

भक्तिरसविमर्शः  
श्री रूपगोस्वामिमतानुसारेण

Sacred Rapture:

A Study of the Religious Aesthetic of Śrī  
Rūpa Gosvāmin

Version .1

by  
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# Introduction

In the first half of the 16th century a few hundred miles up from where India's sacred Ganges meets the Bay of Bengal an enthusiastic religious revival was taking place in the ancient tradition of Vaiṣṇavism, the worship of the old Vedic god Viṣṇu and his many descents or "incarnations." The leader and center of this revival was a charismatic and intensely emotional devotee of Kṛṣṇa whose renunciation name was Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya.<sup>1</sup> Born into a family of *brāhmaṇa* in 1486 C.E. in the town of Navadvīpa as Viśvambhara Miśra son of Jagannātha Miśra, Caitanya sparked off a religious movement that swept through Bengal and spread to other parts of India within a century. That movement of enthusiastic, emotionally charged devotion to Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa's feminine consort/lover/power (*śakti*), still continues today, most noticeably in Bengal and around the ancient town of Mathurā in India's northern state of Uttar Pradesh. Over the last forty years the traditions has spread outside of India in various forms to all parts of the world as a result of the work of several zealous and charismatic gurus.<sup>2</sup> Although Caitanya was well educated and worked as a teacher in India's traditional Sanskrit school system for a while, he never wrote much himself. Instead he attracted some of the leading talents of his time to become his followers, and asked them to write the philosophical, theological, and ritual works that became the foundations of the religious tradition.

There is a popular verse that presents a commonly held view of the main teachings of Caitanya. It is found at the beginning of a commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* called the *Śrī-Caitanya-mata-mañjuṣā* (Treasure Chest of the Opinions of Śrī Caitanya) by Śrī Nātha Cakravartin (16th cent.). It is as follows:

"The Lord who is the son of the king of Vraja is to be worshiped and

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<sup>1</sup>By renunciation name, I mean the name that he took when he entered the renunciant's stage of life called *sannyāsa*. A translation of the greatest of the biographies of the saint Caitanya, *The Immortal Acts of Caitanya* (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*) written by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja (16th cent.), has recently been published by Harvard University Press. The translation from the Bengali is by Edward C. Dimock with the assistance and editing of Tony K. Stewart.

<sup>2</sup>There are a number of representatives of this religious tradition who spread the faith in the West these days. The group with the highest profile and, unfortunately, one with questionable authenticity, has been the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), known also as the Hare Krishna Movement, which was founded by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami in the 1960s.

his abode is Vṛndāvana. The form of worship devised by the wives of Vraja is the most pleasing. The *Bhāgavata* is the purest source of knowledge. Selfless love (*preman*) is the highest goal of human life. This is the opinion of the great master Śrī Caitanya. To that we give our greatest respect.”<sup>3</sup>

The son of the king of Vraja is another name for Kṛṣṇa. Caitanya recognized the deity Kṛṣṇa as the highest deity and thus reversed the ancient Vaiṣṇava tradition that regarded Kṛṣṇa as but one of many descents into the world of Viṣṇu. For Caitanya, Kṛṣṇa was the fullest and highest self-revelation of deity. As Kṛṣṇa is holy so is the land in which he is believed to have spent his early days holy, Vṛndāvana. Among all of the exemplary worshipers of Kṛṣṇa, Caitanya thought that the way the cowherd women (called *gopī*) of Vraja worshiped him was the best. Theirs was the way of selfless giving of themselves for the sake of Kṛṣṇa’s pleasure. This selfless giving is called *preman* or divine or sacred love. The most pure of all scriptures is, in Caitanya’s view, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the Tenth Canto of which tells the story of the life of Kṛṣṇa with special reference to his days in Vṛndāvana (the first forty-five chapters of that Canto). The highest goal of life is not one of the usual goals recognized in the Hindu tradition: wealth (*artha*), sensual enjoyment (*kāma*), religious duty (*dharma*), and liberation (*mokṣa*). For Caitanya it was that selfless love called *preman* for Kṛṣṇa, a condition of emotional life he felt was most fully manifested in the love the cowherd women of Vraja felt for Kṛṣṇa.

Among the many learned men who became followers of Caitanya were the two brothers, Sanātana and Rūpa, and their nephew Jīva. These three men formed the hub of a small group of followers of Caitanya who at his request settled in Vṛndāvana near the city of Mathurā in the state of Uttar Pradesh, not far from the Moghul seat of power in Agra. There they wrote books, “rediscovered” the sites of Kṛṣṇa’s activities, and developed the methods of worship and meditation that became the standard practices for the later tradition. The tradition gave them the title of respect, *gosvāmin*, “master of cows” (Kṛṣṇa was after all a cowherd boy in his youth), and looked to their writings and examples for edification and inspiration. Sanātana Gosvāmin focused on theology, ritual, and hermeneutics; Rūpa Gosvāmin on religious aesthetics, poetry and drama; and Jīva Gosvāmin, working with the South Indian follower of Caitanya, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa, concentrated on philosophy, hermeneutics, and poetry. Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin provided the ritual foundations for the worship and practices of the tradition. The group, with the addition of Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin and Raghunātha Dāsa Gosvāmin, is referred to as the Six Gosvāmin of Vṛndāvana.

I began this study with the intention of focusing on Rūpa Gosvāmin’s (ap-

<sup>3</sup>*ārādhyo bhāgavān vrajeśetanayastaddhāma vṛndāvanam  
ramyā kācidupāsānā vrajavadhūvargeṇa yā kalpitā  
śrīmadbhāgavataṅ pramāṇamamalaṅ premā pumartho mahān  
śrīcāitanyamahāprabhormatamidaṅ tatrādaro naḥ paraḥ*

prox. 1470-1557 C.E.) *Ujjoala-nīlamanī* (Blazing Sapphire), the second of his two texts on what I call his religious aesthetic (*bhakti-rasa-śāstra*). This was envisioned as a complement to the work of others on Rūpa, especially to the work of those who have concentrated on his first and basic work on religious aesthetics, the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (Ocean of the Ambrosia of Sacred Rapture).<sup>4</sup> The *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* contains Rūpa's discussion of sacred rapture (*bhakti-rasa*) in general, his theory of how it is experienced and his descriptions, along with examples, of its varieties. As such it serves as a general introduction to the subject as a whole. Rūpa's *Ujjoala-nīlamanī* is a detailed treatment, with numerous examples, of the specific variety of sacred rapture that is most characteristic of Rūpa's own religious tradition, the Vaiṣṇava community that found its inspiration in life and teachings Śrī Caitanya (1486-1533). The subject of the *Ujjoala-nīlamanī* is sacred erotic rapture (*madhura-bhakti-rasa*, lit. the sweet sacred rapture), which is treated in the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* briefly and as only one of the many varieties of sacred rapture. In the *Ujjoala-nīlamanī*, however, it is described as the "king of sacred rapture (*bhakti-rasa-rāj*)."<sup>5</sup> I wanted to explore this "king of sacred raptures" as a way of understanding the distinctive religious orientation of the Caitanya tradition that makes it unique in the religious history of India. Moreover, it seemed an excellent way of exploring and reflecting on the relationship of erotic and aesthetic experience to religious experience in the thought of one of India's foremost saint-poets.

As I set about this work, I discovered to my great surprise a problem that needed attention before any meaningful study could be made of Rūpa's notion of sacred erotic rapture. This was the problem of determining what Rūpa meant by the word *rasa* (rapture). Rūpa did not coin the word or create the concept; he borrowed it from the previous discipline of Sanskrit aesthetics. What set of characteristics and ideas came with the notion as Rūpa adapted and incorporated it into his religious aesthetic? Most scholars have associated the notion of *rasa* found in Rūpa's works with the theoretical position that has come to be recognized as the "classic" formulation of *rasa*. This is the formulation of Abhinavagupta (10th cent.) in his commentaries on the fundamental works of Sanskrit dramaturgy and poetics, the *Nya-stra* and the *Dhvanyāloka*. I noticed, however, as I read Rūpa's *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* a significant number of points on which he differed from Abhinava's concept of *rasa* and began to wonder if Rūpa was not operating with some other understanding of *rasa*. As I searched the Sanskrit aesthetic traditions for other views of *rasa* that might be closer to Rūpa's, I came across one in the more or less neglected aesthetic of Bhoja (11th cent.), the polymath-king of Dhr in Rajasthan. The similarities in their modes of thought on several points were striking to me and I began to wonder about the influence of this extraordinary Rajasthani king on later

<sup>4</sup>I am referring primarily to David Haberman's work, but also to that of Donna Wulff. See the bibliography for more information on their works.

<sup>5</sup>Rūpa Gosvāmin, *Ujjoala-nīlamanī*, (Vṛndāvana, India: Haridāsa Śarman, 1954), 1.2. I say "for the most part" because Rūpa does suggest in the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* that sacred erotic rapture is superior to the others because it reveals the savor of sacred rapture most completely. See Rūpa Gosvāmin, *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 3rd ed. (Navadvpa: Haribola Kuṭīra, G. 495 [1982]), 2.5.38

Sanskrit aesthetic theory. The usual theory is that Abhinavagupta's treatment of the *rasa* aesthetic was so brilliant that with a little help from his systematizer, Mammaṭa Bhaṭṭa (12th cent.), it overshadowed all opposing views and reached, within a century or two, a pan-Indian currency.

How is it then that Rūpa, who wrote in the 16th cent., produced an aesthetic so different from that of Abhinava's tradition and so similar to that of Bhoja. A little more digging has revealed that a healthy variety of viewpoints on *rasa* existed throughout the period between Abhinavagupta and Rūpa and among those viewpoints Bhoja's was an important contender. Bhoja's work inspired and influenced a number of later writers, mostly in South India, and was incorporated into parts of a Pura (the Agni Pura), the area of the dissemination of which was centered in eastern India (Bengal and Orissa). It is suggestive to note that, although Abhinavagupta's notion of *rasa* eventually became the dominant one among the literati throughout India, Bhoja's view bears a fairly strong resemblance to popular views of aesthetics. In the essay that follows I argue that unless Rūpa is understood in the context of Bhoja's aesthetic influence and not that of Abhinavagupta he is bound to be misunderstood. In supporting this argument, I have gone quite deeply into the aesthetics of both Abhinavagupta and Bhoja and have tried to characterize the ways in which they differ from each other in their views on *rasa*. Having considered their viewpoints, I have presented Rūpa's notion of sacred rapture and compared it to their notions of rapture. In addition, I have sketched a textual history of the development of the idea of sacred rapture (*bhakti-rasa*) before Rūpa. Finally, I have suggested some possible reasons for Rūpa's falling under the influence of Bhoja rather than of Abhinavagupta, apart from the likelihood that he simply preferred Bhoja's tradition to Abhinavagupta's.

In Chapter 1, I formulate the problem. I draw attention to the fact that scholarly attention has been focused mostly on Abhinavagupta in the field of Sanskrit aesthetics and suggest that this has led to the opinion that outside of his thought there is nothing else worth considering in the field. On the basis of this understanding, other scholars in commenting on Rūpa's ideas have naturally attempted, with one or two exceptions, to interpret him on the basis of Abhinavagupta's thought. I have demonstrated the kinds of difficulties such an approach creates for these scholars. Finally, I have suggested that there were a number of other interesting things happening in the field besides Abhinava's work and have called attention to the single *rasa* theories in general and to Bhoja's single *rasa* aesthetic, based on erotic rapture, in particular.

Chapters 2 through 4 form Part I of the book, which is devoted to the discussion of aesthetic rapture. Chapter Two starts with a brief overview of the history of *rasa* aesthetics in order to set the stage for a discussion of the earliest and most fundamental of its texts, the *Nyāstra* (4th or 5th cent. A.D.). As an apparatus for clarifying the distinct positions represented by the different lines of thought on *rasa*, I raise four questions: what is *rasa*, how is it aroused, what is the relationship between *rasa* and *bhava* and who experiences *rasa*. The an-

swers to these questions that each writer gives serve as points on which each can be compared with the others. I then present the process of rasa creation described in the *Nyāstra*, which has been the basis for all later discussions and interpretations. In that presentation the basic terminology of rasa aesthetics is defined and an attempt is made to present the view of that text in its own terms as much as possible. I note that the composite nature of the text and its vagueness have engendered the wide variety of later readings.

In Chapter 3 I focus on the aesthetic of Abhinavagupta and discuss the tradition that has arisen around it. In laying out the main elements of his theory of rasa, certain new insights arise with respect to his relationship with his predecessor Bhaṅya Nyāka on the question of generalization (*sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*). Once Abhinava's aesthetic is laid out it is seen that for him rasa arises out of the mutual cancellation of the contexts of the play and the audience resulting in a temporary relaxation of the individualized limitations of consciousness. The pure consciousness of the spectator colored by the faint surviving impressions left from his or her worldly emotional experience constitutes rasa and, thus, it is similar to release from worldly existence. It can be claimed, therefore, that the rapture of tranquility (*śānta-rasa*) which arises through representation in drama or poetry of such release holds a special place in Abhinava's aesthetic, either as the bedrock of all the rasas or as a metaphor for the rasa process itself (i.e. as a metaphor for the relaxation of individual identity).

In Chapter 4, Bhoja's aesthetic is discussed. His aesthetic is laid out and the answers to the four questions are elicited. Bhoja claims that all forms of rapture are really forms of erotic rapture (*śṛṅgāra*) since they originate out of the quality of self that makes possible the experiences of love (*preman*). Rasa is the experience of love and the rasas are experiences of love for different objects or activities, presenting a potentially unlimited realm of possibilities. In the experience of rasa the identity, instead of becoming relaxed, as with Abhinavagupta, becomes intensified and one's self-valuation is increased. Moreover, rasa is the "peak-experience" of lovers (*śṛṅgārins*) in the world and is experienced only indirectly by the same through drama and poetry.<sup>6</sup>

Chapters 5 and 6 form Part Two of the book which deals with sacred rapture. Chapter Five contains a textual history of the notion of sacred rapture before the time of Rūpa. Sacred rapture has a fairly long history in which it gradually changed from an experience associated with quietistic meditation to the more erotically charged kind of experience it became with Jayadeva and Bilvamaṅgala. Even though the aesthetic tradition indebted to Abhinavagupta argued repeatedly that bhakti should not be considered a rasa, early religious writers such as Vopadeva and Hemadri insisted on its recognition as rasa and later writers have followed suit. Rūpa's thinking on sacred rapture builds on and expands the work of these predecessors.

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<sup>6</sup>The idea of "peak-experience" as a possible Western counterpart to rasa as Bhoja understood it was suggested to me by Wendy Doniger.

In Chapter 6 Rūpa's religious aesthetic is discussed in detail and Rūpa's answers to the four questions are arrived at. Rūpa establishes sacred rapture on the basis of a sthāyin he calls kṛṣṇa-rati (enjoyment of or desire for Kṛṣṇa). All forms of sacred rapture are forms of this sthāyin either in its expansive, self-promoting form or in its diminishing other-promoting form. Kṛṣṇa-rati has two phases of development which Rūpa calls bhāva and preman respectively. Bhāva is its first stage of appearance and preman is its mature form. Rūpa's identification of sacred rapture with preman (love) points to his indebtedness to Bhoja's aesthetic tradition.

In Chapter 7, the aesthetics of both Abhinavagupta and Bhoja are reiterated and Rūpa's religious aesthetic is compared with each of them. Rūpa's aesthetic is found to have more in common with that of Bhoja, in spite of the existence of several important differences. At this point, some suggestions are made that may account for Bhoja's playing a more central role in Rūpa's thought than Abhinavagupta.

In the Conclusion several issues are raised. The first is an assessment of what is gained by looking at Rūpa's aesthetic on the backdrop of Bhoja's aesthetic. For one thing, a number of difficulties that were encountered when Rūpa's writings were connected with Abhinavagupta are resolved. More importantly, Rūpa becomes aligned with an orientation to the world, closer to Bhoja's than to Abhinavagupta's, that is different from the one that he is usually assigned. The richness of Rūpa's conception of love, which owes much to Bhoja's tradition, and the importance of the affirmation of individuality, which is not weakened, but strengthened in the experience of rapture, become emphasized. In short, the whole nature of our understanding of Rūpa's idea of sacred rapture is changed. Finally, the interesting dichotomy in Sanskrit aesthetics between the orientation of Bhoja and that of Abhinavagupta is discussed and a suggestion is made as to why Abhinavagupta has been the focus of so much more attention than Bhoja.

## **Part I**

# **Aesthetic Rapture**



# Chapter 1

## The Problem

Any attempt to understand a text from another culture and age faces the problem of placing that text in its proper framework, of locating the intellectual climate within which it came into being and was understood. In the case of the *Ujvala-nīlamanī* (The Blazing Sapphire), a 16th century North Indian text that unites a tradition of Sanskrit aesthetic theory with one of religious devotion towards the deity, Kṛṣṇa, the problem is particularly crucial. The *Ujvala-nīlamanī* was written by a Bengali (East India) poet-dramatist-saint, Rūpa Gosvāmin, whose forefathers and family traditions came from South India (Karnatak or, perhaps, Andhra) and who, at the end of his life, lived and wrote in or around Vṛndāvana (in modern Uttar Pradesh, North India). Only when one successfully identifies the various threads, drawn from several previous schools of thought, that have been woven into the fabric of Rūpa's religious aesthetics do meaningful and coherent patterns emerge capable of unifying and illuminating his way of thinking about art and religion. Moreover, only when these patterns are correctly identified can one understand and evaluate the culmination of Rūpa's thought in sacred erotic rapture (madhura-bhakti-rasa), which finds its highest expression, in Rūpa's and his followers' work, as extra-marital (parakīya) erotic love.

Sorting out all the lines of influence in order to find the right perspective from which to interpret Rūpa's texts is no small challenge. Consequently, we shall see that though several earlier efforts have been made, certain limitations of knowledge and a fascination with and preference for some writers in and schools of the Sanskrit aesthetic tradition have shaped the ways scholars have understood the *Ujvala-nīlamanī* and Rūpa's earlier, more general work on his sacred aesthetic, the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (Ocean of the Nectar of Sacred Rapture). The resulting interpretations have had to strain, twist and, in some cases, break Rūpa's texts in order to make them fit their perspectives. To be more specific, I shall argue that the interpretation of Rūpa's sacred aesthetic by Western and westernized scholars in terms of the aesthetics of Abhinavagupta (10th

century, Kashmir) has been the result more of a set of scholarly biases than a careful study and reflection on his writings and that a more fertile vantage point for understanding Rūpa's thought can be found in the aesthetic of King Bhoja of Dhārā (11th century, Rajasthan).<sup>1</sup> Though the ultimate aim of this study is the exploration of Rūpa's discussion of sacred erotic rapture (*madhura-bhakti-rasa*), no progress in that direction can be made until the shortcomings of the application of those scholarly preferences to his aesthetic have been pointed out and a more fitting perspective explored.

One of the problems of trying to situate the *Ujvala-nīlamanī* in the tradition of Sanskrit aesthetic theory arises from the way in which that tradition has been viewed and studied by scholars, both native and foreign, of Indian culture. Certain aspects of the tradition have attracted a great deal of attention, while other aspects have been practically ignored. Though the tradition of Sanskrit aesthetic speculation has had many, diverse currents, only one of them has received any significant attention, and that tradition has been recognized early on as *the* tradition of Sanskrit aesthetics. The current I have in mind is called the *rasa-dhvani* (rapture-suggestion) theory of aesthetics, which found its finest expression in Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka* (Light on Suggestion) (9th century A.D.) and in Abhinavagupta's commentaries on that text and on the *Nāṭya-śāstra* (Treatise on Drama) (4th-5th centuries A.D.). For example, two eminent scholars in the field, Masson and Patwardhan, have written:

There can be little doubt that Abhinava is the greatest name in Sanskrit literary criticism, along with Ānandavardhana, ...<sup>2</sup>

and

For later writers on Sanskrit aesthetics, there is no more important name than Abhinava.<sup>3</sup>

It would seem natural, therefore, when looking for the sources of Rūpa Gosvāmin's sacred aesthetic, to locate him among the numerous later writers of aesthetic treatises who were under Abhinava's influence. In fact, Masson and Patwardhan draw that conclusion:

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<sup>1</sup>The preference among western and western-trained scholars for the aesthetics of Abhinavagupta probably has two sources. The first source is naturally enough the pre-existing preference in favor of Abhinava held by most of the native *paṇḍitas* who first taught western scholars about Sanskrit aesthetics. Their primary text was either the *Kāvya-prakāśa* (12th century CE) or the *Sāhitya-darpaṇa*, both of which show Abhinava's influence. The second is the recognition of the fact that, among the various aesthetic theories in India, Abhinava's is most similar to the Aristotelian, contemplative aesthetics that has long dominated in the Western aesthetics.

<sup>2</sup>Masson and Patwardhan, *Aesthetic Rapture* (Poona: Deccan College, 1970), 1:3.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

It seems to us that the whole of the Bengal Vaiṣṇava school of poetics (and not only poetics, but philosophy as well) was heavily influenced by the teachings of Abhinavagupta and the tradition he follows, though nobody writing on the Bengal school has noticed this fact or tried to follow its lead. It is true that the Gosvāmins do not quote Abhinava directly, but we think his influence is quite clear.<sup>4</sup>

This rather strong statement sums up the thinking of most of the scholars who have worked on Sanskrit aesthetic theory. The fact that, as Masson and Patwardhan have observed, nobody has noticed the influence of Abhinava on Rūpa Gosvāmin previously can be easily understood if we recognize that other writers, as we shall see, have thought it a foregone conclusion and too obvious to dwell on. There appear to be two main opinions operating here: (1) that the tradition of Sanskrit aesthetics is synonymous with the aesthetic of Abhinavagupta and (2) that Abhinavagupta's tradition became dominant throughout India quite early because of the popularity of texts which markedly bear its influence, texts such as the *Kāvya-prakāśa* (Manifestation of Poetry) by Mammaṭa Bhaṭṭa (12th cent.) and the *Sāhitya-darpaṇa* (Mirror of Literature) by Viśvanātha (14th cent.). From these two ideas it is a short and easy step to the claim that Rūpa, writing in the 16th century and being a well educated man, must have known of and been influenced by the tradition of Sanskrit aesthetics that originated in the vale of Kāśmīra.

As an example of how these opinions have operated in determining Rūpa's relationship to the earlier aesthetic tradition, let us look at a passage from S.K. De's classic treatment of the early history of the Caitanya sect, the sect to which Rūpa belonged, in his *Early History of the Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Bengal*:

For the working out of this novel idea [thinking of bhakti as rasa] the whole apparatus of orthodox Sanskrit Poetics was ingeniously utilized, although the orthodox rhetorician himself would not regard Bhakti as Rasa, but as Bhāva. Our poet rhetorician [Rūpa], who was also an ardent devotee, follows very closely (even though his peculiar theme makes him depart in detail) the general outlines of the orthodox scheme of Poetics, adopting its main ideas and technicalities, but making them applicable to the conception of emotional Bhakti.<sup>5</sup>

By "orthodox Sanskrit Poetics," De means essentially the Kashmiri school of aesthetics as embodied in the writings of Abhinavagupta and Mammaṭa

<sup>4</sup>ibid., 1:4.

<sup>5</sup>S.K. De, *Early History of the Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Bengal* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1962), pp. 167-68.

Bhaṭṭa. Thus, De portrays Rūpa as an adapter of the orthodox aesthetic tradition which, as a result of the two opinions mentioned above, is synonymous with Abhinava's aesthetics and was dominant throughout India in Rūpa's time.

Masson and Patwardhan notice a glaring problem with their claim that Rūpa was heavily influenced by Abhinavagupta, however, when they remark that the Gosvāmins, particularly Rūpa Gosvāmin, never quote Abhinava. Though they attempt to downplay this problem by opposing it with the evidence of their own examination of the texts, in a writer like Rūpa, who faithfully quotes his sources by name whenever he can, the fact that he has never quoted Abhinava cannot be taken so lightly. On the other hand, it is certain that Rūpa knew the *Sāhitya-darpaṇa*, because he mentions it in the beginning of his work on dramaturgy, the *Nāṭaka-candrikā* (Moonbeam of Drama).<sup>6</sup> Since the influence of Abhinavagupta is evident in the *Sāhitya-darpaṇa*, Rūpa must have been exposed to some aspects of his thought. Unfortunately, however, Rūpa disapproves of method of the *Sāhitya-darpaṇa*, and though certain elements of its aesthetic theory have found their way into Rūpa's system, it cannot be said that he followed it very closely in the formulation of his sacred aesthetics.<sup>7</sup> The relationship of the *Sāhitya-darpaṇa* to the "orthodox" tradition of Abhinavagupta is somewhat problematic, however, since it incorporates ideas contrary to those of that tradition and often openly criticizes that tradition.

Rūpa's failure to mention the *Kāvya-prakāśa*, which has been one of the main vehicles of the tradition of Abhinavagupta, is rather puzzling, though, and one is tempted, as a result, to speculate about the chronology of the spread of this important text to Bengal. As it turns out, the manuscript remains and commentarial tradition of the *Kāvya-prakāśa* in Bengal appear to be fairly late. The earliest surviving and dated manuscript of the text in Bengali script comes at the end of the 15th century and the earliest identifiable Bengali commentator on the text is Paramānanda Cakravartin, a scholar of Nyāya who was a contemporary of Sārvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya, Bengal's first great neo-logician, and who therefore lived towards the end of the 15th century, too. Moreover, he may have been the Paramānanda whom Sanātana recognizes as his teacher, in which case Rūpa may have studied with him as well.<sup>8</sup> It is possible, however, that the *Kāvya-prakāśa* entered the intellectual horizon of the Bengal after Rūpa's education was complete which, if our chronology of Rūpa's life is correct, took place in the last two decades of the 15th century. It was about this time that Raghunātha śiromaṇi, traditionally recognized as a student of Sārvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya, succeeded in establishing the independence of the Bengali school of Navya-nyāya (Neo-logic) from that of the Mithilā school and gained with that independence the right to make copies of the important texts of the school, write commentaries on them and grant titles.

<sup>6</sup>Rūpa Gosvāmin, *Nāṭaka-candrikā* (Vārāṇasī: Chowkhambha Sanskrit Series Office, 1964), verse 2, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>See the Appendix for a discussion of R-upa's life.

One is tempted to conjecture that among the texts that came with the Navya-nyāya school into Bengal was the *Kāvya-prakāśa*, which had enjoyed a long commentarial tradition in Mithilā and Orissa since the time of Śrīdhara (13th century). The profusion of commentaries on the *Kāvya-prakāśa* by Bengali logicians after Paramānanda and the complete absence of any before him lend added support to the conjecture that the text came late to Bengal and thus Rūpa may not have studied it. More will be said on these points later, however. For now, suffice it to say that there appear to be grounds for doubting the validity of the opinion that the Kāśmīrī school of Sanskrit aesthetics was known and accepted throughout India well before the 15th and 16th centuries. To put this in another way, there seems to be no reason to believe that Rūpa had anything more than an cursory or indirect knowledge of Abhinavagupta's system of aesthetics. He certainly had access to Abhinavagupta in the discussion of rasa in the *Sāhitya-darpana*. In addition, there is one section of the discussion of rasa in another work which Rūpa knew and prized called the *Rasārṇava-sudhākara* by Si.mhabhūpāla, in which a theory is given that appears to be Abhinavagupta's. Si.mhabhūpāla, expresses his indifference towards this theory, however, and closes his discussion of rasa with a statement of his own characterization of rasa which, he says, agrees with that of the followers of Bharata, the author of the *Nāṭya-śāstra*.<sup>9</sup> This is the only other instance one can cite with certainty of Rūpa's coming into contact with the thought of Abhinavagupta and one senses that Rūpa seconded Si.mhabhūpāla's indifference towards Abhinavagupta's position.

Before challenging the first opinion mentioned above, which identifies the whole of Sanskrit aesthetics with that of Abhinavagupta, and exploring some of the other currents in the Sanskrit aesthetic tradition that may have exerted greater influence on Rūpa, let us see how the preference for the aesthetic of Abhinavagupta has affected the way scholars have interpreted Rūpa's idea of rasa. First of all, what is Abhinava's idea of rasa according to the scholars who hold these opinions? S.K. De gives us a simplified and concise description of rasa in his *History of Sanskrit Poetics*:

To state it briefly and without any technicality, there is in the mind a latent impression of feelings which we once went through (or which we acquired from previous births), and this is aroused when we read a poem which describes similar things. By universal sympathy or community of feeling we become part and parcel of the same feeling and imagine ourselves in that condition. Thus the feeling is raised to a state of relish, called rasa, in which lies the essence of poetic enjoyment.<sup>10</sup>

The words "universal sympathy" and "community of feeling" provide only

<sup>9</sup>Si.mhabhūpāla, *Rasārṇava-sudhākara* (Sāgaram: Saṃskṛtapariṣad, 1969), p. 104.

<sup>10</sup>S.K. De, *History of Sanskrit Poetics*, reprint of 2nd. ed. (Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Ltd., 1976), 2:134.

a glimpse of the impersonal or depersonalized nature of Abhinavagupta's notion of the rasa experience. Hiriyanna brings out this aspect of Abhinava's rasa much better in the following passage:

This transcendence of the egoistic self in the contemplation of art profoundly alters the nature of the pleasure derived from it. Being altogether divorced from reference to personal interests, one's own or that of others', art experience is free from all the limitations of common pleasure, due to the prejudices of everyday life such as narrow attachment and envy. In a word, the contemplation being disinterested, the pleasure which it yields will be absolutely pure. This is the significance of its description by Indian writers as "higher pleasure" (para-nirvṛti).<sup>11</sup>

According to this view, the rasa experience involves becoming free of one's mundane identity and temporality which in Indian non-dualism are considered impermanent adjuncts to or limitations of the eternal self (*ātman*). In the experience of art, these adjuncts are loosened and the self briefly becomes unfettered and capable of experiencing its own inherent joy, tinged only by one of a handful of elemental emotional states. As Gerow says:

The play becomes a unique medium for the statement, or clarification, of pure emotional consciousness where the *ātman* [the self] is not perceived in and of itself, but is colored by shadings of its most persistent emotional oppositions: love/hate, and so on.<sup>12</sup>

This temporary relaxation of personal identity along with its location in space and time is the essential element of Abhinavagupta's idea of rasa, and consequently when he discusses the impediments to the rasa experience, one notes that they all involve some form of barrier to this relaxation.<sup>13</sup> The special value of poetry and drama for the rasa experience is that they provide the only context in which such a relaxation can occur.<sup>14</sup> This is so because of the manner in which these forms of art "generalize" (*sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*) their content, creating an imaginative world in which the members of an audience may forget their quotidian identities. Those familiar with Western aesthetics will readily recognize the affinities of this aesthetic view with Kant's "disinterested delight" or Aristotle's notion of universal (as distinct from historical) truth in poetry.

<sup>11</sup>M. Hiriyanna, *Art Experience* (Mysore: Kavyalaya Publishers, 1954), p. 32.

<sup>12</sup>Edwin Gerow, "Rasa as a Category of Literary Criticism," in *Sanskrit Drama in Performance*, edited by Rachel Van M. Baumer and James R. Brandon (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1981), p. 237.

<sup>13</sup>Abhinavagupta, *Abhinavabhāratī* in *Nāṭya-śāstram*, ed. by M. Ramakrishna Kavi, 2nd. edition (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1956), 1:280.

<sup>14</sup>Strictly speaking this is not true for Abhinavagupta. He believed that religious ritual also provided a context within which this relaxation of personal identity could occur.

What happens when this conception of aesthetic experience is applied to the sacred aesthetic of Rūpa, an exponent of one of the most radically personal forms of religious devotion to have developed on Indian soil? The following passage is from David Kinsley's *The Divine Player*:

Because *bhakti* is considered a *rasa*, it is also considered impersonal, as in aesthetic theory. This requires of the devotee, therefore, a certain impersonalization. He is required, as is the aesthetic connoisseur, to lose himself in the mood of the drama, to resist involving his own personal desires and emotions. Before he can soar to the heights of all-consuming love for Kṛṣṇa he must forget himself, disassociate himself from those particular circumstances and feelings that make him unique. *Bhakti*, like *rasa* with which it is identified, is not understood to be a feeling or emotion that belongs to the realm of the sensual, that can be "felt," that can ever belong to particular individuals. *Bhakti*, like *rasa*, seems to be a thing in itself, an essence that exists apart from any individual but that can be experienced by individuals once they have divested themselves of individuality.<sup>15</sup>

Does the application of this aesthetic make any sense in the context of the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition which places the personal god, Kṛṣṇa, above the impersonal absolute, Brahman, and which seeks to establish a relationship with that deity that consists of some form of passionate love? Can there be a personal devotion that requires "impersonalization," or a love that is devoid of all elements that makes the lover unique or special? Can there be such a thing as a "disinterested" love? Does it make sense to talk of emotions that cannot be felt by individuals or individuals that can only experience certain forms of emotion when they have lost their individuality? That the characteristic experience of *bhakti*, as it was understood in the Caitanya tradition, should be impersonal, seems, at the very least, unlikely. For Kinsley, however, the only difference between the aesthetic *rasa* and devotional rapture (*bhakti-rasa*) is that the latter is permanent and "transforms the devotee into a heavenly being."<sup>16</sup> This, unfortunately, only makes things worse. Now we are faced with individuals ("heavenly beings") who are permanently divested of individuality. Surely this an odd state of affairs that should have raised some doubt. Kinsley, faced with this troublesome concept *rasa*, has merely plugged in a formula easily available in discussions on Sanskrit aesthetic theory and did the best he could to pretend it made sense.

Another important study of the work of Rūpa Gosvāmin has fallen into a somewhat different difficulty because of attempting to understand Rūpa's aesthetics from the point of view of Abhinavagupta's aesthetics. This is the work of Donna Wulff entitled *Drama as a Mode of Religious Realization: The*

<sup>15</sup>David R. Kinsley, *The Divine Player: a Study of Kṛṣṇa Līlā* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979), pp. 154-55.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 153-54.

*Vidagdhamādhava of Rūpa Gosvāmin.* In one place, she describes the effect of dramatic portrayal of the *līlās* (sports) of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa on an audience:

It is such an experience of total absorption in the eternal *līlā* of Kṛṣṇa, of complete self-forgetfulness through communal participation in intense emotions toward the Lord like those expressed on the stage, that is the cherished goal of this form of Kṛṣṇa devotion; and this, at least for a few brief hours, the *līlās* make possible.<sup>17</sup>

We see here the characteristics of Abhinava's conception of *rasa* in the "self-forgetfulness" and "communal participation." These correspond to the relaxation of individual identity and the generalization described by De and the others. Wulff also points out the importance of dramatic representation in bringing about the experience that is the "cherished goal" of devotion to Kṛṣṇa. She remarks in another place:

We have already observed that Rūpa's exposition of *bhakti-rasa* in the final three divisions of his *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* is based squarely on the dramatic theory of the classical Sanskrit theater.<sup>18</sup>

It is evident from other sections of her work that by "classical Sanskrit theater" Wulff has in mind some notion of the aesthetics of Abhinavagupta. By maintaining this direction in her approach, however, Wulff directly collides with Rūpa's *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, as she herself notices. She writes:

In view of the fundamentally dramatic structure of Rūpa's theory of *bhakti-rasa*, one would expect him to give great importance to dramas representing the eternal *līlā*. It is therefore startling to discover his only explicit statement about the devotional value of drama and poetry:

When love (*rati*) has newly dawned in a devotee of Hari, poetry and drama are efficacious in making [Kṛṣṇa and all associated with him] the *vibhāvas* [and other dramatic elements that combine to produce *rasa*]. Good devotees, [however,] taste *rasa* at the slightest mention of Hari; for this, the power of their love (*rati*) alone is sufficient cause.

Taken at face value, this statement seems to minimize or even deny the devotional value of drama and poetry for all but the beginner on the path of *bhakti*.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Donna Wulff, *Drama as a Mode of Religious Realization* (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1977), pp. 44-45.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 71-72.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

Wulff at this point might have realized that something was wrong with the assumptions she had brought to Rūpa's theory. Instead she says: "Yet such an interpretation is contradicted by the sheer weight of the evidence for Rūpa's valuing of both poetry and drama,"<sup>20</sup> and proceeds to attempt to support her position throughout the rest of her second chapter. She concludes:

In the light of the material that we have just surveyed, which demonstrates unequivocally that drama lies at the very heart of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava devotion, especially as that devotion has been interpreted and shaped by Rūpa's theory, it seems utterly inconceivable that Rūpa would limit the significance of drama to mere beginners.<sup>21</sup>

Yet Rūpa does say, and not just once, that drama and poetry are not the sole causes of the experience of sacred rapture (*bhakti-rasa*).<sup>22</sup> Such a statement would be unthinkable in a follower of Abhinavagupta because, though drama and poetry are not causes of *rasa*, in Abhinavagupta's view, they are still the necessary and only contexts in which aesthetic rapture can arise.<sup>23</sup>

If Abhinavagupta's aesthetic has failed to show kinship with Rūpa's sacred aesthetic, what other possible sources are there? Is it true that Sanskrit aesthetics is synonymous with the aesthetics of Abhinavagupta and his followers? These are the questions that must be asked if one wants to find a perspective that does justice to Rūpa's theory. Abhinava's commentary on the *rasa-sūtra*<sup>24</sup> of the *Nāṭya-śāstra* makes it clear that, before him, there were a number of writers who had different theories on *rasa*. Did any of these theorists establish traditions that survived Abhinava's critique and partial absorption of their views? The predominating view among many scholars is that Abhinavagupta's discussion of *rasa* in his commentary on the *Nāṭya-śāstra*, which pointed out the shortcomings in his predecessor's characterizations of *rasa*, eclipsed those theories and brought an end to those lines of thought. After Abhinava, a writer named Mahimabhaṭṭa wrote the *Vyakti-viveka* (Analysis of Suggestion), in which he leveled an attack on the concept of *dhvani* (suggestion) so essential to Abhinava's understanding of *rasa*. Mahimabhaṭṭa sought to replace *dhvani* as the vehicle for the expression of *rasa* with *anumāna* (inference), and thus represented a divergent current. In addition, there is Dhanañjaya, whose work on dramaturgy, called the *Daśa-rūpaka* (Ten Forms of Drama) views *rasa* in a way different from Abhinava. Furthermore, Rūpa cites this text on at least one occasion and, as we shall see, appears to have taken some aspects of his system from it. Did any of these writers, however,

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>22</sup>Rūpa Gosvāmin, *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* at 2.5.90-91 and again at 2.5.96-97.

<sup>23</sup>On the causality of the play with respect to *rasa* see Gerow's discussion in "Rasa as a Category of Literary Criticism," pp. 237-238.

<sup>24</sup>The *rasa-sūtra*, or aphorism on *rasa*, is the defining statement on the nature of *rasa*. Naturally, it is suitably obscure and so has provoked centuries of debate on its exact scope and meaning. The *rasa-sūtra* will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

exert a major influence on Rūpa's thinking? None of them appears to have established strong traditions in the sense of a corpus of texts and writers that have accepted and further developed their ideas.

Gerow has suggested another possibility: "What we find is almost a literal return to the form of Bharata's original dramatic criticism."<sup>25</sup> He, thus, regards Rūpa's thought as a revival of the aesthetic in Bharata's *Nāṭya-śāstra*. It is true that Rūpa quotes Bharata a number of times in his *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* and *Uj्ज्वाला-nīlamanī* and expresses his ideas on rasa in a way that is more in agreement with Bharata's perhaps more simple and straightforward aesthetic. Rūpa also sees an opposition between Bharata, whom he calls the *muni* (sage), and Viśvanātha, the author of the *Sāhitya-darpaṇa*, and claims sympathy with the view of the former.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, most of the verses that he attributes to Bharata cannot now be found in the extant versions of Bharata's *Nāṭya-śāstra*. What is more, some doctrines are ascribed to Bharata that are patently anachronistic, such as doctrines of generalization (*sādhāraṇīkṛti*) and of the excellence of extra-marital love.<sup>27</sup>

Some other scholars have offered the interesting suggestion that Rūpa and the other Vaiṣṇava writers on aesthetics were more directly influenced by the rasa theory of Bhoja, king of Dhārā in Malwar (Rājasthāna). Bhoja (11th century) was a younger contemporary of Abhinavagupta and independently developed a theory of the nature of rasa that is quite different, one might even say radically different, from Abhinava's. His influence seems to have been felt mostly in South India, and one can even discern what might be loosely called a tradition of works and thinkers who have developed his ideas. Sivaprasad Bhattacharyya in his ground-breaking essay on the topic, concluded:

Whatever be the importance of Bhoja as an authority on Sanskrit poetics, he has thus been cited or referred to by East Indian writers on this subject continuously from the 12 century onwards as late as the sixteenth century. ... Indeed it is a fact that Bengal writers paid less heed to very many of the accepted views of the early Kasmir poeticists on the poetic of rasa than to the contribution of Bhoja.<sup>28</sup>

Here again, however, we are faced with the puzzling fact that Rūpa does not quote Bhoja even once. As mentioned earlier, Rūpa was fond of a work that shows some of Bhoja's influence, the *Rasārṇava-sudhākara* by Siṃhabhūpāla, a 14th century South Indian king of Karnatak. Rūpa's remarks about this work reveal that he knew it well and was fond of it.<sup>29</sup> Another work which was strongly influenced by Bhoja and which was popular in Bengal since the 12th

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>26</sup>Rūpa, *Nāṭya-candrikā*, verses 1 and 2.

<sup>27</sup>See Rūpa Gosvāmin *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 2.5.103 and *Uj्ज्वाला-nīlamanī*, 1.20.

<sup>28</sup>Sivaprasad Bhattacharyya, "Bhoja's Rasa-ideology and its Influence on Bengal Rasa-sastra," *Journal of the Oriental Institute* (University of Baroda) 13, no. 2 (December, 1963): 106-19.

<sup>29</sup>Rūpa, *Nāṭya-candrikā*, verse 1.

century is the encyclopedic Agni Purāṇa. Rūpa quotes verses from the section of this Purāṇa that deals with aesthetics and literary criticism (chapters 337 to 348) at least once as well.<sup>30</sup>

Another scholar, S. N. Ghosal Sastri, has developed the idea that there were two separate rasa traditions in India, which he calls the mono-rasa and the multi-rasa streams, or alternately the Neo-rasa and the Scholastic-rasa schools. He places Rūpa in the mono-rasa stream and relates him to a tradition of earlier writers which features Bhoja as its most prominent member. He says:

In Rūpa Gosvāmin's Rhetorics, the direct influence of Bharata, Dhanañjaya, Śāradātanaya, Śiṅgabhūpāla etc. [is] marked clearly; but his indebtedness to Bhojadeva's *Śṛṅgāra-prakāśa* is more prominent.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, a distinction is made between those who claim that there are many rasas and those who say that there is only one rasa which appears in different forms. The aesthetics of Abhinavagupta and his followers fall into the first group, and those of Bhoja, Śāradātanaya (13th century), and Rūpa fall into the second. Though both Sivaprasad Bhattacharyya and S. N. Ghosal Sastri tend to dissolve the differences between the various theories that postulate a single rasa, it is important to keep in mind that, according to some writers, the only rasa is the rapture of pathos (*karuṇa*); according to some, it is the rapture of astonishment (*adbhuta* or *camatkāra*); according to others, it is the rapture of peace (*śānta*) and, finally, according to some, it is rapture of eros (*śṛṅgāra*). These represent different views of what is essential in the aesthetic experience and cannot be unreflectively collapsed into each other. In other words, there is not one viewpoint that advocates a single rasa aesthetic, but several of them. Among these various views, Bhoja's view takes erotic rapture (*śṛṅgāra*) as the essential rasa and identifies all the other rasas as variations or manifestations of it.<sup>32</sup> Considering the centrality of erotic rapture for Rūpa's sacred aesthetic, the suggestion that Bhoja has been a major influence on his thought becomes more plausible.

Thus, it appears that both of the opinions that have informed studies of Sanskrit aesthetics are questionable. Perhaps alongside the tradition that eventually became dominant there were other vibrant aesthetic traditions that exerted much more influence on Indian aesthetics for much longer than previously has been thought, one of the chief among which was that of Bhojarāja. Moreover, perhaps Abhinavagupta's tradition was not as widely and evenly spread as early as has been thought.

In spite of the dissenting opinions of the two scholars, Sivaprasad Bhattacharyya and S. N. Ghosal Sastri, the general outlook of scholars in the field

<sup>30</sup>Rūpa, *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 2.1.15.

<sup>31</sup>S.N. Ghosal Sastri, *Rasacandrikā & Studies in Divine Aesthetics* (Santiniketan: Visva-bharati, 1974), p. 42.

<sup>32</sup>Bhoja, *Sarasvatī-kañṭhābharaṇa*, ed. by Anundoram Barooah (Gauhati: Publication Board, Repr. 1969), 5.33, p. 240.

has remained unchanged. De, giving full voice to the bias that first drew scholarly attention to Abhinavagupta and his tradition, categorically dismisses Bhojarāja and those whose theories resemble his from the realm of aesthetics altogether. He says, referring to Bhoja, the Agni Purāna, Bhoja's followers, and Rūpa:

With the exception of the *Ujvala-nīlamanī*, which attempts to bring erotico-religious ideas to bear upon the general theme of Rasa, these specialized treatises have, however, very little importance from the speculative point of view; and as they belong properly to the province of Erotics rather than Poetics, treatment of them should be sought elsewhere.<sup>33</sup>

In the concluding chapter of this study I will attempt to characterize the peculiar orientation of Western aesthetics that is behind such an exclusion.

Another important study of Rūpa's sacred aesthetic is David Haberman's *Acting as a Way of Salvation: Rāgānugā Bhakti Sādhana*. Noting the suggestions of Bhattacharyya and Ghosal Sastri, he writes:

Abhinava's influence should not, however, be overestimated; other influences were equally strong (e.g., Bhoja and Viśvanātha). Furthermore, in comparing the religio-aesthetic theories of Rūpa and Abhinava, there are fundamental differences which must be accounted for.<sup>34</sup>

Haberman, then, sees the influences of Abhinava and Bhoja on Rūpa as equally important. He never mentions what exactly Bhoja contributed to the aesthetics of Rūpa, however, nor does he give us any hint as to what are the fundamental differences between Rūpa and Abhinavagupta that must be accounted for. Haberman, presumably, wants to say that Rūpa received from Bhoja the ideas of the centrality of erotic rapture (*śṛṅgāra*) and of the possibility that an actor may experience rasa in a drama, this latter idea being essential to Haberman's thesis. The former idea has already been suggested and seems quite plausible. The suggestion that an actor in Bhoja's aesthetic can experience rasa is misleading, however, and perhaps even incorrect. Bhoja, while not denying the possibility, never affirms the point. For him, the primary locus of the experience of rasa are the original models for the play, the hero and heroine themselves, and not the actors.

Unfortunately, Haberman does not specify how Abhinavagupta has influenced Rūpa either, except in suggesting that some of the terminology Rūpa

<sup>33</sup>De, *History of Sanskrit Poetics*, 2:268.

<sup>34</sup>David Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation: Rāgānugā Bhakti Sādhana* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1984), p. 135. A revision of this work has been published by Oxford University Press (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

uses such as *camatkāra* (astonishment), etc. was derived from him. These terms, however, were part of the common language of aesthetics and of poetry itself and need not be taken, contrary to Gnoli, as the technical or specialized terms found in Abhinava's thought.

From these preliminary reflections, it is evident that the problem of placing Rūpa in his proper context is far from resolved. I shall argue that Rūpa was more influenced by Bhoja and his South Indian followers than by Abhinavagupta, in spite of Masson and Patwardhan's "but we think his [Abhinavagupta's] influence is quite clear." The footnote they provide for that statement merely leads us to a verse in which Rūpa claims that Kṛṣṇa is established as the highest divinity by means of *rasa*.<sup>35</sup> Nothing about the verse indicates whether this is *rasa* as Abhinava understood it or *rasa* as Bhoja understood it. In order to gain, therefore, a better understanding of Rūpa's sacred aesthetic and its culmination in sacred erotic rapture (*madhura-bhakti-rasa*), we must take a deeper look into its roots via a more detailed study of the aesthetic theories of Abhinavagupta and Bhoja and their respective traditions.

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<sup>35</sup>Rūpa, *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 1.2.59, p.53.