

DANAM CONFERENCE 2007

SESSION RT2

Theme: Rasa and Vaishnava Traditions – I

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University of San Diego, *Conveners*

I. Ramdas Lamb, University of Hawaii at Manoa, *Presiding*

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ABSTRACTS

Graham M. Schweig, Christopher Newport University

The Conception and Meaning of Rasa in Bhakti: The Chaitanya Vaishnava School

This presentation will examine how the Caitanya Caritamrita of Krishnadas Kaviraja Goswami, the most thoroughgoing theological statement of the Caitanya school of Vaishnavism, defines, describes, and analyzes rasa. Comparisons will be made to the earlier foundational work of Rupa Goswami's Bhaktirasamritasindhu, and some later works of the school in order to gain a sense of the school's developmental trends in its evolving conception of rasa. And finally, I will suggest how this evolving conception of rasa is grounded in the Bhagavata Purana, the tradition's ultimate shruti-like scripture, to which the school's theologians apply their conceptions and find justifications for their notions of rasa.

Krisztina Danka, Eotvos Lorand University of Budapest, Hungary

Rasa – Aesthetics & Metaphysics Interwoven: Literary Works As Revelations in the Bengali Vaishnava Tradition

There are lots of good English translations of the masterpieces of the Indian Bengali Vaishnava tradition available, but basic theoretical questions, such as how literature itself is defined, how the literary canon is established, and how the aesthetical communicatory dynamics between the author, the literary work and the recipient takes place are yet to be clarified, analyzed and articulated. Some Vaishnava literary masterpieces such as Jayadeva's *Gita-govinda* or Rupa's dramas are considered by the tradition to be mystical revelations as well. While looking into the hermeneutics of this unique genre of literature, one might conclude that the Western-specific models that make a clear distinction between the sacred and literary texts fall short in describing the mode of existence of these works in which the metaphysics and the aesthetics do not exist on an either-or basis but in an inseparable symbiosis. It might be proper to introduce a new literary category, that of the "literary work as revelation" and a new term of a method of interpretation, that of the "methodological theism", and for further clarifications, might be useful to revert to Rupa's *rasa*-theory.

Lance Nelson, University of San Diego

Bhakti-rasa for the Advaitin Renouncer: Madhusudana Sarasvati's Theory of Devotional Sentiment

Madhusudana Sarasvati (16th-17th cent.) wrote an important work on the theology of Krishna-bhakti, the only independent work on the topic written by one of the major thinkers of the Advaita tradition. Titled the *BhaktirasAayana* (alternately, "The Elixir of Devotion" or "The Course of Devotional Sentiment," the text attempts to give an exposition of Krishna-bhakti from a nondualist viewpoint, using the *Bhagavata Purana* as its primary scriptural authority. In the course of this work, Madhusudana develops a theory of *bhakti-rasa* that is idiosyncratic, differing in a number of significant respects from its Gaudiya Vaisnava counterpart. This paper will outline these differences and their rationale, insofar as it can be determined from the text.

Gerald T. Carney, Hampden-Sydney College

Rasa as Foundation and Bridge

Starting from the devotional aesthetics of the Gaudiya Vaishnava *rasa-shastra*, this paper examines, first, the ground for *rasa* in the cultivation of devotional sensibility on the part of ordinary people, such as the audience at *ras-lila*, devotees at *Srimad Bhagavata katha*, and participants in *samaj*. According to the model of devotional development, such people become *sa-hridaya*, possessing the sufficiently cultured consciousness to participate in the tradition as *rasikas*. The possibility of such participation depends, then, on the foundation of a *rasa-culture*, incorporating living arts and the art of life itself as the portal to the devotional world. Finally, the paper concludes with a modest proposal: that many of these characteristics of *rasa* which form the life of *bhakti* provide the segments of a pontoon bridge across the river of inter-religious conversation and dialogue. This paper is based both on academic research and on field research in Vrindaban.

David Buchta (Dvija Maëi Däsa) , University of Pennsylvania

Bhayänaka-rasa as Bhakti-rasa in Gauḍeya Vaiñëavism

Abstract: One of the greatest contributions of the Gauḍeya Vaiñëava tradition to the intellectual history of India is the development of a theory of *bhakti-rasa*. The primary factor differentiating this theory of *bhakti-rasa* from secular *rasa* theory is the circumscription of the range of the *älambana* sub-division of *vibhāva*. Generally, *Kāñëa* is the *viñaya* (object) and a devotee is the *äcra* (subject) of loving emotion in *bhakti-rasa*. However, *bhayänaka-rasa* (terror) presents complications, as *Kāñëa* is supposed to be the object of love, not fear. Furthermore, trust in *Kāñëa*'s protection is supposed to deliver a devotee from fear. This paper will explore the treatment of *bhayänaka-rasa* in Gauḍeya Vaiñëava literature, particularly Rūpa Gosvämé's *Bhakti-rasämāta-sindhu* and Baladeva Vidyäbhüñäëa's *Sähitya-kaumudé* and *Kävyä-kaustubha*. Therein a dual notion of devotional fear is developed, fear of *Kāñëa* and fear on behalf of *Kāñëa*. These treatments of the subject, though brief, contain the seeds of a sophisticated theology of fear. They also suggest that there is an important role in the Vaiñëava tradition, as in Christianity, for the notion of "good, god-fearing people."

Neelima Shukla-Bhatt, Wellesley College

Usefulness of the Concept of Bhakti-rasa in Studying Bhakti Forms

This presentation will discuss the usefulness of the concept of bhakti-rasa in study of bhakti related forms such as bhakti lyrics, their performance, as well as hagiographies of bhakti saints. Examining the conceptual parallels and differences between religio-aesthetic concept of bhakti-rasa and contemporary theories of performance, the presenter will point out the potential and limits of the concept.

Deepak Shimkhada, Claremont College

Paintings: Expressions of Rasa in the 1648 Bhagavata Purana

The *Mahabharata* boldly claims that what is not found here in the realms of religion, economic development, pleasure, and liberation will not be found anywhere else, and what is found anywhere else in these realms will also be found here. Can the same thing be said of the *Bhagavata-purana*? The *Bhagavata-purana* is by far the most popular of the *puranas* and contains some of the materials found in the other *puranas* as well. As one of the favorite *puranas* of the Hindus, Vaishnavas in particular, the *Bhagavata* is repeatedly read, listened to, copied, and painted. While a large number of handwritten texts of the *purana* have survived, only a few, scattered illustrated manuscripts remain.

The *Bhagavata-purana* begins with the surrender of the devotee unto Krishna, who is said to be the Ultimate Truth and the Absolute Person. Because all materially motivated activities are rejected in the *Bhagavatam*, surrender to Krishna is gained only through *bhakti* (devotion). If *rasa* (aesthetic) can be defined as the ontological truth that can be experienced by the senses, then surely *Bhagavata* can be experienced only if one opens his/her senses to receive the *rasa*. The foundation of all these is, of course, *bhakti*, the ultimate *rasa* that a devotee can experience. Also in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Krishna claims that “[he is] the taste in water...[and he is] the pure fragrance in earth.” Is there a correlation between the soteriological surrender and *rasa*?

Applying the same principle of the universality of the *Mahabharata*, the proposed paper will focus on the *rasa* aspects it embodies not only through narratives, such as art, elevated language, and devotion, but also in regard to the part *rasa* plays in the construction of the *Bhagavata-purana's* structure, as well as its relation to the personal-impersonal tension within the text. My paper will highlight experiential aspects of the *Bhagavatam* as experienced by the devotees through images—whether by making or just by seeing—the ultimate aspect of RASA.

Ithamar Theodor, University of Haifa

The Infiltration of Rasa into Vaisnavism

The concept of *rasa* is ancient and has its roots in the Upanisads; it later became a key notion in Bharata's science of dramaturgy. Vaisnavism is by nature dramatical and brahminical, and it has easily absorbed the notion of *rasa* along with other dramaturgical elements. *Rasa* gradually began to be interpreted as a universal principle, and as such, assumed an ontological position within medieval Vaisnava theology, so much so that in the Gaudiya Vaisnava worldview, reality came to be seen as constructed by feelings.