

Research Article

The Aesthetic Equipose: Impact of Shanta Rasa in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

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ABSTRACT

The ultimate function of art is to bring to us a condition of serenity, stillness, and reconciliation. The universe itself is the result of bliss-creating divine play, and esthetic experience is a participation on the part of both the artist and the sensitive "rasika." The experience which the "rasika" derives is "ananda" and when "ananda" is given a name or from it turns into an object of esthetic "visio" or beauty in nature or art. Drama represents esthetic vision. It makes the sahrdaya experience, a pleasure through his apprehension of various emotions penned in it. Shakespeare was an exceptionable figure in the world of drama. He was literally his own boss. The *Tempest*, the swan-song of the maestro's dramatic career, calls for a fresh interpretation in the light of Indian rasa theory. This article shows how "shanta" rasa becomes a part of the play.

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Keywords: "Ananda,"
"Rasika," Reconciliation,
Serenity

Received: 05th November 2017

Accepted: 20th November 2017

Published: 05th December 2017

In the realm of philosophy, in particular, the philosophy of the beautiful, it is drama that has provided the clue or set the pattern for ancient Indian thought. According to Indian esthetics, the object of drama is not to add to man's confusion by posing fresh problems but to help him transcend the turmoil and attain composure. Accordingly, the ideal of the Indian dramatist shifts from a mere character study to the evolution of rasa, a keyword of Indian culture. Whatever the particular emotion underlying a play or a part of it, be it love, anger, or sorrow, when it strikes a corresponding chord in the spectator's heart, it gives rise to a state of relish or delectation ("asvada").

In the sixth chapter of *Natyasastra* Bharata says, "Nahirasadratekascidartahpracvartate" (Nothing exist or excels without rasa.). Bharata has also given a detailed account of sthayibhavas (permanent emotions) in his *Natyasastra*. The eight rasas and their sthayibhavas and their English equivalents are given below:

Sthayi bhavas	Rasa	English equivalents
Rati	Sringara	Love
Hasa	Hasya	Laughter
Soka	Karuna	Sorrow
Krodha	Raudra	Anger
Utsaha	Vira	Enthusiasm
Bhaya	Bhayanaka	Terror
Jugupsa	Bibhatsa	Disgust
Vismaya	Adbhuta	Astonishment

Bhaskaran^[6] in his book *Bharatiakavyasastram* also made an in-depth analysis of rasas and their sthayi bhavas.

Bharatha has mentioned only eight rasas and their sthayibhavas. He did not mention "Santa" rasa or its sthayibhava. Since he defined "Natyā" as "trailokyanuarana," it is impossible for him to negate the existence of "Shanta" rasa. Sethuraman in his An introduction to Indian Aesthetics says: "The state of serenity is the ultimate aim of all mankind. To reach the ultimate state of Shanta, a man should shed his ego (Sethuraman 126)."^[1] The mood of serenity is inherent in man, but his obsessive preoccupation with worldly life is a stumbling block in the path of quietism. Since Bharata had not mentioned "Shanta" rasa or its sthayi bhava, almost all the later Sanskrit estheticians have come out with their own interpretations. Udbhata is the earliest writer to mention it. After many deliberations extending through centuries, the Indian estheticians have made "Shama" the sthayin of "Shanta." "Shama" is not a complete renunciation but a state of absolute self-realization. It is not a state of total detachment but a state of calm that results from right knowledge and right awareness.

Happiness is the annihilation of all desires and "Shanta" rasa arises from the desire to secure the liberation of the self. It is the only rasa of "moksa karma." The attitude of "moksa" is "shama" and "Shanta" is the rasa of the drama which depicts the endeavor to attain that. The dominant rasa present in the play is "Adbhuta," for the whole action of the play is determined by Prospero, who has all along been an embodiment of supernaturalism. All kinds of wonders and marvels take



place on the island before our very eyes. At the same time, the transition from “Abbhuta” rasa to “Shanta” rasa altogether introduces a new dimension in the rasa configuration of the drama. In a way, the main function of Prospero is to highlight the two contrasting moods of “Abbhuta” and “Shanta.”

At some critical point in one’s life, one is directed away from one’s emotions due to some reason or other, and when one is completely free from all doubts and material attachments, he attains the neutral position called “Shanta.” In Sonnet 94, Shakespeare Sings:

They that have power to hurt and will do none
That do not do the thing they must do show,
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
Unmoved, cold and to temptation slow;
They rightly do inherit heaven’s graces (Sonnet 94).^[2]

[There are people, who have the power to hurt others, but they do not do so; they do not do those things what they give the appearance of doing. Such people attract and affect others, but themselves they remain cold and unmoved. They are slow to temptation. They rightly inherit heaven’s graces; they do not waste away the gifts of Nature]

Prospero, the protagonist had suffered heavily at the hands of his brother Antonio, who had been helped in his evil designs by King Alonso of Naples. Since Prospero has supernatural powers, he could have imposed any kind of punishment. However, during the 12 years stay in the island, Prospero not only acquired supernatural powers but also attained wisdom which a great sage and seer possess. He is perfectly calm and tranquil. His reason overcomes his fury. He becomes an Agent of Providence.

Prospero acknowledges the justice and necessity of retribution revealing a mature sense of acceptance. By attaining “moksa,” Prospero is officially able to resume his place in the society. An accurate description of “Santa” rasa furnished by Prospero occurs in Act V scene I where he says.

But this rough magic
I here abjure; and, when I have requir’d

Some heavenly music, which even now I do,-

To work mine end upon their senses, that
This airy Charm is for, I’ll break my staff
Bury it certain fadoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I’ll drown my book (5.1.57-64).

Prospero had become a kind of philosopher who understood that the world in which we live in is an illusion and to which we must not give too much importance. Prospero had developed a benevolent attitude toward his enemies. In Act V scene I, he speaks to his enemies: “I do forgive thee/unnatural though thou art” (5.1.78-79). At the same time, he also forgives his wicked brother Sebastian. He tells him:

For you, most wicked Sir, whom to call brother
Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive
Thy rankest fault, all of them; and require
My dukedom of thee, which perforce, I know
Thou must restore (5.1.130-134)

All the above-mentioned statements clearly prove the impact of “Shanta” rasa in *The Tempest*.

William Shakespeare dramatically captures the moment of Prospero’s transcendence. The most towering individual thus embraces self-knowledge and self-realization. Irving in his book *William Shakespeare* writes: ^[3]

...Prospero is too manifestly the controlling spirit to arouse much concern for his fortunes. The action is simple and uniform, and all occurrences are seen converging slowly toward their destined point. No play perhaps more perfectly combines intellectual satisfaction with imaginative pleasure. (Irving 188).

Esthetics is man’s experience of beauty in art and nature. In other words, it is an artistic objectification, under the laws of beauty. Beauty is entirely contemplative and arises out of disinterested vision and free of any utilitarian purpose. Hegel^[4] notes that beauty is “a product of human activity” and “drawn from the sensuous field of apprehension by the senses. It is affected by the spirit or the absolute idea” (Hegel 25). The Romantics have identified the esthetic and the artistic and argued that imaginatively fashioned art alone gives permanency to the beautiful. The imaginative mind like a lamp illumines Nature by “throwing its beams into the external world” and “casting a halo of glory on it” (Abrams 59) as Abrams^[5] argues in *The Mirror and the Lamp*. Esthetic Visio is a form of bliss that the self-enjoys. The *Tempest*’s journey into the minds of the audience reaches its perfection when the ultimate esthetic bliss is roused in them. The perception of individual characters and individual action finally results in the perception of “Santa” rasa.

Notes

Quietism: A passive withdrawn attitude or policy toward the worldly affairs.

Aesthetic Visio: “Visio” is a Latin word meaning “vision.” The expression Aesthetic Visio means aesthetic vision.

Equipose: A state of equilibrium.

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Cite this article: Tharakan NA. The Aesthetic Equipose: Impact of Shanta Rasa in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. *Asian J Appl Res* 2017;3(12):3-4.

Source of Support: Nil, **Conflict of Interest:** None declared.