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## Rasa Theory

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### Abstract

Indian literature and the world literature are two different entities. But there are many Indian works of art which are recognized as the world literature. Rasa theory is originated from ancient Indian literature which has been fully developed as per the requirements of aesthetic principles. This paper attempts to explore the origin of Rasa theory and its significance in modern literature.

**Key Words:** rasa theory, aesthetics, Indian literature

Indian literature and the world literature are two different entities. But there are many Indian works of art which are recognized as the world literature. The works like *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabharata*, *The Gita*, *The Ramcharit Manas*, *Sarasvatichandra*, *Gitanjali*, *Abhigyan Shakuntal*, *Meghdutam*, *Na Hanyate*, *Karna*, *Devdas*, *Chokerbali*, *Godan*, *Gaban*, *Kabir's Duha*, *Madhushala*, *Suraj Ka Satwa Ghoda*, *Vasant Vilas*, *Tamas*, *Aur Kitne Pakistan*, *Aandha Gav*, *Kya Bhulu Kya Yad Karu- an Autibiography by Harivanshrai Bachchan*, *Satya Na Prayogo*, *Mruchhchhakatikam*, etc. are recognized as the world literature. But I have tried to analyze the Rasa theory by Bharata in terms of the other world theory.

Indian aesthetics has a very rich heritage. There are five major schools of aesthetics that are- *Rasa*, *Dhvani*, *Alamkara*, *Riti* and *Vakrokti*. It has been believed that *Rasa* and *Dhvani* are the soul of poetry and *Alamkara*, *Riti* and *Vakrokti* are the body of poetry. In this respect, *Rasa-theory* bears greater importance.

The Rasa theory celebrates Vedic origin. In Vedas, the 'rasa' means 'Somras'- the most precious element for pleasure emerged from the Sea. In '*Atharva Veda*', the rasa means the juice of plants and grains which leads to the taste. In *Upanisad*, the 'rasa' means '*Atman*' For instance; "*Prano hi va anganan rasa*" which means the 'rasa' is "*Brahman*". Though, there was not any theory like the Rasa theory, it is erroneous to say that there was no rasa. The fact is that it was not designated. Even in the time of Valmiki, the 'rasa' was there. Valmiki says that the real poetry exists because of the outburst of the emotion. By praising the poet, he says that the poet is greater than a critic because he creates the world while the critic scrutinizes it.

The real pioneer of the Rasa theory is Bharata. He discusses his theory in his work *Natyashastra*. The 'rasa' can be defined as the effect of the literature or literary or poetic experience. It is related to the fluidity which is for the relishing part. It is even a kind of an emotional stage which takes a person out of world and connects with the larger universe. In other words, it compels an individual forget

his ego and transcends him for a while. One is completely out of himself, oblivious of his own personal joys and sorrows. Hence, one can experience the joy (*Anand*). It is analogous to the bliss experienced by the sage or the seer in the presence of God or the realization of the Ultimate reality. Poetry inspires the pleasure from the human being. Any unpleasant can be turned into pleasant by the element of 'rasa' but for that the reader has to abandon his ego and should be '*Sahradaya*' by enjoying, appreciating and understanding the intricacies of literary experiences.

Like Longinus, Bharata also gives the idea of sublime poetry. He says that good poetry is that which celebrates these three elements '*Satyam*', '*Shivam*' and '*Sundaram*'- because the poetry is the process of beautifying the things. He also suggests that '*Satyam*' turns into "*Shivam*' and '*Shivam*' turns into '*Sundaram*' by '*Bhavana*' or '*Kalpana*'. It can make us experience the 'rasa' which has to be relished by the reader. For that, the reader has to be '*Sahradaya*'. His ego has to be surrendered. His mind has to be concentrated. All these things are required because the Rasa theory aims at treating the literary works as a whole - in its totality, the author, the text and the enlightened reader.

It is astonishing that way back in the 200 B.C., Bharata has not only pin-pointed as to what constitutes the soul of poetry but also defined with precision the existence and characteristics of all the mental states and their role in the genesis of 'rasa.'

Bharata quite simply interprets the 'rasa' by drawing the analogies from medical and culinary worlds. According to him, the combination of different '*Bhavas*' makes for

the 'rasa' in the same way as a union of different components in medicine results in creating a particular effect, so as also the spectators enjoy a play composed with the help of different elements. In other words, they enjoy '*Sthayibhavas*' and feel delighted. Bharata calls this enjoyment as '*Natyarasa*'.

The most important thing for the Rasa theory is '*Sadharnikarana*'. It shows the parity between the author, the text and the reader. The enlightened reader merges his consciousness with the consciousness of the author by the medium of the text. Hence, the reader feels the same kind of ecstasy which is preciously felt by the author or the poet. '*Sadharanikarana*' is nothing but the common element shared by all the three-the poet, the text and the enlightened reader through which aesthetic pleasure is achieved. Therefore, it is rightly called '*Rasnishpatti*'. This is even the essence of any Romantic poetry.

In order to communicate the concrete process, Bharata presents an enormous maxim which is repeated by many other Sanskrit scholars over a period of time. "*Vibhava – Anubhav – Vyabhichari Samyogad Rasanishpatti*". The maxim clearly means that the union of '*Vibhava*', '*Anubhava*' and '*Vyabhicharibhava*' results into the production of the 'rasa.' There is a basic state of mind (*Sthayibhav*) which merges into the cause (*Vibhava*) which again merges into the effect (*Anubhava*) which further re-unites into something temporary (*Vyabhicharibhava*). This process makes possible the production of 'rasa' through generalization (*Sadharanikarana*).

We feel the resonances of the Rasa theory in many Western theories. At this juncture, a

comparison of Bharata with Aristotle might profitably be attempted. The only difference is that Aristotle's 'Catharsis' is a negative approach while Bharata's '*Rasanubhava*' is a positive approach. Since in the Indian poetics, what is involved is not only the elimination of 'Pity' and 'fear' but also the attainment of the supreme bliss. This essential difference between the two should mark the apparent advance made by the Indian rhetoricians over Aristotle. Yet, it is ironical that in the Indian context, even at present, Aristotle rather than Bharata should be invoked in the judgment of literature including our own. What I personally believe that one should not advocate a complete rejection of Aristotle but rather bemoaning the exclusion of Bharata from Indian culture.

Phenomenology and the Reader Response theory are evolved in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the Western critics such as Marcel Reynold, Albert Beguin, Jean Rosset, Jean Pierre Richard, Heidegger, George Poulet, J.Hills Miller, Husseral etc. Both these theories find their roots in the Rasa theory evolved in 200 B.C. by our great aesthician Bharata. The concept of generalization (*Sadharanikarana*) is nothing but the theory of phenomenology and the concept of the enlightened reader

(*Sahradaya*) is nothing but The Reader Response theory.

Since, it is the critical analysis; one must take into consideration certain limitations. They are as follow:

1. Like the stream of Consciousness technique, it demands a lot of attention on the part of the reader. In order to attain the aesthetic pleasure or the Supreme bliss, the reader has to be *Sahradaya* - the enlightened one.
2. Initially, it is written for the area of dramatics (Natyashastra). Therefore, it is more relevant to the drama than any other forms of literature.
3. Because it is more relevant to drama, it gives more importance to the performative aspects.
4. It is more concerned with the Semantics than Syntactic. Hence for this theory, the end is more important than the means.
5. It strictly deals with the theory rather than the evolution of the theory
6. It becomes prescriptive at times.

To surmise, one can say that though the Rasa theory falls into the category of Indian Literature, it has a world-wide relevance.

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