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Shakespeare and Indian Poetics: *Macbeth* in the Light of Rasa Theory

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Abstract:

The present paper contributes to the literature on rasa theory propounded by Bharatamuni by closely examining Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1606). The theory of *rasa* is encapsulated in chapter sixth of *Natyashastra* thus: "The sentiment is produced (*rasanispattih*) from a combination (*samyoga*) of Determinants (*vibhava*), consequents (*anubhava*) and transitory states (*vyabhicarins*)". Bharata lists forty one mental states, out of which there are eight permanent irreducible mental states which alone can develop into full-fledged aesthetic moods. They are *rati* (love), *hasya* (laughter), *soka* (sorrow), *krodha* (anger), *vira* (courage), *bhaya* (fear), *jugupsa* (aversion), and *ascharya* (wonder). The eight corresponding *rasas* are *Sringara*, *Hasya*, *Karuna*, *Raudra*, *Veera*, *Bhaya*, *Bhibatsa* and *Adbhuta* respectively. The remaining transient emotions only act as attendant feelings to the basic emotions helping to intensify and stabilize it. The paper adds a new dimension by focusing on the soliloquies, i.e., *akashvachana* (speaking to the sky), *atmagata* (speaking to one self), *apavaritaka* (concealed speech) and *janantika* (personal address) concluding with an examination of the dominant state (*sthayibhava*) that prevails throughout the play.

Keywords: *Macbeth*, rasa theory, emotions.

Act 1

The opening scene of the play arouses a feeling of wonder (*adbhuta rasa*) and then strikes fear (*bhayanaka rasa*) in the reader at the mention of the three weird sisters (*alambana vibhava*) who have gathered on a desolate heath in a stormy weather (*udipana vibhava*) to decide when the three should meet again. The feelings of fear and wonder are intensified by witches chanting: "Fair is foul and foul is fair: Hover through the fog and filthy air" (1.1.12-13). Fear supersedes wonder because of the mysterious concluding remarks of the witches. Running parallel to fear, there is a trace of heroism (*vira rasa*) at the mention of the wounded captain who fought valiantly and is praised by Malcolm. The captain recollects (*samriti*) the events detailing Macbeth's achievements, who: "Like Valour's minion carved out his passage / Till he faced the slave" (1.2.19-20). Macbeth is presented as an outstandingly talented fighter with a fierce desire to win generating *vira rasa*. The military strength, aggressiveness, presence of mind, firmness and an unwavering fighting spirit are part of Macbeth's arsenal that help him rout the rebellious

and prove himself crucial to Duncan's fortunes whose frequent emotional outbursts "O valiant cousin! worthy gentleman" (1.2.24) and "Great happiness" (1.2.59) stimulate the *vyabhicarin* of joy (*harsa*). Macbeth fights valiantly which proves his loyalty towards Scotland and is rewarded by the King as the "Thane of Cawdor".

With the opening of scene 3, the witches talk of killing swine and how they will take revenge from the sailor-husband of a chestnut-munching woman who was rude to one of them. Their evil plan "which is too terrible to be described" (Biswas 148) generates *bibhatsa rasa* in the readers. But the emotion of disgust is short-lived when the three weird sisters start chanting a spell as they see Macbeth and Banquo returning from the battlefield. They hail Macbeth by his present title (Thane of Glamis), by his newly bestowed title of which he does not know yet (Thane of Cowdar) and the third proclamation that he will be the king one day triggering *adbhuta rasa* especially the third prophecy which stuns Macbeth and causes him to "start" (1.3.49) producing the *sattvikabhava* of horripilation (*romanca*). The words of the witches have an indelible impact on Macbeth whereas Banquo exhibits courage, firmness, patience and rationality arousing the *vyabhicarin* of contentment (*dhriti*). The witches respond by prophesying that Banquo will be "Lesser than Macbeth, and greater." (1.3.63); he will be "Not so happy, yet much happier." (1.3.64); and he "shalt get kings, though thou be none" (1.3.65). On the contrary, Macbeth, who is submerged into his thoughts, now comes to terms reflecting the *vyabhicarins* of anxiety (*cinta*) and stupor (*jadata*) and requesting the "imperfect speakers" (1.3.68) to stay longer and tell him more but, without answering his compelling questions, the witches vanish into the air. Just then Ross and Angus enter the scene and inform Macbeth of his happy coronation as the Thane of Cowdar by King Duncan. Thus, the first prophecy of the witches materializes arousing the *vyabhicarin* of joy (*harsa*) in Macbeth who also conceives "the greatest" (1.3.116), that is, kingship in an aside (*atmagata*) reflecting the *vyabhicarins* of dissimulation (*avahitta*) as he conceals his thoughts from Banquo whom he considers his a competitor. However, the *vyabhicarin* of suspicion (*sanka*) is expressed by Banquo as he says that "the instruments of darkness" (1.3.123) are not trustworthy enough for they give assurances on insignificant matters and mislead us on important issues. Another aside (*atmagata*) by Macbeth: "Two truths are told, / As happy prologues to the swelling act. / Of the imperial theme" (1.3.126-128) proves that he is lured into temptation by the witches. Notable in these lines are the *vyabhicarins* of joy (*harsa*) and assurance (*mati*). But his soliloquy externalizes his inner conflict for he tries to justify the authenticity of the prophecy by saying that had it been evil, it would not have yielded any success to him reflecting the *sthayibhava* of fear (*bhaya*). However, he faces an ethical dilemma and shudders at the thought of murdering the King because of the King's status as his kinsman, ruler, and guest. This feeling of unnaturalness of the act generates *bhayanaka rasa* arousing the secondary emotional feeling (*vyabhicarin*) of agitation (*avega*) and the *sattvikabhava* of horripilation (*romanca*) ("doth unfix my hair") (1.3.134).

In scene 4, the announcement that Duncan's eldest son Malcolm will be the prince of Cumberland comes as a rude shock (*vyabhicarin*) to Macbeth crushing all his hopes to be the

King as reflected in the aside (*atmagata*): “The prince of Cumberland! That is a step / On which I must fall down, or else o'er leap, / For in my way it lies” (1.4.48-50). The last three lines of this dramatic aside (*atmagata*) may also be read as an illustration of *janatika*: “Stars, hide your fires, / Let not light see my black and deep desires, / The eye wink at the hand. Yet let that be, / Which the eye fears, when it is done to see” (1.4.50-53) in which he buries his conscience and decides (*vyabhicarin*) to covet kingship. Macbeth's agitation (*vyabhicarin*) and furious imagination manifests itself as *raudra rasa* and stimulating the *vyabhicarins* of envy (*asuya*), cruelty (*ugrata*), inconstancy (*capalata*) and indignation (*amarsa*). By the end of this scene, Duncan announces his intention to visit Macbeth's castle at Inverness. Macbeth at once leaves for his castle to take this news to his wife and prepare a grand reception for the king.

The fact that even before reaching the castle in person Macbeth thinks it proper to share the details of his strange encounter with the witches to Lady Macbeth through a letter (given by a messenger to her) and has her as his confidant shows that the Macbeths are deeply in love (*sringara rasa*) for he looks to his wife for advise in important decisions and also promises her good fortune. But it is the humanity of Macbeth and the natural goodness in him that Lady Macbeth believes to be an impediment in his aspirations. Hence, in the following soliloquy (*atmagata*) she allies herself to the evil forces to neuter her and deprive her of the womanly qualities so that she can prepare her husband for the murder:

LADY MACBETH. Come, you spirits

That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here.

And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full

Of direst cruelty! ...

That my keen knife sees not the wound it makes. (1.5.39-50)

This goose-bumps (*sattvikabhava*) inducing speech culminates into *bhayanaka rasa* as the darkness of her mind is revealed. Lady Macbeth is portrayed as a robust and a ruthlessly ambitious woman who resolves to achieve what she has been promised by her husband (“sovereign sway and masterdom”) (1.5.69). No doubt, her love for her husband arouses *sringara rasa*, but it also triggers *bhayanaka rasa* in the reader for they know that a kind and generous ruler is about to be brutally murdered by his most trusted soldier. She takes charge of the situation, where she exhibits firm resolution and expresses her anger (*sthayibhava* of *krodha*) explicitly: “Was the hope drunk, / wherein you dress'd yourself?” (1.7.35), accompanied by the *vyabhicarins* of agitation (*avega*) and ferocity (*ugrata*) manifesting itself as *raudra rasa*. She mocks her husband's manhood and knows very well that she will have to goad him into performing the barbaric act. According to Janet Adelman, “the most horrifying expression” (134) culminates in *bhayanaka rasa* in the following words which are fierce and frightful: “I would, while it was smiling in my face, / Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums, / And dashed

the brain out” (1.7. 55-57). To fulfill her lust for absolute power she would go to any extent even to that of killing a baby that she would feed. Explicit in the above lines is agitation (*avega*) and cruelty (*ugrata*). By the end of Act 1, Lady Macbeth instills courage and hope in her fickle-minded husband by unfolding a fool-proof plan liquidating Duncan.

Act 2

As the scene opens, the soliloquy by Macbeth just before he commits regicide can be analyzed as a mode of *akashvachana*. The opening lines the soliloquy set the tone of questions: “Is this a dagger, which I see before me, / The handle towards my hand?” (2.1.33) suggest that Macbeth is hallucinating reflecting the *vyabhicarin* of surprise and the *sthayibhava* of astonishment (*vismaya*). The lines that follow offer a reply: “Come, let me catch thee: / I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.” (2.1.34-35) revealing an uneasy and confused Macbeth, who, after failing to grasp the dagger, further questions: “Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible / To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but / A dagger of the mind, a false creation, / Proceeding from the heart-oppressed brain?” (2.1.36-39). Macbeth’s conscience is thrust upon by a tsunami of emotions. The vision of the phantom dagger with its “gouts of blood” (2.1.45) pointing towards the King’s chamber is a product of his mental conflict and deep contemplation. Grit and suspense mixed in the right measure evokes *bhayanaka rasa* in the reader.

In scene 2, the tension rises dramatically. The dominant emotion (*sthayibhava*) of fear (*bhaya*) can be traced in the intoxicated (*mada*) (*vyabhicarin*) Lady Macbeth as she waits anxiously for her husband to return after accomplishing the dreadful task of murdering Duncan. The shriek of the owl and the cries of the cricket stimulate the *vyabhicarins* of agitation (*avega*) and restlessness. The same expression can be found in the reader who seems to be in cold sweat wondering if Macbeth will actually have the brazenness to murder his king. After a short while Macbeth confirms that he has “done the deed” (2.2.14) stimulating *bhayanaka rasa*. William Rosen in *The Craft of Shakespearean Tragedy* (1960) aptly says, “Macbeth’s worldly rise is the consequence of Duncan’s fall, but at the moment of greatest triumph there is no rejoicing, only horror” (81).

The porter scene (scene 3) provides comic relief or the emotion of laughter (*hasya bhava*) as the porter cracks drunken jokes but it does not evoke laughter (*hasya rasa*) because Duncan’s tragedy still looms large on the reader’s mind. Prof. A. C. Bradley in *Shakespearean Tragedy* rightly puts it, “The Porter does not me make me smile: the moment is too terrific. He is grotesque; no doubt the contrast he affords is humorous as well as ghastly; . . . not comic enough to allow one to forget for a moment what has preceded and what must follow” (303). In the fourth scene of the second act, Ross and an Old man deliberate (*vitarka*) (*vyabhicarin*) upon the various unnatural happenings initially evoking wonder which is, however, overpowered by *bhayanaka rasa* and *bibhatsa rasa*.

Act 3

Macbeth's soliloquy may be read as an illustration of *janantika*: "To be thus is nothing, but to be safely thus" (3.1.49). He shows anguish (*glani*), worry (*cinta*) and despair (*visada*) about his worthless status as the King of Scotland. The fact that Banquo would father the future king and also he, being a strong testimony to the prophecies, suspects him of murdering the King makes him Macbeth's rival, rather he threatens to scupper Macbeth's ambitious trail. Therefore, he decides to get Banquo and his son (Fleance) murdered during the feast in order to secure his shaky position. Macbeth coerces the murderers dexterously calumniating Banquo and in the process, discharging his own anxieties (*cinta*) reflecting the *vyabharins* of ferocity (*ugrata*) and indignation (*amarsa*) producing *raudra rasa*.

As scene 2 opens, Macbeth does not think it to be necessary to share the plot against Banquo and Fleance with her and starts conjuring up the powers of darkness stimulating *bhayanaka rasa* in the reader.

MACBETH. Come, seeling night,

Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day

And with thy bloody and invisible hand

Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond

Which keeps me pale. (3.2.46-50)

In scene 3, as the ill-fated Banquo with his son Fleance approach, they are assaulted by the hired assassins, while Fleance makes a miraculous escape arousing *karuna rasa*.

As scene 4 opens, Macbeth is aghast and terror stricken at the sight of Banquo's bloody ghost (which seems invisible to others) evoking *adbhuta rasa* in the reader which is immediately followed by *bhayanaka rasa*. According to A.C. Bradley, "The deed is done: but, instead of peace descending on him, from the depths of his nature his half-murdered conscience rises; his deed confronts him in the apparition of Banquo's ghost and the horror of the night of his first murder returns" (275). However, Lady Macbeth displays her presence of mind and tries to calm the excited lords by tactfully laying the blame of her husband's strange behavior upon a disorder that had afflicted him in his youth. Macbeth's vaulting ambition nudges him along the wrong way. He becomes atrocious and resolves: "I am in blood / Stepped in so far that should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er." (3.4.136-137) arousing the *vyabharibhavas* of anguish (*glani*) and wretchedness (*dainya*). He is aware that antipathy against his despotic rule has started building up, led by Macduff. So, he implants paid spies in every nobleman's house.

Scene 5 brings forth the emotion of *adbhuta rasa* at the reappearance of the witches and their queen Hecate who chastises them for meddling with Macbeth without consulting her. But *bhayanaka rasa* emerges as prominent as in the previous scenes.

Act 4

Scene 1 once again opens with the weird sisters are chanting a spell as they stand around a cauldron simmering with a broth made up of the mutilated body parts of a disgusting and horrifying motley of animals and humans stimulating *bhayanaka rasa* and *bibhatsa rasa* as the reader is filled with filthy horror and repugnance. A spell is pronounced and the first apparition appears, “an armed head” (4.1.67), accompanied by thunder triggering *bhayanaka* and *bibhatsa rasa* in the reader. It warns Macbeth against Macduff. The second apparition, “a bloody child” (4.1.75) declares that Macbeth need not be afraid of any person born of women. The third apparition “a child crowned with a tree in his hand” (4.1.85) assures that Macbeth can never be vanquished until the Great Birnam wood shall come to Dunsinane hill. Macbeth is filled with joy (*harsa*) at the impossible nature of this prophecy. Finally the witches comply with his demand to know more and a succession of eight kings, the last with a glass in his hand, and “the blood bolter’d Banquo” (4.1.122) following, rattles (*vyabhicaribhava*) Macbeth. This dramatic spectacle makes him ferocious (*ugrata*) and agitated (*avega*) (*vyabhicarins*) and cools down his enthusiasm which he was very much bubbling with prior to the exhibit manifesting itself as *raudra rasa*. “The culmination of the scene is the return of Banquo’s ghost, an image which sears Macbeth’s eyeballs, but not with terror any more, merely with anger” (Foakes 22).

The climactic scene 2 reveals Lady Macduff’s genuine anger (*sthayibhava* of *krodh*) and fear (*bhaya*) who challenges her husband’s action (his sudden flight to England) and his desertion of his family. Intermingled with her fury is the *sthayibhava* of *soka* and her strong love for her husband is also evident. Through Lady Macduff’s grief, *karuna rasa* is stimulated in the minds of the readers. The *vyabhicarins* associated with this emotion is sadness and revulsion (*nirveda*). However, the innocent babbling of her son arouses *hasya rasa*:

LADY MACDUFF: Now God help thee, poor monkey, but how wilt thou do for a father?

SON: If he were dead, you’d weep for him, if you would not, it were a good sign that I
should quickly have a new father. (4.2.57-60)

As A.C.Bradley rightly observes that Shakespeare’s boys are:

“affectionate, frank, brave, high-spirited, ‘of an open and free nature’ like Shakespeare’s best men. And almost all of them, again, are amusing and charming as well as pathetic; comical in their mingled acuteness and *naiveté*, charming in their confidence in themselves and the world. . . .

Little Macduff exemplifies most of these remarks. . . . And he is perhaps the only person in the tragedy who provokes a smile” (302-303).

Just then a messenger warns her about the approaching danger and urges her to escape with her son arousing *vira rasa* and displaying the *vyabhicarin* of *dhriti* which immediately vanishes and *karuna rasa* rushes in as her son is assaulted by the assassins and she runs away without any chance of escape.

Scene 3 opens with Malcolm and Macduff at the English court. Malcolm exhibits suspicion (*sanka*), anxiety (*cinta*) (*vyabhicarins*) and a tendency to avoid any commitment for it is very difficult for him to trust anyone from Scotland under given circumstances. Finally, after putting Macduff through a tough situation, Malcolm confesses that he is now free of any suspicion about his (Macduff’s) integrity. He pledges to thwart Macbeth’s evil designs by faithfully joining hands with Macduff in the service of nation along with a mighty army offered by the old Siward. A little later Ross tells him the heart-breaking news exhibiting the dominant emotion (*sthayibhava*) of sorrow (*soka*): “Your castle is surprised; your wife and babes / Savagely slaughtered.” (4.3.206-207). Macduff is shocked (*vyabhicarin*), completely at a loss and overwhelmed with emotions that he pulls his hat down. The terrible news of the merciless killing of Macduff’s wife and children “is extremely moving” (Bradely 300) and culminates itself in *Karuna rasa*.

Act 5

Suspense and fear engulf the opening of one of the most celebrated scenes of *Macbeth* as one can observe a doctor of Physics and a waiting gentle-woman discussing the mysterious condition of Lady Macbeth stimulating the *sthayibhava* of fear (*bhaya*). At this point a traumatized Lady Macbeth enters the scene carrying a candle in a trance-like state. In her sleep-walking, she revives the crimes that she has helped Macbeth to commit. She demands that a light be kept constantly by her and regrets an imaginary stain which she is unable to wipe out. Her intense and agitated hand-washing evokes *bibhatsa rasa* with which are associated the secondary emotional feelings (*vyabhicarins*) of insanity (*unmada*) and despair (*visada*). She is obviously suffering from the pangs of the murder of a benign king and about insisting Macbeth do it. She completely loses her control and composure: “What’s done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed.” (5.1.57-58) generating *bhayanaka rasa* dominantly, which is, however, accompanied by *karuna rasa* at her incoherent ramblings and her pitiable condition, as the doctor says: “What a sigh is there! The heart is sorely charged.” (5.1.44) invested with the *vyabhicarins* of sadness and dejection.

In scene 3, in a soliloquy (*janantika*) Macbeth acknowledges the possibility of his defeat and the worthlessness of his life expressing weariness (*srama*), depression (*dainya*) and dejection (*nirveda*) and stimulating *karuna rasa*. He resolves that he will fight until his flesh has been chopped off his bones and calls for his armour. The scene ends with Macbeth arrogantly

(*mada*) declaring that he is not afraid of death and destruction till Birnam wood moves to Dunsinane. Meanwhile in scene 4, Malcolm proves to be a tactical maneuverer as he dictates his soldier to camouflage themselves so that their enemies are misguided exhibiting traces of *vira rasa*.

Scene 5 opens with Macbeth preparing for the battle. He is determined with the conviction that he can withstand any siege from the opponent forces. Just then he is interrupted by “A cry within of women” and soliloquies (*janantika*) that there was a time when even “a night-shriek” (5.5.11) would freeze him with fear and a mere horror story would have made his hair erect on end. But of late he has “almost forgot the taste of fear” (5.5.9) stimulating the secondary emotional state (*vyabhicaribhava*) of insensibility or stupor (*jadata*) and recollection (*smriti*). Seyton re-enters to inform him about the death of Lady Macbeth which is followed by the most famous speech of the play:

MACBETH. Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day

To the last syllable of recorded time; ...

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

And then is heard no more. It is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury

Signifying nothing. (5.5.18-27)

Looking back over the years of life full of lust for unlimited possession and power leading to crimes against humanity, Macbeth honestly assesses his shortcomings in a bid to make a sincere effort to weed out his despair (*vyabhicaribhava*). He introspects on the futility and insubstantiality of human life analyzing his defeat in this battle. Reflecting upon life as a bubble of water, man is to perform his role on the stage of life temporarily according to his karma and finally meet death which is the ultimate and permanent truth. His spiritual anguish generates *karuna rasa*. In the second part of the scene, a messenger enters to inform that Birnam wood seems to be moving to Dunsinane. Macbeth is shocked (*vyabhicaribhava*) and shouts angrily and threatens to hang him (the messenger) alive if he is lying and if it is true he would treat himself in the same way. As the scene ends, he begins to doubt and suspect the pronouncements of the witches “that lies like truth” (5.5.43). No doubt, Macbeth is disappointed but he decides to embrace death gracefully and die as a warrior and not as a coward displaying contentment (*dhriti*).

In scene 7, Macbeth is disabused of the fantasy that the witches had guaranteed him. He understands that he has been entangled in a situation from where it is difficult to disengage, yet

like a valiant soldier bravely opts to face his opponents. *Vira rasa* is introduced as the young Siward fights courageously against Macbeth and loses his life. But it is overpowered by *karuna rasa* at the sacrifice of the brave young man. Macbeth exits and an agitated (*avega*) (*vyabhicaribhava*) Macduff rushes in and expresses his anger and disgust shouting out a challenge to his unseen enemy intensifying *vira and raudra rasas*.

As scene 8 opens, Macbeth gets a jarring blow and is numbed with shock (*vyabhicarin*) when Macduff reveals that he “was from his mother’s womb / Untimely ripped” (5.8.15). He realizes the facade stimulating the *sthayibhava* of *soka* (grief). He feels embittered and dismayed (*vyabhicarins*) and decides not to fight Macduff for he loses all his hopes. However, when Macduff calls him a “coward” (5.8.24), Macbeth reacts aggressively (*vyabhicarin*) with the same heroic courage to protect his self- esteem and doesn’t flinch from the battle, notably a sign of bravery. Thus, Macbeth dies (*marana*) bravely generating *karuna rasa*. Undeterred under intimidating circumstances, he leads from the front like a mighty soldier is supposed to and displays immense dignity in defeat. Macbeth due to his unrestrained ambition brings down his illustrious career to an undignified end. In the end Malcolm, the new King, thanks everyone and his speech reflects that Scotland is a safe place. He also rewards his thanes and friends exhibiting the *vyabhicaribhava* of joy (*harsa*).

Conclusion: *Macbeth (1606)* is filled with a string of emotions- *vismaya, jugupsa, sringara, hasya, vira and karuna* but it is the dominant emotion (*sthayibhava*) of *bhaya* (fear) that reigns supreme throughout the play. “Macbeth is a play *about* fear and driven *by* fear” (Hobgood 35). Fear dominates prior to Duncan’s murder of which the dagger is an externalization. Even after the hideous murder, Macbeth is engulfed by insecurities. It causes his fall from a mighty soldier to a timid fellow with a weak heart who is unable to face any kind rebellion or opposition especially in the person of Macduff and turns into a killing machine destroying his (Macduff’s) entire family on the pretext of suspicion. It is the fear that the scions of Duncan and Banquo would jeopardize his ambitious trail that he resorts to unethical means and consequently embarks upon a violent and blood shedding journey from where it is impossible to turn back.

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