

Critical & Analytical Essays

## Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa : Underlying Process for Experiencing Rasa

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### Editor's Note:

*The question of how a private emotion becomes a shared aesthetic experience lies at the heart of classical Indian poetics. This essay reconstructs the philosophical mechanism of sādhāraṇīkaraṇa with rigorous textual care, demonstrating that the universalisation of feeling is not merely a poetic device but the very threshold at which aesthetic experience approaches metaphysical insight.*

### Abstract

This article examines the concept of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* (universalisation) as the indispensable condition for the experience of *rasa* in classical Indian poetics. While *rasa* is traditionally regarded as the soul of poetry, its realisation requires the dissolution of specific spatial, temporal, and personal associations embedded in poetic elements such as *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, *vyabhicāribhāva*, and *sthāyibhāva*. Through the process of universalisation, these elements are freed from worldly limitations, allowing the *sahṛdaya* to experience *rasa*—the purified universalized aesthetic essence that emerges from emotion. The study further argues that *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* operates through a distinctive mode of aesthetic cognition that cannot be reduced to ordinary forms of knowledge such as illusion, doubt, or resemblance. By enabling the *sahṛdaya* to temporarily transcend self–other distinctions and worldly binaries, aesthetic experience approaches a Vedāntic state of non-duality and bliss. Thus, *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* is shown to function not merely as a poetic

mechanism but as a bridge between aesthetic enjoyment and metaphysical insight. Adopting a textual–analytical and comparative hermeneutic methodology, the study critically engages with key Sanskrit aesthetic treatises—particularly the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and its major commentarial traditions—to reconstruct the theoretical foundations of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*

**Keywords:** *Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*, Aesthetic Cognition, Aesthetic Universalisation, *Rasa*, *Sahṛdaya*, Classical Indian Poetics, Advaita Vedanta

## 1. Introduction

While words and meanings are considered the gross body of poetry<sup>1</sup>, the *rasa* i.e. the aesthetic savoring expressed from them is imagined as the soul of poetry<sup>2</sup>. Because the essence is more subtle and principal than words and meanings, it is considered to be the soul of poetry. The subtle essence, like consciousness, is not easily comprehensible—therefore, practices such as listening and contemplation are necessary. Similarly, in the case of experiencing the essence, it is not possible to feel it in its gross natural state; the mind needs to be more restrained and focused. Moreover, just as the Self is more important than the body, in poetry, the essence holds greater significance than the words. Thus, the essence is referred to as the soul of poetry. Additionally, the Self is naturally blissful<sup>3</sup>; in the same way, the true nature of the *rasa* is joy.

‘*Rasyate āsvādayate iti rasaḥ*’ means that what is worthy of being tasted is called *rasa*. According to this etymology, *kāvya* (poetry, drama, etc.) is referred to as ‘*rasa*’ when readers or audiences witness the extra-daily joy in different contexts. While emotions function as the raw material of poetry, *rasa* is the refined aesthetic experience that emerges from them. The bliss associated with *rasa* does not arise from the emotion itself—whether love,

<sup>1</sup> “*Śabdārthau te śarīram*” (Rājaśekhara, *Kāvyaṃmīmāṃsā*, edited by Madhusudan Mishra, Choukhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1991, p. 25).

<sup>2</sup> “*Vākyaṃ rasātmakam kāvyam. ...rasa evātmā sārārūpatayā jīvanādhāyako yasya.*” (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, edited by Krishnamohan Shastri, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan, 2015, pp. 20-21).

<sup>3</sup> “*Akhaṇḍam saccidānandam...ātmānam...*” (Sadanandayogīndra, *Vedāntasāra*, edited by Badarinath Shukla, Motilal Banarasidas, 2019, p. 1).

sorrow, or disgust—but from experiencing it in a universalized, aesthetic manner. During the experience of *rasa*, a *sahṛdaya* truly gains satisfaction by achieving a higher blissful state. This *rasa-ānanda* is not inferior or fleeting like worldly joy; instead, it is much more subtle and, therefore, rare. Additionally, to experience this supra-mundane bliss, the mind must be elevated to a higher level. In its natural state, the mind remains bound to various worldly connections, and it is only when it becomes deeply engrossed in the subject described in poetry, having relinquished all connections, that the tasting of *rasa* becomes possible. This process of elevating the mind from the worldly to the extra-daily aesthetic level is what the rhetoricians refer to as ‘*sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*’ or universalisation.

*Rasa* is indeed the soul or essential essence of poetry. While analyzing the nature of *rasa*, Bharata Muni states—“*vibhāvānubhāva-vyabhicāri-saṅyogāt rasaniṣpattiḥ*”<sup>4</sup>, meaning that the expression of *rasa* occurs as a result of the interplay between *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, and *vyabhicāribhāva* (transitory emotions). The various feelings such as love, joy, and sorrow, which reside in the heart of a *sahṛdaya* (known in Sanskrit poetics as the *sahṛdaya*: one who has a heart) as impressions, are called *sthāyibhāva* (stable emotions). The element that excites these *sthāyibhāva* in a supra-mundane way is known as *vibhāva*. There are two types of *vibhāva*: *ālambana vibhāva* and *uddīpana vibhāva*. The *vibhāva* that serves as the direct support for *sthāyibhāva* is called *ālambana vibhāva*, while the *vibhāva* that helps to express the *sthāyibhāva* clearly is called *uddīpana vibhāva*. The various behaviors such as a smile, a sidelong glance, and conversation that can be observed among *vibhāvas* are referred to as *anubhāva*. On the other hand, the unstable qualities like embarrassment and doubt, which are changeable, are called *vyabhicāribhāva* or *sañcāribhāva*. The expression of *rasa* is possible due to the combination of all these elements.

These subtle terminologies could be explained with some examples. Before explaining the process of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*, it is useful to first observe how the basic elements of *rasa* appear in

<sup>4</sup> Bharata Muni, *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Part - II), edited by Parasanath Dvivedi, Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, 1996, 6.32.

literary works. Here is the initial verse of the *Naṭikā Ratnāvalī* by Śrīharṣa.

*Pādāgrasthitayā muhuḥ stanabhareṇānītayā namratām  
Śambhoḥ sasprhalocanatrāyapatham yāntyā tadārādhane.  
Hrīmatyā śirasīhitaḥ sapulakasvedodgamotkampayā  
Viśliṣyan kusumāñjalirgīrijayā kṣipto'ntare pātu vaḥ..<sup>5</sup>*

**Meaning:** *Devī Pārvatī* was trying to offer flowers on the head of *Śiva*. (To match the height of *Śiva*) She elevated herself on her toes, softly leaning forward due to the weight of her bosoms. Noticing *Śiva* passionately looking at her with his three eyes, she got goosebumps out of shyness. She was sweating and oscillating. The flowers, intended to be offered on the head of *Śiva*, slipped from her grasp, cascading gracefully between them. May these fallen flowers save you all.

In this beautiful imagery, *Pārvatī* and *Śiva* are feeling passionate love towards each other. This sense of passion, love (*rati*) is the stable emotion (*sthāyibhāva*) here. Both *Śiva* and *Pārvatī* are the abode of this emotion (*ālambana vibhāvas*<sup>6</sup>). *Pārvatī*'s posture (elevated on toes, softly leaning forward), *Śiva*'s passionately looking at her are the *uddīpana vibhāva*<sup>7</sup> (the excitants). The sweating, goosebumps, and trembling are the visible effects of the internal feelings (*anubhāvas*<sup>8</sup>). The shyness of *Pārvatī* is the transitory emotion incited by love is known as the *vyabhicāri bhāva*<sup>9</sup>. Thus this entire imagery arouses the sentiment of passion and love among the readers.

<sup>5</sup> Śrīharṣa, *Ratnāvalī Nāṭikā*, edited by Rajeshwar Shastri Musalgaonkar, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Bhavan, 2003, 1.1.

<sup>6</sup> "Ālambanam nāyakādīstamālambya rasodgamāt." (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.29).

<sup>7</sup> "Uddīpanavibhāvāste rasamuddīpayanti ye.  
Ālambanasya ceṣṭādyā deśakālādayastathā." (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.131-32).

<sup>8</sup> "Udbuddham kāraṇaiḥ svaiḥ svairbahirbhāvaṃ prakāśayan.  
Loke yaḥ kāryarūpaḥ so'nubhāvaḥ kāvyānāṭyayoḥ." (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.132-33);  
'Stambhaḥ svedo'tha romāñcaḥ... vepathuḥ' (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.135).

<sup>9</sup> "Viśeṣādābhīmukhyena caraṇādvyabhicāriṇaḥ.  
Sthāyinyunmagnanirmagnāḥ..." (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.140);  
"Lajjā harṣāsūyāviśādāḥ sadhṛticapalatā..." (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.141).

Another apt example may be the description of Achilles disgracing the dead Hector's corpse. Here is the description<sup>10</sup>:

If in the melancholy shades below,  
 The flames of friends and lovers cease to glow,  
 Yet mine shall sacred last; mine, undecay'd,  
 Burn on through death, and animate my shade.  
 Meanwhile, ye sons of Greece, in triumph bring  
 The corpse of Hector, and your pæans sing.  
 Be this the song, slow-moving toward the shore,  
 "Hector is dead, and Ilium is no more."<sup>10</sup>  
 Then his fell soul a thought of vengeance bred;  
 (Unworthy of himself, and of the dead;)
 The nervous ancles bored, his feet he bound  
 With thongs inserted through the double wound;  
 These fix'd up high behind the rolling wain,  
 His graceful head was trail'd along the plain.  
 Proud on his car the insulting victor stood,  
 And bore aloft his arms, distilling blood.  
 He smites the steeds; the rapid chariot flies;  
 The sudden clouds of circling dust arise.  
 Now lost is all that formidable air;  
 The face divine, and long-descending hair,  
 Purple the ground, and streak the sable sand;  
 Deform'd, dishonour'd, in his native land,  
 Given to the rage of an insulting throng,  
 And, in his parents' sight, now dragg'd along!  
 The mother first beheld with sad survey;  
 She rent her tresses, venerable grey,  
 And cast, far off, the regal veils away.  
 With piercing shrieks his bitter fate she moans,  
 While the sad father answers groans with groans,  
 Tears after tears his mournful cheeks o'erflow,  
 And the whole city wears one face of woe:

In this harrowing scene, the emotion of aversion (*bībhatsa-rasa*) takes root in the reader's heart. Achilles himself and the corpse of Hector become the very embodiment of disgust (*jugupsā*), the *sthāyī-bhāva* (permanent sentiment) of *bībhatsa-*

<sup>10</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, translated by Alexander Pope, Cassell and Company Ltd., 1909, book 22.

*rasa*<sup>11</sup>, and thus serves as the *ālambana-vibhāva* (the primary object that excites the emotion).

The excitants (*uddīpana-vibhāvas*) include the piercing of thongs through Hector's ankles, the dragging of his corpse through the dust, the rising clouds of dust, the disfigurement of Hector's once-divine face, the matting and dustiness of his long-descending hair, and the ground purpled with spilled blood<sup>12</sup>.

Achilles' triumphant proclamation of Hector's death, his striking of the horses, and the raising of his blood-stained hands are the visible physical reactions (*anubhāvas*) that manifest his inner disgust and burning vengeance<sup>13</sup>.

The transitory emotions (*vyabhicāri-bhāvas*) that intensify and consolidate this *rasa* of aversion are manifold: the despondency and faintness (*glāni*) of Hector's friends and beloved, the pride (*garva*) and indignation (*amarṣa*) of Achilles, Hector's death itself (*maraṇa*), the dishonouring of his corpse, Achilles' restless agitation (*capalatā*)<sup>14</sup>, the profound grief (*śoka*) of Hector's parents (expressed through moans, groans, and tears streaming down their cheeks), and the frantic restlessness of his mother (shown by tearing her hair, casting aside her royal veils, etc.)<sup>15</sup>.

However, this connection or mixture is not always possible; for that, the elements like *vibhāva* must be freed from their respective characteristics. The process of freeing these elements from their respective characteristics is what is called universalisation. Universalisation is the preliminary process of *rasa* tasting, where the elements of *vibhāva* and others are liberated from all types of worldly connections and are expressed as the experience of tasting. Therefore, universalisation plays an

<sup>11</sup> "jugupsāsthāyibhāvastu bībhatsaḥ kathyate rasaḥ." (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.239).

<sup>12</sup> "durgandho māṃsarudhiramedo'syālabanaṃ matam.  
tatraiva kṛmipātādyam uddīpanamudāhṛtam." (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.240).

<sup>13</sup> "Niṣṭhīvanāsyavalananetrasaṅkocanādayaḥ.  
Anubhāvāstatra matāḥ ..." (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.241).

<sup>14</sup> This restlessness can naturally be presumed by Achilles' actions like boarding the chariot with pride, raising the blood-stained hands; Hector' mother's tearing her clothes etc.

<sup>15</sup> "...vyabhicāriṇaḥ/moho'pasmāra āvego vyādhiśca maraṇādayaḥ" (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.241-42).

important role as the background for rasa tasting. We are going to discuss this concept of universalisation in this essay.

In *Advaita Vedānta*, the description of a state of non-duality as an aspect of encountering one's true nature is often referred to by rhetoricians as universalisation. The comparative study of this state of non-duality and universalisation is the central point of the actual discussion. This article shows that *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* is not merely a poetic technique, but a mode of experiencing the non-dual awareness described in Vedāntic philosophy.

This paper first explains the mechanism of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*, then distinguishes aesthetic experience from ordinary cognition, compares it with Vedāntic consciousness, examines why even painful emotions produce joy, and finally reflects on the contemporary significance of this insight. This article examines *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* through textual-analysis of classical Sanskrit texts, literary examples, and a comparative reading with *Advaita Vedānta* philosophy.

## 2. The Nature and Operation of *Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*

*Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* is the process by which the elements of *rasa* are freed from specific worldly relationships such as space, time, and personal identity. Through this process, what is bound to particular circumstances becomes universal and accessible to aesthetic experience. In other words, bringing the specifically present aspects of space, time, etc., down to a minor level to make them worthy of tasting is referred to as 'universalisation'. It is the inherent capability of the *sahṛdaya* that makes universalisation possible. Everything in our real life is bound to a specific worldly relationship. This is why these can be accepted or rejected, and in this way, all activities of the world are conducted. The process of freeing oneself from the relationships of these objects is what rhetoricians have termed 'universalisation'.

In this process of universalisation, the commonality of space, time, individuality, vibhāva, anubhāva etc. removes the boundary of individual identity of a person (*sahṛdaya*), sets him free to be integral with the scene or occurrence beyond the spatial-temporal character of the same. Thus the *sahṛdaya* enters the same aesthetic state as the poet or the original character of the

scene (say, Rāma, Sītā, Duṣyanta, Śakuntalā etc.) regardless of the sahr̥daya's own background, joys, sorrows, worries etc. Eventually, the sahr̥daya enters into a state of pure bliss by getting free of his/her personal boundaries.

### 2.1. The Mechanism of *Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*

For the emergence of *rasa*, a minimal presence of *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, and *vyabhicāribhāva* is required. When these elements connect with each other and the resultant *sthāyibhāva* matures, its expression occurs in the form of *rasa*. Here, the digestion of *sthāyibhāva* is made possible through universalisation. As a result of the universalisation of *ālambana vibhāva*, *uddīpana vibhāva*, etc., there are no longer any bonds related to space and time. In this state, the stable emotion becomes free from all forms of personal or individual association. This personal association causes sorrow and other feelings due to its own limitations; therefore, liberation from personal association means liberation from worldly feelings like sorrow and objective happiness.

Now the question may arise—who undergoes universalisation among the elements of *rasa*? Although there is disagreement among rhetoricians on this matter, the *sahr̥daya* experience universalisation as a comprehensive process. That is, universalisation occurs for all elements of *rasa*, including *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, *vyabhicāribhāva*, and *sthāyibhāva*. However, this process is very subtle (indeterminate), making it difficult to observe directly. Nevertheless, when considered from the perspective of the support and supported emotions, one must first accept the universalisation of *vibhāva* and *anubhāva*. Consequently, it must be accepted that *vyabhicāribhāva* and the supported stable emotions also undergo universalisation as a result. Just as *vibhāva* causes *sthāyi-bhāva*, the *sahr̥daya* understands the universalisation of *vibhāva* as causative. Thus, the process of universalisation is complete only after the universalisation of *sthāyibhāva*. Therefore, rhetoricians acknowledge the universalisation of all elements of *rasa*, from *vibhāva* to *sthāyibhāva*.

The necessity of universalisation becomes evident when we consider the paradox of aesthetic engagement. If a *sahr̥daya* considers the *Rāma* portrayed on stage as their own, then the other individuals present in that place will have no right to

perceive *Rāma*. Conversely, if that *sahṛdaya* views the staged *Rāma* as someone else's, then they themselves will not engage in the perception of that *Rāma*. This is because attachment to other's wife, other's husband, or other's possessions is always considered reprehensible (*anucita*). In this way, various relationships such as identity and otherness lead beings onto the path of worldly existence, resulting in a life filled with love and hatred. However, through universalisation

in poetry, all forms of worldly relationships are eliminated. As a result, poetic feelings never become the cause of worldly happiness or sorrow; rather, they exist at a much higher level than mundane life.

For example, we may consider the context of '*Abhijñānaśākuntalam*'. Having illustrated the constituents of *rasa* in detail earlier, we can now examine more concisely how they undergo universalisation. In the *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*<sup>16</sup> *Duṣyanta* and *Śakuntalā* are the *ālambana vibhāva*, while the buzzing of bees, breeze, the Spring (season), fragrance of various flowers and other sounds like of the birds are the *uddīpana bibhāva*. *Duṣyanta*'s excitement, *Śakuntalā*'s lovesickness represent the *anubhāva*, and the *sthāyi-bhāva rati* along with joy, debate, and intellect are the *vyabhicāribhāvas*. In the process of *rasa* appreciation, all of these elements undergo universalisation.

The universalisation of *Duṣyanta* as an *ālambana vibhāva* means that he transcends being *Duṣyanta* to become a mere enamored man, implying that his connections to space, time, and other relationships come to an end. The universalisation of *Śakuntalā* is quite similar; her characteristics related to space and time are also eliminated, leaving behind only the essence of a simple woman.

The universalisation of *anubhāva* means that all of *Duṣyanta*'s behaviors transform from being related to him into the actions of an ordinary enamored man. Similarly, the stable emotions of love and the *vyabhicāribhāva* such as joy and debate also become free from personal feelings of anger and hatred.

In this state, the stable emotion of love (*rati*) that exists is not directed towards *Duṣyanta*'s *Śakuntalā*, nor towards the sensitive *Śakuntalā* or the beloved of a *sahṛdaya*. Rather, it is a kind of liberated (free-flowing) emotional state, in which there

<sup>16</sup> Interested readers may refer to the third act of the drama

remains not even a trace of self-other consciousness. In reality, this is the stable emotion of the *sahr̥daya*, but through universalisation, it becomes detached from personal consciousness.

Thus, in the process of universalisation, what is manifest among the various elements of *rasa* transforms from specific to generic, and what is unmanifest, meaning the emotional form, becomes free from personal associations. In other words, one gains liberation from the spatial-temporal bonds of *vibhāva* and from the self-other consciousness of emotions.

## 2.2. Aesthetic Cognition as a Distinctive Mode of Knowledge

This universalisation is made possible through a distinctive mode of knowing called aesthetic cognition. In a specific context, to perceive something that is not as it is, is called aesthetic cognition. In poetry, due to the appropriateness of the aesthetic experience, even an imagined subject is considered real. For example, if in a poem, animals and birds are seen speaking like humans, a *sahr̥daya*, even knowing that it is impossible for them to speak in such a way, accepts it as possible within the context of the poem. This is how a valid moral or aesthetic insight is reached at the end of the story in poetry. Accepting such unrealistic subjects as real due to appropriateness is referred to as aesthetic cognition. This aesthetic cognition is the foundational basis of all poetic content. It enables a *sahr̥daya* to transcend worldly conflicts such as love-hate, happiness-sorrow, etc., and rise to a level of detached enjoyment of aesthetics.

All objects in this world are fundamentally subjects of four types of knowledge—correct knowledge (*yathartha-jñāna*), illusionary knowledge (*bhrama-jñāna*), doubtful knowledge (*saṃśaya-jñāna*), and similarity knowledge (*sādr̥śya-jñāna*). Aesthetic cognition is recognized as completely distinct from this quartet of knowledge. Correct knowledge can never be called aesthetic cognition because the person acting on stage is not the actual *Rāmacandra* of the *Tretā Yuga*, but merely an actor portraying *Rāma*. This knowledge cannot be equated with the rope-snake analogy<sup>17</sup> of *bhrama-jñāna* (illusory knowledge)

<sup>17</sup> In Vedāntic epistemology, the rope-snake analogy (*rajju-sarpa-bhrama*) illustrates misperception: someone seeing a rope in darkness mistakes it for a snake and experiences fear. Upon illumination,

because, after initially accepting someone as *Rāma*, the audience never thinks during or after the play that the person they considered *Rāma* was actually just an actor playing *Rāma*, and they mistakenly thought of the actor as *Rāma*. In the rope-snake analogy, there comes a point where the illusion is dispelled. In the aesthetic cognition, the audience never experiences such dispel during the aesthetic cognition. Furthermore, aesthetic cognition cannot be considered *saṃśaya-jñāna* because, during the play, the audience never doubts whether the actor is truly *Rāma*. Similarly, it is not *sādrśya-jñāna* either, as the audience does not think of the actor as resembling *Rāma*; rather, in that moment, they perceive the actor and the *Rāma* from *Tretā Yuga* as identical.

Therefore, the content described in poetry or drama cannot be explained by any of the four types of knowledge mentioned above. In such cases, the inclination of aesthetic cognition is particularly evident. It is through this aesthetic cognition that the various aspects of poetry can be accepted, and their universalisation occurs.

### 2.3. Universalisation and Removal of Ignorance

Aesthetic cognition leads to universalisation, and the meaning of universalisation is liberation from the constraints of time and space, personal associations, and so forth. In this state, the subjects that a *sahrdaya* perceives in poetry are revealed in a universalisation or simplified form, free from all mundane relations such as time, place, identity, and other worldly connections. In reality, it is through individual consciousness that the realisation of enduring emotions of happiness and sorrow is gathered; without this, even the thoughts of sensory happiness and sorrow fade away. Therefore, according to the rhetoricians, it is a kind of supernatural perception. Thus, the more deeply a *sahrdaya*'s mind is engaged with these simplified aspects of aesthetic experience, the more the feeling of immersion increases. In this state, the qualities of rajas (passion) and tamas (ignorance) gradually diminish, while the quality of sattva (purity) increases. As a result, according to the memory reference, "*tatra sattvaṃ*

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the illusion is dispelled, revealing the rope's true nature. This example demonstrates how ignorance (*avidyā*) obscures reality.

*nirmalatoāt prakāśakam anāmayam*<sup>18</sup>, the impurities of ignorance in the compassionate mind are dispelled, and the pure essence manifests there.

Here, the term ignorance is used to refer to other knowledge, meaning knowing something in a different way. This ignorance manifests in various forms such as “I am a human,” “I am a doer,” “I have many duties,” etc., and it is the main cause of the soul’s bondage to the material world. From a metaphysical perspective, the Self is actually free from relations, eternal, and complete. To consider such a Self as bound by various worldly duties, such as authority, is a kind of illusion, similar to mistaking a mirage in a desert for water. “*Ajñānenāvṛtaṃ jñānaṃ tena muhyanti jantavaḥ*”<sup>19</sup>. According to this scriptural reference, scholars regard ignorance as the primary obstacle to the manifestation of bliss inherent in one’s true self. When universalisation in poetry occurs and the sattva increases, this ignorance gradually dissipates. At that time, the previously ignited and universalisation feelings of love, sorrow, etc., illuminated by the aesthetic experience, are enveloped by the bliss of consciousness, much like clouds illuminated by sunlight. This kind of enduring emotional state is referred to as *rasa*.

### 3. True nature and Importance of universalisation

#### 3.1. The Triad of Aesthetic Experience

Universalisation is not a property of the text or poetry. Neither is it a process that is invoked by the text itself. It is a process where the creator, the representation, and the connoisseur align in one line. In universalisation, these are the three essential key elements: the poet, the hero (the subject of the aesthetic experience), and the *sahrdaya*. Universalisation is complete when the sentiments of these three are equal or identical. Due to the absence of any limits to this commonality, it becomes universal.

People throughout the entire universe have some common emotions. This sharing of similar emotions even has no boundary

<sup>18</sup> *Bhagavadgītā*, edited by Shripad Krishna Belvalkar, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1968, 14.6).

<sup>19</sup> *Bhagavadgītā* 5.15

in the time also. They are deep rooted in the citta (mind, ego, intellect) of the mankind as a whole. Even these emotions cross all cultural and civilisational diversities. Thus, they can be communicated through any language in any land at any time to any person from diverse cultural and civilisational background. These are called the anādi saṃskāra (beginningless conditioning).

Furthermore, because all listeners, veiled by this beginningless conditioning, share the same kind of desire, they experience similar perceptions. It is through this process that the subjects described in poetry or drama become enjoyable.

Through the process of universalisation, elements such as *vibhāva* and *anubhāva* are presented in a general form. In a natural state, an ordinary person's mind is enveloped in the darkness of ignorance and is fully immersed in worldly matters. In this condition, even if the person is compassionate, they are unable to experience aesthetic enjoyment. This is because they perceive the character of *Rāma* being staged as their own; that is, they acknowledge the characteristics of time and space in *Rāma* and recognize their own connection with him. In this state, the sight of *Rāma* becomes unbearable for them in the presence of other audience members. Conversely, if they regard *Rāma* as someone else's, they will refrain from experiencing the vision of *Rāma*, similar to how one would distance themselves from another person's spouse, another man, or another person's possessions.

Now, a natural question arises—how do *sahṛdayas* engage with characters like *Rāma* and *Sītā*, or *Duṣyanta* and *Śakuntalā*, who are seen as others? The answer brings us to the topic of universalisation. In reality, at this moment, the *sahṛdaya* exists in an extra-daily aesthetic state where all forms of mundane relationships dissolve. As a result, they no longer perceive the staged *Rāma* or *Sītā* as belonging to themselves or others. During this time, there is neither acknowledgment nor rejection of mundane relationships such as self and other. This is a unique state of perfect non-duality, entirely different from the worldly realm, which allows the compassionate mind to transcend domestic concerns such as affection and aversion, happiness and sorrow, authority and subservience, and to exist at a higher level. Various passages in the *Gītā* describe this state of equality—

*Rāgadveṣaviyuktaistu viṣayān indriyaiścāran.*

*Ātmavaśyairvidheyātmā prasādam adhigacchati..*<sup>20</sup>

This state of equality is not a fictional condition; rather, it is a certain state that can only be realized through the experience of those who truly appreciate poetry. Scholars of poetics refer to this as ‘universalisation’. Therefore, Viśvanātha, the author of *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, has stated–

*Parasya na parasyeti mameti na mameti ca.*

*Tadāsvāde vibhāvādeḥ paricchedo na vidyate..*<sup>21</sup>

While perceiving the *rasa* the *sahṛdaya* cannot differentiate the experiences like ‘this is mine’, ‘this is not mine’, ‘this belongs to another individual’ ‘this does not belong to some other’ etc.

Through universalisation, the *sahṛdaya* resides in a state that is entirely different from the mundane world. During this time, their mind transcends the worldly binaries of happiness and sorrow, affection and aversion, authority and subservience, achieving a state of transcendent equality. This is why even permanent sorrow, which embodies a deep sense of pathos, becomes enjoyable for them. The *sahṛdaya*, who is attaining this blissfulness, becomes free from the binary of ‘me-you’. Sorrow arises from the attachment of the self to the object (this belongs to me, this loss is mine). The *sahṛdaya*, detached from this binary of ‘me-you’, is not attached to any object or any emotion. Eventually (s)he does not feel that ‘this is my loss’ and becomes free from individual bondage. Thus the sorrow reinstates him/her to the state of bliss and it becomes enjoyable. There are many literary works centered around pathos that continually attract the compassionate audience, allowing them to derive pleasure from reading. *Uttararāmacaritam*, *Othello* etc. are examples of such literary excellences. This demonstrates that pathos can also be delightful. According to classical interpretation, since permanent sorrow is an object of profound knowledge, it becomes extraordinary through universalisation. In this state, the qualities conducive to experiencing blissful awareness also increase, making permanent sorrow enjoyable as well. The same reasoning applies equally to other emotions like fear, anger, aversion etc.

<sup>20</sup> *Bhagavadgītā* 2.64. (Similar passages appear in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.38, 2.48, 3.9, 3.19, and 18.10.

<sup>21</sup> Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.12.

As a result, in the realm of poetry, there is no room for the complexities or obscurities arising from the restrictions concerning the view or non-view of others' spouses. This represents a special state free from attachment. For those who aspire for liberation and have truly grasped the essence of the *Advaita Vedānta*, this state is the ultimate goal of life. In their perspective, the universalisation of poetry and the determination of aesthetic experience are, in fact, practical forms of *Advaita Vedānta*. This universalisation also serves as a great aid on the path of devotion. Thus, we see that great Selves embodying the essence of Brahman or those seeking liberation, such as Śaṅkarācārya, Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahaṃsa, Maharṣi Ramaṇa, Yativara Rāghavendra, and others, as well as practitioners like Kabīra, Tulsīdāsa, and Mīrā, have attained the highest poetic qualities and immersed themselves in supreme bliss through poetic or poetic-like practices. Therefore, the Vedantic principles expounded in the *Upaniṣads* can be seen as practically embodied in this self-evident universalised state described by the rhetoricians.

### 3.2. Universalisation and liberation

It is due to the inherent capabilities of the *sahr̥daya* that the ignorance represented as filth is dispelled, allowing the themes of poetry to be expressed in a universal form. Through this expression, the enduring emotions ignited by these themes also manifest in a universalised manner. In this state, the universalised and stabilized emotions envelop the self, and the self is then revealed in its universal form of 'I' or 'me'. Statements like "I am an individual known by the name *Devadatta*", "I am happy", "I am sad"—these various forms of emotional expression are indeed particular qualities of the inner consciousness. Under the influence of inherent ignorance, the self referred to as '*jīva*' imposes these qualities upon itself and perceives itself as an individual known by some arbitrary name like *Devadatta*, happy, or sad, much like a colourless crystal appears to be red when veiled by a hibiscus flower<sup>22</sup>. The experiences of names, forms, emotions like happiness and sorrow

<sup>22</sup> This is a classical and famous analogy used in various schools of philosophy to explain the nature of the self and its relation to the world.

in the three states<sup>23</sup> of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep are, in fact, illusions; this is the conclusion of *Advaita Vedānta*.

Patañjali, the author of the *Yogasūtras*, writes an aphorism: *Vṛttisārūpyam itaratra*<sup>24</sup> meaning the blissful Self is bound in this world of objective happiness and sorrow because the Self superimposes the dispositions of the *citta* consisting of the three *guṇas* (*sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*).<sup>25</sup>

Lord Kṛṣṇa says:

*Prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ.*

*Āhankāravimūḍhātmā kartāham iti manyate.*<sup>26</sup>

**Means:** The three *guṇas* (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*) of the nature do everything, but the individual, due to his ego, takes himself as the doer.

Therefore, it is by imposing the qualities of emotional expression upon itself that the self becomes bound in the world. By the same reasoning, the self, enveloped by universalised emotions such as love, which are stabilized in the form of emotional expression, also becomes universalised. In that state, the self temporarily remains free from all forms of worldly connections. This is a temporary de-individualisation of the self. This liberation just resembles the *mokṣa* in its structure and not

<sup>23</sup> The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad clearly states these three states where the self belongs to. The self is either in a waking state where it feels everything through the body and mind. The state of dream is slightly different from the waken state in its nature and duration. When the dream is over, one realises that it was a dream and not actual. In the state of deep sleep one experiences none other than a complete void and bliss. That is what one realises after waking up from deep sleep—I was sleeping blissfully, I could know nothing (*sukham aham asvāsam, na kiñcid avediṣam*). And it is the conscious self—the *Turīya*—that undergoes all these state.

<sup>24</sup> Patañjali, *Yogasūtram*, edited by Dhundhiraj Śāstri, with commentary by Bhojarāja et al., Jaikrishnadas Haridas Gupta, 1930, 1.4.

<sup>25</sup> See *Vyāsa's* commentary: "*Cittam ayaskāntamaṇikalpaṃ sannidhimātropakāri dṛśyatvena svaṃ bhavati puruṣasya svāminaḥ, tasmāccittavṛttibodhe puruṣasyānādisambandho hetuḥ*" (Patañjali, *Pātañjala-Yoga-Darśanam*, with Vyāsabhāṣyam, edited by Vimala Karnatak, vol. 1, Banaras Hindu University, Ratna Publication, 1992, p. 88). Vijñānabhikṣu elaborates: "*Yathā'yaskāntamaṇiḥ svasminnevāyaḥsannidhikaraṇamātrāt śalyaniṣkarṣaṇākhyam upakāraṃ kurvan svāminaḥ svaṃ bhavati bhogasādhanatvāt...*" (Patañjali, *Pātañjala-Yoga-Darśanam*, with Yogavārttikam, edited by Vimala Karnatak, vol. 1, Banaras Hindu University, Ratna Publication, 1992, p. 107). Bhāvāgaṇeśa adds: "*Vṛttinām sukhaduḥkhamohātmaka-ghaṭādyākāratayā caitanyamapi tatpratibimbavaśāt tadrūpamiva bhavati . . .*" (Patañjali, *Yogasūtram*, with Bhāvāgaṇeśavṛtti, edited by Dhundhiraj Śāstri, Jaikrishnadas Haridas Gupta, 1930, p. 7).

<sup>26</sup> *Bhagavadgītā* 3.27

in the duration or saliance. Same is true for the Yogic samādhi also.

### 3.3. Realisation of the Nature of Self

As a result of universalisation, the self also becomes universalised. In this state, the Self is no longer bound by the obscurations<sup>27</sup> of worldly relationships such as authority and subservience. The mind of the *sahr̥daya* transcends worldly binaries such as attachment and aversion, happiness and sorrow, and reaches a higher level. At this point, the obstruction to the self's true nature caused by ignorance is removed, and the self, enveloped by the enduring qualities of bliss, experiences the essence of consciousness and bliss. Therefore, from a metaphysical perspective, the self that is permanently surrounded by universalised love and free from the veil of ignorance is the true essence of *rasa*.

It has been stated in the *Vedas*: “*Raso vai sah, rasam hyevāyam labdhvā ānandī bhavati*”<sup>28</sup>, which means that *rasa* is indeed the essence of the self; by attaining this blissful essence, the self experiences joy. In this regard, the famous rhetorician *Jagannātha* has also said: “*Ratyādyabbacchinna bhagnāvaraṇā ca chideva rasah*”<sup>29</sup>, meaning that the self, which is surrounded by enduring qualities such as love and freed from the veil of ignorance, is indeed *rasa*.

Here, ignorance related to relationships such as authority and subservience obscures the true nature of the self. When this ignorance, which acts as a veil, is removed, the expression of *rasa* as the essence of joy occurs. Removal of the veil is the ultimate duty of a compassionate individual (*Sahr̥daya*). One of the principal aims of Poetry or literature is a temporary removal of the veil. Under the influence of poetry, when this obscuration is shattered, the self—characterized by self-revelation, inherent nature, and essence of bliss—exists in the form of *rasa*, at which

<sup>27</sup> The innate nature of the self is blissfulness. But the worldly obscurations covers this innate nature and the self seems to be in a state of sorrow and worries.

<sup>28</sup> *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, translated by Gambhirananda Swami, with commentary by Śāṅkarācārya, 6th ed., Advaita Ashrama, 2010, 2.7.1).

<sup>29</sup> *Jagannātha, Rasagaṅgādhara*, edited by Bhatta Mathuranath Shastri, Panduranga Javaji, 1939, Ānana 1, Rasa Prakaraṇa.

point there is nothing more for the *sahrdaya* to do in experiencing their true nature.

#### 4. Conclusion

The poet creates poetry by savoring *rasa*, and this savoring is the ultimate attainment for the *sahrdaya* reader of poetry. However, the key to this savoring of *rasa* is universalisation; other than universalisation there is no other way of experiencing the *rasa*. The essay endeavors to highlight not only the discussion of universalisation from the perspective of rhetoric but also its significance in living a rich, fulfilling life. If the themes described in poetry or drama can be universalised in real life, then that life becomes equally enjoyable for every individual. In such a state, people experience a temporary sense of liberation (*mukti*) and are able to perceive the essence of existence, which is the true aesthetic experience of the entire creation. When ignorance is shattered through poetry, the *sahrdaya* directly tastes their own Self as bliss. This extraordinary perception is, in fact, the main goal of the teachings of *Vedānta*. Therefore, the true worldly manifestation of the *Brahmajñāna* is experiencing the *rasa*, and the appropriate manifestation of the liberated practitioner is the *sahrdaya* who experiences *rasa*.

The contemporary world is increasingly afflicted by selfishness, envy, jealousy, conflict, and violence. At the root of these collective crises lies the disturbed and fragmented individual mind. When such an unrefined mind occupies positions of influence, it inevitably gives rise to corrupted institutions—families, communities, nations—and, in turn, to a distorted global order. Thus, a vicious cycle emerges in which disordered individual consciousness continually reproduces social disharmony.

Breaking this cycle demands more than external reforms or regulatory mechanisms; it requires a profound inner reorientation of the human mind. Burdened by stress, anxiety, rivalry, and incessant desire, the modern mind remains far removed from its natural state of balance and clarity. In this context, *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* acquires significance that transcends the domain of literary theory. By dissolving ego-centered distinctions such as “self” and “other,” “mine” and “not mine,” aesthetic universalisation momentarily liberates consciousness from

attachment and aversion, allowing the individual to glimpse the inherent bliss of one's true nature.

Although such aesthetic experiences are transient, their transformative potential is substantial. Repeated engagement with universalised aesthetic experience refines sensibility, attenuates ego-centrism, and nurtures empathy, equanimity, and inward clarity. Consequently, a deep and systematic understanding of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* can play a vital role in shaping educational pedagogy, cultural ethics, and social well-being.

Furthermore, a renewed comprehension of this principle opens promising pathways for the future of literature and performing arts. When artists and creators consciously employ aesthetic universalisation, art can move beyond mere representation or entertainment and reclaim its formative, elevating function. Literature, theatre, music, and dance grounded in *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* can cultivate universal emotional resonance, transcend narrow identities, and offer audiences access to higher modes of aesthetic and spiritual experience. In this sense, *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* may serve not only as the key to *rasa*-experience but also as a guiding principle for the evolution of future artistic expression and cultural renewal.

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