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## AESTHETICISM IN ARISTOTLE'S POETICS AND BHARATMUNI'S NATYASHASTRA

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### ABSTRACT

The present paper is an attempt to explore aesthetic elements in *Aristotle's Poetics* and *Bharatmuni's Natyashashtra* under the light of their matching and contrasting features. The term aestheticism is originated from the *Greek* word 'Aistheta' intended to suggest things appealing to the senses. Later on in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> C, this one was taken to mean the philosophy of beauty. In the modern sense, it popularly stands for the knowledge of beautiful in nature and art.

Since the *Vedic* period, the theory of *Rasa* delivers an explanation and paves the ground for its application by the writers on literary criticism from *Bharata* downward in the works of *Bhamaha*, *Dandin*, *Vamana*, *Udbhatta*, *Rudrat*, in *Agnipurana*, *Anandvardhana* and *Abhinavagupta* – to suggest the aesthetic pleasure.

In '*Poetics*', *Aristotle* talks of catharsis in chapter VI, using it in the sense of "the pleasure of poetry", or "the special pleasure of tragedy" about ten to twelve times at different places. He refers to the meaning of this term that the audience should feel a satisfactory calm of mind after suffering from intense emotions of pity and fear.

Thus in this paper, this is to find out certain uniqueness of and major similarities, obscure identities and subtle and salient differences between the philosophies of aestheticism in *Bharatmuni's Natyashashtra* and those of *Aristotle's Poetics*. Both of them have deeply talked of aestheticism respectively in their aforesaid books.

The theory of *aestheticism* was discovered by the *Greek* writers. In 1750, *Baumgarten* published '*Aesthetica*' dealing with the criticism of taste consideration as a philosophic theory. Later on the term came to signify something which relates to the criticism of the beautiful or to the theory of taste<sup>1</sup>.

Thus the systematic study of beauty in terms of art and literature goes by the name of aesthetics.

In *Plato's* phrase "*rejoice in their grieving*" and in *Jowett's* translation of the phrase of *Plato*, the spectators "smile through tears"<sup>2</sup> which is neither different nor other than the aesthetic pleasure characterized by the realization of *Rasa*.

### *Bharatmuni's theory of Rasa*

<sup>1</sup>Humphrey House, *Aristotle's Poetics* (Indian ed. Kalyani Publications Ludhiana, 1970) P. 113

<sup>2</sup> Humphrey House, *Aristotle's Poetics* (Indian ed. Kalyani Publications Ludhiana, 1970) P. 113

In Indology and Indian literature, the theory of *Rasa* has been discovered and enumerated by *Ramavtar Sharma*<sup>3</sup> and it has been applied in many senses, such as affection, poison, semen, six different flavours of tastes of food, mercury, liquid, sperm, both process and realization of taste, gold, nectar, word essence, a particular ingredient of the body which results from secretion in the body. The first outcome from the digestion of food, erotic etc, eight poetic Rasas, fruit, astringent, water, food, grain, iron, vermilion, a kind of vine, garlic, stem of a specific vegetable a specific kind of sugarcane called devamerisha, flesh, vinegar, a masculine deity and impotent<sup>4</sup>.

In order to point out the theory of *Rasa*, in the present context, the meaning and theory of *Rasa* is discussed here briefly from the period of *Rigveda*, the oldest literary treatise of India and the oldest book of the world library.

In the earlier *Mandalas* of *Rigveda*, *Rasa* occasionally signifies water or milk.

But in this *Veda*, *Rasa* is generally taken to refer the juice of some plant.

*dadhanah Kalase rasam (IX : 63, 13)*

*yasya te madyam rasam (IX : 65, 15)*<sup>5</sup>

In *Atharva Veda*, *Rasa* is used in the sense of juice of plant, "*udosad hinam rasena*" (III : 31, 10) and also in the sap of herb which extends its usage to the sap of grain "*aharsan dhanyam rasam*" (III : 26, 5.)

During the *Upanishadic* period<sup>6</sup> the sense of *Rasa* as the essential ingredient of plants and grain disappears and it began to characterize only the essential element or essence alone, for instance *Rasa* emerges to mean as life breath or the vital air in the essence of the limbs of body.

If we go deeper in the *Upanishads*, there are the two different meanings of *Rasa* in the two

different *Upanishads*. The one being essence in the sense of par excellence and the other being the highest taste or experience accompanied by a sense of joy or aesthetic pleasure — are combined. In that—

*"Rasa, there stands for the one Supreme Reality of the Universe, viz, the self-luminous consciousness ..... which, when realized, results into Perennial Bliss" (Sankaran)<sup>6</sup>. In Taittiriyanopanishad, "Rasa vaisah, rasam hyavayam labdhvanandi bharati" (II 7, 1) And in Maitriyanopanishad "etdvai sattvasya riipam tatsatvameveritam rasah" (V; 2).*

At the very outset in, Chapter one of his *Rasagangadhara*, *Pandit Raja Jagannathan* holds that from the two *Upanishadic* excerpts, just quoted above, it emerged that the germs of the theory of *Rasa* conceived by *Valmiki* and developed later on by *Bharata*, and later writers on poetics.

In *Sanskrit* language, the word *Rasa* is as simple and common as is lofty and confusing that it is instantly comprehended and used by all, right from the level of an illiterate common man, on the one hand, denoting the sense of relishing taste of some food or certain unspecified aesthetic pleasure of some events in his daily life, and on the other, by a *Yogi* and a *sumavash or sahrdaya* reader or spectator of art for whom *Rasa* is the all content surpassing bliss which the former in his transcendental meditation finds and the delight which is offered to the latter by art making him asleep in body and a living soul.

In VI<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Natyashastra*, the sages ask *Bharata*, "*What is that ingredient called Rasa*"? (VI : 2), *Bharata's* reply is cryptic, "*That which a sahrdaya relishes by mind is Rasa*". (VI : 31, 2) Hence *Rasa* characterizes the pleasure which all classes of people receive from their experience and relish it. *Valmiki*, the father of the classical *Sanskrit*

<sup>3</sup> Ramavtar Sharma, Vangamayarnvam (4657-4661) (Varansi : Janmandat, 2024 – Vikram Era)

<sup>4</sup> See. A. Sankaran (The Theory of Rasa and Dhvani) Madras: University of Madras, 1973 PP-1-6)

<sup>5</sup> In this context, it should also be remembered that the entire content of all the four vedas has been

classified into four divisions. I-Mantra, II-Brahmana, III-Aranyaka and IV-Upanishad, Hence in the broader sense, Upanishads are nothing separate from the Vedas.

<sup>6</sup> Asvadayanti manasah tasmannatyarusah smirtih (N.S. VI : 31, 2)

Literature, stands "*At the threshold of the theory of Rasa*".<sup>7</sup> (Sankaran, 7)

The theory of *Rasa* refers to the emotional effect of drama or poetry in general. In that, it successfully illustrates the meaning, nature, and the rise of aesthetic pleasure that a refined and responsive or sahrdaya, audience experiences, while witnessing a successful enactment of a drama by talented actors, or reading poetry. This theory is laid down briefly in the oft-quoted aphorism by *Bharata* in chapter VI of his *Natyashastra*:

*Vibhavanubhava Vyabhi carisanyogad rasanispattih*

Its meaning can be defined in simple English that the realization of *Rasa*, results from the appropriate union of *Vibhava, anubhava and vyabhicharibhava*. But this witty definition in itself does not make any sense for us without associating the union of *Vibhava, anubhava, vyabhicharibhavas* with the permanent emotion.<sup>8</sup>

*Bharat* points out eight, points out eight *sthayibhavas*, which being changed into eight different moods of impersonal joyous emotional exaltation, give the experience of eight different *Rasas* in accordance with their respective *sthayibhavas*, can be represented in the following table —

**STHAYIBHAVA RASA**

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| I.   | <i>Love or Rati</i><br><i>erotic or Srivgara</i>     |
| II.  | <i>Mirth or Hasya</i><br><i>human or Hasa</i>        |
| III. | <i>Sorrow or Soka</i><br><i>Pathos or Karuna</i>     |
| IV.  | <i>Anger or Krodha</i><br><i>wrath or Raudra</i>     |
| V.   | <i>Fortitude or Utsaha</i><br><i>heroism or Vira</i> |

VI. *Fear or Bhaya*  
*terror or bhayanaka*

VII. *Disgust or Jugupsa*  
*disgust or vibhatsa*

VIII. *Wonder or Vismaya*  
*marvellous or adbhut*

Before throwing a cursory glance at the consideration of the realization of *Rasa*, it is significant to make known to ourselves at least very briefly *with vibhavas, anubhavas and vyabhicharibhavas, vibhavas* are the stimuli which rouse a permanent emotion. They are basically of the two kinds — human and environmental, and in language of *Natyashastra*, they are known as *alambana and uddipana respectively. Alambana vibhava* refers to the object which is responsible for stimulating or exciting the dormant emotion. As in the case of the *ratisthayibhava*, the beloved *Shakuntala* stimulates the emotion of love in *Dusyanta*, and the lover *Orlando* activates the passion of love in *Roselind* in *Kalidasa's Abhijnanasakuntalam* and *Shakespeare's As you Like It* respectively. The lively season of spring, the moonlit night in *saradritu*, the cool, soft, slow and sweet smelling breeze, and the fragrance of flowers are the *uddipनाविभवस*, as they tend to enhance the emotive effect as how *environmental vibhavas* add to the excitement of love in *Shelley's Love's Philosophy*:

*The fountain mingles with the river*  
*And the river with the ocean,*  
*The winds of heaven mix forever,*  
*With a sweet emotion,*  
*Nothing in the world is single,*  
*All things by a law divine,*  
*In one another's being mingle*  
*Why not I with thine?*

<sup>7</sup> Srimad Valmiki Ramayana, Sanskrit Text and English Trans (Gorakhpur : Geeta Press, 1992)

<sup>8</sup> Siegfried A Shulz, "Foreword", R.L. Singal Aristotle and Bharata : A Comparative Study of Their

Treatises of Drama (Hosiarpur : Vishveshvaranand Vedic Research Institute, 1977) P. VII.

*See the mountains kiss high heaven,  
And the waves clasp one another,  
No sister – flowers would be forgiven,  
If it disdained its brother :  
And the sunlight clasps the earth,  
And the moonbeams kiss the sea —  
What are all these kissing worth,  
If thou kiss not me?*

*Anubhavas* tend to be the external manifestations of the emotions evoked or excited by *Vibhavas*, as words, gestures, and satva (N.S. VII: prose following the verse 4). “They suggest and indicate the effect wrought upon the characters after the emotions have been evoked.”<sup>9</sup>

Apart from the eight permanent emotions, *Bharata* also happens to point out *vyabharibhavas* in the main aphoristic *sutra* itself, these are subsidiary and evanescent emotions which accompany *sthayibhavas*. All the temporary emotions are essentially and substantially concerned to the permanent emotion. Fundamentally, they tend to originate from it and ultimately merge into it like the waves in the ocean. There are 33 as told by him.

Thus it can be briefly summed up that *Bharat’s* theory of *Rasa* occupies *sthayibhava* as the basic raw material whose essence is contained in “*Asvadayanti manasah*” i.e., tasting by mind. It stands as a poetic technique through which the appropriate union of *vabhavas*, *anubhavas*, and *vyabharibhavas*, as awakens the *sthayibhava* and transform it into a depersonalized and idealized form, it emerges into *Rasa*. IV-

#### **Aristotle’s Poetics:—**

*Aristotle* deals with the theory of catharsis in his world-famous treatise ‘*The Poetics*’. The word catharsis is originated from the *Greek* word ‘*Kathairo*’ which means to cleanse or purify. During the time of *Aristotle*, it was applied in the medical

sense of purification or purgation. *Aristotle* takes the meaning of this word in the sense of the purgation of the excess of pity and fear from the human heart under the effect of tragedy. Thus in both the medical and religious senses, it meant to the purification to all intents and purposes. There is still a lot of controversy, chaos and ambiguity regarding *Aristotle’s* own opinion about this term. Here is a definition of tragedy concerning the same view —

“*Language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play, in the form of action, not of narration through pity and fear affecting the proper purgation of these emotions*”.<sup>10</sup>

On the ground of his theory of catharsis, he has defended poetry in general and tragedy in particular against *Plato’s* allegation that they nourish baser feelings and passions such as pity and fear, that bring no honour to us in the real life. He held that far from nourishing the emotions of pity and fear, rather it did purge the moral system of man of the excess of pity and fear if occupies the pathological and homeopathic process of purgation.

*Aristotle* happens to convince with *Plato* on many points concerning the effect of poetry and its connection with emotions. *Humphry House* maintains these points below.

*Poetry is an imitative art*

*Poetry rouses the emotions of pity and fear*

*Poetry adds pleasure not only as an imitation but also as arousing the emotions through imitative means.*

*The rousing of emotions is caused to happen by poetry with an effect upon the whole personality of the spectator or reader and on his emotional behaviour in real life.*

But *Aristotle* opposes *Plato* apart from aforesaid points. Unlike *Plato*, *Aristotle* strongly defended poets and poetry as they do the pathological effect in the society.

<sup>9</sup> Singhal, P. 38

<sup>10</sup> S.H. Butcher, ed. *Aristotle’s Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, (Indian edition, Ludhiana : Kalyani, 1974)

**Comparison between Bharatmuni's Theory of Rasa and that of Aristotle's Catharsis:—**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> C., occasional efforts were made to maintain certain interrelationship "between the Greek theatre and the Sanskrit drama".

It was done with this intention by the certain unproven theories that Indian theatre borrowed on adopted everything from the Greeks. But there is no Western scholar to have undertaken the herculean task to read thoroughly the canons and principles of the two renowned theoreticians—**Bharatmuni** and **Aristotle**, excluding **Max Lindenass, Leipzig, and Windisch** who made the surfacial observation of the same.

Thus this is to attempt in this paper to highlight certain points of similarities and dissimilarities between **Aristotle's** theory of **Catharsis** and **Bharatmuni's** that of **Rasa**, without dealing with the effect of one upon the other.

**Similaritis**

- I- There is a common discussion about both the terms, **Rasa** and '**Catharsis**', if they could have been borrowed from medicine or religion.
- II- Both of them have propounded the theory of imitation with the view that poetry does imitate human emotions signifying certain flavours based upon man's dominant emotions which lay the foundation of the poetic composition.
- III- In both the treatises — **Natyashastra** and **Poetics**, the theories of **Rasa** and **Catharsis** were propounded for the dramatic purposes, but with the due course of time, they happened to encompass the whole of poetry.
- IV- The universalization and depersonalization of emotions in **Catharsis**, and the **Sadharanikarana** in the realization of **Rasa** stand alike both in process and effect.
- V- Both the theories of '**Rasa**' and '**Catharsis**' tend to deal with aesthetic pleasure which is afforded by art to the spectators.

- VI- Both **Aristotle** and **Bharatmuni** are intended to point out the certain mental and intellectual qualifications for the, fit audience, the appreciator of Art.

**Dissimilarities**

- I- Both of them differ in this respect that **Bharatmuni** talks of different **Rasas** in the **Rasa** theory, while **Aristotle** is confined only to the emotions of pity and fear in his '**Catharsis**'.

- II- **Bharatmuni's Karuna** and **Bhaiya** are completely opposed to **Aristotle's** pity and fear, but have much deeper and wider meaning and application.

Thus in brief, it can be said that both **Aristotle** and **Bharatmuni** has scattered the fragrance of **Aestheticism** in **English** literature along with some similarities and dissimilarities. On the one hand, the first one sowed the seeds of **Aestheticism** pointing out the different aspects of **Rasa Sidhanta**, on the other hand **Aristotle's** innovation of the theory of **Catharsis** laid the basic foundation of the **Greek** plays. Thus both of them added a very significant contributions for the flowering of not only **Sanskrit** drama, the **Greek** drama, but also of **English** drama.

**Notes and References (N.S., VI : 31, 2)**

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