

Relevance of Rasa

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Natyasastra (2.c BCE), as is known to all, is an encyclopedic treatise on theatre by Bharata, himself of great actor and leader of the theatre group. More than being a text of 6000 verses in 37 chapters, it functioned as a fountain-head of all the theatrical activities in India for over two thousand years. It still remains a living tradition inspiring many young actors and directors all over the world. Yet revisiting the text will help us to understand the changes came to the theatre over the years. Rasa is the principle concept in Bharata's repertory but this has undergone many changes over the years.

1. Rasa as Taste: Views of the Ancients

No subject matter, at all, can be presented without rasa.

No meaning can be presented without rasa.

No aim *can* be served without rasa in a performance.

Production of rasa - Bharata uses three metaphors to make his idea clear about Rasa.

Shaadavoadayoh iva -Rasa as taste

Alatachakra (fire-wheel)

Analogy of king to denote the principle emotion

The focus in all the three is to the coherence of the parts.

Bhatalollatah 8th c. - Rasa is emotion heightened/strengthened.

Sankuka- 8th.c. - In the normal state it is emotion; when imitated it becomes rasa. Difference between rasa and *bhava* to the ancient school of thinkers is only in quantity, there is

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no change in quality. The theory of the ancients therefore, can be considered as a prescriptive theory centered on the production of a play. We cannot expect more as Natyasastra was intended as a hand-book for the dramatist and the actor; not for the spectator.

Analysis of worldly and aesthetic emotions

Emotion experienced by the poet

Emotion presented by the poet in the text.

Emotion of the actor

Emotion presented by the actor

Emotion of the spectator

Emotion experienced by the spectator while enjoying a performance.

1. Radical View- Rasa as the .Sublimation of Emotions. Bhattanayaka (9-10th C. CE) Aesthetic Experience mystified. *Sadhaaraniikaranam*(Trans-personalization) Not love for x; but love as such.

Abhinavagupta (950-1020 C.E)

Vaasana/somskaara as the emotional DNA of all human beings.

Aesthetic experience *as lokottara* (trans-worldly)

Abhivyakti- Expression of what is latent in the mind.

Atmavisranti- rest, repose of self - A kind of thrilling tranquility of the self.

The process of aesthetic enjoyment while watching the play is this:

sadharaniikarana(Trans-personalization) *hrdayasamvaada* (sympathetic response.) *tanmyiibhavanam* (Identification) *rasaasvaadam* (aesthetic enjoyment) *atmavisraanti* (repose of the self)

According to Bharata, *natya* is ontologically a recreation of *bhavas* (*bhavanukeertanam*).The harmony created by the coherence produces a taste (rasa). This taste is different from the tastes of its ingredients. The focus here is on coherence,

togetherness (*samyogo*). For Abhinavagupta, *natya* experientially is *rasa*, the sublimation of worldly emotions leading to ultimate tranquillity of the inner-self. The enjoyment of *rasa* in both these cases is devoid of 'conflict'.

2. Kerala's Contribution

Kerala deviates from this Pan-Indian tradition. A royal dramatist Kulasekhara (10th century) found the conventional mode of presentation inadequate to convey new ideas. He applied the doctrine of *dhvani* propounded by Anandavardhana to theatre. His performance-text is known as *Vyangyavyakhya*. He made two additions to Bharata's theatre :

1. Retrospective Narration.

Self introduction by the character in his/her first entry
Imaginative acting (*manodharmabhinaya*)

Multiple transformation of roles (*pakarnattam*)

2. Suggestive *import* (*dhvaniyojana*) revealing the hidden meaning and expansion of author's text.

The actor, thus, was endowed with three functions - Imitator, narrator and interpreter (*anukarta, akhyaata, vyaakhyaato*). These innovations were responsible for the emergence of the classical forms like *Kutiyattam*, *Krishnanattam* and *Kathakali* in Kerala.

3. Contemporary Theatre

The change in the concept of *rasa* on contemporary stage is linked with the impact of *Vyangyavyakhya* on theatre. It can be studied under two heads:

1. Multiple Interpretation

Now a days, after the emergence of the director, none dares to make mere re-telling on stage. Every presentation contains several sub-texts (*ananthopatha*). This is the result of *dhvaniyojana* prescribed in *Vyangyavyakhya*.

2. *Ekaharya* performances

Solo-performances, in many instances, try to replace the multi character-performances. This new phenomenon can be traced to

the technique of *pakomattam* employed on *Kutiyattam* stage. Technically speaking modern directors focus on *dhvani* than on *rasa*, *vastudhvani*, more than *rasadhvani* is convenient for them to communicate with the audience on contemporary issues. Though the former naturally leads to the latter, the shift in stress cannot be ignored.

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