

Metaphysics and Aesthetics influence of the Sankhya and Advaita to Gaudiya Vaisnavism

Abstract

The aesthetic theory of Gaudiya-Vaisnavism is intimately linked with the religious and metaphysical position accepted by this particular school of philosophy. The projection of into aesthetics is not at all a feature which is peculiar to Gaudiya-Vaisnavism alone. We may leave out in this context some ancient masters like Bharata, Bhamaha, Dandin, Udbhatta and Vamana excursion into poetics has not been complicated by instruction of metaphysical considerations. But from the Agnipurana onwards we find a definite attempt to link up respective metaphysics theories with the perspective metaphysical positions to which the authors happened to subscribe. Thus the concepts of the Sankhya and the systems of philosophy came into the field of aesthetics with their marked influence on different aesthetic theories.

Keywords: Aesthetic, Gaudiya-Vaisnavism, Agnipurana, Advaita, Sankhya, Bhakti-Rasa, Ahamkara, Mahat-Tattva Etc.

Introduction

The most stubborn problem relating to the theory of Rasa is – how the basic sthayibhavas or the permanent moods, like pain, anger, disgust and soon, blossom forth into a transcendental experience of unmixed bliss relish. We have shown how the traditional theories have failed to present any logically convincing explanation of this peculiar phenomenon of poetic enjoyment. But it is agreed on all hands that the entire concept of Rasa stands on this plank of transcendentalisation and sublimation of the basic moods into an extra-ordinary relish of an unmixed aesthetic pleasure. Traditional theorists have at least left the matter with an appeal to the transcendental power of literature itself (Kavya-vyaparasya lokottaramahima). But this does not explain or resolve contradiction between the basic mood of pain or anger or disgust and the culminating feeling of poetic ecstasy. It is here that the Advaita Philosopher Madhusudana and the Gaudiya-Vaisnava philosophers of the school of devotion have stepped in to show that no aesthetic pleasure can be rationally explained until and unless one can discover a basic continuity and unity between the basic mood and the aesthetic climate of Rasa. If this unity or continuity is to be maintained there is no other alternative than to concede that only Bhakti-rasa is Rasa par excellence and that the term Rasa, properly speaking, has to be reserved for Bhakti alone.

Objective of the Study

The search for a fundamental unity behind the varieties of emotions and aesthetics relish is, however, not a novel endeavour initiated by the Gaudiya-Vaisnavas for the first time. Even long before the advent of Gaudiya-Vaisnavism in the field of aesthetic philosophy, the same attempt at reduction of many into one was conspicuously undertaken by Bhoja Raja in his “**Sringara Prakasha**”. Even before Bhoja aesthetics philosophers thought it worthwhile to look for a basic emotion and abasic aesthetic feeling on which the rest were supposed to depend. Thus the **Agnipurana** opens its chapter on Rasa with an unequivocal proclamation of this basic unity –

“aksaram paramam brahama sanatanamajam vibhum
vedantesu vadantyakam caitanyam jyotirisvaram ¹
anandah sahajastasya vyajyate sa kadacana?
vyaktih sa tasya caitanya eamat kara rasahvya ²
adyatasya vikaro yah so'hankara iti sarta
tato bhimanastatrodam samaptam bhuvanatravam ³
avimanodratih sa ea pariposamupeyusi
vyavicaryadisamannyat sringara iti giyate ⁴



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tadbodha kamemitare hasadya apyanekasah
svasvasthanadivisesottha parighosa svalaksanah⁵

Review of Literature

The concept of Rasa developed in these opening verses, appears to be reclining against a peculiar philosophical background which has been constituted by a judicious blending of the elements of the Samkhya and the Vedanta systems. According to the Advaita Vedanta, the fundamental metaphysical reality, which gains an inverted expression in the manifold phenomenal world, has existence, consciousness and delight for its essence. Now esthetic realization is essentially of the nature of delightful enjoyment which should have a logical continuity which the nature of fundamental metaphysical reality. Individual human consciousness, though limited by an apparent Individuality is not basically different from the universal consciousness. Hence Rasa is revelation of Supreme bliss. This conception of Rasa underlines a continuous process from meta physics to aesthetics. This is like an apocalypse or revelation of the Soul itself. Yet it cannot be as much unlimited as the realisation of the Brahman, since, the limiting factors furnished by the personality of the aesthetic percipient together with the climate and characters conjured up by the skill and craft of the writer cannot be totally dispensed with. Here the author of Agnipurana has introduced the Sankhya concept of Ahankara to explain the revelation of Rasa.

In Sankhya philosophy Ahankara is the intelligent ego which is considered to be an evolute of Buddhi or Mahat-tattva which is the first transformation Primordial matter. The latter Sankhya-Philosophers, like Vijnana Bhiksu have refused to concede any ultimate difference among Buddhi, Ahankara, and Antah-karana. They think that same principle of intelligence has assumed these three names in respect of the three aspects associated with itself, viz., the sense of certitude in cognition, the sense of Ego standing as the subjective element of cognition and the undying disposition necessary for retentive capacity of the mind. Very often, in the Puranas the different system of Philosophy, especially the Sankhya and the Vedanta are presented in an amalgamated form. One cannot be sure whether this amalgamation has proceeded from confusion of contents or from an extraordinary zeal for bringing different contending systems into a harmonious whole. Whatever be the case, the author of Agnipurana has thought it necessary to introduce the concept of Ego in the development of its aesthetic philosophy.

Concept and Hypothesis

The writer on aesthetics belonging to the Rasa-dhvani School, beginning from Anandavardhana and Abhinava –Gupta, down to jagannatha, have tried to eliminate the element of Ahankara from the field of aesthetics realization. From their standpoint aesthetic enjoyment is a supreme moment of depersonalisation in which we have a glimpse of the universal bereft of the superimposed personal limitations. This view falling in line with the Advaita principle has been considerably modified by Bhoja and the author of

Agnipurana. According to them the Ego must stand at the basis of literary relish. The Advaitin's Brahman does not suffer any mood or emotion. But Rasa by all definitions must have an emotive background. So the pure Brahman of the Advaita is not sufficient to explain the nature of Rasa. The emotive content of the personal man must intervene to make the realisation of Rasa effective and definitive. Hence the Ego or Ahankara has a decisive role to play in this regard. We shall see more of it in our study on Bhoja's theory of rasa to which the Gauriya –Vaisnavas appear to be largely indebted. It is significant that the Agnipurana conceives Ahankara as the first evolute or transformation of Brahman itself considered in its aspect of delight. This is a definite departure from the tenets of Advaita philosophy according to which Ahankara is a transformative expression of the indefinable Advaita nescience, and not of Brahman. But the Agnipurana has tagged the Sankhya Ahankara to the Advaita Brahman perhaps in abid of show that both are necessary for the revelation of rasa as enjoyment relished by a contemplative personal subject. Hence the subject – object relation is not obliterated in the relish of Rasa.

This is quite unlike the situation conceived by the rasa-dhvani-school. From Ahankara comes Abhimana or the sense of personal possession which gives rise to the emotive mood of rati or love. This rati is nourished and finally revealed as sringara or the poetic sentiment of the eros. The universal and the personal both should combine to constitute the poetic enjoyment. The sringara or erotic sentiment is the fundamental poetic feeling which is expressed in the varieties of rasas due to the differences in the situation environments created by the skill and imagination of the poet. The appreciative critic must be a possessor of delight. The poet or the critic cannot be abstracted away from the possessing person and viewed in pure universality. The power of enjoyment must finally belong to the nature of the self itself. And this self, as long as we live within the limits of worldly bondage, cannot be trimmed of the personal element. Literary enjoyment is not a moment of final emancipation in which the depersonalised self stands only in the glory of its universal essence. So the Ego is very much there along with the sense of love possession. In this way the Agnipurana has thought it wise not to dismiss either the Brahman of the Advaita or the Ahankara of Sankhya in developing its philosophy of aesthetics, and has brought the two into a common line leading to the realization of rasa in which both the universal and personal have a combined role to play.

While the author of Agnipurana furnishes the metaphysical basis of aesthetics realization by the fusion of Advaita and Sankhya principles, Bhoja-raj draws heavily upon the Sankhya system in order to bring out the essential character of rasa. The very opening verses of Sringara Prakasha bear eloquent testimony of this fact:

**Atmasthanam gunavisesamahamkritasya
sringaramadhuriha jivatamatmayoneh /
Tasyatmasaktirasaniyataya rasatvam yuktasya
yena rasikoyamiti pravadah //**

**Sattavtmanamamaladharmavisessajanma
janmantaranubhavanirmita-vasanotthah /
Sarvatmasampadudayatisayaikaheturjagarti kopi
hridimanamayo vikarah //
Sringara-vira-karunadbhuta-raudra-hasya-
vibhatsa-vatsalya-bhayanaka-santo-namnah /
Amanasisurdasarasam sudhiyo vayamtu
Sringarameva rasanad rasamamanamah //
Apratikulikataya manaso mudaderyah
samvidonubhavateturihabhimana /
Jneyo rasah sa
rasaniyatayamasakrtayadibhumani
punarvitatharasoktih //**

In Sarasvati-kanthabharana too, Bhoja clearly recognizes Sringara as the only rasa -

Rasobhimanohankara- sringara iti giyate

He then quotes with approval the following famous verse which is found both in Dhvanyaloka and Agnipurana –

**Sringari CET kavih Kavye jatam rasamayamjagat /
Sa eva cedasringaari nirasam sarvameva tat //
According to Bhoja Sringara are both the basis
and the culmination of Rasa. He challenges the
distinction between Rasa and basic imotions
(sthayibhavas). In his own explanation states
without any equivocation:-**

**Stah siddhametat-ratyadayah sringaraprabhava
eva ekonapancasatbhavah/
Viradayo mithyarasapravadah/**

Sringara evaikascaturvargaikakaranam rasa iti.

According to the Sankhya philosophy empirical personality is constituted by the preponderance of Sattva-guna the essence of which is a brightfeeling of pleasure. Sringara is basically this delightful aspect of the personality itself. Indeed this is the very essence of the empirical self or personality. According to the Sankhya the transcendental self in pure consciousness which is too much devoid of character to suffer any sence of personality in itself. In the other hand the Ego or personality is a transformation of the principle of Mahat-tattva which is endowed with the predominance of Sattva-guna. So **Bhoja** says – “jagarti kopi hridi manamayo vikaroh.” Thus Sringara is a perennial disposition derived from the essence of Sattva-guna. It is manifested as a transformation complete with personality. Aesthetic relish is the culmination of this personality. So says Bhattanrisinha in his commentary on Sarasvati-Kanthabharana-

**“Yenarasyate, yenanukulavedaniyataya
duhkhamapi sukhathvenabhimanyate, yena
rasikairahamkriyate, yena sringamuechrayo riyate
sa khalu tadroso’ssti”.**

Findings

Thus aesthetic Sringara is the peak or culmination of delight which forms basic essence of empirical personality. In Sarasvati-Kanthabharana Bhoja empathically identifies Sringara with an abiding love which constitutes the essence of Ego. While explaining the three figures of speech Urjasvin, Rasavat and Proyas he quotes the definitions of Dandin and interprets them in conformity with his own theory of Rasa. In prayas which Dandin defines as ‘prayas priyatarakhyanam’ the Ego attains its fullest self-realisation. The Ego is Sringara itself which

realizes its perfection by fully expanding itself into an all pervading love as a universal phenomenon. Hence Bhoja explains –

**Preyah priyatarakhyanam.....ahamkarasyottarram
kotimupalaksayati**

**Sarvesamapi rayadiprakaranami ratipriyo,
Ranapriyah, parihasapriyah, amarsapriya iti
premni eva paryavasnam bhavati.**

According to the Sankhya theory of causality nothing new can be created. What we call creation is only a manifestation in a new form of the old content that we consider to be the cause. The effect is thus a transformation of the cause. So the effect before its manifestation exists in the cause in an unmanifested form. This is the Sankhya theory of evolution which conceives the primordial matter constituted by Sattva, Rajas and Tamas to be undergoing a constant process of evolution throwing of new evolutes out of the old content. In the aesthetic context Sringara is an evolution of Sattva-guna which is the predominant constituent of Ahamkara. To maintain the continuity between cause and effect the manifested Sringara should be a continuation of the evolving empirical self. In other words there should be a basic identity between Sringara as the culminating aesthetic relish and its basic in the constitution of Ahamkara. The cause and effect must belong to an identical content. This is unequivocally admitted by Bhoja-Raja-

**Samkhyadarsanasrayena ca Sringarah
sannevavirbhavati na tu sannutpadyate.**

The expression ‘atmasthanamgunavisesam’ in an introductory verse of Sringara-Prakasa which has been quoted above requires some explanation. We cannot take the expression strictly in its literal sense. The Atman or the transcendental self is pure consciousness unadorned and unqualified. So it cannot be the seat of any quality whatsoever. Here too Bhoja’s explanation clearly follows the Sankhya tradition. The explanation may be offered in two different ways. Vachaspati Misra takes the position that the transcendental self is reflected in the empirical self of which the predominant constituent Sattvaguna is translucent enough to receive the reflection. As a result the empirical self, though material, appears to behave as a conscious category. The distinction between matter and spirit is thus obliterated. In this way the Atman itself falsely seems to possess qualities which do not really belong to it. So the expression ‘atmasthanamgunavisesam’ should be taken in a secondary or ‘aupacharika’ sense.

The other view which was developed later on by Vijnanabhiksu here finds favour with Bhoja. According to this view the empirical self together with its subject-object relation is itself reflected in the transcendental self. Thus the pure Atman though thoroughly unqualified appears as a possessor of qualities due to the foreign reflection received by it. Bhoja clearly advocates this view in the following observation-

**Atmani pratvimbaiadvarana
ahamkaragunavisesasya bharmarthaphalabhute-
tritiyapurusarthajivitasya-sringarasya
abhimananparanamuah.**

Since the reflection by itself is not a reality the transcendental soul does not undergo any transformation or receive any contamination thereby. The Ego or the empirical self dominated by Sattvaguna is itself the basic phase of Rasa (rudhahamkarata rasasya purva kolih). In this stage of Urjasvi which Dandin conceives as an alamkara? But really it is the stage of Ego asserting itself (rudhahamkarata) which has not yet revealed it as rasa. The different bhavas or moods arise from this basic Abhimana- Sringara which acts as the substratum. In the field of literature the bhavas, inspired by vibhava, anubhava and vyabhicarins, reveal the fundamental abhimana as the relishable rasa. It is the manifest middle stage in the process of revelation. For the practical purpose it is this stage of ahamkara which receives the terminological expression 'rasa' (vibhavanubhavavyabhicari-samyogat para-prakarsadhigame rasa-vyapadesarhata rasaayaiva madhyamavastha). This middle stage is what Dandin likes to define as rasavad-alamkara. Bhoja significantly does not identify it as external figure of speech, but as the manifested essence of rasa itself.

Then this ahamkara rises to a climax and culminates in a delightful love which is relish par-excellence (paramapari-pake prema-rupena parinatau rasaikayanamiti rasasya parama katha iti pratisthitam bhavati). This culminating stage of the empirical consciousness expressing it as abundant love corresponds to the preya-alamkara of Dandin. Here too Bhoja does not take it as an external embellishment of literature, but as the final revelation of rasa as love. Bhoja further says that rasa as abhimana is a transformation of material prakriti (abhimanatma prakritivikarah). It lies dormant as reflection in the transcendental self. It is then a stage of slumber as if, due to the operation of Tamaguna which acts as a hindrance to its awakening. The reflected Ahamkara is awakened from slumber when the vibhavas, anubhavas and the vyabhicharins cooperate in the emergence or vavas, which are nothing but the emergent phases of the empirical self (tamonirbhedasthanesu pratibimborupena suptaiva pratibudhyate). While explaining the implication of the expression – 'jagarti kopi hridimanamayo vikarah' Bhoja draws our attention to the analogy of awakening from sleep and observes that rasa as Ahamkara is still very much there in its unmanifested stage and its nonmanifestation should not be confused with non-existence ('sputa prabodha dristantenatasyanavirbhavavasthayamepistimitarupena vasthanavidyamanatam nirakaroti'). This is quite in keeping with the Sankhya tradition of casual concept.

Hence the expression 'manamayah' is highly significant since it implies that the Ego is the basis and essence of rasa. It marks a departure from other rival theories ('manamayaityanenacasyabhimanatmanah abhimanaeva mulamitanyavastambham niracheste'). This entire process of revelation or the evolution of rasa from abhimana preman is made possible by the reflection of the empirical self in the transcendental self. In the final account consciousness in its primary sense is Purusa itself.

Ahamkara by itself is basically inert being an evolute of material Prakriti. Pure consciousness has no transformation. It is too unqualified and immutable to suffer any process of evolution. But in the revelation of rasa we require both consciousness and process of transformation. So we need some sort of marriage between matter and spirit. This is done by the reflection of matter in spirit. So the material transformation of ahamkara appears as a conscious spiritual process. In this way matter is spiritualized and spirit is materialized. Bhoja's explanation of rasa is thus thoroughly imbued with the spirit of Sankhya Philosophy. It is a definite departure from later induction of Advaita Philosophy into the interpretation of rasa, which we find in the concept of avaranabhanga, developed by Srivatsalanchana and Jagannatha. Bhoja's concept of rasa is especially significant for the rasa-theory of Gauriya-vaisnavism.

Conclusion

The culmination of rasa in an abiding love, as it has been advocated by Bhoja, is a sure step towards the 'madhura' rasa which according to the Gaudiya-Vaisnavas marks the peak of devotional perfection. Philosophers of aesthetics have put themselves to much strain in their attempt to explain how even the emotion like grief, anger, fear or disgust which are felt in real life can attain revelation as rasa, the unfailing essence of which is an unmistakable sense of delightful enjoyment. The matter has been complicated beyond redemption by bringing in the mystical and metaphysical concept of Brahmananda or Brahmasvada as a means to explain the inexplicable. The essence of Brahman, according to the Advaita, is existence, consciousness and bliss. This constitutes the internal or essential definition of Brahman (swarup –lakshana). It is distinguished from the external definition or tatatha-lakshana which takes into consideration the basically unreal aspect of Brahman conceived as the cause of creation, continuity and dissolution of the Phenomenal Universe. The aesthetes subscribing to the Advaita view fall back upon the Swarup –lakshana of Brahman in order to explain the emergence of rasa. They take the clue from the passages of the Upanisads which identify Brahman with rasa. The Upanisads evidently have used the term 'rasa' in the sense of transcendental bliss or delight. It is extremely doubtful if the aesthetic delight derived from literature or other forms of art was especially in the view of authors of the Upanisads when they identified Brahman with rasa. Metaphysical, every form of bliss, happiness or delight, enjoyed even in the phenomenal world, is basically an expression of transcendental bliss which constitutes the essence of Brahman. Just as every form of knowledge is a revelation of universal consciousness, so every form of delight is a revelation of universal bliss. Universal consciousness and universal bliss is one and the same Brahman. In the proposition, such as 'I see a tree', 'you touch a table', 'He feels a pain', the subjects and the predicates and also the forms of cognition go on varying from case to case; yet consciousness per-se remains constant as the basic reality and content throughout the variation of forms.

As the constant content it is the expression of universal consciousness, hence even in instances of illusory knowledge, knowledge in itself is not an unreal appearance. When an illusion is contradicted by a consequent valid knowledge, what is negated is not the cognitive aspect as such. It is the objective aspect which becomes the object of negation (jnanamse ma badhah, api tu visayamse). Hence the veil of avidya is lifted in every form of cognition so far as the essential content of consciousness is concerned. avidya screens the visayamsa or the objective aspect of knowledge. We do not concern ourselves here with the fact the great Advaitin Madhusudana has considerably modified this view. Similarly, in the form of mundane and non-transcendental delight the aspect of joy is very much there as the revelation of Brahmananda itself. So far as the joy in itself is concerned the screen of avidya is definitely lifted there off. This should follow as a logical implication from the famous passage of the Taittiriya Upanisad:-

**Anandadyova khallvimanibhutanijayante,
anandeno jatani jivanti, anandam
pranyabhisamvisantiti.**

Now, to explain the revelation of all the emotions as a joyful relish which forms the essence of rasa, the alamkarikas of the Advaita School introduce the concept of avarana-bhanga in the blissful aspect of the Brahman. The most emphatic and unequivocal statement of this position is found in 'Kavya-pariksha' of Srivatsalanchana Bhattacharya:-

**Kavye hi vabhavadibhirabhivyajyate sthayi,
tasyam cabhivya ktavantahkarana-vrttirupayam
caitanyanandasvarupatmapi bhasate, vedantinaye
sarvasminneva jnana atmabhananaiyatyat.
Atmamanoyoga – ghatitaya atmabhanasamagryah
sattvat Ajnatasyatmano bhanam vina
pratyaksadinamajnata-jnapakattarupa-
pramanyanupa-pattasca. Evam sati Kavya-
darsana-sravana-mahima uktya abhivyaktya
caitanyasyanandamase avaranabhanga kriyate.
Tatha ca ratyadyavacchinnam
caitanyamanandamase bhagnavaranataya
anandarupataya praksamanam rasa iti
paravasitorthah.**

Jagannatha has followed Srivatsalanchana with his remarks –

**Tatkalanivartitanandamsavaranaajanena
Ratyadyavaechinna bhagnavaranacideva rasah.**

Here alamkarikas of the Advaita School make a bold attempt to resolve an apparent contradiction between Sthayibhava and rasa. In this way they go to show how even a grief is relished and enjoyed as Karuna rasa. But they do not seem to be conscious of a definite weakness involved in this line of interpretation. Srivatsalancha correctly says: Vedantinaye sarvasminneva jnaneatmabhanana iyatyat. But he does not see or rather ignores the fact that in a similar way in all sorts of enjoyment whether artistic or crudely mundane, it is Brahmananda which is essentially revealed. If it is so what is so what is the philosophical ground of drawing the distinction between aesthetic delight and crude pleasures, of the world by elevating the former to the status of transcendental relish (alaukika-ananda) and dragging down the later to the level of crudeness (laukika-ananda). In other words the transcendentality or alaukikatva of rasa cannot be established by the metaphysical concept of avaranabhanga.

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