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A PARALLEL BETWEEN THE INDIAN CONCEPT OF RASA THEORY AND THE WESTERN THEORIES

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Before presenting parallel study of the Indian concept of Rasa and the Western theories, it is essential know the meaning and function of Art and literature. Encyclopedia Britannica (1951) defines Art as "All great Art, being emphatically personal is accompanied by variation from existing standard of excellence. This personal variation is marked by a new intensity of feeling, by a new sense of vitality and by a new rhythm of Pattern. All great artist are pioneers possessing these characteristics..... Emotion is the key stone of painting as it is of poetry"

"By literature, A Broche means the written thought and feelings of intelligent men and women arranged in a way that gives pleasure to readers".

Thus the western function of art and literature in terms of pleasure and emotions put together may be said equivalent to the concept of Rasa in Sanskrit poetics. However the Indian tradition does not consider pleasure and emotions as separate entities. The term Rasa has been translated into English as sentiment. But there is hardly any word in English language which can convey adequately the two fold significance of Sanskrit word Rasa, its emotive and transcendental aspect. And what is worse, Sentiment in English has also a debased sense, as we can see from its adjectival form sentimental, But since the word has gained wide acceptance, it has also been used in this treatise.

Rasa is one of the oldest and most popular words in the Vedic as well as in the classical compositions of the Sanskrit language. Though in the Vedas, we do not find any clear concept of Rasa theory, the word is used as an expression of supreme pleasure. In Rig Veda, Rasa denotes the sense of water, some juice and cow's milk. In Atharva veda this word begins

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to develop a new meaning of taste and flavour, During Upnishadic period, its sense changes into the essential element or essence alone. In Ayurveda, the word Rasa conveys the sense of constituent fluid or essential juice of the body.

But in the context of poetics, Rasa stands for an inexplicable, inward experience of the audience or of the readers while witnessing a dramatic performance or reading a poetical work. It is the reader's reaction to his personal involvement with literature.

Kuppu-Swami points out that Rasa is not an empherean highway but an essentially human highway if one can connect it with one's instinct.

Vishwanath seems up the qualities of the experience of Rasa in the following way "It is invisible, self luminous, made up of cognition and bliss, similar to the realization of the absolute and of supermandane nature.

The earliest and the fullest treatment of the concept of Rasa is found in the Natiya Shastra of Bharat Muni. It is Bharat who codified Rasa and elucidated a clear conception of it in connection with dramatic performance in his Natya-Shastra.

In the west, we find some traces of the earliest speculation of the theories regarding the function of art and literature, in Greek antiquity, where Homer considers that the end of poetry is pleasure produced by some sort of artifice and the seductive power of poetry". Socrates favours the idea of pleasure divided by the spectators after witnessing the representation of passions of man in aesthetics and art. Plato states "poetry feeds and waters the passions instead of drying them up, although they ought to be controlled if mankind are even anxious to increase their happiness and virtue".

But Aristotle in more scientific way talks of purgation of the emotion of pity and terror in his theory of Catharsis. He asserts that tragedy provides a sort of emotional relief by purging out the excess of these emotions and maintaining a balance in between human nature. In his views Catharsis of emotion is the immediate or even the sole cause of special pleasure.

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In the Greco-Roman period, emotion and feeling were considered to be essential elements in poetry and art. Longinus asserts. "I should cheerfully lay it down that there is nothing eloquent as real passion standing where it ought.....

Philips Sidney and Dryden, the great modern critics of English literature lay emphasis on "The delightful teaching as the aim of literature.

TS Eliot's objective correlation is worth mentioning here. In his essay on Hamlet, Eliot formulates, in a way canon for the portrayal of an emotion in poetry. The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is finding an objective correlation. In other words a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, which form the formula of that particular emotion, terminates in a sensory experience, the emotion is immediately evoked and can be appreciated.

Eliot's correlation appears to be a direct modern version of the Rasa formula of Bharat. After all, the entire poetic mechanism as stressed in the Rasa sutra is oriented towards enabling the emotional content to be relished by the gifted readers which is also Eliot's purpose in formulating the concept of objective correlation.

I A Richards treats the nature of aesthetic pleasure as systematization of impulses. It is a state of gratification, a state of mind when we feel gratified and fulfilled. A.C Bradley and Clive Bell consider the aesthetic pleasure as a unique pleasure, distinct from all other kinds of pleasure, material as well as spiritual.

Thus the western theorists have laid great emphasis on the stimulation, excitement, expression and communication of emotions But Bharat Muni moves a step forward to the western theories. He maintained that there are various emotions like love, humor, anger etc. In fact without pleasurable emotions, there is hardly any place for pity rather humor enriches the intensity of pathos.

There is another drawback in the theory of Catharsis. Aristotle talks of purging out of painful elements of pity & terror but Catharsis does not get rid of pathological experience. The Rasa

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theory has both psychological as well as a philosophical basis, whereas Cathartic theory is grounded on a psychological- cum pathological foundations.

After discussing the two theories Western & Indian about the aesthetic pleasure, It is essential to throw some light on the various aspect of Rasa. Bharat Muni defines Rasa as follows The Rasa is consequents (Anubhavas) and Transitory feelings (Sanchari Bhavas). While explaining his definition, he says that there are eight Dormant moods which turn into Rasas according to the environment they receive. These eight dormant
stationary moods are:-

(I) Love (Rati)
(ii) Laughter (Hasa)
(iii) Sorrow (Shoka)
(iv) Heroism (Utsaha)
(v) Fear (Bhaya)
(vi) Rage (Krodha)
(vii) Disgust (Ghrana)
(viii) Astonishment- (Vismaya)

As a resultant of the different stationary moods turning into Rasa, eight different Rasas take their forms according to the environment presented. Thus love turns into erotic (Sringara), laughter into comic (Hasya), sorrow into pathos (karuna), Vigour into Heroic (veera), fear (Bhaya) into terror (Bhayanak). Disgust into odious (Beebhatsa), Astonishment into wonder, Rage into furious (Raudra) and Tranquility into peace (Shant).

According to Bharat, Vibhasas (the cause) are the determinants of the eruption of an emotion. He says when actors manifest their action and words act as the medium to evoke the same emotion in the hearts of the spectators. The causes are divided into two classes, the supporting causes (Alambanes) and the stimulating or circumstantial causes (Uddipanas). Supporting causes of a Rasa are the persons who excite the dominant emotions (Sthayibhavas). Sometimes, one character may act as subject to another character. Excitant

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(Uddipan) is the stimulating environment which provides a stimulus to the awakening of that Emotion.

Second constituent is consequents (Anubhavas). These are the visible effects of the feeling which follows the stimulation of some emotion. These are further sub divided into two sub heads physical (Angik) and psycho-physical (stvik). Transitory feelings (Sancharibhavas) pass in and out of a person's heart but do not hinder the permanent dominant emotion. They feed & nourish the permanent dominant emotion and appear and disappear in their minds as waves rise and fall in the sea.

Thus the dominant emotions aroused by causes, exhibited by the consequents and excited by excitants, nourished by transitory feelings and relished by the sympathetic readers and spectators.

It can be concluded that Rasa theory is superior to the doctrine of Catharsis. It pays enough attention to the sympathetic readers and audience. It is more psychological and comprehensive as compared to the western theories. It explains fully the cause of the emotion, their external manifestation and their associated factors. It appears that a complete system of emotive pleasure has not been materialized in the west.

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