

The Eastern and Western Aesthetics: Re-routing *Rasa* Theory

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Abstract:

Aesthetics means the appreciation of beauty and approach to genuine delight, and in this classical sense Indian aesthetics is closer to the real definition than its Western counterpart. Indian aesthetics is more concerned about the idea of delight even to the verge of mysticism. The theory of Rasa is as old as the concept of human cognition and imagination, because this theory is associated with the human faculty of mind. Before talking about the key concepts and theorists of rasa, it is very important to make it clear that it is nowhere a romantic theory of aesthetics. A certain rasa is evoked when there is a reason, a stimulus for it known as- Vibhava and then this stimulation ensues in reaction and result of it known as Anubhava. Rasa is evoked only with the combined impression of both of these with their accompanied sancaribhavas. So this theory is a scientific theory of literary criticism. The paper argues for a cognitive reading of rasa theory which not only substantiates itself with some practical examples but also emerges as a potential alternative to Western aesthetics.

Key words: Aesthetics, Rasa Theory, Cognitive Theory, Indian Poetics.

Aesthetics means the appreciation of beauty and approach to genuine delight, and in this classical sense Indian aesthetics is closer to the real definition than its Western counterpart. Indian aesthetics is more concerned about the idea of delight even to the verge of mysticism. It seems a romantic point of

view but a close analysis will make it clear that the Romantics in English literature and the theories of critics like Walter Pater and I. A. Richards are closer to this oriental sense of Beauty. The writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy etc. have shown that the application of *rasa* theory on any work of art not even enhances its beauty but also increases the pleasure of reception of a work of art.

The problem with *rasa* theory is that it is rarely applied to a larger body of texts- specially the Western texts. So the idea of theory applied gives me an opportunity to support my work with practical criticism and to prove that *rasa* theory gives us the aesthetic pleasure, no matter it is tragedy or comedy, and saves the reader from being only a “wraith of this old self”, a tragic result of postmodern theory. *Rasa* theory tries to reinstate the lost sense of aestheticism in postmodern world of discourse. So sublime this theory is, so sumptuous and pervasive it is that it stands as a light house, and the light is falling on western coasts too.

The Theory of *Rasa*

The theory of *Rasa* is as old as the concept of human cognition and imagination, because this theory is associated with the human faculty of mind. Before talking about the key concepts and theorists of *rasa*, it is very important to make it clear that it is nowhere a romantic theory of aesthetics. A certain *rasa* is evoked when there is a reason, a stimulus for it known as- *Vibhava* and then this stimulation ensues in reaction and result of it known as *Anubhava*. *Rasa* is evoked only with the combined impression of both of these with their accompanied *sancaribhavas*. So this theory is a scientific theory of literary criticism.

What is *Rasa*?

It was Sage *Bharata* who first propounded the theory of *rasa*

and *bhava* in his book, *The Natyasastra*. As the name suggests, the book deals with all the aspects of dramaturgy and the treatment is so vast and so minute that the myth seems right that he wrote this book by the grace of God. In sixth and seventh chapter of this book he writes about the theory of *rasa* and *bhava* respectively. Although my present work is concerned about *rasa* theory but without *bhava*, *rasa* is like a soul without body-invisible.

“There is no drama without *rasa*”, says *Bharata* and we can add in it and can say that there is no art without *rasa*, let it be music, poetry, painting, architecture or anything else only the mode of *rasa* perceptions are different.

Vibhavanubhavavyabhicari samyogad rasanishpattih

This is the central statement to understand the concept or *rasa*. So many different analyses are attempted to understand it but the simple meaning of this *sloka* is that *rasa* is the cumulative result of *vibhavas* (stimulus), *anubhavas* (involuntary reaction) and *vyavhicaribhava* (voluntary reaction). To elaborate this concept he also gives one example here-

When various condiments and sauces and herbs and other materials are mixed, a taste is felt, which is different from the individual tastes of the components and when the mixing of materials like molasses with other materials produces many kinds of tastes, so also along with the different *bhavas* the *sthayi bhava* becomes a taste, which is *rasa*, flavor or a feeling.

It means that when we read a poem or a drama or a novel there are some reasons, some incidents which make us happy, some make us sad, some even make us cry because they stimulate our mental and physical mode of body and we start to feel like this. But after feeling like this we can't control the reactions which will be visible on our face, in our body etc and anyone can see that we are crying or we are afraid. Finally at the end we get a fixed tone of our mood which is imparted to us

by our reading. No healthy one can control this process, because *Bharata* says only dead or animals don't have these emotions in them.

In Indian aesthetic theory, there has always been an argument about the numbers of *rasas*. *Bharata* stated eight *rasas* and later on *Abhinavgupta* added the ninth *santa rasa* in it. Later on, some theorists also added *Vatsalya* and *Bhakti* *rasa* as separate *rasas* too. Very minutely *The Natyasastra* also deals with the relative colors, their patron gods and the *bhavas* too. Let me give a brief outline of it.

<i>Rasas</i>	<i>Colors</i>	<i>Deities</i>	<i>Sthayibhavas</i>
1.) <i>Srngara</i> -	Dark Blue	<i>Visnu</i>	Love.
2.) <i>Hasya</i> -	White	<i>Pramatha</i>	Laughter.
3.) <i>karuna</i> -	Pigeon color	<i>Yama</i>	Pathos.
4.) <i>Raudra</i> -	Red	<i>Rudra</i>	Anger.
5.) <i>Vira</i> -	Yellowish	<i>Mahendra</i>	Heroic.
6.) <i>Bhayanaka</i> -	Dark	<i>Kala</i>	Fear.
7.) <i>Bibhatsa</i> -	Blue	<i>Mahakala</i>	Disgust.
8.) <i>Adbhuta</i> -	Yellow	<i>Brahma</i>	Wonder.

But the basic *rasas* are considered to be four only - *Srngara*, *Vira*, *Raudra*, and *Bibhatsa*, rest of the four have come from them. Humor results when love is parodied, as in the Shakespearean dramas the clown tries to mimic the protagonist and humor arises. Terror produces pathos, the feats of heroism give birth to wonder and anything disgusting or repulsive produces fright or deadness.

Now let me give the short introduction of all eight *rasas* and *vibhavas* and *anubhavas* respectively and finally *sthayibhavas*.

1.) Srngara Rasa – This is the most important element of all human nature, so some of the theorists say that it is the only single *rasa*. It is based on the *sthayibhava* of *rati* (love).

Whatever is pleasurable, lovely, gorgeous and luxurious gives birth to this emotion of love. Dresses, ornaments, perfumes etc enhances the impact of this rasa. It results in the case of man and women of healthy youth. It is of two kinds-

- a) *Sambhoga Srngara* – it is the result of fulfillment in love. Its *vibhavas* are pleasant season, garlands, scent, anointments, ornaments, the desired company, delightful music, parks, waterfalls etc. In most of the French Romances and in Romantic poets we can easily perceive it. It should be expressed by *anubhavas* like loving looks, lifting eye-brows, side glances, graceful steps and gestures etc. The reader while reading a text reacts with these *anubhavas* and the same impulses are communicated in his heart too. The *vyabhicari bhavas* are all most all except cruelty and disgust.
- b) *Vipralambha Srngara*- it is the result of separation from beloved or desirable object. *Vibhavas* are hermit like situation, swollen eyes, dried lips, disarrangement of things etc and *anubhavas* are dejection, fatigue, jealousy, anxiety, lassitude, forgetfulness etc. these all *bhavas* are found in Keats' "Ode to Nightingale."

Most of the times the *vyabhicari bhavas* of *karuna rasa* and *vipralambha srngara* seem same but there is one major difference in both of them. In *karuna rasa* there is the sense of disinterestedness and no hope to get something back but in the separation of *vipralambha* there is always a hope to meet again.

2.) *Hasya Rasa*- It is the *sthayi bhava* of laughter. *Hasya* is evoked when love is mimicked as in the clowns. It is further stimulated by disfigurement of the dress, impudence, greediness, incongruity, incoherent speech, mistakes etc. it is expressed by the *anubhavas* like blown lips or face, widened eyes, making faces, sweating or red face moving contracted on the ground etc.

The *vyabhicari bhavas* are dissimulation, laziness,

lassitude, sleepiness, awakening from sleep etc. Simply it can be of two kinds when someone laughs on her or himself and second when someone laughs on others. According to the classification of the characters, it is of six kinds-

- a) *Smita*- it is gentle laugh and the characters of royal blood laugh like this like a king and queen etc. it is expressed by bashfulness and not showing the teeth.
- b) *Hasita*- it is just laughter, it is also for high characters but here eyes are full blown and slight teeth can be shown while laughing.
- c) *Vihāsita*- it is characteristic of the middle characters, it is a broad smile. It is expressed with a loud laughter and later with the reddening of the face.
- d) *Upahasita*- it is the satirical laughter of the middle characters, in it the nose is distended and shoulders and eyes are bent down.
- e) *Apahasita*- it is silly laughter, it is meant for the base and lower characters, laughing on wrong time and place without any reason, and finally they have tears in their eyes due to the excess of laughing.
- f) *Atihasita*- it is the most mean and boisterous laughter, with rolling down on ground, holding sides, tears rolling down from eyes , patting someone else etc. Female should not do this.

This description is so minute and shows the observation of the writer; it is very close to the dramaturgy of English high, middle and low comedy.

3.) *Karuna Rasa*- Pathos is the final result of this rasa. It is evoked by the help of curse, pain, calamity, separation from dear ones, killing, panic etc. The *anubhavas* are dropping of limbs, tears, pallor, sighs, etc. the *vyabhicari bhavas* are disgust, exhaustion, anxiety, impatience, delusions, confusion, helplessness, laziness, breaking down etc.

The use of this rasa is also done to intensify other *rasas* like *vipralambha srngara* etc. when the feats of wonder are not

performed well, then also this rasa can be felt.

4.) Raudra Rasa- it is the *sthayi bhava* of anger which gives us this rasa. It is associated with evil spirits demons etc. Stimulus is anger, boldness, censure or abuses, insults, lies, provocations, cruelty etc. It is involved in actions like beating, shedding blood, dragging etc; with red eyes, knitting eye-brows, gnashing teeth, biting lips it is expressed. Animal energy, excitement, intolerance, fickleness, sweating etc are its *vyabhicari bhavas*.

This rasa is found in the meanest types of the characters or in the demons because they do all things with force, even the love is enjoyed like that way.

5.) Vira Rasa- it is the characteristic of noble and brave characters. Heroism is its *bhava*. It is stimulated by cold-blooded courage, determination, justice, chivalry, strength, bravery etc. its natural *anubhavas* are steadfastness, fearlessness, skills, daring etc. its *vyabhicari bhavas* are understanding, self-command, excitement, memory and self-consciousness.

Vira rasa also helps to intensify the effects of *Adbhuta rasa*.

6.) Bhayanaka Rasa- it is stimulated by seeing or hearing words, sounds and horrible objects, fear of wild emotions, going in to empty houses, lonely forests, or ghostly stories. It is expressed by hands and legs trembling, eyes flitting to and fro, hair standing on the end, face losing colour and by the loss of the voice. The *vyabhicari bhavas* are being stupefied, sweating, stammering, pallor, confusion, fear, loss of memory death etc, and with all these transitory emotions the reader can feel the same rasa which the writer had when he wrote it.

7.) Bibhatsa Rasa- Disgust is the *sthayi bhava* of this rasa. It is evoked in heart by seeing whatever is undesirable, ugly and evil. By withdrawing the body, by leering, by spitting and

agitation. The *vyabhicari bhavas* are loss of memory, sickness, death etc.

8.) *Adbhuta Rasa*- Surprise is the *sthayi bhava* of it. It is stimulated by the sight of divine persons, desired objects, by going to parks, temples, and by tricks and magic. Eyes distended with wonder, unwinking glances, thrill, tear, joy, twisting the body etc are the *anubhavas*. The *vyabhicari bhavas* are being stunned, shedding tears, stammering, excitement, joy, agitation etc.

9.) *Santa Rasa*- Although it is later added, because *Bharata* said nothing about it in his work. Later on *Abhinavgupta* and some other theorists added it in the list, and *Abhinavgupta* considered it as the best *rasa*, because he felt that all *rasas* merge in it at the end of the aesthetic experience. Its *sthai bhava* is quietude.

How Rasa is evoked?

The Aesthetic experience is described as the 'tasting of flavor' or *rasa swadana*. *Rasa* literally means the quintessential essence of a work of art. A two-way process, the artist strives for *rasa* in his work and the *rasika* or connoisseur intuitively detects it. *Rasa* is bestowed not made. It is not pre-present in the work of art. If someone can see the sap or juice which is inside the flower then one can see *rasa* too inside our body. Arguably the most important term in Indian art theory, *rasa* lays claim to several definitions. In its most obvious sense, *rasa* refers to the sap, juice of plants or extract. More composite connotations include the non-material essence of something or the "best or finest part of it". *Rasa* also denotes taste and flavor, relating to consuming or handling either the physical object or taking in its non-physical properties that yield pleasure

Rasa can be roughly translated as aesthetic sentiment, aesthetic rapture, emotive aesthetics, or the aesthetics of

emotion. At the core of the theory lies the philosophic speculation that literary works are meant to be relished or experienced aesthetically-emotionally. If a work manages to convey an intensified emotion and this is relished by the reader, *rasa* is successfully evoked. *Rasa* is a disinterested state of joy or equanimity and it springs from a communion of *Vibhavas*, *Anubhavas* and *vyabhicari bhavas* and the fusion of these with *sthayi bhava*, the permanent emotion.

Vibhava is just like impulse and rightly says I. A. Richards, “Impulses are vehicles on which a host of other elements -sensations, images, emotions, and references ride piggy back through the mind”. *Vibhāvas* are the stimuli such as the story, the stage and the actors responsible for the awakening of the *sthāyi*, i.e. the latent sentiment in the spectator. The *vibhāvas* are of two kinds- *ālambana vibhāva* is the basic stimulus capable of arousing the sentiment, whereas *uddipana vibhāva* is the enhancing stimuli, the environment in which the basic stimulus is located.

For example in case of arousing the sentiment of pity or *karuna rasa*, the perception of an old weak woman on the stage is the *ālambana vibhāva*; and thatched hut in which the old woman is lying and the surrounding atmosphere of neglect and poverty is the *uddipana vibhāva*.

However, it must be noted that *vibhāva* is not the ‘cause’ of producing any emotion but only the ‘medium’ through which it passes to spectator by means of ‘sympathetic induction’. Thus, in aesthetic induction, everything is a medium rather than a cause and this is because ‘what is transferred is always a generalized feeling’. This transference however, implies not the production of any new emotion in the spectator, but only the awakening of latent sentiment.

Vibhavas are used as object materials to evoke the emotions in the reader, as in the gothic fiction- empty houses, skulls; bones, etc are used to intensify the *Bhayanka* *rasa*. So *vibhavas* are just exactly what T. S. Eliot names, “Objective Correlative”-

"The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."

So when anything like skull, blood, haunted palaces are shown by the writer, reader automatically connects to that object and he correlates himself to it and only *Bhayanka* rasa can be felt not *Srngara* rasa. But in the final analysis a writer's success in evoking emotions will depend on his capability to arrange the *vibhavas* properly, if he fails to do, the text fails to move the reader; so with the death of the author, the death of the textual work is also sure here in this context.

Anubhāvas are the deliberate manifestations of feelings on the part of the actor (in accordance with the mood at aim). They consist of the various gestures and glances etc. of the actor which are intended to develop the basic stimulus or the *vibhāva*. In the reading process the reader should be aware of feeling it in the stage of his mind. Words and images do the job and his mind works like a receptacle of those emotional signals. For example in the case of *śrngāra rasa* the presence of a beautiful young girl on the stage is a *vibhāva* and her movements and glances are the *anubhāvas*. *Vyabhicāribhāvas* are the transient emotions which arise in the course of maintaining and developing the basic mood; they are the ancillary emotions determined by the basic emotion and *Vyabhicāribhāvas* in turn reinforce the basic mood. For example if the basic mood is love, *riti*: joy in union and anguish in separation will be the accompanying ancillary emotions. *Sāttvic bhāvas* are the involuntary expressions such as blushing, perspiration etc. which arise as a result of experiencing and portrayal of the emotion.

What is the Relation between Rasa and Bhava?

It is important to understand that the relation between *rasa* and *bhava* is that of mutual ontological entity. Are they same? Are the sources of their origin is same? Which comes first in the reading process?

“Condiments and herbs render food tasty, so is the mutual relation between *bhava* and *rasa*.” , this is how *The Natyasastra* tells us the relation of it. But sage *Bharata* says that *rasa* is produced from *bhava* and not vice-versa. This is a comment, which is full of doubts for the present day theorists. If they are closely associated then why *rasa* can't produce *bhava* ; when *bhava* can produce *rasa* in the same manner? Was *Bharata* talking about any especial process and the statement was dealt in that respect?

Actually the *bhavas* bring into being *rasa* which is the end of the poem, *the kavyarth*. But the nature of *bhava* is so important, because on the one hand, *bhavas* mean all the elements having the energy or power to manifest *rasa*; on the other, they stand for emotions and moods themselves.

Bharata defines *bhava* like this, “that which conveys the meaning intended by the poet through words, physical gestures and facial changes is a *bhava*” Etymologically; *bhava* comes from ‘*Bhu*’ verb in Sanskrit which means, “to happen, to cause to happen”. And this is what *bhava* does; it makes the realization of *rasa* to happen in the heart of the reader.

When any writer observes some object, he feels something in the form of *rasa* which is in his mind and body then he starts to write here on the page he transforms his *rasa* in the form of *vibhavas*, *anubhavas* means in the form of *bhavas* and when the reader reads a text his mind is captured by these *bhava*-saturated images and the *bhava* again transforms in the *rasa* in the reader, this is how in threading process the *bhava* and *rasa* are associated.

We can also understand it in the form of the lamp analogy. We get a lamp not to look at the lamp but at the other

objects in its light, so in the same way we understand the primary meaning of words in a poem not to rest on it but to relish the suggested meaning of it, which comes from the objects. So in the light of rasa we perceive *bhava* and in the company of *bhava* we feel the rasa.

There are eight *Sthayi bhavas*, thirty three *Vyabhicari bhavas* and eight *Sattvika bhavas*. Like rasa, I will not elaborate them here; just a brief list of these will serve my purpose for this research.

Sthayibhavas are the permanent mode of expression, so they are the most important of all. They are also eight, respective of their *rasas*-

- 1.) *Rati* (Love).
- 2.) *Hasya* (Laughter)
- 3.) *Soka* (Grief)
- 4.) *Anger* (Fury)
- 5.) *Vigour* (Energy)
- 6.) *Fear* (Terror)
- 7.) *Disgust* (Repulsion)
- 8.) *Wonder* (Marvellous).

Vyabhicari bhavas are like beads on the garland, they come and go and just help to intensify the impact of *sthayi bhava*, and they are never permanent. They are thirty-three in numbers.

- 1.) *Nirveda* (Depression).
- 2.) *Glani* (Langour).
- 3.) *Sanka* (Suspicion).
- 4.) *Asuya* (Jealousy).
- 5.) *Mada* (Intoxication).
- 6.) *Srama* (Fatigue).
- 7.) *Alasya* (Laziness).
- 8.) *Dainya* (Misery).
- 9.) *Cinta* (Anxiety).
- 10.) *Moha* (Fainting).
- 11.) *Smrti* (Memory).
- 12.) *Dhrti* (Fortitude).
- 13.) *Vrida* (Bashfulness).

- 14.) *Capalata* (Nervousness).
- 15.) *Harsa* (Joy).
- 16.) *Avega* (Agitation).
- 17.) *Jadata* (Slothfulness).
- 18.) *Garva* (Pride).
- 19.) *Visada* (Sorrow).
- 20.) *Autsukya* (Uneasiness).
- 21.) *Nidra* (Sleep).
- 22.) *Apasmara* (Forgetfulness).
- 23.) *Supta* (Sleep).
- 24.) *Vibodha* (Awakening).
- 25.) *Amarsa* (Intolerance).
- 26.) *Avahittham* (Dissimulation).
- 27.) *Ugrata* (Fierceness).
- 28.) *Mati* (Understanding).
- 29.) *Vyadhai* (Disease).
- 30.) *Unmada* (Insanity).
- 31.) *Maranam* (Death).
- 32.) *Trasa* (Dread).
- 33.) *Vitarka* (Argumentation).

Sattivika bhavas are based on the realistic quality; they are the mirror to see which rasa has evoked and they are also used as intersexual tool to see the effects between different readers at different time. The word *sattva* means emotion, the basic genuine emotion which constitutes our human body and nature. They are eight in number.

- 1.) *Stambha* (Stupefaction).
- 2.) *Sveda* (Sweating).
- 3.) *Romanca* (Thrill).
- 4.) *Svarabheda* (Break in voice).
- 5.) *Vepathu* (Trembling).
- 6.) *Vaivarnya* (Pallor).
- 7.) *Asru* (Tears).
- 8.) *Pralaya* (Swoon).

By the attempts of writers like *Anandwardna* and *Abhinavgupta*, the theory of rasa is associated with the theory

of *dhvani* (suggestions), because in Indian aesthetics, suggestion is soul of poetry. It is hard to evoke all emotions directly always so most of the time a good writer just suggest them. The reader should be intelligent enough to catch the suggestive power of text.

Actually, when the rasa is to be felt the nature of that object, by which it was evoked, changes itself. We can understand it like this that the crude emotion of the psychical level is translated into idealized emotion or the so called aesthetic emotion, which is thus not an emotion pre-existing to the expression of it, but the emotional charge on the experience of expressing a give emotion, felt as a new coloring which that emotion receives in being expressed. This makes the theory of rasa in aesthetics a very important from the point of view of cognitive sciences.

Indian aesthetics even call this feeling of emotion *Alaukika*, something which is more than normal but not supernormal because in west the concept of 'vital art' by Susanne K. Langer is so close to it. For both of them the important thing was that aesthetic sense of beauty, its experience is all different from the everyday ordinary experiences.

The critical overview of Rasa theory is not only enticing but also promising for its analytical methodology, hence can be applied to any kind of text- Eastern or Western.

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