

Dismantling Rasa in *Life of Pi*

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Abstract

The theory of Rasa by Bharatha is an ancient theory that still finds validity and expression in the world of modern research. It has been used by many to find out various postulates it offers. As the name suggests the movie *Life of Pi* is about how the protagonist, Piscine Molitor Patel encounters the ship wreck and his survival thereafter. The study intends to carry out an analysis of the movie under the light of Rasa theory propounded by Bharatha in *Natyasasthra*. It investigates all the major events in the movie using the famous aphorism of Rasa and finds out *angirasa* of the same.

Key words: angirasa, sancharibhavas, vibhavas, rasanispatti

Criticism is the soul of literature; the very soul which finds its expression by enhancing the merit of a literary work. Dismantling a literary work to bring about its various postulates is at once an intellectual and creative endeavour. The study attempts to explore *Life of Pi*, a novel written by Canadian novelist Yann Martel which was later on made into a movie by Mr. Ang Lee, in the light of the theory of Rasa put forward by Bharata in *Natyasasthra*. It has been given in *Natyasasthra* that amidst a variety of fleeting emotions or *sancharibhavas* there is one emotion which would rise above all and become dominant in nature. It is named *angirasa* and my endeavour is to find out the same in the work of art.

Manifestation of *Rasa* in a spectator occurs due to a combination of *vibhavas*, *anubhavas* and *vyabharibhavas*. It is a two way process wherein the artist strives for *rasa* in his work and the spectator in turn detects it intuitively. The resulting aesthetic experience is called *rasaswadana*. The term '*rasa*' refers to the sap, juice of plants or extract. But within the context of art and aesthetic experience, it is a state of heightened delight or ananda. *Rasa* experience is not a physical understanding of the work of art conveyed by the artist or by the author through his words in the text, on the other hand, it is a state of bliss that the spectator intuitively enters when the artist performs on the stage.

The sixth chapter of *Natyasasthra* deals with the *Rasanispatti* or the process of genesis of *rasa*. The famous aphorism of *rasa* is:

Vibhavanubhava –vyabharisamyogat-rasanispattih(52)

That is, *rasa* arises when the *Sthayibhava* in the individual is awakened by his perception of *vibhavas*, *anubhavas* and *vyabharibhavas*. The *vibhavas* are the determinants or catalysts, which are of two kinds. *Alambanavibhava* is the person or object in the context that excites the concerned emotion. *Uddipnavibhava* is the situation in the environment in which person or object is placed that is helpful in intensifying the emotional experience. The outward manifestations brought forth as a result of the *vibhavas* are the *Anubhavas*. These are divisible into *Vacika*, those which can be expressed by words and *Angika* which are expressions through body language.

There are also 'involuntary emotions' known as *Sattvikabhavas*: *Stamba*(paralysis), *Sveta*(sweating), *Romanca*(hair standing on end), *Svarabhetha*(changes in one's tone of voice), *Vipathu*(trembling), *Vaivarnya*(changes in the colour of one's face), *Asru*(becoming tearful) and *Pralaya*(fainting).

The *Sthayibhava* or permanent mood is a major emotion which is developed by a number of minor feelings referred to as *Vyabharibhavas* which are thirty-three in number : *Nirveda* (disinterest), *Glani* (tiredness), *Sanka* (apprehension), *Asuya* (insecurity), *Mada* (intoxication), *Srama* (exhaustion), *Alasya* (lethargy), *Dainya* (pity), *Cinta* (anxiety), *Moho* (delusion), *Smrti* (recollection),

Dhrti (steadfastness), *Vrida* (shame), *Capalata* (impulsiveness), *Harsa* (sudden delight), *Avega* (excitement), *Jadata* (stupor), *Garva* (arrogance), *Visada* (depression), *Autsuka* (longing), *Nidra* (sleep), *Apasmara* (epilepsy), *Supta* (dreaming), *Vibodha* (awakening), *Amarsa* (restrained anger), *Avahittha* (deception), *Ugrata* (ferociousness), *Mati* (analysis), *Vyadhi* (sickness), *Unmada* (temporary insanity), *Marana* (death), *Trasa* (panic) and *Vitarka* (argumentiveness).

Bharata talks about eight *rasas* in *Natyasasthra*. They are: *Sringaram*, *Hasyam*, *Raudram*, *Karunyam*, *Bibhalsam*, *Bhayanakam*, *Viram* and *Adbhutam*. Abhinavagupta suggested a ninth *rasa*, *Santha* which was accepted by majority of Alamkarikas after a great deal of struggle between the sixth and tenth centuries. In addition to nine *Rasas*, two more appeared later especially in literature: *Valsalya* (parental love) and *Bhakti* (spiritual devotion). But these two *rasas* failed to get equal recognition with nine *rasas* because of the fact that they are incapable of developing into a separate *rasa* as the sole theme of a whole poem or drama. The corresponding *Bhavas* of the eight *rasas* are *Rati* (love), *Hasya* (mirth), *Soka* (sorrow), *Krodha* (anger), *Utsaha* (energy), *Bhaya* (terror), *Jugupsa* (Disgust) and *Vismaya* (Astonishment).

Bharata's *Rasasutra* which necessitates fusion of *Vibhavas*, *Anubhavas* and *Vyabharibhavas* in experiencing *rasa* is applicable to dramatic experience only. In forms of literature other than drama, any one of those constituents can serve to result in the *rasa* of the reader. Hence:

- A description of mere *vibhavas* by a poet with *rasavatta* or aesthetic imagination can culminate in a reader *rasa*.
- A treatment of mere *anubhavas* also may bring about *rasa*.
- A poetic treatment of one or more *vyabharibhavas* independently can cause *rasa*.
- A treatment of *abhasas* or semblances of *rasabhava* as also their ebb and tide and mixture may be as relishable as *rasa*

The principle of a ruling dominant sentiment amidst a variety of *rasas* as the key principle for the success of any drama is Bharata's greatest contribution to dramatic criticism. In *Natyasastra*, he states:

When in the midst of a diversity of psychic states, all transfigured by the imagination, there is one master-passion unifying all of them like a thread; that is to be regarded as the ruling sentiment of a work of art. The rest are but momentary....

There is nothing like a single *rasa* in drama. (245-46)

My endeavours in finding out the aforesaid ruling sentiment in *Life of Pi* led me to make the conclusion that the *rasa* that dominates the whole work is *Veera*. It sustains throughout the novel from the very outset. Piscine Molitor Patel is the real name of Pi. At school Pi gets mocked by other children who call him 'pissing' instead of Piscine. Pi becomes the butt of ridicule among other students just because of his name 'Piscine' which sounds like 'pissing'. We see instances of humiliation from his friends and playmates in the school. How he comes out skilfully from such a trouble at school and becomes a legend is an instance of heroic mood in the novel. Here Pi himself as a child is the *alambanavibhava* and ambience of getting teased by his playmates is the *uddipanavibhava*. Pi's explanation of his name 'Pi' as a number in Mathematics equivalent to 3.14 and his endeavour in byhearting all the decimals and his action of jotting down the same on the blackboard accurately in front of the whole classroom serves as *vacika* and *angika anubhavas* respectively. A temperament of *ugrata* that Pi maintains himself when changing his status in the school is the *vyabharibhava*. An aesthetic experience of *veera* is invoked in the reader in this context.

During his childhood Pi tries to feed Richard Parker alone there by hoping to befriend him. Though Pi and Ravi were there in the beginning of their act, Ravi leaves the place when Richard Parker makes his presence. Pi was alone and we see him offering the tiger a piece of meat with his

bare hands. In this Pi is the *alambanavibhava* and the cage of the tiger together with its slow movement towards Pi is the *uddipanavibhava*. Pi's dialogues such as he wants to meet the tiger close up and his affirmation to the tiger to touch the meat in his hand that is "touch it Richard Parker it's for you" (00:19:36) and the explanation given to his father when he was caught between the act that is, "animals have souls, I have seen it in their eyes" (00:21:54) serves as *vacika anubhava*. Trembling hands and bravery shown at the same time when Pi confronts Richard Parker can be taken as *angika anubhavas*. Sweating and trembling are the *sattvikabhavas* and we can also observe *Dhrti* or steadfastness in the actions of Pi and *vitarka* or argumentiveness as *vyabharibhavas* in the situation. All in its proper combination produces *veera rasa* in the reader.

Piscine's pluralistic attitude towards religion is another instance of heroic mood in the novel. As a child Pi questions and ponders about three religious beliefs. For instance, Pi asks the priest in the church that why would God send his own son to suffer for the sins of ordinary people. Though he tells him that it is because God loves us all Pi could find no reason in it. During his childhood he comes across with three religions and he follows the three with his own sound reasoning that faith is a house with many rooms (00:35:41). Deliberations of the boy to reach the church so as to clear his doubts about Christian religious beliefs, his visits in the mosque, silent pondering by the side of the lake and sudden get back from the same place to reach the church in order to clarify his further doubts on religion functions as *uddipanavibhavas* in the spectator. His questions on religion serve as *anubhavas*. Thirst and fatigue that the boy feels reaching the church which is high on a mountain are the *sattvikabhavas* in the context. *Utsaha* shown by the boy in all his efforts to reason out his doubts on religion is the *vyabharibhavas* and again the resulting *rasa* is *veera*.

While on his journey in Tsimtsum Pi gets on to the ship's deck at the time of lightning and thunder all alone. This again is another instance of heroic mood in the novel. Here the rough sea, heavy thunder and lightning works as *uddipanavibhavas*, his *utsaha* in enjoying the sight functions as *vyabharibhavas* which in turn result in a heightened feeling of *veera rasa*.

After the shipwreck too we see heroic mood dominating in the work. Although Pi Patel could not take hold of the provisions for survival in the houseboat initially, he gradually takes over it and even prepares a raft made of oars and life jackets by making use of the tools of survival facing the danger of an untamed tiger in the house boat. The vast sea, company of an untamed tiger, hyena, orangutan and zebra in the beginning serves as *uddipanavibhavas*. It intensifies the heroic mood of the work. *Utsaha* or energy prevails throughout his endeavours in the houseboat which arouses *veera rasa* in the spectator. Pi's decision to tame Richard Parker offers an unforgettable instance of heroic mood in the novel and movie. His words like he must learn to catch fish, if he doesn't he is afraid that the tiger's last meal will be a skinny vegetarian boy functions as *vacika anubhava*. Pi being *alambhanavibhava* and the vast sea and the presence of an untamed tiger in the boat being *uddipanavibhava*; the corresponding *bhava* in the situation is that of *utsaha* and the *rasa* without any doubt *veera* itself. Pi's attempt to anthropomorphize with Richard Parker again takes the spectator towards heroic mood especially when we realize that Pi is going against his father's warning that animals are not meant to be treated or thought of as people.

In between his journey in the sea, Pi and Richard Parker reach an Algae Island. Discovering that the island is carnivorous, Pi decides to leave the island with Richard Parker. Although *Vismaya* or wonder is the predominant mood here, it changes to heroic mood when Pi takes the decision to leave the place. *Veera* manifests in the words of Pi as *Vacika anubhava*: "By the time morning came, my grim decision was taken. I preferred to set off and perish in search of my own kind than to live a lonely half-life of physical comfort and spiritual death on this murderous island" (00:40:37). The statement shows the heroic quality in the characterization of Pi that he is never ready to give up his spirit. Even the Author in the story makes us feel that it is he who is writing the story from the point of view of Pi Patel, making Pi again a hero by himself. All the above instances justify that *veera* is the *angin rasa* in this work of art.

In the beginning, the movie sets off with a song of lullaby in Tamil. Though the *uddipanavibhavas* are the animals, birds and other creatures in the zoo, a mood of *valsalya* is aroused in the spectator with its relation to nature as mother who loves, cares and provides all her creations. But this *bhava* fails to become a dominant emotion throughout the work. Later on *valsalya* is induced into the spectator when Amma recounts stories of Hindu gods to the little Pi during his childhood and again when she supports Pi when he gets mocked by his brother Ravi and advised by his father about his pluralistic views of religion and when she embraces and caresses on his forehead in the middle of Pi's father's illustration to teach Pi about the brutality of animal kingdom by placing a lamb nearby Richard Parker's cage. In all the above instances *valsalya* as a mood is presented especially through *anubhavas*.

Towards the climax we see the mood of *Bhaya* inducing into the mind of the spectator when a castaway makes his entry in to the houseboat of Pi. Although he befriends him initially, later on we see Pi getting attacked by him. He gets killed by Richard Parker but Pi eats some of the flesh and uses severed arm for fishing too. Here the fight between them and murder of the man by Richard Parker are the *uddipanavibhavas*. *Avahitta* or deception shown by the man and *ugrata* or ferociousness shown by the tiger serves as *vyabharibhavas* which in its combination brings forth *bhayanaka rasa* in the readers. But this scene is not found in the movie, Ang Lee might have deliberately left it out of the script or else it might have hindered the harmonious development of *veera rasa* in the movie, as *veera* and *bayanaka* are not complementary in nature. But the presence of this context doesn't affect the mood of *Utsaha* or energy in the novel because *bayanaka* fails to become a ruling sentiment in the whole work.

We could see from the instances above that in between a variety of psychic states such as wonder, fear, parental love and so on there is one dominating sentiment which comes above all and it is the *rasa* of *veera*. Hereby it is also proved that *Rasa* may be an ancient Sanskrit literary theory which dates back to the vedic period but its relevance to modern literature is of intense magnitude.

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