

# The Evolution of Rasas in Indian Literature

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*Rasa* is one of the concepts in Indian aesthetics much studied and widely researched, both in India and abroad. The theory of *rasa* first arose in the context of the ensemble of music-dance-drama-poetry indigenous to diverse Indian regions and multiple languages like Tamil, Sanskrit, Pāṣāṇī, Pāli, Prakrit, and Apabhraṃśa. But it has come to receive, at the hands of modern specialists, so many kinds of lopsided emphasis—philosophical, thematic, cultural, literary, technical, dance-oriented, music-oriented, etc.—that it is no easy task today to visualise the essentials of the theory, developed into a systematic code by Bharata as early as the beginning of the Christian era in his *magnum opus*, the *Nāṭyasāstra*.

When tracing the beginnings and origins of the Indian fine arts and *belles lettres*, scholars naturally turn to the Vedic springs and to incidental references in the Vedāṅgas like *Śikṣā*, *Vyākaraṇa*, *Nirukta* and *Chandas*. Even in the pre-Vedic Mohenjodaro civilization, scholars might find some crude manifestations of dance and music. But in the plethora of academic controversies about chronology, racial minutiae and cultural milieu, the spirit or vital essence of our cultural heritage is missed, more often than not. Hence in this study, an attempt is made to disengage the essence of Indian poetry and dance from representative illustrations, drawn from original sources, steering clear of pedantic discussions.

## Valmiki, the Ādikavi

The mainstream of Indian literary tradition is unanimous in regarding Vālmīki as the father of poetry. A host of creative writers in the centuries that followed—Kālidāsa, Bhavabhūti, Rājaśekhara, Muraṛi, Kṣemendra, etc.—acclaim with one voice that Vālmīki, the poet-sage, started the great *kāvya* tradition on an epic scale. The grandeur of theme, nobility of characters, sublime simplicity of expression, wealth of emotions depicted and an ornate style with a rich variety of *alankāras* or figures of speech, and

finally a large canvas—all combine to make the *Rāmāyana* a singularly unique *ādikāvya* or *mahākāvya*.

From the standpoint of *rasas* which is our primary concern here, it is singularly outstanding not only in variety but also in depth. In the Vedic hymns, we have a spontaneous overflow of man's feelings of awe, wonder and devotion for the divine; but man's life does not constitute its dominant theme. The epic, on the other hand, shows a singular concern for man as man, and thus human sentiments take pride of place; the devotional element slides into the margin. (In medieval times, this marginal note of devotion once again becomes the mainstream and subordinates the sentiments. Such is the persistence of Vedic culture, in age after age.)

It is to highlight the human interest of the epic that it is called in Sanskrit by the name *itihāsa*, which is wrongly translated as 'history' today. A close study of our two *itihāsas*, by the sages Vālmīki and Vyāsa, will reveal that they mean 'poetic accounts' of perfect or heroic individuals of a bygone age. Such literary accounts were designed to provide national ideals of culture. Problems of choosing between good and evil, standards of exemplary conduct or *dharma* and the allurements of *adharma* (selfish and evil ways), the patterns of purity and impurity in thought, word and deed, the mind in its exalted and lowly moments, the rewards of righteousness and the tragic suffering consequenced by sin, the *puruṣārthas* or intrinsic human values—such is the stuff out of which the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata* are made. Yet, a broad and universal religion and spirituality never disappear from their central conception. Though the religious emotion or *bhakti* is not their central theme as in the *Vedas* or in the *Purāṇas*, it does invest the theme with a deeper significance than in the epics of other lands like Greece. The two epics do not openly harp on the theme of the *avatār* or Godhead descending to earth as man. Supernatural feats, both of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, are reduced to the barest minimum. Indeed, it is a later trend that maximises them and revels in adding to the number of supernatural incidents in the story.

However, one thing that stands out clearly is that an all-absorbing predominance is prevalent, i.e., what the theorists would identify as *adbhuta-rasa*, the sentiment of awe or wonder. Both the epics depict the characters in a vein which is more or less sublime and which makes them more elevated and grand than ordinary men in the hard world of reality. The major characters, i.e., heroes and heroines, are cast in a heroic mould which makes them rise high above the run of

common humanity. They are both heroic and lofty (*dhīrodāṭṭa*). Their passions too are to that extent supra-mundane and rise to the stature of what belongs to and leads to *rasa*, be it love or hate, anger or sorrow. That is why the epic *rasas* are deemed *lokottara* or supra-mundane.

The mansion of *rasa* has indeed many halls, generally counted as eight or nine: love (*śṛṅgāra*), heroism (*vīra*), sorrow (*karuṇa*), wonder (*adbhuta*), laughter (*hāsyā*), fear (*bhayānaka*), repulsiveness (*vībhatsa*) wrath (*raudra*) and tranquility (*śānta*). The greatness of the Indian epics is to be traced primarily to the co-presence of all the *rasas* in the different incidents of the plot.

Rāma, for instance, is an ideal hero. He is the paragon of all virtues and a paradigm of good conduct or *dharma*. He is a great son, and a great brother. He is a great warrior and a great ruler. He is equally great in his friendship and his dignity. He remains unshaken by the severest blows of misfortune; he faces evil squarely and fights it manfully. His love of Sītā rises far above the erotic level of the modern novel. It borders more on the spiritual rather than on the sensual. It is so pure and unsullied that physical separation only makes it shine brighter. When even such chaste love comes in conflict with the demands of public good, Rāma does not hesitate to banish Sītā to the forest, though he suffers untold misery by this act forced upon him by fate. The *Rāmāyaṇa* presents its characters as embodiments of certain ideals, prepared to suffer any trial or tribulation for the ideal's sake.

If the grand pattern of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is grounded on the base of *adbhuta*, its ideal humanism enriches its dimension. At the same time, the whole development of the epic plot is geared towards the ultimate victory of good over evil, which is represented by Rākṣasas and their chief, Rāvaṇa. The demon hordes suffer ignominy even at the hands of Hanuman, a mere emissary of Rāma. By lining themselves up on the side of Rāma, even the sub-human monkeys and bears become more than a match to the demonic battalions of Rāvaṇa. They perform super-normal feats in peace and war. If man at his highest level is embodied in Rāma, he is at his lowest in Rāvaṇa, and even sub-humans are shown transformed into supermen by mere association with God-like Rāma. This depiction illustrates *vīra-rasa*, pure and simple.

In the exemplary love of Rāma and Sītā, each sworn to the vow of a single life-mate, we have scope for the flowering of *śṛṅgāra* or

the sentiment of love, which is more sacred than profane, more lustrous in separation than in union, and hence more spiritual than physical. This indeed is the ideal *śṛṅgāra-rasa* of Vālmīki, and classical poets of a later date could not think of anything purer or nobler than this. Hence, whether it be a Sāvitrī, or a Damayantī, a Sukanyā or a Pramadvārā, an Anasūyā or an Arundhatī, they all come to be modelled on the ideal love of Sītā for Rāma—constant even when subjected to the worst humiliation of banishment. Even Kṛṣṇa in the *Harivaṃśa* and *Bhāgavata* puts the purity of the love of Gopīs to test by parting from them once for all, after fascinating them with his loving overtures, overtly amorous but covertly divine. That is indeed of the very essence of *vipralambha śṛṅgāra* or love-in-separation.

Let us have a casual look at the prefatory story introducing the birth of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. It states how the mute sage Vālmīki was suddenly and unconsciously transformed into a poet. Mere spirituality is not enough to make one a poet. Overpowering frenzy or emotional ecstasy is the *sine qua non* for the overflow of creative poetry. The trivial incident of the surviving bird's shriek at the sudden death of its mate, shot down by a hunter, kindles the poetic muse of the sage and he is himself filled with surprise at his creative expression. The pathetic incident takes on a universal dimension enveloping the entire human situation in the subconscious mind of the sage. No wonder that the whole 'Book of Ayodhyā' is redolent with pathos describing the death of Daśaratha, exile of Rāma, lament of the queens and the discomfiture of Bharata, followed by the despair of the abducted Sītā in the next. We have its parallel again in the sub-plot woven round Vālin and Sugrīva. At the end of the epic we see Sītā's descent into the earth in utter despair. No wonder great critics like Ānandavardhana and poets like Bhavabhūti were so much struck by the predominance of pathos in the beginning, middle and end of the epic poem that they declared *karuṇa* or pathos to be the ruling sentiment of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

As foils to these four *rasas*, we have the other four. *Hāsyā* or the comic contrasts with the *karuṇa* and mitigates the latter's bitterness. It is seen only in minor episodes as that of Sūrpaṇakhā courting Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa by turns, and the monkey-tricks or frolics of Hanumān and his friends in the Madhuvana of Sugrīva, after their successful mission of locating Sītā.

The *rasas* of *vībhatsa* and *bhayānaka*, i.e. the ugly and the frightful, jostle with each other in the depiction of the demons in all their

hideous vestures and ventures. Kumbhakarna, the pot-bellied demon, drowned in drink and sleep, is their chief.

Rāvaṇa the demon-king is indeed an embodiment of *raudra rasa* (the sentiment of fury) which is a foil to the steady valour of Rāma.

In the construction of the epic plot one can see how Vālmīki is artfully selecting just such incidents as would lend themselves to the free flow of one or the other *rasa* noted above; and even while providing room for all, how he does not forget to make one of them paramount. This is the principle of one ruling sentiment in the midst of several others which later theoreticians deduced from Vālmīki.

We cannot also forget to note in this connection that Vālmīki's poem was meant to be sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument as openly indicated in the incident regarding its first recitation to an assembly, by the twin sons of Rāma, viz. Lava and Kuśa, as taught by Vālmīki himself.

#### Kalidasa

From the long epic of Vālmīki wherein *rasa* is enshrined in the very theme (*vastu*) for the most part,<sup>1</sup> we come to Kālidāsa, the doyen of all Sanskrit poets, whose treatment of *rasa* is unique in plays as well as poems—unique and unparalleled because the *rasa* appears in him as an inseparable quality of his creative art itself. A *rasa* requires for its manifestation a complex of antecedents (*vibhāvas*), consequents (*anubhāvas*) and accompanying moods and feelings (*vyabhicārībhāvas*). All these elements find spontaneous expression within the short confines of a single quatrain or a unit of a few verses or a dramatic scene, thanks to Kālidāsa's creative genius.

Steeped in Vālmīki's epic as he was, Kālidāsa could start new genres on his own by simply disengaging one or two *rasas* for a fuller and more refined handling. He distils the essence of *vipra-lambha-śṛṅgāra* or love-in-separation in an independent lyric, *Meghadūtam*, taking its cue from a casual description in

<sup>1</sup>We omit here a detailed consideration of Vyāsa's epic *Mahabharata* because its material is heterogeneous from the *rasa* point of view and one would have to analyse at length its numerous *upākhyānas* or epics within the epic. It does not have the unity or consummate poetic finish of Vālmīki's poem.

Vālmīki.\* The story in the lyrical gem of Kālidāsa is almost nil; and yet each verse is a finished work of art adding up to the overall sentiment in a remarkable manner. An ideal super-human character like the Yakṣa is imaginatively conceived by the poet, whose very breath of being is love. To his lovelorn eyes, the beauty of every bird, beast and tree in nature, nay, even inanimate clouds and rivers, hills and dells, appear to be pulsating with life dedicated to love. It is a love blessed by gods who receive worship in temples. The beloved is imagined by the Yakṣa to be engaged in activities like painting his likeness, singing a song containing his name, talking to his pet parrot, and making his pet peacock dance to the rhythm of her clappings. This imaginative delineation of love, at once sub-human and superhuman, adds a new dimension to ideal human love—at once chaste, sanctified and poetic—a dimension which became a model for all later lyric poets in Sanskrit.

If Kālidāsa's *Meghadūtam* is a pure lyric of love, his *Rtusamhāra* or 'Cycle of the Seasons' is a paean or chant welcoming Nature in all her varied manifestations by new-wed lovers. Here we have the frenzy and ecstasy of the *rasa* of *sambhoga-śṛṅgāra* or union in love, which makes one shed the film of familiar drabness from everything and which enables one to see everything in nature—plant, flower or shrub—bathed in divine beauty. Already the Love-god Manmatha emerges with his bow of sugarcane and arrows of five lovely flowers, led by his chief, Spring, riding his chariot of the cool southern wind. The sensuous charm of the verses is such that it enchants the reader with the irresistible wine of *rasa*, finding expression through a stylistic imagery tingling with feeling. Like a sensitive camera, the eye of the lover catches the subtlest shade of beauty in every scene around him and invests them with a magic almost heavenly.

If the two lyrics noted above are exclusive portrayals of *śṛṅgāra-rasa*, so are Kālidāsa's three famous plays. The gamut of courtly love of much-married kings is the common theme of all. But the poet succeeds in achieving variety in this theme by varying the stature of the heroine. Mālavikā is all too human, but Urvaśī is celestial, while Śakuntalā is a mixture of both, as the child of a celestial nymph. The problems of Agnimitra, the hero, are at the earthly level, while those of Purūravas are at the heavenly level and

\*It is generally believed that the first *Sarga* of *Kishkinda Kanda* in Vālmiki *Ramayanam* is the source of inspiration for *Meghadūtam*. The despatch of Hanuman as the messenger of love is also a significant forerunner to the cloud messenger. —Ed.

those of Duṣyanta partake of both levels. The dramatic art of Kālidāsa is not bound by the demands of realism; they are romantic and imaginative, through and through. They are all poetic dramas; plain prose is not of much consequence to them. Though the rules of the theoretician demanded the portrayal of diverse *rasas*, Kālidāsa avoids a lengthy delineation of all *rasas* other than *śṛṅgāra* in his plays; he was well aware that *śṛṅgāra* alone was his *forte*.

Of the two ornate epics or *mahākāvya*s of Kālidāsa, once again, the divine *śṛṅgāra* of Śiva and Pārvatī is the main content of his *Kumārasambhavam*. The sweet melting quality of *karuṇa-rasa* or pathos too was within his poetic range; and we have a full canto therein on Rati's lament at the sudden death of Kāma, which reveals the master's hand.

But Kālidāsa's maturity of genius is achieved in his other *mahākāvya*, the *Raghuvamśa*. Here the pride of place is not exclusive to *śṛṅgāra* which manifests just in one canto, describing Indumati's *svayamvara* with Aja, out of 19 that constitute the poem. The *rasa* of *śānta* or serene calm characterizes the account of Dilīpa in the hermitage of sage Vaśiṣṭha. *Vīra-rasa* dominates in the heroic exploits of Raghu. *Karuṇa-rasa* overflows in the lament of Aja at the shock of his beloved's sudden death, as also in the cantos that describe Daśaratha's foolish (though unintended) slaughter of a sage's child, bringing down upon himself a severe curse, and his death consequent upon Rāma's exile. The pathos of the canto describing Sītā exiled is unparalleled; and it appears again and again in different guises, now in the account of the Goddess Ayodhyā, now in the depravity of Agnivarṇa, now in the disconsolate Lakṣmaṇa, and so forth. It is this which makes the *mahākāvya* unique, rising to be a model for later poets.

Some of them, like Bhāravi, attained success by giving dominance to *vīra* and *raudra rasas*, moving away from Kālidāsa's *śṛṅgāra-karuṇa* matrix. Others like Māgha and Śrīharṣa tried their hand at the *rasas* of profane *śṛṅgāra* and overall *adbhuta* or the marvellous sentiment. The exquisite filigree work of these later poets in the matter of style, their fondness for recondite fancies and conceits and their love of verbal acrostics ultimately brought Sanskrit *kāvya* tradition to a stage of decadence and it need not detain us here. But we must not forget that Kālidāsa and Bhāravi are the products of the golden age of the Guptas; and they were incorporating into Sanskrit new traditions started in other folk languages like Prakrit,

Apabhraṃśa and Tamil, to which we might turn now. Profane or secular love outside marriage became the convention of later lyricists in Sanskrit like Amaru and Jayadeva. These we might consider last since the conventions were borrowed by these authors from the theoreticians of poetics who had studied not only Sanskrit, but other Indian literatures of the time, most of which is now unfortunately lost.

### Rustic Love Poems

We can form an idea of rustic love and conventions of love poetry from Hāla's *Gāthāsaptāśati* (c. 150 AD) or anthology of 700 love-stanzas in Prakrit and also from some citations from the Prakrit poem *Harivijaya* of Suryasena (c. 500), now unfortunately lost. Two other ornate epics in Prakrit now available to us are Pravarasena's *Setubandha* (c. 550 AD) and Vākpatirāja's *Gauḍavaho* (c. 650 AD). The free love of village bumpkins and maids, travellers and unchaste women, is realistically portrayed but in a language at once artful and suggestive, which alone raises it to the rank of poetry as critics like Ānandavardhana noted at a later date. Here are a few specimens:

1. This Indra worshipped is indeed dry wood  
Since no shoots he puts forth!  
Though touched by the village chief's daughter  
With her hands, soft as lotus-petals!<sup>2</sup>
2. Wander freely, O pious man!  
That dog today is killed  
By the big lion that dwells  
in yon Godā river's dells!<sup>3</sup>
3. Gather only flowers fallen on earth;  
Don't shake the creeper,  
O village chief's daughter-in-law!  
The tinkling of your anklets is heard  
by your father-in-law  
and it bodes you no good!<sup>4</sup>

2. *Gāthāsaptāśati*, No. 864.

3. *Ibid.*, II, 75.

4. *Ibid.*, No. 959.



4. Mother-in-law lies here, drowned in sleep,  
And I lie here, mark well  
in daylight, O traveller!  
May you not, blinded by night,  
tumble into our beds right!<sup>5</sup>
5. O traveller, distraught  
by parting from the wife!  
You may go by another road.  
In this wretched village,  
The chief's daughter is such  
That she stalks unbridled!<sup>6</sup>

These unsophisticated invitations to secret amours become a little more stylized with mythical imagery added in the classical Prakrit *kāvya*s. The heroines in love fall into recognizable patterns. These may be illustrated now :

1. *Śrāvaṇa* appears in one of her eyes,  
And *Bhādrapada* in the other eye!  
Spring is in the bed beneath her  
And autumn in her cheeks!  
Summer is in her limbs  
And wintry dew in her garden!  
And in the damsel's face,  
a lotus-lake forsooth,  
There is the winter's iciness!<sup>7</sup>
  2. Your hand-lotus is the real lotus,  
your face-moon is the real moon, O love!  
The lotus outside is but a lotus  
And the poor moon but a moon!<sup>8</sup>
  3. I shall pierce him with my frowned look,  
I shall scold him and turn away!  
Whatever you say, I shall do, O friends,  
Only so long as my lover is unseen!<sup>9</sup>
5. *Ibid.*, No. 669.
  6. *Ibid.*, No. I. 19.
  7. Bhoja's *Sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharaṇa*, II. 76. This is a conventional description of all the seasons to describe her tears, pallor, love-torment, etc. concretely.
  8. *Sahitya-mīmāṃsā*, p. 115.
  9. Bhoja's *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa*, Vol. III. p. 631.

The *śṛṅgāra-prakāśa* of Bhojarāja has as many as a hundred such verses to illustrate the fleeting ways and moods of various classified types of women in love. This is a pointer to the fact that Prakrit poets led the way in exploiting the different possibilities of sensual *śṛṅgāra-rasa*. The Prakrit poems may have a theme of war, plot-wise; but in actual treatment, the *rasa* that gets emphasis is *śṛṅgāra*. It is this fact which attracted the analytical attention of Indian theoreticians. They even accepted the convention that love out of wedlock could reach a higher intensity than marital love. This is evident even in Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*.<sup>10</sup>

Apart from this popular trend of *śṛṅgāra-rasa*, we see Buddhist and Jaina influence in the heightened awareness of *śānta-rasa* both by poets and playwrights in all these languages. The most outstanding Sanskrit representative is Aśvaghōṣa, while the *Nāgānanda* of king Harṣa and the still earlier play *Lokānanda* of Candragomin are examples of this new religious trend. The Jaina Purāṇas too of the different *tīrthaṅkaras* hold aloft the ascetic ideal and *śānta-rasa* is made to take a central place, though it is diametrically opposed to the mundane *rasa* of *śṛṅgāra*.

#### Early Tamil Poetry

We might now turn to the Tamil poetic tradition in the south. In the early Sangam period (roughly up to 5th century AD from earliest times) it was more secular and worldly-wise than ascetic or religious. It has fundamentally two types: (1) *Aham* or 'inner' and intimate, relating to the love-throbs of the heart, and (2) *Puram* or 'outer', relating to social and political affairs like war, trade, etc. Religion is there, but in a minor key.

In *Aham* poetry we already have a conventionalized relationship between the emotions of love and an external landscape. The landscape is divided into five *tinai*s or types, the hills favouring the first union of lovers. Love is denoted by a particular flower such as *kurinchi*, evening and rainy season can suggest or evoke the sentiments of a lonely wife waiting for the return of her husband, of which the *mullai* flower would be symbolic. Māyōn becomes the god of the jasmine landscape.<sup>11</sup>

#### Amaru and Jayadeva

There are then two major trends—one secular and popular and

10. Cf. Ch. XXII. 207; also *Kāmasūtra*, V.i. 40; and Rudrabhaṭṭa's *Śṛṅgāratilaka*, II. 30.

11. For a fuller study of this, see Friedhelm Hardy, *Virabhakti*, Delhi, 1983, pp. 142-147.

the other semi-spiritual and religious—in all the literature up to 600 AD in Indian languages. The first bears its fine flower in the love-lyrics of Amaru; while the second slowly blends itself with the first and gives *śṛṅgāra* itself a pre-eminent place by raising it to the realm of divine love or *bhakti*, a trend most consummately evidenced in the dance-opera-poem *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva. Rādhā is the symbol of the human soul pining for union with the godhead, viz. Kṛṣṇa, who has come down as an *avatār* to uplift humanity from gross sensuality by sublimating it into a divine ecstasy. This is a trend which became uppermost in the later centuries and a number of saints in the south and the north popularised it. Caitanya, Ālvārs, Rāmdas, Purandaradāsa, Tyāgarāja, etc. are all votaries of this new 'poetic religion', if we might coin a new term to describe the new tradition.

### Rasa Theory

From literature, we might now turn to aesthetic theory. The term *rasa* is already familiar to us in the *Upaniṣads* with its spiritual overtone of ecstasy. It is used in the sense of herbal sap, and human semen in medical treatises. But in Bharata's *Nāṭyāśāstra*, it is adopted in a technical sense which is concerned primarily with aesthetic psychology. Mental states constitute the core of all fine arts since their task is first and foremost their re-presentation (*anukīrtana* or *anukaraṇa*). When they become enjoyable they come to be termed *rasas*.

By definition, then, worldly emotions are not *rasas*. Art-emotion alone has the capability of becoming *rasa*. It is also essentially linked with the question of taste in the art connoisseur. Only a man of taste or a *rasika* is qualified to recognise *rasa* in poetry, dance, drama, music, painting, etc. People without refined taste cannot judge art; for they miss the *rasa* therein. The *rasa* at its best is the ecstatic experience of beauty through the medium of the art-form presented to the eye or the ear by the genius of the creative artist. In other words, the *rasika* should be akin in temperament to the *kavi* if he is to appreciate the presented *rasa* properly. That is why another name for the *rasika* is *sahṛdaya*.

What is it that goes into the creation and appreciation of *rasa*? Basically, the answer would be: worldly emotions, but when they undergo artistic sublimation. These are called *sthāyī-bhāvas*. *Rati* or love is the basic raw material for *śṛṅgāra-rasa*; *śoka* or sorrow for *karuṇa-rasa*, and so on. But these basic mental states have to be depicted in their full context of antecedents, accessories and

consequents. These may be partly mental feelings and partly nature-stimuli. The fleeting moods or feelings are termed *bhāvas* (abbreviated form of *vyabhicārī-bhāvas*). These may be accessories revealed in psycho-physical acts or gestures described or enacted which are termed *anubhāvas*. But the very locus for all representation lies in the hero and the heroine and, to some extent, other characters. These react to external stimuli in various ways. All such stimuli and responding characters come to be technically called *vibhāvas*. Now, when all these blend harmoniously, the *sthāyī-bhāva* has a chance of being enjoyed as *rasa* by a *sahṛdaya* or *rasika* (critic). Thus in a sense, the core content of all art—poetry, drama or dance—is *rasa*.

It will be evident that the poet is possessed by the ecstasy of *rasa* in such a way that he cannot but pour it out in a creative upsurge. This involuntary afflatus is conditioned only by one qualification in the poet: it is *pratibhā* or creative genius. It has its analogue only in the appreciative taste of the *rasika*. Both are thus born and not made. An imitation of *rasa* is possible by a second-rate poet by sheer dint of industry. But it will be at once discovered as a counterfeit by a true *rasika*. A first-rate creative artist is one who is endowed with genius and who cultivates talent also at the same time.

When possessed by *rasa*, the poet forgets his worldly personal self and communes with the universal joy of spirit. Hence it is that though the basic state of mind he is out to delineate may be sorrow or disgust, pain or fright, it will not pain him in the least. He is not involved in any personal sense of bereavement when he is describing, say, the death of the beloved of one of his characters. The same is true of the appreciative *rasika* too. He too has no touch of personal sadness when 'enjoying' the *karuṇa-rasa*. This is what the theorists denote by the term *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* or transpersonalization. Because of this phenomenon, even tragedy becomes pleasurable to a highly cultured spectator. When life at the human level is beheld in its entirety, there is no wonder that the naked truth of tragedy is laid bare to the penetrating vision of the creative mind. Hence it is that some of the best poems in Sanskrit including the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* have *karuṇa* as one of the dominant *rasas*. Even great plays like *Śākuntalā* of Kālidāsa and *Uttararāmacarita* of Bhavabhūti have a strong measure of it. Yet a happy conclusion is devised by the playwrights in so far as they are free to change the incidents according to their desire, unlike the authors of primary epics who are writing *itihāsa* or incidents as they actually occurred in the past.

It is only a sort of palliative to the general public whose tastes are not very cultivated and who might become personally sad by an unhappy ending in a play. Besides, the Indian poets invariably wrote with a pedagogic intent; theorists observe that the end of poetry is delightful instruction in the human values of *dharma*, *artha*, *kāmā*, and *mokṣa*.

The failure of good in its conflict with evil may be a realistic fact; but it would not serve the purpose of didactic teaching. Hence writers often strove to avoid this unpleasant truth by devising even supernatural incidents in their works, to ensure the unfailing victory of good over evil.

But the ordinary run of poets, and especially lyricists of small poems, more or less confined themselves to a depiction of the grand passion or *śṛṅgāra*, the sensitive ones among them preferring love-in-separation, which involves depth of feeling bordering on anguish, to the frivolities of physical love. The religious ones among them went to myths and legends and added a spiritual dimension even to what was apparently casual love.

Theorists like Bharata saw that no whole poem or play could be written with a single *rasa*. What was expected was a ruling sentiment amidst a diversity of *rasas*. This alone would ensure the success of a work as a whole. This law of unity of *rasa* was first enunciated by Ānandavardhana in his *locus classicus* of criticism, the *Dhvanyāloka*.

Apart from *karuṇa* and *śṛṅgāra*, two other *rasas* which engage the attention of Indian poets most are *vīra* and *raudra*: *vīra* or heroism in the hero and *terror* in respect of his rival. In fact these alone are primary *rasas*. And the rest of the *rasas* are more or less derivative. They are but incidental and casual in occurrence though their contribution to variety is no less important than the primary *rasas*.

The theorists also noted in minute detail the various types and sub-types of heroines in love and heroes in love or action. They listed the possibilities of its excipients in natural landscape. They enumerated the number of fleeting moods and emotional shades accompanying love; and also the possible varieties of its manifestation. They distinguished which *rasas* were friendly to each other and which were inimical. Coming to characters, they developed conventions of how heroines should have their entourage of maids, go-betweens, etc., and heroes their jesters, companions, etc. They even spoke of the

colours of different *rasas* and their presiding deities. All these technicalities are only of academic interest today.

But a profound truth about *rasa*, discovered by Anandavardhana for the first time, was *dhvani* or the evocative power which is exclusive to the language of poetry and drama. All referential use of language, and even figurative or metaphorical use of language, is enough to explain all non-poetic writings in any language. But when we have poetry at its best, the core of it, which is *rasa*, cannot be communicated to the *rasika* in any ordinary way. It therefore resorts to a third magical creative power of language which is at once pregnant with infinite suggestion. This *dhvani* is such that though it is singularly unique, it should function only in the trail of the first two well known linguistic functions, the referential and the metaphorical.

Anandavardhana indeed established once for all that *rasa* is the 'soul' of literature; and its 'body' of sound and sense is governed by the judicious use of *alaṅkāras* or artistic figures of speech and *guṇas* or literary excellences inherent in the very syllables and syntax of the language used. The latter, like 'sweetness', 'energy' and 'lucidity', are ultimately governed by *rasas* though they apparently seem to be grounded on sound and sense-units of poetic language.

After Bharata (1st century AD) and before Anandavardhana (9th century AD) the theoreticians like Bhāmahā, Daṇḍin, Vāmana, Udbhaṭa and Rudraṭa were all aware no doubt of *rasa*, first put forth by Bharata himself. But they did not have the philosophical acumen to realise its intrinsic importance. They had either regarded it as an independent *alaṅkāra* or *guṇa* and were concerned more with stylistics than with aesthetics. It was left to Anandavardhana to establish the primacy of *rasa* on a sound footing. What Anandavardhana taught, Abhinavagupta (1000 AD) explicated in a masterly manner and it remains the last word in Indian literary theory.

One important corollary of the *dhvani* theory is the concept of *aucitya* or propriety which gives a sure norm to the *rasika* in adjudging the success or failure of a literary work. Propriety is always in relation to *rasa*. Whatever mars *rasa* is impropriety (*anaucitya*) and it looms large in the eyes of the *rasika* the moment it appears; just like an *apasvara* or wrong note in music. The norm of propriety is to be closely studied in relation to the *rasa* intended, and the circumstances that have contributed to its failure. Here is indeed a sure criterion of value-judgement in arts. □