CHAPTER - IV

THE CHARACTER OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

We shall now take up the question like (1) how Rasa is developed, (2) what is the character of Aesthetic experience, (3) how Rasa is enjoyed, and (4) by whom Rasa is enjoyed.

Following the view of Abhinavagupta on Rasa in the fourth Chapter of Mammata's Kāvyaprakāśa¹, he says "Rasa is a permanent mood or primary emotion such as love etc. developed by means of Vibhāvas, Anubhāvas and Vyabhichāribhāvas". This Rasa is of the nature of an experience consisting of enjoyment of it both by the poet and the connoisseur with eyes closed since it resembles the experience of the bliss of realizing the highest principle, supreme joy. The aesthetic experience lasts only so long as the exciting, ensuing and the fleeting emotions last and consists chiefly of relishing by the responsive mind alone being made fit for enjoyment by the process of universalisation. The Sthayībhava is a specific emotion which is always present in a primary or instinctive form in the mind of such spectators as are proficient in the art of experiencing poetic relish or emotion and it becomes distinctly manifested by such agencies as those of women etc., and garden etc., well-known in literature and drama - which agencies are Bhāvas by means of which the internal workings of minds such as Stāyin, Vyabhichārin accompanied by four-fold acting.
can be specifically known - and by means of ensuants or effects of acting such as side-long glances, throwing up of arms around the neck of the hero or heroine by the hero or heroine, which enable the spectator to cognize and realize in a concrete way the special emotional states having the characteristics of permanent and transient emotions and by means of the transitory emotions such as patience, memory etc., called causes, effects and auxiliaries in the real world. These Vibhāvas are recognized in their universalized form, not showing any restriction due to either the affirmation or negation of any of those specific relations that are involved in such conceptions as "this is mine", "this is my enemy's", "this is not mine", "this is not my enemy's" - and even though the said emotion actually subsists in the particular spectator himself, still by virtue of the generalized form in which it is presented, the spectator loses his separate individuality and has his consciousness merged in the Universal and since the spectator represents the mental condition of all men of poetic sensibility, he apprehends the bliss of the emotion. Though this emotion is enjoyed in a highly universalized form, it has no existence apart from its apprehension.

Rasa - Its transcendent charm:

Rasa, as described above is of the nature of a transcendent charm that transcends everything else and lifts up the
consciousness of the spectator to a transcendental level where all other emotional states are merged - the very individuality of the spectator is lost and so long as he enjoys it, he becomes one with the universal. Abhinavagupta adds that "it is relished in the same manner as a mixed beverage, and when it is enjoyed, it appears as if it is vibrating before our eyes, as if it is entering the innermost recesses of our heart, embracing, absorbing and pervading our whole body and mind eclipsing everything else". Obviously, "this is a rapturous bliss of Brahman and the emotion thus manifested becomes the source of transcendent charm and is spoken as Rasa".

This Rasa is not an effect i.e. something produced by Vibhāvas - excitants etc., for if it were an effect, it would continue to exist even after these excitants and the rest cease to exist for example the pot being an effect continues to exist even after the destruction of the causes like potter and his stick, wheel, clay etc., that operated to produce it. But this is not the case with Rasa - experience since Rasa lasts so long as the Vibhāvas etc., continue to exist. Again, Rasa is not to be made known by
the Vibhāvādi etc., as it is never an accomplished entity, like a pot. In actual fact, it is only manifested or suggested by Vibhāvādi etc. and is to be relished. What occurs in such an experience which is neither produced nor to be made known, is not seen to occur anywhere else because, it shows the transcendental or extraordinary nature of its own. It may be regarded as an effect by reason of its being accomplished by relishing it, and it may be regarded as known or cognized in the sense that it forms the object of super-physical consciousness (Svasamvedanagochar) which differs from perception etc., which are ordinary forms of cognition, as well as from the cognition of an imperfect yogin, which is independent of the ordinary means of cognition and also from the cognition of the perfect yogin which is self-centred and free from all touch of any other cognisable thing. The Pramāṇa or the means of cognition of it is not Nirvikalpaka or indeterminate perceptor, nor is it Savikalpaka or determinate perception since it is merely relished as an extraordinary bliss and depends wholly on its own realization. Here also the fact that it is neither of the two and still it partakes the nature of both, confirms that its character is extraordinary or transcendental.

Uniqueness of Aesthetic Perception:

In a qualified person after hearing or reading a poetic composition, there appears immediately after the perception of literal sense, a perception of a different order, an inner perception consisting of a direct experience which completely eliminates the
temporal distinction etc., possessed by the sentences. As a result of this, the state of generality is not limited but extended. The actor by appropriate acting generates a real experience in the spectator and the limiting causes - time, place, the particularity of cognizing subject etc. on one hand and those afforded by the poem on the other, neutralize each other and then completely disappear. The above stated state of generality is readily nourished so that by virtue of the very uniformity of the spectator's perception, it being so nourished, readily nourishes Rasa in all of them and this occurs because the latent impressions of their minds harmonize with each other, the minds being varied by beginning less latent impressions.

Obstacles in Aesthetic perception:

There are seven obstacles impending and obstructing the process of aesthetic perception.

1. The lack of Verisimilitude:

The first obstacle to the realisation of Rasa consists in the lack of adequate realization of the probability of reasonableness of things. In fact, if one is not convinced of the likelihood or veristimilitude of the things presented, he cannot obviously immerse his consciousness in them so that no rest in them can take place i.e. they cannot engage his all absorbing attention. This
is the first barrier to be eliminated. The means by which it is achieved is the consent of the heart which takes place at the view of ordinary events for an event of ordinary character finds ready response in the heart of a spectator. When extraordinary incidents are to be portrayed it is necessary to choose great heroes who, by our deep-rooted faith in them inspire our confidence in their superior capacity to undertake impossible feats. That is why in dramatic compositions whose aim is to teach deeds of extraordinary character transcending the ordinary life, or presenting a lofty moral ideal, the plot and the characters are always drawn from the epics and well-known tradition. This makes the work appealing.

2. The second obstacle is the presence of certain individualistic distinctions of time, place etc., which enable the spectator to sever himself from the objects described. This obstacle consists of in appearing of other forms of consciousness due variously to the fear of being abandoned by the sensation of pleasure etc., to the worry about their preservation, to have a desire to procure other similar sensations, to think of getting rid of them, give them open expression, hide them etc. Even when someone perceives pleasure, pain etc., as inhering exclusively in other persons, other forms of consciousness inevitably arise in him.

The means of overcoming this obstacle are the Natyadharmis or the theatrical conventions which include a number of
things not to be found in ordinary life as for example, the zones dividing pavilion (Mandapa), the stage, various types of costumes, the various dialects used, the different dresses of actors etc., by which they hide their true identity. The various theatrical devices like prologue etc., are employed for this reason only. The presence of the above devices eliminates the original perception like this particular individual, in the particular place, at a particular time. This elimination takes place in so far as in a theatrical performance, there is, on the one hand, the negation of the real being of the actor, and on the other, since the spectator's consciousness does not rest entirely on the represented images - there is no resting on the real being of the super-imposed personage who is super-imposed upon the real being of the actor, so that ultimately there is a negation both of the real being of the actor and that of the character he is playing. Bharat has dealt with all this in connection with Rasa - realisation to ensure universalization of feelings.

3. The third obstacle lies in the undue assertion of self-regarding sentiments or emotions. How can anyone who is overpowered by his own happiness or sorrow concentrate on something else? To overcome this obstacle various means such as music - vocal and instrumental, well-decorated halls, well-accomplished ladies are employed so that on account of a state of generality, these aesthetic objects are enjoyed by all the spectators and possess
such a charming power that even an unaesthetic person reaches limpidity of heart and is forced to vibrate in response.

4. The next comes the place of the possession of sound senses of perception for if the organs of perception are unsound, perception itself will not take place. We require eyes, ears etc., in good condition for the adequate realisation of the data presented to us.

5. The fifth obstacle consists in an absence of clarity or perspicuity. Even where there is clear and unmistakable verbal testimony and inference so as to evoke an evident perception, perception, however, does not rest in them because there is in it expectancy of the certainty proper to direct experience which consists in an evident perception. It is evident that a thing which is directly perceived cannot be proved to be otherwise by a number of inferences and verbal testimonies. To remove this obstacle, we use in dramatic representation something that is different from the inference and verbal testimony and that is almost equal to perception itself.

6. The sixth obstacle consists in the absence of dominant factor. The human mind does not rest content with the cognition of subordinate things but it always runs towards predominant things. Thus the excitants or Vibhāvas, Anubhāvas or auxiliary emotions or Vyabhichāribhāvas or transient feelings do not satisfy human
mind because they are subordinate. Only the Sthāyibhāvas or dominant emotional moods which are directly connected with the ultimate aims or Purusārthas of life satisfy mind.

7. The last obstacle is doubt in general in the efficacy of Vibhāvas etc., in producing and strengthening a particular dominant mood. We must, therefore, always keep in mind that Rasa is that reality by which Vibhāvādi after having reached a perfect combination in the mind of the spectator, make the matter of gustation consisting of consciousness free from obstacles and different from the ordinary ones.

This Rasa differs from the permanent feelings, consists solely in this state of gustation and is not an objective thing i.e. it is not an already realized, self-subsistent thing which can exist independently of tasting. Rasa is a particular form of perception called tasting which lasts exactly as long as the gustation continues and does not last at any time different from it.

This gustation is distinguished (1) from perception of the ordinary sentiments aroused by the ordinary means of cognition like direct perception, inference, the revealed word, analogy etc., (2) from cognition without active participation of the thoughts of others which is proper to the perception of the yogins, and (3) from the compact experience of one's own beatitude which is proper
to yogins of higher order because this perception is immaculate, free from all impressions deriving from external things.

Philosophic character of Aesthetic Bliss:

Abhinavagupta, thus, expounds the view of earlier commentators on Rasa theory of Bharat Nātyaśāstra, and sets out his own views in exhaustive details regarding aesthetic experience. He declares that the previous theories are the staircase on which climbing further or higher has been made possible for him, and he has been able to understand the true nature of Rasa. He only claims credit for improving on the views of earlier authors without unduly criticizing their views. This his method is both of analysis and synthesis. And we can see that Abhinavagupta has given a masterly explanation and exposition of the Rasasutra which has since dominated the field of not only dramaturgy but poetics also. Both in his Abhinavabhārati as well as in Lochana commentary on Dhvanyāloka of Anandvardhana, he repeatedly declares that poetic content is itself Rasa when it is contemplated by connoisseur. He has explained Rasa-experience from the points of view of the dramatist, the actor and the spectator. He has also taken note of and explained seven barriers with a rare penetrative insight and has shown how these can be removed successfully. He has conclusively established that Rasa-experience is different from the ordinary means of knowledge as also from the extraordinary perception of a yogin. The process of Rasa-realisation is unique and
the joy resulting from it is supramundane Bliss. This gives an extraordinary philosophic character to the aesthetic experience. Even so astute thinker as Hemachandrachārya is compelled to follow him verbatim without making any alteration in to the text delineated by Abhinavagupta².
References

1. Mammata: Kāvyaprakāśa IV - 28

2. Hemachandra: Viveka P. 103

"एतसःत्तेष चास्मातिश्रवणीविलम्".