining the aesthetic emotion of the fearful or *bhayānaka* *rasa*. The verse goes like this:

“Behold The deer, owing to the great speed at which it is running is moving more in the sky than on the earth; with a graceful turn of its neck, it is casting backward glances at the pursuing chariot; through fear of the falling of the arrow, it has much of its hinder part contracted within the fore-part; and it scatters on the path half-chewed morsels of grass out of its mouth gaping with fatigue.”

According to Mammaṭa, the king's chariot is the *ālambana vibhāva*, and the flight of arrows is the *uddīpana vibhāva*. The *anubhāva* in this scene is the turning of the neck and running of the deer. The exhaustion, terror, etc. felt by the deer constitute the *sancaribhava* or the

vyabhicāribhāva. Here the location of the *bhayānaka* rasa is the deer which is running away from the arrow of Duṣyanta.

After reproducing the relevant section from *Ekavali*, Rajacudamani Dīkṣita also says that if the *Kāvya prakāśa* is not wrong in illustrating *bhayānaka rasa* with the verse *gīrvābhaṅgābhirāmam*, etc. describing fear in a deer, it is Rasa in birds and animals, and not rasābhāsa.

Now, Vidyādhara following the observation of Abhinavagupta and Mammaṭa declares that animals can indeed be the receptacle of aesthetic emotion or *rasa*. Vidyādhara's observation merits attention in this context. In *Ekāvali*, Vidyādhara notes:

“Some assert that in the case of animals there can only be semblance of *rasa*, but that position cannot withstand scrutiny, since the aesthetic elements can function in the case of animals too. It is wrong to argue that, since animals are devoid of awareness of the foundational factor and other aesthetic elements, they are not an appropriate receptacle of *rasa*. For some human beings can be equally unaware, and we would then be forced to deny that they too can be loci of *rasa*. Here again, it is the sheer presence of the aesthetic elements that actuates the *rasa*, not awareness of them as aesthetic elements. So animals can indeed have *rasa*” (Quoted in Pollock's *Rasa Reader*).

To substantiate his point further, he cites a verse:

"The cow elephant gave the bull a trunkful of water fragrant with lily pollen;
the cakravāka bird honored his mate by means of a half-eaten lotus filament. "

According to Vidyādhara, the bull-elephant is the *alambana-vibhāva* that stimulates the stable emotion of desire. The springtime, etc. function as the *uddīpana vibhāva*. The water fragrant with lily pollen is the reaction to the aesthetic emotion of the erotic. In this way Vidyādhara substantiates his point that animals too can function as the locus of *rasa*.

It is important to note that the view of Vidyādhara was later criticized by Siṅhabhūpāla who was the king of a small principality in today Andhrapradesh. Siṅhabhūpāla in his *Rasārṇavasudhākara* argues that animals cannot become the receptacle of *rasa*. In *Rasārṇavasudhākara*, Siṅhabhūpāla's criticism against the view that animals can become receptacle of *rasa* is both specific and general. First, he begins by specifically criticizing the example of *śṛṅgāra rasa* in the case of the bull-elephant that Vidyādhara cites in Ekāvali. According to Siṅhabhūpāla, it cannot be said that this is the *śṛṅgāra* *rasa* specifically because it happens in the case of animals. According to Bharata, *śṛṅgāra* can happen only if the *vibhāvas* are *samujjvala* or splendid, *śuci* or pure, and *darśanīya* or beautiful. None of these things are applicable in the case of animals, since the above mentioned qualities come out of certain practices like lathering their bodies with fragrances, proper bathing, decoration with ornaments and so on. So, it is wrong to argue that animals can become the location of *rasa*. He also says that the bull-elephant can become only *the real cause of the real passion of the cow elephant*. It cannot become a *vibhāva* because something becomes a *vibhāva not because of any properties specific to the species of those vibhāvas*, but because these *vibhāvas* are cultured and they execute their expression of emotion with proper discernment of propriety.

If you are confused I will explain this with the help of an example. Rāma is able to produce *śṛṅgāra* *rasa* in relation to Sīta not because Rāma is a conscious entity but because he

performs his śṛṅgāra rasa in conformity with the propriety of the period. On the other hand, Rāvaṇa is not able to produce śṛṅgāra rasa in spite of the fact that Rāvaṇa shows all the anubhāvas necessary for the production of śṛṅgāra rasa. Why does this happen? This is because he does not follow the decorum or the propriety of the period. The same issue happens in the case of the animals who are not cultured and aware of the concerns of decency and propriety. Then how can they invoke rasa in the readers? According to Śiṅhabhūpāla, it is a well-known fact that absence of propriety will definitely result in *rasa-bhāsa*. Since propriety is coming out of a cultured mind and the animals are devoid of it, it is wrong to argue that animals can become the receptacle of rasas. The *vibhāvas*, especially in the case of *śṛṅgāra* rasa, need to be desirable objects because of their noble birth and observation of the rules of propriety, so that they are able to elevate the minds of the spectators or readers who actualize the *rasa*.

This was a relatively simple section on the idea of rasa. I hope all the points we discussed so far are clear to you.