

An Introduction to Indian Literary Theory
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Lecture- 19
The Beginning of Rasa Discourse in Literary Theory

Hello everyone, in the previous lecture, we were familiarizing ourselves with the theory of rasa propounded by Bharata. We discussed Bharata's rasasutra and familiarized ourselves with the aesthetic elements that Bharata considers responsible for the generation of rasa. What happened to rasa theory after Bharata? Did the theoreticians after Bharata take up the questions which Bharata left unanswered? Unfortunately, we need to answer this question in the negative.

After Bharata's Natyasastra, that is believed to have been composed in the third century, there is hardly anything substantial available on the discourse of rasa for some time. The next major text to talk about the idea of rasa in the field of literary theory was Bhamaha's Kavyalankara in the seventh century. But in Kavyalankara, Bhamaha took the discussion of rasa to a much narrow direction that the scholars of literary theory could not ever expect.

Instead of taking the discussion of Bharata forward, Bhamaha simply relegated the position of rasa to the realm of figures of speech. When we think about the treatment of the concept of rasa in the critical corpus of Bhamaha, we also need to keep in mind that this is the first instance of the idea of rasa being extrapolated from natya to kavya. Pollock observes that, "Precisely when and how the concept of rasa extended from drama to narrative poetry, from the seen to the heard and the read, and with what consequences for aesthetic theory, is something we need to puzzle out from our textual sources". According to the available historical evidence, Rudra Bhatta is the sole author who explicitly declares his extrapolation of the theory of rasa from the domain of drama to poetry. He describes the difficulty that he faced in such a process and the consequences of it.

Bhāmaha subsumes the idea of *rasa* under three verbal expressions of emotions such as *rasāvat* or rasa-laden expression, *preyaḥ* or ‘affectionate utterance’ and *ūrjasvin* or ‘haughty declaration’. As an example of affectionate utterance, Bhāmaha cites the words of Vidura, the wise half-brother of Dhrtarastra and the well-wisher of Pandava to Krisna. Scholars opine that the citation is from an unknown Mahabharata play and it possibly refers to Krisna’s visit to the abode of Vidura. The verse that Bhāmaha cites as an example of *preyaḥ* or affectionate utterance is as follows:

“The joy that I experience today by your coming to my house, Govinda.
I will have in the future only if you return.”

According to Bhāmaha, a rasa-laden statement is one where emotions such as erotic is clearly shown, as in the following example: “The queen appeared, no longer disguised as a religious mendicant” (XX). The example of the haughty declaration is Karna’s words to Shalya when the snake-arrow which he shot to kill Arjuna returned without accomplishing the mission. He asks: “Dear Shalya, does Karna shoot an arrow twice?”

Like Bhāmaha before him, Daṇḍin also reserves no special category for *rasa* other than that of figuration. Pollock’s observation is noteworthy here. He says that, “For Daṇḍin, as for Bhamaha, *rasa* was native to dramaturgical discourse, where it was more fully explained; in poetry, by contrast, the only category available for its analysis, was the figure of speech. It would take several more centuries for it to be conceived of as the dominant feature of literary work, in fact, the singular feature that distinguished literature from all other forms of language use.”

In Daṇḍin’s *Kāvyaḍarśa*, the idea of *rasa* is used in three different senses—first as a general term for any deviant linguistic expression, and secondly as a general term for any sweet poetic style. It should be noted that both the first and second usages reflect the general conception that literary language needs to be different from the ordinary form of speech, and it is its defamiliarized form that appears enjoyable to the readers.

Finally, Daṇḍin considers *rasa* as a technical term for various instances of affective expressions such as *preyaḥ rasāvat*, and *ūrjasvin*. Although among these three categories only the second one, that is *rasāvat*, is specifically connected with *rasa*, all three are clearly

connected with the expressions of emotion, and this is clearly indicated by Daṇḍin who says all these three categories portray heightened feeling. It is also possible to think that Daṇḍin sees rasa as something that is residing in the character.

This is evident from Daṇḍin's treatment of the "rasa-laden statement" where he says that this trope of emotion specifically refers to the intensified emotion of the character. For him, aesthetic emotion resides in the character's direct discourse, and never in external descriptions. As we saw in the case of Bharata, we can say for certain that the idea of rasa as conceived by Daṇḍin is internal to the work. He does not see rasa as the aesthetic response of readers to a text.

Now let us one again turn our attention to the three ways in which Daṇḍin understands the concept of rasa. As I told you before, Daṇḍin first considers rasa as the essential quality of a poem to be sweet and mellifluous. In *Kāvyaḍarśa*, Daṇḍin says: "(1.51) A poem is defined as "sweet" when it has rasa. Rasa is found in both the language and the subject matter, and insightful people become intoxicated by it like bees by honey". The observation of Daṇḍin's commentator Vadijānghala is particularly noteworthy here. He says that, "the author is distinguishing the language quality from what will later be defined as the ornament called the "rasa-laden" statement. For the latter is concerned with the erotic and other rasas, whereas what is meant here is the sweetness of the very words themselves." Now the second question that he deals with is the way in which this 'enjoyable quality' or 'rasa' is achieved. Daṇḍin says that this can be achieved by keeping words together in such a manner that they sound similar to our ears. Daṇḍin says, "When one word is experienced as similar to another by reason of this or that sound, we have what is called "proximity of words." This conveys rasa". Vadijānghala's commentary on this will further explain Daṇḍin's view. Vadijānghala says that the two devices by which this quality can be achieved include alliteration and the proximity of similar sounding words. Vadijānghala observes "Similar sounding words, when they are placed in proximity, can generate rasa in poetry, since their proximity will appear sweet. It is this "proximity of similar sounding words" that is called `rasa and it is held in high esteem by southerners".

Now the second use of the word rasa by Daṇḍin in *Kāvyaḍarśa*. Daṇḍin says that the word rasa can also be used to refer to the figurative deviation of speech. Daṇḍin is of the view that plain speech or report does not make poetry. Such a speech will be bereft of rasa or

sweetness. For him what makes a piece of writing a literary artifact is the figurative deviation of speech. According to him, the expression—“Hey maiden, why don’t you love me who loves you a lot?”—is *grāmya* (uncouth and unpolished), as it explicitly expresses a man’s desire for a woman. For him this is devoid of *rasa* or attractiveness. But on the other hand if we say: ‘The God of love, that cruel person, is pitiless to me, but he holds no grudge to you, my pretty-eyed lass,’ then the sense is sophisticated and generates *rasa*”. This appears striking to the readers.

Finally, we will come to the three figures of speech which Daṇḍin considers to have the ability to exude aesthetic emotion. These three figures of speech are same as the ones that Bhāmaha lists. These include *preyaḥ* or affectionate utterance, *rasāvat* or *rasa*-laden and *ūrjasvin* or haughty utterance. An affectionate utterance, Daṇḍin says, is an expression of heightened affection. The following is an example of *preyaḥ* or affectionate utterance that Daṇḍin cites. “The moon, the sun, the wind, the earth, the sky, the sacrificer, fire, and water—who are we to bypass all your forms, Lord, and see you in your very person?”. These words are spoken by King Ratavarman, upon seeing Lord Śiva in front of him. The figure of speech called *rasāvat* or *rasa*-laden is a statement beautified by the presence of a *rasa*. The example that Daṇḍin cites is the statement where the erotic emotion is portrayed. “The woman I thought was dead and hoped to rejoin by taking my own life — here she stands, my Avanti! How could I, while still alive, have gotten this woman back?”. Vadijāghala’s observation is of particular importance here. He says all these emotions need to be properly heightened to be manifested as *rasa*. Vadijāghala observes, “What the author means is this: desire that remains unintensified, existing through the inner principle and having the nature of a particular mental formation, will be unmanifest. In this state it is called an emotion, and that is why “emotion” is described as a purely mental transformation (and hence unmanifest). This same emotion when stimulated becomes manifest through some “reaction,” understood as the verbal or other register of acting. At that point it turns into what is called *rasa*. This is why it has been said that it is the emotions, once made manifest, that receive the name *rasa*”. In this section on *rasa*-laden or *rasavat*, Daṇḍin also shows the examples of statements which are laden with other *rasas*.

Finally, Daṇḍin cites the example of the haughty expression. What Daṇḍin quotes as an example of *ūrjasvin* is the speech of a prideful man who frees an enemy seized in the battle.

The following is the verse quoted by Daṇḍin. “Do not fear I will take vengeance for your crimes: my sword would never fall upon an enemy in retreat.”

Although the idea of *rasa* was an important point of discussion in *nāṭyaśāstra* and was well known to literary critics from Bhāmaha onwards, none of the literary theoreticians until Udbhaṭa considered it to be a criterion of literariness or an independent category. For them, “*rasa* was clearly subordinate to and therefore easily subsumed under a larger discourse on figures; it did not constitute the heart of literariness” (Pollock, *A Rasa Reader* 10-11).

In Udbhaṭa’s critical corpus also the idea of *rasa* largely remains as a figure of speech. By adding ‘quiescent’ or *samāhita* to the already existing categories of *preyaḥ* (the affectionate), *rasāvāt* (the *rasa*-laden) and *ūrjasvin* (the haughty speech), Udbhaṭa increases the number of *rasa*-related figures from three to four. It is important to note that Udbhaṭa is not merely increasing the number of *rasa*-related figures, rather he also radically redefines the these figures.

In Udbhaṭa’s theory, “Affectionate utterance” or *preyaḥ* is clearly an “intimation” of a *bhava*, which is not properly developed into the form of a *rasa*. According to Udbhaṭa, any *bhāva* can be called a *preyas*, for affection (*preman*) is used to cover all the *bhāvas*. Udbhaṭa says, “Poetry which is composed so as to contain the indications of the *bhavas* like *rati*, etc. by means of *anubhavas*, etc. is said to contain *preyas*. Since we have already familiarized ourselves with the examples of this figure of speech, I do not intend to cite a verse here. The thing that we particularly need to keep in our mind here is that in *preyas*, the emotions remain at the level of *bhava*, they are not fully developed. Now what about *rasa*-laden or *rasavat*? In the case of *rasavat*, the emotions are fully developed and are clearly manifested.

He also mentions the components conducive for the production of *rasa* namely *vibhāva* (foundational factor), *anubhāva* (stimulant factors), *vyabhicāribhāva* (transitory emotion), *sthāyibhava* (stable emotion), and *svaśabda* (proper name).

Ānandavardhana criticises Udbhaṭa for incorporating the proper name of *rasas* as one of the causes for the production of *rasa*. According to Ānanda, mere names of *rasas* like *śringāra* or *hāsya* cannot generate *rasa*. Even in instances where the name of the *rasa* is mentioned, *rasa* is generated not because of the proper name of the *rasa*, but because of the presence of *vibhava*, etc.

The last *rasa*-related figure of speech that he mentions is *ūrjasvin*. Udbhata transforms “Haughty declaration” into an utterance marked by social impropriety, and hence reconceived as the “semblance of *rasa*” (4.7). This is a point of debate between Kuntaka and Udbhata. The example given by Udbhata for *ūrjasvin* is Śiva’s indecorous advance towards Pārvatī before their marriage. Udbhata’s argument is that *ūrjasvi* or the indecorous representation of *rasas* and *bhāvas* is a figure of speech. Kuntaka does not subscribe to Udbhata’s view that *ūrjasvin* is an *alaṅkāra*, since it tampers with the propriety of the period. Kuntaka observes that *rasa*, *bhāvas*, etc. that are bound together in an improper (*anaucitya*) fashion not only impede the improvement of *rasa*, but also spoil it altogether. He asks how a *rasa* marred by impropriety can shine forth as an ornament (405). According to Udbhata, *ūrjasvin* will always result in *rasābhāsa* or semblance of *rasa*.

Rasābhāsa is that situation wherein a particular *rasa* fails to come into being—despite the presence of all the components congenial for its production—because the emotion is presented in an indecorous manner or is directed towards an improper object.

According to Udbhata, “Any sentiment or feeling that is developed in an improper and objectionable manner is called *rasābhāsa* or *bhāvābhāsa*”. A classic example of *rasābhāsa* that Abhinavagupta cites in his commentary on Ānandavardhana’s *Dhvanyāloka* is Rāvaṇa’s love for Sītā. According to Abhinavagupta, Sītā being another man’s wife and a divine being, Rāvaṇa’s advances towards Sītā are highly improper and do not generate *śrīṅgāra rasa*, although Rāvaṇa does everything that one is supposed to do to express erotic emotion. Abhinavagupta says, “*Rasa* appears when a stable state of mind (*cittavrtti*), constantly directed toward a proper object, is aesthetically relished. The improper variety (*ābhāsa*) of *rasa* or *bhāva* appears when either of them is directed toward an improper object, as when Rāvaṇa’s love is directed toward Sītā”. It is called semblance of *rasa* because the elements required for the generation of *rasa* fail to produce that particular *rasa*. All that we see is mere shadow of the *rasa*, not *rasa per se*.

The final contribution of Udbhata is his redefinition of the idea of *samāhita*. It was an ornament that Bhamaha and Dandin had not even thought of as pertaining to the realm of affect. In the critical framework of Bhamaha and Dandin *samāhita* means the description of a happy coincidence. Udbhata completely changed the definition and brought it into connection

with *rasa*: "For Udbhata, *amāhita* refers to a passage concerned with the cessation of *rasa*, *bhāva*. or their improper varieties, in such a way that there is no trace of a new *anubhāva*."

Now, it's time to wrap up the class. Let us take a look at all the major concepts that we discussed in this lecture. Although the idea of *rasa* was an important point of discussion in *nāṭyaśāstra* and was well known to literary critics from Bhāmaha onwards, none of the literary theoreticians until Udbhata considered it to be a criterion of literariness or an independent category. For them, "*rasa* was clearly subordinate to and therefore easily subsumed under a larger discourse on figures; it did not constitute the heart of literariness" (Pollock, *A Rasa Reader* 10-11).

Bhāmaha subsumes the idea of *rasa* under three verbal expressions of emotions such as *rasāvat* or *rasa*-laden expression, *preyaḥ* or 'affectionate utterance' and *ūrjasvin* or 'haughty declaration' (53-55). Like Bhāmaha before him, Daṇḍin also reserves no special category for *rasa* other than that of figuration. In Daṇḍin's *Kāvyaḍarśa*, the idea of *rasa* is used in two different senses—first as a general term for any deviant linguistic expression (48, 50, 58-60) and secondly as a technical term for various instances of affective expressions such as *rasāvat*, *preyaḥ* and *ūrjasvin* (247).

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