

The Status Of The Religious Emotion

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The "religious emotion" (*Bhakti* in Sanskrit) is generally held to be a distinct kind of emotion because it has for its subject matter man's relationship with God, and therefore accorded a place above the ordinary human themes of love, sorrow, and so forth. Religious poetry, it is often assumed, is a distinct genre. A general distinction too is assumed between the sacred and the secular in art. But, as I shall argue below, "religious emotion" does not designate any one specific emotional state or attitude, nor does it involve a generic distinction like tragic, comic, or heroic. The terms "sacred" and "secular," "divine" and "profane," too, do not make any significant difference for the aesthetic character of a work, although they may serve as convenient labels to designate kinds of subject matter.

The association of art with religion is well known. The religious spirit has penetrated vast areas of the aesthetic activity of people of all climes. It has not only dictated the themes and symbols of their iconography, poetry, drama, music, and dance; it has also influenced their theorizing about the arts. Since the religious experience has, historically, occupied a central place in the cultural life of mankind, it has also come to have a place in the philosophy of art. In Western criticism, for instance, attempts have been made from time to time to "Christianize" or "theologize" aesthetics (e. g., St. Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart, Tolstoy), although the main stream of that tradition stemming from Aristotle had been empirical and analytical. Poetic theory in Sanskrit, too, from Bharata down, was predominantly secular and uncommitted as to theological or metaphysical views. But with the rise of the various devotional cults in the medieval era, it received an out and out religious interpretation. Aesthetics was pressed into the service of theology and mysticism. The Vaisnava mystic of Bengal offered a completely revamped theory of *Rasa* and sought to deify the poetic emotion by making it a form

of god-realization.¹ In the aesthetics of this school the opposition between the secular and religious points of view comes to the surface. Rupa Gosvami and Madhusudana Sarasvati, among others, engaged in an argument against the secular standpoint of the older critics (*Alamkarikas*) who had denied that Bhakti or the devotional sentiment could be a Rasa at all. In reply, the devotionalists argued that the religious emotion was the supreme aesthetic emotion. Bhakti, they said, should be accepted as a poetic emotion by the same logic by which other emotions like love and grief are accepted as legitimate Rasas.

II

Since the devotional aesthetics of these mystics was being offered as a rival to and a modification of Bharata's doctrine of Rasa, it had to be shown to conform to the criteria stipulated by Bharata for the determination of poetic emotions. According to Bharata's Rasa-Sutra, emotions in poetry come to be expressed through the conjunction of three conditions: the causes, symptoms, and other, ancillary feelings which accompany the emotions. An emotion is identified by the object that excites it and by its outward behavioural signs, such as speech, gesture, and other, spontaneous reactions like tears, horripilation, and so on. Not all emotions, however, can attain to the status of full-fledged aesthetic moods or Rasas. Some are more basic and durable than others. In order for an emotion to become a Rasa, it should be a basic emotion (*Sthayin*), that is, it should be able to assert its identity without getting assimilated in other emotions; it should be an irreducible psychic stereotype. Bharata mentions eight such emotions: the Erotic Emotion (*Srngara*), the Heroic Emotion (*Vira*), Pathos (*Karuna*), Wonder (*Adbhuta*), Comic (*derisive*), Laughter (*Hasya*), Fear (*Bhayanaka*), Revulsion (*bhibhatsa*), and Wrath (*Raudra*). Later day writers added a ninth emotion to the list, namely, Subsidence (*Santa*). Subsidence may be described as a state of repose in which the mind is freed from all passions and perturbations, and rests in itself. This is the condition that wise men and Yogis are known to enjoy. According to the established canon, then, there are only nine basic emotions which could be developed into Rasas and sustained through an entire composition. There are a host of other emotions, too—thirty three, according to Bharata—which are called transitory emotions (*Vyabhicari-Bhavas*), jubilation, dejection, shame, indolence, eagerness, envy, and so forth. But these merely accompany the prime emotions as their accessories and serve to reinforce them. They have no independent existence and are not meaningful except with reference to one of the basic emotions. Another important article of the Rasa theory is that while, in a poem, a number of emotions, both

true over time. When we communicate with past individuals, groups and generations we often think it important that true communication is established and the rules of (traditional) criticism are intended to secure the true communication.

Notes and References

1. Aristotle, *On the Soul* 424 a 17—25.
2. This skill has got many names through the ages but the thought is essentially the same from Plato to Batteux and Sulzer.
3. Plato, *The Sophist* 239 D—240 B and 266 C.
4. Aristotle, *On the Soul* 417 a 20 21 and 418 a 3—6.
5. *Spectator* no. 416.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Cf Flavius Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* II. 22.
8. *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales* 65 8—9. Transl. by R.M. Gummere, Loeb Classical Library, London, Cambridge, Mass. 1965
9. Attribute to Virginia Woolf in Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* London: Oxford Univ. Press 1969. P. 3.
10. Cicero comments (*Orator* II 9) on Phidias' work in the following manner: "Surely that great sculptor, while making the image of Jupiter or Minerva, did not look at any person whom he was using as a model, but in his own mind there dwelt a surpassing vision of beauty; at this he gazed and all intent on this he guided his artist's hands to produce the likeness of the god "Transl. by H.M. Hubbell in Loeb Classical Library, London, Cambridge, Mass. 1960
11. Seneca op. cit. 65. 8—9
12. VIII. 3.
13. *Ars poetica*. 343.
14. *The poetics* ch. IX.
15. *Ibid.* ch. IV. (1448 b 8 - 9)
16. *Reflexions critiques sur la Poesie et sur la Peinture*. (1719) I. 1. Nouvelle ed, 1760, p. 6.
17. Op. cit. no. 411.
18. *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, Vol. III, "Of Tragedy", Edinburgh 1826, pp, 247—48.
19. *Ars. poetica* 1—39.

basic and transitory, may be treated, the composition as a whole must establish unity of tone in terms of a single dominant emotion, which will invariably be one of the basic emotions. Thus a tragic drama may develop some subsidiary strands of interest, such as fear and wrath. But tragic pity alone will dictate its dominant tone.

Now the devotionalists (*Bhakti-Vadins*) argue that Love of God (*bhagavat-priti*), inspired by the power of Krishna to delight man's soul—Called *hladini*—is inherent in every soul as a latent capacity, and it resides equally in the spectator/ reader (*samajika*), in the hero or heroine of the poem (*anukarya*), and in the actor or actress enacting that role (*anukartr*). The ultimate locus of Rasa is of course Krishna himself, the supreme *rasika* (relisher)—*rasa-raj* and the source and embodiment of all Rasas (*nikhila-rasamrta-murti*). This conception of God being the source and embodiment of aesthetic relish can be traced back to the Upanisadic saying that Brahman is indeed of the form of Rasa. Bharata's commentators (Bhattanayaka and Abhinavagupta) had asserted that aesthetic relish was equivalent to the bliss of enjoying Brahman. This theory came to be known as *Rasabrahma-vada*.

Love of Krishna (Krsna - Rati), it is further claimed, is a distinct emotion and prime emotion identified by its own separate set of criteria. It is caused by the contemplation of the person, attributes, and actions of Krishna, who is the object of that emotion, expressed by appropriate gestures, such as tears of joy, ecstatic singing and dancing, and so on and nourished by other fleeting emotions like doubt, anxiety, despair, jubilation, and so on. Finally, not only is Bhakti a legitimate Rasa, but it is the one and only Rasa that is truly aesthetic. Ordinary poetic emotions (*kavya-rasas*), having their basis in man's earthly nature, are finite, transient, and cannot be said to generate supernal delight. The religious emotion, on the other hand, is Rasa par excellence, the permanent Rasa (*nitya-rasa*), whereas the other emotions are accidental (*agantuka*)

Both Vaisnava and Saiva mystics laid stress on the emotional element of god-relation, especially on the soul's enjoyment of its relationship with a personal deity. This relationship, however, takes on a variety of attitudes to the Lord—from complete self-surrender and self-effacement (*Prapatti*) to immersion in his being. Accordingly, Bhakti manifests itself in its fivefold forms as :

1. Santa—Rati : peaceful, contemplative attachment
2. Madhura—Rati : the sweetness of passionate love, of a lover

3. *Dasya*—*Rati* : the attachment of servant to his master
4. *Sakhya*—*Rati* : the attachment of a friend
5. *Vatsalya*—*Rati* : the attachment of a parent to the child

All these sentiments of course point to the essential relishability of god-relation. Hence *Bhakti* is established as the one seminal, all-embracing *Rasa*, and the traditional nine *Rasas* are seen as its modifications or as the forms in which *Bhakti* is enjoyed.

III

In his disquisition on *Santa Rasa*, *Abhinavagupta* denies a separate status to *Bhakti* and to other sentiments like tenderness (*sneha*), filial feeling (*vatsalya*), and so on, as these sentiments only culminate in one or other of the nine basic emotions, or they can be subsumed under the transitory feelings.² More particularly, what we call the adoration of God (*Bhakti*) and the attention we direct on him (*sraddha*) are only a means to the attaining of that state of inward bliss, freedom, and meditative poise, which is the hall mark of *Santa Rasa*. Hence they do not deserve to be counted as separate *Rasas*.³ For *Abhinavagupta*, then, the religious emotion is already implicit in the *Santa Rasa*, not, however, as a distinct emotional state, but as composed of a variety of feelings for which *Bharata* has provided definite descriptive labels, such as deliberation, recollection, enthusiasm, self-assurance (born of understanding), and so forth. The *Santa Rasa* has for its basic tone (*sthayin*) the composure (*sama*), or call it the joy of inner peace, born of self-knowledge (*atma—jnana*) or knowledge of the nature of reality (*tattva—jnana*). *Abhinavagupta* argues further that the *Santa Rasa* is not only a distinct *Rasa*, but a primal *Rasa* which underlies all other *Rasas* as their ultimate ground or resting place (*sthayitama*). All the *Rasas* are relished in the form of *Santa*.⁴ Before him, *Bhattayaka* too, arguing from the *Samkhya* standpoint, had spoken of *Santa* as the ultimate *Rasa* and the basis of all other *Rasas*. All mental states rise out of the original equilibrium of the soul (*sattva—gun*.) and subside back into it. The aesthetic state is such a quietistic condition of the mind. All other emotions originate as well as terminate in *Santa* : *santad utpadyate rasah*.⁵

One need not, however, read all this metaphysical meaning into *Santa Rasa*. For, the state of subsidence of all passions can be seen as a genuine experiential condition, in psychological terms, and as a basic mental state according to the criteria of the *Rasa* doctrine. Again, as *Abhinavagupta* has shown, although this state does not exhibit itself in visible dramatic action, unlike the other emotions, being a cessation of all action, it can still be

portrayed in poetry or dramatized on the stage through its appropriate expressions (*anubhavas*). In dramatic representation, the very absence of actional gestures may be taken as a kind of gesture.⁶ That Subsidence can be treated as a poetic mood is attested by much of the nature poetry of Wordsworth. Wordsworth is describing what the Sanskrit critics call the Santa Rasa when, in his "Tintern Abbey" poem he speaks of "that belssed mood"

In which the burthen of the mystry,
 In which the heavy and weary weight
 Of all this unintelligible world,
 Is lightened... ..

At any rate, the above argument in favour of Santa Rasa seems to account for the substance of what we know as religious experience and provide a place for it in the Rasa scheme. However, Abhinavagupta's treatment of it emphasizes its metaphysical, rather than affectional, aspects. *Tattvajnana* or metaphysical knowledge is said to be the essence of this experience. The devotional mystics, on the other hand, conceived of religious experience as a deeply personal and passionate relationship with God. Metaphysical knowledge and devotion to God are two different functions of the mind. In the former, the mind dwells on the formlessness of the deity (*nirvikalpa—cittavrtti*), whereas in the latter it meditates on his manifested form (*savikalpa*) and takes on that form. Santa Rasa, being a quietistic concept, cannot also do justice to the ecstasies of devotional experience. In fact, this mood, based as it is on *vairagya*—the renunciation of all passionate attachments—is quite repugnant to god - relation, which is of the nature of a deep affection (*anuraga, pranaya*) for the Lord. For these reasons, it is argued. Bhakti does not deserve to be subsumed under Santa. Bhakti, rather than Santa, is thus given the pride of place in the devotional aesthetics as the main Rasa (*mukhya—rasa*), and the traditionally accepted Rasas are seen as secondary Rasas emanating from Bhakti (*gauna—bhaktirasas*). Santa itself becomes a particular manifestation of Bhakti.

IV

However, the objection raised by Abhinavagupta against Bhakti being accorded the status of Rasa seems valid and should be examined for its implications. Abhinavagupta's discourse on Santa Rasa is a monument of sound reasoning and demonstrates the correct application of Bharata's logic

concerning the aesthetics of Rasa, Abhinavagupta does not of course elaborate his point. But we may pursue the line of reasoning suggested by him and raise the following questions :

(i) The main argument of the devotionalist has been that the religious emotion should be given a separate status because God, rather than man, is its object. But one might argue, taking Bharata's completely humanistic emphasis into consideration, that the religious emotion, whatever its content (*visaya*), is still a psychic condition and must be presented in poetry in terms of human responses—of joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain and not as something removed from man's psychic nature. An emotion, such as the love of Krishna (*krsna rati*) may have a "religious" object for its subject matter, but it is still a human emotion and must evoke a human response. A difference in subject matter (*visaya—bheda*) ought not to constitute a difference in form and character (*svarupa—bheda*). For example, erotic feeling directed on a princess cannot be substantively different from that directed on a servant maid. Similarly, the fact that religious love is love of the transcendent God does not make the least bit of difference for the form and quality of that feeling. It must still be a feeling of a certain description—tenderness, erotic desire, yearning or whatever. Every experience, however otherworldly or transcendental, is transformed into an aesthetic emotion when it is treated in poetry, and becomes a fit subject for Rasa (*rasa—visaya*). It is realized as a human emotion even though the context may be divine.⁷ Therefore god-relation as a theme does not call for a separate aesthetic. There is nothing specially "religious" about it in aesthetic terms. In poetry, all emotions and all motifs are invariably humanized and generalized; they are secularized or "sacralized," if you like. The distinction between "secular" and "sacred" ceases. Abhinavagupta no doubt speaks of aesthetic experience (*rasasvada*) as supramundane (*alaukika*). But it is in the sense that, owing to the power of generalization, the spectator's apprehension of Rasa transcends the boundaries of person, place, and time. The emotions portrayed in poetry are realized to be at once those of the character and one's own. But no distinction is here implied between secular emotions and sacred emotions. On the contrary the implication is that the subject matter treated in poem may be an ordinary human situation, but the experience one gets out of it is something extraordinary, and "otherworldly" in a sense. As Bharata stated, the subject matter of literature is the stuff of common human experience, the feelings, actions, and conduct of the "three worlds." And this might certainly include experience of the "religious" kind too.

This emphasis on the essential emotionality of aesthetic experience and attempt to explain it in terms of human psychology should not be uncongenial to the Bhakti theorists. For they too, effect, conceive of God in intimately personal terms and humanize God's relationship with man. All the Bhakti poets, including the Vaisnava *Alvars*, the *Sriya Nayanmars*, the followers of Caitanya, the saint—poets like Kabir, Meera, and Surdas expressed their love for God in terms of everyday emotions. God—feeling is rooted in human affection of God : *para anuraktir isvare* (*Saundalya, Bhakti Sutras*); *sa tu asmin para prema—rupa* (*Narada Bhakti Sutras*), although it is insisted that it is more permanent than ordinary human affection.

(ii) But the crucial question for aesthetics is whether Bhakti can be admitted as a distinct emotion (*sthayin*), considering that the term denotes a relationship and not so much a specific emotional attitude. The Bhakti theorists have argued their case in many ways trying to install this concept in the scheme of aesthetic emotions. It has been suggested variously that the basic tone of Bhakti is *manonivesa* or *sraddha* (fixing the mind on God), *bhagavad—akara cittavrtti* (the state of mind that assumes the form of the Lord), *rati* (erotic love for God), or *cittadrava* (the melting of the heart at the thought of God). But the first two are acts of mind or forms of meditation (*dhyana*) which do not connote an emotive attitude. They cannot, in Bharata's terminology, be called *bhavas*. And both these can be symptoms (*anubhavas*) of *Santa Rasa*. Some of the other forms associated with Bhakti, such as friendly feeling and filial love are composite states admitting of various feeling attitudes, and not unitary conditions. Servitude (*dasya*) denotes a type of relationship and may express itself in a number of ways depending on the circumstances. *Maya* or the sense of the illusoriness of the world is sometimes claimed to be a *Rasa*. But this too can take on a number of emotional tones, being a metaphysical concept and not so much a feeling condition. And it can accompany *Santa* as an exciting circumstance. If erotic love is taken as the basis of Bhakti, then, it does not differ from *Srngara Rasa* and hence that need for a separate Bhakti *Rasa* would be obviated. As I have argued before, the fact that Krishna is the object of *Rati* does not make it another kind of *Rati*; whether it is Krishna or some earthly lover, like *Dusyanta*, whether it is felt by god or man, it still remains love. Thus either Bhakti has no emotional basis or it can be subsumed under one or other of the nine basic emotions.

To meet this difficulty, the Bhaktivadin may resort to the argument that Bhakti is a kind of composite, all—embracing *Rasa*, taking diverse forms and running the whole gamut of human emotions from love to fear and sorrow.

But a composite emotion of this kind is an impossibility since it contravenes a fundamental article of the *Rasa* theory : a *Rasa*, by definition, must have a single basic tone (*sthayin*). Again, even supposing that all the nine emotions may be treated within the same devotional poem, only one of them will ultimately establish itself as the dominant *Rasa*: it is not possible for all of them to be given equal importance. When, for instance, the erotic sentiment gains principal importance the mood will be *Srngara*. Furthermore, all the same character without regard to their propriety and mutual congruence. Thus, if the person of the poem is the devotee he cannot, at the same time and with equal intensity, feel both love and anger towards his god. If love is developed as the principal theme, then, anger may enter only as a transitory feeling. There is also the question of the locus of these emotions which, according to our theorists, go to make up *Bhakti*, the objects on which they are directed, and propriety in that regard. Feelings such as Wrath, Disgust, and Pity cannot be directed on God, who is an object of adoration. That is, God cannot be the intensional object (*alambana—vibhava*) of these feelings. The devotee does not become furious with his God, nor pity him, nor turn away from him in disgust. But he can suffer revulsion or pity for himself. Wonder too can be treated only as having its locus in the *Bhakti*. He can marvel at himself. Erotic love can be shown both in God and his devotees : God is the object of enjoyment to the *Bhakta*, but he also delights in his *Bhakta* or in his consort. Thus if *Bhakti* is taken as a composite *Rasa* it cannot establish for itself a definite locus, for the emotions of which it is composed change their ground (*adhikarana*) and can not consistently be attributed to the persons constituting the relationship—God and Man. Paramatman and Jivatman. From this it appears that *Bhakti* is not a term for a unitary *Rasa*, but denotes a type of relationship, which may admit of a number of emotive attitudes depending upon the nature of the situation.

Bhakti, understood as god—relation, may, then, be expressed in poetry through a number of emotional attitudes. And these may be divided into those residing in the devotee and those residing in the deity, or in both.

I. Emotions which can reside in the *Bhakta* and which are caused directly by God as the object of the emotion :—The *Bhakta* can go through a whole range of emotional crises in his encounter with God—from utter despondency to ecstatic joy. Thus, pines for his God, enjoys union with him, laments his separation, suffers grief and despair over the fallen condition of his soul, marvels at God's grandeur, is afraid of his wrath, disgusted with own body and his sensuous attachment to worldly things, and finally rests in god—realization.

(i) (*Srngara*) (erotic passion) : in its twofold aspect of love—in—union (*Sambhoga*) and love—in—separation (*vipralambha*). In the Krishna cult, for example, the Bhakta adopts the lives and attitudes of Krishna's Gopis; he becomes God's bride (*kanta*) since "all souls are feminine to God." This is also a familiar concept in Christian devotional mysticism.

Sambhoga : In love—in—union are represented the variout stages from the first awakening of love (*purva—raga*) to its final fulfilment, e. g., the songs of Kabir and Meera. Or consider the intense eroticism of some of Edward Taylor's *Preparatory Meditations* :

I shall be The Bride Espoused by Thee
And Thou my bridegroom Deare Espoused shalt be.
Be Thou my lily, make Thou me Thy knot :
Be Thou my flowers, I'll be The Flower Pot.
Be Thou my Song, and make Lord, me Thy Pipe.
Make me the Couch on which Thy love doth ly.

Vipralambha : The pain of separation is the theme of Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*. It is also portrayed in the songs of Kabir and Vidyapati. At the symbolical level love-in-separation represents the soul's alienation from Paramatman. The soul feels extreme agitation (*paruma vyakulata*) when losing sight or remembrance of the Lord.

(ii) *Karuna* : Meditation on the pathetic, stricken condition of the soul is characteristic of a phase of religious experience called "The Dark Night of the Soul." The devotee thinks of his unworthiness and his vulnerability to sin and sensuous indulgence, and sometimes falls into deep despair. Typical expressions of this mood of self—castigation (*nirveda*) and penitence may be found in the Holy Sonnets of Donne, as in this instance :

To poor me is allowed
No ease ; for long yet vehement grief hath been
The effect and cause, punishment and sin.

Or in others such as "Batter my heart, three personed God," and "Spit in my face you Jews." Hopkins's "Terrible Sonnets" too are a most poignant expression of a soul in torment, in the grip of desolation and despair resulting from a sense of alienation from God. It should not, however, be supposed that this mood of grief is terminal, for in terms of devotional philosophy, there is no ultimate despair. The devotee must live on the hope, however remote, that he will be redeemed by God's grace. This is especially true of Christian theology.

(iii) *Adbhuta* : One most important aspect of the devotional mind is its adoration of God's superhuman attributes. The devotee celebrates the marvellous beauty, brilliance, and power of the Lord. A famous example of this is Arjuna's vision of Krishna's Cosmic Form (*Visva-rupa*) in the eleventh chapter of the *Gita*. A vast number of devotional lyrics in Sanskrit and other Indian languages are given to the glorification of the perfect form and splendour of the images of the deities. The same sentiment is expressed in Hopkins's sonnet "God's Grandeur": "The world is charged with the grandeur of God," etc.

(iv) *Bhayanaka* : In Hindu theology, God does not typically become an object of fear to the Bhakta, as in the Old Testament theology, although, in some cases, he is contemplated in his fearful aspect also, e. g., Kali. In Bhakti literature, fear is exhibited only by God's enemies, e.g., Kamsa, Hiranya-kasipu

(v) *Vibhatsa* : Disgust or revulsion is never directed on the deity, but one's own self and on worldly objects which lure the soul away and of which the soul grows sick, The sense of spiritual revulsion is expressed in these words of Hopkins, "I am gall, I am heartburn.../ Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours," or by Taylor in these words: "I am but a flesh and blood bag."

(vi) *Hasya, Vira, Raudra* : The comic, heroic, and the wrathful sentiments cannot, at least in their intense form, be properly attributed to the devotee. No doubt, the devotee may sometimes deride his god for not taking care of him, or boast of his achievements in the service of God, or even express anger at God's desertion or injustice, e. g., Job in *The Book of Job* Samson in *Samson Agonistes*. But these sentiments can only enter as transitory feelings in an overall mood either of a lover's complaint or of a pathetic outcry; they cannot be developed as dominant moods.

(vii) *Santa* : This mood can be experienced by the devotee as the final fruit of his spiritual quest. When the soul realizes its unity with God it enjoys the bliss of inward peace--the peace that "passeth understanding."

II, Emotions which reside in the Lord and which are caused by their appropriate objects:--

Not only does the Bhakta direct his emotions on God too may be shown to feel emotions like love, pity, anger, etc.

[i] *Srngara* : both union and separation ; e. g., the loves of Krishna in *Gita Govinda Srikrnakarnamrta*.

[ii] *Vira* : The Lord's incarnations and his heroic exploits in slaying the demons and preserving the moral order.

[iii] *Karuna* : Divine compassion, God's self-gift to the soul; but the sentiment can only be developed as a subsidiary motif accompanying a dominant mood, for God never really becomes pathetic, even for the sake of his creatures.

[iv] *Raudra* : God in his wrathful aspect (*ugramurti*), his fury in slaying the demons and punishing the wicked.

[v] *Santa* : The Lord in his serene aspect (*santamurti*). Not all emotions can be attributed to God, especially Fear and Disgust. But these and other sentiments can be portrayed in the inferior gods. A verse on Saiva Tantra has it,

Erotic love and other emotions may be displayed in the places allotted to the eight gods. And in the centre one should display the serene form of Devadeva (Siva).⁸

V

The foregoing discussion leads us to conclude that the attempt of the Bhakti theorists to set up a rival "religious" aesthetic as opposed to the purely secular conception of Bharata was from the beginning plagued by inconsistencies. The Rasa theory offered by Bharata and his commentators was, in fact, large enough to encompass the whole range of human emotions, and there was no need for a separate theory of religious emotion. The traditional critics certainly do not neglect religious experience. Innumerable instances of religious poetry are discussed and analyzed by them for their aesthetic value-- for their meaning, emotive tone, and formal features--but never in terms other than the aesthetic.

It appears further that, in spite of their theoretical pretensions, the Bhakti theorists were not concerned with aesthetics as much as they were with theology--a fact that leads them ultimately to denigrate the poetic emotion (*kavyarasa*) itself as being of an inferior order to what they called Bhakti-Rasa. In the final analysis, the Rasa of which they speak turns out to be a means to spiritual emancipation rather than to poetic enjoyment *per se*. While under the inspiration of Bhakti movement a whole body of the most beautiful literature, the most haunting songs and lyrics, arose both in Sanskrit and the regional languages, the aesthetics of the classical tradition stemming from Bharata has remained unaffected. The Bhakti reinterpretation of the traditional aesthetics has been, at best, a minor episode in the history of Indian poetics

Notes and Reference

1. For a discussion of the Vaisnava theorists, see V. Raghavan, *The Number of Rasas* (Madras : Adyar Library, 1967), pp. 141-60.

2. See *Abhinavabharati*, ch. VI, "Santa-prakaranam."

3. *Abhinavabharati* : *na tayoh prthagrasatvena gananam.*

4. *Abhinavabharati* : *sarvarasanam santapraya eva asvadah.*

5. *Abhinavabharati*, ch. VI.

6. Jagannatha, *Rasagangadhara*

(BHU ed.), I 155 : "Marmaprakasa" of Nagesa.

7. Cf. Helen Gardner's remark about *Paradise Lost* : "Milton was not writing a work of Christian apologetics. He was writing an epic poem, re-telling the best-known story in the world." *A Reading of Paradise Lost.*

8. *astanam iha devanam stugaradin pradarsayet, madhye ca devadevasya santam rupam pradarsayet.* Quoted in *Abhinavabharati*, "Santa-Prakaranam."