



Development of the Theories of Rasa (Part 1)

(Academic Script)

Hello everyone,

Today's episode is about the substantiation of Navrasa (the nine essences) in Indian art, which focuses on the development of Rasa. It is noteworthy that the rasas are deeply rooted in ancient and medieval art practices. To understand Indian Art we need to study ancient texts of early Indian writers and philosophers. We will understand rasa theory in the light of Bharata's Natya Shastra and Abhinav Gupta's theory of Rasa and Bhava.

Rasas are those aesthetic senses that bring pleasure or sentiments to the viewer, or listener. In a perfect rasa audience lost in a world of emotions that is erupted with the effect of Bhava.

Where the hand goes, the gaze follows.

Where the eyes turn, there goes the mind.

Where the mind goes, there comes Bhava,

And where the Bhava comes, there also will be rasa.

-Natya Shastra

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INTRODUCTION

Indian art developed with a prominence on inducing special spiritual or philosophical states in the audience, or with representing them symbolically or emblematically.

“Our emotions are the gastric juices which transform this world of appearance into the more intimate world of sentiments. On the other hand, this outer world has its own juices, having their various qualities, which excite our emotional activities, this is called in our Sanskrit Rhetoric, Rasa, which signifies outer juices having their responses in inner juices of our emotions and a poem, according to it, is a sentence or sentences containing juices, which stimulate the juices of emotion. It brings to us ideas vitalized by feelings, ready to be made into the life style of nature.”

(Rabindranath Tagore)

The concept of Aesthetics deals with the sense of beauty and taste. It shapes our aesthetic judgment, understanding, emotion and attitude.

According to Kapila Vatsyayan, "Classical Indian architecture, sculpture, painting, literature (kāvya), music, and dancing evolved their own rules conditioned by their respective media, but they shared with one another not only the underlying spiritual beliefs of the Indian religio-philosophic mind, but also the procedures by which the relationships of the symbol and the spiritual states were worked out in detail."

Bharata wrote Natya Shastra around 1st century BC to 3rd Century AD.

Bharata was a sage priest, who studied extensively about Rasas and Bhavas that forms the base for Indian classical dances, particularly Bharat Natyam.

The gestures and graceful movements of Bharat Natyam were later found to be an inspiration for the sculptors of South Indian temples.



Classical dance is governed by the rules of the Natya Shastra; which in turn is a combination of Nritta and Natya. Nritta is basically the expressional enacting of the various sentiments of a particular theme, while Natya is the facial expression which includes eye, hand and facial movements. These expressions and movements of Natya Shastra are well captures by the artists of ancient and medieval India.

The dancer of Prahalada Varadan Temple, depicts beautifully carved sculptures of dancers in various movements and postures. They are capable of creating the atmosphere where the observer feels that he is watching a live performance of these dancing divas.

These curvaceous bodies are seen wearing traditional costumes of Bharatnatyam. The pleats of their sari flow down to their legs and looks like a fan in the center.

This is the detailed image of the dancer of Prahalada Varadan temple, she is wearing a highly embroidered and bejeweled brassiere. Apart from the customary bells, she is wearing a decorative belt that has small bells hanging to it.

This sculpture belongs to Bhaktavatsala Perumal Temple in Nagapattinam that was build during the 17th CE. The style of costume is more customized and intricate that is closer to what we see in the contemporary era dancer. It is the three fan dance costume, seen quite regularly these days.

Classical dance has mainly two features; The Tandava – this refers to the movements on beats. It emphasizes on the male characteristics of strength and firmness. The second one is the Lasya, which is symbolic of Bhawa, Grace, Rasa and Abhinaya. This is feminine in style.

Bharata quotes about performance and drama in Natya Shastra as:



*“Let Nāṭya (drama and dance) be the fifth Vedic scripture.
Combined with an epic story,
tending to virtue, wealth, joy and spiritual freedom,
it must contain the significance of every scripture,
and forward every art.” — Nāṭyaśāstra 1.14–15*

The Natya Shastra contains 6000 sutras, incorporated in to a frame where a number of munis approach Bharat asking him about Natya Veda and Rasa, Bhava, Sutra, Karika, Nirukta, Abhinaya etc. Bharat quenches their thirst by explaining everything minutely. In the 6th chapter we read that Bharat Muni enunciated eight Rasas. Each Rasa according to Natya Shastra has a presiding deity and specific colors.

RASA

Rasa is like a perfume which comes from matter but cannot be simply described or comprehended but only enjoyed. Rasa is a state of heightened delight or ananda, the kind of bliss that can be experienced only by the spirit. Rasa experience is emotional the artist creates a world for the viewer and he reaches to a state of emphatic bliss.

As Bharat Muni explained in Natya Shastra, Rasa is created by the combination of vibhav, anubhava, and vyabhicari bhava. Each rasa experienced by the audience is associated with a specific Bhava portrayed on the stage.

In the Indian theories on sculpture and architecture (Shilpa Shastras), the rasa theories, in part, drive the forms, shapes, arrangements and expressions in images and structures. Some Indian texts on art and architecture or image carving and making, also suggest the nine Rasas.



The 108 dance forms described in the Natyasastra, for example, have inspired Shiva sculptures of the 1st-millennium BCE, particularly the Tandava style which fuses many of these into a composite image found at the Nataraja temple of Chidambaram. The movements of dance and expression in the Natya Shastra are found carved on the pillars, walls and gateways of 1st-millennium Hindu temples.

The specifications provided in the Natya Shastra can be found in the depiction of arts in sculpture, in icons and friezes across India.

“[In Indian arts] the imagery of the Upanishads and the elaborate ritual of the Brahmanas is the ground plan for each of the arts, be it architecture, sculpture, painting, music, dance or drama. The artist repeats and chisels this imagery by giving it concrete shape through stone, sound, line or movement.”

— **Kapila Vatsyayan, the Square and the Circle of the Indian Arts.**

Rasa has been an important influence on the cinema of India. Satyajit Ray has applied the Rasa method of classical Sanskrit drama to movies such as in The Apu Trilogy (1955–1959).

In Hindi cinema, it is the theme of the film Naya Din Nayi Raat , where Sanjeev Kumar played nine characters corresponding to nine Rasa.

It was developed by the rhetorician and philosopher Abhinav Gupta (c.1000), who applied it to all varieties of theatre and poetry.

Bharata beautifully describe the eight Rasas, which he had portrayed in Natya Shastra. All Rasas are indispensable in the arts of ancient India, whether its dance, poetry, painting or drama.



To make it easier to understand the rasa and its associated Bhava, its meaning, we should be aware that each Rasa is symbolized by a particular color; the following table would be helpful:

RASA	BHAVA	MEANING	COLOUR
Shringar(Erotic)	Rati	Delight	Pale Light Green
Hasya (Humorous)	Hasa	Laughter	White
Karuna (Pathetic)	Shoka	Sorrow	Grey
Raudra (Terrible)	Krodh	Anger	Red
Veera (Heroic)	Utsaha	Heroism	Pale Orange
Bhayanaka (Fearful)	Bhaya	Fear	Black
Bibhatsa (Odious)	Jugupsa	Disgust	Blue
Adbhuta (Wonderous)	Vismaya	Wonder	Yellow
Shanta (Peaceful)	Calm	Peace	White

1. Śringaram (love, attractiveness)

It frees the ego and connects us to devotion. When you appreciate beauty it connects you to the source of love. The purpose of universe is to experience a divine love, which exists in everything. It is within each one of us and radiates out to the cosmos.



The subject of Rasa Lila is one of the iconic depictions of the eroticism and romance that is capable of creating the Sringara Rasa in hearts of the viewer. Rasa Lila adds divinity and Bhakti Bhava. Whole atmosphere is filled with brilliance and love.

In the picture above that night Lord Krishna added more divinity, more brilliance to it with a resolution of Rasa with the help of Yogmaya (personified illusion). It was a perfect night for the purpose – flowers bloomed in Vrindavana, full moon shone, and gentle, cool breeze blew from the banks of river Yamuna. Amidst this stimulating ambience Lord Krishna began to play an enchanting tune on his flute. The tune attracted Gopis, their infatuation rushed to its zenith and under the influence of love for lord Krishna and as if in trance, all of them ran to meet their beloved Kanhaiya leaving all their fear, bondages, patience and shyness behind. Some of them were stopped by their husbands and dragged back to home. But only their physical bodies stayed but, their souls reached Vrindavana.

This episode of rasa Lila is extremely enchanting for the person who has fine acquaintance of Hindu Philosophy, but those who are not very well aware can enjoy it too.

2. Hāsya (laughter, comedy)

This Rasa connects you to the sense of humor, laughter, happiness and contentment. It is the extension of what you feel within love. The following images sculptures of Mahabalipuram represent the Hasya Rasa.

The male spirits in the Hindu temples of ancient and medieval India are known Yaksha, the females are called Yakshi. They are not Gods but hold lower positions in Hindu and Buddhist religions. The Yakshas have various function in Hindu mythology, one can find them carved on the entrances of



temples and stupas. Often functioning as protectors of the earth's riches and they became associated with wealth.

This potbellied dwarf once raised his arms to support a bowl on his head, which identifies him as a "carrier," or bharavahaka yaksha. The closest stylistic parallels to this form are seen on pillar capitals at the great early Buddhist stupa (a moundlike structure designed to hold objects of veneration) of Sanchi, near Bhopal. In all probability this yaksha served as an attendant at a stupa's entrance, its bowl used to receive devotees' donations.

3. Raudram (fury, wrath)

In anger we go into the fire. One moment of anger can destroy lifetimes of good merit. Respect anger. When anger isn't honored it can bring up irritation, violence, hatred. Feel the anger. Let it move through you. Breathe into the fire.

Exemplifying the Raudra Rasa, Durga is shown slaying demon Mahisha. Durga is represented in full of courage and bravery. Symbolic of female power and gracefulness as well, durga's face is calm and composed with grace.

4. Kāruṇyam (compassion, tragedy)

Karuna Rasa is an essential part of Natya Shastra. The dominant emotion or the Sthayi Bhava in Karuna rasa is soka or sorrow.

The Vibhavas or determinants of Karuna rasa are curse, distress, down fall, calamity, and separation from the near and dear ones, loss of wealth, murder, imprisonment, flight, dangerous accidents and misfortunes.



5. Bībhatsam (disgust, aversion)

Bibhatsa Rasa in Natya Shastra deals with the odious sentiment and the Sthayi Bhava of Bibhatsa Rasa is disgust. The outcome of Bibhatsa Rasa is from the Vibhavas.

6. Bhayānakam (horror, terror)

Bhayanakam is one of the nine Rasas, which is translated as fear. Fear can be evoked from destructive qualities of Deities or Gods or even Demons. Bhayanaka rasa or the terrible sentiment is one of the essential Rasas in the Natyashastra. The Sthayi Bhava of Bhayanaka rasa is Bhava or fright.

Goddess Kali is presented wearing a dhoti that partially covers her body. She is also wearing a two tiger skin with their head skin attached. This is her Chamunda Avatara, which is derived from Chanda and Munda, two monsters whom Chamunda killed.

Her hair is piled up into a chignon decorated with a tiara of skulls and a crescent moon. Her socket eyes are described as so intense that it burns the evil of all three worlds. She scowls, baring her teeth, and enormous eyeballs protrude menacingly from sunken sockets in her skeletal face. As a necklace, she wears a snake whose coils echo the rings of decaying flesh that sag beneath her collarbone. Just above her navel on her emaciated torso is a scorpion, a symbol of sickness and death. She presumably once held lethal objects in the hands of her twelve missing arms.

Chamunda is naked except for a short diaphanous dhoti partially covering the two tiger skins complete with heads that hang from her waist to her knees. Although her extremities are missing, it is clear from comparison with related images that this Chamunda stood with legs straight, the right turned outward. The starkness and uncompromising horror of this



sculpture are representative of one aspect of Indian theology.

The Goddess Ambika (here identified with: Durga or Chandi) is seen leading the eight Matrikas in 'Battle Against the Demon, Raktabija, Folio from a Devi Mahatmya - (top row, from the left) Narashmi, Vaishnavi, Kumari, Maheshvari, Brahmi, (bottom row, from left) Varahi, Aindri and Chamunda, drinking the blood of demons (on right) arising from Raktabija's blood and Ambika.

7. Vīram (heroic mood)

“Veera is heroism. It represents bravery and self-confidence. Boldness in battle, the attitude with which martyrs go to war and the valor with which they die are all aspects of heroism.”

Shiva is seen representing Veera Rasa in many art works in ancient India. The Natyashastra had been a major inspiration for the sculptors and artists of ancient and medieval India. The dancing Shiva sculpture in Badami cave temples (6th–7th century CE), for example, illustrates its dance movements and Lalatatilakam pose.

Like images of Shiva in his dark form of Bhairava, such macabre images of the Goddess are common occupants of the exterior walls of temples. They appear both on shrines dedicated to Shiva and those to the Goddess herself.

Depicting the heroic Rasa, Durga is represented here at the moment of her victory over the buffalo demon Mahisha. Her power and valor contrasts with her delicate and calm facial expressions. Her courage evokes the Bhava of Veera Rasa. Her iconography mesmerizes the observer with her feminine charm and slender body.



Portrayed with sixteen arms with different weapons creating a kinetic energy, Goddess Durga is a female conqueror of bravery and courage for the ancient sculptor. She is representing the Veera rasa whereas her calm demeanor expresses the Peaceful Rasa.

8. Adbhutam (wonder, amazement)

Adbhuta rasa in Natyashastra is about the sentiment of wonderment surprise. The gestures of surprise or wonder are created when something unexpected happen. The Sthayi Bhava of the Rasa is Vismaya or astonishment.

The appreciation of a marvel that goes beyond the routine and the mundane is Adbhuta.

Some examples can be seen in following images:

Nagas are believed to be an ancient race of semi divine serpent creatures first depicted in ancient Vedic Hindu mythology and oral folklore from at least 5000 B.C. according to hindu mythology they are powerful and are gifted shape-shifter, able to assume any shape they desires.

"[Nagas] from a stem of Vasuki... were blue, red and white colours: all of them had huge, abominable trunks overfilled with deadly venom. Their names-Kotika, Manasa, Purna...

[Nagas] from the family of Dhritarashtra. These snakes ... could move with a speed of the wind and were awfully venomous. Here they are - Shankukarna, Pingalaka, Kutharamukha ..."("Mahabharata")

There are many myths and beliefs about Naga and Nagini. They are a symbol of healing and primal energy. In art, the Naginis are figures of beauty. In many Hindu societies, snakes are worshipped as guardians of the



home; and it is said that when a snake enters your life, there will be a new birth of creativity and wisdom.

In the first book of the "Mahabharata", Nagas are described living on land. Then Brahma had opened wide land and they were descended under it. Having moved in the subterranean world, Patala, nagas had built to him (her) self-dazzling palaces shining with gold and jewels. The wise dragon Vasuki became the king of Nagas and ruled in their subterranean city Bhogavati, filled unprecedented on land treasures.

A carved stone Stele depicting Siva with two cobras South India, 17th-18th Century of arched form tapering towards either side at base and peaking with a makara head, the central area with two intertwining cobras, three trefoils either side and flower heads to interstices, their heads confronting either side of a lingam

Santam (Peace and Tranquility)

In Santam or Shanta Rasa mind is in deep calmness and relaxation. Its when you become still and quiet. In peace you become so full that you are empty. You will not find peace anywhere but within.

Further, Abhinav Gupta introduced a ninth rasa called Śāntam or Shant which denotes the peace or tranquility. These total nine Rasas make the Navarasa.

Tranquility and peaceful is one of the prominent feature of Indian art in ancient India. It was essential when it comes to the divine images of god and goddesses along with other deities associated with these gods.

It depicts one of the most beloved bodhisattvas, Avalokitesvara. The term "bodhisattva" refers to a person that has been awakened by the Buddhist



spirit. The compassion, renunciation and meditation inherent in Buddhism are all evident in these paintings and give them a halo of sweetness and inner life.

Its suave beauty, meditative if slightly effeminate grace, and its plastic perfection are indescribable. The composition around the figure adds to the impression of sweetness, restraint and divine feeling.

In the painting, his tan body, darkened only by the locks of curly hair, is delicate and elegant. He is adorned with pearls, amethyst, and other attributes of traditional Indian jewelry. On his head sits a magnificent crown, which at some point was most likely colored in extreme detail, but over time has faded. His eyes are lowered in a meditative state. His calm, spiritual face sets the tone and mood of the room. In his right hand, he holds a lotus blossom, which may represent his spiritual awakening.

Maitreya, the messianic bodhisattva characterized as the Buddha of the Future, stands in a graciously exaggerated posture, the body beautifully counterbalanced. He holds his raised hand in the gesture of exposition (vitarka mudra) and in his lowered hand displays a flask (kamandalu) universally understood in South Asian culture as the container of amrta, the elixir of life. In a Buddhist setting, the flask is understood as the promise of Maitreya's coming. The elegant aesthetics of this sculpture embody contemporary eastern Indian Pala styles, yet it displays a startling elegance combined with an almost austere economy of surface decoration: jewelry is restrained, textile patterns minimally suggested. The scale is exceptional, as is the aesthetic sensibility of the artist responsible for this work.

This Gupta Period Buddha sculpture is carved in red sand stone embodies the qualities of radiant inner calm and stillness, the products of supreme



wisdom. The figure once raised his right hand (now missing) in the characteristic abhaya-mudra, a gesture dispelling fear and imparting reassurance. The Buddha is robed in the simple, uncut cloth of a monk, and his religiosity is further conveyed by a large halo and auspicious markings (lakshanas), both natural and supernatural, denoting Buddhahood (the state of perfect enlightenment). As the summation of stylistic development in a period of Buddhist expansion, this representation became the benchmark for the Buddha image throughout Asia.

Representations of Jain figures follow a very conservative iconographic and artistic tradition. Since the inactive, almost nude figure with passive expression does not lend itself to dramatic sculptural interpretation, the burden of aesthetic success rests on the skillful and sensitive rendition and manipulation of simple forms into a well-proportioned, visually pleasing sculptural unity.

This superb white marble sculpture represents one of the twenty-four tirthankaras ("crossers of the ford") or jinas ("victorious ones", i.e., conquerors of desire) of the Jain religion. There is very little physical difference between representations of seated Buddhas and those of tirthankaras in Indian art: both are considered enlightened beings and display the markings appropriate for such personages. In addition, however, there are a few marks specific to either Buddhas or tirthankaras. The auspicious srivatsa mark on the chest and the lack of the urna (tuft of hair between the eyes) indicates that our image is a tirthankara.

Some other examples of Shanta Rasa are given with following images:

Today's episode is over but we will continue the Rasa theory in the next episode. Hope you liked this episode.