



Psychological Impacts of Nāṭya

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Abstract

Nāṭya has a unique feature of helping the actor/artist transmit a part of himself, his emotions on to his work (feeling of many to one), thereby transcending the physical self to a state of bliss or 'Ānanda', opening up experience of spiritual moments (feeling of one to none). At the transcendental stage, Rasa is just ONE, like the joy of sad tales or the beauty of an ugly woman in a painting! Aesthetic experience is in tasting one's own essential beatitude and in this sense, Rasa is truly single. In Nāṭya, the Sattva Guna, although invisible, gives support to psychological states and sentiments by means of horripilation, tears and similar other signs displayed in proper places and in harmony with the sentiments. Sāttvika Bhāvas or pure psychological states correspond to nerve centers on a deeper level. Nāṭya helps people to undergo physically, mentally, imaginatively, a process that helps psychological purging forth, of pent-up emotions. It helps to manage stress and emotional health using the techniques, forms and stories that employ psychology as a tool for positive elevation of the mind.

Keywords- Nāṭya, Ananda, Bhāvas, Sattva Guna, Sāttvika, Rasa

Introduction

All our psychological feelings are essentially internal. They originate in human consciousness. They assume, in fact its vital part. Nāṭya has a unique feature of helping the actor/artist transmit a part of himself, his emotions on to his work (feeling of many to one), thereby transcending the physical self to a state of bliss or 'Ānanda', opening up experience of spiritual moments (feeling of one to none). The act of performing not only becomes addictive for the artists who usually say that they simply love performing or cannot wait to get back to stage, but also becomes a revered ideal; as it provides an opportunity to transit from the physical realm to the higher states. As the scripts of Indian classical arts are mostly devotional, they help towards 'Bhakti' which in turn has developed emotional culture of the nation. This path is the path of love and devotion and the process of worship of God and helps the artist and spectator to arrive at meditative states within, during the course of the performance itself. Hence, all aspects within the gamut of our ancient science of art remain not just isolated, but become a holistic and unique therapy, whereby one can experience 'Samatvam' (equanimity of emotions) and 'Samādhi' (experience of oneness with the divine). These concepts may often defy the domain of the so-called rational brain. Says the famous painter Pablo Picasso- *Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth.*

"The aim of art is not to discover the nature of reality but to secure for us the highest experience of life. While it is closely connected with psychology it regards logic, or more properly epistemology, as irrelevant to its purpose" [1]

Theater with a purpose



Purpose of Indian Theater is not to portray stark realism but to attain the very purpose of life through joyful means that are designed with a perfect structure to work gently into the areas of human psychology.

“Dukhārtānām Shramārtānām Shokārtānām Tapasvinām, Vishrāmajanānam Loke Nātyametad Bhavishyati

Dharmyam Yashasya Ayushyam Hitam Buddhivivardhanam,

Lokopadeshajanānam Nātyametad Bhavishyati” [Vol 1, Chapter 1, NS] [2]

Bharata, the Ādi Guru, says that Nātya gives fame, long life and enlightens. It makes weak stronger through humor, enhances scholarship and grants knowledge to those of poor intellect. It teaches duty, expands feelings of love, admonishes, promotes self-restraint, discipline, courage, energy and wisdom. The treatise with its knowledge and practice gives diversion to kings, firmness of mind to persons afflicted with sorrow and composure to those who are agitated. It also grants Viśrānti which is the rest/bliss, for those who are tired, sad, in pain and even in penance.

Nātya Śāstra opens chapter by chapter, exactly showing the world drama unfold from the word, making the characters play various roles with involved acting. The actor is like a Yogi, actually detached from the act in the true sense. There is symbolically the end of a scene, an act, a play like the end of the world drama too. In this context, the dance of Śiva is the cycle of creation or a descent from the subtle realms to the gross while dissolution is an ascent from the gross to the subtle realms. This seminal text in thirty -six chapters, gives the pathway of artistic energy, moving towards its source or consciousness, vibrating with melody, rhythm, literature and dancing, moving the inner recesses of the hearts. How it works through the artistic brains of the many components who put together a piece of art, is indeed a phenomenal spectacle, leaving its impressions on the ones who witness as recipients. Qualifications of artists as necessitated in the text are exemplified as under by Brahma-

Kushala [grasping and skillful, Vidagdha [innovative], Pragalbha [bold, with no fear of stage] and Jitaśrama [energetic with good stamina]. This sets the platform for correct representations of the poem, filled with beauty, elegance and fulfillment. There also arises an exalted Sattva Guna [the pure, good, illumined] in practitioners by nature of the art. “Sattva is something which arises from the mind. It emerges from the concentrated mind.” [3]

Inner to outer- Psychological states

The root Bhāvaya means to cause, to pervade. Through words, gestures and representation of the Sattva, the psychological states or Bhāvas infuse the meaning of the play. It is indeed astonishing that the sage has methodically analysed the human mind in its various role-playing, relationships and situations. The psycho-physio angle of characters, personalities and reactions give a brilliant exposition of the dictum that a ‘sage is a Drashtā’. The sage is seen here as a versatile genius. Bharata Muni, has given a unique classification of the Nāyikās or heroines based on their age, basic character, personality, relationship with lover and various stages of love. Similar is his analysis of Nāyakās or heroes and other characters. It is known in the traditional system of medical science that metaphysically, all matter is composed of five basic



elements pancamahābhūtās which inhere the properties of earth (prithvi), water (jala), fire (tejas), wind (vāyu) and space (ākāśa). The subtlest is space and grossest is earth with respective Tanmātrās or perceptive senses. The body structure is made up of five elements and the functional aspect is governed by three biological humours. Ether and air together constitute vāta -wind, fire and water make up pitta -bile and water and earth create kapha- phlegm. Within each person these Tridoṣās are continually interacting making people possess a variety of differences in behaviour that vary in response to environment, called psycho-physio behavioural patterns. Vāta, pitta and kapha are distinctly present in every individual and express themselves according to predominance of the Gunās of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Sattva, characterised by consciousness and clarity is pure, free from disease and calm. It is responsible for the perception of knowledge. Rajas, the most active, has motion, stimulation and desires; ambitions and fickle-mindedness are a result. Tamas is characterised by disturbances in perception and activities of the mind, delusion, false knowledge, laziness, apathy and indolence.

In Nāṭya, the Sattva Guna, although invisible, gives support to psychological states and sentiments by means of horripilation, tears and similar other signs displayed in proper places and in harmony with the sentiments. It is believed by the learned that the histrionic representation with an exuberant sattva is superior, the one with the levelled sattva is medium, and that with no sattva is inferior. Dr. V. Raghavan explains sattva as follows: “It is the making of our own hearts, which take the shape of what is presented in the poem or drama. This is sattva. This is how even rajasa and tamasa bhāvās like anger and sorrow came to be sāttvika. The Sāmkhya term sattva is used in this context with a specialised meaning imported (injected) into it and equated with sattva, well known in dramaturgy as meaning “tanmayibhāvana.... A tear has to be shown by an actual tear and horripilation by horripilation.” [4] Our subtle bodies are believed to be enlivened by the five elements. The psychic states, when they enter into the predominantly earth-allied element in the vital force, give rise to stambha [stupefaction] and the water-allied element, to āśru [tears]. As tejas [heat] is intimately connected to the vital force, it gives rise to perspiration and paleness of the body. When akāśa [space] affects the vital force, there arises pralaya [fainting or loss of consciousness]. Texts like Sangeeta Ratnākara also take relation of Prāna to Vāyu, Āśru to Jalatattva, Sweda to Agni to and so on.

It is said in Bharata’s text that, “Determinants and Consequents are known by the wise to be things which are created in accordance with the ways of human nature and with the ways of the world. The durable psychological states are eight in number. The complementary psychological states are thirty-three and the Sāttvika states are eight in number. These are the three varieties. Hence there are forty-nine psychological states capable of drawing out the sentiment from the play. The sentiments arise from them when they are imbued with the quality of universality (sāmānya, lit. commonness). The psychological state proceeding from the thing which is congenial to the heart, is the source of the sentiment and it pervades the body just as fire spreads over dry wood” [5]. Abhinavagupta indicates that durable states or Sthāyis arise out of latent impression. These are rooted in four fundamental needs- Vāsanās or instincts, namely Āhāra, Nidra, Bhaya and Maithuna, i.e - food to derive energy, rest to restore energy, fear or insecurity to sustain or maintain and the need to continue life or progeny. They are endless because desire is eternal [Yogasutra IV.10]. All these are aimed at the realization of the four goals or Puruṣārthās namely, Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣa. “The word ‘Vāśana [Yogasutra 1V, 24] comes from the root ‘vas’, to stay. They are tendencies of past lives most of which lie



dormant in the mind. Only those appear which can find scope in this life. They are often identified with Samskāras which are subconscious states constantly generated by experience, in this life". [6]. Although separated by birth, place and time, one can see an uncanny correspondence between memory and impressions. Through several lives, these linger and give rise to instinctive reactions to external situations.

Psychological impact of Sāttvika

An involuntary and spontaneous reflection or expression of the mind is called Sāttvika Bhāva. These feelings are originated in the mind when there is concentration. Sāttvika Bhāvas or pure psychological states correspond to nerve centers on a deeper level. Stupor [stambha], perspiration [sveda], horripilation [romānca], faltering voice [svaraabheda or svaraabhanga], trembling [kampa or vepathu], change of colour or paleness [vaivarṇya], tears [āśru], and fainting or loss of consciousness [pralaya] are the eight Sāttvika bhāvas. After dealing with the sthāyibhāvas and vyabhicāribhāvas, Bharata considers the sāttvikas. He raises the objection as to whether the other mental states are represented without sattva which is why only these eight (stambha, sveda, etc.) are called sāttvika. He himself replies: "Situations of happiness and misery need to be properly presented on the stage with the help of sattva so that they appear completely realistic (yathāsvarūpa) to the spectators. These sāttvikabhāva, which is of the form of romānca (horripilation or gooseflesh), tears (āśru), paleness or loss of colour (vaivarṇya), and such like, in accordance with its appropriate feeling, cannot be enacted by an absent-minded actor. How can sorrow which has weeping as its basis, be represented on the stage by anyone who is not sorry? And how can happiness which has joy as its basis be represented on the stage by anyone who is not happy? Hence the Sattva being desired [in acting] in connection with certain states, the latter are called Sāttvika. This Sattva is explained by the fact that tears and horripilation are respectively to be shown by persons who are not [actually] sorry or happy. And that is why these states stambha, sveda, etc.) are called sāttvikabhāvas.[7]

Sattva is essential in drama because it is an imitation or reproduction or re-enactment of what happens in everyday life or of human nature. Abhinavagupta assesses that Bharata gives some of the sāttvikabhāvas as anubhāvas and some others as vyabhicāriṇs. Vibhāvas, such as seasons and garlands, and anubhāvas, external manifestations of feelings such as tears, are exclusively of a physical nature, and external. He maintains that all rasās are pleasurable – ānandarāpa. The four permanent mental states- love (rati), laughter (hāsa), dynamic energy (utsāha), and wonder (vismaya) are primarily pleasurable (sukha-svabhāva) but the other four- anger (krodha), fear (bhaya), sorrow (śoka), and disgust (jugupsa) are primarily painful. Nevertheless, these permanent mental states do not rest in happiness or sorrow, but are pierced through by an element of these, passing by alone. He establishes: Tasmāt sthāyi-vyabhicari-sāttvika eva Bhāvāh- that these three alone are psychological states. Abhinavagupta, observes that a sthāyi can become a vyabhicari but not vice-versa.

Rasa realization

Bharata states the nature of Rasa- Out of the combination of the determinants, consequents and transitory mental states, Rasa takes birth. It is important to note that Abhinavagupta observes in the chapter on Rasa, "abhinaya Anubhāva eva," ie- the sāttvikas have a dual nature: they are transitory feelings, and at the same time external manifestations of



feeling. His theory of internal and external sāttvikabhāvās [involving the Sāmkhya and the Vedānta concepts of sattva, rajas, tamas, and the kośas, respectively] is deep-rooted. They are harder to feign, as they involve or demand complete concentration of the mind on the part of the actor/spectator. In the context of the sthāyibhāva of ŚĀNTA, Abhinavagupta refers to nirveda, arisen from tattvajñāna (knowledge of the Truth or Reality). To those who disregard this Rasa, he argues that Bharata has implicitly assumed its presence arising out of disillusionment with the world that ultimately leads to tranquility. This is why 'nirveda' is mentioned at the beginning of the vyabhicāribhāvās, keeping as the centre in between the whole set of emotions, even though it is an inauspicious word. This also shows that it is both a vyabhicāri and a sthāyi.

Just as the seed stands as the root cause of a tree, so the aesthetic sentiments- rasās stand as the root cause of the psychological states- Bhāvās. The dramatic representation of the actor, based on the poem, is ultimately based on the generalised emotion – not the poet's personal but an impersonal feeling created by his sensibility and imagination (pratibhā). It is not the realistic but an idealistic sentiment that is emoted, evoked and relished. That even matters like sorrow and such like, which are in themselves distasteful, produce transcendental joy is due to the extraordinary poetic function, called the power of suggestion- vyañjana.

So where exactly do we locate these psychologies, followed by realization of aesthetic joy? Abhinavagupta's own teacher, Bhatta Tauta held the view, later endorsed by him that – when the filled jar overflows, all are pervaded by bliss. The poet and immediate company or troupe, positioned from a place of creative impulse, bring into the play, the super-imposition [adhyaropa] of the psychology of characters on the actors. This will have to be followed later, by negation [apaviddha], once the drama is over. The spectators who are free of conditioned minds, will experience the predominant emotions that in turn will lead to the penultimate bliss. In this context, Rasa is primarily located in the poet and makes the esoteric journey down to the final aesthete. Thus, it is located, rather lodged in its real sense, in the sensitive reader or spectator. This process is altogether different from experiences that ensue from other means of cognition. It is but known that a sensitive spectator looks forward to supreme skill in actors that makes the scenes appear real, although they are not. One needs, therefore, a sahrdayā [one endowed with a similar sensitivity] to appreciate the art arisen, expressed and enacted through the grace of pratibhā. Regarding Bhoja's view, Dr. Raghavan observes: "Of his main concept of rasā as the one principle of alamkāra underlying all feelings and activities, by which characters come into various moods, the poet is enabled to portray them, the actor is enabled to enact them, and the rasika is enabled to enjoy them; the seat is the soul of all cultured men" [8].

Unless gifted with sympathy, the spectator or reader cannot respond to the scenes presented on the stage or in the poem. This empathy is called hrdayasamvāda. This is followed successively, in Abhinavagupta's words, by the stages of tanmayibhāvana (identifying oneself with the scene but retaining a certain distance) and rasa-carvaṇa (aesthetic relishing). When the play with story, song and dance is being represented, there is identification with character and mood both in the artiste and spectator. The former is a Pātra, a vessel who may have to travel from role to role, as in multiple role-playing often done in mono-act theatre and in Ekahārya Lāsya [classical solo dancing]. The latter thoroughly enjoys from his position of deeply concentrating on the visual poetry -Druśya Kāvya, undergoes processes of imagination and catharsis before the realization of Rasa.



Abhinava says on music that the natural tendency of the mind is only towards plain sound. A svara [musical note] has the power to obtrude itself on the mind, to set aside its natural tendency towards mere sound, and by its pleasantness, makes the mind susceptible to emotion. It imposes itself on it and makes its presence felt. The dance and music take both the artiste and spectator to concentrate upon sound as pure melody, pure rhythm and both melody and rhythm.

Philosophy of self- recognition

It is perhaps through dance, music and drama that the puzzles inherent in philosophical discourse find their meaning through their psychological impact. It is Bhattanāyaka who introduced Sādhāranikarāna theory, the psychology of Rasa realization, says Abhinavagupta. He invokes the philosophy of Pratyabhijñā principle of self-recognition in the process of a synthesis (anusandhāna) and re-perception (anuvyavasāya) through the vyabhicārībhāvas, anubhāvas and sthayībhāvas. He takes example of a character such as Rāma who has not been seen in person by any of the actors or spectators and explains how the consciousness of the character is brought on the stage. He also adds that aesthetic bliss is a permanent state intensified by 'Saṁyoga' or a combination of determinant and consequents etc. but had it not been intensified, it is only a permanent state which is present but forgotten, in all. What works is Anusandhāna- the power of realization. Abhinava explains the experience of the rasas through the psychological states, in terms of a dissolution (vigalana) of all other ephemeral items of experience by removal of the veil (āvaraṇabhāṅga). Pratyabhijñā, the philosophy of Trikā [Śiva- Śakti- Nara] involves Abheda [non-dual unity], Bhedābheda [unity in difference], Bheda [multiple differences] and explains this as the reduction in objective, relative identities. The changing 'becoming-ness' of energy- Śakti is lead to 'rest' in 'One absolute' changeless subject, the 'Being' Śiva.

Abhinavagupta says that in aesthetic experience, what is enjoyed is one's own consciousness, which consists of a compact mass of bliss. Different emotions such as love, sorrow, and such, only serve the purpose of lending variety to the enjoyment of this consciousness consisting of bliss. At the transcendental stage, Rasa is just ONE, like the joy of sad tales or the beauty of an ugly woman in a painting! Aesthetic experience is in tasting one's own essential beatitude and in this sense, Rasa is truly single. This 'I', THE SELF, gets coloured by determinants and consequents [vibhāvās and anubhāvās] but remains THE SELF. "Even the flow of tears or shedding of tears when reading a poem full of pathos is only natural as it takes place while experiencing that pure joy; and this flow of tears does not (at all) arise on account of grief. Therefore, the flow or shedding of tears from the eyes of the devotees of (Vishnu, Śiva, or any other) deity on hearing his description is only proper. There is not even the slightest touch of sorrow or grief in listening to such descriptions of deities (and yet they shed tears; it is quite evident that these tears are of pure joy and not of sorrow)" [9].

Nāṭya helps people to undergo physically, mentally, imaginatively, a process that helps psychological purging forth, of pent -up emotions. It helps to manage stress and emotional health using the techniques, forms and stories that employ psychology as a tool for positive elevation of the mind. The mind is used to go beyond its limitations and of course, the body through a scientific structure and discipline, is trained to let go; in a way



its forgotten about. It gives an understanding of how through movement, the energy flow within the body can be activated. One can also reflect on the dominant emotions and experience the exhaustion of the residue of emotions in the process of everyday life. Calmness and peace arise through dynamic meditation and a static, but blissful state of Rasa. “The distinction of Rasa from any merely psychological experience is clear in Abhinava where Rasa is transcendental, the return of consciousness to its own innate and universal but immediate ecstatic nature. In other terms, the aesthetic experience is like a direct perception sui generis, free of every relation with practical reality, etc” [10]. It is said that ‘a willing suspension of disbelief’ is required in the Rasika. The aesthetic experience of grief or sorrow in Nāṭya and kāvya is thus, different from that experienced by people in actual life.

Sahṛdāyas turn back repeatedly to experience this aesthetic sorrow. If it were painful like in the real world, then nobody would ever want to revisit a pathetic play or poem.

“If art is about realism, why then create images? Why not just walk around looking at things around you? Purpose of art is not to create a realistic replica of something but the exact opposite. It is to deliberately distort, exaggerate- even transcend- realism, in order to achieve certain pleasing effects in the viewer” [11]. To either partially or completely disassociate from the mind and tune into the spectacle, far away from the world, is an assured path to transcendental experience.

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