

Application of Rasa theory in Shakespeare's *Othello*

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Abstract : Rasa is a theory of Indian poetics which deals with the entire literary process, beginning from the conception in mind of the artist to the final perception in the heart of the perceiver. This study aims to analyse the William Shakespeare's *Othello* in the light of the rasa theory of Bharatha.

Keywords – Rasa, Sthayibhavas, Anubhavas

I. INTRODUCTION

Natayasastra is the first treatise to deal with Indian poetics written by Bharatha Muni. It deals with the rules relating to theatrical performance. Bharata gave great importance for rasa. The word rasa can be translated as taste, it is the aesthetic emotion. The eight rasas named by Bharatha are *sringara* (erotic), *hasya* (comic), *karuna* (pathetic), *raudra* (furious), *adbhuta* (marvellous), *bibhatsa* (odious), *vira* (heroic) and *bhayanaka* (terrible). Rasa is a combination of various *bhavas*. According to Bharatha it is from the combination of *vibhavas* (determinants), *anubhavas* (consequences) and *vyabharibhavas* (transitory feelings) that rasa is generated. Bharatha lists thirty three *vyabharibhavas*. The *sthayibhavas* or the permanent states are those which are present throughout the work of art. There are eight sthayibhavas, they are, love, sorrow, anger, terror, mirth, energy, disgust and astonishment. According to Bharatha the four primary constituents of drama are wisdom, dance, music and rasa. "Without rasa there can be no drama, that it is the soul of any play." (Patnaik 15). Rasa theory attempts to indicate the character of the emotional effect of drama which culminates in the aesthetic experience. And therefore aesthetic experience can be defined as the act of tasting the rasa.

II. Rasa in *Othello*

Othello is the "tragedy of love" (McEachern 182) written by William Shakespeare. At the beginning of the play *Othello* is portrayed as a military hero who defends Venice. He is presented as a noble person but he is not the supreme power of the state, and thus he is not so different from the spectator. The heroic sentiment is introduced by the portrayal of *Othello*. He is a superior type person. He has military strength, reputation of might and influence which are the *vibhavas* of *vira* rasa. Heroism and diplomacy are the *anubhavas* of *vira* rasa. Energy and ferocity can be seen as the transitory states in the play. The qualities that suggest heroism in *Othello* are firmness and patience. In the presence of danger or threat he does not give way. His might and strength can suggest courage. He is a man devoted to duty and is of unflinching quality. These qualities of the hero arouse the heroic sentiment in the play.

It is the presence of a malicious villain that brings about the tragedy of *Othello*. The villainy of Iago destroys the relationship between *Othello* and Desdemona. Iago says:

But for my sport and profit, I hate the moor,
And it is thought abroad that twixt my sheets
He's done my office. I know not if't be true.
But I, for mere suspicion in the kind,
Will do as if for surety.

(Act 1 Scene 3)

Raudra rasa is dominant in the play. There should be an aggressor for the arousal of *raudra* rasa. It can be an external agent or the man's own mistake can lead to it. In the play we find both. The external agent is Iago; he plots against *Othello* and instigates him that Desdemona is unfaithful. He asks his wife Emilia to steal the handkerchief of Desdemona which was given to her by *Othello*. It was a token of love for Desdemona. Iago uses it as a tool for his malicious plots. When *Othello* feels that his wife is unfaithful the *raudra* rasa is aroused. It was a mistake from the part of *Othello* to trust the words of Iago. Iago is commonly referred to as "honest Iago," *Othello* says "Iago is most honest" (Act 3 Scene 3). And this gave rise to the existence of the most perfect villain the world literature has ever seen.

Iago says "Men in rage strike those that wish them best." (Act 2 Scene 3), he is a villain that doesn't have a real motive. He is an encapsulation of malevolence. His actions are devilish. The dialogues used by Iago throughout the play are full of curses and oaths. And they contribute to *bibhatsa* rasa in the play. *Bibhatsa* rasa has its basis in the dominant state of disgust. It is formed when one hears unpleasant words. In the last act of the play *Othello* calls Desdemona as a "strumpet." *Othello* verbally abuses Desdemona because his heart was hardened when he mistakenly thought that she was unfaithful to him. Despite his cruel words we find *Othello* in grief and after he abuses Desdemona we find him in tears. *Raudra* or the furious is manifest more in words than in deeds. Thus words can both manifest anger as well as pain.

Fury or *raudra* can give way to self destruction. Othello loved his wife so much but when he assumed that she is unfaithful he became furious and at last kills her. He says:

I kissed thee ere I killed thee ; no way but this
Killing myself, to die upon a kiss.

(Act 5 Scene 2)

By this action Othello is destroying himself. He lost a faithful wife, he lost the person he loved most in the world. A moment of misunderstanding lead to his destruction. According to Bharata, pity and fear are the two major emotions that a tragedy should evoke.

In Act 1 Scene 3 Othello describes how he won Desdemona's love:

"She loved me for the dangers I had passed
And I loved her that she did pity them."

This line in *Othello* emphasizes the *sringara* and *karuna* rasa together. Desdemona loves Othello because of his travels, adventures and the dangers that he had passed. And Othello loves her because she feels pity for him. Love is the dominant state of *sringara* rasa. Love in Indian tradition has always been associated with optimism. In the play we can see both love in union (*sambhoga*) and love in separation (*vipralambha*). In *vipralambha* the separation is temporary. Desdemona leaves her father because of her love for Othello and goes with him. Here we can see their love in union. Seeing the beloved one, hearing his or her voice and playing with them are the *anubhavas* of *sambhoga*. When Othello murders Desdemona but later finds out that she was innocent he again feels deep love mixed with remorse. Here we can see love in separation. Death, insanity and fear can be consequences of *vipralambha* and intense love can lead to courage.

Even when Othello decides to kill Desdemona he still has love for her. He says:

Yet I'll not shed her blood,
Not scar that white skin of her than snow
And smooth as monumental alabaster.

(Act 5 Scene 2)

Here the elements of *soka* can be seen as mixed with *raudra*.

Karuna rasa arises from the dominant state of sorrow. Separation from the dear ones, death and other misfortunes are the determinants of *karuna* rasa. Sorrow exudes from sorrow and fear proceeds from fear in ordinary life but for a *sahrudaya* he can derive pleasure even from painful situations. According to Bharata bliss is the only reality. Pain and pleasure exist together.

Karuna is the consequence of *raudra* rasa. *Raudra* rasa is seen in *Othello* when Othello assumes that his wife is infidel, he is agitated, and he determines to kill her. After strangling her to death when he finds that she was innocent he feels pity for her. *Raudra* lead to destruction. *Raudra* and *karuna* rasa is a result of deprivation. *Raudra* can be associated when there is injustice and oppression. In the play injustice was done to Desdemona, who was a faithful wife. Injustice can lead to suffering and hence to *karuna*. Wherever heroism is manifest *raudra* will accompany. Because *raudra* is seen as a courageous state of mind.

After Othello strangles Desdemona to death, one feels *soka* for the wife. And the *soka* for the man can be felt only because he realizes his mistake at the end. Every essence of tragedy is hope and loss of hope brings *Karuna* rasa.

Bhayanaka rasa occupies a secondary position in works where the heroic sentiment is seen. In *bhayanaka* fear is the permanent state. *Bhayanaka* gives rise to *bhaya*. The cause of fear in *Othello* is the rage of Othello. He is a powerful man and his anger brings about the ruin of the subordinate Desdemona.

III. CONCLUSION

Soka or sorrow is the *sthayibhava* or dominant state of the play *Othello*. The character Othello is presented in a heroic light. He is a noble man who has military strength. His adventurous stories have made the heroine Desdemona to fall in love with him. The portrayal of Othello gives rise to heroic sentiment. *Sringara* rasa is produced in the scenes when both Desdemona and Othello declare their love for each other. There is both love in union and love in separation in the play. When Desdemona leaves her father to be with Othello we find love in union. After the death of Desdemona when Othello realizes that he was mistaken he feels deep love for his beloved wife at the same time he feels remorse.

The presence of a malicious villain brings about the tragedy in *Othello*. To produce *raudra* rasa there should be an aggressor. It can be an external agent or the man's own mistakes can lead to it. In the play the external agent is Iago and the mistakes of Othello add to it. *Raudra* rasa is aroused in the scenes in which when Othello assumes that his wife is unfaithful. This leads to his determination to kill her. During the scenes in which Othello strangles Desdemona there produces the *bhayanaka* rasa. *Karuna* rasa is produced throughout the play. It is aroused along with the *sringara* rasa in love in separation. One can feel *karuna* or pity when the faithful Desdemona is murdered and when Othello realizes his mistake.

The flow of different rasas in the play can be traced as *vira*, *sringara*, *raudra*, *bibhastsa*, *raudra* and *karuna*. While reading or watching the play the connoisseur will have a tendency to identify himself with the character. And it will culminate in the aesthetic experience.

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