

A Note on the Aesthetic Concept of Rasa-Bhava in Kav-Silumina

THERE is sufficient reason to believe that the *Rasa* theory of Sanskrit poetics and its aesthetic significance were not unknown to the author of *Kav-Silumina*—the Sinhalese *mahākāvya* written in about the 13th century A.D. The word *rasa* is very frequently used in a derivative and technical sense (cf. *visam̐ba rasa*, *nurā rasa*). The delight experienced in listening to a musical instrument like the *vīṇā* is said to take the form of *rasa*. This *rasa* is said to have the capacity to intoxicate the mind of the listener. Furthermore, the words *rasa* and *bhāva*—the two well-known technical terms in Sanskrit aesthetics—are found mentioned in *Kav-Silumina*. At least in one instance, the reference offers an infallible insight into the author's views on the appreciation of poetry.

The second verse of the first *sarga* in *Kav-Silumina* reads as follows :

Sarasaviya bālumascknī vetvā kivi denō
Pedehi rasa-hav viṇḍunā denetā itā dulabō.¹

(With as little favour as a sidelong glance from Goddess Sarasvatī, people become poets. Yet, those who enjoy² the *rasas* and *bhāvas* of poetry are indeed rare).

What is of significance here is the sentiment expressed by the author in the second half of the verse. The statement implies that the worth of poetry is to be judged in terms of the *rasas* and *bhāvas* it evokes. The highest benefit that accrues to the reader from reading poetry is the experience of its *rasas* and *bhāvas*. *Rasa-hav* being in the plural also implies that it was expected of poetry to depict diverse *rasas* and *bhāvas*. The capacity to experience *rasas* and *bhāvas* evoked in good poetry is also a rare gift, to be found only in the cultured reader.

In this context it is relevant to note some remarks made in *Siya-Bas-Lakara*—the Sinhalese treatise on literary theory written prior to *Kav-Silumina*. While stipulating the essential features of a *mahākāvya*, it says

1. *Kav-Silumina*, I—2.

2. In Sanskrit aesthetic terminology, *vinodati* and similar verbs always denote a pleasurable experience. cf. *Dhvanyāloka* of Ānandavardhana (Kāvya-mālā Series), pp. 59, 160 *et al.*

that this particular class of poetic composition must embody continuous portrayal of *rasas* and *bhāvas* (*rasa-bāvin aturu nomut*).³ Here, it is only echoing what *Kāvya-darśa*—the Sanskrit treatise on literary theory which forms the original of *Śiṅga-Bas-Lakara*—has to say on the subject. Evidently, *Kav-Silumina* too—itsself a *mahākāvya*—subscribed to this view, and held the evocation of *rasas* and *bhāvas* to be an essential feature of all great poetry like the *mahākāvya* (literary form par excellence according to Sanskrit poetic theory).

The experience of *rasa* is universally accepted as pleasurable—but what does the author of *Kav-Silumina* mean when he says that delectation arises from *bhāvas* too? *Bhāvas* are known to be mental states or emotions in their basic forms prior to the stage of transformation into *rasa*, and at least in some instances, their experience is known to be painful. As such, is the experience of *bhāvas* pleasurable? Is not the author of *Kav-Silumina* showing a poor grasp of the *Rasa* theory when he says that *bhāvas* too are to be enjoyed from poetry of good quality? Is he, while speaking of the readers' aesthetic experience of poetry, justified in categorising *bhāvas* and *rasas* together?

Sanskrit texts on poetic theory supply a solution to such doubts. Whatever other meanings the term *bhāva* may possess, it is also employed in Sanskrit aesthetics to denote one aspect of aesthetic enjoyment. Sanskrit literary critics who applied the *Rasa* theory to the evaluation of poetry, divided that experience which they termed *rasa*, into several aspects. The four major ones among them were called *rasa*, *bhāva*, *rasābhāsa* and *bhāvābhāsa*. Of these, *rasa* was undoubtedly given the place of eminence, as it was the highest and the complete state of aesthetic pleasure. Yet, the other aspects too, on account of the fact that they contribute to aesthetic enjoyment in the reader, should be considered as belonging to the domain of *rasa*.

To make the position clear, the following authoritative Sanskrit texts may be cited.

Rasa-bhāva-tadābhāsa-tatpraśāntyādirakramaḥ.⁴

[*Rasa*, *bhāva*, their *ābhāsas* (i.e. *rasābhāsa* and *bhāvābhāsa*), and subsidence of *bhāva* and others, belong to that variety of suggestion known as *akrama* (i.e. *asañilakṣya-krama-vyañgya*).]

3. *Śiṅga-Bas-Lakara*, I-25.

4. *Dharmyāloka* of Anandavardhana (Kāvya-mālā Series Edition), p. 64.

According to the theory of *dhvani*, *rasa* in poetry is evoked through the species of suggestion known as *asānilakṣya-krama-vyañgya*—i.e. suggestion where the sequence between the expressed sense and the suggested sense is imperceptible. Hence in the above citation, ‘the variety of suggestion known as *akrama*’ amounts to saying ‘the sphere of *rasa*’. The citation purports that *rasa*, *bhāva* and others belong to the realm of *rasa*. ‘Subsidence of *bhāva* and others’ is explained by the commentators as the rise, conjunction and subsidence of an emotion evoked in poetry. They form the minor subdivisions of one aspect—i.e. the *bhāva* aspect—of aesthetic experience.

Rasabhāvau tadābhāsau bhāvasya praśamodayau,
Sandhiḥ śabalatā ceti sarve’pi rasanād rasāḥ.⁵

(*Rasa*, *bhāva*, their *ābhāsas*, along with subsidence, rise, conjunction and mixture of *bhāvas*—all these amount to *rasas* as they are to be enjoyed).

The purport of this *śloka* too is the same as that of the first citation, with the difference that it expresses more clearly that the various categories such as *rasa*, *bhāva*, and so forth are aspects of *rasa*. Mixture of *bhāvas* is also added to its other subdivisions.

Abhinavagupta—another great, perhaps the greatest, authority on Sanskrit poetic theory—in his comments on the first citation given above, supports the proposition and maintains that an emotion like a *vyabhicāri-bhāva* (transitory mental state) when exuberantly evoked, causes aesthetic delight; and that experience should be called *bhāva*.⁶

All these would conclusively prove that Sanskrit poetic theorists considered *bhāva* too as one aspect of aesthetic enjoyment which *in toto* was termed *rasa*. Hence, *rasa* on the one hand was a generic term for all these aspects, and on the other, was one aspect—the major aspect—of this aesthetic enjoyment.

Some explanation is necessary regarding the Sanskrit theorists conception of the nature of the delectation pertaining to each of these aspects, *rasa*, *bhāva*, *rasābhāsa* and *bhāvābhāsa*.⁷ *Rasa* is evoked when any one of the main *sthāyibhāvas* (dominant emotions) like *rati* (love) or *śoka*

5. *Sāhityadarpana* of Viśvanātha (Kāshī Sanskrit Series Edition), p. 225.

6. *Locana* on *Dhvanīlōka* (Kāvya-mālā Series Edition), p. 65.

7. The following account is based on *Dhvanīlōka* and its *Locana*, and *Sāhityadarpana*—the Sanskrit texts referred to above.

(sorrow) is developed properly in literature through *vibhāvas* (determinants), *anubhāvas* (consequents) and *vyabhicārī-bhāvas* (transitory mental states). Only a *sthāyibhāva* has the capacity to turn into *rasa*. And it should also be depicted with reference to appropriate characters and situations in the story. *Rasa* is the highest plane of aesthetic enjoyment and its experience is equated to transcendental bliss. *Rasa* is considered the acme of perfection in the evocation in literature of emotions through *vibhāvas* and so forth as advocated by the *rasa* theorists; and as such it is difficult to be achieved.

Bhāva is an aesthetic experience which belongs to a plane lower than that of *rasa*. *Bhāva* arises in more ways than one. When a *sthāyibhāva* itself (which through proper handling could develop into *rasa*) is not developed to its proper pitch does not reach the state of *rasa*, but turns into the *bhāva* stage. Thus through inadequacy of nourishment, ingredients of *rasa* themselves evoke *bhāva*. Here too the reader experiences some aesthetic delectation, but not that same transcendental bliss as in *rasa*. Then again, any emotion other than a *sthāyīn*—a *vyabhicārī-bhāva* like *lajjā* (shame) or *asūyā* (envy) for example—when nourished through *vibhāvas* and so forth in proper channels also evokes *bhāva*. (In a lengthy literary piece like the drama or the *mahākāvya*, diverse emotions have to be depicted—the poet cannot restrict himself to *sthāyibhāvas*.) The resultant experience belongs to the same realm as *rasa*, but is less acute.

Rasābhāsa (semblance of *rasa*) is *rasa* portrayed in respect of inappropriate characters or situations—thus failing to evoke a deep response in the reader. It is but a shadow of *rasa*. For example, Sanskrit theorists maintain that when *ṣṅgāra* is the theme, if the hero's love is not reciprocated by the heroine, *rasābhāsa* (and not *rasa*) is the result. If the story of Rāma were to be narrated in a poem, in Rāvaṇa *ṣṅgāra* towards Sītā cannot be portrayed and only *ṣṅgārābhāsa* is possible. In the same way portrayal of valour (for the evocation of *vīra rasa*) in a person other than the hero of a poem results only in *vīrābhāsa* and not *vīra*. Thus through the inappropriateness of characters and also of situations (*vibhāva-anau-citya*), the poet's efforts to evoke *rasa* result in *rasābhāsa*.

Bhāvābhāsa (semblance of *bhāva*) corresponds to *rasābhāsa* in the sphere of *bhāvas*. The evocation of *bhāva* as mentioned above, but through inappropriate characters and situations result in *bhāvābhāsa*. It is a shadow of the aesthetic experience termed *bhāva*.

Thus it is possible to resolve the doubts that arise regarding the statement in *Kav-Silumiṇa* that *bhāvas* too are enjoyed in poetry like *rasas*. *Kav-Silumiṇa* is here referring to the two major aspects of aesthetic enjoyment specified by Sanskrit aestheticians. Not only *rasas*, but also *bhāvas* denote a state of delight, for, the word *bhāva* is not restricted to mean a mere emotion alone. The statement evinces not a poor grasp of the *Rasa* theory on the part of the author of *Kav-Silumiṇa*, but a thorough knowledge extending to intricate details of this elaborate concept.*

G. WIJAYAWARDHANA

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