



PROBING THE STINT OF RASA: NĀTYAŚĀSTRA AND FORMS OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

The theory of Rasa has been a fascinating term both in performing and visual arts. Though the origin of the term date back historically enveloping millenniums; the application of the theory is so very axiomatic till date. While defining drama, the Sanskrit legend Bharata Muni says, “Nātya is trailokyānukarāṇa”, which means, “Drama is an imitation of the three worlds”. The major text dealing with Rasa is Nātyaśāstra, penned by Bharat Muni. The paper tries to heave light on the concept of Rasa and how Rasa finds its application in each and every form of art, evoking emotion in the reader or audience and helping them to transcend the mortal world to a world of spiritual and moral consciousness.

KEYWORDS: Aesthetics, Bharata Muni, Nātyaśāstra, Rasa, Rasa in Arts

INTRODUCTION

Rasa is an Indian concept connoting the aesthetic flavour of literature, art and music. Rasa literally means, ‘essence’, ‘juice’ or ‘taste’, which evokes an indescribable emotion in the reader or audience. The flavours of Rasa are crafted by the author but experienced by the reader. It is relished through the evoking of the emotions by the *sahrdaya* or the sensitive people with heart. Rasas ostracize dryness to impute flavour. Rasas are created by *bhavas* or the state of mind.

“Rasa was originally a physiological term which appeared in ancient medical literature and meant the physical quality of taste and also any one of six tastes: sweet, acid, salt, bitter, astringent and insipid. These six kinds of tastes characterize the six bodily humours which are known by their tastes” (Dace, 1963).

Bharat Muni has dedicated a section (Chapter 6), in his Sanskrit text Nātyaśāstra during the 1st millennium. Interestingly enough, the complete exposition of the concept of Rasa can be found in its exposition to the performing arts. This was further manifested by Kashmiri Shaivite Philosopher Abhinavagupta (c. 1000 CE). According to him, Indian dramas find a determining unmasking of the Rasas which demonstrates

the persistence of a protracted standing aesthetic tradition adorning the rituals and culture of India. Nātyaśāstra elucidates that the appurtenant effect of performing arts is entertainment but cannot be considered as the primary goal. The primary goal of performing arts is to commute transcending the audience into an incommensurable reality. This reality would envelope wonder and bliss, magnifying the recognition of own consciousness and at the same time, assume reflecting on morality and spirituality. The text introduces its discussion with *Rasa Sutra*, a sutra in Indian aesthetics:

“Rasa is produced from a combination of Determinants (*vibhava*), Consequents (*anubhava*) and Transitory States (*vyabharibhava*).”

— Nātyaśāstra 6.109 (~200 BCE–200 CE), Translator: Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe

The concept of *Rasa* is fundamental, imperative and indispensable to the forms of Indian visual and performing arts which includes literature, dance, theatre, music, painting, sculpture etc. Although, there is difference between how the rasas are interpreted and implemented in various forms of art. There are eight major schools of thought which can be vividly distinguished in the Indian aesthetic tradition:

**Table 1**

Sl. No	School	Theoretician(s)	Text(s)
1	Rasa	Bharata	Nāṭyaśāstra
		Abhinavagupta	Abhinavabhāratī
2	Dhvani	Ānandavardhana	Dhvanyāloka
		Abhinavagupta	Dhvanyālokalōcana
3	Alaṃkāra	Bhāmaha	Kāvyaṅkāra
4	Rīti	Vāmana	Kāvyaṅkārasūtrvṛtti
5	Vakrōkti	Kuntaka	Vakrōktijīvita
6	Aucitya	Kṣēmendra	Aucityavicāracarā
7	Guṇa	Daṇḍin	Kāvyaḍarśa
8	Anumāna	Mahimabhata	Vyaktivivēka

Source: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334710940_Bharata's_Rasa_Sutra_and_the_Theory_of_Rasa_Dhvani

INDIAN CONTRIBUTION TO AESTHETICS:

Indian aesthetics has a long history dating back from 2nd century BC to 17th century AD.

The following are the notable Indian aestheticians and their contributions to the literary world:

Table 2

Sl. No.	Author	Period	Text
1.	Bharata	2 nd Century BC	Nāṭyaśāstra
2	Bhāmaha	7 th Century AD	Kāvyaṅkāra
3	Bhatti	7 th Century AD	Bhāttikāvya
4	Dandin	7 th Century AD	Kāvyaḍarśa
5	Vamana	8 th Century AD	Kāvyaṅkārasūtrvṛtti
6	Udbhata	8 th Century AD	Kāvyaṅkārasaṃgraha
7	Nrpatunga	9 th Century AD	Kavirājamārga
8	Rudrata	9 th Century AD	Kāvyaṅkāra
9	Anonymous	9 th Century AD	Agnipurāna
10	Anonymous	9 th Century AD	Viṣṇudharmōttārapurāna
11	Ānandavardhana	9 th Century AD	Dhvanyāloka
12	Bhattanāyaka	10 th Century AD	Hridayadarpaṇa
13	Bhatta Tauta	10 th Century AD	Kāvyaakautuka
14	Dhananjaya	10 th Century AD	Daśarūpaka
15	Abhinavagupta	10 th Century AD	Abhinavabhāratī, Dhvanyālokalōcana
16	Rājaśekhara	10 th Century AD	Kāvyaṃimamsa
17	Kuntaka	11 th Century AD	Vakrōktijīvita
18	Mahimabhata	11 th Century AD	Vyaktivivēka
19	Bhōja	11 th Century AD	Śṛṅgāraprakāśa, Sarasvatikandābharāṇa
20	Kṣēmendra	11 th Century AD	Aucityavicāracarā, Kavikandābharāṇa
21	Mammata	11 th Century AD	Kāvyaḍarśa
22	Hemacandra	11 th Century AD	Śṛṅgāratilaka, Kāvyaṅśāsana
23	Ruyyaka	12 th Century AD	Alaṃkārasarvasva, Alaṃkārasūtra
24	Jayadeva	13 th Century AD	Candrāloka
25	Vidyādhara	1290-1320 AD	Ekāvali
26	Viṣwanādhā	14 th Century AD	Sāhityadarpaṇa
27	Brahmadatta	Unknown	Rasamanjari
28	Rūpāgōswami	Unknown	Ujjwalanīlāmaṇi, Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu
29	Appayya Dīkṣita	Unknown	Kuvalayānanda
30	Panditarāja Jagannādhā	17 th Century AD	Rasagaṅgādhara

Source: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334710940_Bharata's_Rasa_Sutra_and_the_Theory_of_Rasa_Dhvani

**HISTORICAL ROOTS OF NĀTYAŚĀSTRA**

The *Nātyaśāstra*'s original date of composition is unknown, and is purported traditionally to *Adibharata*, a 36,000 verse Vedic composition. However, no corroborating evidence of the text was found later. The text, *Nātyaśāstra* might have been started to be composed during the 1st millennium BCE, which eventually expanded over time. According to the view of most of the scholars, the first imperforate version of the text likely encompassed between 200 BCE to 200 CE.

Rasasūtra composed by Bharata Muni is considered to be the linchpin of Indian aesthetics. *Rasa*, the Sanskrit word has different and wide-ranging meaning which include 'sap', 'taste', 'relish', 'water', 'flavour', 'juice', 'essence' and 'sentiments.' *The Upaniṣads* use the term to mean 'Brahman'. *Rasa* is the manifestation of the creative and visionary experience of the poet. It also ensues aesthetic relish of the reader. The reader personalises complex emotional states acquainted in the poem. Thus, poetics is nothing but the subjective experience of the author and reader, and at the same time, the objective structure and focus of the poem.

"*Rasa may be said to be the original emotion transfigured by aesthetic delight*" (Dace, 1963).

Bharata Muni defines drama as, "*Nātya is trailokyānukaraṇa*", which means, "*Drama is an imitation of the three worlds.*" For him, drama is an imitation or *anukarana* and narration or *anukirtana* of the actions of the world. Bharata Muni's *Nātyaśāstra* is the basic text dealing with the theory of *Rasa*, while *Abhinavagupta's Abhinavabhāratī* turns to be the next elemental text which contains a commentary on the former.

What Bharata formulated as the evocation of *Rasa* can be stated thus and further explained as:

Vibhāvānubhāva vyabhicāri saṃyogād rasanīṣpattih

Vibhāva + Anubhāva + Vyabhicāribhāva + Sthāyibhāva = *Rasa*
Hence, *Rasa* can be realised by the amalgamation of vibhāva, Anubhāva and Vyabhicāribhāva with Sthāyibhāva.

Sthāyibhāva is the permanent emotion and does not find a suit in the cryptic and veiled definition.

Rasa is propounded in the Vedic literature. The implication is in an undocked aesthetic sense. The *Aitareya Brahmana* in chapter VI, states that *Nātyaśāstra*, subsuming the *Rasa* theory of Hinduism are the oldest of the surviving manuscripts:

"*Now (he) glorifies the arts, the arts are refinement of the self (atma-samskrti).*"

With these the worshipper recreates his self, that is made of rhythms, meters."

— *Aitareya Brahmana* 6.27 (~1000 BCE), Translator: Arindam Chakrabarti

Nātyaśāstra, views theatre as a medium to empower aesthetic experience which can be culminated through the exposure of *rasa*. Entertainment is just an effect of art, but not considered as the fundamental goal according to the priced text. The fundamental goal being evoking *Rasa* and help transcending the spectators into a new realm of values. *Abhinavabhāratī* is undoubtedly one of the most interpreted commentaries on *Nātyaśāstra*. Composed by *Abhinavagupta* (950–1020 CE), refers *Nātyaśāstra* as the *Natyaveda*. It is notable for its extensive look out and scrutiny of aesthetic and ontological questions.

NĀTYAŚĀSTRA - THE STRUCTURE

Bharata Muni's *Nātyaśāstra* features the eight *Rasas*. *Rasa* is the evocation of emotions by an art. There is a mention of six *Rasas* in a section 6 of *Nātyaśāstra*, the text also mentions the existence of eight primary *Rasa*. According to *Nātyaśāstra*, each *Rasa*, is dominated by a presiding deity and also a specific colour. The text highlights 4 pairs of *Rasas*. Taking instance, *Hāsya* arises out of *Sringara*. The Aura of a frightened person is black, while that of an angry person is red. The following has been established by Bharata Muni:

Table 3

Sl. No	Rasa	Stands for	Presiding Deity	Colour
1	<i>Śṛṅgārah</i> (शृङ्गारः)	Romance, Love, attractiveness	Vishnu	Light Green
2	<i>Hāsya</i> (हास्यं)	Laughter, mirth, comedy	Shiva	White
3	<i>Raudram</i> (रौद्रं)	Fury	Shiva	Red
4	<i>Kāruṇyam</i> (कारुण्यं)	Compassion, mercy	Yama	Grey
5	<i>Bībhatsam</i> (बीभत्सं)	Disgust, aversion	Shiva	Blue
6	<i>Bhayānakam</i> (भयानकं)	Horror, terror	Yama	Black
7	<i>Veeram</i> (वीरं)	Heroism	Indra	Saffron
8	<i>Adbhutam</i> (अद्भुतं)	Wonder, amazement	Brahma	Yellow

Source: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334710940_Bharata's_Rasa_Sutra_and_the_Theory_of_Rasa_Dhvani

ŚĀNTAM RASA

Shānta-rasa experiences an equal function and enjoys being an equal member of the set of *Rasas*, but it is simultaneously distinct from the others. It is the clearest form

of aesthetic bliss and was added much later. This addition went through a good deal of struggle between the 6th and 10th centuries, before it could be accepted. It had to be accepted by



the majority of the *Alankarikas*, and the expression "*Navarasa*" (the nine *Rasas*).

Table 4

9.	<i>Śāntam</i>	Peace or tranquillity	Vishnu	White
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APPLICATION OF RASA IN ARTS

Both *Nāṭyaśāstra* and *Yajñavalkya Smṛiti* conclude that any form of art is spiritual. It has the power to guide an individual to *moksha*. It acts as a medium to empower the mind concentration for the liberation of the Self. These arts are offered as an alternate path, which are in strength very similar to the knowledge imparted by the *Srutis*, i.e., *Vedas* and *Upanishads*.

The goal of performance arts, states *Nāṭyaśāstra* is ultimately to let the spectator experience his own consciousness. The playwright, the actors and the director aim to transport the audience to develop an aesthetic experience within him. According to *Nāṭyaśāstra*, "*a rasa is a synthetic phenomenon and the goal of any creative performance art, painting or literature.*" Translation of an ancient text by Wallace Dace explains *Rasa* as "*a relish that of an elemental human emotion like love, pity, fear, heroism or mystery, which forms the dominant note of a dramatic piece; this dominant emotion, as tasted by the audience, has a different quality from that which is aroused in real life; rasa may be said to be the original emotion transfigured by aesthetic delight*". Dating back from Kalidas to the Indian freedom movement, theatre has been a very active tool for social change and inculcating values. Staging of the plays of Kalidas, or that of the great English dramatist Shakespeare, theatre has always followed the rules of *Nāṭyaśāstra* in evoking the desired emotion.

The ancient texts discuss the creation of *Rasas* in various means. One such way of evoking is through the use of facial expressions of the actors. Expressing of *Rasa* in classical Indian dance is known as *Rasa-abhinaya*. The theory of *Rasas* forms the aesthetic underpinning of all Indian classical performing arts, such as Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Kathak, Kuchipudi, Odissi, Manipuri, Kudiattam etc. One such other form is Pantomime, mentioned in *Nāṭya Śāstra* as *Mukhabhinaya*. This does not use speeches and dialogues but involves the use of body movements and expressions to evoke *Rasa*.

Indian classical music dedicates *Ragas* as an inspiration for a specific mood. Here the musician or artist is responsible for creating the *Rasa* in the audience. However, as a matter of fact, all *Ragas* and musical performances in Hindu traditions aim at the creation of one of six *Rasa*.

Bhagavata Purana, a piece of literary work employs *Rasa*, in the form of Bhakti of Krishna. It envelops an emotional relish. This mood is known as *Sthayi Bhava*. This further leads to the creation of attendant emotional conditions which are called *Vibhavas*, *Anubhavas* and *Sanchari Bhavas*. The Sanskrit legend, Kalidas features out the evocation of *Rasa* in many of his works, including *Kumarsambhava*, *Shakuntala*, *Meghduta* etc.

Shilpa Shastras or the Indian theories on sculpture and architecture, evokes the *rasa* in the form of shapes, expressions and arrangements in images and structures. However, there are texts of Indian origin which suggest of nine *Rasas*. Indian temple sculptures, presents a gamut of such pleasant pieces displaying the *Nava Rasa*. Ajanta Ellora, Kailash Temple, Khajuraho, Konark have been evidence of majestic display of artistic aura imbibing the theory of *Rasa*.

CONCLUSION

Rasa is an entwined part of art. Human life is sketchy without emotions, and so is art. Art not only proffer entertainment, but most intrinsically it plays a role of moral and spiritual exhilaration of the human race. This perk up is impossible without the arising of emotions or *Rasa*. *Rasa* finds its exceptional exposure in the field of art. Performing arts like dance, music, theatre, etc. or in visual arts like literature, painting, sculpture etc. it shares its experience of *Rasa* conceived by the performer and evoked in the audience or reader, and hence the age-old theory becomes applicable even in the 21st Century concept of art.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest.

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