



Learning through genesis and development of Rasas (emotional flavors)

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Abstract

The codified value of cultural development dwells upon the essence of historical evidences. The science of drama and aesthetic viability of expressions propounded in historic texts lays a foundation to the process of learning and formation of cultural identities. Cultural existence has quite often come across the idea behind an art work and the term, 'Expression'. In this Research paper I attempt to explore the role of term, 'expression' at gross and subtle levels of communication and human interactions. In the present context of study, how is expression related to universal concept of visualizing aesthetics? My endeavor is to dwell in the subject-matter, as to how human evolution rests upon the idea of 'aesthetically valid artistic expressions'? And the way visual aesthetics in terms of expression plays a matured and significant role in the evolution of mankind.

Key words: Expression, aesthetics, composition, rasas (emotional flavors).

Introduction

The process of learning is an ongoing process in the evolution of mankind. We can refer to the literary works attributed by Aryans who wrote 'Vedic texts,' (hymns in praise of nature and deities like fertility gods and many more). This unique literature which is referred even today is as old as 300B.C, as mentioned by historians¹. Imaginative and meticulous in their relevance they are considered to be ritualistic source of reflection to mankind by propounding human conduct and the purpose of his conduct. These texts hold religious value and are considered to be highly motivating for their property and essence of being universal.

However, five senses are often connoted as evident mediums to acquire information, conceive and breed knowledge. In this respect visual and performing arts have been evidently used mediums of expressions. Expression has been an integral feature in the process of evolution which happens at micro to macroscopic levels of human interaction². With reference to Sanskrit text Natya Shastra, where Natya means 'drama', and Shastra means 'science of', is attributed to Bharata Muni. The rasa method of performance is one of the fundamental features that differentiate Indian way of performing art, different from rest of the world. While drama is believed to be the fifth Veda, and performance of abhinaya is considered as an auspicious way of offering prayer to gods. In the rasa method, empathetic emotions are conveyed by performer, which are felt by the viewer/audience.

The Natya Shastra identifies eight rasas with eight corresponding bhavas/mood: i. Sringar rasa- love, attractiveness. ii. Hasya rasa- laughter, comedy. iii. Raudra-fury. iv. Karuna-compassion. v. Vibhastam-aversion. vi.

Bhayanakam- horror,terror. vii. Viram-heroic mood. viii. Adbhudam- wonder, amazement.

Majorly hasya rasa arises out of sringar rasa and karuna rasa arises out of anger. Horror arises out of aversion and viram rasa leads to adbhudam rasa. However Abhinavgupta (9th-10th centuries) philosopher and aesthetician suggested a 9th rasa which was termed as: i. Shantam- peace or tranquility.

While the Sanskrit term, Abhinaya refers to 'performance', the actual accomplishment of aesthetics of a performance is established between the spectator and the performer, when the audience is been able to relate with a particular bhava, leading to an appropriate emotional response (Rasa). It incorporates everything that an actor may use on stage for effective communication through exact portrayal of emotions, including gestures, body language, speech, costume, make-up, props.

Sanskrit drama is codified and conventional. The Sanskrit theatre began after the development of Greek and Roman theatres in around 2century B.C.E³. The iconography of the costumes and make-up convey meaning to the initiated spectators. Moreover the movements and gestures of the actors which he uses to convey meaningful thoughts are many a time natural and spontaneous gestural codes even though they have been predefined and codified. The scores of codified movements and gestures that Indian classical dancers use can be traced in historic sites as are depicted in temple carvings and paintings of Khajrao and Ajanta, Alora. Expression is an offshoot of Bhavas/feelings. These expressions oscillates between the feelings of 'Tragedy' and 'Catharsis' as stated by Aristotle, that learning happens and innovation occurs.

While Catharsis means act of cleansing or purification, we often get across the term “emotional cleansing” as a phenomenon as (an intended) part of the audience’s experience. It suggests an extreme change in emotion, occurring as the result of experiencing strong feelings such as sorrow, fear, pity, or even laughter. It has been described as ‘purification’ or a ‘purging’ process of emotions. In his works Aristotle had used the term catharsis usually referring to the evacuation of the menstrual fluid⁴. As an example, it would be fair to quote that Ashoka the great emperor professed Buddhism only after being in a state of self realization when his expression of devotion towards mankind aroused through tragedy and then catharsis. The tragedies often were aimed to achieve an insight by learning something from the events of the performances that the audience witnessed through the emotional responsive feelings portrayed on stage. Hence the plays are designed in such a way so as to meet and create the desired Psychological States through performance in order to achieve rasa so that the core sentiments and values are felt by the spectator. I attempt to state that we seek to learn through expression and we express what we learn. And as bhavas are felt which comes out of an act, or which leads to an act, produces a particular flavor or rasa. Here, value of tragedy and catharsis (in context to generating awareness and consciousness) as termed in western grammar of dramatic arts holds value equal, significant and dominant even in the rasa theory. Creation of knowledge and sharing of learning happens with various perspectives of audiences which is seeing and receiving the act in dramatic presentation. The oscillation from tragedy to catharsis can be observed in each cycle of an idea which a man lives during which he observes various bhavas or moods.

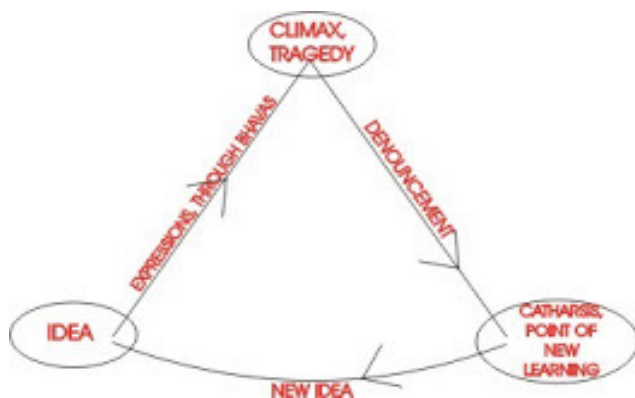


Figure-1
 Ideation Cycle

However purging into any particular bhava has its point of climax where he meets tragedy. This is further followed by denouncement which leads to resolution, wherein he reaches state of catharsis. This point of resolution of fulfillment/self actualization is a form of learning. This learning produces a new thought/idea born out of the viewer’s past experiences and the cycle of learning and evolution continues. It is here that sattvika abhinaya as mentioned in Natya Shastra finds its practical

application in abhinaya performed by the actor thereby bringing out the satvik/pure elements in the psychological ability of the actor by identifying with the character and his emotions. Thus, “Sattva is originating in mind. It is caused by the concentrated mind. The Sattva is accomplished by concentration of the mind. Its nature cannot be mimicked by an absent-minded man.” The vibhava is a cause which leads to perception. It is a cause of a gesture, word or facial expression. It is this vibhava which affects the character and feels sorrow, terror, anger. The better the actor’s sattva, the more real, and convincing shall be his anubhavas. It is thus very important that the anubhava must be properly executed which shall cause the audience to feel a specific rasa corresponding to the bhava. However, past experiences leads to various states of mind or feelings such as love, hatred, shyok, envy etc. this leads to formation of faith or belief in a particular idea which are subsequently the perceptions of human being from past experiences or anubhavas.

VIBHAVA---causes--->BHAVA---causes--->ANUBHAVA--->RASA

The factors affecting the origination of bhavas could be present in the environment which surrounds us. Rasas hence is used to establish a particular objective of an art work which is used to create an impact upon the audience. This impact is the artist’s core sentiment in the form of theme or message. Taste of art as per rasa theory is the flavor or essential property which is derived out of expression and contemplation by the spectator of that art work. This quality or flavor produced is applied to a wide range of creative expression and experiences and are never just the thoughts of the artist or the observer alone. Performing arts which majorly includes theatre, dance, music, opera, dealt majorly with acting and presenting various ideas/thoughts in the form of stories in front of an audience using combinations of dance, drama, speech, gesture, music. Indian folk theatre and dramatics which mainly are said to be originated in the Vedic times included performances based on ritualistic celebrations and depiction of events from daily lives. Example, The great epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata which were of great sources of inspiration for Bhasa (2nd century play writer) for producing works like Madhyama vyayoga (The middle one; based on Mahabharata)⁵.

The role of ‘Expression’ in Visual Aesthetics

The development of an idea is rooted upon the practice of art. In order to impregnate and derive visual aesthetics in an artist’s compositions 3 P’s to define value of art may be considered. These 3P’s are under mentioned- Principle, Practice / perseverance, Patience.

Reality is conceptualized by human expertise that tends to interact at a subtle level with the elements (tatvas) in his environment ranging from microscopic to macroscopic levels of visualization. However, the evaluation of an idea through

dreams empowers the vision to be created by opening up the foresight of conscious with subconscious states of mind. The enriching power to dream allows the dreamer to reflect physical as well as metaphysical realities that makes the concept a universally accepted truth. A truth is purest form of an existing idea. Beauty of unspoken truths subtly or/ and grossly bespeaks of nature which holds element of commonality observed in all beings in nature. Hence it would be correct to state that a true art-work could be characterized by the aptitude and value of artist's composition to befit and entirely dissolve into the whirlpool of nature's elementary instincts. An intuition, which could be defined in the sense to acquire expertise to dream, imagine, visualize, conceptualize and apprehend the idea, marked on the line of scientific equations of nature to chase truth through science and art of natural phenomena. Hence, it is more than a random guess. The juxtaposition of art and artistic endeavor erupt a realization to expression leading to artistic compositions/creativity. Each drop of creative attempts keeps on flowing in the oceanic sized canvas of nature. Man attempts to achieve his perfect self in pursuits of happiness. He aims to attain excellence by streamlining his undaunted energies into potential forms and ideas to give them a strong structure through a panoramic base of expression. He dwells to explain those ideas derived out of his unexplored wealth of energy into an argumentative way of life to attain his aim. Thereby, he creates a whirlpool/synergy of 'though-action' process, while living, leading into an unending process of 'conceiving and breeding desires'.

It wouldn't be unjustified to quote examples from pre-historic to ancient, medieval or modern times that man expressed himself with whatever convenient medium he was environmentally bestowed with. The 8th century B.C Petroglyphs found in Hanu village of western Ladakh, (India) define the magnificently used medium of expression by man.



Figure-2
Petroglyphs of Western Ladakh

The art of expression bespeak of the geographical inference of the region on human psyche, while a 21st century Indian woman's costume depicts traces of British culture which survived in India for over 300 years and eventually became a salient but predominant part of Indian psyche. In media too, the historic traces of animation was found in the caves Burzahom of Kashmir, India. However, the important thing to observe is the natural flair in human 'thought-action' process, driven by the element of desire in him could be described by 3 E's governing the 'thought-action' process. The 3 E's are- Explore, Experiment, and Expound. Explore the conveniently available medium to experiment and obtain derivations which put his thought into well defined structure of actions. These actions however are aimed to give results near perfection by making it aesthetically sound and hold values of universality. A thought might be termed as par excellence and aesthetically sound or beautiful, when it is commonly accepted by all and is aligned well with universal nature. In the process of experimentation with his desires and objectives, man tends to simultaneously respond to his emotions. He dwells to expound his imagination, thereby brewing his subconscious innovative sights, which derive him to 'art and culture of expression'. The significance of expression in an artist's endeavor attempts to meet virtual as well as realistic goals of mankind. A man, whatsoever medium of expression he adopts, his intentions are laterally virtual centric and/ or realistic in approach. In virtual centric goals, he seeks to experience the beauty of pleasure and satisfaction he attains while expressing himself, he is driven into the commercial value/ results of art. In either way, he clearly intends to become 'larger than life' in an attempt to accomplish or gain perfection. The insignia of captivating visual vibrations depicted in the photographic / painting compositions in still imagery lends a vivid and unique blend of natural beauty and artistic emotional values. There have been some photographers who lay stress on the medium which is no way less significant than the expressions of his composition. The artist strives to attain a universal balance in nature. Discovering the sixth sense of attaining enlightenment is his medium of expression- the camera.

In the uniquely blended hues, and pulsating composition depicting 'larger than life' concepts, where an artist chooses to unfold basic 5 elements of nature resonating life and ultimate truth/expression. Truth which is unparallel, and abstract in its own identity! Expression, Medium and Composition.

Often one gets hooked up to the ideas captivated and expressed by an artist. However, intentional or subjected to trial- or-error method of reproducing thoughts in an art work he often strives to achieve to hit the chord of love; worth sustaining. He tends to generate a medium to outlet those thoughts. Leonardo da Vinci, a man of unquenchable curiosity, who acquired much disserved popularity for the famous masterpiece, Monalisa (1503-1505/1507) whose facial expression has been frequently described as 'enigmatic', and a design for the flying machine (c.1488), much before an aircraft actually existed.



Figure-3
Painting Monalisa

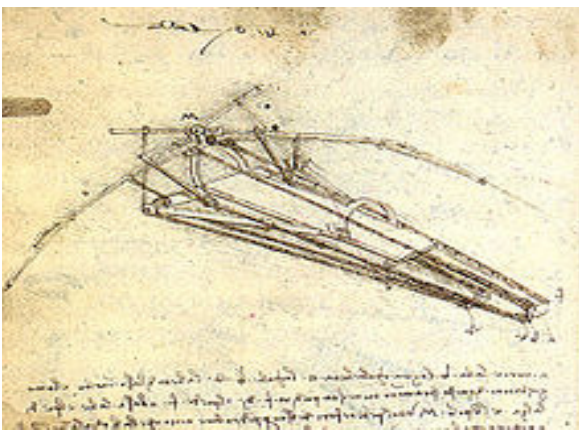


Figure-4
The Flying Machine

The peculiarity in painting, 'Monalisa', the perfect divine like smile attracted critiques attention from around the globe and is considered as an inspiration for artists even in the 21st century. His expression could be said to have merged almost perfectly with the cultural aesthetics of art. He exactly figured out how his medium to expression and his thoughts could have been used to spill moments of magical visual effects on canvas. Artists of such caliber probably had the ability to capture the difference between macro and micro movements of nature and life. Visualizing and synthesizing image to a level of abstract. The significance of expression is as important in its existence as is the medium of expression. The experiment with 'medium' and

'expression' spins the wheel of life and gives it a momentum. Therefore nature allows conceiving, breeding and producing incomprehensible, vast yet unique creativity in the pursuit to happiness, progress and thereby, the evolution of mankind. Expressions of thoughts have been an innate human activity ever since pre-history, and as such, it has been a facilitator in the process of evolution of civilizations. The understanding of our history is necessary for the guidance of our future.

Conclusion

Here, we may sum up the cause-effect relationship and the benefits of using performing arts like theatre to experience Rasas through emotional factors for better and effective learning purposes: i. While theatre promotes knowledge of historical and cultural contents of arts, it helps to express ideas and innovative thoughts that people generally find difficult to express through usage of a particular language or words. For example: silent films of Charlie Chaplin like 'The great dictator' in 1940. ii. Helps in creating mass awareness, and is majorly used as an effective tool for mass Communication. iii. Further dramatic arts also help in improving interpersonal skills, which incorporates interacting with subordinates, interpreting concept and technique to them etc. and intrapersonal skills, wherein the artist has to understand and feel the emotions and characterization, visualize a particular scene to be able to convey the essence of it to the audience. However, in order to experience the essence of rasas which arise out of human emotions form the basis of evolution of mankind, and for better learning purposes, performing arts is indeed an effective tool.

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