

Aesthetic Experience of *Rasas* Through Literature and Indian Cinema

Dr. Gunjan Saxena, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Bareilly College, Bareilly

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Abstract: When a person of literary taste seeks the source to quench his aesthetic appetite, he finds a banquet in the form of art like music, dance, painting, sculpture, drama or literary works. His grasping proficiency of aesthetic pleasure enables him to relish inexplicable experiences. As a matter of fact, the basic and essential essence of these artistic flavors, lies in *Rasa* theory which is conspicuously associated with both categories of literature - *Drishyakavya* and *Shrutikavya*. In *Shrutikavya*, the notions coated with emotions are narrated orally like reciting a poem or telling a short story on radio while in *Drishyakavya*, sentiments and feelings of the character or the creator are manifested through the performances on stage, television or in reel. It may be staging of drama, music, dance, acting or any other artistic presentation. In this reference, *rasa* connotes enigmatic inward experience of the audience or of the readers while beholding a dramatic performance, perceiving art gallery, reading a literary piece and so on. As all of us have to welcome different moods and hues of vivid emotions in every phase of life, we can interestingly absorb aesthetic pleasure in relishing the literature or watching the movies (modern version of drama). This particular research endeavors to manifest and analyses the inevitable role of *rasas* in literature as well as in Indian cinema.

Keywords: Aesthetic pleasure, Indian cinema, Literature, *Rasa* theory, Transcendental experience.

Introduction

The foundation of the Indian aesthetic theory is erected by *Bharat Muni* in his Sanskrit treatise *Natyashastra* which is also known as *Natya-Veda*. He opined that dramaturgy is the amalgamation of all the arts including dance, drama, music, literature and provided to India a unique treatise with detailed analysis of all performing arts with special emphasis on the concept of *rasa*. It is quite conspicuous that *Rasa* theory is not only about 'natya' but it consists of dance, music, theatre, cinema, painting, sculpture and literature too. That's why 'Natya' refers to whatever is performed on the stage, not 'nataka' only and 'Shastra' denotes a book which defines the codes or the rules. So, this book, reveals

paramount features of *Natya* and *rasa* along with *Bhava*, the key ingredients of aesthetic literature. This theory is elaborated in sixth and seventh chapters of *Natyashastra*.

Rasa theory

In order to observe the selected literary pieces and some classic movies with microscopic lens of *Rasa* theory, we should know what are *rasa* and *bhava* and try to comprehend their role and relation in producing inexplicable pleasure in the core of consciousness. Frankly speaking, no word can define the term *Rasa* with accurate meaning yet if we fumble another word for it, it synonymizes ‘sentiment’ or ‘emotion’ which is aesthetically evoked in the heart of the audience or spectators. *Bharat Muni* opines that *rasa* is aesthetic pleasure and *bhava* is psychological state of mind. He highlights their relation and interconnection like this-

“*Na bhavahinoasti raso na bhavo rasvarjitaha*” (*Natya Shastra* ch. VI)

It indicates that *rasa* is not created without *Bhava* and *Bhava* has no existence if *rasa* is not promoted. Thus, emotion and psychological state of mind cause each other to exhibit themselves. To make it clearer, we can provide the image of ‘body’ to *bhava* and of ‘soul’ to *rasa*. While portraying the real essence of *rasa*, *Bharat Muni* clarifies that it can be relished only in artistic situation not in common set of affairs. No emotion can be converted into *rasa* if it is not aesthetically excited. The actors who play the part of Romeo Juliet, cannot imbibe aesthetic pleasure of *sringara rasa*. It can be experienced only by the spectators because they are not the active bearers of the particular emotion rather, they are the seers or observers. It can be comprehended with another example. If a man has lost his son at young age, his untimely death makes his father deeply shocked, crying bitterly and feeling the sadness to the core of the heart yet we cannot speak of him that he is drenched in *Karuna rasa*. But when we read about the heart rendering afflicted psychology of the fathers in the stories ‘The Fly’ by Mansfield and ‘The Lament’ by Chekov, we are doused with the pathetic feelings or *Karuna rasa*. In both of the classic literary stories, demise of their sons leaves them in unendurable torment. Similarly, Mrs. White (the mother) in the story ‘The Monkey’s Paw’ By W. W. Jacobs, is driven at the edge of insanity due to unexpected death of her son. Now, the dolorous mental state of these characters finds resemblance or invokes *Karuna rasa* in the depth of our heart. For its transcendental realization, the reader or the spectator should be soft hearted and ultimate sensitive (*sahridaya*). In the treatise, it is clearly indicated that model spectator must have aesthetic susceptibility, faculty of visualization, ruminative heart and dexterity to identify oneself with the aesthetic object. This psychological procedure becomes possible because human soul, (*chit* or consciousness) is a compendium of various emotions as *Bharat Muni* names it as *Bhava-Jagat* (the world of emotions). If we analyze minutely, we find that Art or any aesthetic approach universalizes psycho-synthetic shades of our soul and makes them a source of appeal to the spectators. In a nut shell, the actors who are active bearers and connector of emotions of the characters, gradually unfold the layers of emotions pervaded in *Bhava-Jagat* of the audience and invoke the pure artistic response of feelings which can be experienced and relished inwardly by the beholders. In Shakespearean play ‘Hamlet’, the Mousetrap scene is performed just to find out whether Hamlet’s uncle is

innocent or guilty regarding the death of Hamlet's father. This technique of catching the conscience is used there and the real *bhava* of the culprit's state of mind emerges from the quick evocation of emotions (*Rasa*).

Formation of *Rasa*

This kind of aesthetic pleasure or *rasa* is produced from the combination of Determinants (*vibhava*), consequents (*anubhava*) and transitory states (*vyabhicharibhava*). As *Bharat Muni* formulated it-

“*Vibhavanubhavavyabhichari samyogat rasanispatti*” (*Natya Shastra*
ch.VI)

In Rasaesthetics, Schechner elaborates this formula that “*rasa* is a cumulative result of *vibhava* (stimulus), *anubhava* (involuntary actions) and *vyabhichari bhava* (voluntary reactions). For example, just when various condiments and sauces and herbs and other materials are mixed, a taste is experienced. Likewise, with the different *bhavas*, (emotions) the *sthayi bhava* (permanent emotions expressed inside) becomes a *rasa*.” (Schechner 29)

To recapitulate, *sthayi bhavas* are inborn, innate and inherent in the psyche of all human beings. They cannot be gained through training. Other *bhavas* which are mentioned in *rasa sutra* are subordinate to *sthayi bhavas*. *Sthayi bhavas* are eight in number while *vyabhichari bhavas* are thirty-three. These are called *vyabhichari* because of their transitory existence. They emerge and vanish like bubbles. In order to exemplify it, we take Shakespeare's 'Othello'. Othello possesses pure love for his wife Desdemona. Being entangled in further crucial circumstances, he becomes jealous by anticipating her illicit engagement with Cassio. He has fear and suspicion of losing her and utters wrathful words to her because of credulous temperament. But the durable and dominating emotions underneath all these temporary sentiments (like repulsion, jealousy, fear credulity etc.) is love and love is the *sthayi bhava* of *Sringar Rasa*. Othello declares openly-

‘I'll kill thee and love thee after.’ (294)

Next term is *vibhava* that is the cause of any basic emotion. In literary perspective it is called an excitant. It is of two kinds – *Alambana* and *Uddipana*. The characters who are acting on the stage and arising the *bhava* of particular *rasa*, are *alambana vibhava* and the background on the stage, nature and enhancing situations are *uddipana vibhava*. ‘Storm Scene’ in ‘King Lear’ plays the role of stimulator to reveal prevalent dilemma the mind of King Lear. Likewise, in ‘Hamlet’, Gertrude's hasty marriage to Claudius i.e., her brother-in-law, same banquet of marriage and funeral, frequent visits of his father's ghost- all these are determinants which stimulate the pathetic emotion. These stimulating situations are enhancer or *Uddipana* while Claudius and Gertrude can be said *Alambana* or evoking characters. *Anubhavas*, on the other hand, are the external display of the emotion provoked by the *vibhavas*.

The formation of *rasa* is related to these categories of emotions- *Klishtha*, *Aklishta* and *Tatastha*. *Klishtha* emotions are against our liking and incompatible to our instincts of pleasure yet they occupy the same potency to pour out *rasa* in our mind. *Klishtha* emotions includes pathetic (*Karuna*), fearful (*Bhayanak*), nauseating (*Vibhastsa*) and horrible (*Raudra*)

rasa while *Aklisha* emotions are those which provide jovial mood and which are homogenous to our wishes and desires. It includes amorous (*Sringar*), ludicrous (*Hasya*) heroic (*vira*) and wonderous (*Adbhuta*). *Tatastha* is the state of the mind when we are at the equal distance from pain to pleasure. It contains *Shanta Rasa*.

Kinds of *rasa*

The spectrum of emotions and moods permeates in literature, music, drama, Arts, movies and in our lives too. It will be interesting to fumble the influence of these *rasas* upon literary works and cinema both. Each and every shade of mood can be exemplified through literary pieces and Indian movies. The poetic verses of *Natyashastra* seem to be the source of inspiration to India cinema not only in depicting the fluctuations of different sentiments but also in enhancing the artistic aura with dance and music. In other words, Indian cinema proves to be a grand feast where the spectator remains free and enthusiastic to taste and relish various *rasas* (emotions) as sumptuous dishes, performed by the actors and actresses. The first one is *Sringara rasa* which portrays the bliss of life accompanied with love. Its durable emotion is *Rati*. It is reflected on the stage or in the movies by spring season, garlands, flowers, beauty, companionship etc. The actions which we perceive as a consequence of generating *sringara rasa* are movement of eyebrows, sidelong glances, mesmerizing smile, blush on the cheeks etc. Perennial love between Radha and Krishna can be referred to as an immortal example of blissful aesthetic feeling in Indian culture as well as literature. This *rasa* possesses dominance and paramountcy over all the emotions in Indian movies. Films like *Mughal E-Azam*, *Ek duje ke liye*, *Devdas*, *Kabhi kabhi*, *Madhumati* etc. stimulate the emotions of love (*Sringara rasa*) in the psyche of viewers at its apex. Likewise, the works of literature are also replete with the major theme of forbidden love like *Romeo Juliet*, *Gift of Magi*, *All for Love*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Porphyria's Lover*, *Last Ride Together* and so on. Depiction, picturization, surroundings and acting of the characters- all these enhance the passion of love which identifies the psychological state of audience mind and assist to generate *rasaraj i.e., sringara rasa*.

Next is *Hasya rasa* which has fixed psychological state named *Hasa* (laughter). It may be aroused by mimicry, incoherent talks, physical actions of joker. For example, the witty, comic dialogues between Launcelot and his father in Shakespeare's 'Merchant of Venice', produce the real sense of comedy and cause *hasya rasa* in the deep psyche of the audience. In it, the character is not bound to laugh with us rather his words and action provoke laughable sensations. Actually, the action on the stage is directly linking to the *bhava* which is already present in us and this linking process is creating the *bhava* of *rasa*. This amusing element can be found profusely in ancient literature as well as in modern perspectives. Kapil Sharma Show, *Bhabhi ji Ghar Par Hain* (serial) and Memes are the modern stylish exemplars of *hasya rasa*. Iconic movies like *Half Ticket*, *Padosan*, *Golmaal* etc. are ultimate sources of relishing *hasya rasa*. The presence of clown in almost every comedy of Shakespeare reveals the essential involvement of laughter at its fullest.

Then we come on *Karuna rasa* with its permanent *Bhava Shoka*. The first and primary reason to evoke this pathetic emotion is death of some near and dear. Other

conditions to enhance pathos are loss of wealth or fame, captivity, murder etc. We can exemplify the scene of confinement in *Krishna Lila* when Devki and Nand were kept in Prison by Kansa. The portrayal of their pathetic conditions is quite enough to bring tears in our eyes. Actors or characters reflect these emotions by paralytic way, shedding tears, fainting and even insanity and death. The classic film 'Sadma' acted by *Kamal Hasan* and *Sridevi* can be referred here. In it, the hero loses his own identity in order to recover the mental illness of the heroine, and one fine day, she refuses even to recognize him. Consequently, he loses his sanity and got psychological shock. Such conditions are enough to create the poignancy in the psyche of the audience. In 'Othello', the demise of innocent Desdemona creates piteousness and makes a sentimental scar in the heart of the beholders. She is too pure to utter even the word 'whore' herself while she is blamed to be a whore by her husband. Falder in Galsworthy's 'Justice' suffers traumatic miseries just for the sake of his love for Ruth. His continuous fall produces overwhelming passions for him in the mental realm of the audience. Innumerable works of literature are there to have the dexterity in formation of *Karuna rasa* like Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, Hardy's novels and many more. Thus, this elementary state of *Shoka* is deeply connected with *Karuna rasa* that is produced by these determinants.

Raudra rasa is connected to the *sthayi bhava- Krodh*, anger, fury- the essential psychological state of mind. The determinants by which anger is aroused are abusive language, loose talks, high pitch of voice etc. The dramatic modes to show it by the characters are blood-stained eyes, fight, swollen nostrils, screams, teeth grinding, furious expressions and so on. Having the *klisha* layering in nature, this *rasa* becomes inevitable while characterizing the wicked personas, villains, devils, tyrannical rulers like *Ravana*, *Kansa*, *Gabbar Singh*, *Mogambo* etc. Although in *Natya Shastra*, only male's wrathful reaction is discussed, yet in mythologies, literature and cinema, we find that the intensity of rage insulates the catastrophe of feminine exploitation too. In this reference, we can observe that *raudra rasa* assists not only to express the evils and negativities of the antagonists, but also to eliminate the existence of evil by evoking the wrath against it. Contemporary plays like Dina Mehta's 'Brides are not for Burning' and Manjula Padmanabhan's 'Lights Out' prove that mental ferocity and demonic *krodh* may emerge from adverse circumstances and misfortunes also. In the film 'Ek Duje Ke Liye', *Kamal Hassan* does *Bhartnatyam* with potential stuff just to release the rage against fate that keeps his love away from him. *Shiv Tandav* is the perfect example of pouring out the wrathful emotions (*raudra rasa*) to the extremity. Thus, *raudra rasa* conveys the essence of the plot in more convincing way as it is again the identifying psychological state of mind of the audience.

The essential ingredient or the *sthayi bhava* that is needed for *Vira rasa* is *Utsah* that dwells permanently in our mind. It is interconnected to energy as without energy, heroic adventure cannot take place. The main components of it are enthusiasm, justice to the sufferers, punishment to the evil doers, chivalrous deeds, courage etc. Due to his bravery Macbeth is applauded as 'Bellona's bridegroom' and 'Valor's minion'. Biopics on our historical heroes such as *Tipu Sultan*, *Tanaji*, *Mani Karnika*, *Major*, *Sher Shah*, *The Legend*

of *Bhagat Singh* etc. fill us with patriotic feelings and generate *Vira rasa* in the mind of the audience to a great extent. All our epics like *Paradise Lost*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharat*, *Abhigyan Shakuntalam* and umpteen mythological stories are well stocked with *Vira rasa*. Such presentations and performances charge the spectators with electrifying sensations and leave them astonished because of *utsah* as the result of *rasa nishpatti*.

As we know, to be scared is a part of life and psychological reaction of human beings. That's why *Bhayanaka rasa* is also included by *Bharat Muni* in *Navrasa*. Its permanent emotion (*sthayi bhava*) is *Bhaya* i.e., fear. When we see some horrendous scene acted on the stage, we feel panicky inside us. Pale face, open mouth, being spellbound, fainting, trembling, sweating, parched lips are *anubhava* of this *rasa*. In the movie 'The Kashmir Files', endless cycle of violence, genuine affliction and unbearable separatism give us goosebumps of terror. Appearance and dialogue delivery of *Gabbar Singh* in *Sholay* increase the heartbeats of the spectators. The last soliloquy of Dr Faustus in Marlow's tragedy 'Dr Faustus' approves the fact that *abhinivesh* (fear of death) lies in the depth of every psyche. His fear of being tormented forever in the hell creates *bhayanaka rasa* in our mind and warns us to keep distance from devilish approaches to get fame. The plays of Harold Pinter also depict the themes of memory and fear and keeps the audience spellbound.

Now something similar to it is '*Vibhatsa rasa*' where we do feel the sense of humiliation or disgust. It is directly linked with the *sthayi bhava jugupsa*. In fact, the theme of movie or literary work is like a banquet or cuisine served before us. Every spice is important if it is in right proportion. The conditions in which this *rasa* is evoked are not favorable or interesting. That's why it comes in the category of *klisha* emotion. Calpurnia's dream in 'Julius Caesar' seems unpleasant and bizarre as she dreams that Caesar's statue sprouted blood from a hundred places and Romans are washing their hands in that fountain of blood. In Jayanta Mahapatra's poem 'Hunger', a teenager daughter of a fisherman is handed over to a customer to be seduced and raped just because of sexual 'hunger' of that customer and starving condition of the fisherman. It creates heinous feeling in the heart of the audience towards such repulsive issues of society.

Another interesting emotion is *Adbhut Rasa* in which we feel wonder at the sight of something unexpected and beyond our imagination. The feeling of astonishment i.e., *vismaya* becomes the cause to form *Adbhuta Rasa* in our mind. Its consequents are- moving head to and fro with mouth opening and eyes widening and uttering wow expressions. When a person sees the series of Harry Potter for the first time, he is led into another unbelievable world with thrilling wondrous sensation and feels himself drenched with *adbhuta rasa*. *Jurassic World*, *Minions 2*, *Fantasy Island*, *Spider Man* etc. are the films which make us dived into the world of wonder. Likewise, the latest movies *Ram Setu*, *Chamatkar*, *Brahmastra* and *Unchai* are enough to stimulate adventurous as well as thrilling experience not only because of theme but also due to marvelous excellent picturization of natural scenes. In *Unchai* three retired friends go on a trek to the Everest base camp. Their journey starts as an adventure and soon turns into a personal journey of emotional enlightenment. The involvement of magical things, supernatural, ghosts, incredible occurrences or impossible possibilities seem essential to bring

the perfect effect of this *rasa*. Paradise Lost, Alice in Wonderland, Gulliver's Travels, Jungle Book are the finest examples of it.

Although only eight *rasas* are elaborated by *Bharat Muni*, ninth one- *Shanta Rasa* was added by the great commentator of *Natyashastra- Abhinav Gupta*. This *rasa* completes the group of *Navarasa*. *Shanta Rasa* represents complete harmony between the mind, body and the universe. As it is the state of peacefulness and tranquility, its *sthayi bhava* is *sama* or the state of being stoic. Its *vibhava* is knowledge, or truth, *anubhava* is self-control and meditation and *vyabhichari bhava* is calmness, closed eyes, purity etc. In the movie 'Guide' (based on R. K. Narayan's novel 'The Guide') the hero becomes the symbol of spirituality at last and creates the transcendental sensation in the mind of the audience. Likewise, 'Satyam Shivam Sundram', The character of Ophelia in 'Hamlet' creates pure and innocent feelings in us. In 'King Lear', Cordelia also conveys the saintly notions and stoic feelings towards every phase of life.

Recapitulation

Schechner in *Rasaesthetics* writes that, "Rasa is flavor, taste, the sensation one gets when food is perceived, brought within reach, touched, taken into mouth, chewed, mixed, savored and swallowed." (Schechner 29) Indian cinema seems to follow such traditional unique *sutras* of aesthetic aspects by including all the norms of *rasa* experience while providing relish and saturation to the audience. In comparison to the theatrical performances, movies have added more realistic and convincing diction not only in formation of *rasa* but also in adoption of dance and music. The spectators smoothly experience the kaleidoscope of emotions presented by Indian cinema at its fullest and passing through various fluctuations of *rasas*, they are finally blessed with transcendental feeling of *Shanta rasa*. Same happens with literature where the keen observer realizes the purgation of emotions at last. As a crux of matter, our consciousness possesses various psycho-synthetic spectrum, which are shown in different modes of life. They aesthetically get identification with what is performed on stage, in movies or through literary works and make us quite saturated with inexplicable transcendent experience.

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