From *Rasa* to *Bhaktirasa*:

The Development of a Devotional Aesthetic Theory in Early Modern South Asia

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1. Introduction

Abhinavagupta's monumental contribution to Sanskrit literary theory led some scholars to conclude that no better ideas were developed by authors after Abhinavagupta. For example, J. L. Masson and M. V. Patwardhan write:

There has been a tendency [. . .] for the post-Abhinava writers to remain relatively silent on the issue of *rasa*. [. . .] there is no doubt that no later writer has written anything more profound on *rasa* than Abhinavagupta. (Masson and Patwardhan 1970: 25)

No author after Abhinavagupta could discuss his theory of *rasa* without addressing Abhinavagupta's view. However, I disagree with Masson and Patwardhan's assessment that no post-Abhinavagupta author wrote anything more profound. One example, pointed out by several scholars, is the unique view taken by Bhojadeva, a Paramāra king in the eleventh century, in his *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* (Raghavan 1978; Pollock 1998, 2016). The theory of *bhaktirasa*, a synthesis of devotional (*bhakti*) and aesthetic (*rasa*) theories developed by Bengali Vaiṣṇava authors such as Jīva Gosvāmī (sixteenth century), is also noteworthy.

In this paper, I focus on Jīva's discussion of the loci of aesthetic sentiment in *Anuccheda* 111 of his *Prītisandarbhā*. In this analysis I demonstrate a part of the development of the *rasa* theory in the post-Abhinavagupta period. In addition, I suggest a slight corrective to Sheldon Pollock's recent assessment on Jīva's *bhaktirasa* theory.

2. Opponents' Views and Jīva's Conclusion

In the *Prītisandarbhā*, at *Anuccheda* 111, Jīva starts a discussion of *rasa* by stating four opponents' views. The first is that *rasa* is primarily in the original character:

Rasa exists primarily only in the original character in the remote past, who is to be imitated (*anukārya*) [by the actor]. But, [*rasa* exists] in the actor secondarily [metaphorically]. This is the first position.¹⁾

Abhinavagupta attributes this first view to Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa. In the *Abhinavabhāratī*, he shows how this view is rejected by Śāṅkuka. The second view Jīva summarizes corresponds to Śāṅkuka's opinion, according to which *rasa* exists only in the actor:

[*Rasa* exists] only in the actor (*naṭa*) who imitates [the original character], because in the former [i.e., in the original character] there exist mundaneness, limitation, and impediment due to fear and so on. This is the second position.²⁾

According to this second view, the original character does not experience *rasa* because for the original character the experience in drama or in poetry is personal and it is not aestheticized. Jīva's formulation of Śāṅkuka's view closely follows that of Viśvanātha's *Sāhityadarpaṇa* at 3.17–18: “Due to limitation (*pārimitya*), mundaneness (*laukikatva*), and impediment (*sāntarāyatā*), for the original character the awakening of love (*rati*) and so on would not become *rasa*.”³⁾ According to the *Vijñāpriyā* commentary on the *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, limitation and mundaneness mean, for example, that Rāma's love toward Sītā is located in Rāma only.⁴⁾ In other words, the original character's experience is personal and not generalized. Thus the actor cannot access such personal experience. Moreover, the original character's experience is hindered by fear and so on. For example, when Sītā is abducted, Rāma experiences personal pain. This cannot be the experience of *rasa*, which, according to Abhinavagupta, is by definition pleasurable.

In Jīva's summary, this second view is refuted by the third and the fourth views according to which only the audience (*sāmājika*) can experience *rasa*. The third view says that the actor does not experience *rasa* since he is simply mechanically imitating the original character.⁵⁾ The fourth view states that both the actor and the audience experience *rasa*.⁶⁾ Thus both the third and fourth views argue that the locus of *rasa* is the audience. These views correspond to that of Abhinavagupta. Jīva then states his own theory which rejects all four views:

In contrast, glorious devotees of the lord accept everywhere the aesthetic sentiment consisting of delight toward him since there are no causes such as mundaneness.⁷⁾

In this statement, the term “everywhere” refers to the original character, the actor, and the audience. According to Jīva, devotees in all three loci experience *rasa*.

3. *Rasa* in the Original Character

Jīva states that *rasa* in the original character is complete and that it is the most important *rasa*. It is this *rasa* that is then transferred to the actor and the audience.⁸⁾ In Jīva's view, *rasa* in the original character is primary, and that in the actor and audience is derived from it. In order to advance this view, Jīva attempts to refute Śaṅkuka's view of *rasa*.

Śaṅkuka argues that *rasa* does not exist in the original character since the original character's experience is (1) mundane (*laukika*), (2) limited, and (3) has impediments such as fear. As for the first two charges, Jīva states that the love toward the lord (*bhagavatprīti*) is inherently established as *alaukika* and is not limited to the original characters. He adds that this is unlike the case of mundane love (*laukikarati*), which is fabricated through poetry.⁹⁾ In this statement, Jīva uses the adjectives *alaukika* and *laukika* in the sense of devotional and non-devotional. However, in his summary of Śaṅkuka's view Jīva uses the term *laukika* in the sense of "personal." This usage follows that of Abhinavagupta.

According to Abhinavagupta, *rasa* is *alaukika* because it is generalized and impersonalized. It is *alaukika* in the sense that experience in drama or poetry is artificially constructed. Abhinavagupta uses the term *laukika* to denote the level of experience that is personal and based on daily life. While Jīva uses two terms *laukika* and *alaukika* in the Abhinavaguptian sense in his summary of Śaṅkuka's view, he uses the same terms in the sense of non-devotional and devotional in his response to Śaṅkuka's critique. Thus Jīva consciously conflates two separate paradigms in his discourse.¹⁰⁾

As for Śaṅkuka's third critique, that the original character's experience is impeded by fear and so on, Jīva argues that devotees' devotional aesthetic sentiment toward the lord (*bhagavatprītimāyārāsa*) is not obstructed by fear and other factors. As evidence, Jīva points out the stories of Prahlaḍa, Vṛtra, Gajendra, and Bharata. These are characters found in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. The first, the story of Prahlaḍa is found in the seventh book of the *purāṇa*. Prahlaḍa was born with devotional love toward the lord. However, since his father Hiraṇyakaśipu was an *asura* who hated Viṣṇu he constantly harassed his son so that Prahlaḍa would give up his devotion to Viṣṇu. Jīva points out

that despite these obstacles Prahlāda's devotional love was not affected.

Then Jīva proceeds to explain how all the factors necessary to produce *rasa* are present in Kṛṣṇa's *līlās*, and how they are *alaukika*. In his explanation Jīva uses the term *alaukika* in the sense that they are related to the lord and therefore transcendental. The necessary factors are (1) the aesthetic causal elements (*vibhāvas*), which are further divided into (1-a) foundational factors (*ālambanavibhāvas*) and (1-b) stimulant factors (*uddīpaṇavibhāvas*), (2) reactions (*anubhāvas*), and (3) transitory emotions (*sañcāribhāvas* or *vyabhicāribhāvas*).

Jīva starts with the identification of (1-a) the foundational factors. He states that both the lord and his retinues are foundational factors and they are *alaukika*. Kṛṣṇa as a foundational factor is *alaukika* because he possesses splendour beyond comparison. His retinues are also *alaukika* since they are equal to Kṛṣṇa.¹¹⁾ Regarding (1-b) the stimulant factors, Jīva cites passages from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. These passages describe the extraordinary quality of Kṛṣṇa's feet, his beauty, his flute performance, and so on.¹²⁾ Jīva states that these stimulant factors are *alaukika* since they are related to Kṛṣṇa.¹³⁾ Thus the aesthetic causal elements (*vibhāvas*) in Kṛṣṇa's *līlās* are *alaukika* in the sense that they are transcendental and extraordinary because they are related to Kṛṣṇa.

(2) Reactions (*anubhāvas*) in Kṛṣṇa's *līlās* are also *alaukika*. As evidence, Jīva cites a passage from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* which states that when Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma walk into the forest, trees begin bristling (*pulaka*).¹⁴⁾ This is *alaukika* in the sense that it is extraordinary for trees to display such a symptom.¹⁵⁾

Finally, (3) transitory emotions (*vyabhicāribhāvas*) in Kṛṣṇa's *līlās* are *alaukika*. According to Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the transitory emotions are thirty-three in total.¹⁶⁾ As one of the transitory emotions, Jīva gives an example of madness (*unmāda*) caused by separation from Kṛṣṇa. He explains that in the context of Kṛṣṇa's *līlās*, even though on the surface separation from Kṛṣṇa is painful, a devotee deep inside experiences bliss. This is because the lord, who embodies supreme bliss, manifests himself in the heart of the devotee.¹⁷⁾ Jīva compares this with drinking extremely hot honey milk when one is hungry. Even though it might cause pain due to the milk's hotness, it is still a pleasurable experience. Similarly, even though separation from Kṛṣṇa may cause pain in a devotee's heart, it does not detract from the *rasa* a devotee experiences in relation to Kṛṣṇa.¹⁸⁾

Jīva further compares this with the conventional understanding of *rasa*. According to Abhinavagupta, *rasa* is by definition pleasurable, which means the audience experiences happiness even from the *rasa* of sorrow (*śoka*). Abhinavagupta explains that this is because of the process of generalization (*sādhārāṇīkaraṇa*) by which aesthetic experience is impersonalized for the audience.

According to Jīva, the *rasa* of sorrow in non-devotional drama or poetry is enjoyable because factors such as aesthetic causal elements (*vibhāvas*) have supra-mundane power (*alaukikaśakti*). In contrast, Jīva explains, in the case of Kṛṣṇa's *līlās* the pain of separation is pleasurable because the condition of being *alaukika* is innate (*svābhāvika*).¹⁹ Thus Jīva argues that while *alaukikatva* in non-devotional poetry or drama is the artificial creation of poets and writers, it is inherently present in Kṛṣṇa's *līlās* because of Kṛṣṇa's transcendental nature.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I briefly examined Jīva's understanding of devotional *rasa* as presented in *Anucccheda* 111 of the *Prītisandarbhā*. Responding to Śaṅkuka's criticism, Jīva argues that there is *rasa* in the original character. According to Jīva this is not only because all the factors, the *vibhāvas* and so on, are present in Kṛṣṇa's *līlās* but also because they are inherently *alaukika*. We additionally observed that Jīva uses the term *alaukika* in two different ways. In non-devotional poetry and drama, *rasa* is *alaukika* because it is generalized and artificially aestheticized. In the case of devotional poetry and drama, *rasa* is *alaukika* because it is related to Kṛṣṇa's transcendental nature. Jīva consciously conflates these two different understandings to argue for the presence of *rasa* in the original character.

In his recent book *The Rasa Reader* (2016: 21, 302), Sheldon Pollock states that Jīva restricts *alaukikatva* only to devotional works:

For Jīva “supermundane” was a status to be awarded only to the *rasa* of those experiencing God, whether in literature or in life [. . .] the discourse of *rasa* was not just being transferred from poetry to theology, it was being restricted to theology. (p. 21)

Whereas “mundane” literature had once been thought to produce “supermundane” *rasa*—Abhinava's great insight—the new theological *rasa* made an exclusive claim to that status and thereby demoted the old *rasa* of nonsacred texts to the mundane. (p. 302)

However, when Jīva conflates two understandings of *alaukika* he does not reject the *alaukikatva* of *rasa* in non-devotional literature. Jīva describes the *alaukikatva* of *rasa* in non-devotional literature as artificial, and that in devotional literature as inherent. Nevertheless he admits that *rasa* is *alaukika* in both cases. Thus I suggest that a more nuanced analysis of Jīva's *rasa* theory is in order.

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Notes

- 1) *Prītisandarbhā*, *Anuccheda* 111: *rasasya mukhyayā vṛttyānukārye prācīne nāyaka eva vṛttiḥ / naṭe tūpacārād ity ekaḥ pakṣaḥ /* 2) *Prītisandarbhā*, *Anuccheda* 111: *pūrvatra laukikatvāt pārimitiyād bhayādisāntarāyatvāc cānukartari naṭa eva dvitīyaḥ /* 3) Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa* 17cd–18ab: *pārimitiyāl laukikatvāt sāntarāyatayā tathā / anukāryasya ratyāder udbodho na raso bhavet //*
- 4) *Vijñāpriyā*: *pārimitiyād iti sitādiviṣayateḥ rāmādimātranāṣṭhatvena parimitatvād ity arthaḥ / laukikatvād iti tannāṣṭhatyādes tatraiva dṛṣṭatvād ity arthaḥ /* 5) *Prītisandarbhā*, *Anuccheda* 111: *tasya ca śikṣāmātreṇa śūnyacittatayaiva tadanukartṛtvāt sāmājikeṣv eveti tṛtīyaḥ /*
- 6) *Prītisandarbhā*, *Anuccheda* 111: *yadi ca dvitīye sacetastvaṃ tadobhayatrāpi katham na syād iti caturtha iti /* 7) *Prītisandarbhā*, *Anuccheda* 111: *śrībhāgavatānām tu sarvatraiva tatprītimayarasasvikārah, laukikatvādheter abhāvāt /* 8) *Prītisandarbhā*, *Anuccheda* 111: *tatrāpi viśeṣato 'nukāryeṣu tatparikarēṣu yeṣāṃ nityam eva hṛdayam adhyārūḍhaḥ pūrṇo raso 'nukartrādiṣu sañcarati /*
- 9) *Prītisandarbhā*, *Anuccheda* 111: *bhagavatprīter alaukikatvam aparimitatvaṃ ca svata eva siddham, na tu laukikaratyādivat kāvyakṣiptam /* 10) Lutjeharms (2014: 221 footnote 238) also points out this complexity in Jīva's use of *laukika* and *alaukika*. 11) *Prītisandarbhā*, *Anuccheda* 111: *tatrāmbanākāraṇasya śrībhagavato 'samordhvātīśayibhagavatvād eva siddham / tatparikarasya ca tattulyatvād eva /* 12) *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 3.15.43, 10.44.14, 10.29.40. 13) *Prītisandarbhā*, *Anuccheda* 111: *athoddīpanākāraṇānām tadyānāṃ ca tadyatvād eva /* 14) *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 10.21.19. 15) In classical Sanskrit literature, trees are considered to be immovable since they lack the faculty of action (*karmendriya*). However, they are considered to be sentient, being endowed with the faculty of cognition (*jñānendriya*). For a detailed discussion on this topic, see Hara (2009: 236–247). I thank Bergljot Chiarucci for this reference. 16) *Nāṭyaśāstra* 6.18–21ab: *nirvedaglāniśāṅkākyās tathāsūyā madaḥ śramaḥ / ālasyaṃ caiva dainyaṃ ca cintāmoḥaḥ smṛtir dhṛtiḥ // vṛṇā capalatā harṣa āvego jaḍatā tathā / garvo viśāda autsukyaṃ nidrāpasmāra eva ca // suptaṃ vibodho 'marṣaś cāpy avahittham athogratā / matir vyādhis tathonmādas tathā maraṇam eva ca // trāsaś caiva vitarkaś ca vijñeyā vyabhicāriṇaḥ /* 17) *Prītisandarbhā*: *tatra bahis tadyaviyogamaya-duḥkhe 'pi paramānandaghanasya bhagavatas tadbhāvasya ca hṛdi sphūrtir vidyata eva, paramānandaghanatvaṃ ca tayos tyaktum aśakyatvāt /* 18) *Prītisandarbhā*, *Anuccheda* 111: *tataḥ kṣudhātūrānām*

atyuşṇamadhuradugdhavan na tatra rasatvavyāghātaḥ / 19) Prītisandarbhā, Anuccheda 111: kiṃ ca svābhāvikaḥlaukikatve sati yathā laukikarasavidāṃ laukikebhyo 'pi kāvyasaṃśrayād alaukikaśaktiṃ dadhānebhyo vibhāvādyaḥkyāprāptakāraṇādibhyaḥ śokādān api sukham eva jāyate iti rasatvāpattis tathaivāsmābhir viyogādān api mantavyam /

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