

JOHN KEATS'S POEM ISABELLA: AN AESTHETIC STUDY IN THE LIGHT OF BHARATA'S RASA SIDDHĀNTA (THEORY OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE)

Nivindhya Sharma¹
Ankit Trivedi²

The present paper aims at demonstrating the theory of *rasa* as conceived by Bharata, in his treatise *Nāṭyaśāstra* (2nd century BC). Bharata assiduously has put his idea, as "vibhāvānubhāvavyābhicārīsamvogataraṇaṣapattiḥ" (the savouring of the emotion is possible through the combination or integration of these elements: *vibhāva* (causes and determinants of the rise of an emotion) *anubhāva* (following emotions) and finally *vyābhicārībhāvas* (transitory emotions). These constituents are not only helpful in making the work of art more creative but also the reader consummates the aesthetic value of it. The attempt demonstrates this working of *rasas* in John Keats's poetry. Keats aesthetic experience is categorically very akin to Indian poetics when he supports 'eternal poetry' that is saturated with emotions and feelings can be better objectified with the theory of *rasa*. In nutshell, this study will help the readers to interpret and experience all kinds of beauty which lies in the poetry of John Keats.

Key words: *vibhāva, anubhāva, vyābhicārībhāvas*

The *rasa siddhānta* (theory of aesthetic experience) of Bharata (5th c.) is based on the four kinds of *abhinaya* (acting/expression)—*āṅgika*

¹ Nivindhya Sharma is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, S.M.N. PG College, Haridwar.

² Ankit Trivedi is a Research Scholar in the Department of English, S.M.N. PG College, Haridwar.

abhinaya (voluntary non-verbal expression) to depict emotions/feelings of a character being played by the actor, *vācika abhinaya* (verbal expression) to express emotions/feelings, tone, diction, pitch of a particular character, *āhārya abhinaya* (costume and stage expression) to enhance expression, *sārvika abhinaya* (involuntary non-verbal expression) expressed by the presence of tears, mark of horripilation, change of facial color, trembling of lips, enhancing of nostrils) to express the deepest emotions of a character. Thus the main topic dealt with in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is the harmonious and creative use of language—both verbal and non-verbal—which makes the expression a highest kind of poetry. Bharata puts this harmonious and creative use of language in his *Nāṭyaśāstra* in the following way: "vibhāvānubhāvavyābhicārīsamvogataraṇaṣapattiḥ" (the savouring of the emotion is possible through the combination or integration of these elements: *vibhāva* (causes and determinants of the rise of an emotion) *anubhāva* (gestures expressive of what is going on in the heart or the mind of main characters), like casting a terrified glance, heaving a sigh or involuntarily shedding a tear) and *vyābhicārībhāvas* (transitory emotions which go along with and consequently reinforce prevailing mood or emotional disposition). The *vibhāvās* (causes and determinants of the rise of an emotion) are of two kinds: *ālamban* (supporting causes, usually the hero or the heroine or such objects) and *udāhṛan* (features or circumstances that accentuate the feelings of *ālamban* (hero or heroine). The *ālamban* (supporting causes, usually the hero or the heroine or such objects) are again of two types: *vīcārālamban* (person or object of the rise of an emotion or the person or object for whom the emotion is awakened) and *āṣṭālamban* (person in whom the emotion is awakened). Through the conjunction of language used by the poet, he activates, with some kind of empathetic induction, the propensity of *citābhāvas* (basic sentiments) in the reader and the movement it is consummated, the *sahridaya* (sensitive reader) experiences an affluence or transport which is designed as *rasa* (aesthetic sentiment).

Bharata holds that each one of us is fitted with a built-in structure of

śāhībhāvas (basic sentiments) which are the modified drives of instincts as a result of centuries of evolutionary process of humanization and social living. These *śāhībhāvas* (basic mental states), which are chiefly eight in number—*raśi* (erotic love), *shoka* (grief), *krodha* (wrath), *utsaha* (energy), *bhaya* (fear), *hasa* (humour), the poet so that we have one *rasa* (aesthetic sentiment) corresponding to each of them. The corresponding *rasas* (aesthetic sentiments) of the *śāhībhāvas* (basic sentiments) are *śhrāngār* (erotic), *karuṇa* (pathetic), *raudra* (anger), *virāṭ* (heroic), *bhāvanā* (fear), *hāsyā* (laughter), *bībhatsā* (disgust), *adbhuta* (wonder). The poet succeeds in doing this by resorting to the devices of concretization.

Let us analyze the poem *Isabella* is a pathetic love-tale which demonstrates the *nispatti* of *vipratībhāvaśhrāngār* (erotic in separation). The story is basically a simple one and involves Isabella and Lorenzo, two Florentines, who love each other deeply. Isabella's two brothers, who rich and greedy want to marry her with a wealthy nobleman. So, they lure Lorenzo into the forest, murder him and bury his body and fabricate a story about him to have left the country for a business tour. Isabella feels embittered but one night Lorenzo comes in her dream and tells her of his tragic fate. Then Isabella installs the pot of Basil, putting in it the skull of Lorenzo, which later the brothers steal and the eventually the death of Isabella takes place primarily corresponding to the production of *śhrāngārā rasa*. Here too the fusion together of various emotions (*ambhāvas*, *vibhāvas*, and *sancārībhāvas*), lead to the dominant emotion (*śāhībhāvas*) of *karuṇa rasa* (pathos).

Mah (attachment) *utsukā* (eagerness), *sauras* (mental agony), *cinā* (anxiety), *daurya* (depression), are the *vyabhicārībhāvas*. Now the *śāhībhāvas* like *śoka* which is unpleasant in practical life, becomes pleasant. The unpleasant sentiment of *śoka* which in life produces grief due to *lokasamśrayāt* (association with material world), it becomes *ātaunk* (supra-human) as a result of *kāryasamśrayāt* (association with aesthetic world). In the story, the subject acquires the complexion

of *vibhāvas* and afford *karuṇa rasa* which *śāhībhāvas* relishes in the story. This is the state of *śāhībhāvaśhrāngār* (erotic in separation) during the course of the story. Here *cinā* (mind) is liquefied. Now *rajas* (mode of passion) and *tamas* (mode of dullness) are also liquefied and so transcends the worldly limits. It is *rajas* and *tamas* that makes *cinā* have different experiences of life. They limit the realization of *cinā* have but the moment these *guṇas* (modes) are melted, the limitations of *cinā* are removed and the *śāhībhāvas* has *rasa*. The liquefaction of *cinā* takes place after *rajas* and *tamas* get subdued for the time being, affording scope for the *śāhībhāvas* to inundate the inner consciousness. This is a state of cumulative experience of mind known as *bhāgāwaraṇacittavasthā*.

The poem starts with the depiction of the tragic love of a damsel of Florence for a Youngman in the service of her merchant-brothers. To present this image the poet uses the *karuṇa rasamāde* up of either an artistic creative manner to support the theme and sense of the story.

Fair Isabel, poor simple Isabel!

Lorenzo, a young palmer in Love's eye!

They could not in the self-same mansion dwell

Without some stir of heart, some malady;

They could not sit at meals but feel how well

It soothed each to be the other by;

They could not, sure, beneath the same roof sleep

But to each other dream, and nightly weep. (ll. 1-8)

The beginning of both lovers in the form of inherent having

exclamation mark at the end directly exhibits the nature of the lovers.

The exclamation in the first two lines forces the nature of the lovers,

feeling of suspense. The fear of being harmed by her brothers prevents

Isabella from seeing Lorenzo in the open. Consequently, they feel the

pangs of separation. This is how her brothers' cruelty becomes the root

cause of their separation and suffering. The brothers thus create the

atmosphere of quiet gloom in their piteous love-story. In this poem the

production (*nispatti*) of *karuṇa rasa* comes about through the fusion

together of *vibhāva* (cause), *ambhāva* (manifestation), *satvikabhāva* (in-built body response), *sancaribhāva* (fleeting emotion) and *abhināva* (action).

Vibhāva (cause) is usually of two kinds, *uddipana* (context) and *ālamhana* (experience). *Vibhāva* is Isabella's undeclared love for Lorenzo, which eventually brings about her estrangement and suffering. Keats expresses their love in the following lines:

With every morn their love grew tender,
With every eve deeper and tenderer still;
He might not in house, field, or garden stir,
But her full shape would all his seeing fill: (stanza II, lines 9-10)

Uddipana (context) is the impossibility of their marriage due to her brother's dislike of Lorenzo. While *ālamhana* (experience) depends upon:

- i. *Prasava* (event) – the secret meetings of Isabella and Lorenzo that cause the death of Lorenzo, and
- ii. *Asrava* – (experience) – Isabella and Lorenzo.

This suspense of the reader is clarified in the next lines where the *rasa* takes a flight towards the emotion of fear caused by the imagined danger to the lives of the lovers. As the *sahridaya* goes on reading the poem he comes to know that Lorenzo is a timid lover, he is nervous and shy of Isabella, and so is hesitant to declare his love to her. The *sahridaya*'s suspense is gripped in his shy nature as he reads on impatiently to know whether Lorenzo will be able to summon sufficient courage to unfold his passion to the lady of his choice or not. Keats verifies this in the following way employing *sasandeha* *ālamhā* *kāra* directly conveying the meaning:

A whole long month of May in this sad plight
Made their cheeks paler by the break of June:
To-morrow will I bow to my delight.

To-morrow will I ask my lady's boon." (II, 25-28)

The speaker's showing uncertainty, whether he would be able to express his love to Isabella or not, enhance the *sahridaya*'s curiosity and the feeling of suspense too. But when her brothers come to know about her love, they decide to kill Lorenzo and bury him in the forest. These repetitions please us and confer a sort of significance on what is being said.

Here *adbhuta rasa* can occur either by itself or as part of a memory of the beloved, that is, through the *vahicārībhāva* of *smṛti*. The lover's impressions about his beloved are awakened by his being fully engrossed about the movements of his beloved, though the latter is not actually before him.

Love! thou art leading me from wintry cold,
Lady! Thou leadest me to summer clime,
'And I must taste the blossoms that unfold
In its ripe warmth this gracious morning time.'
So said, his erewhile timid lips grew bold'
And poised with hers in dewy rhyme:
Great bliss was with them, and great happiness
Grew, like a luscious flower in June's caress. (II, 71-72)

Finally, Lorenzo collects his courage and succeeds in expressing his feelings to Isabella. Now, "Great bliss was with them, and great happiness/Grew, like a luscious flower in June's caress." (II, 71-72) the use of expression, "great bliss" and "great happiness" adds to the ecstasy of the lovers and enables the *sahridaya* to experience the same bliss. But this experience is just a relaxing juncture.

Very soon Keats presents a fresh complication in stanzas from XIV to XXII where the *sahridaya* learns that Isabella's two brothers cannot bear the thought of their sister marrying Lorenzo and so they determine to kill him. Now a feeling of suspense is born which is sustained till the poem reaches its climax. In the stanzas XIV to XV the poet not only enables the *sahridaya* to be familiar with nature of the two brothers but

and generates a feeling of disliking and disgust in his heart for their cruelty:

For them the Ceylon diver held his breath,
And went all naked to the hungry shark;
For them his ears gush'd blood, for them in death
The seal on the cold ice with piteous bark
Lay full of darts; for them alone did scethe
A thousand men in troubles wide and dark:
Half-ignorant, they turn'd an easy wheel
That set sharp racks at work, to pinch and peel. (ll. 113-120)

Here the emphasis on the repetition of words, "for them" intensifies the disgust feeling as it reminds the *sahridaya* that all the tortures depicted here, either being experienced by human beings or by animals, are only because of them. This detailed picture of the tortures is full of or primary meaning) in which the *vācārtha* (conventional meaning) is desired in its original form works like *ākṣepaśāntkāra*. Now the suggested meaning transcends the *abhidheyārtha* or the *vācārtha*. In other words, it puts the conventional meaning in relation with something else with which it is apparently connected in the statement. The common element between *ākṣepaśāntkāra* and *abhidhā* born juncture the *sahridaya* is mentally prepared to be said. At this situation to be posturized further in the poem and so he is led to an apprehension about the successful journey of love.

This apprehension is translated into fear in stanza XVIII where Keats describes the brothers discovering Lorenzo and Isabella's secret love. The discovery of their love emotions enables the reader to imagine some imminent disaster. The apprehension and fear of the reader comes true in the poem very soon when he encounters the conspiracy of Isabella's brothers of killing Lorenzo. The conspiracy is versified in stanza XXII by using *vivāhalaṅkāra* in the following way:

And many a jealous conference had they,
And many times they bit their lips alone,
Before they fix'd upon a surest way
To make the youngster for his crime alone;
And at the last, these men of cruel clay
Cut Mercy with a sharp knife to the bone;
For they resolved in some forest dim
To kill Lorenzo, and there bury him. (ll. 169-176)

The exposition of honour-killing accentuates the feelings of *bhaya*. Now the poem takes a turn to its main sentiment of *karuṇa* with the poem starts and ends. After materializing their plan, the cruel brothers tell a false story to Isabella that Lorenzo has gone to foreign lands on a business trip. Isabella innocently believes on them and suffers from the pangs of separation which ironically in Indian terminology is *śṛṅgāra rasa*:

She weeps alone for pleasures not to be;
Sorely she wept until the night came on,
And then, instead of love, o misery!
She brooded o'er the luxury alone:
His image in the dusk she seem'd to see,
And to the silence made a gentle moan,
Spreading her perfect arms upon the air,
And on her couch low murmuring "where? O where? (ll. 233-240)

Isabella in low volume arises the *sahridaya*'s pity for her pain of separation and helplessness and thus he/she sympathizes with *śṛṅgāra rasa*. Isabella is disappointed to learn about the sudden departure of her lover. Though she reconciles herself to the absence of Lorenzo, she still longs to hear about his well-being. However, when no news arrives, she is greatly pained and hurt. She weeps and moans. She also sees a vision in which the pale shadow of Lorenzo tells her about his murder. She is shocked to think about her brothers' bloody knife that killed her lover. Then following the words of Lorenzo's ghost, Isabella visits

the place where he is buried. Her visit has a grim digging scene where Isabella unearths the head, takes it home, combs its hair, washes it with her tears, and kisses it all the day. The poet has artistically enabled the reader to feel the intensity of pain, sorrow, and suffering of Isabella with the help of *karuna rasa* in all these scenes. Keats states this *anubhāva* (the pathetic mental condition of Isabella). The management of some of the rhetorical constructions like repetition and parallelism is also employed very beautifully by the poet. When, he talks about his murder to Isabella in her vision. Keats appropriately says:

Strange sound it was, when the pale shadow spake;
For there was striving, in its piteous tongue,
To speak as when on earth it was awake,
And Isabella on its music hung:
Languor there was in it, and tremulous shake,
As in a palsied Druid's hard unstrung;
And through it moaned a ghostly under-song,
Like hoarse night-gusts sepulchral briars among.

(XXXVI lines 281-288)

These characteristics of *sārvikabhāva* are also experienced in Isabella when she laments and feeds his skull with tears. In fact, the last characteristic of *pralaya* (lack of awareness) is more forcefully obvious in her actual loss of feeling, when she learns in her vision about Lorenzo's murder by her brothers. When Isabella's only sign of Lorenzo's remembrance is also stolen away, she experiences deep agony. All these *sārvikabhāvas* as seen in Lorenzo and Isabella's change of grief. Further, these *sārvikabhāvas* are expressed through *abhinaya* (which is the indicator of the *sthāyibhāva*). The sorrowful body movements of Isabella (*angika*), their pathetic language (*vācika*), their sad and mourning appearance (*ahārya*) and their despondent, melancholic and piteous condition (*sārvika*) display *abhinaya* (action) of the tragic poem. All these *samcārībhāvas*, awaken pathos. For instance, in the following description of Isabella's grief, a variation on the word "forget" clearly conveys the desired meaning of the

poet and the *saharḍaya* witnesses the presence of *karuna rasa* with *āśeṣatāṅkāra*.

And she forgot the stars, the moon, and sun,
And she forgot the blue above the trees,
And she forgot the dells where waters run,
And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze;
She had no knowledge when the day was done,
And the new morn she saw not; but in peace
Hung over her sweet basil evermore,
And moisten'd it with tears unto the core. (ll. 417-424)

Here the repetition of the word, "and she forgot", suggests Isabella's undue obsession with Lorenzo's head, which is buried in the pot of basil. The *saharḍaya* easily grasps the meaning that Isabella has forgotten everything except Lorenzo's head or sweet basil and now she is like a living dead body without any charm for life. The use of repetition and parallelism imparts sweetness to the description. These devices successfully suggest with *karuna rasa*, the strange, uncanny pathos of Isabella's predicament. But the sentiments of pity and pathos generated in the heart of the *saharḍaya* do not end here and continues. The pathetic keynote of Isabella's tragedy crosses all the limits and forces the *saharḍaya* for an outburst of tears. The *saharḍaya* also has the instances of incremental repetitions and parallel structure in his poetry which he beautifully uses to impart melodious effect to his poetry. The following stanzas 55 and 61, from Isabella can be taken to illustrate the use of incremental repetitions and parallel structuralism in Keats's poetry:

O Melancholy, linger here awhile!
O Music, Music, breathe desponding!
O Echo, Echo, from some somber isle!
Unknown, Lethargic, sigh to us - O sigh!
(Isabella, l.433-36)
O Melancholy, turn thine eyes away!
O Music, Music, breathe despondingly!

O Echo, Echo, on some other day,
From isles Lethæan, sigh to us – O sigh!

In both of these stanzas the use of *karuna rasa* is conspicuous through the artistic use of the device of incremental repetition along with an apostrophe to intensify the plot emotionally. Here the poet has personified "Melancholy", "Music" and "Echo", to enact an opera of woe and thus to make the reader sympathize with the suffering Isabella. These figures, inherently, evoke a sense of tragedy. A distinct and sympathetic tone is used in an artistic and creative manner to support the theme and sense of the story. This distinctness of the sympathetic tone and language is apparently reflected in the use of interjection, apostrophe, repetition and parallelism. The repetition of interjection and apostrophe deepens the pathos here and the lamentation becomes prominent. In the stanza 55 the three interjections in the lines, 433, 434, and 436, accentuate the reader's strong sympathy for Isabella. Apart from the apostrophes, as shown, Keats also uses the tragic atmosphere in these stanzas. The parallel structure impresses the reader with the tone of woe, which resonates with the sad ditty of Isabella's story. A look at the two stanzas make it clear that by enhancing the pathetic effect.

... 'for cruel't is,' said she,
To steal my basil-pot away from me!
And so she pined, and so she died forlorn,
Imploring for her basil to the last.
No heart was there in Florence but did mourn
In pity of her love, so overcast (ll.495-500)

This last event of stealing the basil-pot is the cruellest deed of Isabella's brother which moves the heart of the reader pathetically and the *karuna rasa* gets maturity here. The piteous feelings of the *sahridaya* get outburst on this cruel act done by the brothers, which causes the tragic end of Isabella's life. Her death combined with the word "forlorn" creates an extreme sympathetic feeling in the reader's heart and thus this last scene having the prominence of *karuna rasa*.

The analysis of the poem demonstrates how the use of *karuna rasa* employed in the love episode of Isabella and Lorenzo, and their secret meeting, the impossibility of their marriage, the sufferings of Isabella, the revelation of the murder of Lorenzo, the installation of the pot of basil, the stealing of the pot of basil and the eventual death of Isabella, hatches the graph of *karuna rasa*, assisted by the secondary rasa i.e. *bhayanaka*. All these *sancāribhāvas*, awaken pathos.

References

- Bharata. 1954. *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Poona: Gaekwad Oriental Series. Ed. I, II, III. Print.
- Bhāmaha, Ācārya. 1925. *Kāvya-lankāra*. Ed. Devendranatha Sharma. Patna: Bihar Rastra Bhāsa Parishad, Print.
- Bhoja. 1969. *Śhṅgāra Prakāśa*. Ed. Gr. Josyer. Mysore: Coronation Press, 1955; rpt. Print.
- Dasgupta, S.N., 1947. Ed. *A History of Sanskrit Literature Classical Period* Vol. I. Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, Print.
- De, S.K. 1947. *History of Sanskrit Poetics*. 2nd Rev. ed. 2 vols. Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Print.
- Bate, Walter Jackson. 1963. *John Keats*. Harvard University Press, Print.
- . 1945. *The Stylistic Development of Keats*. New York: Modern Language Association of America, Print.
- Blunden, Edmund. 1970. *Selected Poems: John Keats*. Collins, London and Glasgow: Print.
- Hunt, Leigh. 1820. *The Indicator*. Harvard University, London: Print.
- Keats. 1820. *The Poetry of John Keats: Lania, Endymion, Poems* 1817, and Poems Print.
- Poetry: 4 Books. *An Electronic Classics Series Publication*. © 2010-2012. Print.

