

29. Ibid., p. 90.
30. See: *Understanding Mysticism*, (ed.) Richard Woods, Image Books, Garden City, NY, 1980. Also: *Mysticism and the Modern Mind*, (ed.) Alfred P. Stiernotte, Liberal Arts Press, New York, 1959.
31. Ibid., p. 91.
32. The above literal reading of Descartes in the context of traditional mysticism also makes a number of his other claims much more understandable. These include (1) his claim to have an idea of unbounded consciousness ('God'),<sup>2</sup> his claim that this idea and that of self are the two most 'clear and distinct' Ideas that he has, and that they are both innate, and<sup>3</sup> that he experienced 'light' and great bliss in the contemplation of this 'idea' of God. The fact that such a subjective mode of experience exist of course says nothing about the objective truth of its contents, but the supposition that Descartes may have had this experience might make his insistence on his doctrine of clear and distinct Ideas somewhat easier to understand.
33. Both Hume and Kant kept open at least the logical possibility of experience that could fulfil the otherwise rejected notion of self. Hume allows the possibility that someone else might be able to conceive of a notion of self existing entirely without perceptions, but adds: 'I must confess I can reason no longer with him. All I can allow him is, that he may be in the right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular' (Hume D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, (ed.) L.A. Selby Bigge, Oxford, 1958, p. 252). Kant allows the logical possibility of experience of 'noumena' such as the self completely independent of all perceptions, but he maintains that it is impossible for us as human beings not only to have but even adequately to conceive of such experience. (Kant I., *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N.K. Smith, New York, 1995, p. 157. See also pp. 90, 164, 250, etc.)
34. This thought experience is first articulated by Ibn Sina, *al-Shifa* [De Anima], Tehran, 1978, V.I, p. 281. Copleston describes Avicenna's thought-experiment as follows: 'Imagine a man suddenly created, who cannot see or hear, who is floating in space and whose members are so disposed that they cannot touch one another. On the supposition that he cannot exercise the senses and acquire the notion of being through sight or touch, will he thereby be unable to form the notion? No, because he will be conscious of and affirm his own existence, so that, even if he cannot acquire the notion of being through external experience, he will at least acquire it through self-consciousness.' Copleston F., *A History of Philosophy*, London, 1968, v. II, part I, p. 216. See also: Edwards P. (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, London, 1972, vol. 1, p. 228.
35. Hume D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, (ed.), L.A. Selby Bigge, Oxford, 1958, p. 252. See also pp. 634-5.

## Rasa—The Bane of Indian Aesthetics

DAYA KRISHNA

Jaipur

Indian thinking about the arts has been centred to such an extent about what has been called *rasa* in the tradition that it has come almost to be completely identified with it. There are other concepts which the cognoscenti know such as *dhvani* or *vakrokti* but they have always been treated not as rivals or alternatives but only as subservient or supplementary to it. The concept has remained central in all thinking and has never been questioned or criticized or critically evaluated for its adequacy for the understanding of all the arts which the civilization pursued in its long history. Yet, rooted as it was in the reflection on *nāṭya* which was the concern of Bharata in his well-known treatise on the subject, it should have been obvious to the blindest observer that it could not do justice to all the other art forms which have nothing to do with the representation of the human situation or situations in the context of which Bharata explicitly *defined* it and which the dramatic performance was supposed to portray. It is, of course, true that Bharata does discuss—even in substantive detail—other arts, particularly dance and music, but *always* as subservient in the depiction of the mood or rather the 'emotional feel' of the situation seen as defining and constituting it, and *not* as something *independent* of it, having a world of its own, with its own *puruṣārtha*, autonomy and values which had only an accidental relation to the human situations as portrayed in the play. The arts could not have a 'free' life of their own within the context of the performance of the play for, if permitted to do so, this will interfere and even destroy that which the performance was supposed to achieve. Bharata was aware of this, but he did not care as, for him, it alone was *sarvaśilpapravartakam*, and not just *sarvakarmānudarśanam*. What is, however, strange is that the whole

subsequent tradition, with rare exceptions, accepted what he had said on the subject.

Each art is autonomous and independent and to think of it only in the context of *Nāṭya*—or *Kāvya*, as was done later—is not only to do injustice to them but fail to understand that which pervades, encompasses and envelops them all, distinguishing the activity that creates them and the distinctive *puruṣārtha* that sets it apart from all the other activities of man. The idea of *alankāra* developed in the context of reflection on *kāvya* proved as inadequate as that of *rasa* developed in relation to the reflection on *nāṭya* in Bharata. The former misled the thinkers into treating all art as being a 'craft', just as the latter was misled by its understanding of the human situation in terms of the 'emotional meaning' it has, and not the ideal value or values it pursues in terms of a meaningfulness, which includes man's relation not only with other men and women, but also nature, transcendence and one's own self. Art does involve prolonged apprenticeship, learning the 'tricks of the trade', amassing 'skills' of all sorts, but it is not just this. Also, human beings do live immersed in a world of feelings and emotions, but the 'enterprise' of human life is never just that. Man seeks something beyond what he is, something more than just feeling or emotion, and the creation of art itself is an evidence of this, just as his enterprises in other fields such as 'knowledge' and 'action' do. Art is not an easy thing to achieve, and a 'hedonistic' perspective on it which the *rasa* theory—bereft of all its subtle subterfuges—is basically incorrect as it forgets the far-reaching Indian insight that man is defined by what he 'seeks' which basically involves the distinction between 'is' and 'ought', and not what he 'is'. What is the ideal seeking involved in the creation of *nāṭya* or of any other art, Bharata does not ask; nor does anybody else in the long tradition of thinking on this subject in a country which has prided itself in thinking that every *śāstra* must have a *prayojana*, if it is to be a meaningful enterprise significant enough for man to engage in. Uddyotakara, the well-known Naiyāyika belonging to the early seventh century AD, formulated the contention in the clearest manner when he said that every *vidyā* has its own *niḥśreyasa* which defines and distinguishes it from all others, giving concretely the

examples of *vārtā*, *dandanīti*, *ānavikṣiki* and *adhyātma vidyā* in order to illustrate his point.

But even if one leaves aside Bharata's forgetfulness about the *prayojana* or *niḥśreyasa* of the *śāstra* that he was creating, one cannot but wonder why he did not even attempt to give a *vyāvartaka lakṣaṇa* of that of which he was building a *śāstra*. Perhaps, he was too early in the tradition to do that as the formal characteristics of what constitutes a *śāstra* had not crystallized by then. Even so, it remains a moot question why his successors did not do anything to rectify the situation. In fact, even his definition of *rasa* has not been reformulated in spite of the obvious inadequacies and inapplicability to other arts, including poetry and literature.

The fact that no need was felt for redefining Bharata's definition even in respect of the art form he was writing on, suggests a deeper problem about the nature of reflection on art in this country. What, after all, is to be the object of reflection in the case of art? The 'object' created or the complex creative act which brings it into being, or both? In the case of any work of art, the problem is intrinsically complicated by the fact that it is not a 'natural' object at all and hence cannot be understood like any normal object. Abhinavagupta had raised this issue at the beginning of his treatise on Bharata's work called *Abhinava Bhāratī*, but did not pursue it further after citing reasons as to why it could not be assimilated, classified or defined as the other objects that we 'know' of. Nor did any of the thinkers who thought after him seem to have done that.

But the case of *nāṭya* is different from all the other arts as it presupposes a 'written' text or a text adapted for purposes of being performed as a 'play'. There is a person to take charge of this enactment and 'actors', both male and female, who try to give it a 'living' reality which has to be seen with the eye and heard by the ear and understood for the meaning conveyed by it all. It consists of a sequence of acts and scenes, and has a beginning and an end indicated by the rise and fall of the curtain which signals the 'opening' and 'closing' of the performance.

What, thus, demands to be reflected upon is whether the idea of *rasa* captures the meaning or significance of that which is conveyed by the

'story' embodied and enacted through the acts and scenes performed on the stage. Bharata uses the term *anukṛti* and its analogues such as *anukīratana*, *anukarāṇa*, etc., to convey this meaning. But, surely, the actual story of human life as it is 'lived' and which is sought to be represented, does not seek *rasa*, or be understood or defined in its terms. If it is so, how can that which is its *anukṛti* or *anukīratana* ever be understood in its terms without distorting it completely and making it seem what it is not, a superimposition, an *adhyāsa* from which not only thinking about Indian aesthetics has not been able to recover up till now, but also the far-reaching influence that it has had on the life of the cultured *nāgara* in this continent as it began to be conceived of and modelled on its model and in its terms. The subtle inter-influencing of art and life has seldom been reflected upon, but the Indian case can provide a classic example if one wants to do so. The self-conscious formulations of Bharata influenced the writers and artists in their literary and artistic creations and these, in turn, 'determined' the 'ideal' way in which civilized and cultured *men* were supposed to live in the tradition which, in turn, affected the art-productions as that was the way they were wanted to be.

Yet, though this 'circular self-effectivity and self-validation' has misled most observers of the scene into thinking that what *appeared* to be the case was also really so and that, besides this, it also captured the 'reality' of what art 'really' is, even though there was also some counter evidence to them. The elaboration of the theories of *dhvani* and *alanṁkāra* in the context of *Kāvya* and the almost total non-applicability of the theory to non-representational arts which have nothing to do with the human situation are the obvious counter examples. Bharata's theory cannot be applied in principle to non-representational art because of the way he defined it. All this was deliberately ignored or underplayed in the picture that modern writing on the subject has built regarding thinking about aesthetics in the Indian tradition. The tradition itself might have helped in this, but only at the cost of a 'collusion' whose incalculable costs have not been thought of by those party to it. How, for example, can *dhvani* or *alanṁkāra* be accommodated in a *rasa*-centric theory of even *kāvya* without fundamentally challenging the definition of *rasa* which is essentially tied to the diverse human

situations in terms of which the specific particularity of each *rasa* is defined and which can never be understood without reference to 't'. Does each situation have its own *dhvani*, just as it is supposed to have its own *rasa*? Or, does the *rasa* itself create its own *dhvani* which is the heart of the matter? Or, is *dhvani* the resultant that emerges out of the totality of the whole and, if so, how is it different from the *rasa* that is also supposed to characterize the whole and is supposed to be an emergent quality from the different specific *rasas* that characterize the parts from which it is built?

Further, what about *alanṁkāra* which has dominated thinking about *kāvya* in this country and whose proliferation has known no end? Does each *alanṁkāra* have a *rasa* of its own? If so, there would be as many *rasas* as there are *alanṁkāras* and, in any case, they would have little to do with the human situations in terms of which Bharata defined them.

Thus, neither *dhvani* nor *alanṁkāra* can be accommodated within the theory of *rasa*, though most writers have assumed that this can easily be done and that there is no problem in doing so. The fact that the extension of the theory to other arts raises even more intractable problems has been masked by two facts. First, Bharata himself had discussed *nṛtya* and *sangīta*, or dance and music in detail and treated them in this context alone as they were to subserve the purposes of the *nāṭya* which was the primary object of his reflection and discussion. In fact, it is not quite clear if he conceived of the former as consisting primarily of *abhinaya* conveyed through dance, supported and augmented by music which was its inevitable accompaniment. The analysis of each part of the body in terms of its possible movements and their combination into *aṅgahāras* depicting and expressing various emotional states is an evidence of this. Dr Kapilā Vātsyāyana's well-known work on the subject documents this, though she strangely ignores almost completely its relation to *nāṭya* and concentrates only on its relation to Indian temple sculpture which, according to her, not only illustrates it in stone, but also defines its history as it evolved over time and space in different regions of India.

The treatment of dance in the *nāṭyaśāstra* seems to have given a strange twist to the development of both *nṛtya* and *nāṭya*, taking each

away from its own immanent ethos and *nisus*, making each lose its autonomy in trying to accommodate itself to the other in terms of the theory propounded by their author. Bharata's analysis of dance is as *rasa*-centred as that of *nāṭya*; only this time, it is *abhinaya*-centred, if presentations of classical Indian dance in modern times are to be believed, in spite of the *karaṇas* and the *aṅgaḥāras* he delineates and describes. In fact, even the latter are explicitly seen in terms of the emotions they express and the *abhinaya* may only be said to bring this out. *Nāṭya*, thus, disappeared into the dance and the dance into the *nāṭya*, and both became subservient to the theoretician's formulation which became so *rasa*-centred that it did not know how to escape from it.

This became clear in the author's treatment of music which he treated as completely subservient to the *nāṭya*, having no independent autonomy of its own, its sole purpose being to enhance the 'emotional being' of the scene enacted by the actors on the stage. The *nāṭya*, of course, was his central concern and everything had to be subservient to it, but the mistake lay in his 'understanding' of the *loka* of which it was to be an *anukṛti* or *anukarana*, or even *anukirtana*, terms that Bharata himself has used. The *loka* constituted by 'human beings' is not only 'feeling-centred' but also centred in 'knowledge' and 'action' which have only a tangential relation to 'feeling' and which, in any case, can never be defined in its terms. The *loka*, thus, which Bharata is supposed to be concerned with is not the 'actual' *loka*, but an idealized abstraction of persons in interaction whose life is centred in the feelings they feel and who have nothing else to 'do' in their lives.

The situation may be saved by pointing out that, after all, all art does this, and the *nāṭya* does it pre-eminently as it has to be performed before an audience which wants to have a 'nice' evening in a hall fully packed with the smell of perfume floating in the air, and beautiful ladies and gentlemen adding their own charm to the occasion. No greater contrast could be imagined than the mood and expectancy prevailing in the auditorium and the one behind the curtain which is still to rise and reveal the 'magic world' for which every one is waiting. The *rasa* certainly cannot be behind the curtain: neither the director nor the actors could possibly have seen that way in the innumerable

rehearsals that had preceded or 'feel' the impending result of their efforts in that manner. In fact, even the successful enactment of the play would hardly be said to produce any *rasa* in them unless the feeling of relief 'that it was all over', be said to be that.

But what about the audience? Who would deny that they have gone through an 'experience' which, whatever be its name, was, in a sense the *prayojana* and *puruṣārtha* of everything that went before? Was Bharata, then, talking about this when he talked of *rasa*? Was he concerned with the spectators alone who watched the spectacle and were immersed in it often visiting another world and, for a time, living and participating in it?

But, then, who were these spectators in respect of whom the theory really applies though, by a projective superimposition, it may be applied to the play as enacted and even the play as written. The tradition calls these people *sahradaya*, a term which is misleading in the extreme as it seems to suggest that the only quality required for it was to be responsive, or to be in tune with what was going on, on the stage. But how can one be responsive or be in tune with whatever is going on, unless one cultivates and develops almost an infinite plasticity of sensitivity not only to the subtlest shades and nuances of feelings and emotions, but also awareness of the multiple dimensions of a human being in both their depth and height in all directions? Keats called this 'negative capability', but he thought it was necessary for the creator, forgetting that it was even more necessary for the readers or the viewers, as they have to read or view the most contrary creations of man. For this, however, one needs a long self-training or self-learning which makes one perpetually open to new possibilities that the 'creators' are trying to actualize all the time and also judge them critically in the light of the immanent standards and ideals that man has vaguely apprehended in the creations he has encountered in the past.

The audience, thus, is not a 'raw' audience, a *tabula rasa* on which the playwright, the director and the actors may create the emotional concoction they like, but a culturally trained, critical judge of the performance, a function which Bharata's analysis in terms of *rasa* seems totally unaware of, and which the idea of *sahradaya* fails to capture as it does not take into account the cognitive-critical judgment

involved in the creation of a work of art and its appreciation. Both the creation and appreciation involve a continuous process of rejection, and most of the creations and productions are a 'failure', facts which Bharata's theory cannot explain.

The dismal failure of Bharata's theory is clearly revealed in its incapacity to handle the notion of *rasābhāṣa*, which should have been just the place to come to grips with the problems raised by any theory which tries to be exclusively 'feeling-centred'. Can one be mistaken about the *rasa* that one apprehends? This should have been the central question for the theory, but it just is not so. The issue, when it is raised, is answered not in the context in which the theory was propounded or formulated, but in relation to the 'moral appropriateness' of the situation which is the occasion for the arousal of the *rasa* in the reader or the spectator. The stock example is that of Rāvaṇa and the way he feels for Sītā. Why should this not be an example of *śṛaṅgāra*, but only of *rasābhāṣa*, or pseudo-*śṛaṅgāra*, remains the unanswered question for the theory. If moral considerations are held to be relevant for the very arousal of *rasa*, then the theory itself would have to be formulated differently. The reformulation, however, would find it difficult to limit itself to just this, as 'judging' whether the ascription of some property—be it simple or complex—is correct, is a cognitive act fraught with all the problems that any 'truth-claim' involves. The claim that some creation has this particular *rasa* can escape this requirement only by claiming it to be self-validating because of its being a judgment of taste, having nothing to do with inter-subjective validation through mutual discussion. But *rasa* is an 'objective' ascription, both to the whole and the parts out of which the whole is said to be built, and yet the theory does not tell us what is the relation between the *rasas* that characterizes the parts and the one that characterizes the whole. The latter—if it is an emergent property—has to be different from those which characterize the parts, but Bharata has no distinct name for it. One may opt for something like that which later on was added and called *śānta*, but then it would characterize all *nāṭya* equally and, in any case, be difficult to accommodate within Bharata's definition of the same.

In fact, the later additions of *śānta* and *bhakti* to the list of *rasas* mentioned by Bharata raises problems not only about the exhaustiveness of the list given by Bharata, but also about the adequacy of his definition of it. Neither *śānta* nor *bhakti* can be related to specific human situations whose *anukaraṇa* or *anukṛti* can be said to give rise to them. The former has generally been attributed to the *Mahābhārata*, which is not a *nāṭya* or even a *kāvya*, and has been a subject of dispute in the tradition. As for the latter, the attempt of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī to establish *bhakti* as a *rasa* has been examined in detail by Professor R.B. Patankara in his article in *India's Intellectual Traditions* whose second edition has recently appeared under the auspices of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research. *Bhakti*, if taken seriously as the realization of a 'feeling relationship' with whatever is regarded as 'ultimately real', destroys the distinction between 'art' and 'reality', and thus cannot give rise to an experience which could be called *rasa* in the sense in which it has been used in the tradition about 'aesthetic thought', or thought about the arts that has occurred in India.

This is obviously correct, but what Patankara does not see is that the 'art creations' in India tried to create an entirely 'objective' world where only one character dominated the scene and became not only the source of all *rasas*, but also more 'real' to the 'imagination-centred' life of the people than any 'living' person, and this was Kṛṣṇa, Mīrā, Sūra, Jayadeva and a myriad others in the different languages of India, including Sanskrit, and the arts concretizing them through pictorial representations found far and wide all over the country and their 'realization' into 'felt-forms' in dance and music is more than sufficient evidence of this. The *Gīta-Govinda* is a classic example, combining as it does, the poetic, the pictorial, the musical and the dance forms centring around the life of Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana. The *Viraha-Bhakti* of which Wilhelm Hardy wrote is perhaps found here rather than in the south where *Śrīmad Bhāgavad* was composed and Andal's passionate love for the lord burst into uncontrollable song and yet found no painters to paint, or dancers to express what she felt in those lyrics, whose intensity of feeling hardly comes out in the translations one reads.

Yet all this, though true, can hardly do anything to 'save' the *rasa* theory from all the shortcomings we have pointed out earlier. In fact, the situation seems to worsen if we confront the theory with the actual plays found in Sanskrit and ask the simple question whether the theory helps us to understand or appreciate them any better. Kālidāsa is said to have written three plays, *Vikramorvaśiṣam*, *Śākuntalam* and *Mālvikāgnimitram*. How does the *rasa* theory help us in illuminating our understanding of these plays? It would be difficult even to honestly answer the simple question, 'what is the *rasa* in these plays?' And, if one were to ask this about *Mudrārāksasa*, what would, or could, one say? It is not that there are not plays about which there is little doubt or dispute. Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacaritam* is one such case. But what about his *Mālatī-Mādhava*? One would find it difficult to give any unhesitating answer, as nothing seems to be clear in the matter.

One may multiply examples, but whether one does so or not, one thing is clear: the theory, in spite of its prestige, was not used either by the critic or the creator to seriously reflect or evaluate the work that was being produced in the realm of *nāṭya* in this country. It is true that sometimes the writers seem to be deliberately trying to create scenes so that *rasas* like *raudra* or *bhayānaka* or *vībhatsa* may arise as, say, in *Mālatī-Mādhava*, but then these seem so obviously 'forced' as to mar the play. In fact, many of the scenes located in cremation grounds or even those relating to execution of human sacrifice belong to this class. Yet, though these scenes abound in deference to Bharata's enumeration of these as distinct *rasas*, no one seems to have asked why one cannot have a play with these as its predominant *rasa*, or those who equate it with what he called *sthāyī-bhāva*, as its *sthāyī-bhāva*. To think of a play as being any of these would be strange indeed. But the same will be true of *hāsyā*, though to a less extent.

But, if so, the very idea of *rasa* would have to be seen in a disjointed way, as some of them can never characterize the play as a whole, while others may do so. The distinction would strike at the very roots of the theory as it assumes that all *rasas* are equally so, and that *qua rasa*, there cannot be much to choose between them. On the other hand, if a distinction were to be made, one would have to offer a ground for the distinction, and a justification for the same.

Not much thought has been given to the problem, as it has been assumed there is no problem at all. Take, for example, the *rasa* called *adbhuta* and the *sthāyī-bhāva* associated with it called *vismaya*. How can it be a separate *rasa* on its own and, in any case, what can be the human situation whose *anukṛti* is supposed to give rise to this *rasa*, and whose *sthāyī-bhāva* is supposed to be *vismaya*? But *vismaya* is short-lived and can hardly be *sthāyī* for very long. As for *adbhuta*, it can hardly be a characteristic of any particular creation, but rather 'some thing' that may characterize any outstanding creation if it is of a certain kind. Here, it is like a *camatkāra* which is also actually a characteristic of a few masterworks, even though Jagannātha seems to offer it as a characteristic of *kāvya* in general.

The shift of attention from *Nāṭya* to *Kāvya* revealed the essential limitations of the *rasa* theory even more clearly, as the latter was hardly concerned with the *anukṛti* of human situations as was the former. But the reflection should have freed the theory from its limitations and led to a wide-ranging, all-encompassing theory of art which saw *bhāva* or the world of feelings itself in a different way than as it was seen by Bharata. This, however, did not happen as his authority was too great to be set aside. Yet, the conflict is there in all the theorists who reflected on *kāvya*, whether they belonged to the *dhvani* or the *alamkāra* school, or any other. There was something like *rasa*, but it could not be the *rasa* of Bharata, tied as it was to the human situation and divided into the eight or nine forms he had classified them into. Poetry was tied to language, and it was language that created the *bhāva* and the *rasa*, and not the depiction of any human situation, as Bharata had thought.

'What was the relation between language and *rasa*?' This should have been the question raised by the new theorists who reflected upon *kāvya*. But, instead of doing so, they got trapped in the mechanism of poetic construction or the 'crafting' of the poem, and gave us the *alamkāra śāstra* with its unending proliferation and classification which, married to the *rasa* theory, produced Sanskrit poetry, the most crafted sensuous poetry ever written in the world. It was over-ornate and had to be sensuous or even grossly sensual as the only *rasa* it could now feel as *rasa* had to be those related to *śraṅgāra*, directly or indirectly.

Strangely, the *rasa* born out of *alanikāra* was not paid any attention, for, had this been the case, it would have taken thinking on the subject away from the 'content' and turned it towards those formal elements which arouse a 'feeling-response' that has little to do with human situations as they are 'lived' in ordinary life, or even as they are represented as *mimesis* in art. The *mimetic* or the *anukaraṇa* element has misled the theorists from Aristotle and Bharata onwards as their thinking arose in the context of *nāṭya* or drama which, *prima facie*, seem to be concerned with this and this alone. But poetry, which may be seen as a halfway-house to music, need have nothing of this and yet produce its effect in spite of, or even because of this. The meaning aspect of words functions differently in poetry than it does in ordinary language, something that perhaps was sought to be captured by the *dhvani* theorists in the Indian tradition. But *dhvani* is not *rasa*, though it may arouse one, but then it itself would have to arise not just from the 'meaning' of the words in the poem, but from the *bhāva* or the 'feelings' associated and contained in them.

From poetry to music is a little step, but if that had been taken, the limitations of the traditional *rasa* theory would have been obvious as language or even 'mimicry' would have been seen as totally contingent to the experience of that which was sought to be conveyed by the term *rasa*.

Yet, so strong was the tradition that instead of poetry and music providing a corrective to a theory based on *nāṭya*, they themselves began to be seen and moulded in its terms. The innumerable paintings of *rāga* and *rāginis* attest to this and, what is even stranger, is to find practicing musicians articulating their 'experience' of these in terms of the *rasa* theory of Bharata. Omkar Nath Thakur, the well-known vocalist, is on record confirming what the painters of earlier generations had proclaimed aloud through their work. Perhaps, it was their work, which shaped or influenced his imagination, as the ordinary listener seldom 'sees' or feels classical music in this way. It is not that what has been called *bhāva* is totally absent, or that it is not sought to be conveyed by the singer as, say, in *thumrī* or the *bhajans* that he/she invariably sings at the end of the performance, and which is even to some extent, present in the *khyāla* that precedes it. But what about the

pure *alāpa* which is supposed to be the real essence of all true music, and which comes into its own in the style of singing called *dhruvād* whose *alāpa* is perhaps the purest example of what music seeks, at least in its classical north Indian form today.

The conflict and the tension between the two, i.e. the word-independent and the word-dependent forms has not been noticed as the musician perforce has to take the 'meaning' in their 'feeling' or 'emotional' sense into account and convey them in their 'living feel' as best as he/she can. The conflict is clear in *khyāla* where the words are there but play only a secondary role to the *svara*-modulation, formation, and combination in which both the artist and the audience are really interested. Even the choice of the 'wording' is subtly chosen to subserve this purpose. But the situation dramatically changes with the *bhajan* or the *thumrī* and both the audience and the artist know it. Nobody is interested in *rāgadārī* now; the atmosphere has changed and the 'strain' of 'listening' and 'attending' and 'creating' has eased and there is relaxation all around.

There is, of course, *rasa* in both, but if it is to be called by the same name, it can only lead to confusion, at least in thought, if not in practice. The problem becomes still clearer, if we ask ourselves what do we 'feel' when we 'see' a great piece of sculpture or architecture? Is it *rasa*, or something else? It will be too difficult to classify it under the former, but then we will have to find a different name for it and ask ourselves, is there nothing akin to this in the 'experience' that we have in respect of other arts? In case there is, why does it get mixed or submerged in something else which perhaps more appropriately is conveyed by the term *rasa*? The latter still retains something 'human' about it, man 'seeing' himself 'reflected' in a 'mirror'. The former, on the other hand, seems 'freed' from all such references and hence the 'feeling' that arises in respect of it also seems unburdened by all that is 'human, all too human', breathing a purer, fresher air. One may find it difficult to stay long at those abstract, rarified levels, but there can be little doubt that human consciousness seeks it always and in all fields, including that of the arts. Mathematics and philosophy are the clearest examples of this impulse towards 'freeing' ourselves from all human sensuousness, including that involved in the notion of the 'inner-

sense', and art tries to do this in the realm of 'feelings' in spite of the fact that it is, and has to be, inevitably sensuous because of its very nature. The search for absolute abstraction in the realm of feeling through its complete detachment from the human reality from which it arises and in which it is involved in a sensuous presentation, is the ultimate impossibility it seeks, a contradiction which it shows challenging man to transform his life of feelings through the capacity for sensuous-cum-non-sensuous imagination that he has within himself.

The search for 'purity' and 'autonomy' may be said to characterize all the 'seekings' of man, but arts face the problem, burdened with the dilemma that it is not only wedded to the sensuously 'felt' and 'lived' life of man, but also that it has to please, attract and 'entertain' without which it cannot have a 'life' of its own. The distinction between the popular and the classical epitomizes this, though the so-called 'classical' has to have the elements of the 'popular' in it to maintain its appeal even to classical audiences. The *rasa* theory caters to this element and derives its strength from it, as it is there everywhere in all cultures and civilizations, whether acknowledged or not. But the self-conscious formulation of a 'temptation' into a norm has played havoc not only with the 'thinking' but also the 'art-creations' in the Indian tradition which have had to try to come to terms with it, whether they liked it or not. The story of their struggle to throw off the burden bequeathed to them in the name of Bharata still has to be written. But what made the thing increasingly difficult was the half-deliberate confusion by bringing in the *raso vai sah* of the *Upaniṣads* and treating the *ānanda* produced by the *rasa* as '*bhrahmānanda sahodara*'. Now one could indulge the temptation to one's heart's content and feel 'good' about it if one was as close as one could be to the highest ideal of spirituality propounded in one's culture.

The influence, however, was not a one-way affair. The 'ideal' of '*rasa*-experience' initiated by Bharata affected the ideal of spiritual seeking in the tradition in a way that has not been noticed primarily because it has been seen not only as completely autonomous in itself, but also as unrelated to the other 'seekings' of men and as being unaffected by them. The transformation of the upaniṣadic *raso vai sah* into the various *rasika sampradāyas* of *bhakti* on the one hand and of

*tantra* on the other, are an evidence of this. The development of *vajrayāna* in Buddhism and of *rasika sampradāya* in *Rāma Bhakti* would have appeared theoretical impossibilities, if they had not been there as actual 'facts' in the tradition. Perhaps, the very formulation of the ideal of *mokṣa* in positive terms as 'unalloyed bliss' or *ānanda* facilitated this. The *Bṛhadānyaka* analogy was taken literally and the centrality of *Śṛṅgāra* as *rasarāja* or preeminent amongst all the *rasas*, did the rest.

The deeper harm done by the theory of *rasa* was, thus, in the spiritual domain where, in spite of the way Patanjali had seen it in the search for the transformation of consciousness by its own activity toward 'freeing' it from all 'objectivities' so that it may be able to experiment with itself and find its truth and power in freedom, was forgotten for something that appears only as a subtle substitute for gross sensory pleasure. The lesson that art could have provided in case it had searched for its own truth, or the immanent ideal that governed it from within in terms of its own 'seeking', just could not be as it itself had been derailed by Bharata's authority and his theory propounded about it.

The internal contradictions in the theory were not seen, nor its 'limitations' deriving from the context in which it had arisen. The theory purported to be about the 'arts', something created by man and claiming to have a 'reality' of its own, alongside with and yet independent of that which it presupposes and considers as 'really real' or 'actual' and yet evolves a concept that is 'consciousness-centred' and makes it central to its theory. *Rasa* is centred in consciousness, and can be centred nowhere else, and so if a theory about the arts has to be built, it has to be centred in the arts and has first to ask itself what is its distinguishing or differentiating feature, and then think in terms of it. Also, as arts are in plural, it has to think not only in terms of the generalized differentiation, but also the 'specificities' that differentiate the one art from the other. The concept of *rasa* is intrinsically unable to do this, as consciousness has the capacity and the ability to 'feel' the same or something analogous in respect of 'nature' or even what is called 'actual' at the human level, or even without reference to any 'reality', whether actual or virtual or imagined. The meditative consciousness that seeks to withdraw from all 'objectivity' attempts to do just this.



It is, of course, true that neither in actual life nor in meditative consciousness, one can experience *bhayānaka*, *raudra*, *bībhatsa*, *karuṇa* as *rasa*. As *hāsyā*, *vīra* and *śrīṅgāra*, they can certainly occur and be 'enjoyed' in actual life, though not in meditative consciousness, unless it chooses to live an 'imagined life' as, say, in *bhakti*. The only *rasa* that remains for consciousness when it has withdrawn from all 'objectivities' is *adbhuta* which the *Śiva-sūtra* talks about, or *śānta*, which the latter theoreticians added.

The arts themselves are not all of a piece, and it will be difficult to say if they share anything in common except that they seem to be human creations based on the senses, and that their extension and complication occur independent of considerations of 'utility' relating to the biological needs conceived fairly narrowly. The exploration of the sensory realm relating to each of the senses in terms of the possibilities inherent in it and the ideal values immanent in it gives to each realm an autonomy which has a cognitive dimension that has not been noticed because of its close association with the 'feelings' that it arouses and through which it is apprehended. A painter 'knows' colours, and a dancer 'knows' the body in a way that it cannot be known by a physicist or chemist, or an anatomist or physiologist or doctor. They also know, but their knowledge stops short just at the point where the 'knowledge' of the artist begins. He or she 'accepts' the primacy and the 'reality' of the sensed qualities in their sensuousness which the 'objective' scientist, with all his instruments of observation and analysis, cannot. It is akin to the knowledge of a stone which the sculpture has, a geologist cannot, and what an architect 'sees', an engineer cannot.

The last example should bring home the truth that arts differ very widely in their relation to the 'other' kinds of knowledge which alone is considered 'knowledge' these days and is deemed 'scientific'. The knowledge which is there in what we call 'engineering' is necessary in a sense in which the knowledge involved in physics or chemistry or anatomy or physiology does not. Not only this, knowledge in these fields may not, and usually does not, help in understanding and appreciating what a painter has painted or a dancer has danced.

Music is perhaps the clearest example of a total disconnection of 'sound' from the way it is ordinarily produced or heard. Poetry and the

literary arts are at the other end and though what is called 'language' arises from the same physiological base, the two move in such different direction as 'art forms' that it is difficult to see any relation between them. Linguistics and poetics are worlds apart, and though music has been sought to be related to sound frequencies and vibrations since the times of Greeks, both the musician who creates and the listener who listens know how irrelevant it is to the activity they are engaged in. The so-called 'music of the spheres' is irrelevant to all except perhaps the mystic who is not interested either in science or art, or the knowledge they embody and represent.

The worlds that the arts make are thus diverse and distinct and hence have to be 'known' in their own way. The 'truth' of each has to be seen in terms of what it embodies and seeks, independent of the 'subjectivity' of the consciousness that tries to know and understand it. Most theories of art do not do so, and the *rasa* theory certainly does not. It takes one away from the work of art and sees it primarily in 'instrumental' terms as if it had no 'individuality' of its own, when it has not only a 'uniqueness' and 'individuality' about it, but is valued and cherished for just that reason. If *rasa* were the essence of it, then the 'individuality' should make little difference, and only the 'universality' should suffice.

But, besides the individuality and the uniqueness, there is also the history and the plurality of the particular art form, which has also to be taken into account. The *rasa* theory is just incapable of doing this. It is time to forget it; it has already done great harm to India's thinking about the arts, and the effects this has had on the creation of artworks in this country. Any insights that it may have given can, and should, be accommodated in the new thinking. But whatever the resistance, cultural or otherwise, the arts and the thinking about the arts has to be rescued from the millennium-long *adhyāsa* superimposed on it by Bharata's authority, and the unquestioning way it has been accepted till now.

# JOURNAL OF INDIAN COUNCIL OF PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH

---

Volume XXI  
Number 3  
July–September  
2004

---

Editor: Daya Krishna  
Associate Editor: R.C. Pradhan

**Indian Council of Philosophical Research**  
Darshan Bhawan  
36, Tughlakabad Institutional Area, Mehrauli-Badarpur Road  
New Delhi 110 062, India