

## The Doctrine of Rasa and Abhijyana Shakuntalam

Kalidas's works show his belief in the doctrine of Bharata's *rasasutra*. The *vibhavas*, *anubhavas* and *vyabicharibhavas* are dealt with so minutely in his works that its union with *sthayibhavas* produces *rasa*, which is relished till today. *Shakuntala* is his most cherished play. It is the story of Shakuntala's love with Dushyanta – they fall in love, separate and at the end reunite. The separation is the phase of transformation of the lovers. Here the physical earning transcends into a more matured and spiritual love when they finally meet. On this maturation of love Chandra Rajan says: Sakuntala, having delineated love's ecstasy and fulfilment as well as its anguish in the separation that follows the anger and bitterness of its cruel betrayal, finally gathers it all in the closing scene in an epiphanic moment of recognition, restoration and reunion. Kalidasa has treated these three phases of the lovers lives in seven acts, and these seven acts are an amalgamation of Kalidasa's indepth knowledge of human sentiments which is named as *rasa*.

*Sringara*, love in its many aspects is a perennial theme of lyrical poetry. The *nataka Shakuntala*, is about love of Dushyanta and Shakuntala hence *sringara* is the *rasa* that ornaments the play. Kalidasa explores the twin aspects of *sringara rasa* – *sambhoga sringara* and *viralamba sringara*. The *sambhoga sringara* has been shown as erotic and the *vipralamba sringara* as sublime. The first instance of *sambhoga sringara rasa* is when the king experiences that indicates a good omen is a fine example of *vyabicharibhava*:

“Dushm. [*walking round and looking*] Now then I enter the sanctuary. – [*He enters the grove*]- Oh! this place must be holy. My right arm throbs.

[*Pausing and considering*]- What new acquisition does this omen promise in a sequestered grove?”

But the gates of predestined events are in all places open. In the tranquil environment of Kanva's ashrama Dushyanta sees Shakuntala in her full blooming youth and falls in love with her. The undisturbed surrounding is the *vibhava*:

“...Rippling beneath a passing breeze, waters flow in deep channels to lave the roots of trees; smoke drifts up from oblations to the Sacred Fire to dim the soft sheen of tender leaf buds; free from fear, fawns browse lazily in meadows beyond, where darbha-shoots are closely cropped”.

The beautiful surrounding, the inner joy of Dushyanta and ofcourse the beauty of Shakuntala triggers the feeling of love in him. The flattery of Priyamvada and

Anasuya are the major forces who initiate Shakuntala to express her love through a letter. Their words excite Dushyanta too. Though standing behind the bushes he too is unable to control himself from adoring and appreciating Shakuntala's magical youth, "Her lower lip has the rich sheen of young shoots,/her arms the very grace of tender twining stems;/ her limbs enchanting as a lovely flower/ glow with the radiance of magical youth". Before the lovers could express their love for each other Kalidasa separates the lovers. But this *vipralamba* is not the resultant of any hatred. It brings out the ingrained feelings of love. They long to meet each other. Dushyanta impatiently reveals to Madhavaya about his growing love for Shakuntala. On the other side Shakuntala suffers from fever. *Virahotkanthita* Shakuntala begs, "My friends, if you approve, counsel me as to how I can find favour in the eyes of the Royal Sage; otherwise I shall be just a memory". Act III of the play is full of the erotic elements of *sambhoga sringara*. For Shakuntala, *vipralamba* starts from the time Dushyanta left for Hastinapur. With the curse of Durvasa in the fourth act begins the separation as Dushyanta forgets Shakuntala as a result of the curse. But it is in Act V when Dushyanta does not recognize her and refuses to accept her the separation becomes a brief for her. Shakuntala's sorrow begins. Dushyanta realizes his mistakes as he sees the lost ring found by the fisherman . Now begins Dushyanta's *vipralamba*. In Act VI he withdraws all his interest from worldly pursuits and repents on his cruel behaviour towards his beloved. In distress he speaks to Madhavaya: "Ah! My friend, Was it a dream? A magical vision Of loveliness ? A hallucination? Or, the fruit of my good deeds past, reward in strict measure, and no more? It is gone, I am quite certain, never to return: Wishes? – they have fallen, all, off the edge of a precipice."

In grief, the king bans the celebration of the spring festival. His costumes too symbolise his grief. These are the *vibhavas* of *vipralamba sringara*. The king's disgust and guilt towards himself are the *anubhavas*. His fainting is the *vyabhicharibhava*. All this combine to produce love-separated i.e., *vipralamba sringara*. In Act VII Kalidasa returns to *sambhoga sringara rasa*. But the reunion in the seventh act does not show sensuous love like it was in the first act. Rather the meaning of love has been raised from the physical to the spiritual ideal. *Sringara rasa* is no more in its erotic aspect, it has transcended to a more meditative behaviour of the matured lovers. The lovers unite in the serene surrounding of Kasyapa's hermitage. Sarvadamana becomes the medium to reunite his parents, Dushyanta and Shakuntala. On seeing the child the king's heart is filled with *vatsalya* (affection) for the child, "O how my heart goes out to this wayward little fellow". Hence the complete cycle of *sringara rasa*.

The repudiation of Shakuntala is no doubt *vipralamba sringara*. But it also arouses the pathetic sentiment i.e., *karuna rasa*. The curse of Durvasa, loss of Dushyanta "s memory are the cause of the lovers" suffering. These determinants have lead to the shedding of tears, sorrow and grief for both Dushyanta and Shakuntala. Such consequents combine with the *vyavicharibhavas* like the king"s fainting to produce *karuna rasa*. Another example of sorrow in the drama is Shakuntala"s departure from Kanva"s ashrama , the scene is full of sorrow. There is tear in everyone"s eyes. Even the dear (*sarangarava*), the trees shed tears while she is leaving for her husband"s house. Though Kanva and the other hermits were happy that Shakuntala was going to her husband"s house but the very realisation that their separation was permanent one could not stop sage Kanva also from sighing in grief: "How can my grief ever leave me, O my beloved child, when I see grains of wild rice already scattered by you sprouting green shoots at the cottage door." The scene of Shakuntala"s departure and the lover"s suffering in separation evokes *karuna rasa* in the spectators too.

The curse of rishi Durvasa was a result of his anger. Shakuntala sat in the thoughts of Dushyanta, unmindful to the happenings around her. She could not listen to Durvasa"s words, which insulted him. This raised the *krodha* of the irate stage and he cursed Shakuntala to be forgotten by the person in whose thoughts she was lost. Thus the curse upon Shakuntala which is an example of *raudra rasa*. We see *raudra* in Shakuntala too: "SAKUNTALA (*in anger*): *Ignoble man! You who are like a well covered with grass...you judge every one by the measure of your own heart... who would stoop to imitate your conduct ... practicing falseness putting on the mantle of virtue?*"

In Act V when Dushyanta failed to recognise Shakuntala despite all her trials to remind him of their intimacy, the calm and innocent girl lost her temper. Such a reaction by Shakuntala was the result of Dushyanta"s refusal to recognize her and accept her. These are certain examples of Kalidasa"s treatment of *raudra rasa*.

*Veera rasa* is the heroic sentiment that is characterized by expression of energy. The energy identifies a king. There are only a few instances of *veera rasa* in the play. In the first example *utsaha* is the *sthayibhava*. In act one when Shakuntala is troubled by a bee the king steps out from behind the bushes and drags the bee away: "KING (*hastily steps forward*): *Ha! While the chastiser of the wicked, great Pu ru"s scion rulers o ver this rich earth,*

*who dares behave in the churlish manner  
to guideless, young girls of the hermitage.”*

This king’s heroic energy is exposed again at the end of Act VI when Dushyanta accepts the proposal of Indra to help him fight against the Titans. The example of *adbhuta rasa* in *Shakuntala* is when Dushyanta and Matali pass over Hemakuta, the king is astonished:

“KING (*in a tone of almost wonder*): *How’s this Matali!  
The wheels glide noiseless; no jolting is felt;  
no dust is seen whirling around;  
they do not touch the surface of the Earth;  
nothing marks the chariot’s descent.”*

He wonders on seeing the chariot glide dustlessly and noiselessly. Such a glide is not normal to the chariots on the earth. Thus an example of *adbhuta rasa* in Kashyapa’s *ashrama* Dushyanta is again astonished to see the little child Sarvadamana playing with the lion cubs. This is not common to all children. Hence it is *adbhuta* for Dushyanta. But in Sarvadamana it is the *veera rasa* that is relished. The first act of *Shakuntala* shows *Santa Rasa*. On the hermits’ request the king withdraws his arrow. The furious mood that ventured to kill the deer now cools down with a desire to get purified with the sight of the holy hermitage. The tranquillity of both the hermitages, Kanva’s and Kasyapa’s are examples of *santa rasa*. Enjoying the serenity of Kanva’s ashrama Dushyanta describes: Rippling beneath a passing breeze, waters flow in deep channels to lave the roots of trees; smoke drifts up from oblations to the Sacred Fire to dim the soft sheen of tender leafbuds; free from fear, fawns browse lazily in meadows beyond, where darbha-shoots are closely cropped. Such an example proves Kalidasa’s acceptance for the ninth *rasa* i.e., the *santa rasa*.

The examples of the various *rasas* in *Shakuntala* show Kalidasa’s deep insight into the Bharata’s *rasasutra*. *Rasa* as we know is the *sthayibhava* produced by the union of *vibhava*, *anubhava* and *vyabhicharibhava*. It is not just the mixture of these *bhavas* that is the cause of *Rasa*. It is their harmonious blending that produces *rasa*. A poetic genius alone can conceive such a configuration. It is Kalidasa’s genius, who could write such a wonderful play *Shakuntala*, where its aesthetic configuration is so perfect that it outshined all other plays for centuries.

**Source:**

*Kalidasa’s Shakuntala And The Doctrine Of Rasa*

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