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Poorvam

International Journal of Creative Arts and
Cultural Expressions

**SĀDHĀRANĪKARANA :
UNDERLYING
PROCESS FOR
EXPERIENCING RASA**

*Dr. Rakesh Das &
Sri Prolay Nandi*

Featured

**THE METAPHYSICS OF
'EMBODIMENT' IN
BHARATA'S SYSTEM OF
NĀṬYA: THE
DYNAMICS OF 'EXTRA-
DAILY'**

Shri Piyal Bhattacharya

Book Review

**NITHIN
SRIDHAR'S
CHATUH SHLOKI
MANUSMRTI:
TRADITION,
AUTHORITY,
AND THE
FOURFOLD
FRAMEWORK**



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Poorvam International Journal of Creative Arts and Cultural Expressions (PIJCACE) is a peer-reviewed, open-access journal that serves as a global platform for advancing interdisciplinary scholarship in the creative arts, cultural expressions, and humanities. With its name rooted in the Sanskrit word Poorvam (meaning "Eastern" or "ancient"), the journal foregrounds perspectives from South and East Asia while fostering critical dialogues that transcend geographical and disciplinary boundaries.

PIJCACE publishes original research articles, critical essays, and review articles that engage with diverse themes in creative arts, cultural expressions, and humanities. The journal particularly welcomes contributions that illuminate the cultural, artistic, philosophical, and literary traditions of South and East Asia while fostering critical dialogues that transcend geographical boundaries.

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Preface

There is a question that underlies every act of creative or cultural expression, though it is rarely asked aloud: what does it mean to give form to something that resists form? Whether one is speaking of the body in motion upon a stage, a melody carried from master to disciple across generations, a tale told in snowbound silence, or a philosophical argument that refuses to settle into ideology, the act of expression is always, in some measure, an act of negotiation between what can be contained and what overflows containment. It is this negotiation that the present issue of Poorvam explores, not as a declared theme, but as a living undercurrent running beneath its several inquiries.

With this second issue, Poorvam continues the conversation it began, a conversation about the arts and cultural expressions of South and East Asia, and about the intellectual traditions that have sought to illuminate them. The journal was founded in the conviction that scholarship need not choose between rigour and sensitivity, between the local and the transcultural, between the ancient and the urgently contemporary. The essays gathered here bear out that conviction in their diversity of method, language, and concern.

The issue moves, at its broadest, across three registers of inquiry. The first is metaphysical: what is the nature of the aesthetic act, and what does it accomplish in the consciousness of the one who performs or receives it? The second is critical: how do inherited forms, textual, musical, philosophical, carry authority, and what is our responsibility toward them as readers and scholars? The third is existential: what does art, in its many manifestations, tell us about the condition of being human, about suffering, about longing, about the terror of the familiar made strange?

These are not separate concerns. They fold into one another, as the essays themselves demonstrate. A study of embodied performance opens into cosmology; an inquiry into aesthetic universalisation arrives at the threshold of non-duality; a musical analysis becomes a meditation on lineage and devotion; a reading of a novella becomes a confrontation with silence and the dissolution of the self. Even the philosophical essay on ideology, which may appear at first glance most distant from the arts, asks, at its core, the same question that every artist must eventually face: what does it mean to remain genuinely open, self-correcting, and honest in one's enquiry?

It is our hope that the reader will find in these pages not merely arguments to be assessed, but invitations to dwell in a tradition, in a text, in a form. We are grateful to the contributors who have trusted the journal with their work, to the reviewers who have engaged it with care, and to the readers who bring to these pages a curiosity that no editorial effort alone can manufacture.

Amritanath Bhattacharya

Editor-in-Chief, PIJCACE

March 2026

Critical & Analytical Essays

The Metaphysics of 'Embodiment' in Bharata's System of Nāṭya: The Dynamics of 'Extra-Daily'

Shri Piyal Bhattacharya¹

¹ Founder and Artistic Director Chidakash Kalalay Centre of Art and Divinity Garia, Kolkata, West Bengal, India



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Editor's Note:

The term "extra-daily" translates the Nāṭyaśāstra's foundational distinction between *laukika* (ordinary, worldly) and *alaukika* (extraordinary, transcendent). This dichotomy pervades the text, particularly in the concept of *alaukika rasa-niṣpatti* (extraordinary *rasa* experience), wherein Bharata creates a consecrated performance universe distinct from empirical reality through non-daily time (*tāla*), consecrated space (*devatās*), and psychophysical embodiments (*sthāna*, *cārī*, *karaṇa*). While Eugenio Barba independently developed similar terminology in twentieth-century theatre anthropology defining "extra-daily techniques" as those which alter daily bodily behavior to create scenic presence. The present usage translates concepts indigenous to Bharata's metaphysical system, predating Barba's phenomenological framework by nearly two millennia. Both theorists recognize the fundamental distinction between performance and daily life, though Bharata's approach is cosmological and soteriological where Barba's is biomechanical and comparative. See Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese, *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer*, trans. Richard Fowler, Routledge, 1991.

Abstract

This critical essay examines the metaphysical foundations of embodiment in Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra, arguing that the *sthānas*, *cārīs*, and *karaṇas* are not merely physical movements but psychophysical embodiments of cosmic *tattvas*. Drawing on parallels between the cosmological unfolding described in Taittirīya Upaniṣad and the theatrical universe of *nāṭya*, this study demonstrates how Bharata systematically creates an 'extra-daily' performance dimension through consecrated space, non-empirical time (*tāla*), and embodied gravitational presence. The essay explores how expansion of space through *sthānas* manifests specific energies (*rūpa* and *guṇa*), how *cārīs* dynamically explore floor and aerial space, and how *karaṇas* serve as epistemological tools for acquiring embodied knowledge. Central to this analysis is the concept of *Kaiśikī vr̥tti*, which transforms daily actions into extra-daily artistic expressions capable of generating *alaukika rasa* experience. This

metaphysical framework reveals Bharata's system as a parallel universe creation on stage, where psychophysical embodiments serve the ultimate purpose of delivering dharmic teachings while elevating both performers and spectators beyond mundane emotional experiences.

Keywords: Nāṭyaśāstra, embodiment, extra-daily, sthāna, karaṇa, rasa, psychophysical performance, Bharata

1. Introduction

Embodiment constitutes a process of giving form to something imperceptible (like spirit). The prefix “em” stands for in and Middle English “bodi” means the whole physical structure of a human or animal; material frame.

This, in essence, represents the expression, arrangement or exemplifying an idea intelligently or perceptibly by bestowing a material form to it.

Now the question arises: what constitutes 'embodiment' in Bharata's nāṭya, and what is the rationale behind such embodiment? What we see as mere “movements” or “steps” for dance or “units of dance” such as Cārī, Hasta, Karaṇa, Aṅgahāra as found in the Nāṭyaśāstra are all embodiments. Embodiments of what? Embodiment of various tattvas or cosmic reality that manifests the universe of nāṭya. This might sound absolutely alien at the moment, but we read this in parallel with the cosmic unfolding of the universe where we live in, dwell in.

Taittirīya Upaniṣad extols the gradual unfolding of tattvas in a synchronic order -

तस्माद्वा एतस्मादात्मन आकाशः संभूतः। आकाशाद्वायुः।
वायोरग्निः। अग्नेरापः। अद्भ्यः पृथिवी।

- (Brahmānandavallī 1.1)

Ākāśa or ether or commonly referred as 'hollow space' emerges out of the Ātmān that is Brahman the ultimate Supreme no-space from where everything evolves. The gross emanation of the universe as we perceived through our five sense organs and five work organs begins to unfold from here.

This hollow space is not bound by anything. It possesses only one attribute or guṇa - the śabda-guṇa or the possibility of audibility.

This frequency may render inaudible to many living beings. That possibility of being audible intensifies as action or movement begins to occur as space gets denser and exude vāyu.

Vāyu adds another attribute to this system the sparśa-guṇa the attribute of touch. When the air begins to move in higher frequency, it gets ignited owing to the friction. This ignition is prakāśa or agni. Till now there was no visibility which finds its first appearance here. With visibility arrives the attribute of rūpa or form.

Śabda > Sparśa > Rūpa

When the heat gets cooled down, the space gets denser and appears fluidity - water bearing the attribute of rasa. And the finally arrives the most solid element - pṛthivī, bearing the attribute of gandha or smell, thus catering a complete circle of sensory experiences of perception for us.

This represents a gradual unfolding of cosmic emanation from the causal (Brahma) to imperceivable (hollow space), to subtle and gross. These five elements come together to create a complete structure. This entire process is only fathomed if there is a bhāvanā working behind it. It feels as a complete thought-process partakes in creating a form or structure. Was the cosmos not existing before this process was forged through an ideation? It indeed was there, but that did not reveal any process to us. Those tattvas were only grasped through bhāvanā.

Likewise, one might ask: was there no existence of performance or nāṭya before the Nāṭyaśāstra? Of course, there was. That was just the performance itself in the form of songs and dance etc. However, what the Nāṭyaśāstra did was to give a different shape to the tattvas required for nāṭya and unveiled the process. Not just that it bestowed a sense of deep purpose to take it away from mere practice of merriment.

The tattvas those manifest nāṭya are the Carīs, Karaṇas, Agahāras. What is imperceptible is given/expressed in forms to physically manifest the world of nāṭya, hence these Carī, Karaṇa, Agahāra are embodiments, not mere movements. The question that naturally follows is: how may we begin to grasp the embodiments of Bharata's system of nāṭya?

This process unfolds in two different parts. The first is through learning the Sthānas. Sthāna is that tattva that trains the actors to embody rūpa through the expansion of space. Now, one particular aspect is to keep in mind our body has already got a structure - rūpa. This is familiar to our own selves. Let's call it 'daily'. However, the characters one is about to portray, their rūpas are not identical to our rūpas. Therefore, Bharatamuni is devising a process to embody rūpa of some characters invisible to us. And that process is founded on the metaphysics of space and time. Let us understand that gradually.

Consider a space, a stage with no performer. This space is dormant, it has no form. But as soon as an actor enters and stands in that space, the space becomes dynamic. The presence of an actor itself breaks the space with directions and that makes the space 'ākāśa' palpable. It becomes deśa. Now, we all know that our entire life on the Earth is bound by directions. The rūpa we have, the body itself creates directions such as my left side, right side, head on top, legs at the bottom etc. We may find the same kind of ideation lending the foundation in the post-Bharata treatise Saṅgīta-ratnākara where the placement of hands can be observed to create directions –

पार्श्वद्वयं पुरस्ताच्च पश्चाद्दूर्ध्वमधः शिरः ।

ललाटकर्णस्कन्धोरोनाभयः कटिशीर्षके ॥

ऊरुद्वय च हस्ताना क्षेत्राणीति चतुर्दश ।¹

- SR 7.546-547a

Coming back to our main discussion, this appearance of the 'daily' space, bound by the cardinal directions, is governed by the movement of the Earth around the Sun and the curvature path Sun creates everyday on the visible sky. However, Bharatamuni is psychologically freeing the actor at the very beginning. His system of nāṭya and the performance space is not governed by the 'daily' sense of direction. Here, the side where the audiences sit is always the East.

What about time? Does he adhere to the empirical flow of time? Not quite. Bharata keeps his theatre away from the 'daily' in this case as well. We know that the empirical time on this earth is also

¹ The two sides, front, above and below, the crown, forehead, ear, shoulders, naval, the waistband, the thighs - these are the 14 places where hands may be placed.

governed by the Sun as well as intrinsically linked to the 'daily' activities of our body.

The time taken to blink an eye is called an 'akṣi-nimeṣa', 15 such akṣi-nimeṣas create 1 kāsthā. 30 such kāsthās form a kalā and that leads to muhurta and days and night, resulting into 15 days of lunar cycles, months, seasons, years, aeons... Quite intriguingly Bharata does not subscribe to this empirical framework of time. He says -

या (सा) लौकिकी कला काष्ठा निमेषश्च स्मृता बुधैः ।

न सा तालकला ज्ञेया ह्यन्येषां तालगाः (गा) कलाः (ला) ॥

- NS 31.2²

This is how Bharata takes steps to create an 'extra-daily' tattva – tāla as measurement of time for his theatre. If one has to create tattvas for a new universe on stage (which itself is an extraordinary bhāvanā) the rūpa one needs to create and the time in which it needs to pulsate should not be created in any 'daily' space or time.

Now, let's come back to the performance space. With breaking the space free from the 'daily' sense of direction, Bharata is mentally elevating the space. This is first level of moving towards the 'extra-daily'. Secondly, we find Bharatamuni mentioning the placing of specific devatās at various pillars placed around the performance arena. This the second level of creating 'extra-daily' - from mental to physical. He is not just creating a space but consecrating a space. Though it is covered and does deal with directions, we may consider this as ākāśa since there is no action yet. It is the "hollow space".

As the actor enters and occupies at point, the action begins. This is a transformation and genesis of another tattva from the earlier. The actor needs to contemplate on this bhāvanā and readily that will emit a sense of elevated 'extra-daily' in their inner space which will help them to create convincing rūpas of invisible selves of characters outwardly through their already structured body-space.

Now, let's move closer to the actor occupying space on the stage.

² In common usage what is regarded as kalā, kāsthā, nimeṣa etc., those are not tāla-kalā or time-measures suitable for tāla.

The focus of the spectators is on that actor. The actor becomes the central point of attention. The presence creates a gravitational pull in space. As one occupies larger space, the gravitational pull becomes stronger. This is just like plants or stars having more mass and acquiring more space creating higher gravitational pull.

The same is created by the actors through Sthānas. The Sthānas teach the first manifestation of rūpa. My body already has a rūpa and I am learning to manifest another rūpa through the same body - it is the core of abhinaya. And so, this method is anādi. This is why Bharata's guru of creating a nāṭya is Brahmā, and the guru for kriya is Parameśvara. These two mentions propound the 'anāditva'.

2. Sthānas: Metaphysics of Space and Time

So, whenever there is a creation, it necessitates certain elements - tattvas, without which there can be no creation. So, here in the Nāṭyaśāstra Bharatamuni is unfolding the tattvas and method of an artistic creation. Therefore, the purpose of nāṭya has to remain clear in one's mind: when we are performing nāṭya, that is another creation, another universe. Over ages, as the historical time and space continue to change, we may create method, but something fundamental has to be there, the core remains unchanged. Bharatamuni puts his finger onto that. And so, the tattvas, the rūpas propounded here cannot be mere dance units or "items".

Let us go back to the actor creating gravitational pull and manifesting another rūpa through Sthānas. Bharata muni is teaching to increase the space between the feet in harmony with stretching the knees and the thighs. Quite curiously he uses a term that represents a time unit - tāla. The gradual expansion of tāla is mentioned to begin from one tāla to 2½ and runs up to 5. The one tāla expansion of space posits the body almost in equilibrium, whereas 5 tāla-expansion depicts the optimum stretch after which the body loses its natural balance. So, Bharata nowhere hurls upon anything inorganic which might go against the natural fabric of the body. All these Sthānas are his way of taking the actors beyond their normal 'daily' comfortable stances but also to expand their inner space of mind to install the embodiment.

How does this occur? Let us examine. Bharata mentions the names of the Sthānas as follows -

वैष्णवं समपादं च वैशाखं मण्डलं तथा ।
 प्रत्यालीढं तथालीढं स्थानान्येतानि षण्णूणाम् ॥
 - NŚ 10.51

The gradual expansion of space occurs as follows –

2.1 Samapāda

समपादे समौ पादौ तालमात्रान्तरस्थितौ ॥
 - NŚ 10.58³

We see Bharata is ascribing the svabhāva of this sthāna. This determining of the svabhāva denotes the expression of a certain pulse or energy through a physical form. That is EMBODIMENT. This expansion of space embodies an energy a particular kind of energy. So, the actors are not just demonstrating a mere body-position, but manifesting an invisible energy in the outer space through a particular rūpa.

Now, to let this ideation of metaphysics – this bhāvanā sink deep within the actors, Bharata is ascribing Adhi-devatās for each and every Sthāna. This becomes an impetus for the actors and takes him towards the itikartavyata (what-to-do) successfully. For Samapāda it is -

स्वभावसौष्ठवोपेतौ ब्रह्मा चात्राधिदैवतम् ।⁴

Brahmā being the universal creator represents a harmonious state of balance and equilibrium. The same is demarcated with the one-tāla span. This is how the system of Bharata's nāṭya infuses the 'extra-daily' embodiments.

Thereafter, Bharata is moving onto solidifying this practice within the psyche of the actors. For this, he prescribes application of this to portray various characters or situations. Thus, these embodiments become psychophysical.

अनेन कार्यं स्थानेन विप्रमङ्गलधारणम् ॥

³ Both the feet are parallel, placed at the distance of one tāla.

⁴ Marked by the presence of natural Sauṣṭhava, Brahmā is the presiding deity of this posture.

रूपणं पक्षिणां चैव वरं कौतुकमेव च ।

- NS 10.59b-60a⁵

स्वस्थानां स्यन्दनस्थानां विमानस्थायिनामपि ॥

लिङ्गस्थानां व्रतस्थानां स्थानमेतत् कारयेत् ।

- NS 10.60b-61a⁶

Hereafter the space begins to expand and at all the junctures certain energies get manifested.

2.2 Vaiṣṇava Sthāna

द्वौ तालावर्धतालश्च पादयोरन्तरं भवेत् ।

किञ्चिदञ्चितजङ्गं च सौष्ठवाङ्गपुरस्कृतम् ।

वैष्णवं स्थानमेतद्धि विष्णुरत्राधिदैवतम् ॥

- NS 10.53⁷

Here, we see how the expansion of space creates change in rasa

शृङ्गाराद्भुतबीभत्सवीरप्राधान्ययोजितम् ।⁸

And so, we see the applications mentioned for this embodied space becomes the embodiment of bhāva leading to rasa

चक्रस्य मोक्षणे चैव धारणे धनुषस्तथा ।

धैर्योदात्ताङ्गलीलासु तथा क्रोधे प्रयोजयेत् ॥

- NS10.50⁹

Here, for example, the act of releasing cakra or holding bow depicted at this expansion of space is not mere body position rather they are embodiment of Utsaha leading to Vīra. Likewise,

⁵ This space is to be employed -

i) while holding the sacred thread, ii) to depict the appearance of birds, iii) while bestowing a boon, iv) and depicting curiosity.

⁶ v) while normally standing at ease, vi) to portray an immobile chariot, vii) or an immobile aircraft, viii) or to portray the Śaivaite Lingayet sects, ix) or the ones observing penance.

⁷ Distance between feet = 2½ tālas. The thighs are slightly open towards outside and Sauṣṭhava is held in front. Lord Viṣṇu is the presiding deity of this posture.

⁸ This posture is fitting for portraying the acts of-a) Śṛṅgāra, b) Adbhuta, c) Bībhatsa, and d) Vīra.

⁹ The releasing of the cakra and the holding of a bow, and the depiction of (i) patience, (ii) large-heartedness, (iii) pastime and (iv) anger.

इदमेव विपर्यस्तं प्रणयक्रोध इष्यते ।

उपालम्भकृते चैव प्रणयोद्वेगयोस्तथा ॥

- NS 10.56

The depiction of the lovers' quarrel, taunt and anxiety of love depict that this expansion of space also embodies the pulsation of Rati bhāva leading to the experience of Srigara rasa. In the same way this particular embodied space depicts -

शङ्कासूयोग्रताचिन्तामतिस्मृतिषु चैव हि ।

दैन्ये चपलतायां च गर्वाभीष्टेषु शक्तिषु ॥

- NS 10.57¹⁰

Another important aspect to concentrate on goes as follows

स्थानेनानेन कर्तव्यः संलापस्तु स्वभावजः ।

नानाकार्यान्तरोपेतैर्नृभिरुत्तममध्यमैः ॥

- NS 10.54¹¹

Here, the prevalent quality (guṇa) of the actor gets subsided and the attribute (guṇa) of the space takes over. This makes our point pertinent where the rūpa and in turn the guṇa we possess in the 'daily' body-mind gets subsided. This is the metaphysics of embodiment of 'extra-daily' in Bharata's nāṭya.

The space gets expanded further and as it continued to expand, we find more and more rajah guṇa and more and more gravity gets manifested.

2.3 Vaiśākha

तालास्त्रयोऽर्धतालश्च पादयोरन्तरं भवेत् ॥ ६१

तालांसीनर्धतालांश्च निषण्णोरुं प्रकल्पयेत् ।

त्र्यश्री पक्षस्थितौ चैव तत्र पादौ प्रयोजयेत् ॥ ६२¹²

¹⁰ The same may be employed when depicting - Doubt, envy, severity, anxiety, reminiscing, poverty, restlessness, pride and power.

¹¹ This sthāna may employed in manyfold ways, the primary purpose of it is to depict general conversation among characters of high (uttama) or mid-quality (madhyama) category.

¹² The distance between the feet = three and a half tālas, to be adjusted seated on the thigh. The feet are positioned as angular pakṣasthita.

We see with the expansion of space more rigorous affairs are setting into place -

स्थानेनानेन कर्तव्यमश्चानां वाहनं बुधैः ॥ ६३

व्यायामो निर्गमञ्चैव स्थूलपक्षिनिरूपणम् ।¹³

शरासनसमुत्कर्षे व्यायामकृतमेव च ॥ ६४¹⁴

The space expands further and more gravity is added. If Vaiśākha depicted the gravity or riding horse, the Mandala depicts the gravity of riding an elephant. So, the gravity of such activity and pulsation of such activity gets embodied in the expansion of space and time.

2.4 Mandala

ऐन्द्रे तु मण्डले पादौ चतुस्तालान्तरस्थितौ ॥ ६५

त्र्यश्री पक्षस्थिती चैव कटिजानू समी तथा ।¹⁵

धनुर्वज्राणि शस्त्राणि मण्डलेन प्रयोजयेत् ॥ ६६

वाहनं कुञ्जराणां तु स्थूलपक्षिनिरूपणम् ।¹⁶

And finally, we find the expansion of space is taken up to five tālas between the feet. This is the optimum extent of stretch of human structure. The gravity is optimum here and so do fit the energy of the actions and characters accordingly –

2.5 Āliḍha

अस्यैव दक्षिणं पादं पञ्चतालान् प्रसार्य तु ॥ ६७

आलीढं स्थानकं कुर्याद्द्वद्रश्चास्याधिदैवतम् ।¹⁷

अनेन कार्यं स्थानेन वीररौद्रकृतं तु यत् ॥ ६८

उत्तरोत्तरसंजल्पो रोषामर्षकृतश्च यः ।

¹³ This position may be used for a lot of acts - i) Riding a horse, ii) exercising, iii) exiting, iv) depicting a large bird

¹⁴ This may be employed for - v) Drawing an arrow at the bow, vi) displaying exercises.

¹⁵ Maṇḍala = Indra - presiding deity Distance between feet = 4 tālas One foot positioned diagonally and another in 180° Waist and knee are level

¹⁶ This position is to be used for - i) Holding weapons such as bow and thunderbolt, ii) riding elephants, iii) depicting a fat bird

¹⁷ The right foot is to be taken away at the distance of 5 tālas. Rudra is the presiding deity of this position.

मल्लानां चैव संफेटः शत्रूणां च निरूपणम् ॥ ६९¹⁸

मल्लानां चैव संफेटः शत्रूणां च निरूपणम् ॥ ६९

तथाभिद्रवणं चैव शस्त्राणां चैव मोक्षणम् ।¹⁹

One interesting aspect is that, alongside the gradual expansion of space-time and acquiring of various rūpa and guṇa, definite artha also gets designated. Thus, we can understand another dynamics of Bharata's nāṭya in respect to cosmic unfolding - there no creation until arrives any form or rūpa, and the moment it does, artha also gets determined. So, nāṭya again creates a replica of the cosmic creation of artha-maya jagat.

2.6 Pratyālīdha

The mirroring of Ālīdha is Pratyālīdha -

कुञ्चितं दक्षिणं कृत्वा वामपादं प्रसार्य च ॥ ७०

आलीढपरिवर्तस्तु प्रत्यालीढमिति स्मृतम् ।²⁰

Looking at the expansion of space and thereafter the application of Pratyālīdha, one can visualise the heaviness of the weapons and in turn the energy of that embodiment.

आलीढसंहितं शस्त्रं प्रत्यालीढेन मोक्षयेत् ॥ ७१

नानाशस्त्रविमोक्षो हि कार्योऽनेन प्रयोक्तृभिः ।²¹

Now, on our regular life generally people are not familiar with the prāṇika śakti one requires to handle such weapons. Neither do people squat in at such expanse. So, we again can see that Bharata is creating an 'extra-daily' tattva for the efflorescence of nāṭya, and the applications provide the impetus to ponder on in the mental space because when the body gets expanded in the outer space the mental space has to be equally expanded, the prāṇika kriya has to coincide, and only then the inner and outer will merge in harmony, and this will lead it perfection in rendition. Thus, the embodiment becomes psychophysical.

¹⁸ Many acts may be performed at this position by denoting Vīra and Raudra - i) accelerating arguments, ii) anger and rage, iii) confrontation of the wrestlers, and iv) depiction of enemies.

¹⁹ iii) confrontation of the wrestlers, iv) depiction of enemies, v) harassing, troubling others, and vi) releasing weapons.

²⁰ Bending the right leg extend the left leg (at the same position). Thus, the opposite of Ālīdha is called Pratyālīdha.

²¹ The weapons are to be drawn in the Ālīdha sthāna and to be released in the Pratyālīdha sthāna. Releasing various weapons is the chief function of this position.

With the introduction of the Adhi-devatās almost in the fashion of characters and situations, Bharatamuni demarcates this system and therefore the elements laid in the treatise primarily meant for the nāṭya or dramatic performances.

There is another layer of psycho-physicality embedded in here which becomes effective for the actors' training. Suppose a modern actor with no orientation of what a character like Bhīma or Duryodhana can do during a battle of clubs can do, has no direct engagement of memory thus no samskāra stored in buddhi. In that case how can they enact the scenes such as the battle between Bhīma and Duryodhana from the play Urubhaṅgam? Here, the actor trained in the system of Bharata only needs to fathom the dramatic situation and can easily employ the embodied psychophysical movements to depict the character.

2.7 Mindful Engagement vs. Mechanical Reproduction

One might ask: does this not encourage mindless engagement or mere reproduction of movements? No. On the contrary it depicts not just the mere physical conditioning but a much profound mental seasoning. And systems such as this bars the actor from resorting to random imitation of the real life events of the world, or worse still relate with any personal emotive situation and replicate that.

This is not at all intended for the thrust of Bharata's nāṭya is not in replicating reality

नानाभावोपसम्पन्नं नानावस्थान्तरात्मकम् ।

लोकवृत्तानुकरणं नाट्यमेतन्मया कृतम् ॥

- NS 1.112

but to engage in such a display of the 'affairs of the world' (sarva-karmānudarśakam) which is a glorious re-telling of all the dwelling of the mundane world -

त्रैलोक्यास्यास्य सर्वस्य नाट्यं भावानुकीर्तनम् ॥

- NS 1.107

This basic tenet is the core of this system, hence the necessity of creating 'extra-daily'. What we seek in today's world is a mere

physical perfection, achieved through the imitative correction and there's no self-correction generating from within. Whereas Bharata's nāṭya is propounding such a metaphysics and dynamics of embodied psycho-physicality which will prompt the actors to create and perfect one's rendition as per the rightful embodied energy and psychophysical movements.

The question that follows is: what is the ultimate purpose this metaphysics aims to achieve?

2.8 The Ultimate Purpose: Metaphysical Aims

The direct answer to this is to successfully render the extraordinary splendour of rasa-experience (alukika rasa-niṣpatti) which is distinct from the mundane emotional experiences because nāṭya itself has been qualified as such a substance which is unparalleled to the ten laukika padārthas and five laukika jñānas

नाट्यं नाम लौकिकपदार्थव्यतिरिक्तं
 तदनुकारप्रतिबिम्बालेख्यसादृशयारोपाध्यवसायोत्प्रेक्षास्वप्नमायेन्द्र
 जालादिविलक्षणं तद्गाहकस्य
 सम्यग्ज्ञानभ्रान्तिसंशयानवधारणानध्यवसाय-
 विज्ञानभिन्नवृत्तान्तास्वादनरूपसंवेदनसंवेद्य वस्तु रसस्वभावमिति
 वक्ष्यामः ।

Rasa is its core, and this experience of rasa is directed to the audience. And that is achieved through the creation of 'extra-daily' embodiments as explained above. The question naturally arises: why is it directed toward the audience?

2.9 Directing Experience to the Audience

Because the emanation of the knowledge of nāṭya itself happened to divert the attention of the viewers from the mindless indulgence in sensory activities and mere merriment. The idea is to pass on messages pertaining to caturvarga - dharma (advices on the sustenance of life and ethics), artha (advices on the financial affairs), kāma (teachings on the non-over-indulgence of sensory pleasures) and mokṣa (advices on being shedding psychological baggage and be free). This can only happen if the viewer are cut off from their immediate reality of time and space. This is precisely why Bharata is creating these new dynamics of 'extra-daily' space and time. Upon watching this splendid depiction of 'extra-daily' the audience will believe this newly

formed world of nāṭya on stage to be true, and thus, they can easily absorb the teachings depicted through the dwelling of the 'extra-daily' characters.

This is the higher purpose of nāṭya and so Abhinavagupta reminds the actors that -

तस्यापि तु नेह 'गायेनृत्येद्वादयेत्तन्त्रितो वा भवेत्'
इत्युपदेशः क्रियते । अपि तु स्वरसत एव
तावन्मनोजविषयास्वादप्रवृत्तस्यात एव
वेदशास्त्रपुराणादिभीरुहृदयस्य तन्मनोजवस्तुमध्ये तादृगिदं
वस्त्वनुप्रवेशितं यद्वलादेव पुमर्थोपायावगतिं करोतीति
वक्ष्यामः।²²

- ABh on NS 1.1

A question naturally arises: if all of this is directed toward the greater good of the audience, what does an actor achieve from this?

The achievement of the actors is tacitly woven. Through the training in this system the actor achieves a heightened body-mind conditioning and the state of 'being-doing' or effortless ability to perform. Moreover, this constant practice of distancing one's own rūpa and bhāva to bear and bring forth the rūpa and bhāva of someone else larger than their own selves bestow a blissful rendering of psychological counselling where the actors acquire the ability to not get too perturbed by or caught in the whirlpool of everyday emotions.

3. Cārī: Dynamic Exploration of Space

With this ideation of space containing energy and that emitting a rūpa in the Sthānas, the body begins to explore the space around in 3D cube. This is considered as first endeavour (ceṣṭā) to move with the harmonious engagement of the feet, cuffs, thighs and waist. This ceṣṭā is called Cārī -

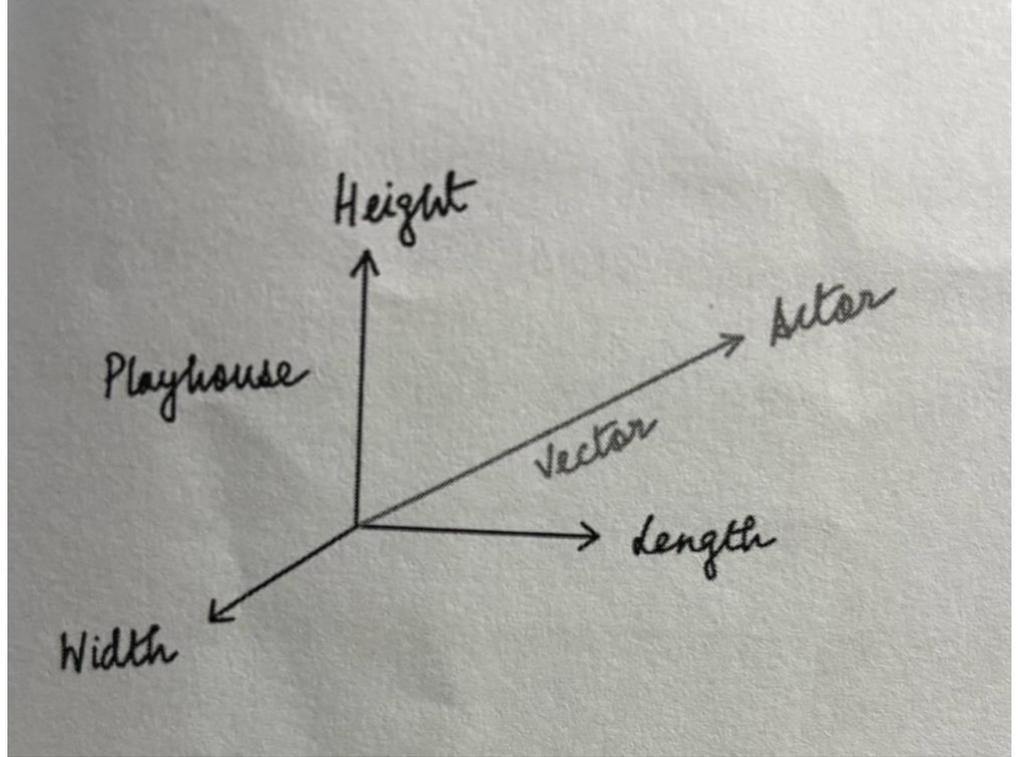
²² Here (the Nāṭyaśāstra) it is not just advised to merely sing, or dance, or play, or remain attached with it (for merriment). The purpose here is to depict rasa and for that wisely chose topics of concern and engage to portray that for the ones who are disinterested in acquiring life-lessons through the teachings of Vedas and Purāṇas etc. It is advised to choose a vastu (plot for nāṭya) and thereafter emit knowledge through performance for the ones mentioned above, so that they may receive the knowledge of puruṣārtha (dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa) effortlessly.

एवं पादस्य जङ्घाया ऊरोः कट्यास्तथैव च ।

समानकरणे चेष्टा चारीति परिकीर्तिता ॥

- NS 10.1²³

That engages in dynamism expressed through vectors, tangents and torques. This is vehicle with which the actors begin to move in space.



यदेतत्प्रस्तुतं नाट्यं तच्चारीष्वेव संज्ञितम् ।

नहि चार्या विना किञ्चिन्नाट्येऽङ्ग सम्प्रवर्तते ॥

- NS 10.6²⁴

This begins with the exploration of floor-space around the body of an actor, followed by the areal space around. The earlier is called Bhaumī cārī and the latter is called Ākāśikī cārī.

Let us understand the dynamics through a few examples -

निषण्णाङ्गस्तु चरणं प्रसार्य तलसञ्चरम् ।

²³ The endeavour of moving leg, knee, thigh and waist together in balance is called Cārī.

²⁴ Whenever a nāṭya is presented it is unfolded with cārī. Nothing in nāṭya can be performed without the cārī.

उद्वाहितमुरः कृत्वा शकटास्यां प्रयोजयेत् ॥

- NS 10.16²⁵

Here we can again find the connotation of nama-rūpa-kriyā. Here, the nama or name itself demarcates form and necessitates an action. But this could easily coincide with the worldly act of pulling a cart. How does Bharatamuni separate this ceṣṭā from the 'daily' and transforms to 'extra-daily'. He asks the actor to drag the feet. We have already seen the extension of two feet can be maximum 5 tālas, so presumably the same is followed here. Then, the raised chest is added, at such stretch of the body the tiresome job of pulling a cart is suggested here. The expansion of space, perhaps performed in slow tempo creates a stretch in the inner space of the actors as well. And in result what reverberates is the translation of body-mind reverb manifested in an 'extra-daily' rūpa and kriyā in the outer space. Now, under no circumstances a cart-puller takes the body closer to the ground or extends the feet so much.

This is the process of embodying the 'extra-daily' in the psychophysical exploration of the floor-space, while founding itself on the cornerstone of bhāvānukīta.

Let us examine an Ākāśikī cārī now –

कुञ्चितं पादमुत्क्षिप्य पुरतः सम्प्रसारयेत् ।

उत्क्षिप्य पातयेच्चैनमतिक्रान्ता तु सा स्मृता ॥

- NS 10.30²⁶

Here, too, we find the playing around nāma-rūpa-kriyā to weave an 'extra-daily' dimension in the dynamics of exploring aerial space. Whereas a 'daily' leaping movement could easily do with stretching the leg and then leaping, we find a detailed array of movement of feet. This separates the ceṣṭā from 'daily' and adds move possibility to it rather than just leaping. Acārya

²⁵ One needs to get the body close to the ground while extending one foot forward by dragging the sole on the floor. (At this position) make the chest raised - this is applied depict pulling a cart (śakata) forward (āśya). Whensoever a nāṭya is presented it is unfolded with cārī. Nothing in nāṭya can be performed without the cārī.

²⁶ Lift the leg bent in kuñcita and extend it forward. It should be thrown up and (thereafter) coming down and leaping (thus travelling in the aerial space) which is called Atikrāntā.

Abhinavagupta asserts an application of this: this may be applied to depict an uphill motion. While moving in atikrāntā cārī for an action, one should raise the body upwards to move with a leaping foot -

परिक्रामन्त्यनेनेति परिक्रामः चार्यादिसंनिवेशः
तद्वशादेकस्यापि रङ्गदेशस्य स्थानभेदेनापरित्यागः, यथा
"आरोढुमुद्वहेद् गात्रम्" "अतिक्रान्तेन पादेन" (XII.102)
इत्यादिना विशेषे तु प्रासादपर्वतादिरूपत्वमस्यैव ।

- ABh on NS 13.3

Thus, we can find a mere body movement becomes an 'extra-daily' embodiment of psychophysical movement, fitting to serve as element or tattva for the manifestation of nāṭya. There is another interesting aspect: Bharata mentions that these cārī constitute vyāyāma for the actors and cārīs joined together can bring out the energetic expression of Arabhaṭī -

संरम्भावेगबहुलैर्नानाचारी समुत्थितैः ।
नियुद्धकरणैश्चित्रैरुत्पन्नारभटी ततः ॥

- NS 20.14²⁷

yet he mentions that these are lalita kriyās which are employed in launching/throwing all sorts of weapons -

एताश्चार्यो मया प्रोक्ता ललिताङ्गक्रियात्मकाः ।
स्थानान्यासां प्रवक्ष्यामि सर्वशस्त्रविमोक्षणे ॥

- NS 10.50

This seemingly contradicting parameters again demarcate that Bharata is not trying to replicate the reality of combat, rather creating a different glorious-retelling of the situation without losing its spirit. We see an abundance of such "lalita" or graceful application of the daintiness of movements. Why is this so?

This constitutes a special mode or vehicle (vṛtti) called Kaiśikī. This vṛtti has the capability of transforming any 'daily' action into 'extra-daily', and in turn proves to be the most befitting vehicle for manifesting the alaukika rasa.

²⁷ Ārabhaṭī emerges out of the conjugation of various cārīs performed in excessive anger and flooding emotion, conjoined with articulated martial movements.

Now, rasa being the principal substance (dravya) of nāṭya finds itself replete with Kaiśikī. We find Bharatamuni also asking for such a dravya which could manifest rasa (in the 1st chapter of the Nāṭyaśāstra.) This Kaiśikī vṛtti thrives on the subtle pulsation of any movement of the limbs, marked by the presence of valana, vartanā etc. Without Kaiśikī the embodiment will happen but the subtle rasa will not be manifested.

This is where our concept of embodiment gets differed from the Western ideation of embodiment. Walking on the line of modern conceptualisations, even if we discard songs or orchestral music from the performance, still when a dancer creates pulsating movements with the limbs, the experience of rasa still may be felt through just the employment of Kaiśikī vṛtti. And Kaiśikā vṛtti is nothing but nṛtta which beneficiary (upaskāraka) for the nāṭya, says Abhinavagupta, for that nṛtta aids in augmenting the process of creating an unearthly, extra-ordinary aura of splendour, and thus, augmenting the rasa-experience. Quite rightfully Kaplia Vatsyayan observes that nṛtta has the capability of severing the thread of reality and transporting the audience to another plane. This is the power of Kaiśikī vṛtti. Now the question arises, how to manifest this Kaiśikī vṛtti?

Bharata is beginning the journey to reach the successful application of this by providing typical body- geography just for that - to understand the Aṅgas-Upaṅgas-Pratyāṅgas first. Owing to this reason, we find an elaborate delineation of various Aṅga, Upāṅga and Pratyāṅga bhedas.

4. Karaṇas: Epistemological Tools for Embodied Knowledge

4.1 The Purpose of Systematic Classification

The sole purpose of this system is to skilfully create an efficient body awareness of optimum quality, where the concentration of mind is permeated to every single movement, bent and angle of limbs. Thus, turning the physical body into an 'all eye'. This is intended to acquire the skilful status where through the movement of each limb rhythm and melody can be emitted.

The purpose of the illustrative practice of bhedas is to turn one's limbs into a charcoal to etch lines and angles in the hollow space where these movements will emerge as illumination, driven and operated by the prāṇika kriyā. We find a similar ideation in the

Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad which considers the straight line to the illumination of light and the movement of the air is foreseen to have a tangent movement -

तेजांसि सरलरेखाः । VU 2.9

तिर्यग्रेखा मरुद्रूपा इति । VU 2.22

Any angle creating any bhaṅgī in the body continues to change bhāvas. Human beings continue to display bhāvas emitted through their body squeezing and contracting during cold and ailment, expanding and restless in heat etc. So, the bhāvas those emerge in the inner space of the body find manifestation in the outer body of Aṅga-Upaṅga-Pratyāṅga, which the other śāstras address as indriyas.

Indriya means Karaṇa. Karaṇa means Sadhana or tool to practice and exercise jñāna. Knowledge can never be attained without practice. The knowledge of nāṭya and in turn nytta as delineated above is universal.

To acquire this knowledge within our system as effortlessly as breathing or eating, and sinking the skill of letting our already-shaped body partake shape of something else, a brilliant plethora of embodied practice is laid down in the Nāṭyaśāstra called the 'Karaṇas'.

These 108 Karaṇas are there to meet the purpose of such knowledge acquiring; thus, the 108 Karaṇas serve as tools to acquire the knowledge of metaphysics and dynamics of nytta. If we study and practice them carefully with heightened awareness, all our limbs - Aṅga, Upaṅga and Pratyāṅga will get rejuvenated, re-awaken through the special activity encapsulating prāṇa, manah and buddhi, for Karaṇa pushes an actor to hone these faculty to an optimum level. Karaṇas continue to put special conditions in front without which a Karaṇa cannot ever be qualified as so. Meeting these criteria deals with an acute manoeuvring of placing one's limbs in the rightful position while curving desired unbroken virtual paths with the limbs. Let us look at some of those criteria

हस्तपादसमायोगो नृत्यस्य करणं भवेत् ॥

- NS 4.30²⁸

²⁸ The conjoining of the movement of the lower and upper limbs constitutes the tools for nr̥tta.

The question that follows is: in what manner and to what extent must this be achieved? What criteria constitute the parīkṣā for the successful manifestation of Karaṇa?

Abhinavagupta delineates -

हस्तोपलक्षितस्य पूर्वकायवर्ति शाखाङ्गोपाङ्गादेः
पादोपलक्षितस्य चापरकायगतपार्श्वकट्यूरुजङ्घाचरणादेः
सङ्गततयाऽत्रुटितत्वेवृत्तियोजने । पूर्वक्षेत्रसंयोगत्यागेन
समुचितक्षेत्रान्तरप्राप्तिपर्यन्ततया एका क्रिया
तत्करणमित्यर्थः ।

- ABh on NS 4.30

This is specially marked by the presence of beauty in galore and the daintiness of the movement

.... अधिकं (यत्) सौन्दर्यानुप्रवेशेन सविलासत्वं नाम ।

- ABh on NS 4.30

This is the difference of embodiment between Indian and Western conceptualisation as we mentioned earlier. This presence of beauty abundant, the daintiness of movement weaved within the embodied psychophysical movement itself that will automatically augment the rasa-experience. In the same line, we find Śarāṅgadeva describing Karaṇas as kriyās which can manifest the seamless, unbroken flow of rasa

स्याक्रिया करपादादेर्विलासेनाव्रुटद्रसा ॥

- SR 4.548

This system of devising such embodied movement constitutes the knowledge of maximising the possibility of exploring what we always carry along with ourselves - our body-mind. The way we live and dwell in life, it impedes us from acquiring the first-hand knowledge and extra-ordinary possibility that is embedded within our body-mind.

Let us examine, a few examples to observe how Karaṇas embody bhāvas and in the process push the contour of suggestibility - The Karaṇas bring forth a special kind of embodied psychophysical movements to depict certain vākyarthābhinaya and serve as tool to translate meaning of the text in the gestural space, which in turn augment rasa experience. Phillip B. Zerilli observes this as a wonderful phenomenon in traditional Indian performance systems, such as Kathakali, to delve on embodied movements

which becomes stimulators and vehicles to augment the rasa-experience.²⁹

We find the mention of such vākyārthābhīnaya in the Abhinavabhāratī, for example: Vartitam for depicting envy ('asūyā-vākyārthābhīnaye'), Apavidham for envy and anger ('asūyā-kopa-vākyārthābhīnaye'), Līnam for praying for something dear ('priya-prarthana-vākyārthābhīnaye'), Kaṭicchinam for bewilderment ('vismaya-pradhāna-vākyārthābhīnaye') etc.

Let us choose one such example to observe how it is moving away from the 'daily' to manifest 'extra- daily'.

4.2 Vartitam: An Illustrative Example

We find the outline of this psychophysical embodiment from Bharatamuni and later being supplemented by Abhinabhagupta:

कुञ्चितौ मणिबन्धे तु व्यावृत्तपरिवर्तितौ ॥

हस्तौ निपतितौ चोर्वोर्वर्तितं करणं तु तत् ।

- NS 4.62b-63a³⁰

The Abhinavabhāratī supplements necessary adhesives to completely visualise it as 'ekākriyā' which begins by departing from one position and reaches the rightful position thereafter in a flowless action-

वक्षः क्षेत्रे उन्मुखं स्वस्तिकवदश्लिष्टमेव मणिबन्धनगतं

करयुगलं कृत्वा तत्रैव विहस्तौ समकालं व्यावृत्तपरिवर्ती

(वृत्तौ) विधायोत्तानावेव यथास्वमूर्धोः पातनीयौ ।

असूयावाक्यार्थाभिनये चोत्तानौ पताकौ ।³¹

- ABh on NS 4.62b-63a

Here we can try to grasp how much Bharata is pushing the action of daily 'envious' to the edge of extra-daily through his

²⁹ See Phillip B. Zerrilli, *Psychophysical Approaches and Practices in India: Embodying Processes and States of 'Being-Doing'* (Cambridge University Press, 2011)

³⁰ When both the wrists break into vyāvṛtta-parivṛtta from kuñcita at the wrist, and falls on the thighs is called the Vartitam karaṇa.

³¹ After holding the palms crossed much alike svastika near the chest, both the hands split in vyāvṛtta-parivṛtta at the same time to fall on the things. To embody the enactment of envy, let both the palms fall in patāka facing upwards.

śārīrābhinaya where only the conjoining of wrists at the chest level and thereafter splitting and falling on the thighs with upward patāka hasta let out the body reverberation of envious. Now, though that action is performed in the outer space with the outer body, the action cannot be comprehensible if the logic and ideation behind this is not fathomed.

We take more Karaṇas and try to observe the treatment of space n time embedded in there to depict the intended vākyaṛthābhinaya in the form of poetic suggestion or dhvani, manifested through the reverb of the body-mind.

Earlier Bharata mentioned in the 1st Chapter that nāṭya involves following all manners of various emotive and mental states of people, which constitute the 'daily' and then to distil it and present as glorious retelling (bhāvānukīrtana) to turn it 'extra-daily'.

5. Conclusion

The entire process of fathoming a mental state and then processing it first occurs in the cittākāśa of the actors with supreme awareness and keeping the bodily action 'extra-daily' in the outer space (bhūtākāśa) necessitates the presence of a perennially observing self. This ever-observing self is incurred from the ideation of ātmā that brings forth the layer of cidākāśa. Thus, we can see that Bharata's dynamics of nāṭya is founded on a layered ideation of space and metaphysical wisdom of movement rather than just bodily action and/or interaction with other bodies on the stage space.

This entire journey occurring from 'daily' to 'extra-daily', travelling away from normal occurring in the outer body space through sthāna, cārī, karaṇa and with specially engineered ka-ca-ṭa-ta-pa for measuring the time units are all there to lead the performance of nāṭya to reach the state of alaukika rasānubhūti. The same is attempted with employing extraordinary subtle schema of śruti for the vocal rendition. And as a matter of fact, such metaphysics of embodiment is permeated all over the Nāṭyaśāstra in pursuing the adhikāra-sūtra.

So, through all of these elements or tattvas Bharata is creating a different world altogether, the way Brahma creates a universe, likewise Bharata is creating a parallel universe on the stage. When

the *sāmājika* gets attached to that through their viewing experience (*indriya samnikarsa*), they begin to believe that world as 'real' and then the true *rasanispatti* occurs.

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Critical & Analytical Essays

Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa : Underlying Process for Experiencing Rasa

Dr. Rakesh Das ¹ & Sri Prolay Nandi²

- ¹ Associate Professor, Department of Sanskrit and Philosophy, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute, Belur Math, Howrah, West Bengal, Bharat. Orchid ID 0009-0009-7101-0226; rakdas@gmail.com
- ² Research Scholar Department of Sanskrit and Philosophy, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute, Belur Math, Howrah, West Bengal, Bharat. prolay.nandi.vedvid@gmail.com



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Editor's Note:

The question of how a private emotion becomes a shared aesthetic experience lies at the heart of classical Indian poetics. This essay reconstructs the philosophical mechanism of sādhāraṇīkaraṇa with rigorous textual care, demonstrating that the universalisation of feeling is not merely a poetic device but the very threshold at which aesthetic experience approaches metaphysical insight.

Abstract

This article examines the concept of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* (universalisation) as the indispensable condition for the experience of *rasa* in classical Indian poetics. While *rasa* is traditionally regarded as the soul of poetry, its realisation requires the dissolution of specific spatial, temporal, and personal associations embedded in poetic elements such as *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, *vyabhicāribhāva*, and *sthāyibhāva*. Through the process of universalisation, these elements are freed from worldly limitations, allowing the *sahṛdaya* to experience *rasa*—the purified universalized aesthetic essence that emerges from emotion. The study further argues that *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* operates through a distinctive mode of aesthetic cognition that cannot be reduced to ordinary forms of knowledge such as illusion, doubt, or resemblance. By enabling the *sahṛdaya* to temporarily transcend self–other distinctions and worldly binaries, aesthetic experience approaches a Vedāntic state of non-duality and bliss. Thus, *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* is shown to function not merely as a poetic

mechanism but as a bridge between aesthetic enjoyment and metaphysical insight. Adopting a textual–analytical and comparative hermeneutic methodology, the study critically engages with key Sanskrit aesthetic treatises—particularly the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and its major commentarial traditions—to reconstruct the theoretical foundations of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*

Keywords: *Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*, Aesthetic Cognition, Aesthetic Universalisation, *Rasa*, *Sahṛdaya*, Classical Indian Poetics, Advaita Vedanta

1. Introduction

While words and meanings are considered the gross body of poetry¹, the *rasa* i.e. the aesthetic savoring expressed from them is imagined as the soul of poetry². Because the essence is more subtle and principal than words and meanings, it is considered to be the soul of poetry. The subtle essence, like consciousness, is not easily comprehensible—therefore, practices such as listening and contemplation are necessary. Similarly, in the case of experiencing the essence, it is not possible to feel it in its gross natural state; the mind needs to be more restrained and focused. Moreover, just as the Self is more important than the body, in poetry, the essence holds greater significance than the words. Thus, the essence is referred to as the soul of poetry. Additionally, the Self is naturally blissful³; in the same way, the true nature of the *rasa* is joy.

‘*Rasyate āsvādayate iti rasaḥ*’ means that what is worthy of being tasted is called *rasa*. According to this etymology, *kāvya* (poetry, drama, etc.) is referred to as ‘*rasa*’ when readers or audiences witness the extra-daily joy in different contexts. While emotions function as the raw material of poetry, *rasa* is the refined aesthetic experience that emerges from them. The bliss associated with *rasa* does not arise from the emotion itself—whether love,

¹ “*Śabdārthau te śarīram*” (Rājasekhara, *Kāvyaṃmīmāṃsā*, edited by Madhusudan Mishra, Choukhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1991, p. 25).

² “*Vākyaṃ rasātmakam kāvyam. ...rasa evātmā sārārūpatayā jīvanādhāyako yasya.*” (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, edited by Krishnamohan Shastri, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan, 2015, pp. 20-21).

³ “*Akhaṇḍam saccidānandam...ātmānam...*” (Sadanandayogīndra, *Vedāntasāra*, edited by Badarinath Shukla, Motilal Banarasidas, 2019, p. 1).

sorrow, or disgust—but from experiencing it in a universalized, aesthetic manner. During the experience of *rasa*, a *sahṛdaya* truly gains satisfaction by achieving a higher blissful state. This *rasa-ānanda* is not inferior or fleeting like worldly joy; instead, it is much more subtle and, therefore, rare. Additionally, to experience this supra-mundane bliss, the mind must be elevated to a higher level. In its natural state, the mind remains bound to various worldly connections, and it is only when it becomes deeply engrossed in the subject described in poetry, having relinquished all connections, that the tasting of *rasa* becomes possible. This process of elevating the mind from the worldly to the extra-daily aesthetic level is what the rhetoricians refer to as ‘*sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*’ or universalisation.

Rasa is indeed the soul or essential essence of poetry. While analyzing the nature of *rasa*, Bharata Muni states—“*vibhāvānubhāva-vyabhicāri-saṅyogāt rasaniṣpattiḥ*”⁴, meaning that the expression of *rasa* occurs as a result of the interplay between *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, and *vyabhicāribhāva* (transitory emotions). The various feelings such as love, joy, and sorrow, which reside in the heart of a *sahṛdaya* (known in Sanskrit poetics as the *sahṛdaya*: one who has a heart) as impressions, are called *sthāyibhāva* (stable emotions). The element that excites these *sthāyibhāva* in a supra-mundane way is known as *vibhāva*. There are two types of *vibhāva*: *ālambana vibhāva* and *uddīpana vibhāva*. The *vibhāva* that serves as the direct support for *sthāyibhāva* is called *ālambana vibhāva*, while the *vibhāva* that helps to express the *sthāyibhāva* clearly is called *uddīpana vibhāva*. The various behaviors such as a smile, a sidelong glance, and conversation that can be observed among *vibhāvas* are referred to as *anubhāva*. On the other hand, the unstable qualities like embarrassment and doubt, which are changeable, are called *vyabhicāribhāva* or *sañcāribhāva*. The expression of *rasa* is possible due to the combination of all these elements.

These subtle terminologies could be explained with some examples. Before explaining the process of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*, it is useful to first observe how the basic elements of *rasa* appear in

⁴ Bharata Muni, *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Part - II), edited by Parasanath Dvivedi, Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, 1996, 6.32.

literary works. Here is the initial verse of the *Naṭikā Ratnāvalī* by Śrīharṣa.

*Pādāgrasthitayā muhuḥ stanabhareṇānītayā namratām
Śambhoḥ sasprhalocanatrāyapatham yāntyā tadārādhane.
Hrīmatyā śirasīhitaḥ sapulakasvedodgamotkampayā
Viśliṣyan kusumāñjalirgīrijayā kṣipto'ntare pātu vah..⁵*

Meaning: *Devī Pārvatī* was trying to offer flowers on the head of *Śiva*. (To match the height of *Śiva*) She elevated herself on her toes, softly leaning forward due to the weight of her bosoms. Noticing *Śiva* passionately looking at her with his three eyes, she got goosebumps out of shyness. She was sweating and oscillating. The flowers, intended to be offered on the head of *Śiva*, slipped from her grasp, cascading gracefully between them. May these fallen flowers save you all.

In this beautiful imagery, *Pārvatī* and *Śiva* are feeling passionate love towards each other. This sense of passion, love (*rati*) is the stable emotion (*sthāyibhāva*) here. Both *Śiva* and *Pārvatī* are the abode of this emotion (*ālambana vibhāvas*⁶). *Pārvatī*'s posture (elevated on toes, softly leaning forward), *Śiva*'s passionately looking at her are the *uddīpana vibhāva*⁷ (the excitants). The sweating, goosebumps, and trembling are the visible effects of the internal feelings (*anubhāvas*⁸). The shyness of *Pārvatī* is the transitory emotion incited by love is known as the *vyabhicāri bhāva*⁹. Thus this entire imagery arouses the sentiment of passion and love among the readers.

⁵ Śrīharṣa, *Ratnāvalī Nāṭikā*, edited by Rajeshwar Shastri Musalgaonkar, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Bhavan, 2003, 1.1.

⁶ "Ālambanam nāyakādīstamālambya rasodgamāt." (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.29).

⁷ "Uddīpanavibhāvāste rasamuddīpayanti ye.
Ālambanasya ceṣṭādyā deśakālādayastathā.", (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.131-32).

⁸ "Udbuddham kāraṇaiḥ svaiḥ svairbahirbhāvaṃ prakāśayan.
Loke yaḥ kāryarūpaḥ so'nubhāvaḥ kāvyānāṭyayoḥ." (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.132-33);
'Stambhaḥ svedo'tha romāñcaḥ... vepathuḥ' (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.135).

⁹ "Viśeṣādābhīmukhyena caraṇādvyabhicāriṇaḥ.
Sthāyinyunmagnanirmagnāḥ..." (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.140);
"Lajjā harṣāsūyāviśādāḥ sadhr̥ticapalatā..." (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.141).

Another apt example may be the description of Achilles disgracing the dead Hector's corpse. Here is the description¹⁰:

If in the melancholy shades below,
 The flames of friends and lovers cease to glow,
 Yet mine shall sacred last; mine, undecay'd,
 Burn on through death, and animate my shade.
 Meanwhile, ye sons of Greece, in triumph bring
 The corpse of Hector, and your pæans sing.
 Be this the song, slow-moving toward the shore,
 "Hector is dead, and Ilion is no more."
 Then his fell soul a thought of vengeance bred;
 (Unworthy of himself, and of the dead;)
 The nervous ancles bored, his feet he bound
 With thongs inserted through the double wound;
 These fix'd up high behind the rolling wain,
 His graceful head was trail'd along the plain.
 Proud on his car the insulting victor stood,
 And bore aloft his arms, distilling blood.
 He smites the steeds; the rapid chariot flies;
 The sudden clouds of circling dust arise.
 Now lost is all that formidable air;
 The face divine, and long-descending hair,
 Purple the ground, and streak the sable sand;
 Deform'd, dishonour'd, in his native land,
 Given to the rage of an insulting throng,
 And, in his parents' sight, now dragg'd along!
 The mother first beheld with sad survey;
 She rent her tresses, venerable grey,
 And cast, far off, the regal veils away.
 With piercing shrieks his bitter fate she moans,
 While the sad father answers groans with groans,
 Tears after tears his mournful cheeks o'erflow,
 And the whole city wears one face of woe:

In this harrowing scene, the emotion of aversion (*bībhatsa-rasa*) takes root in the reader's heart. Achilles himself and the corpse of Hector become the very embodiment of disgust (*jugupsā*), the *sthāyī-bhāva* (permanent sentiment) of *bībhatsa-*

¹⁰ Homer, *The Iliad*, translated by Alexander Pope, Cassell and Company Ltd., 1909, book 22.

*rasa*¹¹, and thus serves as the *ālambana-vibhāva* (the primary object that excites the emotion).

The excitants (*uddīpana-vibhāvas*) include the piercing of thongs through Hector's ankles, the dragging of his corpse through the dust, the rising clouds of dust, the disfigurement of Hector's once-divine face, the matting and dustiness of his long-descending hair, and the ground purpled with spilled blood¹².

Achilles' triumphant proclamation of Hector's death, his striking of the horses, and the raising of his blood-stained hands are the visible physical reactions (*anubhāvas*) that manifest his inner disgust and burning vengeance¹³.

The transitory emotions (*vyabhicāri-bhāvas*) that intensify and consolidate this *rasa* of aversion are manifold: the despondency and faintness (*glāni*) of Hector's friends and beloved, the pride (*garva*) and indignation (*amarṣa*) of Achilles, Hector's death itself (*maraṇa*), the dishonouring of his corpse, Achilles' restless agitation (*capalatā*)¹⁴, the profound grief (*śoka*) of Hector's parents (expressed through moans, groans, and tears streaming down their cheeks), and the frantic restlessness of his mother (shown by tearing her hair, casting aside her royal veils, etc.)¹⁵.

However, this connection or mixture is not always possible; for that, the elements like *vibhāva* must be freed from their respective characteristics. The process of freeing these elements from their respective characteristics is what is called universalisation. Universalisation is the preliminary process of *rasa* tasting, where the elements of *vibhāva* and others are liberated from all types of worldly connections and are expressed as the experience of tasting. Therefore, universalisation plays an

¹¹ "jugupsāsthāyibhāvastu bībhatsaḥ kathyate rasaḥ." (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.239).

¹² "durgandho māṃsarudhiramedo'syālambanaṃ matam.
tatraiva kṛmipātādyam uddīpanamudāhṛtam." (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.240).

¹³ "Niṣṭhīvanāsyavalananetrasaṅkocanādayaḥ.
Anubhāvāstatra matāḥ ..." (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.241).

¹⁴ This restlessness can naturally be presumed by Achilles' actions like boarding the chariot with pride, raising the blood-stained hands; Hector' mother's tearing her clothes etc.

¹⁵ "...vyabhicāriṇaḥ/moho'pasmāra āvego vyādhiśca maraṇādayaḥ" (Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.241-42).

important role as the background for rasa tasting. We are going to discuss this concept of universalisation in this essay.

In *Advaita Vedānta*, the description of a state of non-duality as an aspect of encountering one's true nature is often referred to by rhetoricians as universalisation. The comparative study of this state of non-duality and universalisation is the central point of the actual discussion. This article shows that *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* is not merely a poetic technique, but a mode of experiencing the non-dual awareness described in Vedāntic philosophy.

This paper first explains the mechanism of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*, then distinguishes aesthetic experience from ordinary cognition, compares it with Vedāntic consciousness, examines why even painful emotions produce joy, and finally reflects on the contemporary significance of this insight. This article examines *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* through textual-analysis of classical Sanskrit texts, literary examples, and a comparative reading with *Advaita Vedānta* philosophy.

2. The Nature and Operation of *Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*

Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa is the process by which the elements of *rasa* are freed from specific worldly relationships such as space, time, and personal identity. Through this process, what is bound to particular circumstances becomes universal and accessible to aesthetic experience. In other words, bringing the specifically present aspects of space, time, etc., down to a minor level to make them worthy of tasting is referred to as 'universalisation'. It is the inherent capability of the *sahṛdaya* that makes universalisation possible. Everything in our real life is bound to a specific worldly relationship. This is why these can be accepted or rejected, and in this way, all activities of the world are conducted. The process of freeing oneself from the relationships of these objects is what rhetoricians have termed 'universalisation'.

In this process of universalisation, the commonality of space, time, individuality, vibhāva, anubhāva etc. removes the boundary of individual identity of a person (*sahṛdaya*), sets him free to be integral with the scene or occurrence beyond the spatial-temporal character of the same. Thus the *sahṛdaya* enters the same aesthetic state as the poet or the original character of the

scene (say, Rāma, Sītā, Duṣyanta, Śakuntalā etc.) regardless of the sahr̥daya's own background, joys, sorrows, worries etc. Eventually, the sahr̥daya enters into a state of pure bliss by getting free of his/her personal boundaries.

2.1. The Mechanism of *Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*

For the emergence of *rasa*, a minimal presence of *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, and *vyabhicāribhāva* is required. When these elements connect with each other and the resultant *sthāyibhāva* matures, its expression occurs in the form of *rasa*. Here, the digestion of *sthāyibhāva* is made possible through universalisation. As a result of the universalisation of *ālambana vibhāva*, *uddīpana vibhāva*, etc., there are no longer any bonds related to space and time. In this state, the stable emotion becomes free from all forms of personal or individual association. This personal association causes sorrow and other feelings due to its own limitations; therefore, liberation from personal association means liberation from worldly feelings like sorrow and objective happiness.

Now the question may arise—who undergoes universalisation among the elements of *rasa*? Although there is disagreement among rhetoricians on this matter, the *sahr̥daya* experience universalisation as a comprehensive process. That is, universalisation occurs for all elements of *rasa*, including *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, *vyabhicāribhāva*, and *sthāyibhāva*. However, this process is very subtle (indeterminate), making it difficult to observe directly. Nevertheless, when considered from the perspective of the support and supported emotions, one must first accept the universalisation of *vibhāva* and *anubhāva*. Consequently, it must be accepted that *vyabhicāribhāva* and the supported stable emotions also undergo universalisation as a result. Just as *vibhāva* causes *sthāyi-bhāva*, the *sahr̥daya* understands the universalisation of *vibhāva* as causative. Thus, the process of universalisation is complete only after the universalisation of *sthāyibhāva*. Therefore, rhetoricians acknowledge the universalisation of all elements of *rasa*, from *vibhāva* to *sthāyibhāva*.

The necessity of universalisation becomes evident when we consider the paradox of aesthetic engagement. If a *sahr̥daya* considers the *Rāma* portrayed on stage as their own, then the other individuals present in that place will have no right to

perceive *Rāma*. Conversely, if that *sahṛdaya* views the staged *Rāma* as someone else's, then they themselves will not engage in the perception of that *Rāma*. This is because attachment to other's wife, other's husband, or other's possessions is always considered reprehensible (*anucita*). In this way, various relationships such as identity and otherness lead beings onto the path of worldly existence, resulting in a life filled with love and hatred. However, through universalisation

in poetry, all forms of worldly relationships are eliminated. As a result, poetic feelings never become the cause of worldly happiness or sorrow; rather, they exist at a much higher level than mundane life.

For example, we may consider the context of '*Abhijñānaśākuntalam*'. Having illustrated the constituents of *rasa* in detail earlier, we can now examine more concisely how they undergo universalisation. In the *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*¹⁶ *Duṣyanta* and *Śakuntalā* are the *ālambana vibhāva*, while the buzzing of bees, breeze, the Spring (season), fragrance of various flowers and other sounds like of the birds are the *uddīpana bibhāva*. *Duṣyanta*'s excitement, *Śakuntalā*'s lovesickness represent the *anubhāva*, and the *sthāyi-bhāva rati* along with joy, debate, and intellect are the *vyabhicāribhāvas*. In the process of *rasa* appreciation, all of these elements undergo universalisation.

The universalisation of *Duṣyanta* as an *ālambana vibhāva* means that he transcends being *Duṣyanta* to become a mere enamored man, implying that his connections to space, time, and other relationships come to an end. The universalisation of *Śakuntalā* is quite similar; her characteristics related to space and time are also eliminated, leaving behind only the essence of a simple woman.

The universalisation of *anubhāva* means that all of *Duṣyanta*'s behaviors transform from being related to him into the actions of an ordinary enamored man. Similarly, the stable emotions of love and the *vyabhicāribhāva* such as joy and debate also become free from personal feelings of anger and hatred.

In this state, the stable emotion of love (*rati*) that exists is not directed towards *Duṣyanta*'s *Śakuntalā*, nor towards the sensitive *Śakuntalā* or the beloved of a *sahṛdaya*. Rather, it is a kind of liberated (free-flowing) emotional state, in which there

¹⁶ Interested readers may refer to the third act of the drama

remains not even a trace of self-other consciousness. In reality, this is the stable emotion of the *sahṛdaya*, but through universalisation, it becomes detached from personal consciousness.

Thus, in the process of universalisation, what is manifest among the various elements of *rasa* transforms from specific to generic, and what is unmanifest, meaning the emotional form, becomes free from personal associations. In other words, one gains liberation from the spatial-temporal bonds of *vibhāva* and from the self-other consciousness of emotions.

2.2. Aesthetic Cognition as a Distinctive Mode of Knowledge

This universalisation is made possible through a distinctive mode of knowing called aesthetic cognition. In a specific context, to perceive something that is not as it is, is called aesthetic cognition. In poetry, due to the appropriateness of the aesthetic experience, even an imagined subject is considered real. For example, if in a poem, animals and birds are seen speaking like humans, a *sahṛdaya*, even knowing that it is impossible for them to speak in such a way, accepts it as possible within the context of the poem. This is how a valid moral or aesthetic insight is reached at the end of the story in poetry. Accepting such unrealistic subjects as real due to appropriateness is referred to as aesthetic cognition. This aesthetic cognition is the foundational basis of all poetic content. It enables a *sahṛdaya* to transcend worldly conflicts such as love-hate, happiness-sorrow, etc., and rise to a level of detached enjoyment of aesthetics.

All objects in this world are fundamentally subjects of four types of knowledge—correct knowledge (*yathārtha-jñāna*), illusionary knowledge (*bhrama-jñāna*), doubtful knowledge (*saṁśaya-jñāna*), and similarity knowledge (*sādṛśya-jñāna*). Aesthetic cognition is recognized as completely distinct from this quartet of knowledge. Correct knowledge can never be called aesthetic cognition because the person acting on stage is not the actual *Rāmacandra* of the *Tretā Yuga*, but merely an actor portraying *Rāma*. This knowledge cannot be equated with the rope-snake analogy¹⁷ of *bhrama-jñāna* (illusory knowledge)

¹⁷ In Vedāntic epistemology, the rope-snake analogy (*rajju-sarpa-bhrama*) illustrates misperception: someone seeing a rope in darkness mistakes it for a snake and experiences fear. Upon illumination,

because, after initially accepting someone as *Rāma*, the audience never thinks during or after the play that the person they considered *Rāma* was actually just an actor playing *Rāma*, and they mistakenly thought of the actor as *Rāma*. In the rope-snake analogy, there comes a point where the illusion is dispelled. In the aesthetic cognition, the audience never experiences such dispel during the aesthetic cognition. Furthermore, aesthetic cognition cannot be considered *saṃśaya-jñāna* because, during the play, the audience never doubts whether the actor is truly *Rāma*. Similarly, it is not *sādṛśya-jñāna* either, as the audience does not think of the actor as resembling *Rāma*; rather, in that moment, they perceive the actor and the *Rāma* from *Tretā Yuga* as identical.

Therefore, the content described in poetry or drama cannot be explained by any of the four types of knowledge mentioned above. In such cases, the inclination of aesthetic cognition is particularly evident. It is through this aesthetic cognition that the various aspects of poetry can be accepted, and their universalisation occurs.

2.3. Universalisation and Removal of Ignorance

Aesthetic cognition leads to universalisation, and the meaning of universalisation is liberation from the constraints of time and space, personal associations, and so forth. In this state, the subjects that a *sahrdaya* perceives in poetry are revealed in a universalisation or simplified form, free from all mundane relations such as time, place, identity, and other worldly connections. In reality, it is through individual consciousness that the realisation of enduring emotions of happiness and sorrow is gathered; without this, even the thoughts of sensory happiness and sorrow fade away. Therefore, according to the rhetoricians, it is a kind of supernatural perception. Thus, the more deeply a *sahrdaya*'s mind is engaged with these simplified aspects of aesthetic experience, the more the feeling of immersion increases. In this state, the qualities of rajas (passion) and tamas (ignorance) gradually diminish, while the quality of sattva (purity) increases. As a result, according to the memory reference, "*tatra sattvaṃ*

the illusion is dispelled, revealing the rope's true nature. This example demonstrates how ignorance (*avidyā*) obscures reality.

*nirmalatoāt prakāśakam anāmayam*¹⁸, the impurities of ignorance in the compassionate mind are dispelled, and the pure essence manifests there.

Here, the term ignorance is used to refer to other knowledge, meaning knowing something in a different way. This ignorance manifests in various forms such as “I am a human,” “I am a doer,” “I have many duties,” etc., and it is the main cause of the soul’s bondage to the material world. From a metaphysical perspective, the Self is actually free from relations, eternal, and complete. To consider such a Self as bound by various worldly duties, such as authority, is a kind of illusion, similar to mistaking a mirage in a desert for water. “*Ajñānenāvṛtaṃ jñānaṃ tena muhyanti jantavaḥ*”¹⁹. According to this scriptural reference, scholars regard ignorance as the primary obstacle to the manifestation of bliss inherent in one’s true self. When universalisation in poetry occurs and the sattva increases, this ignorance gradually dissipates. At that time, the previously ignited and universalisation feelings of love, sorrow, etc., illuminated by the aesthetic experience, are enveloped by the bliss of consciousness, much like clouds illuminated by sunlight. This kind of enduring emotional state is referred to as *rasa*.

3. True nature and Importance of universalisation

3.1. The Triad of Aesthetic Experience

Universalisation is not a property of the text or poetry. Neither is it a process that is invoked by the text itself. It is a process where the creator, the representation, and the connoisseur align in one line. In universalisation, these are the three essential key elements: the poet, the hero (the subject of the aesthetic experience), and the *sahṛdaya*. Universalisation is complete when the sentiments of these three are equal or identical. Due to the absence of any limits to this commonality, it becomes universal.

People throughout the entire universe have some common emotions. This sharing of similar emotions even has no boundary

¹⁸ *Bhagavadgītā*, edited by Shripad Krishna Belvalkar, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1968, 14.6).

¹⁹ *Bhagavadgītā* 5.15

in the time also. They are deep rooted in the citta (mind, ego, intellect) of the mankind as a whole. Even these emotions cross all cultural and civilisational diversities. Thus, they can be communicated through any language in any land at any time to any person from diverse cultural and civilisational background. These are called the anādi saṃskāra (beginningless conditioning).

Furthermore, because all listeners, veiled by this beginningless conditioning, share the same kind of desire, they experience similar perceptions. It is through this process that the subjects described in poetry or drama become enjoyable.

Through the process of universalisation, elements such as *vibhāva* and *anubhāva* are presented in a general form. In a natural state, an ordinary person's mind is enveloped in the darkness of ignorance and is fully immersed in worldly matters. In this condition, even if the person is compassionate, they are unable to experience aesthetic enjoyment. This is because they perceive the character of *Rāma* being staged as their own; that is, they acknowledge the characteristics of time and space in *Rāma* and recognize their own connection with him. In this state, the sight of *Rāma* becomes unbearable for them in the presence of other audience members. Conversely, if they regard *Rāma* as someone else's, they will refrain from experiencing the vision of *Rāma*, similar to how one would distance themselves from another person's spouse, another man, or another person's possessions.

Now, a natural question arises—how do *sahṛdayas* engage with characters like *Rāma* and *Sītā*, or *Duṣyanta* and *Śakuntalā*, who are seen as others? The answer brings us to the topic of universalisation. In reality, at this moment, the *sahṛdaya* exists in an extra-daily aesthetic state where all forms of mundane relationships dissolve. As a result, they no longer perceive the staged *Rāma* or *Sītā* as belonging to themselves or others. During this time, there is neither acknowledgment nor rejection of mundane relationships such as self and other. This is a unique state of perfect non-duality, entirely different from the worldly realm, which allows the compassionate mind to transcend domestic concerns such as affection and aversion, happiness and sorrow, authority and subservience, and to exist at a higher level. Various passages in the *Gītā* describe this state of equality—

Rāgadveṣaviyuktaistu viṣayān indriyaiścāran.

*Ātmavaśyairvidheyātmā prasādam adhigacchati..*²⁰

This state of equality is not a fictional condition; rather, it is a certain state that can only be realized through the experience of those who truly appreciate poetry. Scholars of poetics refer to this as ‘universalisation’. Therefore, Viśvanātha, the author of *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, has stated–

Parasya na parasyeti mameti na mameti ca.

*Tadāsvāde vibhāvādeḥ paricchedo na vidyate..*²¹

While perceiving the *rasa* the *sahṛdaya* cannot differentiate the experiences like ‘this is mine’, ‘this is not mine’, ‘this belongs to another individual’ ‘this does not belong to some other’ etc.

Through universalisation, the *sahṛdaya* resides in a state that is entirely different from the mundane world. During this time, their mind transcends the worldly binaries of happiness and sorrow, affection and aversion, authority and subservience, achieving a state of transcendent equality. This is why even permanent sorrow, which embodies a deep sense of pathos, becomes enjoyable for them. The *sahṛdaya*, who is attaining this blissfulness, becomes free from the binary of ‘me-you’. Sorrow arises from the attachment of the self to the object (this belongs to me, this loss is mine). The *sahṛdaya*, detached from this binary of ‘me-you’, is not attached to any object or any emotion. Eventually (s)he does not feel that ‘this is my loss’ and becomes free from individual bondage. Thus the sorrow reinstates him/her to the state of bliss and it becomes enjoyable. There are many literary works centered around pathos that continually attract the compassionate audience, allowing them to derive pleasure from reading. *Uttararāmacaritam*, *Othello* etc. are examples of such literary excellences. This demonstrates that pathos can also be delightful. According to classical interpretation, since permanent sorrow is an object of profound knowledge, it becomes extraordinary through universalisation. In this state, the qualities conducive to experiencing blissful awareness also increase, making permanent sorrow enjoyable as well. The same reasoning applies equally to other emotions like fear, anger, aversion etc.

²⁰ *Bhagavadgītā* 2.64. (Similar passages appear in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.38, 2.48, 3.9, 3.19, and 18.10.

²¹ Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 3.12.

As a result, in the realm of poetry, there is no room for the complexities or obscurities arising from the restrictions concerning the view or non-view of others' spouses. This represents a special state free from attachment. For those who aspire for liberation and have truly grasped the essence of the *Advaita Vedānta*, this state is the ultimate goal of life. In their perspective, the universalisation of poetry and the determination of aesthetic experience are, in fact, practical forms of *Advaita Vedānta*. This universalisation also serves as a great aid on the path of devotion. Thus, we see that great Selves embodying the essence of Brahman or those seeking liberation, such as Śaṅkarācārya, Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahaṃsa, Maharṣi Ramaṇa, Yativara Rāghavendra, and others, as well as practitioners like Kabīra, Tulsīdāsa, and Mīrā, have attained the highest poetic qualities and immersed themselves in supreme bliss through poetic or poetic-like practices. Therefore, the Vedantic principles expounded in the *Upaniṣads* can be seen as practically embodied in this self-evident universalised state described by the rhetoricians.

3.2. Universalisation and liberation

It is due to the inherent capabilities of the *sahr̥daya* that the ignorance represented as filth is dispelled, allowing the themes of poetry to be expressed in a universal form. Through this expression, the enduring emotions ignited by these themes also manifest in a universalised manner. In this state, the universalised and stabilized emotions envelop the self, and the self is then revealed in its universal form of 'I' or 'me'. Statements like "I am an individual known by the name *Devadatta*", "I am happy", "I am sad"—these various forms of emotional expression are indeed particular qualities of the inner consciousness. Under the influence of inherent ignorance, the self referred to as '*jīva*' imposes these qualities upon itself and perceives itself as an individual known by some arbitrary name like *Devadatta*, happy, or sad, much like a colourless crystal appears to be red when veiled by a hibiscus flower²². The experiences of names, forms, emotions like happiness and sorrow

²² This is a classical and famous analogy used in various schools of philosophy to explain the nature of the self and its relation to the world.

in the three states²³ of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep are, in fact, illusions; this is the conclusion of *Advaita Vedānta*.

Patañjali, the author of the *Yogasūtras*, writes an aphorism: *Vṛttisārūpyam itaratra*²⁴ meaning the blissful Self is bound in this world of objective happiness and sorrow because the Self superimposes the dispositions of the *citta* consisting of the three *guṇas* (*sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*).²⁵

Lord Kṛṣṇa says:

Prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ.

*Āhankāravimūḍhātmā kartāham iti manyate.*²⁶

Means: The three *guṇas* (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*) of the nature do everything, but the individual, due to his ego, takes himself as the doer.

Therefore, it is by imposing the qualities of emotional expression upon itself that the self becomes bound in the world. By the same reasoning, the self, enveloped by universalised emotions such as love, which are stabilized in the form of emotional expression, also becomes universalised. In that state, the self temporarily remains free from all forms of worldly connections. This is a temporary de-individualisation of the self. This liberation just resembles the *mokṣa* in its structure and not

²³ The Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad clearly states these three states where the self belongs to. The self is either in a waking state where it feels everything through the body and mind. The state of dream is slightly different from the waken state in its nature and duration. When the dream is over, one realises that it was a dream and not actual. In the state of deep sleep one experiences none other than a complete void and bliss. That is what one realises after waking up from deep sleep—I was sleeping blissfully, I could know nothing (*sukham aham asvāsam, na kiñcid avedīṣam*). And it is the conscious self—the *Turīya*—that undergoes all these state.

²⁴ Patañjali, *Yogasūtram*, edited by Dhundhiraj Śāstri, with commentary by Bhojarāja et al., Jaikrishnadas Haridas Gupta, 1930, 1.4.

²⁵ See *Vyāsa's* commentary: "*Cittam ayaskāntamaṇikalpaṃ sannidhimātropakāri dṛśyatvena svaṃ bhavati puruṣasya svāminaḥ, tasmācittavṛttibodhe puruṣasyānādisambandho hetuḥ*" (Patañjali, *Pātañjala-Yoga-Darśanam*, with Vyāsabhāṣyam, edited by Vimala Karnatak, vol. 1, Banaras Hindu University, Ratna Publication, 1992, p. 88). Vijñānabhikṣu elaborates: "*Yathā'yaskāntamaṇiḥ svasminnevāyāhsannidhikaraṇamātrāt śalyaniṣkarṣaṇākhyam upakāraṃ kurvan svāminaḥ svaṃ bhavati bhogasādhanatvāt...*" (Patañjali, *Pātañjala-Yoga-Darśanam*, with Yogavārttikam, edited by Vimala Karnatak, vol. 1, Banaras Hindu University, Ratna Publication, 1992, p. 107). Bhāvāgaṇeśa adds: "*Vṛttinām sukhaduḥkhamohātmaka-ghaṭādyākāratayā caitanyamapi tatpratibimbavaśāt tadrūpamiva bhavati . . .*" (Patañjali, *Yogasūtram*, with Bhāvāgaṇeśavṛtti, edited by Dhundhiraj Śāstri, Jaikrishnadas Haridas Gupta, 1930, p. 7).

²⁶ *Bhagavadgītā* 3.27

in the duration or saliance. Same is true for the Yogic samādhi also.

3.3. Realisation of the Nature of Self

As a result of universalisation, the self also becomes universalised. In this state, the Self is no longer bound by the obscurations²⁷ of worldly relationships such as authority and subservience. The mind of the *sahr̥daya* transcends worldly binaries such as attachment and aversion, happiness and sorrow, and reaches a higher level. At this point, the obstruction to the self's true nature caused by ignorance is removed, and the self, enveloped by the enduring qualities of bliss, experiences the essence of consciousness and bliss. Therefore, from a metaphysical perspective, the self that is permanently surrounded by universalised love and free from the veil of ignorance is the true essence of *rasa*.

It has been stated in the *Vedas*: “*Raso vai sah̥, rasam̥ hyevāyam̥ labdhvā ānandī bhavati*”²⁸, which means that *rasa* is indeed the essence of the self; by attaining this blissful essence, the self experiences joy. In this regard, the famous rhetorician *Jagannātha* has also said: “*Ratyādyabbacchinna bhagnāvaraṇā ca chideva rasah̥*”²⁹, meaning that the self, which is surrounded by enduring qualities such as love and freed from the veil of ignorance, is indeed *rasa*.

Here, ignorance related to relationships such as authority and subservience obscures the true nature of the self. When this ignorance, which acts as a veil, is removed, the expression of *rasa* as the essence of joy occurs. Removal of the veil is the ultimate duty of a compassionate individual (*Sahr̥daya*). One of the principal aims of Poetry or literature is a temporary removal of the veil. Under the influence of poetry, when this obscuration is shattered, the self—characterized by self-revelation, inherent nature, and essence of bliss—exists in the form of *rasa*, at which

²⁷ The innate nature of the self is blissfulness. But the worldly obscurations covers this innate nature and the self seems to be in a state of sorrow and worries.

²⁸ *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, translated by Gambhirananda Swami, with commentary by Śaṅkarācārya, 6th ed., Advaita Ashrama, 2010, 2.7.1).

²⁹ *Jagannātha, Rasaganīgādhara*, edited by Bhatta Mathuranath Shastri, Panduranga Javaji, 1939, Ānana 1, Rasa Prakaraṇa.

point there is nothing more for the *sahṛdaya* to do in experiencing their true nature.

4. Conclusion

The poet creates poetry by savoring *rasa*, and this savoring is the ultimate attainment for the *sahṛdaya* reader of poetry. However, the key to this savoring of *rasa* is universalisation; other than universalisation there is no other way of experiencing the *rasa*. The essay endeavors to highlight not only the discussion of universalisation from the perspective of rhetoric but also its significance in living a rich, fulfilling life. If the themes described in poetry or drama can be universalised in real life, then that life becomes equally enjoyable for every individual. In such a state, people experience a temporary sense of liberation (*mukti*) and are able to perceive the essence of existence, which is the true aesthetic experience of the entire creation. When ignorance is shattered through poetry, the *sahṛdaya* directly tastes their own Self as bliss. This extraordinary perception is, in fact, the main goal of the teachings of *Vedānta*. Therefore, the true worldly manifestation of the *Brahmajñāna* is experiencing the *rasa*, and the appropriate manifestation of the liberated practitioner is the *sahṛdaya* who experiences *rasa*.

The contemporary world is increasingly afflicted by selfishness, envy, jealousy, conflict, and violence. At the root of these collective crises lies the disturbed and fragmented individual mind. When such an unrefined mind occupies positions of influence, it inevitably gives rise to corrupted institutions—families, communities, nations—and, in turn, to a distorted global order. Thus, a vicious cycle emerges in which disordered individual consciousness continually reproduces social disharmony.

Breaking this cycle demands more than external reforms or regulatory mechanisms; it requires a profound inner reorientation of the human mind. Burdened by stress, anxiety, rivalry, and incessant desire, the modern mind remains far removed from its natural state of balance and clarity. In this context, *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* acquires significance that transcends the domain of literary theory. By dissolving ego-centered distinctions such as “self” and “other,” “mine” and “not mine,” aesthetic universalisation momentarily liberates consciousness from

attachment and aversion, allowing the individual to glimpse the inherent bliss of one's true nature.

Although such aesthetic experiences are transient, their transformative potential is substantial. Repeated engagement with universalised aesthetic experience refines sensibility, attenuates ego-centrism, and nurtures empathy, equanimity, and inward clarity. Consequently, a deep and systematic understanding of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* can play a vital role in shaping educational pedagogy, cultural ethics, and social well-being.

Furthermore, a renewed comprehension of this principle opens promising pathways for the future of literature and performing arts. When artists and creators consciously employ aesthetic universalisation, art can move beyond mere representation or entertainment and reclaim its formative, elevating function. Literature, theatre, music, and dance grounded in *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* can cultivate universal emotional resonance, transcend narrow identities, and offer audiences access to higher modes of aesthetic and spiritual experience. In this sense, *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* may serve not only as the key to *rasa*-experience but also as a guiding principle for the evolution of future artistic expression and cultural renewal.

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Critical & Analytical Essays

Ideology as the Final Arbiter of Truth: A Critique

Nilambar Chakrabarti ¹

¹ PhD Research Scholar, Jadavpur University, Sylff Fellowship Recipient, Former Research Fellow in South Asian Studies, Smith College.

Editor's Note:

Pranab Kumar Sen's reflections on ideology remain among the lesser-travelled paths in his otherwise widely studied philosophical corpus. This essay brings that neglected terrain into focus, arguing that Sen's identification of dogmatism and closure as the defining marks of ideology carries significant implications for how we understand the proper conduct of philosophical and scientific enquiry.



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Abstract

This paper examines Pranab Kumar Sen's distinctive and comparatively lesser-known analysis of the concept of ideology, as articulated in his 1992 seminar paper "Philosophy, Science and Ideology," later included in *Knowledge, Truth and Realism*. While Sen is widely recognized for his contributions to debates on truth, meaning, logic, and the realism-anti-realism controversy, his reflections on ideology reveal a striking moment of intellectual courage. Against the prevailing and often populist invocations of ideology, Sen undertakes a conceptual inquiry into its very meaning. The paper focuses on one central issue Sen treats with seriousness: the relation between philosophy, science, and ideology. By identifying certain defining characteristics of ideology, such as dogmatism, closure to criticism, and resistance to self-correction, Sen argues that ideology is fundamentally incompatible with philosophy and science, both of which are essentially self-critical and epistemically open enterprises. This study reconstructs Sen's analysis of ideology without engaging the broader political-philosophical literature on the subject, as its primary concern is his conceptual framework. In doing so, it also offers a critical reflection on Sen's position, assessing its implications for understanding the normative role of philosophy in society.

Keywords: Ideology, Epistemology, Pranab Kumar Sen, Coherence Theory of Truth, Foundationalism

While reading P.K. Sen, one can be absorbed effortlessly in the subject at hand, whether it be truth, theory of meaning, logic, or the realism-anti-realism debate. But his understanding of ideology, which is relatively lesser known, is a unique exposition of his intellectual courage in which he challenged the populist notion of ideology, going at its very root. In 1992, Sen presented a paper titled "Philosophy Science and Ideology" at a seminar at Aligarh Muslim University, and this paper was later included in his collection of essays named *Knowledge, Truth and Realism*¹. This paper deals with some major intellectual concerns, namely the relation between ideology, philosophy, and science, and the role philosophy can play in the larger society. This paper seeks to examine one of the issues that Sen took very seriously while discussing the relationship between science, philosophy, and ideology: namely, Sen's analysis of the notion of "ideology." In addition, an attempt will be made to offer a critical understanding of Sen's position.

What Sen undertakes, in critically analysing the very notion, is an inquiry into the meaning of the term "ideology." He identifies a few defining characteristics of ideology and attempts to demonstrate how these characteristics are not compatible with philosophy or any epistemic body we entertain. It must be acknowledged that a vast literature exists in the field of political philosophy on this subject; however, those broader understandings fall outside the scope of the present discussion, as the primary concern of this paper remains Sen's conceptualisation of ideology.

The term *ideology* was coined by Antoine Destutt de Tracy, a French Enlightenment philosopher. He introduced this term in order to explain various rational or irrational perspectives of human behaviour in the aftermath of the French Revolution. He also used the term ideology as a "science of ideas" that could be

¹Sen, Manidipa, Sen, Madhucchanda, Chakraborty Nirmalya Narayan, eds. *Knowledge, Truth and Realism: Essays in Philosophical Analysis by Pranab Kumar Sen*. Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi, 2007, pp. 147-160.

used as a weapon to face the irrational impulses of the mob. This was how the word "ideology" entered the academic world. The notion of ideology in the hands of Antoine Destutt de Tracy stands for a method that helps one to understand human rationality. But gradually the connotation of the term changed. Later, with the arrival of Marxism, the notion got a rigid political inclination and its epistemological aspect became completely suppressed (Kennedy 353–368). In 1917, with the Bolshevik Revolution and the subsequent foundation of the Soviet Union in 1922, ideology became synonymous with Marxism and the state began to use ideology as a faithful intellectual machinery unto which people had to surrender their free rational wills (Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses").

Sen has noticed this shift, writing "it is, in fact, a shift from 'ideas' to 'ideals'" (Sen et al. 151). As has been established above, with the advent of Marxist political scholarship, the implied meaning of the term ideology was compelled to stand for a set of political beliefs alone, excluding broader epistemic beliefs of any kind. If one wishes to explain the cognitive condition of human beings or rational human actions using a set of epistemological ideas as its method, modern scholarship will refuse to name this epistemic endeavour as "ideology." But Sen raises the question: what is wrong with not understanding ideology only through a particular set of political beliefs? What if the word ideology were used to denote any existent set of beliefs that determines thought and action? Though Sen does not answer what would follow if the term ideology were taken in the above way, his understanding of the relation between philosophy and ideology can give some hints (Sen et al. 151–152).

Sen lists three defining features of ideology (Sen et al. 154): first, it claims a kind of finality for itself; second, it claims to provide the final set of true understanding while interpreting the human condition and rationality; third, it is inevitable — attempting to escape one's own ideology is like trying to jump out of one's own skin. The first two features are related to each other insofar as they position ideology as the final arbiter of truth. The third feature concerns the inevitability of ideological participation. According to Sen, taking part in an ideological framework is inescapable. He writes, "I cannot but have the ideology that I

have, because it is something which arises out of a historical necessity" (Sen et al. 154). This is illustrated through the example of a worker enrolled in a trade union — given the economic mode of production and the related societal conditions, participation in a particular ideological framework becomes practically compulsory (Sen et al. 154). These three features, taken together, constitute the ideological framework as Sen understands it.

There is a longstanding and influential tendency in scholarship to understand ideology as a means of theoretical oppression (Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"). If ideology tends to oppress, and if oppression is morally unacceptable, then ideological oppression is equally indefensible. Social institutions exist that seek to justify this particular kind of oppression by demonstrating how it can produce effective change in society. A notable example is the United States Department of Defence's 2016 solicitation for biodegradable training ammunition — framed as an environmental initiative, yet one that simultaneously naturalizes and legitimizes weapons production as a socially beneficial enterprise, which is itself an ideological operation. Sen recognizes this very dynamic: the problem with ideological oppression is that neither the oppressor nor the victim often realizes their respective roles, precisely because ideological oppression is manifested through sanctioned social institutions (Sen et al. 154–155). Ideology designs social institutions in such a way that those institutions derive their very substance and justification from the ideology itself (Sen et al. 155).

One might mistakenly treat Sen as a postmodernist, as he theoretically challenges the grand narrativity of ideology throughout his paper. Certainly, he was not a postmodernist — his philosophical work maintained a consistent commitment to binary logic and classical analytic method. Rather, his theoretical framework remained critically open and resistant to dogmatic commitment of any kind. Sen did not advocate freedom from ideological inclinations altogether; he sought instead to encourage the critical questioning of what he calls *unwanted ideological growths* (Sen et al. 159). In his paper, Sen does not provide an alternative theoretical space where an ideological framework can sustain itself without becoming an apparatus of intellectual oppression. An ideology becomes a successful

oppressive apparatus when it promotes false consciousness by distorting the meaning of a certain discourse or manipulating the real state of affairs. The present discussion therefore turns to two theoretical models capable of preventing ideology from spreading false utopian narratives.

It cannot be denied that foundationalism helps an ideology to grow in various ways. Specifically at the very dawn of an ideology, the entirety of its theoretical understanding rests on this very notion of foundationalism. Foundationalism acts as a powerhouse for any ideological enquiry as it can satisfy the enquiry by providing grounded set of premises, conceptual strategy, and justification. As time passes by, this very notion of foundationalism endorses the manifestation of power disguised as naturalised knowledge.² Ideologies are thus deployed to consolidate power or promote a false discourse. In short, foundationalism enables an ideological discourse to legitimise its own point of view at the expense of others; this self-legitimising and totalising vision promotes a rigid inevitability within ideological frameworks.

Sen conceived the fact that foundationalism was often used as a theoretical ploy to spread hegemonic ideas through language, visual images, and texts. An alternative truth-theoretic model will therefore be proposed here that can lead to a conclusion, perhaps, where Sen wishes to arrive. Sen neither planned to see an ideological discourse as an extension of an all-engulfing grand narrativity nor insisted that anyone subscribe to any anti-foundational standpoint.³ But he vehemently criticized any dogmatic ideological pursuit throughout his life, since this kind of pursuit bears a tendency to stop the growth of human progress. Taking this understanding of Sen into consideration, Davidson's formulation of the coherence theory of truth is invoked here as the proposed backdrop of a healthy ideological pursuit. Davidson's formulation of coherence stands in contrast

² The notion of power disguised as naturalised knowledge draws implicitly on Foucault's concept of power/knowledge. See Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, Vintage Books, 1977.

³ For a contrasting postmodern perspective on grand narrativity and the rejection of foundationalism, see Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

with foundationalism. In his formulation, the idea of coherence is not divorced from the idea of correspondence. Davidson never sketched his notion of coherence as the competitor of correspondence — Davidson, in fact, aims at providing an argument which shows that his kind of coherence yields correspondence, even if he is not suggesting any kind of primacy of coherence over the correspondence theory of truth (Davidson 137). Hence for Davidson, while correspondence remains the nature of truth, coherence serves as its epistemological test — the means by which beliefs can be assessed for their likely correspondence with reality (Davidson 137-39). If a set of ideological beliefs seems to be pernicious while it promotes any utopian truth which lacks the nature of correspondence, then the idea of coherence can prevent that promotion of truth by scrutinising the central belief mechanism of that particular set of ideological beliefs. Beliefs entailed from an ideological discourse can be accepted as true only insofar as they cohere with a pre-existing set of beliefs. One can accept Stalin's interpretation of Marxism to be true until it coheres with pre-existing Marxist beliefs; otherwise one is permitted to give away her entire existing set of beliefs regarding Marxism.⁴ Thus, the coherence theory of truth can detain an ideology from becoming a putative judge that obligates an individual to accept the truth it promotes without any scrutiny or revision.

Another model which can go with Sen's position is Quine's theoretical understanding, popularly known as naturalized philosophy. What does naturalising philosophy mean? It means we can think of two kinds of truth: truths which lie on the periphery and hold a direct relation with the empirical world, and truths which are inside the system (Quine 20-43). The truths inside the system are connected in various ways to the truths lying on the periphery. The implication of adopting this model is very unique: if somebody wishes to change one truth inside the system, it will affect the entire system. In scientific practice it often happens that you change one truth in your system and this paves the path for restructuring the entire system. This epistemic articulation of Quine can be applied to any ideological pursuit

⁴Trotsky considered the version of Marxism propounded during the Stalinist regime to be self-made and oppressive, as it did not cohere with pre-existing Marxist beliefs and praxis.

and will hopefully produce amazing changes inside any ideological discourse. Needless to say, this theoretical model is capable of warning an ideology from taking any bold normative call. This particular model can also scientifically organize any ideological discourse, where an ideology is not treated as a mere future predictor but as a fallible platform that always remains subject to critical analysis, self-criticism, and revision.

The above two models remind us that a system of beliefs which sustains an ideology must have an inner coherence; otherwise we have to think twice before accepting them to be objectively true. Any ideological system must allow one to re-evaluate his beliefs and should also promote those criteria by which one can change his belief system if needed. Ideology is such a theoretical discourse which hardly has any resting place. And for this very reason, the claim “ideology as the final arbiter of truth” cannot be objectively validated according to philosophers; rather such a claim seems doubtful. The reason behind the doubt is: what is the criterion of truth we refer to while talking about any ideological pursuit? Those who are committed to a particular ideology can answer this question by showing that the truth involved within an ideological pursuit does not need any other criteria to justify itself—truth is self-evident for them. Perhaps this is the reason why revisionism or fallibilism is viewed with so much antagonism by those committed to a given ideology (Sen et al. 154).

Sen has accepted the fact that many philosophers had tried to envision their own philosophical system as the final arbiter of truth—viz. Kant and the early Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. On the contrary, there are many philosophers who had rejected this claim also. A philosophical truth is the subject of a rational enquiry and neither demands to be accepted widely nor bulldozes anyone who does not wish to subscribe to it. Even those who envisioned their philosophical system as the protector of truth would also condemn the act of bulldozing someone unwilling to subscribe to their system. Descartes,⁵ who conceptualised his system as the final protector

⁵For Sen's discussion of Descartes and the cogito as an example of a philosophical system that envisions itself as the final protector of truth, see Sen et al., p. 156.

of truth based on the *cogito*, was empathetic towards those thinkers who had to start anew, arrive at his own *cogito*, and build their own philosophy, although it should coincide with the philosophy Descartes had advocated.

Sen in this paper never insists that we be free from any ideological inclination. Rather he asks us to critically evaluate the theory which stays behind any ideological succession. Sen observes that the theory which supervises an ideology to grow also promotes a self-evident truth while that ideology undertakes the process of indoctrinating its followers. Thus ideology becomes “action-centric” instead of being “truth-centric,” though the action of that ideology is guided by a self-evident model truth. Sen has questioned the very nature of this self-evident account of truth which assures the objective acceptance of an ideology. It is true, ideology is like a growing tree, and if it is so, it is not at all static. But that self-evident truth that helps an ideology to grow sometimes requires a pruning. In pruning ideologies, we have to invite the notion of coherence that will act as a truth-testing criterion while that self-evident account of truth claims a kind of finality for itself. Sen makes a humble appeal to those who are committed to a given ideology to depend upon their rational faculties, as the notion of coherence is one of the greatest gifts of these faculties.

It is needless to say that coherence is able to produce an alternative eye for seeing any particular pursuit of ideology, as the theory of coherence opens up a space for fallibilism, revisionism, and self-criticism in assessing one’s own beliefs and generates a kind of epistemic humility. If an ideology aims at easing human progress, it must open the window for criticism and revision; otherwise it will be reduced into some mere historical happening or social descriptive fact.

From Bakhtin to Paul Ricoeur, or from Althusser to Sen, these rational minds always talked about how ideology alienates itself from philosophy. Ideology sometimes appears to be the thinking machinery of the state, or it has been dialogically imposed on pliant followers. But these minds are optimistic about a collaboration—one in which epistemology and philosophy shall guide any ideological pursuit by critically reflecting upon the

self-evident account of truth which lies at the very heart of any ideological discourse. And there is no compelling reason to say that we cannot theoretically formulate any collaboration or peaceful coexistence between philosophy and ideology. Sen hopes this collaboration can give philosophy its legitimate position and role, as that which can ask any question, doubt anything, examine every view for whatever it is worth, and come up with a judgment that has a status superior⁶ to that of any other judgment we can think of (Sen et al. 159).

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⁶According to Sen, a judgment entailed from an epistemological discourse is superior in the sense that this judgment is guided by reason and is not dogmatically articulated.

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Critical & Analytical Essays

An Analytical Study of Vālājapēṭ Veṅkaṭaramaṇa Bhāgavata's Musical Style Using Select Compositions

Gayathri V B ¹

¹ Postgraduate Scholar, Jain (Deemed-to-be University), Audio Engineer, Mahati Cultural Academy, Malleshwaram, Bangalore



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Editor's Note:

The guru-śiṣya paramparā is not merely a pedagogical arrangement but the living vessel through which a musical tradition renews itself across generations. This study of Vālājapēṭ Veṅkaṭaramaṇa Bhāgavata's compositions brings long-overdue analytical attention to a figure whose contribution to the Karnatic tradition has been felt more than it has been formally examined.

Abstract

Guru-Śiṣya paramparā is a revered tradition of learning through close mentorship. It is a system rooted in the concept of paramparā, representing an unbroken lineage of knowledge passed from guru to śiṣya through oral tradition. Each disciple becomes a custodian of their guru's teachings and is entrusted with the responsibility of preserving, practising, and sharing the art form with future generations, ensuring its sustained evolution. This tradition reached its zenith after the enduring impact of the Trinity — Śrī Śyāmā Śāstri, Śrī Tyāgarāja, and Śrī Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar — a heritage that inspired generations of composers to carry forward their legacy and enrich the field of Karnatic music.

In order to acquire subtle knowledge and reach transcendental realms, it is a prerequisite to find a bona fide guru to ensure qualitative transmission of proficiency. At the same time, it is a coveted desire of every guru to look for the right disciple with whom they can share their knowledge and later impart advanced learning to sincere disciples. Vālājapēṭ Veṅkaṭaramaṇa Bhagavata was one such devoted chief disciple of Saint Tyāgarāja.

The current case study deals with the profound compositions of Vālājpēṭ Veṅkaṭaramaṇa Bhagavatar, the foremost disciple of Śrī Tyāgarāja. The article explores the melodic, thematic, and structural features of select compositions by Veṅkaṭaramaṇa Bhagavatar, highlighting his distinctive style and lasting contribution to the Karnatic music tradition.

Keywords: Guru–Śiṣya paramparā, Vālājpēṭ Veṅkaṭaramaṇa Bhagavatar, Śrī Tyāgarāja, compositional forms, structural features

1. Methodology

The study is exploratory and qualitative and is conducted using an analytical approach. This study adopts a comprehensive analytical framework to examine the select compositions of Vālājpēṭ Veṅkaṭaramaṇa Bhagavatar through three interconnected dimensions: lyrical, melodic, and thematic. The lyrical (sāhitya) analysis focuses on the poetic content, language, and expressive nuances embedded in the compositions. The melodic dimension encompasses both rāga and tāla, aiming to understand the musical architecture, stylistic choices, and rhythmic intricacies that shape each piece. The thematic analysis explores the underlying devotional, philosophical, and narrative elements, identifying recurring motifs and contextual relevance. Together, these components provide a holistic lens to interpret the artistic intent and cultural significance of the compositions within the broader tradition of Karnatic music.

The selected compositions of Vālājpēṭ Veṅkaṭaramaṇa Bhagavatar for this study have not previously been analysed from structural and melodic perspectives, particularly with regard to their sāhitya (lyrical content), rāga (melodic framework), and tāla (rhythmic structure). This study aims to address that gap by examining the melodic, thematic, and structural features of select compositions, focusing specifically on those composed in the rāgas Bhairavī and Dhanyāsi, which were chosen as each has the highest number of compositions—four—in the selected corpus. The analysis is based on the published notations found in the 1991 edition of the book *Srimad Venkataramana Bhagavatar Swamigalin Swara Sahityangal and Charitra*

Surukkam, which serves as the primary source material for this research.

The data collection for this research article is as follows:

1.1 Primary sources

The book titled *Srimad Venkataramana Bhagavata Swamigalin Swara Sahityangal and Charitra Surukkam*, published by the Srimad Venkataramana Bhagavata Swami Jayanthi Committee in the year 1991 and edited by V. N. Nagaraja Bhagavata and Prof. T. R. Damodaran. This book contains the notation for 71 compositions of the composer.

1.2 Secondary sources

Articles

Books

Journals

Theses

Websites

2. Introduction

The philosopher-poet Maharishi Dr. Shuddhananda Bharathi (1897–1990 AD), a devoted Sāma Yoga practitioner, proclaimed: “Tyāgarāja is the temple of Rāma nāma—Rāma kokilam—who warbles the glory of Rāma from the honey-dropping arbor of music. He is a Mira in motion, a Kabir in devotion, a Purandara Dāsa in music, and a Nammālvār in vision.”¹ Dr. Raghavan further adds to this observation, stating: “The age of Caturdaṇḍī, of Gīta, Prabandha, Thāya, and Ālāpa had to give place to the age of Pada, Kīrtana, and Kṛti. In achieving this, Tyāgarāja stands foremost with his marvellous contribution.” His devotion, religious fervour, reformatory zeal, and spiritual realisation pour out in the form of classical compositions in Karnatic music, which are deeply captivating and relatable to every heart on the path of bhakti

¹ <https://www.indian-heritage.org/music/thyagar.htm>

(devotion). It is for this reason that the śiṣya paramparā of Śrī Tyāgarāja is considerably wide.

His foremost disciples disseminated the guru's compositions through three principal lineages: Tillaisthānam (Rāma Iyengār), Umayālapuram (Kṛṣṇa and Sundara Bhāgavatar), and Vālājapēṭ (Veṅkaṭaramaṇa Bhāgavatar and his son Kṛṣṇaswāmy Bhāgavatar).

Vālājapēṭ Veṅkaṭaramaṇa Bhāgavatar was born to Nannusamy of Ayyampettai on February 18, 1781, in Ariyalur, Tiruchirappalli district, into a Saurāṣṭra Brahmin family. He was fluent in Telugu, Saṁskṛtam, and Saurāṣṭra. He composed nearly 150 works in these languages, closely reflecting Tyāgarāja's musical style. His contributions span various compositional forms such as varṇa, svarajati, kṛti, and tillāna. Many of his compositions remain unpublished, with existing records found in the Vālājapēṭ notations—manuscripts preserved at the Madurai Saurāṣṭra Sabha and the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library in Chennai. He attained mukti on December 15, 1874, and a temple dedicated to him stands near the Tyāgarāja samādhi in Tiruvaiyāru.

Vālājapēṭ Veṅkaṭaramaṇa Bhāgavatar, though a late bloomer, became a promising disciple of Śrī Tyāgarāja. His contribution has been immense in unearthing factual details about the life and musical compositions of his guru. Along with documenting his guru's works, he also composed a number of original compositions. Though he is believed to have composed between 2,000 and 2,500 pieces, only about 150 have been identified so far. Among these, 70 compositions are published with lyrics and notations (svaralipi) in the 1991 book *Srimad Veṅkaṭaramaṇa Bhāgavatar Swāmigalin Swara Sāhityangal and Charitra Surukkam* from Ayyampettai (Sankaranarayanan).

For the purpose of this study, two compositions are chosen. Many compositions in the rāgas Kēdāragaula and Bhairavī were composed by Veṅkaṭaramaṇa Bhāgavatar, which serves as a criterion for selecting the kṛtis analysed in this article. While the composition in Bhairavī is a svarajati, the selected compositions are examined to understand their melodic, thematic, and structural characteristics within the broader framework of the Karnatic music tradition.

3. Composition Analysis

Svarajati: *Sāmi Nenaruna Brōvara* in the Rāga Bhairavī

Pallavi

Sāmi nenaruna brōvara nādūpai jālamēla nannēlukōra

Caraṇa-1

Mōmiṭu tirugarā mamata nēda nīde nātanu vaṭamcu benciti
gadarā

mudamotava sadayūḍavagucu sarasane daneda
gatiyakatami niluvadika nanu

Caraṇa-2

Kāmita phalada yōkari varada nīvanāda raṇa sēyamēra
takadūraka

nikaramuna karamiḍi bharavasa mosagudu vanucu śaraṇani
padamula baḍiti

Caraṇa-3

Sāṭi dorakani sāmi cāla valacati rāmana seriginan kṛpā
jūḍarā sarasāgraṇi

ninu vinā gatiga vara sārekulu nī pada sārasamulviḍa
jālanunannika

sādaramuna manupumu nanu sākulu jūpaka
sānandamukanu

Caraṇa-4

Nī padamula nera nammiti gadā sadā sarasīruhāyata nētra
nikhila lōka

rakṣaṇātyakṣasam rakṣamām patitāgragaṇyam anagha
santatamu

nā morālincibirā nanu parāku salupaka

Caraṇa-5

Nīvē gati anucuna palu vidhamulan moraliḍina nī
 kṛparādika
 nēmīsētu nevaritō teluputu sumā vinumā ghanā kṛpakala
 dora
 nīvē nādu gurutavivekuladana mīvē rāmacandrapura
 dāsanuḍavu
 nīvē vidhi bhavādi sēvyuṭavaraku nātha tāḷajālamēla
 takadika

This svarajati, set to vilamba (dvikāla) Ādi tāḷa with sama eḍuppu, is dedicated to Lord Rāma, revered as an eloquent and sinless protector by devotees. In this composition, the devotee humbly expresses an earnest plea to the divine, yearning for guidance, protection, and compassion. Despite being a loyal servant, he questions the perceived absence of affection and grace shown by the deity. Seeking refuge and the fulfilment of his desires, he surrenders at the deity's feet, placing unwavering faith in the divine protector even amidst life's challenges.

Addressing Lord Rāma—whom he reveres as eloquent and unparalleled—the devotee implores mercy and forgiveness, longing for compassion rather than judgment. He praises the deity's sinless and pure nature and humbly requests that his prayers be accepted, seeking constant shelter and grace.

Through sincere devotion and repeated appeals, the devotee recognises the deity as his ultimate guide, protector, and teacher. He expresses profound gratitude for the incomparable compassion received, acknowledging his own unworthiness to repay such divine kindness. Emphasising the deity's role in shaping the harmony of his life, he identifies the divine as the Lord of Rāmacandrapura, one who is revered even by fate and destiny.

The composition comprises a Pallavi with two āvarta-s and seven saṅgati-s, followed by five Caraṇa-s, each with four āvarta-s. The

first and second Caraṇa share the same melody. The Pallavi's initial āvarta in the first and second saṅgati-s is melodically identical, with subtle druta variations in the second saṅgati. The laghu section from the third to the seventh saṅgati remains consistent, while the first druta of each exhibits distinct phrases such as Ś ; ; ś n (third), m p d n Ś ś n (fourth), and ś n ś p d p ś n (fifth). The final druta phrase d p m g r s r g remains uniform across these saṅgati-s. The sixth and seventh saṅgati-s share similar laghu melodies, while their second āvarta-s and druta segments vary with phrases such as g g r s m m g r n n and ṅ s r g M p m G R, and druta phrases d p ḡ ḡ ṛ ś n n and Ṛ ś ṛ ḡ ṛ Ś ś n, respectively.

The composition begins on Śaḍja (Sa) and Madhyama (Ma) in the Pallavi and includes Pañcama (Pa) in the Caraṇa-s. The highest note is Madhyama (Ma) in the tāra sthāyi, and the lowest is Niṣāda (Ni) in the mandra–madhya sthāyi. Janṭa prayōga-s such as gg, mm, nn, pp, ṛṛ, and dhātu prayōga-s such as s g r g, g n s r, and m d p d enrich the melodic texture.

The composition exhibits several melodic features that deviate from conventional Bhairavī patterns. In the sixth saṅgati of the Pallavi, the phrase “g g r s – m m g r – n n d p – ḡ ḡ ṛ ś – n n d p” is notable for the insertion of “m m g r,” which is uncommon in the standard Bhairavī sequence. Another distinctive feature is the dhātu phrase “D Ṛ Ś ṛ ś N D P,” which begins with a leap from D to Ṛ, an unusual transition when compared to more typical P–Ṛ or N–Ṛ movements. The seventh saṅgati of the Pallavi includes the phrase “m g p d p m G R,” presenting both technical complexity and an octave leap from R to Ṛ.

In the first and second Caraṇa-s, the phrase “Ḡ Ś Ṛ N Ś D N P D M P R G Ṇ S R” is particularly rich in texture. The fourth Caraṇa displays a repeating 3–3–2 rhythmic pattern across the first two āvarta-s, which are mirrored, creating a symmetrical musical design. The fifth Caraṇa introduces the phrase “ś n d m” and the sequence “N ś – P d – M p – R g,” further enhancing the composition's expressive quality.

Prosodically, the composition demonstrates dviṭiyākṣara prāsa and extensive use of svarākṣara-s, including both śuddha

(e.g., *Sāmi*, *Nīde*, *krpā*) and *sucita* (e.g., *nādupai*, *mōmiṭu*, *ninuvinā*). Instances of *hrasva* syllables aligning with *dīrgha svāra*-s, as seen in *nīpada* and *Kāmita*, further enhance the lyrical sophistication of the *svarajati*.

4. Kṛti: Karuṇānidhi in the Rāga Kēdāragaula

Pallavi

Karuṇānidhivaṇi nera nammīna nannu
Karuṇīñcavademi rā Rāma

Anupallavi

Śaraṇāgata pōṣaṇa birudāṅka
Paramānanda paripūrṇa ninnu

Caraṇa-1

Parama puruṣa nī smaraṇamu sēyucu
Dāridrya dūralai merayucu niṇḍē
Parama bhāgavatula pādasēvakuḍānai
Nirupamā maunī caritamulanu vini

Caraṇa-2

Suravaruḍāni ninne śaraṇu śaraṇanina
Karivarumoravini parama dayāluvai
Śīrirmoḍalagu nī pariṇanula maraci
Veravaku manasunu dūramuna pōsina

Caraṇa-3

Rāmacandrapuravara budhapālana
Rāmadāsa hṛtāpa śamanā
Kāmapūrituḍaina nannu niṣkāmuniga jēsi
Pāliñceṭi

This *kr̥ti*, composed in praise of Śrī Rāma, is a sincere plea that extols his divine qualities while seeking his compassion and guidance. It acknowledges Rāma as the ocean of compassion and expresses unwavering faith in his mercy, imploring his presence and grace. The composition highlights Rāma’s swift response to devotees, his nourishing presence, and the supreme bliss he embodies, recognising him as a complete and perfect divine being.

The text reflects the belief that constant remembrance of Rāma removes distress and illuminates the hearts of those who seek refuge in him. The devotee aspires to serve at his feet alongside exalted *bhāgavatas*, listening to his incomparable deeds in deep contemplation. The composition further conveys complete surrender, portraying Rāma as one who listens attentively to the prayers of his devotees and offers protection. His compassion and greatness shield his followers from fear and inner turmoil, ensuring that their hearts remain undisturbed and pure.

Structurally, the composition comprises a Pallavi, Anupallavi, and three *Caraṇa-s*. The Pallavi and Anupallavi span two *āvarta-s* each, while the *Caraṇa-s* consist of four *āvarta-s* and share a common melodic structure. The Pallavi and Anupallavi resemble the melodic framework of Tyāgarāja’s *Vārija Nayana*. The Pallavi has no *saṅgati-s*, whereas the Anupallavi displays two melodic variations in its first line, with the phrase “*pōṣaṇa birudāṅka*” differing only by the addition of *ṛ ṣ*. The lines “*Niṣkāmuniḡā jēsi pāliṅceṭi*” and “*Paramānanda paripūrṇa ninnu*” share similar melodic contours with slight variation.

The Pallavi begins on the *tāra sthāyi Śaḍja (Ś)*, the Anupallavi on the *madhya sthāyi Madhyama (M₁)*, and the *Caraṇa* on the *madhya sthāyi Riṣabha (R₂)*. The highest note employed is *Madhyama (Ma)* in the *tāra sthāyi*, while the lowest is *Pañcama (Pa)* in the *mandra sthāyi*. *Janṭa prayōga-s* occur throughout the composition, with the exception of *Ma*, and *dhātu prayōga-s* such as *r m g s* and *r p m p ṣ n* are also present. Typical *rāga* phrases include *m P d P*, *r M g S*, *p S N S*, *ṛ ś n d P*, *m P ṛ Ś*, and *r P m G*, with no unconventional melodic deviations observed.

Set to Ādi tāla in madhyama kāla, the Pallavi and Anupallavi feature an anāgata eḍuppu of two akṣara-s, while the Caraṇa-s employ an anāgata eḍuppu of three akṣara-s. Prosodically, the Pallavi and Anupallavi each contain a single pāda, while the Caraṇa-s comprise two pāda-s each. Dvitiyākṣara prāsa is evident in phrases such as *Karuṇānidhi-karuṇiṅca* and *Rāmacandra-kāmapūrituḍaina*, while anuprāsa is also observed across sections. The composition further exhibits both śuddha and sucita svarākṣara-s, such as *ri* in *Kāmapūrituḍai* and *ru* in *Karuṇānidhi* aligning with *Ri*. Instances of hrasva and dīrgha alignment between sāhitya and svāra, as seen in *Rāmacandrapura* and *Śaraṇāgata*, enhance the lyrical and melodic richness of the kṛti.

5. Conclusion

Vālājpēṭ Venkaṭaramaṇa Bhāgavata's work clearly reflects the Tyāgarāja tradition while simultaneously showcasing his own distinct musical style. His compositions are marked by deep devotion, structural clarity, and a refined balance between lyrical elegance and melodic coherence. Although the saṅgati-s and rhythmic patterns employed are relatively simple, the music conveys depth, restraint, and thoughtful expression. These compositions hold significant value not only as performance repertoire but also as pedagogical material, offering an effective synthesis of bhakti and musical discipline.

Several strategies may be adopted to promote and disseminate these compositions more widely. Various platforms and organisers can encourage musicians to perform such lesser-known works through thematic presentations. With the aid of modern technology, additional orchestral arrangements may be created for these compositions and presented to connoisseurs on special occasions. As an experimental initiative to familiarise listeners with the composer's oeuvre, albums featuring a selection of his compositions may be recorded and circulated on social media platforms. Music educators may also conduct workshops to introduce students and practitioners to these compositions.

Vālājpēṭ Veṅkaṭaramaṇa Bhāgavataṛ's contributions exemplify the essence of the guru–śiṣya paramparā, wherein knowledge is transmitted with reverence and precision, thereby safeguarding the legacy of Karnatic music for posterity.

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Critical & Analytical Essays

Domestic Porosity and the Transcultural Uncanny in Select Japanese and Indian Folk Narratives

Debasmita Sarkar ¹

1 Assitant Professor, Dept of English, SRM University, Sikkim; PhD Research Scholar, Jadavpur University



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Editor's Note:

Terror, in the Japanese folk narratives examined here, does not arrive from without but surfaces from within the familiar. This essay reads figures such as Yuki-Onna and Futakuchi Onna alongside South Asian serpent-lover myths and A. K. Ramanujan's framework of the contextual self, situating the uncanny not as a culturally specific phenomenon but as a transcultural logic of boundary, substitution, and the return of what domestic order seeks to contain.

Abstract

This essay examines how Japanese folk narratives produce the uncanny not through spectacular supernatural intrusion but through subtle disturbances within domestic life. Drawing on Freud's concept of the uncanny and Kristeva's theory of abjection, the study explores how familiar spaces (such as household) become porous environment where boundaries between human, spirit, and object begin to dissolve. Close readings of the Japanese tales of "Yuki-Onna" and "Futakuchi Onna" demonstrate how secrecy, appetite, and bodily transformation destabilize the apparent stability of domestic order. The snow-woman's silent return as wife reveals how intimacy may conceal alterity, while the hidden mouth of Futakuchi Onna exposes the tensions between bodily need and social expectations of restraint. The analysis extends comparatively to Girish Karnad's *Nāga-Mandala* and Abanindranath Tagore's *Khiner Putul*, where serpent lovers and edible dolls function as mythic substitutions that articulate otherwise inexpressible domestic anxieties. Japanese traditions of

animated dolls (ningyō) further illustrate how objects may serve as vessels of memory and spiritual presence. Across these narratives, the uncanny emerges through symbolic substitutions that transform landscapes, bodies, animals, and objects into alternative forms of life. The article argues that folklore imagines domestic space as fundamentally relational, where human identity remains permeable to nonhuman forces.

Keywords: Uncanny; Mythopoeic Substitution; Domestic Space; Ningyō; Comparative Folklore

In many Japanese folk narratives, terror becomes active through a subtle disturbance of the familiar. A wife eats almost nothing or a mother reappears carrying a dead child; and the stories start taking shapes from inside their emptiness. Those images do not belong only to the spectacular domain of horror but to the intimate terrain of the everyday. The uncanny in Japanese folklore are not from the intrusion of the supernatural into reality rather from the unsettling recognition that the ordinary selves may harbor otherworldly potential. Sigmund Freud's formulation of the uncanny as the return of whatever is repressed yet once familiar provides a crucial interpretive entry point. The uncanny, he argues, arises when something previously known and very intimate reappears in estranged form, producing a peculiar mixture of recognition and dread (Freud 124). Such experiences destabilize the boundary between the feelings of homely ('heimlich') and the unhomely ('unheimlich'), revealing the fragile structures of psychic security. The sense of abject may emerge when the border between inside and outside collapses. The hidden returns to visibility with disturbing identities, (dis)order, and meaning. Characters appear in tales featuring hidden mouths, elongated necks, or spectral maternal bodies, where bodily containment fails and the self is rendered porous. Anthropological perspectives identify such anxieties as culturally structured and therefore psychological. The cultural logic of certain narratives is inseparable from Japanese aesthetic traditions. Carmen Blacker observes that Japanese religious practice assumes the permeability of worlds with mountains, ritual sites, and ancestral rites serving as points of contact

between the living and the dead. Spirit visitation is therefore not an anomaly but an extension of relational matrix (112). Noriko Reider likewise notes that demonic figures often represent forms of social and existential otherness, embodying anxieties about exclusion, and alterity. Such figures destabilize not only the boundary between human and nonhuman but also the boundary between social belonging and exclusion.

Japanese aesthetic philosophy shapes the affective texture of the uncanny. Yuriko Saito argues that Japanese aesthetics integrates moral sensibility into everyday life, encouraging respect and attentiveness toward both human and nonhuman presences (29). This kind of ethical attentiveness may heighten sensitivity to disturbance when the ordinary world is disrupted, and the disturbance is felt as a moral and affective dissonance. Complementing this sensibility is the aesthetic valorization of imperfection and transience in which weathering, incompleteness, and ephemerality are embraced as signs of temporal depth and natural process (Saito 383). The fleeting presence of the snow-woman or the dissolving boundary between life and death thus resonates with an aesthetic philosophy that recognizes impermanence as intrinsic to beauty. Within this cultural and theoretical threads, mythic narratives encode prohibited desires, anxieties, and contradictions through symbolic displacement. Rather than representing transgression directly, folklore renders it narratable through substitutions. Such mythopoeic substitution functions as a cultural tendency that allows socially unspeakable tensions to be articulated within narrative form.

While the uncanny manifests differently across cultures, its structural logic of the disturbance of boundaries and the return of what has been suppressed resonates transculturally. Comparative insights from South Asian serpent-lover myths or several other domestic secrecy codes reveal analogous strategies of substitution and containment. A.K. Ramanujan's observation that cultural selves may operate contextually rather than through fixed boundaries suggests a broader framework for understanding structures of porous identity (42). Yet Japanese uncanny narratives remain distinctive in their aesthetic restraint.

Snow, Silence, and Secrecy in "Yuki-Onna"

The tale of Yuki-Onna unfolds with meteorological stillness. A snowstorm confines two woodcutters, the elder Mosaku and the younger Minokichi, to a mountain hut. During the night, a woman formed from snow enters silently, bends over the sleeping bodies, and exhales a deathly breath that freezes the old man where he lies. When she turns toward the younger man, however, she pauses. His youth moves her to mercy. She spares him on a condition that he must never speak of what he has seen - "I intended to treat you like the other man. But I cannot help feeling some pity for you,- because you are so young.... You are a pretty boy, Minokichi; and I will not hurt you now. But, if you ever tell anybody - even your own mother - about what you have seen this night, I shall know it; and then I will kill you.... Remember what I say!" (Hearn 113). If he tells anyone, she warns, she will return and kill him. This conditional intimacy structures the tale. The encounter is neither seduction nor assault, rather it is a contract forged at protecting the existence. The snow-woman's power lies not in her supernatural lethality but in her demand for silence. Her survival requires secrecy. Years later, Minokichi marries a mysterious woman named O-Yuki. She is gentle, and strangely untouched by the hardships of rural life. She bears children, manages the household, and ages with uncanny slowness. The domestic sphere appears stable. Yet the narrative repeatedly marks her difference by referring her skin remains pale, she dislikes cold air, avoids certain forms of disclosure. The everyday rhythms of marriage and childcare conceal an unresolved in-between space. One night, moved by affection and nostalgia, Minokichi recounts the snow-woman incident to his wife. As he speaks, her face changes. The story he narrates is the revelation that destroys the domestic order he inhabits. O-Yuki reveals herself to be the snow-woman and declares that only the presence of their children prevents her from killing him. She vanishes into the night, dissolving back into snowfall.

The uncanny force of the narrative resides with the sense of protecting secret in the form of intimacy. The marriage is sustained by silence. The wife is not an intruder but the reappearance of an earlier encounter in altered form. The domestic interior thus becomes the stage upon which the repressed returns in intimate disguise - "The uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and

long familiar.” (Freud 124). Sigmund Freud further clarifies the mechanism, “This uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old - established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression” (148). The shift from snow-woman to spouse collapses the boundary between the strange and the familiar, rendering the home uncanny. Yet the terror is not sudden. The terror unfolds through recognition. O-Yuki has always been both wife and the other. The uncanny resides in delayed comprehension, in the realization that intimacy has always harbored alterity. Revelation violates the pact. The violation of silence does not only create a necessity to reveal truth; it also dissolves the conditions under which difference could be accommodated. The domestic order collapses because the fragile terms of coexistence are breached.

Julia Kristeva’s notion of abjection helps explain the unsettling affect produced by the snow-woman’s presence - “The abject has only one quality of the object - that of being opposed to I” (Kristeva 1). This establishes abjection as a threat to subjecthood. The abject disturbs identity by exposing the instability of bodily boundaries, “Filth is not a quality in itself... it applies only to what relates to a boundary” (Kristeva 69). Yuki-Onna’s unsettling presence similarly derives from boundary instability rather than grotesque excess. Her body is neither fully material nor immaterial. She is cold yet animate, visible yet dissolving, her breath freezes and her touch annihilates warmth. She embodies the border between life and nonlife. Coldness functions as an abject marker while warmth signifies vitality in human community. There is a blend of ecological embodiment with permeable Worlds. The snow-woman does not violate bodily integrity through violence; she unsettles it through dissolution. Her breath transforms vitality into stillness, rendering death atmospheric rather than corporeal. The terror she produces therefore belongs to the domain of abjection - an encounter with the fragile, where life yields to elemental cold.

Rather than representing nature as inert backdrop, the tale presents weather as an active agent through which presence becomes perceptible, suggesting a cosmology in which the human, the natural, and the spiritual remain continuous rather than divided. The tale refuses a rigid separation between natural environment and supernatural agency. Yuki-Onna becomes

visible only through “snow-light” as the storm forces open the hut door, and her lethal breath appears as “bright white smoke”, rendering death an atmospheric process rather than a bodily assault (Hearn 113). When she departs, she does not exit the landscape but “vanishes into the snow” (Hearn 118). The narrative thus collapses distinctions between weather and bodyⁱ. Snow is not background scenery but medium, and the storm enables her manifestation. Yuriko Saito’s discussion of Japanese aesthetics emphasizes attentiveness to transience and imperfection as intrinsic to beauty (Saito 383). Yuki-Onna’s presence is defined by ephemerality: she appears in snowfall, lives within domestic temporality, and dissolves again into winter air. Her beauty is inseparable from impermanence. This aesthetic sensibility intensifies the uncanny rather than mitigating it. The snow-woman is not grotesque; she is luminously fragile. Her disappearance leaves an affective residue where absence becomes the hauntingⁱⁱ.

Hunger and the Hidden Mouth: “Futakuchi Onna” and the Abject Economy of Appetite

Among the most unsettling figures in Japanese uncanny lore is the Futakuchi Onna (“two-mouthed woman”), a domestic figure whose horror also emerges through concealment. She appears as the ideal wife - quiet, frugal, and eating almost nothing. Yet rice vanishes daily from the household store. Suspicions lead to revelation. In widely circulated Edo-period variants, the husband secretly observes his wife and discovers that her hair parts to reveal a second mouth at the back of her head, which cries out for food and devours rice with insatiable hunger. The uncanny resides in disclosure of the fact that what appears orderly conceals a devouring excess within the domestic body.

Although “Futakuchi Onna” circulates primarily through oral narrative and *yōkai* compendia rather than a single canonical literary text, Noriko T. Reider situates such devouring female figures within a broader cultural logic in which monstrous women embody social anxiety, marginalization, and survival tensions. Mountain women (*yamauba*), for example, are said to consume unsuspecting passers-by, reflecting fears surrounding exclusion, hunger, and the precarious conditions of subsistence (Reider 181). Futakuchi Onna belongs to this continuum of

figures through which appetite, marginality, and social unease become narratable.

Futakuchi Onna's second mouth opens where the body should remain sealed. The body ceases to function as a coherent organism and instead becomes a disturbing visual imagination. The hidden mouth confuses nourishment and devouring, restraint and excess, domestic order and bodily need. The mouth is an organ mediating intake and expulsion. Its multiplication renders appetite autonomous. Hair culturally coded as feminine beauty, and in the story of Futakuchi Onna it animates to feed the second mouth where bodily unity disintegrates. Nourishment becomes compulsion. The tale gains clarity when situated within agrarian economies structured by scarcity and labour discipline. In such contexts, food distribution and consumption were moral as well as material concerns. Reider observes that supernatural figures often materialize tensions embedded in everyday social life. Futakuchi Onna's hidden appetite echoes anxieties surrounding resource depletion, household survival, and the regulation of women's labor and consumption.

The figure embodies a paradox as she appears as the ideal frugal wife yet harbours an appetite that threatens domestic stability. The hidden mouth literalizes what patriarchal domestic order attempts to regulate (such as female hunger, bodily need, and claims upon sustenance). The uncanny emerges when the ideology of restraint confronts the reality of biological demand. Futakuchi Onna reveals an economy in which hunger circulates beneath the surface of domestic order. The visible wife consumes nothing; the invisible mouth consumes everything. This split dramatizes the tension between normative femininity and biological need. The young female character tests the ethics of sustenance. Her story materializes an abject economy of appetite as a system in which hunger must remain invisible in order for domestic order to appear stable. When the hidden mouth becomes visible, the illusion of containment collapses.

Maruyama Ōkyo and the Intimate Apparition

A comparable visual articulation of intimate haunting appears in Maruyama Ōkyo's "The Ghost of Oyuki" (c. 1750), where a female apparition emerges in attenuated form, her lower body dissolving into emptiness. The painting visualizes the uncanny

not as violent intrusion but as the return of intimate presence, suspended between memory and embodiment. Ōkyo's Ghost of Oyuki offers a visual analogue to the domestic uncanny explored in Japanese folk narratives. The apparition's partially dissolved body destabilizes the boundary between presence and absence, rendering the figure neither fully material nor entirely immaterial. The figure's attenuated form, limp hands, and dissolving lower body render presence as incomplete embodiment. Rather than dramatizing horror, the painting stages a quiet return. It is a presence that seems to arise from memory rather than invasion. The ghost does not enter the domestic sphere; she appears to have never fully left it. This visual logic parallels the narrative structure of figures such as Yuki-Onna, whose return collapses distinctions between intimacy and estrangement, life and afterlife, dwelling and haunting.

Ōkyo's ghost is believed to represent a beloved seen in a dream; Yuki-Onna returns as wife and mother before revealing her supernatural identity. In each case, the uncanny emerges through the return of intimate presence rather than the arrival of the monstrous. Visually and narratively, the body dissolves at the point where memory and presence intersect. The lower half of Ōkyo's ghost fades into emptiness; Yuki-Onna dissolves into snow. Embodiment is suspended rather than terminated.

Serpent, Seclusion, and Subversive Intimacy in *Nāga-Mandala*

Girish Karnad's *Nāga-Mandala* (Play with a Cobra) transforms an oral folktale into a theatrical meditation on desire, marital authority, and the instability of identity within domestic life. Rani's marriage to Appanna converts the household into a carceral interior. Locked inside during the day and denied companionship, she inhabits a space that is simultaneously shelter and prison. Karnad's staging underscores the paradox. The home, culturally idealized as a site of protection, becomes an institution of isolation. Domestic produces silence, and silence becomes the condition in which the uncanny can emerge.

The cobra's nocturnal visits to Rani arise within an intimate enclosure, mimicking the husband's form. When Appanna's demeanor shifts at night, Rani registers the transformation -

“You were so different yesterday... you spoke so kindly.” (Karnad 233) Does the line register fear or cognitive dissonance? We find the fractures of identity within familiarity. The domestic interior reveals itself as a space capable of hosting multiple presences. The cobra articulates the temporal logic structuring this dual existence, “The husband decides on the day visits. And the wife decides on the night visits.” (Karnad 236) Day and night divide public duty from emotional and erotic fulfilment. Marriage becomes temporally bifurcated - daylight sustains patriarchal authority; night permits affective reciprocity. This temporal split does more than enabling deception. It reveals that conjugal identity is already structured by asymmetry. The cobra’s visits expose the insufficiency of marital life.

A. K. Ramanujan’s reflections on the structures of folktale is important in terms of understanding cultural logic. He observes that the Indian self is relational rather than singular, constituted through roles and contexts (Ramanujan 42). Within this structure, one may “live simultaneously in several worlds and operate in each according to its own logic” (Ramanujan 45). Folktale worlds therefore permit distinct orders of reality to intersect “without anxiety” (Ramanujan 47). The cobra’s assumption of Appanna’s form expresses relational multiplicity. Rani’s experience unfolds across overlapping realities of social marriage, emotional intimacy, and mythic presence. Ramanujan further notes that folktale truths are context-sensitive rather than absolute (50). This epistemology becomes crucial in understanding the play’s climactic oath.

In South Asian imaginations, *nāgas* are beings associated with subterranean realms, fertility, water, and cyclical renewal. Their presence marks phases of transformation. Karnad mobilizes this symbolic reservoir to reconfigure marital sexuality. The serpent-lover does not represent illicit desire; he restores vitality where patriarchal neglect has produced sterility. Rani’s emotional and bodily awakening unfolds through nocturnal encounters that are tender rather than violent. When she later insists, “I was never alone. Someone was always with me.” (Karnad 247) - she asserts an experiential truth that exceeds social recognition. Presence here is relational rather than juridical. Pregnancy, in this context, signifies restoration. Fertility emerges through mythic mediation. A distinctive feature of *Nāga-Mandala* is its framing device. Stories within the primary story finds their

narrators. Flames become storytellers there, and narrative acquires agency. This meta-theatrical structure foregrounds the relationship between voice and survival. Stories persist by being told; women survive by being heard. Rani begins as voiceless, confined within domestic silence. Through narrative and ordeal, she becomes the central speaking subject whose words determine living truth. Karnad thus links feminine speech with narrative endurance.

Rani's pregnancy provokes communal judgment. Patriarchal authority demands proof of fidelity. She undergoes the snake ordeal, placing her hand into the cobra's nest and swearing

"If I have touched any man other than my husband and this cobra, let the snake bite me." (Karnad 252) The oath destabilizes binary truth structures. By invoking both husband and cobra, Rani articulates layered truth consistent with folktale epistemology. Ramanujan's observation that folktales accommodate context-dependent truths clarifies the logic at work here (Ramanujan 50). The cobra does not harm her. Mythic logic intervenes in juridical authority, compelling the community to accept her testimony. That is why identity in the play is relational - not fixed but substitutive. Rather than punishing desire, the play reconfigures marital ethics. The serpent, rather than destroying the household, enables its transformation. The community adjusts. The uncanny becomes a mode through which rigid structures soften, allowing relational life to continue. In this sense, *Nāga-Mandala* does not resolve contradiction but inhabits it.

The Edible Body and the Substitute Self: Abanindranath Tagore's *Khiner Putul*

Abanindranath Tagore's *Khiner Putul* ("The Doll of Condensed Milk"), first published in 1896, reworks a Bengali folk motif in which an edible figure mediates domestic injustice and emotional deprivation. The tale opens with a sharply asymmetrical royal household. The king possesses two queens - the favoured Suo-Rani and the neglected Duo-Rani. The narrative emphasizes this imbalance through spatial imagery. While the favoured queen occupies luxurious palaces and gardens, the neglected queen inhabits a marginal domestic corner, surrounded by poverty and silence. The disparity is not merely material but affective at the

same time - the king's attention circulates exclusively around one household while the other remains invisible.

Within this domestic economy of neglect, the narrative introduces an extraordinary substitute object. The monkey, one of the tale's trickster figures, proposes the creation of a doll fashioned from condensed milk. The instruction appears simple yet symbolically charged - "Cook the milk slowly till it thickens, and shape from it a little doll - white and delicate as the moon." (Abanindranath Tagore, 29) The doll emerges as a fragile body composed entirely of nourishment. Milk, a substance associated with maternal care and sustenance, is transformed into anthropomorphic form. The resulting object occupies a strange ontological position - it is neither fully animate nor entirely inert. Its existence destabilizes the boundary between food and body, nourishment and personhood.

Freud's reflections on uncanny objects illuminate this effect. In "The Uncanny", he identifies dolls and automatons as privileged sites where the boundary between animate and inanimate becomes unstable, producing a peculiar cognitive unease - "Dolls, waxwork figures and automatons... awaken the impression that they may come to life." (Freud 135) The milk doll in Tagore's narrative exemplifies precisely this phenomenon. Although initially inert, it functions narratively as a proxy self for the neglected queen. Through the doll, the queen acquires symbolic presence within a courtly structure that has erased her visibility. The doll thus mediates affective recognition. It is through this substitute body that the queen's marginality becomes narratable.

The material composition of the doll intensifies the uncanny dimension. Unlike wooden or porcelain dolls, the milk doll is edible. Its substance belongs simultaneously to nourishment and embodiment. The substitution performed by the doll also reflects the narrative logic of many South Asian folktales classified within the international tale type ATU 459 ("The Make-Believe Child"), where artificial figures are created to simulate human presence. Variants of this tale type occur across India and other parts of Asia, indicating a widespread folkloric pattern in which fabricated bodies mediate social anxieties about legitimacy, reproduction, and domestic status.

Animated Objects and Spirit Presence: Ningyō and the Uncanny Object-Body

Japanese folklore preserves a long tradition in which dolls are understood not merely as toys but as vessels capable of absorbing human presence. The word *ningyō* literally means ‘human form’, suggesting that the doll already occupies a space between representation and embodiment. Within ritual practice, dolls are often treated as substitutes for the human body, absorbing illness, or misfortune before being discarded or ritually released. This substitutional function appears prominently in purification rites such as *hina-nagashi*, where paper dolls are set afloat on rivers to carry away impurities.

The animistic logic underlying these practices reflects a psychology in which material objects may acquire vitality through contact with human emotion and ritual intention. Dolls therefore function as bodies or objects capable of holding traces of human presence without being fully human themselves. Folkloric narratives sometimes push this logic further by depicting dolls that appear to possess consciousness or memory. One well-known example is the legend of “Okiku Ningyō”, a doll preserved at Mannen-ji temple in Hokkaido whose hair is believed to grow continuously. According to the story, the doll was originally owned by a young girl named Okiku who died unexpectedly; after her death, the doll’s hair began lengthening as though animated by the child’s lingering spirit. Whether interpreted as miracle or legend, the narrative expresses a widespread belief that objects intimately associated with human affection may retain a trace of the person who once cherished them. The doll appears almost alive, yet not fully so. The observer oscillates between recognizing it as object and perceiving it as body.

The *ningyō* tradition demonstrates that this ambiguity is psychological and culturally structured. Dolls frequently serve as substitute bodies within Japanese ritual life. In purification ceremonies, a doll absorbs defilement on behalf of the human subject; in memorial practices, it may preserve the emotional trace of the deceased. Objects thus become containers for human presence.

A different yet related form of doll symbol appears in the traditions surrounding *hina* dolls, displayed during the festival

of Hinamatsuri (Girls' Day). Historically, hina dolls originated as ritual substitutes designed to absorb misfortune on behalf of young girls. Early forms of the ritual involved paper or straw dolls that were touched to the body and then set adrift on water, carrying away illness and spiritual pollution. The dolls thus functioned as surrogate bodies, temporarily bearing the vulnerabilities of the human subject before being removed from the domestic space.

Intimacy and the Porous Human

Across the narratives examined in this study, the uncanny does not erupt through spectacular violence or overt supernatural invasion. Instead, it emerges through quiet rearrangements within the intimate sphere of everyday life. The stories considered here reveal a recurring narrative strategy that may be described as mythopoeic substitution. Rather than presenting social tensions directly, folklore transforms them into substitute bodies capable of inhabiting the domestic sphere without immediately disrupting it. Snow becomes woman; hunger becomes a second mouth; a serpent becomes a lover; nourishment becomes a doll; and objects shaped in human likeness become vessels of memory or spirit. What binds these substitutions together is the peculiar permeability of the spaces in which they occur. The home, which modern sensibility often imagines as a secure boundary separating the familiar from the unknown, appears in these narratives as a far more porous environment. Doors remain closed, yet spirits enter; marriages appear stable, yet identities divide; objects lie still, yet memory moves within them. The supernatural in such narratives therefore appears less as a separate domain than as an intensification of the natural world's latent vitality.

Yet the comparative dimension of this study demonstrates that the logic of substitution extends far beyond a single cultural context. The serpent-lover of South Asian folklore, the edible doll of Abanindranath Tagore's *Khirer Putul*, and the spirit-bearing dolls of Japanese ningyō traditions - reveal different ways in which narrative imagination negotiates the limits of the human. These stories stage encounters with forms of life that lie just beyond the categories through which human societies organize experience. To live within such worlds requires a capacity to

coexist with ambiguity. In this sense, folklore preserves a quiet philosophical intuition that the boundaries separating human beings from animals, spirits, landscapes, and objects are neither absolute nor permanent. They are provisional lines drawn across a reality that remains fundamentally relational. At such moments the familiar worlds do not disappear - they become deeper than it first appeared.

End Notes

ⁱ Hiroshige's paintings of winter landscapes also do not treat snow just as a backdrop. Snow absorbs sound, softens architecture, and reshapes spatial perception. Figures appear diminished, suspended within atmospheric stillness. Weather becomes the primary agent shaping experience. In *Evening Snow at Kanbara*, houses and travellers seem enveloped by snowfall rather than situated within it. Snow reorganizes the environment, transforming space into a muted field of presence. Human movement slows; sound is absorbed; the world appears hushed and suspended. This aesthetic logic resonates with the conditions of Yuki-Onna's manifestation. She appears in 'snow-light' as the storm forces open the hut door (Hearn 113). Visibility itself is mediated through weather.

ⁱⁱ Himalayan folklore across Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, and Sikkim preserves narratives in which mountain weather is animated by spirit presence. Ethnographic accounts describe female apparitions encountered in snowstorms or high passes, often associated with sacred terrain, death, or supernatural guardianship. These figures are not understood as intrusions into the natural world but as manifestations of landscape power. See O. C. Handa, *Nanda Devi Raj Jat: Himalayan Pilgrimage* (New Delhi: Indus, 2004); William S. Sax, *Mountain Goddess: Gender and Politics in a Himalayan Pilgrimage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Toni Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain: Popular Pilgrimage and Visionary Landscape in Southeast Tibet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993). For regional folklore documenting spirit women and mountain presences in Himalayan oral traditions, see H. S. Saklani, *Folklore of Kumaon* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing, 1989), and K. C. Baral and G. B. Subba, *Himalayan Cultures and Traditions* (New Delhi: Adroit, 2005).

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Review

Suffering, Struggle and Soliloquy: A Postmodernist Reading of Krishna Baldev Vaid's *None Other*

Srijani Dutta ¹

¹ Independent Researcher and Writer, India



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Bhattacharya

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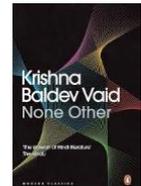
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Editor's Note:

Krishna Baldev Vaid's None Other occupies an unusual position in Indian literary fiction, being intensely interior, resistant to plot, and unrelenting in its meditation on meaninglessness. This essay situates the novella within a postmodernist framework, reading its fragmented soliloquy as a formal enactment of the existential crisis it describes.

Vaid, Krishna Baldev.
None Other.
Penguin Random, 1992
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Postmodernism, a socio-cultural-philosophical movement deals with the recurrence of parody, pastiche, metanarrative and instead of the grand narratives it celebrates "small"/metanarratives or voices. In this era, it is assumed that God is dead so does the reason, meaning, truth, law and order. In the fluid structure of existence, there occurs the blending of opposing ideas, contradictory thoughts resulting in an oxymoronic state. This era does not believe in the 'truth' causing the emergence and existence of falsehood.

Krishna Baldev Vaid's novella *None Other* (1992) depicts the meaninglessness of reality by focusing on the existential crisis of human life. The sole protagonist is a nameless entity who suffers from old age and disease and writes down his agony. The entire novella turns out to be his intense soliloquy on pain and meaninglessness. Here, the author projects his multiple selves, distorted thoughts that celebrate plurality. There is no proper characterization as well as plot construction. The world is

doomed and apocalyptic. He becomes a (post)modern man who reflects on the disorganised society. The tone of the book is philosophical and meditative that makes the novella a postmodernist utterance on human struggle. This text is a saga of a conflicted mind depicting his fragmented ideas and personality. The book reads like a meditative rhapsody on pain, struggle and suffering. Life is absurd and the constant search for purpose in this meaningless world is a daunting task. In the text, the protagonist attempts to look for meaning which he miserably fails to find and locate. His failure to discover a finite resolution or conclusion makes his life unbearable and stagnant. Like the tramps of Beckett, the protagonist encounters silence, pauses and maintains a non-verbally communication with himself. His aloneness in this world intensifies the miserable tragedy of existence. He pours out his heart; stares at his suffering in this cruel world with his subjective view and often romanticises the pain of his life. The name of the text is symbolic as it means nobody. It echoes the sentiments of Beckett's philosophy. Vaid through his character represents the nonsensical temperament of life and transforms the text into an absurdist literature. In this text, the readers can find the reference of other texts, intertextuality, metanarrative resulting in the culmination of unpredictable storytelling and open ended meaning. Therefore, the lack of any singular narrative or meaning of the deficiency of any solid plot construction makes this text postmodern in nature.

Vaid's *None Other* alludes to T. S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" (1922), "I am a doddering old fool, an outcast, an exile, a solitary-outwardly scarred and inwardly bruised; friendless- who has wasted the better part of his blasted life in this alien arctic wasteland..." (35). It is a metanarrative that echoes the themes of nothingness and existential crisis reflected in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1954). Soliloquy is a long speech where a character delivers the dialogues to himself/ herself without intending to involve others. It is different from internal monologue as the internal monologue can be 'heard' by the others. Apart from being the saga of an old man's suffering, pain, loneliness and memory, it becomes a melodious contemplation on nihilism and absurdity of human existence. The soliloquy of the old man finds a direct

resemblance with the utterances of the old man of Eliot's "Gerontion" (1920),

Here I am, an old man in a dry month,
Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.¹

Through the metaphorical title, the writer tries to depict how lonely human existence can be. The loneliness is so acute that the protagonist continues his interior monologue. He has no other to talk to. He is in deep sorrow and curses his existence. Throughout the novella, nothing interesting happens. No action happens except the psychological misfortune and emotional turmoil. There is no proper movement or physical action represented in the text. It is all about the passing thoughts of the protagonist. The sentences are long and reflecting the psychological wounds. This text here also echoes Eliot, due to the disillusionment and lack of spiritual faith of the protagonist:

I wouldn't have been able to continue to crumble and endure my death, in this monstrous house, in this alien wasteland. I am caressing my own back now. I shall feel embarrassed. I am beginning to be. There is no one to witness it. Except of course that devil. Who, for all I can see, is still around. Invisible or otherwise. But he doesn't count. Even so, the very thought of his presence is enough to extinguish me. In a split second. At least for a while. For nothing but nothing can extinguish me permanently. (107-08)

The writer has translated his own work from Hindi language bridging the gap between autobiography and biography. This novella appears to be a thorough record of spontaneous 'emotion recollected in tranquility' and beautifully turns out to be more than a raw informative diary. This book is a melancholic poetry. It appears to be a confessional art like the poems of Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath. Sometimes, he romanticises his alienation and pain. Sometimes, he takes an anti-romantic stand to outdo his excessive reflection and meditation on life. He looks at the process of living as a curse, a mistake that cannot be rectified. In

¹ Eliot, T. S. "Gerontion." Poetry Foundation, www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47254/gerontion. Accessed 24 Dec. 2024.

this text, he is the sole character as well as the protagonist whose soliloquy turns his expression into an organic whole. While Eliot discusses the post-world war society exposing the emotional, spiritual decay, Vaid's book somehow tries to indirectly capture his trauma of partition and its dislocation. His transplantation into the 'unknown' land or the 'other' side of border/India makes him feel strange, cursed and 'foreign.' His description of the old house somehow discloses his disregard and disgust for his current state/nation, "I feel as if I am already in a state where every moan is melodious. This feeling doesn't last long, but as long as it does I feel I have lost my body and boredom" (42). His entire residence is not a home anymore. It becomes a dry house, "My house looks like a bloated monster. About to die. Or perhaps about to be resurrected" (3). The stark contrast between resurrection and death reflects his conflicted mind and wretched condition. Along with his house, he is dying- "Alone and disgruntled. In this unlively alien town" (5). It also becomes the microcosm of the entire nation which is devoid of warm sense and sensibilities and goes through sufferings after partition. Throughout his book, he maintains his subjective gaze while oscillating between the waves of subjectivities and objectivities. His languages are fragmented and are written without proper punctuation making the thoughts incomprehensible.

Memory is the tool that he uses to record his feelings which is gloomy and dark. The constant duality of optimism and pessimism marks his novella. He has tried to recall his attachment with wife and children but doubts about their existence or non-existence. Sometimes, he nurtures the thoughts of suicide and sometimes he withdraws himself from it, "The essence of my angst. Someday, I mean certainly before the end, I will destroy all my books and notebooks. It will take some time...All consumed by the same bonfire! An attractive idea!" (28). He welcomes his conflicted ideas and at the same time, tries to discard them. He wants to be free from the pangs of suffering but finds no solution, "I want to break off all my limbs, one by one, and cast them away, one by one, as I soar" (124). His suffering sticks to him like a chronic malady whose medicine has not been invented till date,

I don't want to waste the rest of my life in moans. I want to breathe my last, not moaning or screaming, but laughing, absurdly, so that, if anyone should care to recall my last face after I'm gone, he should see a toothless old child, his eyes closed, his mouth open-emitting light. (34)

The child is the symbol of innocence whereas old age signifies experience and maturity. He wants to keep his 'youth' alive. He wants to die yet he wants to live. This antithetical thought distorts his peace and stability. His only companion is his notebooks where he pens down everything- "Writing should no longer be a temptation for me, but it is, perhaps because of the torment that it also is" (79). He says that he remembers everything and forgets nothing. The dilemma of everything and nothing makes him confused and bored. His notebooks turn out to be his diary like Anne Frank's kitty where she tries to mirror the trauma, memory and experiences of World War and holocaust. How far does one's own diary/recording act as an authenticate source of information? The writer Vaid writes the lyrical biography of the confined old man and his vulnerabilities by unconsciously making his novella stand on the division between fiction and reality. Is the writer showcasing his own wretched condition? Who is this old man? Is this the author himself? The old man's mind is impregnated with these questions and contradictions:

But I am recording all this here? For whom? I need to raise these questions every now and then. In order to be able to rake my memories. In order to be able to suppress them. Otherwise, I would be forever lost in the jungle of my past. (39)

These are the raw confession of the old man who dives into the narrative of stream of consciousness mode. He has no control over his thoughts. His confession comes out like an epiphany:

I am different from other alienated old people of my age; or at least I think I am; I want to suffer according to my own system...I am in my moan-room, on my knees, behind a closed window that opens on the

street, like a sinner about to pray. Underneath my knees are two cushions. In front of me is a low stool on which sits this notebook in which I am recording all this. (122)

The old man henceforth curses his old age and weakness by saying:

Unlike other old people, I have no phlegm in my system, so I can't just spit something out and feel a little relief...Most of my old friends have died; the rest must have been devoured by space and time. I like to think of them as depraved victims of malevolent cosmic forces. (29)

In addition to this, the readers can find the long silences, pauses as words fail to utter truth and meaning. Thus, his novella transforms itself to be a postmodern text. His existence metaphorically becomes an existence of an alienated postmodern man as there is no purpose, no meaning, no truth except suffering like Sisyphus. It may refer to his post-partition days where Godot never arrives. He utters, "For my real aim now is not to arrive anywhere, but to have a premonition of the process and futility of arriving, and of not arriving, anywhere. The freedom to end without illusions" (95). Godot happens to be the symbol of hope, youth, vitality and joy. Here, the novella is plagued with the malady of unforgettable trauma and memory of pain. The protagonist has no name as a name gives one an identity. His nameless condition depicts his shapeless identity. His pain is psychological as well as physical. He focuses on body, body parts and paints the picture of those diseased limbs. He compares himself with a "wounded crow" (71). His suffering makes him an ugly being, "Between my legs hangs my poor penis. By its balls, whenever my eyes meet its eyes, I stop writing and begin to feel sorry for its forlorn state" (103).

The title of the book is also symbolic as it represents no-one. It is the book about this particular old man and his expressionistic tales of miseries. Therefore, there is no one to share his struggle with- "There is none other! I remember the

tune. I've lost the rest of the words. I think I'll interrupt myself and hum this tune for the rest of the day. There is none other!" (27). The novella has no proper beginning, ending, plot development, and characterization. It is a pure song of boredom and resilience. Living seems to be a burden to him that cannot be erased. There is a sense of endurance in it, "I had to endure time. I mean I have to. Time is the only inescapable torment. This is a tattered truth. All truths are tattered. I can't fly beyond tattered truth on the wings of tattered truths. Perhaps this is my only pain" (218). He not only encounters with the suffering, he but also bears the pain of agony. The silences show his inability to frame his thoughts and find suitable words causing the collapse of verbal communication- "Silence is the only way out of this swamp." (70) The break and silence echo the empty silences of Harold Pinter. He is in constant dialogues with his multiple selves and there is an on-going battle with him (self). Therefore, the readers have to believe in his confessions positing themselves on the verge of doubt, uncertainty and counter-question. It erases his identity of man as a singular entity and transforms himself into a pastiche of different voices.

This is a poetic novella on noise and cacophony. The old man fails to make a symphony out of it. It can be argued that the old man is the surrogate voice of the author who meditates on postmodern existence. Therefore, it generates questions on the concept of authorship. It also raises question: Who are the readers? For whom, is he writing down his expressionistic emotions? The novella ends with an open conclusion leaving a space blank for the readers to interpret it in their own way- is it an autobiography of the author himself? Is it his confession on life and struggle? Is it his own soliloquy as he is alone on the present stage of his life, "As long as one is alive, one cannot rise above the basic animal needs- food, sex, pain and shelter; the extent and intensity of these needs can be reduced but never denied" (121). Nobody knows the answer including the old man, "I am a part of nothing. The nothing I see has no parts" (205). The book is open to the readers as the novella is inconclusive in its nature. It celebrates the plurality of the old man's voices which often clash with each other. For this reason, he becomes a

postmodern man and his novella becomes a postmodern soliloquy on the mandatory co-existence of life and death, consciousness and unconsciousness, peace and void, family and alienation, matter and mind, heaven and Hades, noise and music, darkness and light.

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www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47254/gerontion. Accessed 25 Feb. 2026.

Review

Nithin Sridhar's Chatuh Shloki Manusmrti: Tradition, Authority, and the Fourfold Framework

Amritanath Bhattacharya ¹



¹ Author, Director, Producer, Email: rik_amrit@yahoo.com, Mobile: +91 7003701370, Website: <https://rikamrit.com>

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Editor's Note:

This is an extremely well-informed critical review of the smṛti text subtly weaving in the conditions of readership and challenges of the same in the contemporary era. The review essay succinctly points out that the endeavour by Sridhar has been to initiate the interested readers into a careful reading of this śāstra text, abiding by the parameters necessary for doing so. The essay touches upon the recent controversy which embroiled Manusmṛti, sharply pointing out the efficacy of Sridhar's decision on the four verses containing the 'philosophical architecture' of the Manusmṛti in its embryonic form, and thus projecting a futuristic vision of a full scale bhāṣya of the text.

Sridhar, Nithin.

Chatuh Shloki Manusmṛti An English Commentary.
Vitasta, Ed I, 2025. ISBN 978-81-19670-91-8



After passing through the "Amrit Kaal" of independence, whether for economic or political reasons, Indian society now appears, from a worldly or empirical standpoint, to be deeply engaged in the search for "best practices." In intellectual discourse, this tendency is often described as an exploration of civilisational self-recovery. The aspiration to free ourselves from the influence of the colonial period in the sphere of knowledge is not without basis, for the history of learning in India is *anādi*, its origin untraceable and therefore not bounded by a determinate end. Such a tradition does not merely

belong to antiquity; it continually enables human intelligence to transcend the limits of time and place.

The book under present discussion, *Chatushloki Manusmriti* by Nithin Sridhar, represents one such exploration of civilisational recovery and of social “best practices,” and may be regarded as a commendable endeavour in that direction. The work presents the subject matter of the entire *Manusmriti* to new readers through an analysis of its first four verses and through a determination of the *anubandha chatushtaya*, the fourfold framework that defines the scope and purpose of a śāstric text. It may be inferred that one of its aims is to respond, at least in part, to the collective trauma associated with the *Manusmriti* in public memory, recalling, for instance, the public burning of the text in open streets. However, since every branch of Indian knowledge and its rightful domain is traditionally established through the framework of the *anubandha chatushtaya*, it would be appropriate to situate our discussion of this work within that very structure.

Not all forms of knowledge are meant for everyone. Although this statement may initially sound somewhat undemocratic, its essential emphasis lies on the cultivation of preparedness through disciplined engagement. The reason, once again, is the previously mentioned conditioning of space and time. Knowledge that is *pauruṣeya* is composed within a specific historical and cultural context. Therefore, only one who is properly qualified within that particular framework can truly grasp its inner purport. Does this then imply that a text composed two thousand years ago confers no right of access upon present readers? If such a question arises, the answer is simple: it does, and certainly so, but only upon the fulfilment of certain prior conditions.

Beyond reverence and curiosity, there remains another fundamental requirement in becoming an *adhikārī*, a qualified recipient. One must rise above certain deeply embedded internal conditionings and render oneself receptive. A striking example appears in the *Praśna*

Upaniṣad, where even accomplished seekers who had completed their Vedic studies were required to dwell for a full year in austerity and disciplined practice under the sage Pippalāda before their questions were answered. In the case of the *Manusmṛiti*, therefore, the primary qualification of the reader is familiarity with what may be termed a “muni consciousness,” and second, a disposition of *śraddhā* toward dharma. The term *śraddhā* should not be mistaken for mere respect; its Sanskrit sense is closer to an inward offering of the heart and intellect before the subject in question. Indeed, the dialectical traditions of Indian *āstika* thought teach us to transcend the limitations of space and time. Where liberation is the ultimate aim rather than examination or certification, such a mode of study may well appear alien to contemporary sensibilities. This possibility must be acknowledged at the outset.

Nithin is aware that the readers of his book are not already acquainted with this “muni consciousness.” Moreover, he consciously seeks to revive the discussion of the *Manusmṛiti* by moving against prevailing media narratives and reanimating the argument afresh. Among the components of the *anubandha chatuṣṭaya* is *prayojana*, the purpose. After reading the work, one gains the impression that this is indeed Nithin’s own purpose as an author. His intended readers, or *adhikārīs*, are not those who have studied the *śāstras* within a traditional *gurukula*, but rather millennials and members of Generation Z, and perhaps even the emerging Generation Alpha. Through awakening curiosity within them, he seeks to prepare them as potential recipients of the *Dharmaśāstra* tradition. In a broader sense, then, the receptors of this work consists of those who possess curiosity about Indian *śāstric* thought but lack access to traditional or institutional modes of study. For such readers, the fulfilment of curiosity regarding the *Dharmaśāstra* and entry into its intellectual domain may be regarded as their *prayojana*. If one were to question Nithin’s own qualification to compose such a work, one may turn to the confession he offers in the preface at the very beginning of the book.

“Before 2015, my engagement with Hindu textual tradition was limited to a few Vedantic texts and perhaps some secondary literature on miscellaneous aspects of Hindu dharma... It was in the aftermath of the Sabarimala temple entry issue in 2015–16... that I realised that the epistemological, ontological, ethical, theological, and teleological basis of much of Hindu beliefs and practices lie in the genre of texts called dharmasāstras, with smṛtis at the core of it... Since then... I have kept going back to the dharmasāstras to gain clarity and access to proper epistemic tools to understand the Hindu worldview and its practices.” (xxxi)

This admission is significant. It reveals that the author’s engagement with the *Manusmṛiti* does not emerge from inherited institutional authority, but from a sustained research-based encounter with questions concerning Hindu identity, socio-cultural practice, and normative thought. His *adhikāra*, therefore, is not grounded in the traditional *gurukula* mode but in intellectual inquiry prompted by contemporary socio-religious debates.

Further, in explaining his method, he clarifies:

“In this section, I have adopted the traditional technique of bhāṣyas or commentaries which involves a detailed word-by-word examination of each of the verses... This methodology ensures that the present work, though contemporary, is well anchored in the textual tradition and hence, must be seen as a contextualisation and contemporisation of the teachings of the long dharmasāstra tradition, rather than a new innovation.” (xxxiv)

This methodological self-positioning is important. By consciously employing the *bhāṣya* mode, he attempts to situate himself within the

śāstric hermeneutic lineage even while addressing a modern readership.

Having examined the *adhikārī*, the *prayojana*, and their mutual interrelationship, it is now reasonable to turn to the *viśaya*, the subject matter, and to analyse its relation to the remaining two faculties. However, before doing so, it is necessary to clarify the distinction between *pauruṣeya* and *apauruṣeya*, without which the categorisation of *śruti* and *smṛti* cannot be properly understood.

A śāstra is not studied in the same manner in which we ordinarily read a modern book. In contemporary or Western intellectual frameworks, a book is typically authored by a specific individual situated within a definite historical and geographical context, presenting a distinctive personal perspective on a particular subject. The structure of book–author–reader (and also publisher), does not adequately describe the mode of composition of Indian śāstric literature. A śāstra is not the product of an isolated individual; rather, it is the cumulative outcome of sustained reflection within a community dedicated to a particular branch of knowledge over generations. For this reason, specific authorial attribution is often absent. Even where compilation may have been undertaken by a particular person, authorship is frequently attributed not to an individual ego but to a lineage-consciousness.

The Purāṇic corpus provides a compelling illustration. Even in texts composed long after the historical Vyāsa, the name Vyāsadeva appears as author; yet this signifies less a biographical individual than what may be termed a Vyāsa-consciousness. In the foreword to the present volume, Bharat Gupta perceptively observes:

“Hence, whereas the *Nicomachean Ethics* is a personal vision of Aristotle on ethical issues, the *Manusmṛti* is the product of a school of scholars trained in preserving a tradition or sampradaya of ethics. Whereas Aristotle wished to be original and distinct from others in his

vision, the śāstrakāras of *Manusmṛti* only wished to further embellish a tradition. Whereas Aristotle was concerned with analysing, defining and prescribing eudaimonia or how to achieve uninterrupted happiness, the Indian codifiers were largely descriptive of how people had evolved patterns of ethical behaviour, and how these norms alter as time passes.” (xxviii)

If such a framework is to be sustained, preservation becomes central. Within the traditional transmission of knowledge, the aim has always been to minimise diminution. It is precisely in recognition of the inevitability of some degree of loss that the distinction between *śruti* and *smṛti* occupies a crucial place in the Indian knowledge tradition. In the case of *śruti*, the claim is that alteration is minimal, even that its content remains unchanged across millennia. No such claim is made in the case of *smṛti* (nor is that its purpose).

Knowledge here is not conceived merely as a mental faculty of an individual; rather, it is understood as participation in a higher consciousness transmitted into human awareness. This conception itself stands in contrast to modern individualism. The source from which supreme knowledge is said to descend into human cognition is referred to, within the *smṛti* framework, as Brahmā. That which is attributed directly to Brahmā is *śruti*, where diminution is regarded as minimal; hence it is received as *āptavākya* and accepted as *śabda pramāṇa*. In the case of *smṛti*, however, knowledge does not descend directly but is received through lineage and transmission. The present author draws upon what may be described as a reservoir of collective memory; therefore, the text belongs to the category of *smṛti*.

In many verses of the *Manusamhitā*, Manu does not present Brahmā’s words verbatim but offers interpretative exposition before the assembled sages. Manu, understood as embodying a realised human consciousness, instructs the sages who approach him seeking guidance in dharma. Although such instruction may be regarded as

āptopadeśa, it reaches us through historical transmission and is therefore not available in an unmediated form. Further, while grounded in the Veda, *smṛti* is not beyond the conditions of space and time. For this reason, it does not function as *śabda pramāṇa* in the same sense as *śruti*.

Within this dialogical setting, the sages approach Manu to inquire into the nature of dharma appropriate to the four varṇas, not religion in the modern sense, but context-sensitive normative order. The responses unfold across the twelve chapters of the *Manusamhitā*. Yet the essence of this teaching is encapsulated in the first four verses of the opening chapter, within which the *anubandha chatuṣṭaya* lies embedded. Nithin's work undertakes a detailed analysis of these four verses and, through them, presents the entire thematic architecture of the *Manusamhitā*.

The structure of the book itself reflects this intention. As the author explains:

“This book is divided into two sections followed by appendices. The first section is the ‘Introduction’ which contains three chapters namely, ‘Origination, transmission, and authorship of Manusmṛti: Is the text a patchwork or a careful construction?’, ‘Place and function of smṛtis and dharmasāstra in Hindu worldview’ and ‘Decoding Manusmṛti: Some pointers to make sense of dharmasāstra texts.’ ... The second section is a commentary on the first four verses of Manusmṛti that deal with *anubandha catuṣṭayam* ... In this section, I have adopted the traditional technique of *bhāṣyas* ... This methodology ensures that the present work though contemporary, is well anchored in the textual tradition and hence, must be seen as a contextualisation and contemporisation of the teachings of the long dharmasāstra tradition, rather than a new innovation.”
(xxxiii)

Three appendices supplement the main text, addressing the conception of varṇa, critical engagement with revisionist interpretations, and including a *stuti* dedicated to Svāyambhuva Manu along with translation.

The decision to focus on only four verses is not arbitrary. The author situates his work within an established textual convention of writing concentrated studies on foundational opening sections, such as the *Brahmasūtra-Catuḥsūtrī* or the *Catuḥślokī Bhāgavatam*, where a small number of verses are treated as containing the essence of an entire corpus. *Chatuh Shloki Manusmṛti*, accordingly, presents itself as a continuation of that hermeneutic tradition.

The smṛti texts are fundamentally prescriptive teachings. Precisely because they are teachings, they are better approached through the triadic structure of upadeśa, upadeṣṭā and upadeśya, that is, instruction, instructor, and the one instructed, rather than primarily through the epistemological schema of pramāṇa, prameya and pramā. Nithin seeks to interpret the dharmasāstras as śabda pramāṇa, and he provides substantial reasoning in support of this position. Yet in doing so, he renders śabda into the English word "word," a translation that risks narrowing the semantic and epistemic range of the original Sanskrit term. A similar compression is visible in the very verses with which Sridhar opens his preface, the ninth and tenth verses of the second chapter, which he translates as: "in all matters, these two do not deserve to be criticised, as it is out of these that dharma shone forth." The expression in question, amīmāṃsye, carries a meaning that far exceeds this rendering. Rooted in the term mīmāṃsā, which in the Indian philosophical tradition denotes systematic inquiry, interpretive investigation, and epistemic authority, amīmāṃsya does not merely mean that these texts should be spared criticism. It implies that they stand beyond the very mode of rational interrogation that mīmāṃsā represents, that they carry a self-validating, trans-rational authority. This is a theologically and epistemologically significant claim, and its

flattening into "do not deserve to be criticised" drains the passage of its intended doctrinal force. Since these are the verses Sridhar himself places at the threshold of the work, the translation difficulty is not peripheral; the reader encounters it at the very moment of entering the book. It may be more appropriate to consider the dharmaśāstras not strictly as śabda pramāṇa, but as śāstra pramāṇa, authoritative within a normative and pedagogical tradition rather than as an independent means of valid cognition in the same sense as śruti.

Chatuh Shloki Manusmṛti is a work that succeeds on several counts. The decision to concentrate on only four verses, reading them as containing the entire philosophical architecture of the Manusamhitā in seed form, is not merely a rhetorical convenience but a genuine hermeneutic claim grounded in an established textual convention. It is a disciplined and pedagogically sound choice, and it gives the book a formal coherence that distinguishes it from more polemical engagements with the same text. The three introductory chapters, particularly the one offering practical guidance on how to read a dharmaśāstra, do real preparatory work for a reader who has never encountered this tradition. And by demonstrating that the Manusmṛiti possesses a carefully constructed internal framework, Sridhar makes it considerably harder to dismiss the text as a loose collection of social prescriptions, which is perhaps his most important contribution to the current public conversation around it.

The present volume may be seen as preparatory in nature. By adopting the *bhāṣya* method in analysing the first four verses, he signals a larger aspiration: to compose a full-scale commentary on the *Manusamhitā* in the near future. In that sense, this work not only reopens discussion on dharmaśāstra within contemporary Indian society but also lays the foundation for a more sustained and comprehensive engagement with the text.

Works Cited

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