CHAPTER - I. : THE FUNDAMENTALS :

Drama as a form of literature:

Dramatic literature occupies a significant place in the domain of literary output. Not only does it occupy a large space in the libraries, but it has also its deep and sacred station in the hearts of millions. Even in modern days, on looking at the thronging crowds at the theatre, we realise the truth of Bharata's saying that drama arose out of the desire of the gods who prayed to Brahma in these terms 'Krishaniyakam iccham dovyam itavyam ca yad bhavet.' This prophecy regarding drama by the Creator receives confirmation from this very fact. In appeasing the angry demons Brahma stated that drama is not a monopoly of the gods alone, all the ideas can be presented through it and everyone, whether sorrowful, wearied, bereaved or a sage, will find mental solace and bodily rest in the drama. (Dwakhartanam sramartanam sokartanam Tapasvinam /, Vismajananam loke natyam etad bhavisyati // NS. I, 111-12).

This vast scope has made the drama what it is. In it we find royal personalities like Dusyanta and Ramanahdra, noble characters like Cārudatta, great sages like Kañva, Durvāsas etc., illustrious ladies like Sakuntalā, Sītā etc. as well as innumerable types of the common folk. In fact, drama includes in its sphere so easily and charmingly the most sublime and the commonest
trivialities; so easily it rises to the highest peak of human
grandeur and descends to the pit of buffoonery, it is so closely
associated with the consciousness of the society that, to quote
the words of Allardyce Nicoll, a modern critic on dramatic theory,
we can say that 'The drama is at once the most peculiar, the
most elusive, and the most enthralling of all types of literature.'
(Theory of Drama)

The unique character of drama:

This unique and all-influencing character did not elude
the Indian mind. Hence drama claims its origin in the oldest
book of the Indo-Aryans, the Veda. Bharata says - 'Jagrāha
pāthyam rgvedāt sāmabhyo gītam eva ca / Yajurvedāt abhinayān
rasān ātharvanād api // ' (NS. I,17). All the four sacred Vedas
were churned, so to say, by Brahmā to create this new form. The
Indian mind has always been religious without being dogmatic
and so Aesthetics and Poetics have got no dissension with Ethics
and Philosophy in India. Drama accordingly endowed with all the
enthralling qualities, aims at removing the evils in man and
vindicating the victory of truth and beauty. In fact, the aim
that literature, as formulated by later critics, will lead the
reader to the realisation of the truth - after a perusal of the
Rāmāyaṇa - that Rāma is to be followed and not Rāvana, is most
effectively seen in the drama. Drama being an art bi-sensual in
nature (dṛṣṭam śravyam ca) is pregnant with affective qualities
and through life-like presentation works out, in a very artistic
manner, the purgation of the heart as thought of by Aristotle.

Theories on drama began as early as the 1st or 2nd
century B.C. Unfortunately the dramatic compositions on which
the generalisations rested could not escape the ravages of
time. The theories, however, prove their definite existence.
The greatest and first theorist Bharata and his commentators
facilitate us with a study of the development of drama and the
dramatic theory and the increasing importance of drama is felt
from the fact that critics like Sāgaranandin (early 10th century),
Dhanañjaya (10th century), Rāmacandra and Gunacandra (12th century)
and Śaradātanaya (1175 – 1200 A.D.), besides many others, carried
on the discussion of the various theories and wrote criticism of
the extant dramas. So much so that following the lead of
Abhinavagupta, to whom goes chiefly the credit of establishing
the Rasa theory of the Dramaturgic school in relation to general
literature, Visvanātha (1300–84 A.D.) included drama for the
first time in his treatise on poetics, the Sāhityadarpana.

The Theory of Imitation:

Modern Psychology allots an important place to
imitation as is obvious from the observation of James - "Imita-
tion and invention are the two legs on which the human race has
historically walked." Apart from the important part it plays in
the execution of the individual's social and mental upliftment,
imitation is and has always been the basis of literature in
general. The poet and the novelist both imitate the actions of
men and the incidents in which they are involved in terms of
words, rhythmical or prosaic. The dramatist also takes help
from imitation in the preparation of his play. The greatest
critic of ancient Greece, Aristotle, so, defines tragedy, which
was to him the only dramatic form of worth, as the 'imitation of
an action that is serious.'

The sage Bharata defines drama as an imitation of action in these words:

'Trailokyasyāsyā sarvasya nātyam bhāvānukīrtanam'
'Lokavṛttānukaraṇaṃ nātyametaṃ mayā krtam'
'Saptadvīpānukaraṇaṃ nātye hy asmin pratiṣṭhitam'//

(NS. I, 103, 109 & 116)

Later critics also define drama as 'avasthānukṛtir nātyam'.(DR)

From these observations it becomes clear that drama as a distinct form of literature is one with the other forms of literature as far as imitation is concerned. What, then, are the special features of a drama which distinguish it from other literary forms? In short, the question resolves itself in, what is drama and the dramatic.

"Lokavṛttānukaraṇa", mere imitation of people's action serves the purpose though the definition seems too wide. To make it precise we must hit upon some other characteristic features of the drama as a form of literature. Bharata gives us a clue. It is the fact of 'prayoga'. The first play that was performed by Bharata and his sons in Heaven in the presence of the heavenly bodies was one purporting the defeat of the demons from the gods. (Tadante'nukṛtir vaddhā yathā daityāḥ surair jītaḥ, NS.I,58) This fact narrows down the term 'imitation' by two factors - presentation and audience. We may conclude that 'drama is an imitation of action which is meant for presentation before an audience.' This presentation must not be narrative but it
should be interpretative by a band of actors. A drama as a distinct literary form must then have these qualities. There should be imitation of life and action, capable of being interpreted by the actors through acting (abhinaya) in order to please an audience.

Difference of the drama from other literary forms:

From the above discussion we can distinguish drama from other literary types; Mahākavya, Kathā, Ākhāyikā etc., though all these are one so far Rasa is concerned. The drama as a form of literature, on the other hand, presupposes 'abhinaya' which is typical to it. The dramatist will take his characters from the world (Nāṭakāṁ khyātavṛttam syāt) but the exact presentation of the scenes of life would be disliked by the audience. To copy is not the function of the dramatist; he is to imitate. The dramatist is at liberty to take any natural scene or episode of the daily life, but in order to make it a success, he must employ devices to endow a significance to the ordinary episodes so that it may transport the 'laukika' things into the 'alaukika'. The devices, which a playwright makes use of, are called dramatic conventions. These conventions, when related to plot, may be named technique and all these depend upon the stage, the play, and the audience.

We have seen that an additional charm in the drama is due to its 'drāyatva'. The 'kāvyas', 'kathās' etc. please the reader but only through the ear. There is a marked difference between them and the drama in this respect. The actors through
their acting make drama more appealing. Being at the same time both 'śravya' and 'drṣya', drama has of necessity a difference in its plot as well. A Mahākāvyya can never be transformed into a drama only by assigning some portions to certain characters. The story to be told in a drama must be dramatic in nature. The word dramatic is popular and the meaning of it is 'something striking'. We often read in newspapers of many dramatic episodes as of a brother, for long away from his own brother, meeting him in a distant part of the country suddenly and their recognition and union. Drama also provides such striking coincidences and there is an ancient law as well that at the end the unexpected or the unaccountable (Abhuta rasa) may have a suitable place to surprise the audience.

The object of dramatic representation:

The drama, thus aims at presenting the illustrious lives of remarkable men through the display of various sentiments. Mention has already been made (page 8.) of the fact that drama shares the same ideal with the other forms of literature in general i.e. inculcating some moral truth that may ennable life and character of its votaries. This function of drama should not, be considered as primary. The didactic element should be made ulterior. Joy or 'ānanda' is of prime importance. The catering of pure delight, and not of moral teaching, is the mission of dramatic literature. The satirical comment on the advocates of knowledge in a drama is finely expressed by Dhanañjaya in the beginning of his treatise (DR. I, 6.)
It may be noted here, that the joy, which is offered by the drama to its audience, must be moral in essence; otherwise it would fail in its mission of entertaining people. Immorality can never entertain the mind permanently even if it may succeed in doing so to a limited number for a limited period. The faculties of the mind being inter-related, it is not possible to enjoy anything without satisfying the cognitive faculty which chooses between the good and evil.

So we may hold that drama aims at entertaining the mind and to imparting to it through that entertainment some moral lesson, the effect of which ennobles life and character.

**Rasa and the Drama:**

Admittedly the theory of Rasa is a unique contribution of the Nāṭaka school, a school which may be called by that name, founded chiefly by Bharata and his followers. Abhinava and Śāradātanaya refer, in their works, to Dvādasā-sāhasrī, Nāṭyaveda, Sadāśiva, Brahman and some other theorists; they are taken for granted merely on the ground of reference by these authorities. Whatever may have been the theory of Rasa before the advent of Bharata about the 1st century B.C., it received a definite and logical shape in the Nāṭyaśāstra in the form of a sūtra -

'Vibhāvānubhāvavyabhicārisamyoṣgād rasanīśpattih'

Rasa is evolved by the combination of Vibhāva, Anubhāva and the Vyabhicāri.
That a school of dramaturgy had existed long before the Alamkāra school, is clear from the fact that Pāṇini mentions some of the Śūtrakāras viz: Śīlālin and Kṛśāśva in his Aṣṭādhyāyī, while no such mention of schools of Poetics is found. From this we may infer that the dramaturgic school is older than the Poetic school. Even as early as Bharata’s time there existed the idea of Rasa; and along with it may have existed the idea that Rasa is to be sought chiefly in the literary products. It was Bharata himself, who first of all established Rasa as the essence, ātman or soul of poetry, to the later writers, of all poetic products with theoretical exactitude. Moreover, Bharata made ‘guṇas’ and ‘alāṃkāras’ subservient to Rasa and was perhaps the first to enumerate the poetic excellences in their primitive condition. Thus we can conclude that Bharata, the earliest extant theorist on dramaturgy, was also the first to establish that the awakening of Rasa in the hearts of the spectators is the principal business of drama.

This relation of Rasa with the drama was, later on, discussed elaborately by the advocates of the Rasa school (viz: Lollāta, Śāmkuka and Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka and placed upon the highest seat by Dhvanikāra and Abhinavagupta) so accurately that, as a result dramaturgy, though formulated separately, got itself incorporated in the Poetics. Further, that Rasa was chiefly conceived by the dramaturgic school becomes clear from an examination of theorists like Bhāmaha, Daṇḍin and others. To them Rasa was not so important as it was to the Rasavādins. They included into ‘alāṃkāra’ the Rasa which, according to Bharata and his followers, was itself ‘alāṃkārya’.
From the above discussion it is clear that Rasa was first conceived by the dramaturgists and it was they who considered Nāṭaka or drama as the fittest vehicle of Rasa. The supernormal (Alaukika) and unique character of Rasa and the psychology working behind the realisation of it were discussed clearly by the followers of Bharata. The Utpattivāda of Lollaṭa, the Anumitivāda of Śāmkuka and the Bhuktivāda of Bhāṭṭa Nāyaka present the gradual evolution of ideas regarding the realisation of Rasa. These scholars use the drama to illustrate the function of Rasa and even Abhinava, the great master of the Dhvani school uses drama to illustrate his theory of Vyañjanavāda in the realisation of Rasa. Thus Rasa was first conceived as belonging to drama and it was much later that Rasa came to be included by the Dhvanivādins in their 'dhvani' which according to them constituted the soul of poetry. (Kāvyasyātā dhvaniḥ, DHV. Vākyam Rasātmakaṃ, Kāvyam, SD.)

We may now discuss how the dramaturgists came to accept the awakening of Rasa as the principal function of drama and how did they apply it to drama.

Nāṭyasāstra says:-

'Yathā bijād bhaved vṛkṣo vṛkṣāt puṣpam phalam yathā
tathā mūlam rasah sarve teṣu bhāva vyavasthitah.'

(NS. VI, 308)

(As from the seed comes out the tree, from the tree come the flowers and fruits, so all the Rasas are the seed and the bhāvas (emotions) dwell in them.)

This simile of a tree and the consummation of it into flowers and fruits contains the process and function of Rasa in the
domain of drama. The simile is apt inasmuch as we cannot give preference to either 'bīja' or 'vrksa' to the other. Both are required and so both Rasa and Bhāva jointly go to produce the Rasabhāvanā. The 'sthāyī' (sentiments), 'sāmcāri' and 'sāttvika' bhāvas are as indispensable as are the Rasas resulting from them. (Srngāra, hāsya etc.) With these are related the fourfold histrionic device of presentation (Abhinaya).

Once again, Bharata points out that Rasa is a thing of the dramaturgic school exclusively. Not merely he clearly states - 'Aṣṭau nāṭyarasāḥ smrtāḥ' and 'Ete hyaṣṭau rasāḥ proktāḥ druhiṇena maḥatmanā', he further adds, in course of explaining the 'āsvādyata' or tasteability of Rasa, that as men taste the Rasa of the perfectly prepared dish so does the 'preksaka' taste the dramatic Rasas when suggested by histrionic presentation of the various emotions (bhāvas) through the 'vācika', 'āṅgika' and 'sāttvika abhinayas'. As they are realised through the 'abhinaya' they are called 'nāṭyarasa'. - 'Yathā hi nānāvyaḥjanasamakrtam annam bhuñjānā rasān āsvādayanti sumanasaḥ puruṣāḥ harṣādīnścādhigac-chanti tathā nānābhāvābhinayavyayājītan vāgaṇgasattvopotan sthāyibhāvān āsvādayanti sumanasaḥ preksakāḥ. Tasmān nāṭyarasāḥ iti vyākhyātāḥ.' (NS. VI, 31)

A word as to how the simile of seed, tree, flower and fruit has been used to exemplify the fulfilment of the dramatic plot, and how it has given rise to the 'pāñcasamādhis' and other technicalities, may now be considered.