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## **William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: A *rasa* Reading**

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William Shakespeare occupies a unique place in India. Indians have been reading his works and admiring them for decades. His comedies appealed and won our heart immediately. His tragedies also, though they seemed complex and difficult to make aesthetic appeal initially, became very popular later. Among his most popular tragedies in India, *Hamlet* has a unique position due to its story and the protagonist. Hamlet, in comparison to other protagonists like Macbeth, Othello and King Lear, comes very close to the idea of a hero in Indian drama, both classical and popular. He is intelligent, sensible, humane and free from selfishness. He is liked, because he faces bravely one misfortune after another. He loses his father at an early age. The murderer of his father is his own uncle who not only usurps the throne but marries his mother also. His own beloved meets a very sad end and dies getting drowned. Before her death, he happens to kill her father in one rash moment of his life. Later, he happens to kill her brother also in a duel. Hamlet would never have liked to do these things. The circumstances lead him to do these things. In spite of all these, Hamlet continues to be is a well-meaning and well intentioned youth. He remains very upright, noble, brave, fearless, and considerate. He has sincere aversion for anything wrong, immoral, indecent and indecorous. He is never after comforts and power, in spite of his being a prince. He doesn't run away from his duties, be it as a prince or a son. He shows strong sense of commitment. He would stick to his vows under any circumstances and won't mind making any sacrifice for them. Further, he shows high maturity at an early age. These things make Hamlet very dear to Indians because we find these characteristics in the heroes of Indian drama. *Hamlet* echoes Indian value system to a very great extent.

Hamlet is quite unlike other Shakespearean tragic heroes. Othello kills his innocent and virtuous wife. He is vulnerable and gets governed by Iago, an undeserving man. He orders for the execution of Cassio, who was a good youth and was always loyal to him. A hero cannot be credulous to this extent. All his good qualities get diminished due to this demerit of him. Macbeth is very ambitious. He does not mind killing a loving and fatherly King. King Duncan was his guest and had come to honour him. It was a grand gesture of the King Yet, he murders him. He later on kills his friend Banquo also. He does not stop there but indulges himself in other unfair things too. King Lear on the other hand does not have any estimate of his daughters' love and respect for himself. He does great injustice to Cordelia. He ill-treats her and humiliatingly disowns her to be taken away by anyone to marry her. She is given no right as a princess even to have self-respect. When one compares Hamlet with these tragic heroes, one immediately notices a basic difference in their characters. All other protagonists are senior in age and yet they lack in maturity and behave in a rash manner, while Hamlet is youngest among these four. He hardly has seen the world, but he shows rare maturity and rationality in his



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conduct. Indians naturally appreciate that. They do not appreciate protagonists indulged in sinful acts for personal ego or ambition. Perhaps, that is why Sri Aurobindo found barbarism in these tragedies. Sri Aurobindo states that, while reading *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, one feels that they belong to ‘the cruder civilizations and more barbarous national types.’ (as quoted in S K Das 56)

In the other three tragedies of Shakespeare, one finds the *karuna rasa* i.e. compassion or sympathy for the protagonists. Readers do aesthetically experience the ways in which the protagonists are helpless against their circumstances. So, though they err and indulge themselves in wrong actions, they win the compassion of the audience, because they are basically good. Further, in the end, they realize their errors. Sometimes, they confess them, seek pardon and opt for self-punishment also. These final gestures of them liken them to the Indian audiences and so they are received as great tragic heroes.

The case of *Hamlet* is slightly different. When one applies *rasa* theory on *Hamlet*, the response to Hamlet is not only that of compassion (*karuna*) for him. The response is rather varied. Sangeeta Mohanty in her doctoral work on *Hamlet* mentions that *karuna rasa* is the predominant *rasa* like other tragedies. S. C. Sengupta, however, believes that odious (*bibhatsa rasa*) is the dominant *rasa* in the play. Sangeeta Mohanty adds that heroic sentiment is also a very powerful sentiment, but, because Hamlet is not fully successful and he himself also gets killed in the end, the play can be described as having pathetic/tragic sentiment as its central *rasa*. So, ultimately, it remains a tragedy only in her opinion. Actually, pity or compassion for Hamlet is not the central response, nor is odious central. *Hamlet* generates an altogether different and complex response in the readers. This paper is an attempt to elaborate on that.

The common academic response in India, which is the product of the classroom activities and is based on received English interpretations of Shakespeare, is that *Hamlet* is a tragedy and it gives the aesthetic experience of pathos. In Western perspectives, *Hamlet* is indisputably a tragedy, leading to catharsis in Aristotelian sense. It is one of the best Shakespearean tragedies for them, though some critics do have some reservations against it. Of course, their issues pertain mainly to its structure, absence of objective correlatives in it or some other technical things. As far as the hero is concerned, common agreement is that he is a great tragic hero.



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Some critics have applied Indian aesthetic theories on *Hamlet*, particularly, *rasa* and *dhwani* theories. Their efforts are good and path-showing. Still, such efforts are very few and in their initial stage only in terms of the quality and quantity of such efforts in nearly more than 150 years, because since 1860, Indian critics like Michael Madhusudana Dutt, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee etc. have given their responses to Shakespeare. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee has given his views on *The Tempest*, *Othello* and other plays and they are comparative in nature expressed in 1872 (in *Bankim Rachanabali Vol. II*). For nearly more than a century, systematic and elaborate studies of Shakespeare have been made in India e.g. *Hamlet Unveiled* (1906) by Rentala Venkata Subbarau. A lot of work is being done now. People have applied almost all emerging Western theories for the interpretation of Shakespearean works, but, comparatively, the application of Indian theories is almost negligible.

Indian theories can and need to be applied on western literature. For that, as M. S. Kushwaha mentions, the scholar must make certain modifications in their application, because they cannot be applied as they are. It is so because Indian theories did not come into existence for helping readers in interpretation. They were composed rather to guide the poets/writers in their compositions. Kapil Kapoor believes that some composite models need to be developed for their more effective and meaningful applications. He writes in *Literary Theory* that

a need is felt for a composite analytical framework – quite contrary to the insistence in the tradition on a strict adherence to one theory alone. A practical analytical model should be strong enough to investigate all the major dimensions of a literary composition . . . Such a model shall lean on more than one theory and draw its categories eclectically from as many theories as need be. (34)

He even states that such a composite model is available in tradition itself and shows the model of analysis presented by Rajasekhara (10<sup>th</sup> century). All Indian theories have emerged from their previous theories and hence have close connection among them. Hence, one need not confine oneself to any single theory alone and mind taking ideas from other theories also while applying a specific theory.

Those who have applied one or other Indian theories on Shakespeare are Sri Aurobindo, Smarjit Dutta, Rajee G. Shahani, Syed Mehdi Imam, S C Sengupta, Prem Lata Paliwal and S Nagarajan among others. There are a couple of noteworthy efforts of applying *rasa* theory on *Hamlet*. I came across some other efforts also in doctoral research in the present time, but they are not very well applied. So they are not taken



up for critiquing here.

*Hamlet* being a very complex play, the critics hold different views about the central sentiment in it. According to S.C. Sengupta, as stated earlier in this paper, the predominant *rasa* is aversion i.e. Odious(*bibhatsa*) . He writes:

Keeping as far as we can to the Indian system of criticism, we may say that in *Hamlet*, the predominant state is aversion (*jugupsa*), but it is strengthened and enriched by the mental states, and the total effect is not merely revolting (*vibhatsa*) but tragic—a concept for which there is nothing corresponding in Indian poetics. (158) (quoted in Mohanty, 182)

Sengupta concludes in his study that *Hamlet* is not a play about a mission delayed but about a complex state of mind predominated by aversion. He argues that while revenge is the purported theme of the play, the core subject is the utter revulsion caused by a mother's unchastity, because Hamlet's disgust for his mother also taints his attitude to others. ( quoted in Mohanty, 180)

Sangeeta Mohanty disagrees with the view of S.C. Sengupta and states that Shakespeare has clubbed powerfully together aversion (*bibhatsa*) and heroism (*vira*) both and yet, the Sentiment of Sorrow or *karuna rasa* figures out prominently in the play. Further, she adds to the complexity by stating that *vira rasa* in its completeness expects absolute victory of the hero i.e. the hero kills the enemy and remains invincible. In her view, Hamlet being slain in the drama, the *vira rasa* is not accomplished ideally. Therefore, it results in *karuna rasa*. She likens Hamlet's case with that of Abhimanyu of *Mahabharata*. She thinks that Abhimanyu is responded with compassion and thus tragic in sentiment. Actually, the fact is different. In spite of getting slain, Abhimanyu remains a heroic hero. In folk literatures, many heroes die and yet the *rasa* they arouse is not *karuna* but *vira*. In popular drama, even if the hero is not successful in his mission, he arouses *vira rasa*. So, the argument that a heroic hero must get complete victory is not convincing. There are number of heroes in Saurashtrian folk literature, who did not succeed completely but the literature narrating their stories arouse heroic/*vira rasa*. When these heroes die, the readers, rather than pitying on them, show admiration for them. They do not see that they died and thus did not succeed fully, but that they fought bravely for a noble cause. In our response to *Hamlet* also, we admire his actions and keep in our memory his bravery and other heroic qualities rather than his death or failure. In case of Hamlet, what is more important is that he has accomplished his mission successfully. There is no failure on his part. His is a sacrifice for the cause of his



noble goal of revenge and justice.

To prove her point that *karuna* is the central *rasa*, Sangeeta Mohanty quotes Abhinavagupta who has mentioned that when “the adverse situation of a righteous man is seen or heard, it produces *karuna rasa*.” (187 quoted from *Abhinavabharati*, trans. Visheshwara Acarya 578-582). There is no disagreement with this statement of Abhinavagupta. However, the meaning extracted from this statement is not correct, because the context in which this statement is written is not applicable here. This is a general statement on how people respond. If Sita is in adverse situation, one would feel *karuna* for her, because she is righteous. We feel *karuna* for Ram also, when he is searching for her in the unknown forest and facing many adversities, because he is right and doing his duty of searching for Sita for her liberation. But, our overall response to Ram is not of *karuna*. Yes, our overall response to Sita would be of *karuna*. We have to see the difference between the two characters. Mohanty identifies adverse situation of Hamlet as his ending in death. Thus, because *Hamlet* ends in his death, for her *karuna* is the central *rasa*, *vira rasa* being hampered by his death. It is true that the ending of each play is crucial for a final impression, but that does not mean that her conclusion, that “it wouldn’t be contradictory to select *karuna rasa* to be the final predominating emotion”, (187) is true. She takes death as the most adverse situation in the life of the righteous man Hamlet and hence *karuna rasa* is central for her.

What is important is not just the presence of the adverse situations in the life of a hero, but how he overcomes or tries to overcome them courageously. Under such circumstance, what is otherwise *karuna* does not remain *karuna*, but becomes heroic. Hamlet does not become a pitiable man but a heroic person. Hamlet faces all adverse challenges and successfully overcomes them. He successfully kills Claudius, which was his prime mission. In that effort, he too gets killed. So, what is important for the audience now is not that he dies, but that he successfully accomplishes his mission, destroys the evil from Denmark, fulfills his promise to the Ghost of his father and restores the life in general to its normalcy. Thus, he is a successful hero, rather than a tragic hero. It is not a fall in his life, but a sort of rise.

As per the western reading of a tragedy, the reader feels relaxed that he is not the central character himself. One does feel so while reading *Macbeth*, *King Lear* or *Othello*. We do not want to be like them. So when we come out of the imaginary world to the real world, we feel relaxed. This type of response does not emanate from *Hamlet*. There is no Aristotelian feeling of fear on the part of the Indian readers. Neither there is a feeling that Hamlet is doing something bad, wrong, immoral or sinful. One does not fear Hamlet in





Aristotelian sense, because he is on his right track. With patience and courage, he is busy in trying to accomplish his mission for the betterment of his kingdom and for the satisfaction of his late father. One has a strong feeling of admiration for him. This sense of admiration for him is the experience that stays with the audience in its memory to brood over afterwards. In that case, the argument that the pathetic or tragic (*Karuna*) *rasa* is the dominant *rasa* in the play is not true. Even Odious (*bibhatsa*) is not the central sentiment, because aversion is a driving force for Hamlet, in addition to his promise to his father. The action of the play is heroic, giving the readers a sense of satisfaction also. When the play ends, one does not go home with the feeling of aversion. Or one does not feel aversion, when one remembers the action and the conduct of Hamlet. So, Sengupta's argument about the central *rasa* of the play is also not acceptable and convincing. The central experience of *Hamlet* is that Hamlet punishes the agents and carriers of aversion. The good defeats the evil and there is optimism in life. One does not have this experience in other tragedies in which pathetic or tragic is the central sentiment.

Thus, though this is true that this play is very complex and it is not easy to determine which *rasa* is the dominant one in it, it is not impossible at the same time to identify the most central *rasa* of the play. The central *rasa* is Heroic *rasa* only. All the three i.e. Odious, Heroic and Pathetic/tragic do seem to be predominant on different occasions in the play. Someone has even added fear to be an equally important *rasa* in the play. What is important however is what stays after the play is over in the experience of the reader/spectator and that should determine the dominant *rasa* in the play, because after the play is over, other experiences become secondary and only the overall dominant *rasa* remains in the memory of the reader/spectator to carry with. Anandavardhana calls it *dhwani* (*anuranan*).

Some critics feel that inaction or delay is the main weakness of Hamlet which actually leads to his own death also. Had he not delayed killing of Claudius, he too would have survived and done better for Denmark. And in that context, they think that he is not a heroic hero. Had this been really true, Hamlet was certainly a tragic hero. In that case, he had a fatal flaw, responsible for his tragic fall and this disaster. However, when one goes deep into this argument, one does not find it convincing, because Hamlet, as a hero, is neither callous, nor careless nor cowardly. We can't ignore the fact that he undergoes the dilemma of 'to be or not to be'. He does not want to kill Claudius by any means or in any desperate manner. On some occasions, he feels utterly disappointed with man or humanity. Some such soliloquies, perhaps, might have forced these critics to assess Hamlet as a person to be pitied with rather than admire. That might have forced



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them to ignore Hamlet as a powerful Determinant (*vibhava*) of heroic *rasa* and consider him rather as a Determinant of pathetic (*karuna*) *rasa*. That might have made them also ignore a fact that Hamlet does not fall at all as per the Indian aesthetic perception. If death is taken as a fall, then that is not true in Indian traditions. What is death in the play is actually very meaningfully described in Sanskrit as *viragati* (What happens to a *vira*/hero). He never falls in our eyes. We never think that he should not have done something. Wherever there is a scope for doubt, Shakespeare has put strong clues which are open for interpretation. Our interpretation of them goes in his favor only.

Let me critically examine further and explain what I have stated above. I believe that the text itself is the evidence that Hamlet is not indecisive by temperament at all. There is neither any sense of helplessness in his perception. It is a fact that he is not hasty in the execution of his decision like Othello. He is a man of cool deliberation. There is consistency and stability in his character. He is not confused at all. All his actions reveal that he is a brave person. He goes ahead step by step. He is smart enough to take advantage of even his adversities by transforming them suitably in favor of himself. The way in which he turns upside down the conspiracy of his uncle to send him to England and get him killed there is an evidence of it. This handling of Claudius' letter to the king of England is a powerful example of his ability to transform a disadvantage to an advantage. An indecisive or helpless person cannot even think of such moves. His killing of Polonius is a rash action. Though he kills him out of anxiety, it is his maturity of wisdom that he succeeds in begging apology from Laertes and thus coming out of it by convincing him that it was not a deliberate act of him. Laertes too excuses him. This is his diplomatic success that also ultimately proves him to be heroic.

Hamlet, gradually but constantly, moves in the direction of his goal. Every move of him takes him further towards his goal with more and more conviction on his part. Those who do not like his not killing Claudius when he was at prayer and hence interpret it as a blunder on his part, are not correct in their judgment of Hamlet, because Hamlet has a strong reason not to do so. Actually, his rationale proves him to be heroic rather than tragic. He is really a hero in not murdering Claudius at his prayer. One won't disagree with him that by killing him during his prayer, Claudius would rather have gone to heaven. Thus, in that case, Hamlet would have helped him rather than taking revenge on him:





Hamlet. Now might I do it pat, now a is a-praying.

And now I'll do't and so a goes to heaven;

And so am I revenged.

A villain kills my father, and for that

I, his sole son, do this same villain send

To heaven. (III iii: 1051)

Thus, the charges of double-mind, indecisiveness and feebleness are not true. We can't ignore the way in which Hamlet keeps on cleaning and building his path for striking on his enemy. Very strategically, like a hero, he goes ahead with the execution of his mission. Mohanty is right in stating that in just turning away Gertrude from Claudius, Hamlet secures his first triumph over his enemy. Also, in killing Polonius, of course, unknowingly, he removes one thorn from his path. This success of him proves him more and more heroic. (164) Hamlet regains before his death his friendship of Laertes also. Laertes regrets that he was misguided by the king and became an instrument in slaying of a good prince like Hamlet. These are his successes.

Hamlet is neither confused nor lacking in initiative to act. He is actually very humane in his attitude. He is rational also. He can't trust the words of a ghost just because it was supposed to be that of his father. He can be neither impulsive nor orthodox in his thinking. He did not reject the Ghost or its message, but he needed evidence for self-conviction that whatever it had said was correct. After his conviction only, Hamlet would move fast in executing his plan. It is in this regard that he sets a trap to verify whether Claudius is really the culprit and organizes an enactment of a play in the court, specially for his 'parents'. He is successful in his scheme and feels fully convinced of the murderer. Now he would slay Claudius and avenge the murder of his father. So, this should be rather seen as a heroic trait in his character, rather than his delay or indecisiveness. Sangeeta Mohanty also has considered it as a heroic trait.

When Claudius kneels for his prayer, Hamlet enters the hall. For him it is a golden opportunity to slay him, but his conscience steps in between. It is not an excuse to postpone the action. Neither has he any fear in executing his plan. Rather, in this situation, he thinks that his father's death will not be avenged, if he kills



his murderer at prayer. He believes that by killing him then would only send him to heaven. By slaying him then, he would undoubtedly follow the Ghost's command but its purpose would be lost. Hence he decides to wait. This is his positive and seasoned thinking.

The argument is also not convincing that Hamlet's failure in love is a *peripetia*, because he has deliberately suppressed his love for a certain time. Because it is a voluntary act, he is not facing any disappointment. Further, because Hamlet suppresses his love, it cannot be said that he is insensitive to love. He certainly loved Ophelia earnestly and would have loved to marry her. However, he had other temporary but urgent priorities in life all of a sudden, it expected him to suppress this passion for Ophelia and neglect her for the time being. It was a purely temporary suspension, but Ophelia could never understand it. It is rather her immaturity to understand or her lack of interest in the priorities of life of her lover. She never took interest in his private world, nor did she win that much confidence of Hamlet that he could share his things with her. She played in the hands of his ill-meaning and selfish father. Still, Hamlet did not mind those things and remained a sincere lover to her with all sympathies for her. Due to his sincere love for her, he got seriously shaken at the news of her death by drowning. Her death is but a misfortune for both of them. One can't consider Hamlet to be held responsible for whatever happened to her.

Abhinavagupta writes that heroism is the effect of one's physical strength and commitment to moral principles such as control of sense organs and proper consideration of the legal instructions. He visualizes in a hero the qualities like great patience, tolerance, ability to sacrifice the coveted things, attaining the goal of life and also the skill for fighting in the battlefield. (593-596) Hamlet does fit well in this category of heroism. After he meets the Ghost of his father, his priorities of life alter significantly. Now the new goal of his life is revealed in his vow which we come across in **Act-I Scene- v**. This vow of Hamlet reveals his agenda. The readers must evaluate Hamlet's life and success in the light of this vow. While evaluating him in the light of his vow, one would realize that Hamlet does not deviate an inch from this goal even for a moment. All his moves are in the direction of fulfilling it. His intentions are noble and high. He wants to do something great before either he dies or gets diverted to other temptations of life. This vow reveals many great qualities of his character like his commitment to the expectations of his late father, his ability to remain focused for the mission undertaken, his readiness to withdraw from the routine engagements and pursuits of life, his genuine aversion for what is immoral and sinful and readiness to eradicate it (This is called *manyu* in Vedas and it is a virtue), his ability to challenge the most powerful villains of humanity and his



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commitment to clean Denmark of such elements at the helm of affairs. A look at his vow and what he swears would make one realize his stature as a typical heroic hero very much found in Indian literary works celebrating chivalric traditions. Such a hero is capable of arousing *vira rasa*. He swears thus,

In this distracted globe. Remember thee!

Yea, from the table of my memory

**I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,**

All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,

That youth and observation copied there;

**And thy commandment all alone shall live**

Within the book and volume of my brain,

Unmix'd with baser matter: yes, by heaven!

**O most pernicious woman!**

**O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!**

My tables,--meet it is I set it down,

**That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;**

**At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark:**

Writing

**So, uncle, there you are.** Now to my word;

It is 'Adieu, adieu! **remember me.**'

**I have sworn 't.** (I v:1037) (*Emphasis mine*)



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After responding to and clarifying the charges on Hamlet which may be employed to discard him as a hero, and justifying him to be a heroic hero, let me now turn to actually interpreting the play from the *rasa* perspective and see which *rasa* is central. Bharatmuni gives a *rasasutra* - a formula – that reveals the process of the arousal of *rasa* in the audience. According to this formula, “the Sentiment (*rasa*) is produced from a combination of Determinants (*vibhava*), Consequents (*anubhava*) and Transitory States (*vyabhichari bhava*).” When these three components harmoniously come together and move in the direction of any Permanent State (*sthayi bhava*), the corresponding Sentiment (*rasa*) gets aroused. Bharata speaks of eight Permanent States which are inherently there in every normal human being. They are love, mirth, sorrow, anger, energy, terror, disgust and astonishment. When these Permanent States are activated by the three factors i.e. Determinants, Consequents and Transitory States, in a harmonious manner, the Sentiments (*rasa*) are produced. These corresponding Sentiments are respectively the erotic, comic, pathetic, furious, heroic, terrible, odious and marvelous. As stated above, Bharat mentions eight Permanent States and eight Sentiments. He mentions two Determinants i.e. Context (*uddipan*) and Experience (*alambana*). The *alambana vibhava* is further classified into two i.e. Event (*visaya*) and Experiencer (*asraya*). He then speaks of four aspects of Consequents (*anubhava*) as Gestures (*angika*), Words (*vachika*), Make-up (*aharya*) and representation of the Temperament (*sattvika*). The Temperamental States (*sattvika*) are classified into eight i.e. Paralysis, Perspiration, Horripilation, change of Voice, Trembling, change of Color, Weeping and Fainting. Lastly, he mentions that there are 33 Temporary States (*vyabhichari bhava*). They are discouragement, weakness, apprehension, envy, intoxication, weariness, indolence, depression, anxiety, distraction, recollection, contentment, shame, inconstancy, joy, agitation, stupor, arrogance, despair, impatience, sleep, epilepsy, dreaming, awakening, indignation, cruelty, assurance, sickness, insanity, death, fright and deliberation. (different critics have employed different English words to translate these Sanskrit terms of Bharata. I have used the English terms employed by V S Seturaman) The Sanskrit terms used by Bharata are respectively *nirveda*, *glani*, *shanka*, *asuya*, *mada*, *shrama*, *alasya*, *dainya*, *chinta*, *moha*, *smriti*, *dhriti*, *vrida*, *chopalata*, *harsha*, *avega*, *jadata*, *garva*, *vishada*, *autsukya*, *nidra*, *apasmara*, *supta*, *vibodha*, *amarsha*, *avahitta*, *ugrata*, *mati*, *vyadhi*, *unmada*, *marana*, *trasa* and *vitarka*.

Bharat then explains briefly the possible combinations of the three factors for arousing each Sentiment. Since the debate about the central *rasa* in *Hamlet* moves on three only i.e. Pathetic, Heroic and Odious, I discuss here these three Sentiments and their ingredients only.



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According to Bharata, the Pathetic/*karuna rasa* can be aroused when the Dominant State is that of sorrow. Moreover, the Determinant (*vibhava*) can be affliction under a curse, separation from dear ones, loss of wealth, death, captivity, flight from a place, dangerous accidents, other misfortunes etc.. Then, the Consequents (*anubhava*) i.e. the actions on the stage, can be shedding of tears, lamentation, dryness of the mouth, change of color, drooping limbs, being out of breath, loss of memory etc. And, the Transitory States (*vyabhichari bhava*) can be discouragement (indifference), weakness (languor), anxiety, yearning, excitement, delusion, fainting, sadness, dejection, illness, inactivity, insanity, epilepsy, fear, indolence, death, paralysis, tremor, change of color, weeping, loss of voice etc.

When *Hamlet* is examined, one does not feel that the Dominant State of the play is 'sorrow'. No doubt, there are occasions in the play when sorrow becomes powerful. However, disgust, fear, wonder, or even energy happen to be powerful on other occasions. The Determinants in the play happen to be separation from the dear ones, death, dangerous accidents, flight from a place and misfortunes. The Consequents are lamentation, shedding of tears by Ophelia, Gertrude and the friends of Hamlet etc. The Transitory States employed by the playwright are indifference (detachment), anxiety, excitement, sadness, dejection, inactivity, insanity, death and weeping.

When one looks at the Consequents in the play, one notices that the lamentations are not that of Hamlet. Tears are also not shed by him. Usually, the very instrument of the manifestation should be the protagonist, but it is not so here. Secondly, one does find Hamlet's indifference (detachment with) to Ophelia, dejection or insanity etc., but these Transitory States are deliberate and assumed ones. They are really not his *bhava* at all. Actually, he is not indifferent or insane. His dejection also is not the routine one, but philosophic one. Since Hamlet moves fast and in the direction of achieving his goal, one would be able to visualize that he is creating an illusion of reality. So, one must not take them as genuine reality. Once one is aware of the genuine reality, one would not feel that *karuna rasa* is the central *rasa* of the play, because these components are not there at all.

For the Odious sentiment, Bharata mentions that the Dominant State is that of disgust. The Determinants of this *rasa* are hearing of unpleasant, offensive, impure and harmful things, seeing them or discussing them. The Consequents happen to be stopping all the movement of all the limbs, vomiting, narrowing of mouth, spitting, and shaking limbs disgustingly etc. The Transitory States employed for the arousal of this *rasa* are epilepsy, delusion, agitation, fainting, sickness, death etc.



When one examines the play to see whether *bibhatsa rasa* is the central *rasa* in it, one observes that Hamlet feels disgusted with his mother Gertrude and Uncle Claudius both. He generates the same aversion for them in audience also. One does find hearing and discussing of what is evil, unpleasant, offensive, impure etc. However, the other fact is that these two characters are not the main focus of the play. They are the target of our aversion. In other words, the audience joins the hero in his disgust for them. Another important point is that the audience never feels any disgust for Hamlet. Further, Shakespeare does not use as Consequents the things like vomiting, spitting, narrowing of mouth, shaking of limbs disgustingly etc. at all in the play. Even the Transitory States are not the ones suggested by Bharata. Hence, it is not fair to state that Odious is the central sentiment of the play. When the play is over, the audience is not left with a feeling of aversion/disgust. Rather, Hamlet takes on the characters who deserve to be despised. His endeavour to defeat the disgusting forces wins our applause. So when the play is over, the experience with which the audience goes back is that of appreciation of Hamlet's efforts. Otherwise there is nothing disgusting on surface visible or audible in the play. Hence, I do not think that *bibhatsa rasa* (Odious Sentiment) can be the central *rasa*. Shakespeare does have potential Determinants for this *rasa*, but he does not use the Consequents and the Temporary States which can harmonize with the Determinants and activate the Permanent State of Disgust. And hence, the Odious Sentiment is not generated. Moreover, if at all aversion is created; it is not created for Hamlet, who is the main *alamban vibhav* (the Experience Determinant) in the play. It is created for Claudius, Gertrude and their supporters only. The focus of the spectators is always on the central character, for whom there is no disgust. In addition, this experience of disgust does not exist throughout the play as the focused experience.

I have strong reasons to think that actually the heroic sentiment (*vira rasa*) is the central sentiment. It is seen earlier that when the three components together harmonize themselves and move in the direction of the Permanent State of *jugupsa* (disgust), the central *rasa* would be *bibhatsa*. If the direction is towards the Permanent State of *shoka*, the *rasa* would be *karuna*. In this play, they move in the direction of *utsaha* (optimism and enthusiasm) and *krodh* (anger), hence it is *vira rasa*.

Shakespeare uses energy (*utsaha*), anger (*krodh*) and detachment/indifference i.e. *nirveda* (which is a Temporary State in Bharata, but a Permanent State in Abhinavagupta), combined by giving almost equal significance to them. Actually, according to Abhinavagupta, *nirveda* is the Permanent State for the *shant rasa* (Sentiment of Tranquility or Philosophical state). Arjuna in *Mahabharata* is the *alambana vibhav*





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(Determinant) of the *vira rasa*, but often he becomes philosophical and seems to be confused or double-minded or uncertain of what to do and what not to do. He also feels dejected at times e.g. at the time of the death of Abhimanyu. However, ultimately, he sets his eyes on his goal (*dharma*) and defeats the Kuru army and becomes an Determinant (*vibhava*) of generating *vira rasa* only. To a very great extent, it is possible to draw parallels between the two with regard to the creation of *vira rasa* and not with regard to the traits of their personalities, because they are not comparable.

In order to generate the Heroic sentiment, Bharata states that the action “relates to the superior quality of persons and has energy as its basis. It is created by Determinants such as presence of mind, perseverance, diplomacy, discipline, military strength, aggressiveness, reputation of might, influence and the like. Secondly, it is to be represented on the stage by Consequents such as firmness, patience, heroism, charity, diplomacy and the like. Transitory States in it tend to be contentment, judgement, pride, agitation, energy, ferocity, indignation, remembrance, horripilation and the like.” (Bharat Muni as qtd in Seturaman 28-29)

Bharata writes only following two couplets (He does not elaborate and explain any couplet),

“The heroic sentiment arises from energy, perseverance, optimism, absence of surprise, and presence of mind and (such other) special conditions (of the spirit).” (IV 67)

“This Heroic Sentiment is to be properly represented on the stage by firmness, patience, heroism, pride, energy, aggressiveness, influence and censoring words.” (IV 68)

When one examines the text, one does feel that Shakespeare has certainly chosen a person of superior qualities as the Determinant (*alambana vibhava*). In Sanskrit terms, Hamlet can be described as *dhirodatta-cum-dhiralalita-cum-dhira-prasanta* personality. This is the complexity of the play and its protagonist that Hamlet has traits of the three of the four categories of protagonists given by Bharata. He does not embody exclusively any one category. This is quite unusual also. In Sanskrit drama, major dramatists have not mingled the categories of personalities. Shakespeare has mingled them and created a complex personality.

I agree with Sangeeta Mohanty, when she comments on the complex personality of Hamlet in these words,



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It goes without saying that the character of Hamlet is highly equivocal and no classification of male characters in Sanskrit poetics would explain the character of Hamlet satisfactorily. However the category of *dhirodatta* could be applicable to him, but his sensibility, intellectuality, humanism and lovingness all might prompt to attribute to him the *dhiralalita* category as well. At times it appears that in him the *dhiralalita* predominates over the *dhirodatta*. The very entrance of Hamlet in the drama marks him as both a *dhiralalita* and *dhira-prasanta* personality, which means he is a conscientious and serious person. His first appearance on the stage and his inaugural dialogues with both Claudius and Gertrude reveal the seriousness of his purpose. (142)

Hamlet is in a situation which is unbearable for him. His father is recently dead. His mother, who used to show so much attachment to his father, marries soon to Hamlet's Uncle, and now the King, Claudius. Somehow, Hamlet never liked that man. In such a state of shock and disgust, he comes to know that the Ghost of his father has been appearing for a few days in the attires of a warrior. So he decides to see and talk to him. Before he discusses the motive of the Ghost, he verifies that the ghost is really that of his father. He hears the story of his murder from him. He is further shocked when the Ghost tells him that the murder was done by none else but his Uncle and King Claudius, whom his mother has married now. What was believed to be an accidental death was actually a cold blooded murder of a very good and loving King. The Ghost had a desire that Hamlet took revenge on Claudius by killing him. He wanted him, however, to leave his mother on her fate, to be punished by nature, though he was very upset with her. Under such circumstance, Hamlet takes a vow and promises the Ghost that he would be avenged properly, come what may.

To provide the experience of Heroic Sentiment, Shakespeare creates the *alamban vibhava* of *vira rasa* in Hamlet and invests in his personality the qualities which reveal his presence of mind, perseverance, diplomacy, discipline, military strength, aggressiveness, reputation of might, influence and the like. He is shown as a disciplined person. He is also quite influential having tremendous inner strength. He is quite taken note of by all around him. His remaining upset disturbs many and displeases his mother and friends. This shows his influence. He shows a nice presence of mind when he talks to the Ghost, advises Horatio and others, handles Polonius's inquisitiveness about his affair with his daughter, kills Polonius, deciphers the intention of Claudius to send him to England, does not kill him while in prayer, convinces Laertes of his innocence in the killing of his father and finally advises Horatio and others for future. Only a hero can show such a presence of mind, strength, perseverance, discipline as well as diplomacy.



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He shows high perseverance. Right from the time he takes the vow, he leaves no stone unturned to fulfil it. He knows that his enemy is also very smart, hence, he remains very careful that his scheme is not sensed by him. He does not want him to become alert. So, he assumes madness also. To verify that Claudius is really the culprit, he organizes a small enactment in the palace. He deciphers all the moves of Claudius and makes sincere efforts to fail him in his moves. This shows his perseverance.

He shows rare discipline in his words and actions. He does not become sentimental except once i.e. at the time of the burial of Ophelia and it is in that state of mind that he challenges Laertes' claim of his love for Ophelia and quarrels with him. Of course, he soon gets reconciled with him, but, he has given a golden opportunity to Claudius to use Laertes against him and hatch a conspiracy to kill him. Later, under the conspiracy of Claudius, Laertes invites Hamlet for a friendly duel. Out of friendly gesture as well as chivalric tradition, he accepts the offer without knowing that Laertes' sword would be smeared with venom. He is unaware that Laertes has joined Claudius for that unheroic act. Thus, excepting this, by and large, Hamlet remains under poise. He uses his steps very intelligently without forgetting his goal. Even his communication with different people in the play shows that he is highly disciplined.

Since the play is not about heroic deeds in a battlefield, the three other aspects as suggested by Bharata i.e. military strength, aggressiveness and reputation of might are not found in the play in that manner and degree.

Shakespeare uses Transitory States like contentment, judgement, pride, agitation, energy (vega), ferocity, indignation, remembrance and horripilation. The play ends with contentment on the part of Hamlet. He was supposed to take revenge and he has successfully done it. He has no other ambition. He does not have any temptation to survive anymore. So, he dies with full contentment. This contentment has resulted due to his perseverance, presence of mind, diplomacy, strength and discipline as far as Determinants are concerned. Throughout the play, we see Hamlet showing us these qualities. Hamlet never becomes desperate in killing Claudius. Even if he has to let a chance go, he allows it to take place. This shows his patience and confidence. We find him showing heroic gestures on several occasions like meeting the ghost, talking to it alone, answering the King and also his mother boldly on all issues, killing Polonius, accepting the challenge of Laertes, fighting with him and finally killing Claudius.



Hamlet is a man of wise and accurate judgements. He judges the Ghost. He understands its message in true spirit. He decides to assume madness and thus avoid letting Claudius get any clue. He organizes a play in the palace to know whether Claudius is really involved in killing of his father. His killing of Polonius also shows his sense of judgement. Shakespeare has shown Hamlet's accuracy of judgement by telling the audience indirectly that Claudius was really the culprit and villain. Had he not been involved in killing the father of Hamlet, he should not have indulged in so many conspiracies that led to killings of Polonius, Gertrude, Hamlet, Laertes, Rosencranztz, and Guildenstern. He is thus a diehard villain and he has betrayed all. He always remains self-centred and hence does not hesitate in sacrificing anyone to attain his selfish motives. If Hamlet had decided to kill him, it was not just due to the words of the Ghost that Claudius had murdered him, but his own strong conviction that he had done so. These evil acts of Claudius are there to indirectly support the judgement of Hamlet. Only, what he could not judge was the fact that Ophelia would really go mad. Or he did not find other means to keep her away from this misfortune. Otherwise, overall, he thinks well and in right direction.

Hamlet shows energy while killing Polonius and fighting with Laertes and Claudius. Thus, it is not difficult to see how the three are harmoniously brought together to create the *vira rasa* in the play. In fact, in different incidents, different Transitory States or combination of two or more states are employed by Shakespeare. He has followed Bharata coincidentally and has confirmed that Bharata's theory is right and plausible.

Thus, *Hamlet* has as its dominant *rasa*, the *vira rasa*. The *vira rasa* emerges effectively in the play and that has been possible because Shakespeare has not only successfully harmonized the Determinants, Consequents and Temporary States but also moved them in the direction of the Permanent State of *Utsaha* (Energy). What Shakespeare has modified is that he has not kept just the State of Energy as the Permanent State, but has created a complex Permanent State, which is not mentioned in Bharata. Shakespeare's Permanent State is a complex mixture of *Utsaha* (Energy), *krodha* (Anger) and *Shoka* (pathos). So, one can say that Shakespeare has deviated from Bharata by combining the three variant Permanent States. He has deviated successfully also. The Indian readers also find no problem in appreciating *Hamlet*. Further, Shakespeare has given much more importance to *nirveda* also. All the major soliloquies of Hamlet reveal the Temporary State of *nirveda* in Hamlet. He is highly philosophical and perhaps that makes him dearer to readers also. Bharata does not mention specifically that *nirveda* can be employed. What can be employed is



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slightly open ended in him. Yet, the way he names other Temporary States, he does not make a mention of *nirveda*. Shakespeare makes *nirveda* quite prominent as a Temporary State, taking it very close to a Permanent State (In Abhinavagupata *nirveda* is a Permanent State), as it occurs throughout the play. *Hamlet* has been quite quotable and the secret of its quotability is the strong presence of *nirveda* as a Temporary State in the play. So this is another unusual thing in the play; and Shakespeare has used this unconventional thing successfully.

In addition to what is stated above, Shakespeare has also deviated remarkably in the creation of the personality of the protagonist. He does not follow Bharata in constructing the personality of the protagonist in the play. Hamlet is a combination of three personalities in one like the combining of the three Permanent States as mentioned above and that is quite convincing to the readers. It is for this reason that though the protagonist dies in the end, he remains a hero and not a tragic hero. The Indian audience is accustomed to see a protagonist (hero), who purely embodies noble qualities and has no trace of evil in him. Thus, it is only Hamlet, among all the Shakespearean tragic heroes, who can step into the shoes of the Indian hero and is worthy of applause on stage. Lear, Macbeth and Othello are not heroes like Hamlet. They suffer from severe deficiencies in character unlike Hamlet. Hamlet's 'deficiency', if at all, is his sensitivity, which does nothing to undermine his character as a hero, rather it enhances his moral stature. His image as a prototype of the Indian hero makes it a perfect model for such an interpretation.



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