



Shakespeare's *Hamlet* from the Perspective of the Theory of Rasa

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Abstract— This article is focusing on analysing the character of Hamlet from the perspective of 'rasa' theory. Hamlet as character is considered a tragic one whereas his indecisiveness is considered to be one of the reasons behind his downfall. But this article highlights that Hamlet's 'sthayibhavas' are the reason behind his doom. It's not his lack of determination in taking the revenge. Instead his instinctual feeling is the main cause behind his downfall. Besides this article analyses various aspects of 'bhavas' as noticed in Hamlet and brings into light how these 'bhavas' generate various forms of rasa among the spectators and readers.



Keywords— rati (love), hasya (mirth), soka (sorrow), krodha (anger), utsaha (energy), bhaya (fear), jugupsa (disgust) & vismaya (astonishment)

INTRODUCTION

Rasa as a concept denotes the aesthetic effect of visual, literary and musical work on human psyche. Various kinds of bhavas originate in readers and audiences' psyche due to the effect of rasa. A sensitive reader and perceiver only can relish the effect of rasa. Rasa is the by-product of readers and audiences' bhava. Natyashastra incorporates the theory of rasa in it and the main goal of the theory of rasa is to channelize the positive bhava of human psyche to realize the true potentiality mind and spirituality. Natyashastra talks about three types of bhavas – sthayi (stable), sanchari (travelling) and sattvika (pure). These three types of bhavas are actually based on the effect of rasa on human mind. Natyashastra lists eight sthayibhavas with eight corresponding rasas: rati (love), hasya (mirth), soka (sorrow), krodha (anger), utsaha (energy), bhaya (fear), jugupsa (disgust) & vismaya (astonishment). Rasa as a concept is not new to Indian Knowledge System 'it figures in rigveda, it is also to be found in our ancient treatise on chemistry and medicine. (Patnaik, 14)

Various aspects of bhavas & rasas as reflected in various dialogues in Hamlet:

From the perspective of sthayi bhavas when Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' is judged, it becomes clear that 'soka' (sorrow) after the death of Hamlet's father played an important role in deciding the next courses of action by Hamlet. It is from 'soka' a form of 'sancharibhava' originates in Hamlet's psyche in the form of 'dainya' (depression) which is evident from the following soliloquy in Act-1, Scene 2 –

O that this too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd

His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! O God! (P. 158)

From the above cited soliloquy it is evident that Hamlet was deep grief and went into depression. He realized the frail nature of physical existence but not like a matured philosopher but like common people under sudden trauma of losing father. This sudden depressive feeling compelled him to think of committing suicide but restrained this thought by his religious bent of mind.

In act-2, scene-II, Hamlet is found in a state of 'soka' and 'dainya' where he is expressing his inability to

summon courage to take revenge and blaming his weakness in the following manner –

O, vengeance!
 Why, what an ass am I: this is most brave,
 That I, the son of a dear father murdered,
 Prompted to my revenge by heaven and
 hell.....
 A stallion! Fie upon't, foh! About, my
 brains! (P.227)

The cited soliloquy reflects Hamlet's indecisive nature and highlights his irresolute state of mind. Due to the realization of this weakness of his mind, he is again found in 'soka' (sad) and 'dainya' (depression) and blamed himself as 'ass', 'stallion' etc. His realization of weakness delves him into more sadness and this state of mind is more clear from this famous soliloquy – 'To be or not to be'.

But as the play progresses more Hamlet is found to possess more materialistic thinking. Hamlet notices that Fortinbras of Norway is leading a massive army to fight for a small and meaningless plot of land and thus war becomes a matter of honour. It is from this scene a sense of resolution is noticed in Hamlet's psyche when he says –

.....O, from this time
 forth,
 My thoughts be bloody, or be
 nothing worth! (P.290)

But it is from here if Act1, Scene 5 is analysed from the perspective of 'rasa' another form of 'bhava' originates. It is in this scene confrontation between Hamlet father's ghost and Hamlet is staged. 'Bhaya' (fear) & 'bhismayabhava' (astonishment) both the feelings have been portrayed in this scene in the following manner –

Ghost: I am thy father's spirit,
 Doom'd for a certain term to walk the
 Night.....
 Hamlet: O God! (P.180)

This scene arises a creepy feeling and a sense of astonishment not only for Hamlet but for the audience too. This revelation of identity is both shocking and mysterious. When this scene proceeds further, the same feeling of fear converts into anger and despair. A sense of 'jugupsa' (disgust) and 'krodha' (anger) is also noticed when Hamlet utters frustrated words for his mother and uncle in the following manner –

O most pernicious woman,
 O villain, villain, smiling damned villain! (p.188)

In Act 3 Scene 1 'rati' (love) as 'bhava' gets reflected from the side of Ophelia when she comments –

O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
 The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye,
 Tongue, sword... (p.236)

Ophelia seems infatuated towards Hamlet when she applauds Hamlet in the above cited way. But Hamlet who is fully gripped by 'bhavas' like 'soka', 'krodha' & 'dainya' does not find proper time to let him absorbed in 'rati'. Thus 'love' as a feeling gets a painful touch in the play 'Hamlet'.

Some specific aspects of rasas as reflected in Hamlet:

i.. Shringara Rasa (Love and Beauty):

Hamlet, despite its tragic nature, is not devoid of elements that evoke the Shringara rasa. The love between Hamlet and Ophelia, though marred by tragedy, initially embodies the beauty of young romance. The delicate and tender moments shared between the two characters resonate with the Shringara rasa, creating a poignant contrast against the impending darkness.

ii. Karuna Rasa (Compassion and Sorrow):

The pervasive theme of sorrow and loss in Hamlet aligns with the Karuna rasa. Hamlet's deep grief over his father's death and his mother's hasty remarriage evoke profound empathy from the audience. The soliloquies, particularly Hamlet's iconic "To be or not to be," resonate with a sense of existential sorrow, contributing to the overarching emotional landscape of the play.

iii. Raudra Rasa (Anger and Fury):

Hamlet's quest for vengeance against his uncle, Claudius, mirrors the Raudra rasa. The intense anger and fury simmering within Hamlet drive the plot's momentum. The famous play-within-a-play scene, where Hamlet exposes Claudius's guilt, serves as a dramatic expression of this emotion, heightening the overall intensity of the narrative.

iv. Bhayanaka Rasa (Fear and Anxiety):

The ghost of King Hamlet, appearing as an ominous figure, introduces an element of fear and anxiety, aligning with the Bhayanaka rasa. The supernatural presence of the ghost adds a layer of mystery and foreboding to the play, creating an atmosphere that keeps the audience on edge.

v. Hasya Rasa (Laughter and Comedy):

While Hamlet is predominantly a tragedy, there are moments of dark humor that align with the Hasya

rasa. The gravedigger scene, for instance, infuses a morbid sense of comedy into the play, providing brief respite from the overall somber tone.

vi. Veera Rasa (Heroic Valor):

Hamlet's internal struggle and eventual pursuit of justice align with the Veera rasa, emphasizing the heroic aspect of the protagonist. Despite his flaws and internal conflicts, Hamlet's determination to right the wrongs committed against his father showcases a form of valor that resonates with audiences.

CONCLUSION

In combining the Theory of Rasa with Hamlet, it becomes evident that Shakespeare masterfully crafted a narrative that transcends cultural and temporal boundaries. The universality of human emotions explored in the play allows audiences from diverse backgrounds to connect with its characters and themes. The Theory of Rasa provides a lens through which we can appreciate the nuanced emotional tapestry woven into Hamlet, showcasing the timelessness and depth of Shakespeare's genius. Thus Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' as a character highlights various aspects of 'bhavas' which in turn arise various forms of 'rasa' in the spectator's psyche. Hamlet is a tragic character but his 'bhavas' are nothing but more humane. His feelings reflect humanity above everything which seems obscure when put to test in tough situations as he experienced. Hamlet's flaws are nothing but the outcome of his 'Sthayibhavas' which are in continuous conflict with 'sancharibhava'. As a result of this conflict, he is to suffer mental agony as his deeds are not beastly like his uncle Claudius who murdered his father or like Fortinbras who is ready for bloodshed in the name of honour. Thus Hamlet represents commonly human feelings and is able to make a psychic connection through his 'sthayibhavas' with all the readers and audiences. Satya D. Chaudhury nicely says about 'sthayobhavas' in the following way – 'Permanent emotions (sthayibhav) always in here, in dormant stage in all the human minds are basic instincts, and are fed by a number of minor feelings...' (p. 68)

In conclusion, the Theory of Rasa offers a valuable framework for understanding the emotional impact of art, even in the context of diverse cultural traditions. Applying this theory to Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' highlights the play's ability to evoke a range of emotions, creating a powerful and enduring experience for audiences around the world. As one continues to explore and appreciate the richness of global artistic traditions, the intersection of theories like Rasa with iconic works like Hamlet reminds one of the

shared human experience that transcends borders and centuries.

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