

# The interpretation of Ajñeya's short-stories in the light of rasa-theory

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# THE INTERPRETATION OF AJÑEYA'S SHORT-STORIES IN THE LIGHT OF RASA-THEORY

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## 1. Ajñeya's acquaintance with the Sanskritic tradition

The acquaintance of Saccidānanda Hirānanda Vatsyāyana — Ajñeya with the Sanskrit literary tradition is unquestionable. Proof for this is provided by the following example from his short-story *Kavitā aura jīvana: eka kahānī* (Poetry and Life: A Story). There is a quotation from *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva: "*mukharam adhīram tyaja mañjīram ...*", which means: "leave this anklet, which is restlessly making noise".<sup>1</sup> In Ajñeya's short-story it serves as an illustration of the narrated action: the poet, main hero, in search of poetic inspiration tries to localize the source of the jingling anklet. It indicates a picture of *abhisārikā*, the woman going for the meeting with her lover — a type of heroine known in Indian poetics since Bharata's classification of performing characters.

It is a matter of fact that the elements of Sanskrit poetical and literary tradition are consciously chosen by Ajñeya, however the author does not inform us about their sources. The following examples provide evidence of some ideas taken by him from the *rasa*-concept.

In *Kavitā aura jīvana* there is a quotation from the first sūtra of Viśvanātha's *Sāhityadarpaṇa*: "*vākyam rasātmakam kāvyam*", which means: "speech characterized by sentiments is literature".<sup>2</sup> In *Alikhita kahānī* (The Not-Written Story) the term *bhakti rasa* occurs, which arose from the cult of Kṛṣṇa and was popularized by Rūpa Gosvāmin in the theory of devotion. Another short-story, *Tāja kī chāyā meṃ* (In the Shadow of the Taj) treats the question of being *sahṛdaya*. This term was first defined by Abhinavagupta, but known already to Anandavardhana as well as to Bharata, who called it *prekṣaka*.<sup>3</sup>

The problem remains that we cannot yet identify the exact sources of Ajñeya's references to the traditional Indian aesthetics. Another question is

1 *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva, 5th *sarga*, 4th *śloka*.

2 *Sāhityadarpaṇa* Sri Viśvanātha Kavirajā, edited with the Chandrakala Sanskrit-Hindi commentaries by Acharya Shesharaja Sharma Regmi, p.24.

3 *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata, ch. 27: *Nāṭya Siddhi Nirūpana*, v. 53-57.

whether Ajñeya uses the elements of *rasa*-theory, either because he supports and accepts them or because he rejects and criticizes them.

## 2. Looking for the matrix of *rasa*-theory in the Indian tradition

Apart from the problem connected with the reception of *rasa*-theory by Ajñeya there are the problems related to the analysis of the Sanskrit tradition itself. One has to be aware of the fact, that there was no uniform theory of aesthetics in ancient India.

The theory of *rasa* as it is known in India today is determined by the view of Mammaṭa. His work *Kāyaprakāśa* (The Light of Literature) and the hindi poetics *Rasika-priyā* (Beloved of Connoisseur) of Keśav Das have become a leading manuals of aesthetics at Indian universities. Masson and Padwardhan maintain, that all writers on Sanskrit poetics after the tenth century were in principle followers of the theory established by Abhinavagupta.<sup>4</sup> The religious and mystical context of his works caused the revival of the *rasa* concept. By making *rasa* an essence of *dhvani*, the theory of suggestion, Abhinava joined the ideas of two previous poetics: *nāṭya* — elaborated by Bharata in his treatise on drama, and *kāvya* — worked out by the alaṃkāristas for poetry. From Daṇḍin's *Kāvyādarśa* one concludes, that both theories co-existed during his time. Daṇḍin himself refers to the concept of *rasa* in explaining certain figures of speech. He uses the terms accepted for drama and exemplifies their meaning in the context of prose and poetry.<sup>5</sup>

The first preserved text on Indian poetics is the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata, a compendium of dance-science and dramaturgy. In spite of the lack of clarity and uncertain date as well as the authorship, the book became an authoritative manual of stage-craft. The ideas proposed by *Nāṭyaśāstra* influenced Indian literary criticism to the point, that from the field of drama they have been expanded to literature and art in general and formed an independent aesthetic theory. It is justifiable to accept the concept of *rasa* proposed by *Nāṭyaśāstra* as a matrix for any further interpretation of this theory.

4 MASSON, J.L., PATWARDHAN, M.V., *Aesthetic Rapture*, vol. 1, p.4.

5 *Kāvyādarśa* of Daṇḍin, v. 51-60, tr. by BÖTHLINK, O., p.9-11.

### 3. Classification of the stories selected

For the purpose of analysis of Ajñeya's short narrative works in the light of *rasa*-theory I decided to divide the texts into two groups. The first one reveals the author's view of aesthetics as a philosophy of beauty and the place of literature in it. The second group of selected texts illustrates the technical aspects of *rasa*, i.e. — the poetics of this theory, those more or less evident constituents of the text, which joined together evoke an aesthetical experience in the reader.

The purpose of such selected analysis is, firstly, to find out the traditional, Indian background of Ajñeya's reflections on the aesthetics and literature, and, secondly, to specify the elements of *rasa* used by him on the level of language, composition and the meaning, that is on the three structural levels of a literary work, in order to identify so called *vibhāvas* — causes of emotions, *anubhāvas* — their effects or external manifestations, *vyabhicāribhāvas* — the transient, accompanying emotions and the combination of them, which in effect causes the specific, corresponding *rasa* of the recipient.

### 4. Examples for the two groups selected

To the first group belong such short-stories as: *Tāja kī chāyā meṃ* (In the Shadow of the Taj), *Kalākāra kī mukti* (The Liberation of the Artist), *Paramparā — ek kahānī* (Tradition. A Story), *Kavitā aurā jīvana. Ek kahānī* (Poetry and Life. A Story), *Nāī kahānī kā ploṭa* (The Plot of a New Short-Story) and *Alikhita kahānī* (The Not-Written Story). The themes of these short-stories concentrate on the nature of aesthetical experience, on the relation between the artist, his work and the reception of it, and on the inspiration and the process of creation.

The short-story *Tāja kī chāyā meṃ* provides an important example of Ajñeya's understanding of the nature of aesthetic experience. By stressing its emotional basis the author refers to the concept of *rasa*:

"Beauty is that, in the emotional experience of which, we would go away from the mundane happiness and unhappiness, it means we would be separate from experiencing feelings, but is the experience of beauty not the feeling itself?"<sup>6</sup>

Further the narrator relates the state of the main hero — Anant:

6 AJÑEYA, *Tāja kī chāyā meṃ*, in: *Ajñeya kī saṃpūrṇa kahānīyām*, Dillī 1982, p.373.

"Anant left behind the field of reasoning, he flowed into the river of emotions... Slowly ...the excessive excitement of self-sacrifice began to overwhelm him... And somehow the impulse arose in him to express the feeling in poetry, to make it visible in some way. Its pressure was so forceful."<sup>7</sup>

In another place of the story, this time in the monologue of the main hero, appears the question of being *sahṛdaya* — being well disposed for the reception of art:

"I, called Anant, am a poor person, without means to live, there is no poetry in me... I neither know the means of self-expression nor the ways of their use, because I am only a poor man called Anant. But is it not exactly the thing I shall be proud of, that I can get lost in art, that I can be submerged in the spiritual endeavour of other people, in their love?"<sup>8</sup>

An example for the second group of my classification is the short-story *Dārogā Amīcanda* (The Superintendant Amīcand). I shall illustrate the application of *rasa* elements only by the way colour terminology is used in the story.

At the very beginning of the story, in the narrative part of the text, there is an enumeration of certain colours. The leading character, who is also the narrator of the story, says:

"Why not, ...I had enough rest, let the emptiness disappear now, some motion will flow into my life; for sure there will be some colouring in the huge *Hazārā* prison, in some places will be more of the black colour, in some others — more of the red-yellowish one."<sup>9</sup>

Ajñeya uses the Hindi words *syāha* for black and *lāla-ūjalā* for the colour resulting from the mixture of red and yellow. In the concept of *rasa* proposed by Bharata the black colour, Sanskrit term: *kṛṣṇa*, belongs to the sentiment of terror: *bhayānaka*, which is caused by fear. The red-yellowish colour known in Sanskrit as *gaura* relates to the sentiment of heroism. This term in fact includes several colours: yellowish, white, reddish and saffron.<sup>10</sup>

7 *Ibid.*, p.379.

8 *Ibid.*, p.372.

9 AJÑEYA, *Dārogā Amīcanda*, *ibid.*, p.245.

10 *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata, ch. 6, v. 43.10.

Ajñeya consciously introduces the terminology of these colours and stresses the exactness of their names. Further analysis of the short-story proves the evidence of the elements causing the experience of the two mentioned *rasas* with the dominance of *vīra*, the sentiment of heroism.

A more detailed interpretation of Ajñeya's short narrative works would go beyond the limitations of this paper. To conclude I would like to stress, that Ajñeya's modern and experimental approach to literature does not reject the achievements of his own Indian literary tradition, but rather, means exploring and expanding them.

