THE LÄSYÄNGAS IN BHARATA'S THEATRE TREATISE

TWO EXPOSITIONS, TWO REALITIES

Both in Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra and in the Abhinavabhāratī, its commentary by Abhinavagupta, there are some concepts made conspicuous to the reader's attention through their many occurrences. Among them, the lāsyāṅgas, dealt with in no less than two long accounts in the Nāṭyaśāstra — namely: one in chapter XIX, the itivṛttādhyāya, treating of the plot, and the other headed tālādhyāya, or rhythm chapter — and celebrated in many a place by the Abhinavabhāratī for their beauty, theatricality and absolute perfection.

For after all, why should there be two expositions on the lāsyāṅgas in Bharata's treatise? As a vigilant reader, but, most of all, as an accomplished exegete, Abhinavagupta reveals and demonstrates that the answer is to be found in the Nāṭyaśāstra itself, in that chapter XIX where the lāsyāṅgas are being first investigated. Such is the answer: the lāsyāṅgas in chapter XIX are but fragments (indifferently termed amśa or bhāga in the Abhinavabhāratī) borrowed from those lāsyāṅgas fully stated in chapter XXXI. Abhinavagupta's thesis is a daring one, insofar as no commentator before him would have contemplated such an idea — which he supports by putting forward two arguments of a different nature.

The first one is rooted in kārikā 138 which closes, in chapter XIX, the development about the lāsyāṅgas, and whereby the reader is duly warned by Bharata himself against the fragmentary character both of the definitions which have just been given and of the object just defined. The text reads as follows:

eteśāṁ lāsyavidhau vijñeyam laksanam prayogajñaiḥ
tad ihaiva tu yan noktaṁ prasaṅgavinivṛttahetos2 tu

"It is in the exposition on the lāsya [in chapter XXXI] that those who have a knowledge of representation must derive the exact definition of these [lāsyāṅgas]. The reason for not formulating that definition at this stage is the desire to avoid any redundancy."

Abhinavagupta thus comments:
"And yet, it will be objected, that [läsyāṅga] which benefits from fragments (bhāga) [borrowed] from the [full-fledged] lāsyāṅga is the only one that has been stated here; but their essential nature (svarūpa) should be expounded [too]. Fearing the objection, he says: 'It is in the lāsyā technique that, from the latter [the exact definition] . . .’

The second argument put forward by Abhinavagupta while concluding is of a formal order: the lāsyāṅgas of chapter XIX can but be stage adaptations of the lāsyāṅgas of chapter XXXI, and their given definition can only be a fragmentary one, insofar as Bharata, in the itivṛttadhvyāya, does not conform to the usual protocol of exposition. For, after enumerating the ten lāsyāṅgas, and reasserting that there are ten of them here as there are ten of them there — meaning in the account of the lāsyā — Bharata directly proceeds and defines the geyapada (kā 121) which comes first in the list.

But then the canonical exposition order demands, in the case of real definitions— that is complete ones—, that they should be preceded by this solemn warning:

\[ \text{etesāṁ lakṣaṇaṁ vyākhyāsyे} \]

“I am going to state their definition.”

One may easily get convinced of this by referring to chapter XXXI, kā 330, in which things precisely occur as expected:

\[ \text{lāsyam ity eva yat pūrvaṁ mayā vah parikīrtitam} \]
\[ \text{lakṣaṇaṁ tasya vaksyāmi prayogam ca yathākramam} \]

“What I formerly dealt with when I wrote: ‘This is what the lāsyā is’, I am going to give its definition as well as the order of its performance.”

Therefore — Abhinavagupta comments — the complete definition of the lāsyāṅgas is to be found in chapter XXXI, whereas chapter XIX only offers a fragmentary definition suiting the fragmentary character of its object.

Otherwise, one would have to admit that the account — like an elephant driven to madness — had broken its chains, and so that the text could have run out of Bharata’s control, which is simply unthinkable.

Such is the key necessary to the understanding of the lāsyāṅgas: the