

Yatō Bhāvastatō Rasaḥ: Perspectives on Rasa Theory and Its Importance

Vlad-Anton ȘTEFĂNOAIA¹

Abstract: Indian Classical Drama is a field widely discussed, from Sanskrit treatises to modern theoreticians, but little was written about it by the Romanian academics, much less in the Theological field. For this instance, the present paper is an attempt in providing a short introduction to one of the “cornerstones” of Classical Drama: *rasa*. Classical Theatre exceeds the expectations of realism, developing ‘exaggerations’ understood only in the context of a fictional dramatic universe, created specifically for them to meet their purpose: the aesthetic experience. To accede such a cosmos of beauty, sophistication (based on imagination, sensibility, and openness of the mind) is required from the audience, and not only from the performers, with the goal of transcending oneself through aesthetics, and even uniting with Brahman.

Keywords: *rasa, relish, flavor, taste, emotion, sentiment, theory of generalization*

Preliminaries

Nāṭyaśāstra represents the primary source on Indian Classical Drama and the fundament of further theatrical and literary aesthetic speculations, with Brahmā himself naming the work “the fifth Veda”.² The author is considered to be Bharata Muni, though it might not be a proper name, but a title, denoting a scholar or a leader belonging to the

¹ Vlad-Anton Ștefănoaia, “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, “Systematic Theology” Master’s Program, E-mail: vladantonst@gmail.com.

² Bharata Muni, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, I, 14.

actors' guild.³ Considering that *Nāṭyaśāstra* is the result of a synthesis along the ages, there is no unique author, but a collective of authors, referred by the pseudonym of *Bharata*.

Until recently, the only way we knew about its existence was through quotations in Sanskrit literature, as the corpus was thought to be lost forever. Publishing an integral edition became a nearly impossible task, as the fragments recovered presented corrupted texts, thus a comparative manuscript analysis was much needed. Hence, the 1926 Baroda edition, attempting to reclaim a complete *Nāṭyaśāstra*, referenced no less than 40 manuscripts. Nevertheless, because this and other previously published variants contained omissions, errors, and significant differences, additionally, Manmohan Ghosh created the first critical edition and later provided the first complete English translation.⁴

In 1997 Romania had the honor of receiving the first European published translation of the quintessential treaty on Indian Classical Theatre (with a Second Edition in 2016). The initiative belongs to a personality as fascinating as the endeavor in translating this classical work in Romanian: Amita Bhowe. A graduated in mathematics, physics, and chemistry, Amita-Didi would follow her husband in Romania, the country to whom she will remain bound until the last breath, becoming her homeland. By completing a course on Romanian language and literature, the future professor of Sanskrit, Bengali and Indian Civilization opened a unique cultural bridge, being the first Indian philologist preoccupied by Romanian Language, translating works of Eminescu, Caragiale, Sorescu and many others in Bengali.⁵

Three years after presenting her PhD dissertation on Indian influence over Eminescu, as a lecturer, she would give practical courses on Bengali and Sanskrit and theoretical courses on Indian Civilization and Aesthetics, dedicating herself mind and soul to her students and in preparing specialists in Indian Studies, paying herself (with financial support from her brother) for books and materials from abroad, otherwise unavailable in Romania. Although, her continuous sacrifice and implication were not always received with gratitude, probably due to a conflict of interests. Her last years had a dramatic turn, despite the hopes aroused by the changes with the beginning of the post-communist era. After “dozens of memoirs without an answer, of hopes at the doors of the Ministry of Education” she died on September 24th 1992.⁶ Her legacy is carried by

³ A. Bhowe, “Nāṭyaśāstra – Cartea Teatrului (Introducere)”, in Bharata, *Nāṭyaśāstra: tratat de artă dramatică (Nāṭyaśāstra: treaty of dramatic art)*, Cununi de stele, Bucharest, 2016, p. 15; C. Făgețan, “Prefață”, in Bharata, *Nāṭyaśāstra: tratat de artă dramatică*, p. 23.

⁴ C. Făgețan, “Prefață”, in Bharata, *Nāṭyaśāstra: tratat de artă dramatică*, p. 22.

⁵ C. Mușat-Coman, “Cuvânt înainte”, in A. Bhowe, *Manual de limbă sanscrită*, vol. 1, Cununi de stele, București, 2021, p. 6.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

the same students whose love and perseverance were once the power behind professor Bhose's determination in withstand the hostile conditions.

On October 22nd 1987, Amita Bhose forwarded an "Offer" to the Director of *Meridiane* Publishing House, which not only gave a couple of glimpses into the contents of a primary source text concerning Indian aesthetics, but also provided, by translating the term *rasa* as *aesthetic conscience* or *aesthetic experience*⁷, a first step in understanding the issues addressed in this paper: what is *rasa* and why is it so important?

Before proceeding with the analysis, I would like to thank the professors and colleagues who encouraged me to publish, a support for which I am very grateful.

Components

In his attempt of contouring a definition for *rasa*, Bharata points out the necessity of emotional sensibility in appreciating the components of dramatic art. Similarly to a man who needs a culinary refinement into enjoying the experience given by every single ingredient in part of a specific dish, likewise sophistication would be required from a spectator, otherwise the different nuances of emotions could not be entirely relished. However, unlike other feasts, this banquet of feelings is cherished, through theatrical interpretation, by the mind (*manasā*)⁸, but this sophistication is not a privilege. Both sensibility and intellectual engagement are the keys in understanding what gives the elegance to a connoisseur, the openness towards an emotional and spiritual itinerary.⁹

Furthermore, Bharata argues that the success of a text is ensured only by *rasa*, otherwise it has no appeal. Consequently, considering the reverse, this accentuation raises a problem: there is interest only where is the *flavor*, which is not a valid point considering that a separation between authoritarian, scientific, historical on one side and poetic works on the other side had been done.¹⁰ For the former ones, their purpose is to serve as instructions and references to human conduct, their essence and point of interest. The appreciation was made for this very last one, because its core, its purpose resides in transmitting feelings, hence an art piece, whether is a literary or a theatrical one, "will become meaningless in that it will fail in its purpose—providing aesthetic delight"¹¹ Besides fulfilment in and through *rasa*, also poetic literature must comply a couple of characteristics.

⁷ "Istoricul traducerii", in Bharata, *Nāṭyaśāstra: tratat de artă dramatică*, p. 7.

⁸ Bharata Muni, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, VI, 32-33.

⁹ K. Butler Schofield, "Learning to Taste the Emotions: The Mughal *Rasika*", in K. Butler Schofield, F. Orsini (eds.), *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India*, Open Book Publishers, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0062>, p. 409.

¹⁰ G.K. Bhat, *Rasa Theory and Allied Problems*, The M. S. University of Baroda, Baroda, 1984, pp. 4-5.

¹¹ P. Patnaik, *Rasa in Aesthetics*, D. K. Printworld (P) Ltd., New Delhi, 2013, p. 24.

One might associate poetry with rhyme, rhythm, or verse, but in Indian Classical Arts a *kāvya* is defined by three coordinates: premises, resources, and reasons. A literary work is not meant to forward instructions, but to enlarge our perceptions about life by creating a medium built with the help of fictional elements, deeply rooted in “the laws of realism and probability” (the premises), which engages the receiver emotionally (the reasons or finalities). Figures of speech or ornamentations, specific words chosen and arranged in a specific order, *vakrōkti*—playing with connotations through intonation and innuendos (the resources), all of these serve as the foundation for assembling this mythical cosmos.¹² A spectator accustomed to realism might be disappointed seeing a play based on classical principles, but this expectation is the reason behind narrowing the dramatic experience, hence the flavors of it: “Hindu theorists on the subject believe that the highest aesthetic enjoyment is not possible without giving the greatest possible scope to imagination, and are therefore in favour of avoiding realism.”¹³

An artist does not transmit, but suggests feelings, the mind playing the crucial role of perceiving them and correlate to the subjective experience, an emotional involvement which differs depending on the audience. The vehicle of suggestion is the art of *abhinaya* – an imitation of characters’ actions both physically and psychologically (with M. Ghosh naming it *suggestive imitation*) helping in acquiring nuances harder to achieve just reading a text. Since rhythm also played an important role besides lyrics, a play was rather danced than acted¹⁴, accordingly there are two components that lead towards *rasa* on a dramatic play: dance and *abhinaya*.

The analysis of a couple of verses might prove helpful in better understanding the constitutive elements and their relationship. Nandikeśvara dedicated 3 strophes (35-37) on the course or the succession of dance (*nātyakramah*) where he briefly indicates fundamental aspect that would be discussed in detail later: after offering prayers and flowers, the dancer could start the performance and singing, which, supported by the art of expression (*abhinaya*), should reflect *bhāva* through glances, not in any chaotic manner, but according to the rhythm of the percussion.

Curiously, singing is executed also by the dancer, which nowadays is not common (probably not practiced at all) among the Classical Dances recognized by *Sangeet Natak Akademi*. Usually, we might encounter such an image in Indian and Pakistani cinematic works, but disregarded as surreal, not only because of the unmatched voice of the singer or the lack of training in vocals from the actors, but also because of the choreography. Breathing is a key point in dance, but the movements hardly allow speaking or singing for an entire piece. Although, this is not impossible, with executions such as “Teri

¹² Bhat, *Rasa Theory and Allied Problems*, pp. 4-5.

¹³ M. Ghosh, “Introduction”, 2, 5; in M. Ghosh (ed., trans.), *Nandikeśvara’s Abhinayadarpaṇam*, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1975, p. 7.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 2, 8; in Ghosh, *Nandikeśvara’s Abhinayadarpaṇam*, p. 9.

Mehfil Mein Kismat...” from *Mughal-E-Azam* being perfectly valid and quite matching the indications from *Abhinayadarpaṇam*.

Another example is that given by the late Pandit Birju Maharaj, who performed a *ṭhumrī*¹⁵ sitting¹⁶ (a peculiarity of Lucknow Gharana¹⁷) while singing, because the delicate movements didn’t interfere with the required breathing technique. On top of that, late Pandit Chitresh Das developed a unique technique called *Kathak Yoga* who proposes singing, playing instruments (harmonium or cymbals), performing an intricate footwork and dance, all at the same time.¹⁸

Returning to *nāṭyakramah*, Nandikeśvara states:

“Where the hand goes, eyes also should go there.

Where the eyes go also mind should go there.

Where the mind goes there the State (*bhāva*) should follow,

and where there is the State (*bhāva*), there the Sentiment (*rasa*)”¹⁹

From the context of *nāṭyakramah*, these are referring to the dancer and the creative process which leads to *rasa*. But since the enjoyment does not meet its finality until it also becomes the experience of the audience, at some extent, the strophe likewise might refer to the spectator. For both, the relationship between movement and gaze implies involvement, which is more about the art behind hand gestures – *abhinaya*. Observing the *abhinaya*, the spectator precepts the stage action and interprets it through mind, arising emotions and therefore the flavor. Bharata explains the emergence of *rasa* from

¹⁵ Lalita du Perron addresses *ṭhumrī* as one of the three genres in the North-Indian Music Tradition, called ‘semi-classical’ due to its flexibility in relation with the rules of the tone pattern – *rāg*. This is because of its place in a performance: as a prelude, a continuation of another genre, *khyāl*, which is more serious, thus functioning as a kind of ‘distresses’ moment. Originating in the folk songs and tunes, its beauty is overshadowed by a poor reputation, due to a judgmental attitude towards courtesans, the primary performers of *ṭhumrī*; L. du Perron, “Introduction”, in *Hindi poetry in a musical genre: ṭhumrī lyrics*, Routledge, London & New York, 2007, pp. 2-3.

¹⁶ “Pandit Birju Maharaj : Thumri”, published on *Vishnu Tattva Odissi Vilas* on July 27th 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfA2I7Cd4nE>, accessed on November 21st 2023.

¹⁷ A *Gharana* is a system of organization, a “school” in the North-Indian Performing Arts tradition based on discipleship lineage (*guru-shishya parampara*). Related to dance, in Kathak (one of the eight Classical Dances recognized by the Sangeet Natak Academy), there are four (major) Gharanas: Benares, Lucknow, Jaipur and Raigarh, each of them with its peculiarities. Every gharana bears the name of an important center, although they have a wider spread, especially in today’s context.

¹⁸ A performance by his disciples: “Kathak Yoga – Chitresh Das Dance Company makes history”, published on *chhandam* on December 17th 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwVhXtdtMQ>, accessed on November 30th 2023.

¹⁹ Nandikeśvara, *Abhinayadarpaṇam*, 36.

bhāva as such: “Rasa is produced by a combination of determinants (*vibhāva*), consequents (*anubhāva*), and transitory emotional states (*vyabhichāri*)”.²⁰

As a result, the terminology regarding Indian Classical Drama comprises *rasa*, *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, *vyabhichāri*, *abhinaya*, to which *sthāyibhāva* should be added.

Searching for a Definition

Although comprising an entire theory and system of thinking behind it, the term *rasa* until today remains one of the hardest to translate or to correlate, especially for the Western terminology. The Romanian translation of *Nāṭyaśāstra* mentions a couple of proposes, a series of phrases to bring through a closer translation towards the essence of *rasa* into European Languages: *sentiment*, *essence of the sentiment*, *beauty*, *aesthetic configuration*. Instead, Raniero Gnoli’s *aesthetic experience* is much preferred.²¹

For instance, there is no concise meaning, but rather an etymological evolution. At a first glance, *rasa* means *taste*, *flavor*, *relish* but not necessary in all contexts, as, for example, in Taittirīya Upaniṣad it was used as a name for *Brahman*. On a cosmogonical structure, the self-created *ātman* is identified as *delight* or *essence* and those who attain the Ultimate reality not only taste *rasa*, but also are part-takers of it, experiencing the supreme bliss²². Defining the term by itself, neither Viśvanātha Kavirāja’s explanation doesn’t help: the relish is “what is tasted, or relished”²³. However, through Patnaik’s observations, it is obvious that *rasa* would mean nothing without a proper context and time, reducing it to “a cloud of meanings”, hence this is why at a certain point it was the word for medicinal basic elements, soma drink, wine or even water.²⁴

If the term has more of materialistic connotation in Vedic and scientific writings, in Upaniṣads it shifts towards a metaphysical value, expressing the reality of *Brahman*. But Bharata retains only two meanings: a culinary oriented one, as a paradigm for explanatory purposes, and as an abstract concept inseparably bounded by emotion (*bhāva*). So, it is unfair to think that *rasa* was solely understood as a transcendental principle, because even its connotations as *taste*, *flavor* or even *mercury* recline towards healing, cooking, and alchemy.²⁵

Given the broad spectrum, the question of whether there is a link between material and metaphysical meaning arises. Also, is *rasa* a finality, a process, or both? Behind any concept, object, or experience lies a core which constitutes the essence of it, distinct from the “outer” layer which has qualities given by the relation with space, time, and

²⁰ Bharata Muni, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, VI, 31.

²¹ Bharata, *Nāṭyaśāstra: tratat de artă dramatică*, p. 108, n. 1.

²² Taittirīya Upaniṣad II, vii, 1.

²³ *Sāhitya Darpaṇa* I, 3, b.

²⁴ Patnaik, *Rasa in Aesthetics*, p. 13.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

sensorial awareness. From this interaction result two aspects of the same reality: one cataphatic and one apophatic. Thus, a thing occupies a space, is subject of time, but the unfolding of chronology doesn't affect or change the innermost part, the essence, which is apophatic. When applying those principles on *rasa*, the analysis becomes problematic.

Patnaik offers a perspective, explaining that in sensorial experience there must be a dominant, dividing the sensations by the dependence either on space or on time. In seeing and touching, space is a constant, while time is determined only by a movement (the premise of a chronology) and its influence is present around the object, not in it. On the other hand, hearing, smelling, and tasting (*rasa*) are linked to time (who's present *in* them), and subjected to becoming (a possible common ground with the concept of *bhāva*), so they are experienced as a process. Interestingly in this instance, the object remains completely absent or at most implied, in comparison with the space-dependent sensations where the object is the center.

Until here, *rasa* follows the time-related patterns because the act of tasting underlines movement, a process which entails development, and that would not be a questionable conclusion if interpreted strictly into a profane manner. But the term is perceived by Upaniṣad thinking as directly linked to Brahman. Consequently, to elaborate the dilemma even more, *rasa* is not only the essence, but also a progress in uniting with the Absolute: "He reaches the abode Sālajya and the flavor of Brahman enters in him".²⁶ The verb *enter* emphasizes here the presence of a process where *rasa* is directly involved.²⁷

The apparent contradiction between Brahman and the change determined by development could be explained through the process of becoming, or better said returning, of ātman. First, the ambivalence of nuances should be bound to the cataphatic and apophatic dimensions as two sides of the same coin. The *flavor* or *taste* are received through senses, but the intuitive perception could search, through them, beyond the materiality. Considering the concept of unity in Upaniṣad theology, the senses represent only a rudimentary level of experience, which have the potential to enclose the self or, through them, to accede towards an apophatic knowledge, and for this reason *rasa* is not anymore empirical, but a plenary experience.

Second, the Sacred cannot be named, remaining inaccessible in essence, but apprehended through actions or relations. This is why Saint John of Damascus also discussed that the word *Theós* might come from two verbs – *to run* and *to burn*, which are qualities of the way He acts²⁸. On the other side, in Romanian the term *Dumnezeu* is a juxtaposition between *Lord* (lat. *Domine*, rom. *Dumne-*) and *God* (lat. *Deus*, rom. -*Zeu*), qualities in relationship with His creation. By the same manner, *rasa* is a quality of

²⁶ *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad*, I, 5.

²⁷ Patnaik, *Rasa in Aesthetics*, p. 20.

²⁸ St. John of Damascus, *Expositio accurate Fidei Orthodoxae*, I, 9.

Brahman, understood both as an action (“the flavor of Brahman enters him” from Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad) and in relationship with the individual self (“Truly, this [Brahman] is the delight” from Taittirīya Upaniṣad). For the same reason, the only explanation Viśvanātha Kavirāja gave is not a non-sense, but an apophatic expression similar to *ho ̄n* from Exodus 3,14: there is no basis of comparison, therefore a circular definition is much needed.

There were identified eight (or nine) *rasas*, Bharata exploring each of them (without exhausting the subject) in detail²⁹: erotic, comic, compassionate, furious, heroic, terrifying, disgusting, and awesome, with bliss under discussion on later interpretations.³⁰ Every *rasa* comes because of the interaction between different aspects of the psychological experience of humanity, either being an emotion, sentiment, cause, or augment.

Terminology

Vibhāva represents the cause or determinant of an emotional response and it is one of the concepts explained summarily along its pair (*anubhāva*) because Bharata was confident people are particularly familiar with such a mechanism.³¹ There are two components on the determinant: the main or substantial cause, which is the focus in stimulating an emotion, called *ālambana-vibhāva*, and it could be a person, an object or simply a thought, and secondly the enhancer, which consists of the environmental and contextual elements that increase the emotional response, called *uddīpana-vibhāva*.

On the other hand, *anubhāva* is nothing but the complementary physical response to determinants. In other words, it’s an indication for an emotional impact. As Bharata explains in chapter VII of *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the components are the words, the body language, and the temper. Without the knowledge of the mental state gained by *vibhāva*³², *anubhāva* can be deceitful. Bhat indicates: “ ‘tears’ which are a physical reaction to an emotional impact and come in the category of *anubhāva* may be caused by heat, smoke, a disease, sorrow, or joy; ‘trembling’ may be due to fear, anger or sorrow”.³³ These two should not be confused as emotional states in themselves, but rather as the framework for psychological states³⁴, but they are components of the theatrical interpretation or abhinaya.

Bhāva is a general term, comprising both emotions and sentiments. Indian Classical Dramaturgy classifies this in three divisions: *vyabhichāri* (the only one

²⁹ Bharata Muni, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, VI, 45-83

³⁰ Patnaik, *Rasa in Aesthetics*, p. 63 sqq.

³¹ Bhat, *Rasa Theory and Allied Problems*, p. 11.

³² Bharata Muni, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, VII, 3.

³³ Bhat, *Rasa Theory and Allied Problems*, p. 11.

³⁴ Patnaik, *Rasa in Aesthetics*, p. 32.

mentioned in *rasasūtra*), *sthāyi* and *sāttvika*. Some of the transitory states, known as *vyabhichāri* or *saṃcāri*, would never be experienced by people in their lives, depending on context which triggers and individual's reaction. By contrast, even though they are the largest in number (33), *vyabhichāri* are the most limited out of the three *bhāvas* in cherishing the flavors.

Evaluated separately, *sthāyibhāva* defines a permanent psychological state, which is innate for every human being. Concerning its existence, it may reside on a subconscious level, becoming a conscious state under the action of a stimulus. *Sthāyi* is associated with self-set finalities directly or indirectly, which is why, for example, laughter would be linked with simple uncultured people but not only: by itself, doesn't seem to be point towards reaching a goal, however attached to more serious states "they too are likely to contribute to some achievement".³⁵ Bharata, through the metaphor of the king, explains that a *sthāyibhāva* is accompanied by transitory emotions, determinants, and reactions.³⁶ These are classified in eight persistent sentiments: love, amusement, sorrow, anger, dynamism, fear, disgust, wonder, adding a ninth one in correlation with *śāntarasa* – tranquility (*sama*).³⁷

On the other side, *sāttvika* is one of the most difficult to understand, as it requires a concentration and alignment of mind and body, as the exterior would perfectly reflect the inner state. Bharata argues that the importance of such a *bhāva* is due to necessity of perfectly copying natural reactions of humanity in theatrical representations³⁸. There are also in number of eight: paralysis, perspiration, shiver, change in voice, tremor, loss of color, tears, loss of consciousness.³⁹

By contrast those who in a real context would be uncontrollable reactions, in the art of acting are voluntarily taken, not as a worthless mimicking, but as an authentic mind-body reaction to an emotion⁴⁰ and this is not just pure theory. As an example, in 2014, Odissi maestra Sujata Mohapatra performed for 'Sublime Urge to Rejoice' Festival the theme of the meeting between Rama and a female hermit called *Sāvri* or *Śabarī*. In the concluding part of the piece, we can clearly observe two of *sāttvikabhāvas*: *āsru* (tears or weeping) and *vepathu* (tremor).⁴¹

Although this is not an isolate case where we can meet the concept of *sāttvika*. The very beginning of *Abhinayadarpaṇam* is represented by the following prayer:

³⁵ Bhat, *Rasa Theory and Allied Problems*, p. 14.

³⁶ Bharata Muni, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, VII, 7-8.

³⁷ Patnaik, *Rasa in Aesthetics*, p. 227.

³⁸ Bharata Muni, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, VII, 93.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, 94.

⁴⁰ Bharata, *Nāṭyaśāstra: tratat de artă dramatică*, p. 108, n. 12.

⁴¹ "Sujata Mohapatra presents Saavri and Moksha at SUR Festival 2014", published on *Sublime Urge to Rejoice* on September 14th 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ke4XBsuvBW>, accessed on December 2nd 2023.

“We bow to the *sāttvika* Śiva
whose *āṅgika* is the world,
vācika is the entire language,
and whose *āhārya* is the moon and the stars.”⁴²

As we may observe, Śiva is not only the first and highest dancer, but also the sacred as a personal form is the very source of dance. *Āṅgika*, *vācika*, *āhārya* and *sāttvika* are the constituents of *abhinaya* – art of expression. Thus, *āṅgika* is the section dedicated to gestures (body, face, and body movement by different interactions of limbs). *Vācika* is a very interesting direction in exploring dance, at least in the more recent years, if the theory of classicization is admitted as a pure modern concept and synthesis. The rhythm and poetry intertwined would give birth to compositions such as *kavit*⁴³ or a thematic *paran*⁴⁴ in Kathak.

However a much more attention should be given towards mnemonic syllables used as dancing sounds, with different origins and an abstract meaning. It is not entirely accurate characterizing them as having “no meaning” because they have a content given by the provenance which is linked to their value. In Kathak (again) for example we can meet a variety of mnemonic sounds as *nom-tom* from *tarānā* (with phrases such as *dhirtana-dhere-na*) where strong sounds are absent, leaning towards delicacy and fluidity, rather than dynamic movements. As per these last ones, their source is the percussion (*pakhawaj*, table) and became a part of repertoire for tempos reaching a faster pace (*madhyam laya* sometimes, the transition between *madhyam* and *drut*, *drut laya*). Sounds as *tram* and *kram* (inspiring a jump), *dhaghetete* encourage stronger movements, met in *paran* and *ṭukṛā/ torā*⁴⁵.

⁴² Nandikeśvara, *Abhinayadarpaṇam*, 1.

⁴³ A poetic composition rhythmically recited, serving as percussion and thematic basis for the dancer.

⁴⁴ A *paran* is a forceful composition consisting of energetic movements suggested by heavy syllables and percussion patterns. An example – *Durga Paran* performed in *Mishra Jati* (sequences of seven beats), which adds another level of complexity and intricacy: “Om Jayanti... Old Version of Maha Kali Mantra in Praise of Goddess Kali by Pali Chandra”, published on *Kathak by Guru Pali Chandra* on September 19th 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0aXFraqpzyM>, accessed on December 7th 2023.

⁴⁵ Contouring the difference between *ṭukṛā* and *torā* becomes quite difficult, as it might be Gharana-related or rhythmically related. On one side, Professor Dipanwita Singha Roy (Punjabi University, Patiala) states that the former is related to Lucknow Gharana, while the latter is part of terminology in Jaipur Gharana. On the other hand, Professor Amita Dutt (Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata) mentions that scholars would argue on the length of the composition. Rhythm in Indian Classical Music and Dance is based on cycles of beats, thus *ṭukṛā* covers only one cycle, while *torā* covers more, or simply *ṭukṛā* is a short piece and *torā* a longer one; “Technical Dancing of Kathak on Teen Taal”, published on *CH 02: CEC-UCG 02: History*,

Another category of rhythmic syllables is natwari: “bols that were inspired by the Natwar or Krishna”⁴⁶. Following Natwar’s dance on the hook of Kāliya, dancer assumed syllables as *dhig-dha, ta-thei, na*, comprising and combining them in a larger corpus of compositions. Lastly, sounds from nature were systematized into another chart of mnemonic *bols* (a peculiarity of Lucknow Gharana) as *jhijhikita* (insects), *kukuthere* (birds), *jhanakjhanak* (bells on the ankles – ghungroo) and so on, forming *parmelu*⁴⁷. In Jaipur Gharana, *parmelu* is simply a combination between percussion and *natwari*, the complex categorization being characteristic to Lucknow Gharana.

Āhārya refers to the costumes, helping in portraying better the characters on theatrical scene. Dancers would dress as Śiva, Radha or Krishna as could be followed on recent performances by Vishal Krishna⁴⁸, Sitara Devi’s grandson and a Benares Gharana exponent. Indian Classical Dance is more complex, however these are just a couple of glimpses, as an attempt in grasping what could (or better said should) lead to the delight of theatrical art.

Pleasure in Pain: Rasa or Psychopathy?

One might argue that a theatrical piece on themes of love, laughter or heroism are quite pleasurable, but that would not be the same for tragic or heinous events, although people enjoyed watching them even in Antiquity. How does it come possible that a human could relish on misery? A primary psychological diagnosis would be psychopathy, considering the enjoyment found in someone else’s misfortune.

The answer is simple, yet complicated. Usually, in Aristotelian works we might find the therapeutic dimension of music, which in case of sacred tunes would have a relieving result. Speaking about purification on Aristotle’s considerations of tragedy, professor Balmuş noted: “the tragic «catharsis» - through the profound impression a tragic subject arouses in the audience – has a cleansing action on ordinary emotions,

Culture & Philosophy on September 8th 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8cG1XTxj3A>; “Kathak – Teen Taal: Simple Tukdas – II”, published on *CH 02: CEC-UCG 02: History, Culture & Philosophy* on September 20th 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6RRv8MfZEK>, accessed on December 10th 2023.

⁴⁶ “Natwari Tukra 1|History and Myths related to its Origin| Learn Kathak Online| Lesson 100”, published on *Kathak by Guru Pali Chandra* on January 30th 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nIwyKPK9n7g>, accessed on December 7th 2023.

⁴⁷ “Parmelu | Intra-Forms of Kathak by Saswati Sen and Kalashram Repertory”, published on World Forum for Art and Culture on August 20th 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TB2GNRXEkOY>, accessed on December 8th 2023.

⁴⁸ “7. Gat Nikas – Mayur ki Gat”, published on *Michelle Das Neogi* on January 12th 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYEvC2t0BiM>, accessed on December 8th 2023.

recurring in daily life”.⁴⁹ Emotional experiences are synthetically stimulated into a specific context with the purpose of healing them, attenuating them.

As I mentioned previously, *rasa* has a metaphysical dimension, which is either a process or the very returning to Brahman. This implies transcending your ego, thus going beyond someone’s individualized self is the premise and the realization of tasting *rasa*.⁵⁰ This is subjected to a theory systematized by the kashmirian philosopher Abhinavagupta: *Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* – the theory of generalization, and insists that *rasa* is not a wordily pleasure. Consequently, the relish doesn’t know a limitative state, it is entirely unsatiable.

Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa implies the selfless identification with others, where the individual became lost in the work of art depicted, transcending even personal fears, sorrows, or grief. In *Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* everything is a reflection, including the psychological interactions on stage on the mind of the spectator. For Abhinavagupta this voluntarily emptying is called *camatkāra* and defines a neutral state of mind where *rasa* could be fully developed⁵¹. This means that a perceiver should be a *sumana*, a mind purified by all biases, by any obstacle, hence not everyone is prepared to taste the flavor. A trainee is able to observe subtleties, but those signs depend on two factors in triggering emotions: the latent cognitive and emotional experience, and the “tendencies of the past”.⁵² Therefore, the aesthetic experience depends on awareness, the line of transmission being *rasa* (as potency) – *bhāvas* – *rasa* (in realisation).

Instead of Conclusions

Rasa comprises a complex concept and terminology behind it, to who it is dependent. As observed, every element in itself is intricate, interesting and mandatory for an aesthetic experience.

Indian Classical Dramaturgy is not only about mimicking or experimenting with rhythms and music, but cherishing every part of an art form, which is not simply entertainment, but a complete implication and immersion into others’ emotional experience, through theatre. *Rasa* means more than flavor and is ultimately a transcendental goal, where an individual passes beyond ego, identifying with the other one, approaching thus the union with the *ātman*s and at the same time with *Brahman*, attaining the supreme bliss. Both the actor and the receiver need to be trained in reaching the relish, they need to be both cultivated and sensible. Consequently, the experience is different from a mind to another.

⁴⁹ C. Balmuș, “Două noțiuni fundamentale în teoria aristotelică a tragediei: «mimesis» și «catharsis»”, in Aristotel, *Poetica*, Ed. Științifică, Bucharest, 1957, p. 128.

⁵⁰ Patnaik, *Rasa in Aesthetics*, p. 41.

⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 40.

⁵² Ibidem, pp. 45-46.

Bhat warned that a piece of theatrical art should be judged by literary criticism rather than Sanskrit Poetics, preoccupied by theorizing and less about developing a critical apparatus.⁵³ Not every conglomerate of the determinants, enhancers and mere traces of emotions would lead to *rasa*, although his affirmation raises an important question: Are all kinds of writings, which claim by their content to be literary works, producing *rasa* or not? After all, in absence of a well-defined system of critique, any trace of determinants, consequents and emotional states could qualify them as eligible, thus Bhat's *ex-abrupto* conclusion deserving a further discussion.

Bibliography

BALMUŞ, C.; “Două noţiuni fundamentale în teoria aristotelică a tragediei: «mimesis» şi «catharsis»”, in Aristotel, *Poetica*, C. Balmuş (trad.), Bucharest: Ştiinţifică Publishing House, 1957, pp. 114-132.

BHARATA; *Nāṭyaśāstra: tratat de artă dramatică*, Amita Bhose (trad., introd.), Constantin Făgeţan (trad., pref.), Carmen Muşat-Coman (pref.), *Amita Bhose Collection*, Bucharest: Cununi de stele, 2016.

BHAT, G.K.; *Rasa Theory and Allied Problems*, Baroda: The M. S. University of Baroda, 1984.

BUTLER SCHOFIELD, K.; “Learning to Taste the Emotions: The Mughal *Rasika*”, in K. Butler Schofield, F. Orsini (eds.), *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India*, Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0062>, pp. 407-422.

DU PERRON, L.; “Introduction” in Du Perron, L.; *Hindi poetry in a musical genre: ṭhumrī lyrics*, London & New York: Routledge, 2007, pp 1-21.

GHOSH, M. (ed. & trans.), *Nandikeśvara's Abhinayadarpaṇam*, 2nd Edition Revised, Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1957.

MUŞAT-COMAN, C.; “Cuvânt înainte”, in Bhose, A.; *Manual de limbă sanscrită*, Carmen Muşat-Coman (pref.), volume 1, Second Edition, Bucureşti: Cununi de stele, 2021

NEDU, O. C. (ed. & trans.); *Upaniṣad*, 3rd Edition, Bucharest: Herald, 2023.

PATNAIK, P.; *Rasa in Aesthetics*, 3rd Edition, New Delhi: D. K. Printworld (P) Ltd., 2013.

ST. JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *Expositio accurate Fidei Orthodoxæ* in Schaff, P. (ed.); *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, Series II, Volume 9, translation: Revd. E. W. Watson, Revd. I. Pullan, Revd. S. D. F. Salmond *et alii*, Grand Rapids (MI): Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009.

⁵³ Bhat, *Rasa Theory and Allied Problems*, pp. 64-65.

VIŚVANĀTHA KAVIRĀJA; *Sāhitya Darpaṇa*, translation: James B. Ballantyne, *Bibliotheca Indica* Collection, Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1851.

Electronic resources:

“7. Gat Nikas – Mayur ki Gat”, published on *Michelle Das Neogi* on January 12th 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYEvC2t0BiM>.

“Kathak – Teen Taal: Simple Tukdas – II”, published on *CH 02: CEC-UCG 02: History, Culture & Philosophy* on September 20th 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6RRv8MfZEK>.

“Kathak Yoga – Chitresh Das Dance Company makes history”, published on *chhandam* on December 17th 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwVhXtcdtMQ>.

“Natwari Tukra 1|History and Myths related to its Origin| Learn Kathak Online| Lesson 100”, published on *Kathak by Guru Pali Chandra* on January 30th 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nIwyKPK9n7g>.

“Om Jayanti... Old Version of Maha Kali Mantra in Praise of Goddess Kali by Pali Chandra”, published on *Kathak by Guru Pali Chandra* on September 19th 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0aXFrakpzyM>.

“Parmelu | Intra-Forms of Kathak by Saswati Sen and Kalashram Repertory”, published on *World Forum for Art and Culture* on August 20th 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TB2GNRXEkOY>.

“Sujata Mohapatra presents Saavri and Moksha at SUR Festival 2014”, published on *Sublime Urge to Rejoice* on September 14th 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ke4XBsuvBw>.

“Technical Dancing of Kathak on Teen Taal”, published on *CH 02: CEC-UCG 02: History, Culture & Philosophy* on September 8th 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8cG1XTxj3A>.