

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts
Kalākośa Division

Concept Note

Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta: Issues in Aesthetics

19th August, 2015

It is possible to suppose that no knowledge production happens in isolation even from the minds of the most innovative thinkers. A new aesthetic theory on closer inspection shows relationship with the past either in form of contestation or acceptance or a combination of both. Abhinavagupta's (950-1025 A. D.) aesthetics emerges in a similar dialogue with the past and takes a new direction in keeping with the demands of his time. As such sources on Indian aesthetics prior to Abhinavagupta's times are quite scant, and therefore his commentaries in which he encapsulates the earlier theories offer us some historical understanding of the development of his theories.

Prefacing his own understanding of the most elusive concept *rasa* of Indian aesthetics Abhinavagupta puts four verses as a prelude which shows his sense of gratitude to the 'Tradition' or in other words these four verses depicts beautifully the making of Abhinavagupta's aesthetics on staircase of critical thinking of his preceptors.

A galaxy of thinkers like Bharatamuni, Bhāmaha, Daṇḍin, Udbhaṭṭa, Vāmana, Rudraṭa, Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa, Bhaṭṭa Śāṅkuka, Bhartrhari, Ānandavardhana, Somānanda, Utpaladeva, Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, Bhaṭṭa Tota, Indurāja, Kohala, Dattila, Mataṅga, Kīrttidhara, Mātrgupta and many more have inspired Abhinavagupta in making of his Aesthetics as attested by his writings.

Among them Utpaladeva (900- 950 A. D.) a disciple of Somānanda and one of the chief exponents of the *Pratyabhijñā* school of thought has been recognised very much as a Philosopher, a Metaphysician who systematised *Pratyabhijñā* School

of Philosophy, but his recognition as a Aesthete or literary genius stills needs a desideratum. Renowned scholar Dr. K. C. Pandey remembers Utpala as a probable commentator on *Nāṭyaśāstra* or some section of it, in any case as an authority on Saṅgītaśāstra. We come across references of Utpala as a teacher of Saṅgīta in *Abhinavabhāratī*.

Utpaladeva, best known for his philosophical compositions, was also a highly realized devotee of Lord Śiva. He composed a *stotra* named *Śivastrotāvalī*, a collection of twenty songs devoted in praise of the Absolute.

We know Utpala as a grand teacher of Abhinava in School of *Pratyabhijñā*, but it is a subject of research that whether Utpala was a grand teacher of Abhinavagupta in field of Aesthetics or not? Uttuṅodaya in his commentary *Kaumudī* on *Dhvanyāloka-locana* hints that Utpaladeva may be the teacher of Bhaṭṭa Indurāja, teacher of Abhinavagupta in Aesthetics and thus Utpala proved a grand teacher of Abhinavagupta in aesthetics too.

Utpaladeva's idea of *vimarśa* and its metaphysical-psychological relation with *camatkāra* has been elucidated brilliantly by Abhinavagupta in his *Vivṛtivimarśinī* and he used it with brevity in field of Aesthetic experience. It is one of the most formative insights of Utpaladeva which proves significant for Abhinavagupta's aesthetics. *Ajaḍapramāṭṛsiddhi* one of the sections of *Siddhitrayī* provides a philosophical basis for Abhinavagupta to co-relate the Individual self *parimita ātmā* with Absolute Self *aparimita ātmā* and in this framework Abhinavagupta explains how we able to break the worldly frame and become 'Universal' absorbing every objective phenomenon while reading or watching poetry/performance.

Utpala's concept of *hṛdaya* (heart) has been taken brilliantly by Abhinavagupta and it is really amazing to see how he uses its philosophical meaning in elaborating the notion of *sahrdaya* (a man with alert sensibility).

Another important concept of *viśrānti* 'repose within one-self' has been taken from Utpaladeva's writing (*Ajaḍapramāṭṛsiddhi*) and masterly applied by Abhinavagupta in his philosophical texts and also in realm of Art and its reception.

Keeping in mind, Utpaladeva's significant contributions in *Pratyabhijñā* School of Philosophy and his close affinity with Saṅgīta, Kalākośa division is going to organise a one-day symposium on 19th August 2015 by inviting the most eminent Scholars of the field, namely, Prof. Navjivan Rastogi, Prof. K. D. Tripathi, Prof. Radhavallabh Tripathi, and Prof. G. C. Tripathi who through their lectures would try to investigate Utpaladeva's insights on Aesthetical issues and also in what way his grand disciple Abhinavagupta takes it and uses for his own overarching Aesthetics.

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