

Review Article

Rasa Paradigm: An Esthetic Probe Into Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

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ABSTRACT

William Shakespeare needs no introduction to the literary public. He has established himself as a fine writer and a master craftsman. The *Tempest* has been viewed by critics and biographers of Shakespeare as his farewell to the stage before retiring to Stratford-upon-Avon. It was printed as the first play in the Folio of 1623, since *The Comedy of Errors*. This article puts in perspective how the theory of "rasa" becomes operative in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. This euphonious play is reread employing the codes of rasa theory in Indian esthetic criticism. The whole action of the play is governed by the supernatural powers of Prospero operating through Ariel. The play can be experienced with supreme delight and delectation when the readers employ the configuration of the fascinating "rasas."

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INTRODUCTION

In India, theater is considered a composite art form in a harmonious fusion of elements from dance, music, pantomime, epic, and ballad. Bharata lists four primary constituents of drama - wisdom, dance, music, and rasa, and among these primary constituents, the most important section is the one on "rasa" (sentiment) and "bhava" (emotion).

Where the hand goes, there the eyes follow;
Where the eyes go, the mind follows;
Where the mind goes, the mood (bhava) follows and
Where the mood goes, there arises sentiment
(Zarrilli. p. 203).^[1]

In Indian literary concepts, rasa signifies the estheticization of emotions. In *Indian Aesthetics: An Introduction*, Sethuraman^[2] has given an account of emotions that stir the mind of the people. In other words, the emotions are transacted from the mind of the creative artist to the minds of the "Sahrdayas." Through physical gestures, bhavas and bodily expressions, the artist conveys the emotions into the mind of the spectator so that he too will be able to experience the same emotion as that of the artist. Bharata states the entire principle of the esthetics of rasa in just six words: "Vibhava, Anubhava, Vyabhicari, Samyogath, Rasa, and Nishpathih." Rasa arises from the proper combination of "Vibhavas" (determinants), "Anubhavas," (the physical consequents) and "Vyabhicari bhavas" (transient emotional states).

In drama, there are nine rasas which are accepted worldwide and has been used in all art forms: They are "Sringara," "Hasya," "Karuna," "Raudra," "Vira," "Bhayanaka," "Bibhatsa," "Adbhuta," and "Santa." V Raghavan in his book, *The Number of Rasas* has given a detailed account of the same. A quick glance through the five acts of *The Tempest* enables us to see the exquisite world of the Navarasas. By expressing a kaleidoscope of emotions (rasas), the play transports the readers to an imaginative realm.^[3]

In chapter XIV of the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge explains the nature of dramatic illusion.^[4]

The poet does not require as to be awake and believe; he solicits us only to yield ourselves to a dream and this too, with our eyes open, and with our judgment perdue behind the curtain, really to awaken us at the first motion of our will and meantime, only, not to disbelieve (Coleridge. p. 87).^[4]

Imagination, as dreams show, is something that awakens in most of us only when our primary senses are put to sleep. The dramatist may feign an imaginary world with imaginary persons, situations, and incredible adventures. However, by the vividness of his narrative, by the minuteness of detail and above all, by the natural sequence of cause and effect, things are made to happen as they would have happened, had they been real. The most striking aspect of *The Tempest* is the same.



Adbhuta rasa actually manifests the whole play. The depth of the sea, the corals and pearls, and the sea change carry us into a region of magic. To enjoy the play, we have to suspend our faculty of disbelief and transcend the thin veneer of it, delving deep into the very spirit of the play which, in the Coleridgean parlance, is “a willing suspension of disbelief” (Coleridge. p. 86).^[4]

The story has to be in the form of a cow’s tail, bushy at the end, and with a crowd of surprise. Right from the beginning of the play, Shakespeare invites the readers to a pleasure dome of poetic play by inducing them to awaken their imagination and sensibility to esthetically perceive the actions of the supernatural agencies. Whatever actions take place on the island is the result of Prospero’s supernatural powers, exercised through Ariel. For instance, Edward Dowden says:

Prospero is the man of genius, the great artist lacking at first in practical gifts, which leads to material success, and set adrift on the perilous sea of life, in which he finds his enchanted island, where he may achieve his works of wonder (Dowden. p. 425).^[5]

Prospero, with the help of Ariel, has drawn around the island, a magic circle which the passengers cannot step across. The attributes of magic used by Prospero are his robe, the wand and the books. He attains his end by the simplest of means, subjugating nature by calling to his aid his magical faculty which is truly one of the greatest of wonders in any Shakespearean romance. By cultivating aright attitude, readers can travel to the world of adbhuta rasa.

Furthermore, music and magic enhance the supernaturalistic aura, in *The Tempest*. The presentation of masque is an excellent example. Masque creates wonder or adbhuta in the minds of the readers. It reinforces the supernatural effect, and the masque itself is supernatural.

Apart from adbhuta rasa, the play also presses into service a number of other rasas: “Vira,” “Raudra,” “Karuna,” “Hasya,” “Sringara,” “Bhayanaka,” “Bibhatsa,” and “Santa.” Of these, the generation of santa rasa is of particular interest as the play significantly culminates in santa rasa. Santa rasa is irresistible. It implies a state of calm or equilibrium: A state of quietude or repose.

Santa rasa is to be known as that which arises from a desire to secure the liberation of the self, which leads to a knowledge of the truth, and is connected with the property of highest happiness (Madhusudana. p. 139).^[6]

The Tempest culminates in three emancipations: Of Caliban from the enthrallment of the drunken Stephano, of Prospero from his magic and of Ariel from the service of Prospero in the cause of the magic. However, the clearest example of the transformation of a character from being an alambana of adbhutata one of santa is furnished by Prospero, the author and stage manager of all that occurs on his island. Prospero has attained the wisdom which a great sage and seer possess. He recognizes the “atman” within him. Transparently enough, Shakespeare is building a new bhava (Santa) in the place of

the old one (Adbhuta) and this transition altogether introduces a new dimension in the rasa configuration of the drama.

Prospero tells Ariel in specific terms:

.... the rarer Action is
In virtue than in vengeance: They, being penitent,
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
Not a frowne further: Goe, release them Ariel,
My Charms Ile break, their senses Ile restore,
And they shall be themselves (Bloom. p. 5.1.33-37).^[7]

Prospero realized his own mortality. It dawned on him that his magic had limits. They are fragile like the “stuff that dreams are made of.” He attains “mokSa.”

Every literary creation is mysterious, whether it be drama, novel or poetry. The poet, the creator takes the Sahrdaya to the ultimate esthetic bliss that is above all languages. In *The Tempest*, as in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (edited by Wilks)^[8] Shakespeare has appealed to the imagination of the readers. A profound presence of navarasas lends the play a dramatic quality that could be rarely seen in other plays. The Sahrdaya or the sensitive reader is invited to perceive the ideal art offered by it. Ultimately, what remains is ananda or esthetic bliss.

Notes

1. Rasa literally means esthetic flavor of any visual, literary, or musical work, that evokes an emotion and feeling in the reader or audience, but that cannot be described
2. In this essay, bhava means emotion, sentiment, state of body, or mind.

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