

ANALYTICAL DISCUSSION OF RASA THEORY IN INDIAN PAINTING

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Abstract

The theory of rasa, originally developed in the context of Indian performance arts such as drama and dance, has been applied to Indian painting with intriguing results. Analyzing the theory of rasa in Indian painting involves examining how visual art can evoke and communicate the same range of emotional experiences described by the rasas in classical Indian aesthetics. Rasa is an essence of every work of art like dance, music and Literature that can only be suggested and not articulated. It is a type of thoughtful abstraction in which the world of physical forms is permeated by the interiority of the human feelings. However the word may seem magical at first but it is, not so in actual because to experience rasa one does not need any magical spell but has to be sensitive enough to connect with the emotions of the work. It is the concept of emotions, connections and feelings. This research paper aims to explore the meaning, history and scope of rasa theory in present scenario.

Keywords:

human feelings , history, Aesthetic emotion ,rasa , Analyzing , emotional experiences , Indian Painting

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Introduction

The concept of rasa is fundamental to many forms of Indian art, and can be found in dance and performance, music, musical theatre, literature as well as cinema. The Rasas were first described by Bharata Muni, an ancient Indian musicologist and theatrologist, in the *Nâmya Ūâstra* (Sanskrit: , *Nâmyaûâstra*), a Sanskrit Hindu text on dramatic theory and the performing arts, written between 200 BCE and 200 CE. According to this text, there are 8 original rasas, each of which has an associated deity and a specific colour. Later authors have added a 9th rasa, plus some additional rasas.

It consists of 36 Chapters that comprises 6000 shlokas. The 6th chapter of *Natyashastra* deals with 'Rasa' whereas the 7th chapter is about 'Bhavas'. The text continues to evolve in the modern day in form of multiple manuscripts, each with a different chapter title and content. However, the most thorough exposition of Rasa Theory in drama, music and dance is found in the works of Abhinavagupta. To amuse the audience is the desired effect of performing arts according to the Rasa Theory. However, its primary purpose should be to transport the audience into a different, parallel reality of happiness where they can experience the core of their own mind and think about mystical and ethical issues.

Rasa Categories in Painting

Indian paintings often strive to evoke one or more of the eight (or nine) primary rasas. Here's a closer look at how each rasa can manifest in visual art:

1. *Shringara* (Love/Beauty): Paintings depicting romantic or devotional themes, such as Radha and Krishna, use graceful poses, tender expressions, and harmonious color schemes to evoke love and beauty. The intricate details and elegant compositions contribute to creating a sense of romantic allure and aesthetic pleasure.

2. *Hasya* (Humor): Humor in paintings can be expressed through playful depictions or caricatures. The portrayal of humorous situations or expressions, often with exaggerated features or whimsical scenes, engages viewers with light-heartedness and joy.

3. *Raudra* (Anger): The depiction of wrath or conflict might include dynamic compositions, intense colors like reds and blacks, and fierce expressions. Such paintings convey the power and intensity of anger, drawing viewers into the dramatic emotional experience.

4. *Veera* (Heroism): Heroic themes are often represented through grand, dynamic compositions, with figures depicted in strong, assertive poses. The use of bold colors and dramatic contrasts enhances the sense of valor and courage.

5. Karuna (Compassion/Sorrow): Paintings reflecting sorrow or compassion often use subdued colors and poignant imagery. Scenes of suffering or devotion evoke empathy and a deep emotional response from the viewer.

6. Bhayanaka (Fear): Fear can be depicted through unsettling imagery, dark palettes, and tense compositions. Such paintings might include elements of horror or anxiety to evoke a sense of dread or apprehension.

7. Bhibhatsa (Disgust): This rasa is less commonly depicted but can be found in works illustrating unpleasant or grotesque subjects. The use of disturbing imagery and uncomfortable themes serves to provoke a visceral reaction of disgust.

8. Adbhuta (Wonder/Amazement): Paintings that evoke wonder might include fantastical elements, intricate details, and scenes of the supernatural. The aim is to awe the viewer with the extraordinary or the sublime.

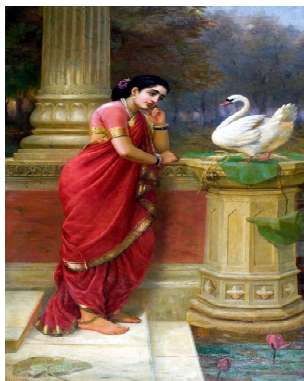
9. Shanta (Peace): Often depicted through serene landscapes, meditative figures, and calm compositions, this rasa conveys tranquility and inner peace, aiming to soothe and calm the viewer.

Several artists, both historical and contemporary, have drawn on the principles of Rasa theory in their work. Here are a few notable examples:

1. Raja Ravi Varma (1848–1906)

Context: Raja Ravi Varma is one of the most renowned Indian painters who extensively used the concept of rasa in his works.

Application of Rasa: His paintings often depict themes from Hindu mythology and epics. For example, in his portrayal of the “Shakuntala” and “Nala-Damayanti” stories, he evokes the rasa of Shringara (love and beauty) through detailed and romantic imagery. His skillful use of color and composition enhances the emotional depth of these scenes.



Nala -Damayanti by Raja Ravi Varma

2. Nandalal Bose (1882–1966)

Context: A prominent figure in the Indian modernist movement, Nandalal Bose was known for integrating traditional Indian themes with modern techniques.

Application of Rasa: Bose’s works often reflect a deep engagement with Indian mythological and folk themes, conveying a range of rasas. His illustrations of the Ramayana and Mahabharata display a rich emotional palette, including Adbhuta (wonder) and Karuna (compassion), through innovative use of line and form.



Mahabharata through paintings by Nandalal Bose

3. Jamini Roy (1887–1972)

Context: Jamini Roy was known for his unique style that combined folk art traditions with modernist approaches.

Application of Rasa: Roy’s paintings, such as those depicting scenes from rural Bengal and traditional myths, often evoke a sense of Karuna (compassion) and Shringara (beauty). His use of vibrant colors and simplified forms creates a distinct emotional resonance that connects with viewers on an intimate level.



Art Focus – Journey to the Roots –Jamini Roy 1887-1972

4. M.F. Husain (1915–2011)

Context: M.F. Husain was a prominent contemporary Indian artist whose work was influenced by a range of traditional and modernist ideas.

Application of Rasa: Husain's paintings, which frequently engage with themes of Indian mythology, often convey various rasas, including Raudra (anger) and Adbhuta (wonder). His dynamic compositions and bold use of color and form create a visceral emotional impact.

5. K. Laxma Goud (b. 1944)

Context: A contemporary artist from Telangana, K. Laxma Goud is known for his prints, drawings, and paintings that blend traditional and modern elements.

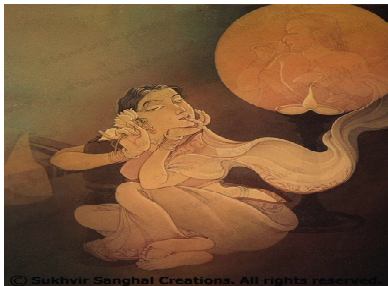
Application of Rasa: His works often explore themes of rural life and traditional stories, conveying rasas like Karuna (compassion) and Shringara (beauty). The emotional depth in his depictions of everyday life and mythological figures reflects a nuanced understanding of rasa.



6. Bhupen Khakhar (1934–2003)

Context: Khakhar was a significant figure in contemporary Indian art, known for his distinctive narrative style and incorporation of everyday themes.

Application of Rasa: His paintings often explore themes of personal and social identity, evoking rasas like Hasya (humor) and Karuna (compassion). His use of vibrant colors and poignant, sometimes ironic, subject matter invites viewers to engage deeply with the emotional content.



Prof. Sukhvir Sangal Indianized the Chinese and Japanese wash Technique of painting on the basis of Indian Rasa theory. For the first time he expressed the nine rasas through symbolic colour.

Cultural and Historical Context -The portrayal of rasas in Indian painting is deeply influenced by cultural and historical contexts. For example, Mughal paintings often focus on themes of courtly life and romance, while Rajput paintings might emphasize heroic or devotional themes. Understanding the cultural backdrop helps in appreciating how rasas are represented and perceived.

Scope of Rasa Theory in Indian painting

The Rasa Theory in Indian Aesthetics has a profound and enduring impact on a number of disciplines including Literature, performing arts, and cultural studies. The following aspects highlight the scope and influence of the Rasa Theory:

1. **Emotional Experience:** Rasa theory helps to explore and comprehend the emotional experiences elicited by artistic expressions. It identifies a range of emotions, known as rasas, including love (sringara), humor (hasya), compassion (karuna), anger (raudra), heroism (vir), fear (bhayanaka), disgust (bibhatsa), and wonder (adbhuta).

2. **Artistic Creation:** Rasa theory provides guidelines for creators to evoke specific emotions in their audience through their work. Artists use various techniques such as language, rhythm, melody, gesture, and form to convey these emotions effectively.

3. **Audience Response:** The theory emphasizes the role of the audience in the artistic experience. It suggests that the audience participates actively in the creation of rasa by empathizing with the characters or situations portrayed in the artwork.

4. **Philosophical Underpinnings:** Rasa theory is deeply rooted in Indian philosophical traditions, particularly in the concept of aesthetic enjoyment (rasavada) and the idea of transcending the mundane through artistic experience.

Conclusion

Rasa theory in Indian painting is a sophisticated framework for understanding the emotional and aesthetic impact of art. By analyzing how different rasas are depicted through color, composition, and symbolism, one gains insight into the artist's intent and the viewer's experience. This theory not only enriches the appreciation of Indian art but also highlights the deep interplay between emotion, aesthetics, and cultural expression. The scope of Rasa theory in Indian painting encompasses a rich array of emotional, technical, and cultural dimensions. It influences how art is created,

experienced, and interpreted, providing a profound understanding of the emotional impact of visual art. Whether in traditional contexts or contemporary adaptations, Rasa theory remains a vital aspect of appreciating and analyzing Indian painting.

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