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Classical Indian Aesthetics and *rasa* Theory: Observations on Embodied Rhetoric, Reader Response, and the Entanglement of Aesthetics and Religion in Hindu India

Abstract The chapter investigates the historical effectiveness and theoretical power of *rasa*, one of the key terms of Indian aesthetic theory, denoting here “dramatic effect,” “expression,” “aestheticised emotion,” “emotional flavour,” “mood,” and “aesthetic sentiment.” *Rasa* aesthetics refer to a theory of affect and effect, and as argued in the chapter may also be viewed as “embodied rhetoric.” The continuities and subtle transformations of *rasa* aesthetics as embodied rhetoric will be discussed from a historical and systematic perspective starting with its inception in the drama theory of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, through to Ānandavārdhana’s poetics of suggestion, Abhinavagupta’s philosophy of aesthetic immersion, Śārngadeva’s musical yoga, Vaiṣṇava devotional *rasa-bhāva* theology, and finally to everyday speech. Particular emphasis is given to the manifold dovetailing of aesthetics and religion in India, and to two major shifts in perceiving *rasa*: (a) a shift from production aesthetics to reception aesthetics, reader response, and aesthetic immersion; and (b) (under the influence of the adoption of *rasa* in devotional religion and theology) from a strict separation of (transpersonal) aesthetic mood (*rasa*) and (personal) real world emotion (*bhāva*) to understanding *rasa* itself as real world emotion—for which, previous to *rasa* aesthetic theory, no separate term existed.

Introduction

Drink, o you connoisseurs (rasika) on earth who have a taste for the beautiful [or: who have a poetic taste, a taste for a language full of feeling] (bhāvuka), drink again and again this Bhāgavatam, this storehouse [of] aesthetic mood (rasa) (Bhāgavatam 1.1.3b).¹

These persuasive words are found in the invocation verse at the very beginning of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (ninth century AD). This great Sanskrit work of emotional Kṛṣṇa devotionalism (*bhakti*) enjoyed exceeding popularity through the centuries. The initial phrase appeals to the reader (i.e. reciter or orator) and the listener to relish the religious text aesthetically and to participate in it almost corporally, to “drink its sap” and “enjoy the flavour of the nectar-like stories.”² Metaphors of food and drink also abound elsewhere in *bhakti* literature. The “reader response” of the pious is often to “drink,” “eat up,” “devour,” “chew,” and “digest” the sacred text, to “taste the sweetness” of the divine name and immerse themselves in singing and listening to God’s glories. The *Bhāgavatam* narrating Kṛṣṇa’s life on earth became a script for establishing a close relationship to God and for achieving intensity of feeling by perceiving him as a child, master, friend, lover, or even hated enemy. Most of all, the work was supposed to incite a deep and affectionate “love of God” (*bhakti*). Indeed, the tenth book narrating Kṛṣṇa’s “love games” with the *gopīs* (cowherdresses) inspired an Indian bridal mysticism.

The very diction and rhetoric of the source—not forgetting its audible dimension in actual performance—feeds the recipients’ imagination and evokes strong images and emotions. The quote speaks of “aesthetic mood” (*rasa*), which in the case of religious literature is primarily the sentiment of devotion (*bhakti rasa*), peace of mind (*śānta rasa*), and sweetness (*mādhurya rasa*). However, the aesthetic experience goes beyond noetic content. Very much in consonance with European conceptions of aesthetics—Baumgarten’s sensory cognition and Kant’s synthesising intuitive knowledge, for example—the *rasa* refers to pre-reflexive, sensory-affective, non-notional experience triggered by sensory mediation. In the *bhakti* traditions, and the Hindu context at large, the spoken and sounding word, song, and music are invariably important sensory mediators used to produce aesthetic immersion. We are repeatedly advised to “drink” the

1 *Pibata bhāgavatam rasa ālayam muhuraḥ rasikā bhūvi bhāvukāḥ* || (Bhāgavatam 1.1.3b). Quoted in James D. Redington, *Vallabhācārya on the Love Games of Kṛṣṇa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990), 3. It is the third benedictory verse before the main body of the text starts and also appears in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Māhātmya* the “Glorification of the Bhāgavatam” ascribed to the *Padma-Purāṇa*, 6.10. See C. L. Goswami and M. A. Shastri, ed. and trans., *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*, Sanskrit text and English translation, Part I (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 2014), 44–45. Similar expressions are found within the *Bhāgavatam* itself, e.g. 1.1.10.

2 *Bhāgavatam*, ed. and trans. Goswami and Shastri, 1, see also 2–3, 15, 45, 48.

religious text “with the cups of the ears.”³ Merely hearing it is held to be auspicious, purifying, and liberating. Thus, *rasa* is about the reader’s response and also about the text’s own agency and performance—its power to bring auspiciousness and to evoke and channel emotion.

Moreover, it is important to note that not only the religious idea behind calls for emotional and aesthetic identification, but also the very standards of literary theory dealing with “worldly,” profane literature demand that truly artistic literature (*kāvya*) should not only produce meaning but also embody emotion and make it perceptible. *Rasa*, in the literary discourse is first of all “the linguistic production of an emotion in the text,”⁴ but this production aesthetics—which was never lost from sight in the actual writing of literature and poetry—shifted its major locus to reception aesthetics and reader’s response around the time the *Bhāgavatam* was composed. This religious text adopts the literary paradigm; it proudly intrudes into the space of worldly literature and breaks the genre’s boundaries by demanding to be enjoyed not only as a *Purāṇa* (“ancient story” with religious content, mythical lore), but also as a *kāvya*, artistic literature or poetry.⁵

Remarkably, and truly outstanding in the sacred lore of *Purāṇas*, the *Bhāgavatam* suggests, self-consciously and reflexively, the entanglement and merger of aesthetics and religion. It does not speak of devotees but rather of art lovers or “connoisseurs” (*rasika*) who, according to Indian aesthetics, must be *saḥṛdaya*, “of equal heart,” with the artwork. They become its co-producers through deep listening, text participation, and aesthetic response—or, in the diction of the quote, by their “taste for the beautiful” (*bhāvuka*). Similar to *rasika*, the term *bhāvuka* does not relate to the beauty of content or the sublime in a religious sense, although it encompasses the semantic field of auspiciousness, blessing, and happiness. Beauty refers instead to literary beauty and ornamentation (*alaṅkāra*) (i.e. expressive forms, tropes, figures of sound and sense), which along with *rasa* belong to the very definition of literature and poetry.⁶ Thus, “taste for the beautiful” is here synonymous with taste for poetry and literary beauty (*alaṅkāra*) and for a language full of feeling (*rasa*). Indeed, the *Bhāgavatam* is known for its beautiful language and poetic power full of *rasa*.

The original meaning of *rasa* was “sap (of a plant),” but there are many more lexical meanings in classical Sanskrit: starting with “taste,” above all “a wholesome taste,” and therefore also “essence” both in a technical and metaphorical sense. In addition, *rasa* connotes “condensate” and

3 This metaphor appears, for instance, in the Hindi *Rāmāyaṇa* of Tulsīdās (sixteenth century), the famous *bhakti* work of Northern India known and publicly recited and orated as Rāmkaṭha (“the story of God Rām”). The earlier *Bhāgavatam* contains quite similar expressions and oral-aural practices and originated in the South.

4 Sheldon Pollock, “Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out,” in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 47.

5 Pollock, “Sanskrit Literary Culture,” 60, 61.

6 Pollock, “Sanskrit Literary Culture,” 40.

“concentrate,” and can therefore also suggest “drug” or “medicine”; so, *rasa* can also cover the semantic field and actual literal meaning of “sap, nectar, taste, flavour, essence.” In fact, it became a key term for many aesthetic theories in South Asia. Here it denotes “dramatic effect,” “expression,” and “aestheticised emotion,” referring to “emotional flavour,” “mood,” and “aesthetic sentiment.” This chapter explores the history, the shifting reflexive appraisal, and the oscillating relation to religion of *rasa* aesthetics, which made its first appearance in theatre studies many centuries before the *Bhāgavatam*.

I want to suggest that *rasa* aesthetics may be understood as embodied rhetoric and the art of sensuous and emotional persuasion. This suggestion will need more elaboration, of course, for I do not mean to suggest that these aesthetic formations are strict equivalents or structurally equal to European rhetoric, but rather to introduce an alternative perspective by looking at how other cultures deal with similar questions and offer new insights through their different focus.⁷ Instead of intellectual persuasion, it is auratic, emotional and sensory persuasion, feeling and embodiment—including affective body language—that are crucial to this Indian alternative. Notwithstanding historical transformations and a broad spectrum of evaluations, the common thread remains the corporal presence of non-corporal affect associated with the *rasa*—that is, its relation not only to emotion and interiority, but also to mediality and expressive form. The reflexive appraisal of *rasa* deeply influenced not only the understanding of art and religious experience, including its triggers, for instance song and music which emotionalise the message and are traditionally defined as “colouring the mind,” *rasa* aesthetics also left traces on the whole cultural system. *Rasa* became the key for conceptualising affect and determined the cultural evaluation of feelings and emotionality⁸—and in fact, it has become a major term for “emotion.”

This chapter investigates the implicit and explicit entanglement of aesthetics and religion and the continuities and shifts in understanding *rasa* aesthetics in the domains of theatre, poetry, philosophy, music, religion,

7 Although no precise equivalent to the term and concept of European rhetoric exists in India (see also below, section 1), M. Monier-Williams, *A Dictionary English and Sanskrit* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 41992), 690, includes nevertheless the lexeme “rhetoric” and identifies it with *alāṅkāraśāstra* (the “knowledge of ornamentation” referring to the poetics school of ornate poetry) and also with the art of *pravacana* (eloquent proclamation, public discourse). Both certainly contain rhetorical elements but are neither identical to European rhetoric, nor with each other. My suggestion that we may understand *rasa* aesthetics as “embodied rhetoric” also tries to connect European and Indian data but goes in another direction. It builds on the insight that no exact equivalent to European rhetoric theory was developed in India and stresses a possibly unique Indian form of rhetoric that is based on the sensory and the emotional as central features. Although I will also include poetics, it is not the older school of Ornamentalists which will provide my basic material, but the later school of suggestion.

8 June McDaniel, “Chapter 3: Hinduism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. John Corrigan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 51–71.

and everyday life. The first section will set the framework for the investigation that follows. It will draw attention to the cultural matrix in which *rasa* aesthetics developed and discuss the concepts of “embodied rhetoric” and Indian aesthetics from a comparative perspective. The second section discusses Bharata’s *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the foundational text of Indian aesthetics and of what I call “embodied rhetoric,” both of which first appear in drama theory and theatre studies. The following sections explore the continuities and transformations of *rasa* aesthetics (as a theory of affect and effect and of embodied rhetoric) in poetics and literary theory (section 3), and in metaphysics, musicology, and religion (section 4). The concluding section 5 summarises the shifts within *rasa* theory, in particular the shifting locus of *rasa*, which engendered lasting effects in understanding emotion in daily life. Particular consideration will also be given to the multiple functions of *rasa* aesthetics as embodied rhetoric and its power of forming collective and subjective identity within and beyond religion.

1. Indian performance culture and *rasa* aesthetics as embodied rhetoric

The corporal trope of drinking the sacred text with the cups of the ears is an important hint of the contextual frame of this chapter’s contents. The wider background is a cultural matrix in which text, ritual, and sound belong together. Since ancient times and even after the introduction of writing, the vast lore of sacred literature in Hindu India—and even profane texts—have always been embodied in the voice: they are performed, memorised, declaimed, taught face-to-face from teacher to student, preached in public, recited, sung, staged, and danced, but hardly ever silently read. The spoken *and* the sounding word are highly esteemed in the cultural system of symbols.⁹ This feature persists even today, particularly in the religious field. Orality and literacy have never been mutually exclusive; texts are there to be heard and they are composed with that in mind. Readings are thus performances and texts are aesthetic events. They are not restricted to semantic information but speak just as strongly to the senses, the body, and the emotions. Many discourses in the past have attached great importance to a careful audible realisation and were often also very sensitive to the emotive contents and the communication of moods. This cultural fabric of common conditions for aesthetic/aisthetic and religious experience gave way to manifold relations and to a dovetailing between

9 Guy L. Beck, *Sonic Theology: Hinduism and Sacred Sound* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993); Annette Wilke and Oliver Moebus, *Sound and Communication. An aesthetic cultural history of Sanskrit Hinduism* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011); Annette Wilke, “Sound,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, vol 5, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 134–149; Annette Wilke, “Sonic Perception and Acoustic Communication in Hindu India,” in *Exploring the Senses*, ed. Axel Michaels and Christoph Wulf (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014), 120–144.

art/poetry and religion/sacred literature. It is noteworthy, however, that in the past the sensory-aesthetic dimensions in the production and reception of texts was not restricted to the religious sphere. Even mathematicians made use of sonic codes, the most complex metres, and double encoding (*śleṣa*). They chose the diction of the poets and of liturgical literature to convince and persuade the readers.

In India too, and perhaps most pronouncedly in this cultural area, this book's overarching question about religious texts, rhetorical theory, and aesthetic response must be tackled from the standpoint of aesthetics. Remarkably, within the highly performative cultural framework, which also includes sophisticated hermeneutics, early scientific linguistics, and a long culture of debate, no exact equivalent to European rhetoric was developed. Instead we find at a very early age an aesthetic theory of affects and effects and their means of expression and stimulation, which may be termed (perhaps) "embodied rhetoric." This theory of sensory (non-verbal) rhetoric and emotive persuasion and its key-term *rasa*, "aesthetic sentiment," appear for the first time in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* ascribed to Bharata, the famous textbook for the theatre, which was compiled from the second/third century BC to fourth/fifth century AD.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* remained the foundational work for classical Indian aesthetics due to *rasa* retaining its role as the most important element. It had a deep and long-term impact on poetics, musicology, religion, and the culture at large. It is important for the argument of embodied rhetoric to see the *rasa* aesthetics as both rooted in and spilling over to India's pronounced performance culture and its predilection for orality. It is likewise vital to keep in mind that literature was functionally aligned to memorising, oral-aural performance, public staging, and sensory-affective effectiveness and persuasion beyond the semantic meaning aspect, rational argument or mere delivery of information. Theatre, aesthetics, performance, orality, and emotion may thus be seen as a larger unity whose common denominator is an embodied rhetoric aiming at sensory-affective persuasion. This chapter's aim is to understand the *rasa* aesthetics' history of success and the processes of semiosis attached to different forms of mediality in their own right and context. But I also wish to occasionally draw attention to the structural resemblances (beyond obvious divergencies) with European rhetoric and aesthetic theories, starting with Greco-Roman rhetoric's prime model of face-to-face oration rather than textual rhetoric. In some ways similar to Indian theatre, European Greco-Roman rhetoric—understood as the orators' art of persuasion—included a theory of affects which in turn also became fundamental for poetics. Like European rhetoric, Indian *rasa* aesthetics includes questions of style and figures of speech, although these were never its basic elements.

From the European perspective, *rasa* aesthetics only partly overlap with European rhetoric, in so far as it shares the important theoretical realm of classifying emotions. As already outlined, it is strictly speaking more a theory of affect and effect and less a theory of intellectual persuasion, style,

clarity of speech, or of convincing and logical argument, as it developed in Europe (let alone the charge of moral corruptness).¹⁰ *Rasa* aesthetics does not refer to politics, (i.e. to public speech to attain political power) or to education in the first place, but instead to complex poetical systems of drama and literary theory, which of course infiltrated many other cultural segments—from the tandem of poetry and polity¹¹ and theatre's educational programme (see below section 2) to everyday speech and, most profoundly, religion. What makes it still meaningful to speak of rhetoric is not merely that oral and public performance and the art of brilliant speech belong to the *rasa* aesthetics, just as they do to the European concept of rhetoric, it is the very centre of *rasa* aesthetics—the emotional flavour and atmospheric mood—which makes it an excellent candidate for the art of persuading and convincing. Good speech (like good story) happens only when the orator manages to touch the emotions of the audience. One might even suggest that these emotions are the very engines of persuasion and efficacy. Thus, emotions are fundamental particularly where persuasion is pursued, and this is what *rasa* is all about. Indian thinkers pondered very deeply the verbal and non-verbal means of evoking emotional response. Unlike European rhetoric, *rasa* aesthetics surmount the linguistic framework. *Rasa* is about atmospheres, that which touches in and beyond the language, and also about the *rasa*'s media of expression which include not only figures of speech, but also modeling the voice, bodily gestures, etc. This is why I speak of *embodied* rhetoric. Aesthetic-aesthetic expressions enhance and colour effective speech beyond the verbal message and have strongly emotionalising effects. Since human understanding and knowledge production is more encompassing and pervasive than intellectual conviction, there is also something akin to emotional and body knowledge¹² or emotional intelligence. Indeed, the discussion of *rasa* in various Indian contexts amounts to understanding feeling as its own category of knowledge. Indian theatre studies probably rightly proclaim that nothing exists outside the realm of *rasa*, and in this sense, embodied rhetoric indicates a concept of rhetoric which surpasses mere intellectual persuasiveness and conviction but includes body, mind, and intellect in a holistic manner. *Rasa* aesthetics as embodied rhetoric and the art of sensuous and emotional

10 The art of argumentation can be seen in India in a pronounced debating culture (expressed in writing in commentaries and hagiographies) and in exegetical rules developed in the Vedic Mīmāṃsā schools.

11 According to Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit Culture and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006; Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007) the tandem of poetry and polity brought about a "Sanskrit cosmopolis" from Java to Afghanistan in the first millennium and spread a common vision of state and ethos. He attributes a vital role in this process to the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, the first great *kāvya* work of India.

12 A strong argument for body knowledge and the physiological conditions of all our knowing has been forwarded by Anne Koch, *Körperwissen, Grundlegung einer Religionsästhetik* (Habilitationsschrift University of Munich, 2007, Open Access University of Munich) (urn:nbn:de:bvb:19-epub-12438-7). She seeks, not least, to overcome the Cartesian body-mind split.

persuasion may be an innovative stimulus for an enlarged concept of rhetoric within and beyond Europe. But even if we do not want to go that far, the surprising and daring proposition of *rasa* aesthetics as “embodied rhetoric” tries to conceptualise rhetoric from an alternative angle and add to intercultural understanding and exchange.

One might object that European rhetoric theory and its classification of emotions was aware of some of the aspects that were central to Indian embodied rhetoric, whereas the latter lacked the explicit rhetoric instruction that was so central in Europe. However, at least in part, a structural equivalent to European rhetoric instruction can be found in the instructions for the actors in Indian theatre studies. Since every act of rhetoric is a form of staging and pathos, the instructions for the actors in Indian drama theory are of particular interest. They concern primarily paralinguistic, nonverbal, and performative means of communication, which are particularly relevant in a situation where voice dominates letter. A special property of any oral communication and orator’s performance are a number of transrational and metalinguistic elements which contribute substantially to the success of persuasive effects, for instance, the constitution and “language” of the body, the timbre of the voice, the gestures of the hands, and most of all the very presence of the performer and his/her skill of staging and interacting.¹³ It is precisely the reflection on these kinds of data which led to the development of *rasa* theory and aesthetics-aesthetics in early Indian theatre studies, whereas in European rhetoric theory they were counted among the secondary, “peripheral routes” of communicative persuasion in contrast to the “central route” of notional impact and rational argumentation.¹⁴ As argued above, emotionalising strategies are central to an art of persuasion and more generally for any personal conviction, affective bonds, moral decisions, and shared spaces of imagination. Perhaps European rhetoric was blinkered in this aspect or too biased in favouring the intellect and discursive mind over feeling and emotions. Either way, it is important that *rasa* aesthetics focus not on the *what* but on the *how* of communication and its effects. It is a rhetoric theory of aesthetic articulation, stimulation, and response.

I will show that Indian aesthetics and *rasa* theory is also very much about completeness and claims of universality,¹⁵ and not just about the beautiful and sublime. These terms have been central to European aesthetics and theories of art and the popular understanding of aesthetics since the eighteenth century. The term “aesthetics” itself was coined at that

13 Joachim Knape, *Was ist Rhetorik?* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000), 99.

14 Knape, *Rhetorik*, 96.

15 Aesthetic theorists, such as Bhaṭṭanāyaka, attribute to poetry (and any art) two major functions besides creating meaning (*abhidā*), namely that of producing ineffable relish and pleasure (*bhojakatva*) and the power of universalisation (*bhāvakatva*, i.e. *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*) which strips ordinary emotion(s) “of their individual and personal aspects and generalizes them in the minds of the spectators endowed with the power of imagination”: K. Kunjuni Raja, *Indian Theories of Meaning* (Chennai: Adyar Library and Research Centre (1969) 2000), 287–288.

time by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–62) who initiated aesthetics as an academic discipline concerned with sensory perception or aisthetics (Greek *aisthesis*), recollection, beauty, and the arts; whereas Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) critical aesthetics (re-)introduced the category of the sublime in addition to beauty—not as properties of objects, but as judgments of taste relying on emotional cognition and response. According to Kant, while the beautiful attracts, the sublime affects the recipient in a deeper way. It shares affinities with religion and may be also fear-inspiring. The sublime connotes something boundlessly great and mighty which excels everything and transcends all limitations and ordinary daily life—a power which lifts up everything base, vulgar, and lowly and inspires virtuousness. Perhaps the closest proximity to European aesthetics of the beautiful and sublime can be seen in the *bhakti* aesthetics relating to the divine absolute, the infinite and wonderful, and subjectively to surrender, devotion, ecstasy, awe, and the refinement of emotional sentiment and spiritual life. Of course, the changing European theories of the sublime make it a very complex category and not at all necessarily related to religion.¹⁶ Many aspects of it have been covered by Indian *rasa* aesthetics since its inception, and without ever actually using the term “sublime.” These include and stretch from the artwork's world- and time-transcending power and the elevation of the soul by poetic speech to the aesthetic responses sense of wonder, heroism, fear, and terror, which in Europe fell under the category of sublime but in Indian theatre studies belong to the most basic *rasas*. Similar to Kant's idea of the sublime, the *rasas* issuing from theatre play were thought to have uplifting power regarding moral life (*dharma*).

Likely, it was not only the *rasa*'s birth in theatre, but also India's performance culture that assured that *rasa* theorists never lost sight of the fact that aesthetics and aisthesis go together and that aesthetic moods need suggestive sensual stimulation. This remained stable even though a move becomes detectable from the objective (the actors' representations of *rasa*) to the subjective (the recipients' relish of *rasa*)—that is, from production to reception aesthetics. When *rasa* theory reached its peak with Abhinavagupta (tenth–eleventh centuries), the sublime was found in the aesthetic immersion itself. Abhinavagupta, the famous aesthetic theorist, Kashmir philosopher, and proponent of non-dual Śaiva Tantra, declared aesthetic immersion and self-forgetfulness to be the only central *rasa* underlying the plurality of *rasas* and pointed out its resemblance to the religious peak-experience of mystical oneness.

There have since been many shifting functions of *rasa* and aesthetic immersion. The relationship of art and religion was likewise changing and very complex, ranging from demarcation and boundary-work to interface

16 Jörg Heininger, “Erhaben,” in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe. Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*, ed. Karheinz Barck et al., vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001), 275–310.

and dovetailing, and finally even identification. The following chapters record some paradigmatic shifts while expounding the *rasa* theory in theatre, poetics, philosophy, musicology, and religious settings. As Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* was foundational for all later discourses, it will be treated more elaborately. I will also give particular weight to Ānandavārdhana (ninth century), who explored poetics as an art of suggestion. His *Dhvanyāloka* and new school of poetics became very influential. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the *Dhvanyāloka* contain most of the material for what I call embodied rhetoric. Both works were commented on by Abhinavagupta who is thought to have brought the *rasa* theory to perfection with his philosophy of aesthetic identification. This had an impact on musicology, and *rasa* was also adopted in religious discourse, most prominently in Vaiṣṇava theology; however, this very rich later tradition will be treated in a more summary fashion. Particular consideration will be given to the shifting functions of aesthetic response and religious encoding, starting with the theatre's claim to be the Veda for the common people.

2. Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*: Theatre as a Veda for the common folk and the theory of aesthetic moods

*Students of the Veda are forbidden to play dice,
read books, chase women, sleep all day long or go to
the theater.¹⁷*

This quotation is from the *Nāradyā-Śikṣā*, a handbook of Veda phonetics. In it theatre is something that Veda students should avoid, as it is improper behaviour to mix with the low and common folk, and actors were of very low social status. But some seem not to have obeyed the prohibition, evidenced by the texts on theatre studies containing quotations from the works of the Vedic phoneticians and the passages on scale theory in certain works of Vedic phonetics that seem to have been taken from theatre studies. In fact, theatre studies apply very similar methods to those used in phonetics, which is not surprising since ultimately both disciplines are dedicated to the sensory aspect of signs and sound: Indian theatre comprises speech, play, dance, song, and instrumental music; strictly speaking, theatre is often dance drama or music drama.

Just like the Vedic recitation manuals, theatre studies also provide detailed technical instructions about how one should recite texts. A distinction is made between presentations that use the voice, gestures or

17 *Nāradyā-Śikṣā* 2.8.30, ed., trans., and annot. by Usha A. Bhise (Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1986), 73. A more literal translation would be, "The six obstructions to attaining [Vedic] knowledge are dice, love of the theatre, reading books, women, and sleepiness": *dyūtaṃ pustakavādyam ca nātakeṣu ca saktikā [śaktatā?] | striyastandrā ca nidrā ca vidyāvighnakarāṇi ṣaṭ | |* See Wilke and Moebus, *Sound and Communication*, 504 and fn. 70.

facial expression (*abhinaya*). Theatre studies, however, are not limited to the instruction of acting techniques, but relate them to a metalinguistic category which tries to cover the sensory emotive content of the actors' voices, gestures, and faces—the *rasa*. What is more characteristic of theatre studies and later aesthetic theory than anything else is this central term *rasa*—that is, mood, expression, dramatic effect.

The main source for theatre studies is Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* ("Textbook for the theatre").¹⁸ For simplicity's sake, I will speak of "Bharata" and *Nāṭyaśāstra* interchangeably, although the work must have had more than one author. The compilation of an early, now-vanished version was probably available in the second century AD,¹⁹ which will have contained much more ancient material and been further reworked. The treatise covers all the arts that are important for musical theatre: poetry, prosody, dance, music theory, singing and the study of instruments, drama theory, stage construction, costumes and make-up, and also techniques for directing.

As mentioned, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* 1.12–18 claims the theatre to be the "fifth Veda," a Veda for the common folk. This symbolic appropriation of the most authoritative and sacred text of normative Brahmanical Hinduism, which was restricted to the three higher castes and in practice known only to the Brahmins, is remarkable considering the despised status of theatre and actors, as well as the fact that the only thing theatre shares with the Veda is its claim to universality. While this claim is founded in the belief of the Veda's timelessness and eternal validity, the universality of the theatre lies in the notion that the whole of reality is represented: "Everything that occurs in the three worlds [earth, air and heavens], is the subject of the theatre."²⁰ Theatre seeks to impart extensive knowledge about the world, it describes humans' behaviour in happiness and misery, and points out the consequences of doing right and wrong. Thus it is not only entertaining, but also educational and comforting (*Nāṭyaśāstra* 1.112–120). Bharata's theatre is trying to be "universal theatre" in the truest sense of the word, and this is expressed not least in his metalinguistic *rasa* theory. The search for completeness may explain why (unlike in classical Western aesthetics) even revulsion and disgust belong to states of mind that are eligible for treatment in the arts. Indian aesthetics has a characteristic striving to integrate all the diverging states of the soul and therefore quite a different

18 *Nāṭyaśāstram of Bharatamuni*, ed. Manavalli Ramakrishna Kavi, 4 vols. (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 21956); R. S. Nagar and K. L. Joshi, eds., *Nāṭyaśāstram of Bharatamuni: With Sanskrit Commenary Abhinavabhāratī by Abhinavagupta and English Introduction*, 4 vols. (Delhi: Parimal Publications, 1994); Lyne Bansat-Boudon, *Poétique du theatre indien: Lectures du Nāṭyaśāstra* (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1992); Paul Thieme, "Das indische Theater," in *Fernöstliches Theater*, ed. H. Kindermann (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1966), 21–120; Wilke and Moebus, *Sound and Communication*, 504–524. This chapter's discussion of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is largely based on Wilke and Moebus.

19 Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture," 42.

20 . . . *trailokyasyāśya sarvasya natyaṃ bhāvānukīrtanam* | (*Nāṭyaśāstra* 1.107, trans. by Wilke and Moebus, *Sound and Communication*, 505)

programme than that of classical European aesthetics. The Indian theatre aims to harmonise the many and varied fields of meaning in life, which exist in everyday life separated and conflicting with one another:

Sometimes we show *dharma* (noble deeds with high morals), sometimes comedy and games, sometimes striving for riches, sometimes a peaceful soul. Sometimes people laugh, sometimes they fight, sometimes they make love and sometimes they commit murder.²¹

There are two prerequisites for the theatre's claim that it portrays all aspects of our world: (a) that all objects and events must be surrounded by *rasa*—they must have a dramatic power and inexorably bring about emotional participation; and (b) that all objects and events in the world can also be represented in this atmospheric form of aesthetic mood. The reality of the theatre does not reflect phenomenal reality—otherwise it would not be theatre. However, in contrast to a literary work, the objects and events of everyday reality (*lokadharmā*) are not only named, but also occur in quite a real way on the stage (*nāṭyadharmā*). The reality of the theatre should provide both elements: sensory immediacy in the gesture, plus artistic communication of moods. In the actors' instructions every mood is painstakingly described in a phenomenological elaborate manner. The result is a profound systematic exploration of the spectrum of human feelings and their bodily expressions. Not least, the early Indian theatre studies inspired this paper's fundamental term "embodied rhetoric."

2.1 THE RASA THEORY OF AFFECTS

In theatre studies *rasa* refers to the sensory emotive content of the actors' voices, gestures and faces, and denotes dramatic effect. There is emphasis on production aesthetics which are intended to evoke specific moods in the audience during a performance. One can neither see nor hear the *rasa*, according to Bharata, one can only "taste" it—we might say "feel" it. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* classifies eight fundamental moods (*rasa*) based on eight basic types of emotions (*sthāyī-bhāva*) known to everybody:²²

21 *kvacid dharmāḥ kvacit kṛṣṇā kvacid arthāḥ kvacicchamaḥ | kvacidhāsyam kvacid yuddham kvacit kāmāḥ kvacid vadhaḥ ||* (*Nāṭyaśāstra* 1.108, trans. by Wilke and Moebus, *Sound and Communication*, 507).

22 It is noteworthy that the multi-semantic term *bhāva* ("existence, being," "condition," "state of being," "state of mind," "disposition," "opinion," but also "meaning," "meditation," "love," "amorous gesture," "will" and many other denotations) takes on, only in aesthetic theory—starting with drama theory—the explicit meaning of "emotion." Otherwise there is no separate term for emotion, or only very general terms like "movement of the mind" are used to connote "emotion," among other things (e.g. agitation etc.). As seen below, aesthetic theory makes a distinction of (eight) dominant or "primary" (*sthāyīn*) and (thirty-three) accessory or subordinate (*vyabhicārin*) *bhāvas* or emotions.

1. erotic romantic mood (*śṛṅgāra*) is based on pleasure of love, passion, and joie de vivre (*rati*);
2. comic mood (*hāsya*) is based on the subjective emotions of laughing and cheerfulness (*hāsa*);
3. tragic, pitying and compassionate mood (*karuṇā*) is based on sorrow and suffering (*śoka*);
4. tremendous, terrifying or terrible mood (*raudra*) is based on irritation and anger (*krodha*);
5. heroic mood (*vīra*) is based on will, stamina, effort and strength (*utsāha*);
6. mood of horror, or creepy mood (*bhayānaka*) is based on fear and anxiety (*bhaya*);
7. revolting and disgusting mood as an aesthetic quality (*bībhatsa*) is based on repugnance, antipathy, and hatred (*jugupsā*), i.e. on revulsion in a psychological sense;
8. fantastic and wonderful mood (*adbhuta*) is based on astonishment (*vismaya*).²³

Later, a ninth *rasa* was added, the mood of peace (of mind) and tranquillity (*śānta*), which was based on detachment (*nirveda*) and represented by yogis, ascetics, and saints. This mood, however, always remained a matter of dispute and was never fully accepted amongst the sophisticated art critics and literary theorists. They sharply distinguished religious literature (the unauthored Veda and the seers' Purāṇas) from their own literary culture (*kāvya*), which was viewed as a purely human discourse based on expressive and indirect language, and the intentional use of imagination suiting the *rasa*,²⁴ as well as on real-world emotions and aesthetic moods.²⁵

Indeed, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* already makes a strict distinction between emotions (e.g. jollity) and aesthetic moods, in this case the comic mood. According to Bharata's theory, the representation, for instance, of pleasure of love and lust for life (*rati*) through certain gestures and descriptions creates an erotic romantic mood (*śṛṅgāra-rasa*). This mood is not the desire for an individual person, but an aesthetic experience which must not be equated with the actual emotion of someone in love. According to Indian aesthetics, art has an ontology of its own. Later theorists even use the term "*alaukika*," "unworldly" or "otherworldly," and *lokottara*, "transcending the world." It is held that feelings, such as pain and pity or sexual desire, always appear in works of art in a de-personalised form (*sādhāraṇīkṛta*). For this

23 See also T. P. Ramachandran, *The Indian Philosophy of Beauty*, 2 vols. (Madras: University of Madras, 1979–1980), here vol. 2, 52, and Paul Hacker, *Grundlagen indischer Dichtung und indischen Denkens* (Vienna: Institut für Indologie, 1985), 31.

24 Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture," 45–61, in particular 45–52. These men of letters were very self-conscious about producing fiction and proud of their skills in indirect, suggestive language, metaphors, and tropes.

25 See Hacker, *Grundlagen indischer Dichtung*.

reason, they are able to arouse the same feeling in different people and are capable of expressing universal features about life. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* laid the groundwork for this claim of an intersubjective universality of *rasa*. Whereas one's emotions (i.e. real-world states of mind) are subjective and personal, *rasas* are transpersonal and relate to life as such. The notion of a transpersonal aesthetic sphere of pure feeling, which can be cognised and shared by all, was vital to the educational programme of theatre, which was to bring everything in life to the stage, to account for all emotions, harmonise the different sectors of life, and offer ethical guidance and moral upliftment.

The fundamental idea of *rasa* aesthetics can be illustrated best by the famous *krauñca* episode, which initiates the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*. This episode describes how the author, Vālmīki, witnessed a female bird shot by a bird-catcher's arrow, and the pain of its mate. This experience, it is said, caused Vālmīki to write his famous work in the same fundamental mood—the aesthetic sentiment of pity and compassion. According to later art theorists it is not the particular pain of the bird, nor is it the subjective feeling of the poet that found expression in the first verse, but pain and pity in general. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* already understands the dramatic effect or mood of, for instance, eroticism (*śṛṅgāra*, literally “shining adornment,” but also “erotic love”) as a metalinguistic symbol which is separated from all actual occurrences of being in love and of sexuality and which has a purely aesthetic meaning. For this reason, although one can feel the erotic atmosphere of a scene, one cannot actually define it—at most one might find other ways of describing and interpreting it.

What remained essential to the *rasa* theory was that the *rasas* can be experienced in the same way, and although referring to feeling or an interior state of relish, they can be expressed and evoked. *Rasas* can be embodied, vocalised, and visualised, and this is precisely what happens in the theatre. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* contains clever considerations on body language, the modulation of voice, and psychosomatic gestures. It is this theory of aesthetic articulation, stimulation, and response, for which I have coined the term “embodied rhetoric,” which, as outlined above, I understand as a theory of sensory (non-verbal) rhetoric and emotive persuasion. Bharata categorises the possible representations of *rasa* as follows:

- representation by gestures performed with the limbs (*āṅgika*) or the body;
- representation by the description of situations in the monologues and dialogues of the actors, and also by the character of the expression of the declamation (*vācika*), i.e. by vocal gestures or expressive vocalisations;
- representation by psychological or psychophysical gestures (*sāttvika*), such as one's hair standing on end or weeping, as an expression of strong emotions and feelings (*bhāva*);

- representation by other things, such as costume, jewellery, make-up and musical accompaniment.

The greatest influence in the development of the *rasa* theory was probably the need to provide specific instructions for the *sāttvika* or psychophysical gestures, whose execution required the performer to immerse himself in the mood of a scene. To describe the realisation of the *sāttvika* gestures, one also had to describe the moods. This necessarily led to the creation of an early phenomenology of affects and the formation of an extensive and subtle language of gestures.

2.2 ELABORATION OF THE AESTHETIC SENTIMENTS AND THEIR EMBODIMENTS

The eight basic types of emotions or fundamental states of the soul (*sthāyībhāva*) are condensed in the artistic expressions of the drama, which incite the corresponding eight aesthetic moods (*rasa*). Both the dominant emotional states and their corresponding *rasas* are elaborately described. This very detailed and exact phenomenological description includes also thirty-three transitory emotions (*vyabhicāribhāva*) (see below ch. 2.3). In the *Nāṭyaśāstra*'s phenomenological exploration of the spectrum of human feelings, every (aesthetic) mood (*rasa*) and the affect or fundamental emotional state (*bhāva*) on which it is based, is described along with the sensory indexes—suggestive images, tangible symbols, and corporal signs. To every mood a deity and a colour are allocated as well as certain sceneries and bodily gestures which evoke or directly express the mood and its specific atmosphere.

As an illustration of this, I will discuss the moods of the terrifying (*raudra*) and the wonderful or fascinating (*adbhuta*). These two sentiments are of particular interest because they correspond to Rudolf Otto's major terms for the numinous or holy—the contrast-harmony *mysterium tremendum* and *mysterium fascinans*.²⁶ In Otto's phenomenology of religious feelings and the sublime, the "*tremendum*" or terrifying mystery refers to feelings of wholesome dread, terror, and awe in reaction to a "wholly other," which ranges from gruesome demons and spirits that cause one to shudder and freeze, to the overwhelming divine majesty and energetic power that inspire complete surrender and the mystical death of the ego. The *fascinans*, on the other hand, denotes absolute attraction, fascination, and delight in something utterly wonderful (*mirum*), gracious, and charming that causes elation, rapture, and bliss. To Otto this "double character" of the numinous—that is, its "harmony of contrasts" (*Kontrastharmonie*)—is

²⁶ Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (Munich: Beck 1997, Original 1917). The book was so much read in his time that by 1927 it was already in its 22nd edition.

the foundational data of all religion(s). Emotions are at the centre of his definition of religion. The numinous, according to him, cannot be grasped rationally nor explained or defined, but only felt. In the non-religious field, he finds closest approximation in the aesthetic sublime.²⁷ His ultimate model, however, is mysticism in which he sees a “theology of the *mirum*”; the *mirum* (and its semantic field of mystery, astonishment, and wonder) denoting the ineffable wholly other.²⁸ Within this model the contrast-harmony of the holy, its double nature of repelling and attracting, becomes a mystical *coincidentia oppositorum*.

Otto’s phenomenology received critique in contemporary religious studies for many reasons: for being ahistorical, blind to the social, far too focused on feeling, theologically biased (in favour of the Judeo-Christian tradition) and for going beyond a description of empirically sound data. Yet it is remarkable how much some of his ideas resonate with Indian data. The *tremendum* and *fascinans* belong not only to the list of basic *rasas*, Otto’s thesis of a contrast-harmony is also quite suitable for Indian deities who are likewise classified into *ugra* (wild, awesome, and terrifying) and *saumya* (mild, gracious, and attractive), whilst all the great universal deities encompass the contrast-harmony of both features—with a clear dominance of the mild, gracious, utterly attractive and *mirum*. The Kṛṣṇa devotionalism discussed above fits precisely into this pattern: Kṛṣṇa has a cruel side (in killing the demons), but for his worshippers he is characterised by his exceedingly attractive sides (the flute-playing young cowherd inspiring mystical longing and *unio* experience). Indian *rasa* aesthetics, absorbed in Kṛṣṇa devotionalism, rests on the epistemological function of feeling as a category of knowledge. Similar to Otto’s numinous, the Indian *rasa* can only be felt and not explained or grasped in rational terms. Otto saw the *mysterium tremendum* as the most fundamental and basic religious emotion. Even this is partly reflected in the Indian pantheon, for instance, in the terrifying Vedic god Rudra who was the protoform of the benign universal Lord God Śiva (“the auspicious one”) of classical Hinduism. The theology of Śiva (in the Śaiva Āgamas as well as the Purāṇas) likewise bears many features of mystical *coincidentia oppositorum*.

Otto’s psychological theory of the holy also finds correlation in the aesthetic moods of *raudra* (the terrifying) and *adbhuta* (the fascinating). However, *rasa* aesthetics are clearly not restricted to the supra-mundane and “wholly other”; in this sense one can also voice a critique of Otto.²⁹ Yet it is of interest that precisely *raudra* and *adbhuta* are the two *rasas* with the greatest affinity to religion in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (where *śānta* and *bhakti rasa* do not yet exist)—whether it is in name, as in the case of *raudra*, meaning literally “the state of the god Rudra,” or in religious associations and

27 Otto, *Das Heilige*, 56 (edition 1927, 58).

28 Otto, *Das Heilige*, 31 (edition 1927, 39).

29 See also Annette Wilke, “‘Stimmungen’ und ‘Zustände’. Indische Ästhetik und Gefühlsreligiosität,” in *Noch eine Chance für die Religionsphänomenologie?* ed. A. Michaels, D. Pezzoli-Olgiati and F. Stolz (Berne: Lang, 2001), 103–126.

images, as in the case of *adbhuta*, a sense of wonder, attraction, and the wonderful.

What interests me here in particular are the precise phenomenological and psychophysical descriptions of aesthetic sentiments and their embodied expressions. The instructions of the actors begin with a deity and a colour, which provide a mental map for the specific *rasa* in a condensed and metaphoric form. The terrifying (*raudra*), for instance, is associated with the awesome god Rudra and the colour of this mood is [blood] red. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* elaborates:

The fundamental state (*bhāva*) of the terrifying mood is anger and outrage (*krodha*). It has the character of a demon, of a wild giant or of an arrogant human being. It leads to war. It arises (*vibhāva*) when somebody is angry and outraged, mistreated, offended, deceived, attacked or abused, when he is being threatened or chased. These expressions (*anubhāva*) reveal it: the person lets fly with his fists, he causes hurt on purpose, destroys things, seizes things violently for himself, takes up weapons, injures others, and draws blood. And it can also be expressed in this way: the eyes turn red, the eyebrows are drawn together, he presses his lips together and grinds his teeth, while his cheeks flap and he clenches his fists. The temporary states (*vyabhicārin*) are these: sometimes one has a clear head, sometimes one is brave or aroused, something eats one up, sometimes one becomes brutal and violent, and then indecisive again, merciless and arrogant. One sweats, shakes, one's hair stands on end and one stutters.³⁰

In contrast to this, fascination or *adbhuta*, literally the “wonderful, marvellous, extraordinary, supernatural, a (good) omen,” is associated with the creator-god Brahmā and canary or lemon yellow as its colour. It is something utterly attracting like Otto's *fascinans*, although it is not primarily associated with mysticism but instead with astonishment and certain experiences, literary tropes, and material culture related to the supernatural and the body's reactions (possibly akin to mystical rapture):

The fundamental state of the mood of the fantastic and wonderful is astonishment. It arises when one sees heavenly beings, when a long-standing wish is fulfilled, when one enters a grove or a temple,

30 *Atha raudro nāma krodhasthāyibhāvātmaḥ rakṣodānavodddhatamanuṣya-prakṛtiḥ saṃgrāmahetukāḥ | sa ca krodhādharṣaṇādihikṣepāṅṛtavacanopaghātāvākpāruṣyābhidrohamātsaryādibhir vibhāvairutpadyate | tasya ca tāḍana-pāṭāḍana-pīḍana-cchedana-bhedana-praharaṇā-haraṇa-śastasaṃpātasamprahāra-rudhirākarṣaṇādyanikarmāṇi | punaścaraktanayanabhrukūṭikaraṇadantoṣṭhapīḍana-gaṇḍasphuraṇahastāgriniṣeṣādibhiranubhāvair abhinayaḥ prayoktavyaḥ | bhāvās cāsyāsaṃmohotsāhāvegāmarśacapalataugryagarvasvedavepathuromāñcagadgadādayaḥ |* (*Nāṭyaśāstra* 6.64, trans. by Wilke and Moebus, *Sound and Communication*, 508).

when one imagines heavenly hordes, heavenly palaces, supernatural phenomena or “magic” illusions, or when one sees or hears of these things. These expressions reveal it: the eyes are wide open and immovable, one has gooseflesh, the eyes water, there is sweat on one’s brow, shivers of joy run down one’s back, one calls “O, O” and “bravo,” makes spontaneous gifts, makes uncontrollable movements with one’s arms and face, and one’s robe flaps about. One experiences states of being spellbound, of arousal, confusion and surprise, or one collapses in a faint.³¹

For Bharata, the moods are invariably expressed in body language and are brought about by certain circumstances, sceneries, and images. He defines the aesthetic sentiments primarily in a literary way—that is, he describes them via certain scenarios and tropes (such as in the *adbhuta* the religious tropes “heavenly hordes” and “heavenly palaces”), which generate these moods and harbour them within themselves. I have suggested that one can speak of embodied rhetoric, which in this case seeks to bring about not so much an idea or an opinion, but a feeling and emotional flavour enhanced by multisensory embodiment. The forms of aesthetic expressivity in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, in particular the literary images, figures of speech, and tropes, were regarded by later literary theorists, such as the famous Daṇḍin, as rhetorical elements (he spoke of the art of “ornamentation” or artistic devices). However, for Bharata the literary tropes are in fact only signals and indexes, examples that are known to everyone. What he actually seeks is a corporal and synaesthetic metalanguage of signs or symbols. He strives for classification of universal feelings and their aesthetic forms of embodied expression. What is most important to him is universal aesthetic categories. The scenarios and gestures, for instance “flapping cheeks” to reveal inner tension (“being under pressure”), are never anything other than signs. They point to something which is not inherent: a flavour or an atmospheric mood. It is therefore not an abstract metalanguage or merely literary rhetoric and it is less concerned with ideology and content. Instead it is about aesthetics-aesthetics and thus concerned with sensory things that exist in participation and with direct experience in a sensory-emotive way. Although one can feel the erotic or repulsive atmosphere of a scene, one cannot actually define it—at most, one can find other ways of describing and interpreting it. What I call embodied rhetoric and corporal metalanguage rests on a semanticisation of psychosomatic gestures rather than on

31 *Athādbhuto nāma vismayasthāyibhāvātmakah | sa ca divyajananadarśanepsitamanorathāvāptyupavanadevakulādigamanasabhāvimānamāyendrajālasambhāvanādibhirvibhāvair utpadyate | tasya nayanavistārānimesaprekṣaṇaromāñcāsru-svedahaṣasādhuḍadānaprabandhahāhākārabāhuvadanacelāngulibhramāṇādibhir anubhāvair abhinayaḥ prayoktavyaḥ | bhāvās cāsyā stambhāsruśvedagadgadaromāñcāvegasaṃbhramajādatāpralayādayaḥ |* (Nāṭyaśāstra 6.75, trans. Wilke and Moebus, *Sound and Communication*, 508–509).

actual language. It is about performativity, about performances and their suggestive power to invoke particular emotional flavours in audiovisual fashion.

2.3 EMBODIED RHETORIC AND SEMANTICISATION OF GESTURES

Bharata describes the audiovisual communication of the *rasas* as having many stages. He begins with the most precise phenomenological description of thirty-three accessory and transitory subjective emotional states (*vyabhicāri-bhāva*), added to the eight dominant and more permanent emotions (*sthāyi-bhāva*). This also includes states such as depression, doubt, tiredness, worry, jealousy, certainty, joyful arousal, and madness. These supplementary emotional states encompass psycho-physical ones such as dreaming, agony, illness, and amnesia. Just like the *rasas*, these feelings are defined according to the *conditions* under which they arise and the ways they can be communicated audiovisually. For example, according to Bharata, madness can be triggered by separation from loved ones, by the loss of one's good reputation, or by illness. It is expressed by laughing without any reason, weeping or screaming, speaking a continuous stream of nonsense, singing, dancing, reciting, smearing oneself with ashes or dirt, and carrying a skull. Interestingly, the latter indicators are found amongst early Śaiva ascetics who pretended to be insane as part of their religious practice. Bharata puts the emotional expressions of madness in the *rasa* categories of tragedy and love(-sickness). Consequently, one and the same subjective state can figure in several *rasas*.

The detailed catalogue of affects added in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* to the eight basic ones, shows how intensely emotions and mental states have been explored in a culture in which no semantic equivalent to "emotion" exists.³² We find only the word *manas*, "mind," which may also denote intellect, or very general terms like "movement of thoughts" (*vṛittvikāra*). The theatrical *rasa* and *bhāva* became themselves the common terms for feelings and emotions.³³ Indeed, it is interesting that they appear in theatre never in their pure, intangible form, but by means of corporal and sensory communication, physical signs, and iconic images. Just as there are no clear demarcation lines between emotion and intellect in the actual language, there is no mind-body split in performative activities and actual everyday practice.

As already discussed, the *sāttvika* gestures—that is, the embodiments of feelings—are systematically to be distinguished from the emotional states. In practice, however, they are often confused with them. The

32 See also McDaniel, "Hinduism," and this chapter, n. 22.

33 See Monier-Williams, *Dictionary English and Sanskrit*, 224, who typically refers in the first place to *rasa* and *bhāva* to mean "emotion," and then adds terms like *manovikāra*, *cittavṛtti*, *cittavikāra*, which simply denote a movement (*vikāra*) of the mind.

psychosomatic or *sāttvika* gestures include weeping, shaking, quivering, blanching, sweating, etc. Ideally, these phenomena can only be represented correctly if the actor is able to enter into the emotional states which trigger these symptoms. Hence the name *sāttvika*, derived from *sattva*, something “that really exists.” But it is unlikely that this idealistic requirement can be fulfilled. Therefore, instructions are provided about how the *sāttvika* gestures can be simulated by use of the body and the voice. The major media of communicating a *rasa* utilises sense perception, or audiovisual signs: well-defined stylised gestures performed by the limbs (*aṅgā-bhinaya*), and “vocal gestures” or expressive speech (*vāg-abhinaya*). The concept of the theatrical *rasa* is always realised in a multimedial and synaesthetic fashion.

When Bharata speaks of *nāṭya-dharma*, he links this with the requirement that theatre should be like a reality that opens itself up to sensory impression. At the same time, theatre should also fulfil the demand for artistic form. Bharata’s catalogue of gestures contains a differentiated body language that plumbs the whole field between simple imitation (such as falling to the floor to portray the *sāttvika* gesture of fainting) and symbolic communication (complex quasi-lexemes), thus complementing verbal communication and taking on the role of a sensory rhetoric and art of suggestion. Some symbols are highly technical and can only be decoded by a connoisseur of the theatre. For example, there are manual gestures for “deer” (the fingers form two little horns and a snout), “lotus,” and “elephant.” Even “heavens,” “love,” and “liking,” and abstract ideas such as “charity” and “decision” can be represented by the positions of the hands and body. Such quasi-lexemes often have a function that we expect to be fulfilled by the scenery. For instance, a dancer can indicate that there is a tree without the need for a tree on the stage.

Other “gestures” impress the senses and emotions in a more direct way. The vocal expressions, which function quite differently to mimesis and technical symbolism, are important for the communication of mood. The mimetic gestures communicate via similarity and recognition, while the symbolic gestures communicate via symbols and signals that must be decoded. In contrast, the sonic aspect is purely expressive, does not call things by their names, and works on a sympathetic and less a conventional level. This purely sonic aspect occurs primarily through the harp music that is played as background music to create an atmosphere. With the exception of a rather loose allocation of certain musical styles to certain *rasa* groups, the music remains strangely vague—quite atypical of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* which is otherwise overflowing with detailed instructions. Music is tellingly associated with special gods and spirits, while the theatrical language, gestures and feelings are the province of human beings (the author Bharata).³⁴

34 This is made clear in the framing story and the “overture” (*pūrva-raṅga*). The function of the overture is primarily religious rather than to put the audience

Despite this, the audible aspect is not totally detached from the dramatic aspect and its theatrical *rasas*. For example, for every class of character there is a rhythm on the drums which “describes” the characteristics in sound. Most importantly, the *rasas* are strongly manifest in the *kāku*, the musical modulation of the voice of the actor. Interestingly, however, the moods which might be differentiated at the semantic level and even appear to be contrary, create partly identical sonic forms of expression. For example, the terrifying and the fascinating can be found in the same group as the heroic—a group characterised by bright energetic sounds and rhythms of tension.³⁵

Bharata differentiates six categories of vocal expression, four of which are relevant to the *rasa*, namely its representation in music, in recital, in tempo, and in phrasing a sentence. It is precisely in this refined and subtle voice model that we find what great attention Indian aesthetics has paid to exact phenomenology. In the phenomenology of speech and voice there is an attempt to define the *rasas* in a very precise way at a purely psychophysical level and to develop an audible representation of them. Representation in recital includes, for instance, speaking in a shrill or deep voice, rapidly and hastily, or slowly. Each indicates certain moods; for instance, speaking slowly indicates something wonderful. Representation through phrasing (*aṅga*) a sentence is another important means of expressing and evoking *rasa*. The *rasa* depends on whether the sentences are pronounced fluently or falteringly, whether the speaker makes pauses or continues without any breaks, and whether a sentence is spoken with a rising or falling intonation, or in a monotonous manner.³⁶

Theatre may thus be seen as a “*Gesamtkunstwerk*” of embodied rhetoric, in which the most dominant expressive forms are the gestures of the body and the voice. A stage representation, or putting what is meant into sensory form, is only possible via gestures. This transfer of meaning into direct sense perception, which is realised using gestures, is missing

in the right mood for the play. All the gods, spirits and demons have to be honoured and “pacified,” if only to prevent the performance from being disrupted. The demons possess a specific affinity for anything that is non-semantic. Their songs use words that do not belong to any comprehensible language, whereas the songs of praise to the gods are semantically lucid. Before these start, the orchestra dominates the singers. As in the Sāma-Veda, “pure music” is believed to have a tendency towards the world beyond.

- 35 Comedy and eroticism can also be grouped together, expressing themselves in a smooth, melodious vibration of the voice. The opposite is shock and revulsion that demand dark, hidden timbres and broken, irregular rhythms. Only tragedy stands alone. It is characterised by a monotonous voice that lacks energy and sinks in lamentation.
- 36 Eroticism and comedy are expressed through a well-formed manner of speaking and in either a sing-song intonation or a playful one. A voice that falters or gives up is characteristic of horror and disgust. The typical feature of the moods of the heroic, the terrifying, and the fascinating is that a whole sentence is uttered without the speaker taking a single breath anywhere in the middle. And finally, monotony and the absence of pauses identify a tragic mood.

in language. Language always develops at a distance from that which it describes, as Cassirer notes:

[. . .] not in proximity to the immediately given but in progressive *removal* from it, lie the value and the specific character of linguistic as of artistic function [. . .]. Language, too, *begins* only where our immediate relation to sensory impression and sensory affectivity *ceases*.³⁷

Language can only speak about a thing—but it cannot also be that thing. It can fulfil the demand for artistic representation, but it does not open itself up to immediate sensory perception. This is where the “language of gestures” becomes important—the bodily gestures and the sound gestures in the theatre. An actor who comes on stage with his hands casually stuffed into his trouser pockets and announces in the voice of a newscaster that a terrible demon is pursuing him and wants to eat him up, is not especially credible and will not create a *rasa*. If, however, he follows Bharata’s instructions, he will speak the same sentence with his eyes wide open, an unsteady gaze and shaking limbs, intoning the same sentence with a dark and quivering voice, he *is* the fear that is to be represented. The mimetic gestures of the actor are material signs (in Cassirer’s words “Dingzeichen”) of immaterial moods. Imitation has a quality going beyond language: it is more sensory, more direct and less conventional, but will always require an act of imagination—that is, it will involve a creative and formative activity on the part of the actor and the spectator:³⁸

[. . .] the apparent “reproduction” (*Nachbilden*) actually presupposes an inner “production” (*Vorbilden*).³⁹

Most of the gestures of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* are located between imitation and symbolism and are highly suggestive and persuasive. The eyes and eyebrows are a good example. The eyes are regarded as one of the most powerful means of expression, especially for the *rasas*, which are never represented by the technical manual gestures. Thus, over one hundred verses are dedicated to the eyes alone. One thing that is clearly mimetic are the eyes when depicting the sentiment of horror: the eyelids are wide open and rigid, the pupils quivering. This simply represents the physiological reaction to whatever type of threat is imminent. In the case of the erotic-*rasa* the eyes are more symbolic. For example, a furtive look from the corner of the eye (*kaṭākṣa*) plays a significant role: it signals erotic

37 Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Volume 1*, trans. John Michael Krois (New Haven: Yale University Press, (1955) 1998), 189. German original: *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen, Erster Teil: Die Sprache* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft (1953), 1998), 138.

38 Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms 1*, 182–183 (German original, 130).

39 Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms 1*, 183 (German original, 131).

interest. The deliberate ambiguity of the signal because of its volitional state of suspense, the desire being “hidden, but unmistakable” in contrast to the unequivocal rigid gaze of fear, receives great elaboration. The suggestive ambiguity as a topic occurs again and again in scenes and poems and has inspired some of the most beautiful verses:

Like an arrow that is touched with both poison and ambrosia, it has penetrated me deeply—the glance from the corner of your eye.⁴⁰

This is a good example of the power of language in poetic diction. As the signal is transferred here into a metaphor, the message—which is not mentioned explicitly with words—becomes condensed and replete with atmospheric flavour, colour, and fragrance. Only poetic language is capable of doing this. It contains the power of suggestion and implication, and it activates the imagination of the recipient to perceive meaning and atmospheric flavour which cannot be perceived via the senses. For although ultimately no arrow is shot, in the fictional world of poetry everything is possible. In the realm of imagination not only do looks of love become sweetly poisoned arrows, but the reader also finds the image particularly apt even though there is no mimesis here at all. The poetic exaggeration gives the gesture of the eyes an emotional immediacy and density that go beyond its original signal function. And it is precisely this art of suggestion found in poetic language that was plumbed in later poetics.

3. Ānandavardhana’s *Dhvanyāloka*: The new school of suggestion in poetics and the theory of aesthetic response

The refined, highly artistic poetry and its theoretical reflection emerge in a different milieu to that of theatre and performing artists: the world of courtly poets, an elite of wealthy literati and sophisticated connoisseurs of art. Poetry evolved, like Indian classical music, at the royal courts. In contrast to Bharata, the court poets and art critics—such as Daṇḍin (seventh century AD), the fountainhead of the so-called school of ornamentation—do not identify with the Veda, nor is there an interest in the new lord gods of classical Hinduism. Their self-understanding was often utterly profane. In their works of art criticism, religion is explicitly put outside the sphere of art. The whole range of what is sung, unwritten, and oral in popular religion is regarded as uncourtly and “uncultured.” Even Vedic hymns (i.e. very traditional forms of religious expression characterised by special poetry and a particular style of chanting) are regarded as having no real aesthetic dimension because they are outside the realm

40 Quoted in Abhinavagupta’s commentary *Abhinavabhāratī* on *Nāṭyaśāstra* 14.1.

of *kāvya*.⁴¹ *Kāvya* ("literature") refers to literature rich in metaphors and tropes: the courtly epics and a literary style of highly ornate poetry in difficult, extravagant language often with double encoding so that the same verse can have two quite different meanings. This so-called *śleṣa* style (literally "fused verse"), was introduced by the famous court poet Daṇḍin in the seventh century and was seen as the masterpiece of the school of ornamentation. This older school of poetry was challenged and exceeded in the ninth century, however, by the school of suggestion, in which the *rasa* came to the fore.⁴² There was a decisive move within literary theory between the seventh and tenth century "away from an original ideal prescriptivism toward an analysis of actually existing texts."⁴³ Ānandavardhana (820–890), who was instrumental for this new (*navīna*) school, ended his epoch-defining work *Dhvanyāloka* with the following verse:

What one calls poetry, is the origin of all [earthly] happiness, a garden of the gods. If the brilliant style and the gorgeous ornamentations suit one another and an unfalsified *rasa* resides in it, everything is found there that the perfect ones [= art-lovers, art-connoisseurs] can desire. We have now shown the *dhvani*, which contains [all] this, with its wondrous power of delight that can only be compared with the magnificent wish-granting tree [of paradise].⁴⁴

This eulogy of *rasa*-filled poetry and its "wondrous," "delightful," and "magnificent" power of suggestion (*dhvani*) is an interesting document for a non-religious, purely aesthetic sublime in India. Ānandavardhana emphasised more than the earlier poetic theory that the important thing about an artistic piece of poetry was not its well-constructed and embellished

41 Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 5. According to Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture," 45–61, it is primarily the use of language which is seen as major difference to religious literature.

42 *Rasa* was also acknowledged previously by Daṇḍin, but not put at the centre of discussion. Daṇḍin was not replaced by the new school, as it is often maintained. Daṇḍin's standards and rules of literary composition were still observed, as Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture," 42–47, 52, convincingly argues, but literary theory changed to such an extent that what was formerly counted as "brilliant literature," i.e. *śleṣa*, was devalued.

43 Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture," 43.

44 *Īty akliṣṭarasāśrayocitaguṇālaṅkāraśobhābhṛto yasmād vastu samīhitam sukṛtibhiḥ sarvaṃ samāsādhyate | kāvyākhye 'khillasaukhyadhāmnī vibudhodyāne dhvanir darśitaḥ so 'yaṃ kalpatarūpamānamahimā bhogyo 'stu bhavyātmanām ||* (*Dhvanyāloka* 4.17, Vṛtti 15, trans. Wilke and Moebus, *Sound and Communication*, 541–542).

The quotations and translations in this section are based on the critical edition of K. Krishnamoorthy, *Dhvanyāloka of Ānandavardhana* (Dharwar: Karnatak University, 1974), here 298. The late ninth-century work includes a commentary (*vṛtti*) on the *kārikā* verses. The question of whether Ānandavardhana was the composer of both, or only of the Vṛtti, has been hotly debated. See Edwin Gerow, *Indian Poetics* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1977), 253.

My discussion of Ānandavardhana draws from and expands Wilke and Moebus, *Sound and Communication*, 541–548.

form (*alāṅkāra*) or the beauty (*śobha*) of its representation, but the emotion and mood (*rasa*) it imparts. According to Ānandavardhana this does not come about through the immediate meaning of the words, but through *dhvani*. *Dhvani*, literally “individual / expressive sound,” is commonly used in colloquial speech when a fine, almost inaudible sound is perceived that one nearly misses altogether. Ānandavardhana adopts this term in the sense of allusion, accompanying undertone, associative field, and suggestion (*vyāñjanā*).⁴⁵ He means the metalinguistic, psychological content of words and sounds. They contain more information than the literal meaning alone, and this information is always heard along with the literal meaning. Thus, it is clear that the *dhvani* is not quite the same thing as figurative meaning, allegory, metonymy or metaphor (used lavishly in *kāvya* compositions). Stylistic figures like these can certainly reveal the *dhvani* of a sentence or poem, but they are not the *dhvani* itself. Ānandavardhana uses the term for both the suggested psychological, cognitive, and emotional content of speech figures and for the suggestive power of poetic language that is able to incite moods and affections.

By means of the *dhvani* concept and with recourse to the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Ānandavardhana offered the first explicit account of the *rasa* in poetry. In doing so he linked *rasa* (sentiment) and *alāṅkāra* (ornamentation) in a synthetic and coherent theory of literary aesthetics, and thus founded a general theory of linguistic signification.⁴⁶ In this theory we find, perhaps most clearly, the interface between rhetoric and aesthetic immersion. Although the *dhvani* can reside in a single word, it is usually the mode of description which evokes it, as in the following verse:

gaṇaṇaṃ mattamehaṃ dhārāluliajjuñiāiṃ a vaṇāiṃ |
ñirahaṅkāramiāṅkā haranti ṅilāo vi ṅisāo | |
gagaṇaṃ mattameghaṃ dhārālulitārjunāni ca vanāni |
nirahaṅkāraṃṅāṅkā haranti nīlā api niśāḥ | |

The clouds tumble about in the sky,
the [tall] Arjuna forests waver in the roaring rain,
and although the nights are [so] dark that the [timid] moon
becomes despondent,
[their beauty] steals [all my] thoughts.⁴⁷

45 Harold G. Coward, “Bhartṛhari’s Dhvani: A central notion in Indian aesthetics,” in *Revelation in Indian Thought*, ed. H. Coward and K. Sivaraman (Emeryville: Dharma Publishing, 1977), 66–70, assumes that Ānandavardhana picked up the term *dhvani* from Bhartṛhari’s *Vākyapadīya* 1.47 and Ṛtti in 1.5, and expanded its meaning from manifested sounds to both the suggestive power of spoken words and the thing suggested, i.e. the principle poetic mood and the unitary idea of the poem.

46 Gerow, *Indian Poetics*, 253; Ambasamudram Sankaran, *Aspects of Literary Criticism in Sanskrit or The Theories of Rasa and Dhvani* (Chennai: Madras University, 1929).

47 *Dhvanyāloka* 2.1, Ṛtti 5, trans. Wilke and Moebus, *Sound and Communication*, 543.

Here the *dhvani* resides in the words “tumbling” (*matta*, which also means “drunk” or “crazy”) and “despondent” (*nirahāṅkāra*, more literally “ego-less,” and also connoting “without assertiveness” and “intimidated”), which precisely because of their rather negative connotations especially emphasise the ambivalent beauty of the monsoon and its dark, overcast nights. These associations exceed the literal meaning and surround the whole verse with their suggestive power. “Tumbling” not only means the rainclouds that roll across the sky in the sense of a naturalistic description, it also evokes the wild and uncurbed power of the monsoon with its rain beating down, its thunder, its floods, and the beauty of the natural world, which becomes lush again after the heat and drought of the summer. “Despondent” not only refers to the moon hidden behind a thick blanket of clouds, but also alludes to a particular theme that occurs frequently in Indian poetry: the topic of the lovers separated by the storm, who become all the more despondent when they see the peacocks performing their courtship dance in a frenzy of delight that the rain has arrived. The Indian connoisseur of literature can thus see in his mind's eye a homogeneous image of moods with a strong impact on affect and emotions.

The allusions within a *dhvani* verse often use literary fields of meaning that superimpose particular tropes on colloquial semantics. For example, the “poetic monsoon” of the verse quoted above is based on the physical meteorological event, but it is also constituted from the classical monsoon scenes in Indian literature, including religious texts, which have sprung up around the natural event. Every monsoon poem evokes the grief of Rāma over the loss of his beloved Sītā, and the god Kṛṣṇa's love-affair with the beautiful Rādhā; a connoisseur of Indian literature will constantly have these well-known popular images in the back of his mind. The *dhvani* is saturated with real and imagined worlds that meet within it.

Similar to the modern theory of aesthetic response (“Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung”) of the German literary theorist Wolfgang Iser,⁴⁸ Ānandavardhana's *rasa* and *dhvani* theory is less a theory of the aesthetics of reception and more a theory of aesthetic effect or aesthetic response. His *rasa* denotes precisely such an effect or response (“Wirkung”) and his *dhvani* may be compared to Iser's qualification of aesthetic texts as “open texts,” containing undefined “blanks” that give space to the reader. Indeed, the *dhvani* is about what is not said within the said. The meaning is directed, but at the same time it is kept in suspense. The reader's imagination is necessary to complete the text by combination, that is, by realising the blank as “giving rise to a whole network of possible connections” and associations “which endow each segment or picture with its determinate meaning.”⁴⁹ Of course, the text itself must in the first place provide the

48 Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading. A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); German original *Der Akt des Lesens: Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung* (Munich: Fink, 1976, reprint 1990).

49 Iser, *Theory of Aesthetic Response*, 196; *Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung* (1990), 303.

potential, or in the words of Iser: "Effects and responses are properties neither of the text nor of the reader; the text represents the potential effect that is realised in the reading process."⁵⁰

Ānandavardhana's *dhvani* harbours both undefined openness as well as a channelling function and inherent potential effect. It is precisely those key lexemes, which are indeterminate, ambivalent, indirect, full of semantic oscillation—that is, open or "blank"—that produce the *rasa* by directing the reader's imagination to cognise a network of mutual projections and entangled meanings. And it is precisely the said in the unsaid and the unsaid in the said that makes good poetry in the eyes of Ānandavardhana. He would not speak of "gaps," but of "suggestiveness" and "allusion," and in place of Iser's "mutual projection" and "connectivity" there is the aesthetic *rasa*, the sensing of the holistic "*gestalt*," which in the *dhvani* is contained in condensed and potential form. Although one can say, following Iser, that while perceiving and relishing the allusion or suggestion, the reader at the same time realises and relishes the effect, the wealth of relations "hiding" in the verse, it is essential for Ānandavardhana that this connectivity is achieved less by an intellectual process and more by using "sensing" and "feeling" to decipher the allusion. More than determinate meaning—which certainly may also be there—suggestive poetic and literary language leaves first of all a fragrance or emotional flavour and atmosphere. This is what the *rasa* as aesthetic effect and reader response is all about. The *rasa* refers here to a synthesising as well as emotionalising effect and the knowledge function of feeling. The primary thing in this typical Indian aesthetic category *rasa* has always been a non-notional, sensual-affective aesthetic experience.

Ānandavardhana ushered in new aspects of embodied rhetoric and here we move into rhetoric's own field: language. Ānandavardhana is of particular interest here, as he explored the complexities and multiple communication aspects, strategies, and functions of language—and not just of poetic language, which was his primary field. It was essential to Ānandavardhana that the function of language does not exhaust itself in denoting, describing, and informing, but gains its richness from language's capacity to allude, suggest, and indicate. Indeed, Indian art theory does not consider "plain" ordinary language, which bluntly states what is to be communicated, as appropriate for literature. This is because *rasa* is missing; that is, indirect language is seen as more refined, more artistic, and more effective in emotionalising the content and the reader's response. Surely, as the art of persuasion it is preferable that rhetoric uses allusion, hidden messages, and emotionalising strategies to convince the addressees.

Embodied rhetoric and persuasive power in the field of language manifest, according to Ānandavardhana (if we dare to connect him with these foreign terms), in expressive speech forms that do not communicate directly, such as Bharata's gestures or in simple denotation, but instead use deliberate ambiguity and suspense (important devices according to Iser to

50 Iser, *Theory of Aesthetic Response*, ix; *Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung* (1990), 7.

create blanks and evoke reader response). Good poetry—and, we might add, effective rhetoric—lies in the well-chosen and well-presented triggers which tap not only the individual imagination, but also the literary and cultural *imaginaires*. The *rasa* is thus embodied not only in a richly figurative speech, in tropes and in expressive language, but also in a conscious play of hiding and revealing which allows a network of associations and combinations. The sensory-affective persuasion in the *rasa-dhvani* aesthetics is about the power of (not only) poetic language to communicate more than what is actually said. It is precisely in this space where the *rasa* is produced, evoked, and relished. The real thing happens for Ānandavardhana therefore not so much in verbal understanding, but in intuiting the text's allusions, in mentally seeing anew, in sensing what is unsaid, anticipating a holistic *gestalt*, and thus fully enjoying the *rasa*. More than anything, the aesthetic experience of *rasa* is getting into the aesthetic mood of the text, tasting its flavour and immersing oneself in its atmosphere—an atmosphere which suggestive-persuasive poetic images in particular have the potential to impart. Ānandavardhana distinguishes between an outer and an inner *dhvani*; the outer refers to the suggestive power and function of uttered words, alliterative forms, etc., whereas the inner refers to the thing suggested—the principle aesthetic mood and the unitary idea of the poem.⁵¹

In principle, any linguistic material can trigger suggestions of aesthetic atmospheres. Older theoreticians of poetics, such as Daṇḍin, considered sound and sense, word (*śabda*) and meaning (*artha*), to be the fundamental linguistic categories. Daṇḍin founded his entire poetological system upon the difference between the terms *śabda* and *artha*. This system does not hold for Ānandavardhana, however, since *dhvani* is a unique type of *artha* ("meaning"). Meaning for him includes not only the cognitive, logical content, but also the emotive elements and the socio-cultural significance of utterances. The question of meaning must be approached in a holistic manner. To formalists like Daṇḍin, beauty exists in the beauty of the individual parts: a beautiful woman is beautiful because all her limbs are exquisite and decorated with costly jewellery. For Ānandavardhana, by contrast, real beauty lies not in the individual parts, but in a quite different dimension, namely, in the overall impression.⁵² The woman herself is beautiful and the holistic image of her beauty is what is relished. In poetry this holistic image corresponds to the *dhvani*. *Dhvani* is always present primarily in the whole verse or the whole poetic work, but a single word can also flood a verse with *dhvani*. Even individual phonemes can bear *dhvani* and be "flooded with *rasa*." Whereas it was important to Daṇḍin that poetry sounds good, having one's emotions touched and immersing oneself into the mood—the aestheticised emotion—should also be conveyed.

This is why it was not Daṇḍin's sophisticated, embellished art that became a model for devotional literature, but instead Ānandavardhana's

51 Coward, "Bhartṛhari's Dhvani," 71.

52 *Dhvanyāloka* 1.4, Vṛtti 5.

dhvani, which fuses notions of aesthetic moods and imageries of refined embellishment, and thus values affective stimulation as more important than brilliant technique. As we shall see, this interiorisation (i.e. the focus on aesthetic response and aesthetic immersion) was further developed by Abhinavagupta (tenth/eleventh century). The aesthetics of the two Kashmiris Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta outbalanced—at least according to often heard modern judgements in India—the ornamentalists and became the most influential aesthetic theories in the history of reception. For both, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* was foundational.

While Bharata was interested in the creative techniques of the actor which generate *rasa*, Ānandavardhana reflects on the creativity of the poet. Since the *dhvani* pertains to the verse or the composition as a whole, there cannot be any provision or instruction for the aspiring court poet on how to construct it. Whereas ornamentalists like Daṇḍin envisioned poetry as an artistic patchwork and provided a large set of ornate literary building blocks for the construction of brilliant masterpieces (which in fact was followed in actual practice until at least the seventeenth century),⁵³ to Ānandavardhana there were no techniques of craftsmanship that one could learn and apply to produce a real *dhvani*-poem or work. Daṇḍin sees *rasa* as arising mainly through perfect technique and tasteful arrangement, while in Ānandavardhana's opinion *rasa* only appears when the "tone" is right and when a totally unique mood is expressed and evoked by the poetic diction. In keeping with this view, the poet needs what we might call genius. Ānandavardhana speaks, when referring to the poet, of *pratibhā* or "inspiration," of something that "intuitively enlightens." He sees the capacity of the poetic genius' spontaneous ideas as the reward for earlier lives, and asserts that the very source of poetic inspiration is Sarasvatī, the goddess of language, music, and wisdom. However, here Sarasvatī is only a metaphor in the sense that the actual core and cause of poetic utterance ultimately remain inexplicable.

4. The *rasa* Theory in Philosophical Aesthetics, Musicology, and Religion: Variants of merging aesthetics and religion

Ānandavardhana's poetic theory on suggestion as the major cause for *rasa* was immensely influential in many fields and it was multifunctional. *Dhvani* literature was the expression of as well as the stimulus for atmospheric moods, sensuously emotive sentiments, social values, and metonymic associations, and both profane and religious circles made use of the multifunctional power of the *dhvani* to embody feelings and to stimulate them. Their literary *dhvani* productions shaped cultural perceptions by evoking, creating, and (re-)embodying collectively shared sentiments and cognitive

53 This important point was made by Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture," 45ff., who sees Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta as generally overestimated.

worlds, both within and beyond the elite cultural milieu of art critics. Not least, *Dhvani-rasa* aesthetics deeply inspired different forms of metaphysics and theology.

It certainly informed the work of the philosopher Abhinavagupta who wrote his famous commentaries on the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (called *Abhinavabhāratī*) and Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka* (called *Locanā*) a good century after Ānandavardhana. Today, Abhinavagupta (ca. 950–1020) is regarded as one of the greatest philosophers and theologians of India, who revolutionised the Śaiva Tantra and brought *rasa* theory to perfection. The view that he was the most important and most influential theorist of Indian aesthetics may be disputed, but he certainly gave the discourse on *kāvya* ("literature") a significant and very radical new turn. In Abhinavagupta we find a decisive move towards the subject and towards aesthetics as an inner experience of the sublime. He shifted the emphasis almost completely to what Ānandavardhana called the "inner *dhvani*," which for Abhinavagupta constituted the very "soul" of the aesthetic experience—or the *rasadhvani* as he also used to call it.⁵⁴ Abhinavagupta advanced a new *rasa* theory by ultimately accepting only one *rasa*: the delightful aesthetic immersion in the taste of *dhvani*. Analytical emphasis shifted from the textual processes of meaning production (how literature embodies emotions and makes them perceptible) to a theory of aesthetic reception based on aesthetic identification and immersion—that is, a radicalised theory of aesthetic response. The recipient is not passive; he or she must be one "with an equal heart" (*sahṛdaya*), which makes him or her part of the creative process. This means the recipient, too, has the ability of *pratibhā*, intuition, sudden insight, and the creative power of imagination. The fundamentally creative role of the art-lover as *sahṛdaya* and the idea that it is the recipients who produce a work of art as much as the artist himself is congruent with modern Western theories of art.

What separates Abhinavagupta from modern theories, however, is his essential step of discerning ultimately only one *rasa*: the self-forgetful immersion in which subject and object become one. He regards this state of mind as the aesthetic experience at its highest level and likens it to yogic absorption (*samādhi*).⁵⁵ Abhinavagupta thus conceives potentially the complete fusion of the sacred and profane spheres and of aesthetic and religious experience. What is important to him is immersion for immersion's sake. According to Abhinavagupta, the self-forgetful, pleasant state of mind in art experience, which is qualified by a complete merger with the object, has the quality of religious experience because it allows for awareness of one's innately blissful nature and the non-dual nature of reality.

Abhinavagupta's central term was *sāmarasya*, which means "that which is of or expresses the same, similar, equal (*sama*) flavour, juice, or

54 Coward, "Bhartrhari's Dhvani," 71.

55 For further references, see Raniero Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience according to Abhinavagupta* (Rome: Is.M.E.O., 1956), xxiv f., 100–101 fn. 4.

essence (*rasa*).⁵⁶ This denotes for him the highest aesthetic enjoyment (*rasa*). As Abhinavagupta states: The experience of *rasa* is “a resting (*viśrānti*) in one’s essential nature (*saṃvīt*), which . . . is pervaded by bliss (*ānanda*) and light (*prakāśa*), and is similar to the tasting (*āsvāda*) of the supreme Brahman.”⁵⁷ Note here that the great theorist of non-dual Śaiva-Tantra says “similar” and not “identical.” However, he nonetheless nurtured the idea of identification between art experience and religion, and he clearly regarded them as structural equals. Indeed, he uses the term *sāmarasya* not only for the highest level of aesthetic experience but also for “the highest spiritual state, where the essence (*rasa*) of the Divine is perceived as all-pervading, and where Self and universe fuse into One in perfect harmony.”⁵⁸

This fusion of aesthetic *rasa* and religion was completed in the thirteenth century by the musicologist Śārṅgadeva,⁵⁹ who was definitely inspired by Abhinavagupta. Śārṅgadeva presented music as a pleasing yoga for everybody, and simply listening to music could be seen as a religious act. Just as the theatrical and poetic *rasas* are seen as something transpersonal, so too is the notion of the Rāga music. Śārṅgadeva’s central term was *nāda*, “sound,” and he picked up the notion of cosmic sound (*nāda*) from the Śaiva Tantra. Fusing this idea with the Brahman, the ultimate godhead of the late Vedic Upaniṣads, he coined the term Nāda-Brahman, “Sound-Brahman” or “Sonic Absolute,” connoting that the whole world is pervaded by sound. Thus, music to him was a direct expression of universal sound and listening to music amounted to a direct participation in the cosmic sphere. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that unlike yoga and Tantra, the very notion of musical Rāga is pure emotion and mood. Rāga—from *rañj*, “colouring”—is something which colours the mind. A specific Rāga will always be connected with a specific mood, and according to Indian musicology, this association is not by convention but is a cosmic fact. Music and musical moods are therefore seen as something pertaining to the divine or cosmic sphere. The better the performing artist, the better he or she “awakens” the Rāga and the mood inherent in it. The more the listener is one of equal heart, the more he or she is coloured by precisely this mood. It is decisive in this conception of musical experience that the *rasa* or emotional colouring is seen as something transpersonal, and in the case of music, even as a cosmic truth. Hence, songs do not have to have a religious content in order to have a functional or “unseen” religious function, and indeed they often do not in Hindustani (North Indian) music. In contrast, much of Carnatic (South Indian) Music is religious. In

56 Sadananda Das and Ernst Furlinger (ed.), Editors’ Preface to *Sāmarasya. Studies in Indian Arts, Philosophy and Interreligious Dialogue—in Honour of Bettina Bäumer* (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2005), xi.

57 *Abhinavabhāratī* on Nāṭyaśāstra 6.31, quoted by Das and Furlinger, Preface *Sāmarasya*, xi.

58 Das and Furlinger, Preface *Sāmarasya*, xi.

59 For a more elaborate discussion, see Wilke and Moebus, *Sound and Communication*, 830–847.

this context, in particular, Śārngadeva's contention could easily take a religious turn. The famous Carnatic composer and musician Tyāgarāja (1767–1847), for instance, holds that listening to music means tasting the bliss of Brahman.⁶⁰ Tyāgarāja composed devotional hymns with beautiful Rāga melodies.

Another powerful fusion of aesthetic and religious experience can be discerned in later Sanskrit poetry, which became strongly "devotionalised" and vice versa in the religious field itself. Ānandavardhana's new *dhvani* theory of *rasa* (ca. 850) and the idea that poetry must be "filled with *rasa*" had a major impact on the religious literary production and hymnology.⁶¹ The *rasa* aesthetics were highly suitable for devotional hymns, and songs and were used to explain their function of expressing and stimulating religious feelings and moods. Only a few devotional hymns, however, reached the high literary standard of classical "profane" *kāvya* literature, but those who did are held in high esteem up to the present day and became much more popular than the profane *kāvya* poems. Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* in the twelfth century and the Great Goddess hymn *Saundaryalaharī* of uncertain date (latest sixteenth century) are probably the most famous examples of highly ornate and *rasa* inflated religious poems, and both were also set to music, that is, they were sung in different Rāgas verse by verse. However, the major idiom used for the highly emotional *bhakti* lyrics has always been the vernacular languages (which adopted the literary standards of the Sanskrit), and the usual *bhakti* text was song.

In this situation the *Bhāgavatam* (ninth century), discussed at the beginning of this chapter, stands out. This is an early Sanskrit text that took up the literary *rasa* standards and explicitly called upon the reader to drink the sweet nectar (*rasa*) of its beautiful words. The *Bhāgavatam* was to be relished as a religious as well as an aesthetic work and was appreciated for both its beauty of poetic diction and the spiritual depth of its semantic content. It is famous in particular for its narrative of the childhood and youth of the pastoral god Kṛṣṇa and his play with the Gopīs, the cowherd women who leave their husband and children to be with their sweet Lord Kṛṣṇa. This work became immensely successful. Its hidden and open eroticism (tenth chapter) made it easy for profane poets and musicians to compose erotic poems under the cover of religion, while in the religious field a bridal mysticism developed. Its major *rasa* was *mādhurya*, "sweetness," which was seen as the very peak of loving devotion and the total immersion in God Kṛṣṇa. *Mādhurya*, sweetness, was the erotic *rasa* sublimated and transformed into a religious *rasa*. It was seen by the Vaiṣṇava theologians of the sixteenth century as the highest form of the *bhakti rasa*. The *Bhāgavatam* was the first Sanskrit text based on highly emotional and

60 See William J. Jackson, ed., *The Power of the Sacred Name: V. Raghavan's Studies in Nāmasiddhānta and Indian Culture* (Delhi: Satguru, 1994), 224.

61 The incorporation of aesthetic standards and *rasa* can, however, be discerned already in the early ecstatic devotional poetry of the saint-singers of Tamilnadu (from the seventh/eighth century) who used the vernacular idiom.

ecstatic Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, and it reached its peak with the poets Mirabai and Jayadeva as well as the Vaiṣṇava theologians of Bengal in the sixteenth century. These theologians wrote works on religious aesthetics that reflected the aesthetic stimulation, response and immersion of religious experience. They used the *Nāṭyaśāstra* as a model for classifying and elaborating equally painstakingly the ritual and devotional gestures and the corporal and sensory-emotive expressions of the *bhakti rasa*—including weeping, laughing, and fainting. These theologians not only gave *rasa* an explicit religious bent, but also *bhāva*. *Bhāva* came to denote an “ecstatic state,” which refers to the total loving immersion in God and spontaneous or ritual ecstatic rapture as expressed in the passionate feelings of the agony of separation and the bliss of union manifested in visions of Kṛṣṇa and his mate Rādhā, as well as in “divine madness” (unpredictable laughing, weeping, crying, dancing, singing etc., including being abrupt, impolite, childish, and irritable).⁶²

Thus, over the course of time many forms of aesthetic-religious blending took place, and typically religious *rasas* were discerned: tranquillity (*śānta rasa*), devotion (*bhakti rasa*),⁶³ and sweetness (*mādhurya rasa*). These religious *rasas* became tremendously important in religious and popular discourse, but they were also looked upon by traditional art critics with suspicion. The *śānta rasa*, for instance, has been constantly debated in poetics, and the more recent *bhakti rasa* was never really accepted. The Vaiṣṇava theologians on the other hand, propounded it as the very peak of all *rasas*, and in the Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, *mādhurya* (sweetness) became the peak of peaks. Embodied rhetoric within this discursive field embraced the persuasive objective of creating—by repeating, chanting, and singing Kṛṣṇa’s name and *mantra* and intensely visualising his story—a pure body of emotion, that is, a “perfected, spiritual body” (*siddha deha*) filled with divine presence and absorbed in the service of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and the bliss of Kṛṣṇa’s paradise.⁶⁴

Something very interesting happened to the *rasa* in this merging of aesthetic theory and religion: in everyday speech it became a word used to describe real-world emotion. The religious reflection on the *rasa* and its application to religious emotions instead of aesthetic moods was apparently decisive for this development, as it brought about the breakdown

62 June McDaniel, *The Madness of the Saints. Ecstatic Religion in Bengal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 6, 7, 9, 20–25, 43–45.

63 *Bhakti rasa* was further subdivided into peace/tranquillity (*śānta*), obedience/servantship (*dāsyā*), friendship (*sākhyā*), tenderness/fond affection (*vātsalyā*), and passion (*rati*). See Axel Michaels, *Der Hinduismus: Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Munich: Beck, 1998), 285.

64 See McDaniel, “Hinduism,” and McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, 3, 41, 43, 45–53. The ritual creation of a spiritual body goes along with a total change of identity; the person (including males) wants to assume the identity of a handmaid (*mañjari bhāva*) of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa to become non-different from Rādhā “by being her female servant and thus experience[ing] her emotions” (McDaniel, *ibid.* 80).

of the classical distinction between reality/real-world personal emotion (*bhāva*) and fiction/transpersonal aesthetic sentiment (*rasa*).

Classical literary theory had always drawn a sharp line between literature (*kāvya*) and the sacred lore of the Veda (“knowledge”), the Purāṇas (“ancient lore”), and Itihāsas (narratives about the past “how it really was”) in terms of function and language usage.⁶⁵ Whereas *kāvya* was understood as a purely human domain and as fiction in which fine linguistic expression was enjoyed for expression’s sake and for the perfect merger of sound and sense, word and meaning, denotation and implication, beautiful form and *rasa*, religious literature was seen as a fundamentally different type of text and was excluded from the realm of *kāvya*. There were several reasons for this, among which the following very traditional views stand out: The Veda was acknowledged as the realm of “authorless” revelation and eternal sound with inherently magic efficacy. Moreover, the Veda was the source of commandments and moral action. The post-Vedic religious lore (*purāṇa* and *itihāsa* consisting of mythical and sectarian narratives) was, on the other hand, attributed to the ancient seers whose “pure” and infallible knowledge revealed the world as it really was. In contrast to the Vedic sound, their primary linguistic feature was semantic meaning—plainly communicated in ordinary everyday language; that is, directly expressing what was meant. This was in contrast to *kāvya*’s indirect and metaphorical language and lacked the *kāvya*’s linguistic discrepancy to reality. In this interesting classification of texts, the Veda was attributed to be a master, while the seers’ texts were like a friend, and the *kāvya* like a seducing mistress.

This classification sheds some light on why art in classical literary discourse was given its own degree of ontology as being “beyond this world,” and as a fictitious reality or a virtual reality of beauty, perfection, and refinement. This also explains why the *rasa* as aestheticised emotion formed a different category to the corresponding emotions experienced in everyday life. Even in the “modern” theory of “inner *dhvani*” or aesthetic mood, *rasa* was still set apart, and in some ways more than ever by defining the aesthetic mood as “depersonalized emotion,” which explained why even sad stories could be enjoyable. But once the genres were mingled together and the aesthetic rules applied to religious texts, it was also logical that *rasa* moved from fiction to reality and became a term for emotion in the ordinary world of daily transaction.⁶⁶ The bridge between the two

65 For the following, see Pollock, “Sanskrit Literary Culture,” 45f., 49–52, containing many references and quotations.

66 It should be noted, however, that Vaiṣṇava theologians tried to maintain the classical *rasa-bhāva* distinction by explaining *rasa* as empathy with somebody else’s experience and as pure, impersonal consciousness-bliss (representing Kṛṣṇa, the impersonal Lord of *rasa*) and *bhāva* as very personal feeling of intensive love (represented by Kṛṣṇa’s beloved Rādhā, “the Lady of Great Emotion, who is the essence of personal feeling”). See McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, 81. Individuality is vital to Vaiṣṇava theology. Therefore, *rasa* needs *bhāva*: “Without *bhāva*, it runs risk of depersonalization” (McDaniel, *ibid.*).

domains was created by the religious *rasas*, including *bhakti rasa*, which was more than an aestheticised flavour, since loving surrender and affection has always been at the centre of *bhakti*, “love of God.” *Rasa* denoted here rather an enforcement and deepening of feeling. It also served as a category to systemise and classify devotional acts as “gestures” of *bhakti*: embodied by worship, hearing God’s stories, repeating his holy name, and singing songs of praise, such gestures of devotion were seen as direct participation in the religious sublime.

I hope it has become clear in this section that *rasa* theory and aesthetics were immensely important in different forms of religious piety and could even take the form of functional religion (such as in music). *Rasa* aesthetics allowed the accommodation of different visions of the religious sublime—from non-dualist (Abhinavagupta) to dualist (Vaiṣṇava theology). Perhaps most importantly, religion’s *rasa* reception was likely the most important trigger in the movement of *rasa* as a word meaning “emotion,” thus transcending the *rasa-bhāva* distinction of classical aesthetics where *rasa* was restricted to (transpersonal) aesthetic sentiment and emotional flavour, in contrast to *bhāva* whose meaning in aesthetic theory became (real-world personal) emotion, feeling, sentiment or affect (such as fear, suffering, love, or joy). For the religious and theologians, this “worldly understanding” of *rasa* and *bhāva* is of course superseded by the religious, spiritual understanding—which itself was powerful enough that even in everyday speech *bhāva* became primarily related to deep absorption in God, ecstasy, and divine madness.

5. Conclusion

Aesthetics in India have a long and colourful history. I have coined the term “embodied rhetoric,” and it can be extended beyond the theatre where it is seen in the dramatic gestures of the actors. Embodied rhetoric is also found in the phrasing of verses, in onomatopoeic sound- and meaning figures, in suggestive language pictures and metaphors, in melodies and song, and in religious readings—that is, in declaiming, reciting, chanting, singing, staging and dancing religious texts, and in other forms of ritual acts, which were understood by theologians as gestures of devotion. The fundamental category of aesthetics, however, is the dramatic effect and mood stimulated and enhanced by these gestures—the *rasa*, or invisible emotional flavour that transcends the body and senses while at the same time is made manifest by them and thus remains part of them.

In Indian art theory and *rasa* aesthetics we can discern a move away from the aesthetics of production (i.e. a theory of affects and aesthetic sentiments and the devices of their dramatic expression) towards the poetic art of suggestion and the creativity of the artist, which involves an Indian theory of aesthetic response. There is likewise a move towards the aesthetics of reception, which stresses the experience of the recipient who is

also a co-creator and towards theories of immersion in the aesthetic and religious sublime—be it the consumption of one’s own bliss, merging with cosmic sound, or an intensive love of God. In other words: while the major category in classical art theory remained the *rasa*, reflection on the locus of *rasa* changed from experienced to experience and experiencer.

There was also a shift towards subjectivity and inner relish without ever giving up the transpersonal claim which correlates with *rasa* theory and religion. Hence, the *rasa* was not restricted to the arts, it spilled over to religion, and enhanced and deeply imprinted the cultural understanding of emotion. The “other-worldly” character of art (i.e. its own ontology) was conveniently streamlined with religion, but the distinction of real-world emotion and aesthetic sentiment was also consciously blurred in religious discourse, which spilled over into the popular reception of *rasa*. Starting with theatre’s claim to be the fifth Veda, there was a constant dovetailing of aesthetics and religion and with related experience, to the extent that it effected a total merger. As mentioned, in the religious sphere, as well as in every day usage, *rasa* became a term for real world emotion (although some theologians maintained a distinction between *rasa* and *bhāva* for impersonal and personal feeling). We should not forget, however, that even *bhāva* defined as “emotion” was an innovation of Indian aesthetics—developed, as it was, within the *Nāṭyaśāstra*’s new *rasa* theory. The original and more general meaning of *bhāva* is much broader and confusingly multisemantic, starting with “existence, being, becoming” “(true) condition,” “state of being,” “(engaging) state of mind,” “innate property, inclination, disposition,” etc.⁶⁷

The *rasa* conceptions, theories, and pragmatics make clear how much a cultural system that had no separate word for emotion nonetheless valued it deeply. Moreover, and equally remarkable, *rasa* aesthetics not only generated a classification of affects, but also new influential separate words for emotion (including affect, sentiment, and feeling)—*rasa* and *bhāva*. While we owe the latter’s existence to the creativity of Indian drama theory, religion had a major share in the *rasa*’s coinage as “ordinary” emotion—and in coating *bhāva* with notions of devotional absorption and rapture.

67 Whereas these meanings can easily be related to emotion (although more generally, *bhāva* as a state of being can also be applied to the state of childhood), this is less so for other meanings, such as “purpose,” “meaning, sense,” “living creature,” “behaviour,” “abstract meditation,” “dalliance,” “instruction,” “a venerated man.” For the great variety of denotations and connotations of the term, see V. S. Apte, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, rev. and enlarged ed. 1978), 716–717; M. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal 1979, first ed. Oxford UP 1899), 754; Otto Böhtlingk and Rudolph Roth, *Sanskrit Wörterbuch*, 7 vols. (Delhi: Motilal 1990, repr. of first ed. St. Petersburg 1855–1875), vol 5, 257–260. Apte, for instance, lists thirty-one different meanings of *bhāva*. On the other hand, most conjunct terms with *bhāva* have to do with sentiment and “the heart.” The aesthetics’ coining of *bhāva* with emotion (and rapture) became extremely influential, although other meanings did not disappear. Moreover, it is very typical that Bengali-English Dictionaries (less so the Sanskrit ones) include “ecstasy, outburst of emotion, passion, mental confusion, possession trance, and rapture” among the definitions of the term *bhāva*. See McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, 21.

The religious appropriation of *rasa* had (almost naturally) profound effects. In particular, the specific religious *rasas*—*śānta* (peace of mind), *bhakti* (loving devotion), and *mādhurya* (sweetness), have never been seen as mere aesthetic moods, but as a direct experience of the sublime and as real personal emotion, a deep feeling of human-divine relationship and merger. Indeed, real feeling is all that counts in *bhakti* devotionism. The same pertains to music. Here the pretension is that music will always naturally colour the mind in an emotive way and lift one up to a divine sphere of pure musical moods. It is thus easy to understand that *bhakti* and music joined forces and that the major expressive means for *bhakti* became song and music. In music theory it becomes clear how much the mood, expressed and stimulated by music, is seen as personal relish and as a transpersonal, cosmic truth—an experience of terror or peace of mind etc.—that is shared by all human beings. Although classical art theory discerns a clear demarcation between aesthetic sentiment (*rasa*) and emotion (*bhāva*) and between religious and profane spheres, the notion of *rasa* allowed for mergers and entanglements in the religious and nonreligious spheres of society. The relationship between art/poetry and religion/religious expression was a complex and pluriform one.

Aesthetic expression, response, and immersion took collective and individual forms and had multiple functions. One of the important functions of *rasa* aesthetics was to give a feeling of completeness, spanning from theatre's claim that it covered all possible emotions, all *rasas*, and the entire world to the *Bhāgavatam*, allowing one to see God in everything and to establish an intense relationship with him that could even include bitter enmity. Different forms of completeness, which were at the centre of *rasa* theories, included Ānandavardhana's claim that *dhvani*, verbal "suggestion," always aims at giving a sense of a unitary whole, and that Abhinavagupta's single *rasa* is an embodied experience of the blissful unity between self, world, and divine reality.

There are, of course, a number of other major functions of *rasa*. The following will outline how it shaped collectivity and became a "technology of the self" (Foucault),⁶⁸ that is, it formed subjectivity by training certain states of mind, spiritual attitudes, and the moral subject:

1. The social function of the theatrical *rasa* is narrated in the framing story of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*: in a rotten world of egoism, the old Veda does not work anymore. A new Veda is needed: the theatre, the major function of which is joyful education of *dharma* values and providing even the dullest person an entertaining learning through watching a play. In a similar way the epics and Purāṇas are conceived as a new Veda. These are now explicitly religious

68 Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 16–49.

texts (though the epics did not start off this way) where the major function is moral and spiritual upliftment and even liberation. Such results are invariably attributed to the act of merely listening to epic and mythical narratives and watching their dramatic staging. Such cultural performances had great impact in channelling and disciplining behaviour, identity and belonging, and in creating shared fields of imagination and emotion. According to the Indologist Sheldon Pollock, it was the courtly epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, the first *kāvya* work, in particular which enhanced a tandem of polity and poetry, and which spread through writing, wandering bards, and dramatic staging a certain vision of state, justice, and morality in Greater India, from Afghanistan to Java.⁶⁹ Thus, even politics and education, which have been very central to the European rhetoric tradition, fall into the sphere of *rasa* aesthetics and its collective persuasion.

2. A second important social function was a persuasive framework for aesthetic and spiritual appreciation of the whole of reality in which horror and disgust turned into aesthetic categories, transpersonal aesthetic moods, or even something divine (e.g. in musical *Rāgas*). The *rasa* discourse in this context nurtured an aesthetic vision of reality in which the ugly became beautiful, the demonic became part of the divine, and the tight social grids of norm and hierarchy were surrounded by an aura of harmony. Religious persons could even understand atrocities as a divine expression or the play of God (*līlā*). But just as importantly, also for non-religious persons, aesthetic relish could easily amount to functional religion, one that was supported by the claim of holism surrounding the classical theory of eight or nine *rasas* and enhanced by the individualistic shift of classical aesthetic theory to aesthetic immersion and identification. Subjectivity and immersion is innate to the *rasa* concept, and Abhinavagupta in particular stressed this aspect. In his theory, immersion was there for immersion's sake and clearly had a functional religious aspect. With Abhinavagupta, absorption in a play, a poem, or music became a powerful technology of the self. He presented it as a delightful technique of self-cultivation and self-perfection, producing an experience of internal bliss and the "equal flavour" of the all-pervading Divine.
3. Perhaps the most important function of *rasa* was its synthetic quality, which achieved various fusions: the superseding of the word and meaning (*śabda-artha*) opposition, the merger of sensory and emotional appeals of poetry, the linking of the inner and outer worlds, and the blending of art and religion. *Rasa* aesthetics supported a typical Indian love of integration, merger, and a holistic, non-dual worldview. This brings us back once again to the subjective sphere of aesthetic identification. Aesthetic immersion was likened to yogic

69 This is one of Pollock's major theses in *Language of the Gods*.

absorption, and importantly, to a particularly pleasant form of yoga without hard asceticism, as the musicologist Śārṅgadeva argued. As outlined above, Indian aesthetics is very much about completeness or holism, and immersion. Typically, post-Bharata, the *sānta rasa*—the “aesthetic mood of peace and tranquillity,” which was a typical Indian notion of the sublime—was added to the list of eight. *Sānta* was a *rasa* that was closest to religion and the search for final liberation (*mokṣa*), and characteristically represented by yogins and ascetics. However, its debate among the hard-core poetics demonstrates that the relationship of art and religion ranged from separation to competition and could even encompass a complete merger.

4. Aesthetic immersion collapsed the boundaries of sacred and profane—most pronouncedly in music: merely listening to music turned into a religious experience. On the other hand, there was also a rich adoption of music in religion. Song and music had been the major medium of *bhakti* religiosity since the thirteenth century, which was often expressed in vernacular hymns and simple Bhajans. After the thirteenth century, with the rise of vernacular poetic and religious expression overriding the globalised Sanskrit culture, *bhakti* devotionism became the mainstream religious habitus. The Muslim rule in Northern India not only diminished temple culture and ritualism, but also led to intercultural exchange and mutual inspiration, for instance in the development of Rāga music at the courts, or in Sufi and *bhakti* traditions. This cultural situation spurred highly interiorised forms of religion and the *bhakti* religiosity of feeling in particular. This is also the field in which Ānandavardhana’s *dhvani* and *rasa* theory enjoyed everlasting success, and in which we can discern mutual borrowing between poetics and religion. Poetry became devotionalised, while devotional hymnology adopted the art of suggestive, *rasa*-saturated poetry. The *rasa* theory was strengthening devotionism (*bhakti*) and provided a systematic ground for the theological reflection of devotional gestures, subjective religiosity, and ecstatic religion. What the Vaiṣṇava Kṛṣṇa devotionism seeks as its most cherished goal is the encounter with God and the creation of a body of emotion: the whole person in all her limbs should be filled with the sentiment of love for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and saturated with the Lord’s sweetness. Technologies of the self in this context include chanting the divine name and visualising oneself as maidservant of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.
5. A more general function of *rasa* theory was the profound traces it left in the subjective and collective social body as a means of understanding and conceptualising emotion. As already outlined, it was not only the *Nāṭyaśāstra* but also the religious reflection on *rasa* that were instrumental for this.
6. I have suggested a further general function. The *rasa* aesthetics, involving elaborate description of affects and moods, as well as a

deep reflection of the sensory and linguistic stimuli, and suggestive means evoking certain affects and moods, brought forth an implicit theory of embodied rhetoric (i.e. a rhetoric relating to dramatic, poetic and other sensory-aesthetic stimuli and emotional effect). In other words, it is the good and convincing performance which is persuasive, for it evokes, stimulates, and trains certain feelings and convictions (e.g. in the religious sphere that everything is God's play, or that mind-absorbing devotional practises are techniques of the self through which one is able to transform his/her personality). Although (the art of) persuasion may not be deliberately sought, and although *rasa* is not about contents but about form, sensation, and dense atmospheres, *rasa* does strengthen the messages conveyed and has a major role in making them effective. Persuasiveness and efficacy are two sides of the same coin. Furthermore, I underline my initial claim that aesthetic theory and embodied rhetoric may be seen as the natural outcome or logical result of a pronounced performance culture in which the spoken *and* sounding word never lost its value and appeal.

7. Regarding religion and everyday life, we do not have to go as far as Vaiṣṇava theology to find the importance of *rasa* in religious and non-religious popular and scholarly milieus. One might argue that the widespread cultural notion of merely listening to a religious text, such as Purāṇa reading, is already purifying and auspicious, and can be particularly well explained by the holistic conception of *rasa*. As most people would actually not understand the content of Purāṇa reading (it is in Sanskrit) the *rasa* concept can explain why a word-for-word understanding is not really necessary. It is enough to know that "this is a religious text" to bring the gods to mind; in other words, it is enough to have the *rasa* of the text's religious and soteriological power. Powerful speech in Hindu India is first of all liturgical speech and poetic expressivity, starting with Vedic chant (the Veda was always orally transmitted). This liturgical model of powerful, authoritative speech, but also the sophistication and fame of poetics, may explain why even mathematicians wrote their scientific treatises as though they were liturgical texts, and made use of sound codes instead of numerals and of the most complicated metres of classical poetry. The mathematicians are perhaps the most striking example of *rasa* aesthetics as embodied rhetoric and art of persuasion. Their aesthetic style of science was not only to allow for easier memorisation and identifying with the abstract scientific subject in a more emotional way, this way of communicating astonishing scientific results was also a way to legitimate, authorise, persuade and draw attention; it sought to suggestively communicate the brilliant content through an equally brilliant form—or in other words through an embodied rhetoric. This embodied rhetoric

stimulated a flavour beyond the words, a *rasa* of intellectual brilliance and authority.

We can thus conclude that *rasa* aesthetics served different and shifting functions besides those of enjoying and reflecting on art: education, legitimation, persuasion, and also worldview formation, deep experience, self-perfection, and enhancement of religious belonging and morality. It provided an aesthetic vision of the wholeness of the world and a non-dual perception of reality and of a tranquil state of mind, complete absorption, immersion for immersion's sake. Perhaps most importantly as regards religion, it intensified religious feeling and devotion. In Hindu India the interface and dovetailing of art and religion was particularly dense and complex and altogether highly pluriform and multifunctional. Within this plurality, one can determine a common thread which pervades the whole cultural fabric: powerful speech is first of all liturgical speech and aesthetic/aesthetic poetic expressivity. Both generate aesthetic identification by speaking to the senses and emotions and by invoking atmospheric flavours.

This may explain why sophisticated theories of aesthetics and poetics exist, but not in exact equivalence to European rhetoric. I began the first section by drawing attention to the Indian performance culture in which the vast lore of sacred literature—and even profane texts—have always been embodied by the voice, performed, memorised, declaimed, recited, sung, staged, and danced. The high valency of the spoken *and* sounding word in the cultural system of symbols in Hindu India from ancient times to today has left traces on textual understanding and apparently also on the way rhetoric is conceptualised in a highly aesthetic-sensory way. We find the art of sensory-affective persuasion in use in fields as disparate as theatre and poetic diction or mathematics and religion. This embodied rhetoric, its working, its media, and the emotional effects were made explicit in classical aesthetic theory. If my suggestion is correct that rhetoric in India is basically aesthetic and aesthetic theory, at least in part, is about embodied, sensory non-verbal rhetoric and emotive persuasion, then we can form a different concept of rhetoric to Europe. Rhetoric in India is less about ideas and ideologies than it is about the stimulation of moods and sentiments and the production of emotional, aesthetic-sensory, and corporal knowledge—reinforcing intellectual conviction and transcending it by producing its own realms of meaning.

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