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Application of Rasas in Indian Classical Dance

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Abstract

Sensory communication as an outcome of performing arts has been described in Sanskrit aesthetics two millenia ago as rasa. The rasas are emotional and mental states that art can induce. A fully developed work of art should dynamically incorporate all nine of them (collectively known as the navarasa). The rasa theory was originally developed by Bharata Muni in Natya Shastra, and later elaborated by Abhinavagupta in Abhinavabharati. This thesis aims to offer an insight into the aspects of Sanskrit aesthetics which prescribe the application of rasas in Indian classical dance. The main research question seeks to explore what is the function of rasas in natya (trinity of dance, theatre and literature), with a specific focus on Bharatanatyam. The sub-questions investigate what is each rasa, how different rasas are applied in a performance according to the Natya Shastra, what is the essence of the concept of rasa itself, and finally, what is the contemporary use of rasas, and how does it differ from the ancient theory. The formal constituents of rasas (bhava) are described along with the acting technique (abhinaya). The methodology is based on an ethnographic approach; each chapter combines theoretical inquiry with analyses of the research materials collected during fieldwork in India. Three case study performances are analyzed: *Mira* by Mrinalini Sarabhai, *Sampradayam* by Mallika Sarabhai, and *LDR* by Revanta Sarabhai.

Introduction

Sensory communication as an outcome of, or object produced by, performing arts has been helpfully described by Sanskrit aesthetics two thousand years ago as *rasa*. In short, the rasas are emotional and mental states that art can induce, also called sentiments. A fully developed work of art should dynamically incorporate all nine of them – as described in *Natya Shastra* by Bharata Muni:

Sringara – erotic sentiment

Hasya – comic sentiment

Raudra – furious sentiment

Karunya – pathetic sentiment

Vira – heroic sentiment

Adbhutam – marvellous sentiment

Bibhatsa – odious sentiment

Bhayanaka – terrible sentiment

Santam – tranquillity, or peaceful sentiment

This thesis aims to offer an insight into the aspects of Sanskrit aesthetics which prescribe the application of rasas in Indian classical dance. A more thorough comprehension of this concept has a profound relevance not only in enriching the understanding of Indian classical dance in performance studies, but also provides useful tools for *western* aesthetics. This is especially valid within the focus of contemporary dance, given the important role Indian classical dance played in shaping early American modern dance, as seen in the work of Ruth St. Denis described below. Investigating how the ancient performing tradition is applied on stage in contemporary Indian classical dance has a high potential value in the wider academic debate on aesthetics, and in setting up the field for future discourse within the reception of historical dance tradition in contemporary dance theory.

The main research question seeks to explore what is the function of rasas in Indian classical dance. The sub-questions will investigate what is each rasa, how different rasas are applied in a performance according to the *Natya Shastra*, what is the essence of the concept of rasa itself, and finally, what is the contemporary use of rasas, and how does it differ from the ancient theory. Each chapter of the thesis will combine theoretical inquiry with analyses of the research materials collected during fieldwork in India. The methodology is based on an ethnographic approach, as described below. This Introduction will further address the relevance of the subject and its

motivation. The research methodology and literary framework will be presented next, followed by an outline of the chapters.

The relevance of Sanskrit aesthetic concepts and Indian classical dance to contemporary dance and theatre studies in European academia lies in the fact that Indian classical dance had a profound effect on shaping the beginnings of American modern dance, by rooting the form more in the ground, in contrast to the lightness of ballet. Priya Srinivasan, an associate adjunct professor in the Department of Dance at University of California Riverside, describes in *Sweating Saris* (2012) that Ruth St. Denis, considered the mother of contemporary dance, went on to establish her career as a soloist and choreographer after being influenced by Nachawali dancers from North India who came to perform on Coney Island in 1904. Her acclaimed performance of *Radha*, which centred on the main avatar of *the* Goddess in Hinduism, featured St. Denis with several Indian dancers in what we would call today a fusion between ballet and Indian classical dance (Srinivasan 23). This research does not aim to produce a comprehensive review of historical changes in contemporary dance, but encompasses Indian aesthetics – which constitute one of many influences – in an attempt to bring more understanding about the nature of dance. If in studying Dutch and European contemporary dance we take seriously the influences from America to Russia, from classical ballet to early modern dance, then the exclusion of Indian classical dance, its traditional aesthetic theory and contemporary interpretations, would be a great loss to the awareness of choreographers and scholars alike.

To be concise, I shall bypass lengthy descriptions of previous literature and would like to use this space instead to discuss two important works on rasas, which are central to this thesis: *Natya Shastra* and *Comparative Aesthetics*.

Natya Shastra (natya in Sanskrit is the name for the trinity of dance, music and theatre; shastra means rules or the science of) is an ancient Indian treatise on the aesthetics of performing arts which defines the rasa theory and the art of creating a performance in precise detail. Due to its broad scope it is considered the foundation text of Indian fine arts. The scripture, or its compilation, has been attributed to the sage Bharata Muni and is difficult to date. It is thought to be a surviving part of a now-lost Sanskrit Veda (one of the books of knowledge that form the oldest layer of Sanskrit literature). Different sources provide different estimations but Kapila Vatsyayan, a leading scholar of classical Indian arts, maintains in her seminal work *Bharata: The Natyasastra* (1996) that the texts comprising the *Natya Shastra* were written between 1 BCE and 3 CE (Vatsyayan 6). Bharata originally described eight primary rasas. Since the addition of the Santam rasa by the

philosopher and aesthetician Abhinavagupta in the tenth century, the concept is known as *navarasa* (the nine rasas).

The *Natya Shastra* has been translated into English in full for the first time in 1950 by Manomohan Ghosh. I will use a 2010 edition titled *Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharatamuni*, which will be abbreviated as NS[1] for facility of reference. To describe the ninth rasa, I sought out a specialist work and have consulted *Santarasa & Abhinavagupta's Philosophy of Aesthetics* (1969) by J. L. Masson and M. V. Patwardhan; I will also employ other secondary sources. As the English spelling of Sanskrit names and concepts differs substantially between the sources, I will use the most common anglicized spelling throughout my own text and provide the original in quotations.

The other significant work that proved to be fundamental to this thesis is the first volume of *Comparative Aesthetics* (1950) by Kanti Chandra Pandey. In over six hundred pages it analyses, among other subjects, the history of Indian aesthetics, Abhinavagupta's theory of meaning and aesthetics, the types of rasas, the techniques and types of Sanskrit drama, the essentials of representation, and the aesthetic currents in poetics and philosophy of music. Written in 1950, this compendium serves as a bridge – just like the work of Abhinavagupta in the tenth century – to understand ancient arts in modern times. It is worth mentioning that the subtitle, *Indian Aesthetics*, was added only to the 2008 edition. This illustrates how differing bodies of art theory can become highly ingrained in their place of origin to the point that they are considered to be the only authoritative and central artistic canon. I am quite certain the same observation can be made about theoretical approaches that are employed in artistic inquiry in Western Europe. I will support my arguments with a compendium *Understanding Bharatanataym* (2013) by Mrinalini Sarabhai, which is an important practical guide to the dance form and execution of rasas.

The research methodology employed in this thesis is based on an ethnographic approach, which is a widely applied method in dance – as described by Anya Peterson Royce in her classic textbook *The Anthropology of Dance*, as well as across various disciplines – as exemplified by Pavel Zemliansky in *Methods of Discovery.* In Chapter 10 *Ethnographic Research* Zemliansky defines its components as: observation, interviewing, collecting and reading cultural artefacts, keeping field research notes and journal, as well as consulting secondary print and electronic sources. He describes ethnographic researchers as those who "work in the culture which they are studying to recognize [its] traits and ... describe it to others" (Zemliansky n.pag.). In order to collect first hand research materials, in 2014 I applied for a one term residency at Darpana Academy for Performing Arts[2] in Ahmedabad, India. There, I had the opportunity to attend Bharatanatyam classes with the first year students – mostly six year old girls, observe any other classes given at the

academy including Carnatic music, and to attend rehearsals of the company. In addition to attending Bharatanatyam shows, I travelled with the company into the city slums for presentations of its socially relevant street theatre performances, and attended other performances by guest artists at the Natarani theatre (part of Darpana). This allowed me to interview the dancers, choreographers, musicians and teachers, while having full access to the Darapana library. Regarding documentation, I collected extensive notes, translations, and verbal explanations, as well as video registrations of dance performances and personal interviews with their choreographers, dancers, teachers and art critics. Additionally, I collected photos and videos of classes and cultural events, publications and DVDs by Darpana, as well as copies of local scholarly work otherwise unavailable in the Netherlands. Receiving accommodation at the Darpana guest house gave me a unique opportunity to know my neighbours, who were mostly Darpana employees or visiting artists, and to engage in the life of the academy in an all pervasive manner. My personal understanding of Indian culture and dance could reach a deeper insight through the explanations of different dance styles during a festival from teachers, and later, from talking with the artists themselves in an informal setting. In *Research Methods for Cultural Studies*, Aeron Davis further describes methodologies used to examine cultural production. One of these is sociological and ethnographic work, which "involves observing and documenting the actual processes and people involved in cultural production" and constitutes one of the two pillars of this thesis' methodology (58). I also had the opportunity to conduct interviews about aesthetics and their underlying philosophical concepts, as well as the application of rasas in various forms of Indian dance, with three important figures: Mrinalini Sarabhai, Kumudini Lakhia and Suresh Desai.

Mrinalini Sarabhai (born 1918) is a Bharatanatyam dancer, choreographer and instructor, with a background in the Dalcroze Method. She founded the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts in 1948. Besides choreographing more than three hundred dance dramas, she has written novels, poetry and plays. Kumudini Lakhia (born 1930) is a pioneer in contemporary Kathak, dancer and choreographer, who is credited with the move away from traditional stories towards the abstract movement, and from the solo form of Kathak to group choreography. She is based in Ahmedabad, India, and as the founder of the Kadamb Centre for Dance and Music,[3] she continues teaching, choreographing and performing internationally. Prof. Dr. Suresh D. Desai (born 1938) is a retired professor of English at Gujarat University and has been a performing arts critic and author with publications on dance in Indian journals such as Narthaki, Sruti, Nartanam, national dance annual Attendance and theatre quarterly Natak.

All these experiences have given me an insight not only into the dance form and its theory, but most importantly into the culture that is inseparable from its art. Additionally, I have acquired

cultural artefacts in the form of registrations of performances and personal interviews with their choreographers. The following three works by three generations of practitioners within the same school of Bharatanatyam will be analysed with regard to their application of rasas:

Mira (1980) by Mrinalini Sarabhai is an abstract performance that contrasts the emotions of a young girl in love, with her other ecstatic and tortured side, performed simultaneously by two dancers. The original video edit has a transparent layer with a close-up on dancers' faces, implying how important the rasas are to the performance of Bharatanatyam.

Sampradayam (2008) was created by Dr. Mallika Sarabhai, the daughter of Mrinalini, famous in India for creating socially concerned daring performances, and internationally for a role in Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* and the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize nomination. The performance *Sampradayam* consists of five choreographies to live music, of which only one tells the classical story of seduction between the gods Krishna and Radha, and is otherwise a lively group composition designed for entertainment. This shift was widely criticised by Indian art critics mostly for the drastic departure in form and technique from the prescribed ancient tradition.

Long Distance Relationship also known as *LDR* (2011) by Revanta Sarabhai, the son of Mallika, was part of a larger master thesis project for the University of Roehampton, which included Revanta's critical writing on performance practice and research. With parallel narratives in text and video, brought in a multimedia setting, and with modern soundtrack performed live, *LDR* deals with emotions by exploring rasas in a multi-layered space via an interdisciplinary approach to engage the spectator on multiple levels.

These three case studies have been chosen to illustrate the different manifestations of rasas in an attempt to explain their essence and possible applications. Carefully singled out of a large body of work by choreographers from the same school of *abhinaya* (acting technique), the performances are meant to reflect the variety of ways in which rasa theory can be employed on stage. The family connections between the creators evince the means of art production in India and are not relevant to this research. Video registrations of the performances are given in the attachment to this thesis.

Conducting research in a cross-cultural mode requires it to be positioned in regard to what perspective the author is writing from. In this process I will relate to interculturalism. Coming into the field of Indian dance as an outsider, through participation I could become not only an observer but also, even though just partially, an insider. By moving beyond merely describing, as would be the case for similar research relying on secondary sources, and by placing myself within that specific culture, a dialogue is created and an exchange of knowledge happens. My starting point

derives from the work of Martha Nussbaum, professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago. In *Cultivating Humanity* (1997) she rejects the multiculturalist notion that "only members of a particular group have the ability to understand the perceptive of that group" (82). This additional insight is aimed at presenting the reader with the specific cultural framework within which this research was carried and is further elaborated in section 3.4.

Chapter One will introduce the nine types of rasa. The main focus will fall on theoretical background and its significance in performing arts. Chapter Two will focus on the components of rasas and the methods of representation. Several technical terms will be explained in order to avoid confusion in the subsequent chapters. Chapter Three aims to contextualise the rasa theory and to summarise what is the essence of rasa. I will sketch a brief history of Bharatanatyam, accentuating the importance of its twentieth century revival and the debate surrounding it until nowadays. In the same respect I will outline the principles of Hinduism, which constitute the main body of Sanskrit literature, in the scope that is relevant to understanding rasas in Indian classical dance. I will also shortly reflect on my position as a researcher in a foreign culture. Chapter Four will contain examination of the three case studies from contemporary Indian classical dance outlined above. I will conduct analyses of video registrations, personal observations of live performances and interviews with the choreographers, with the focus on comparing the application of the primary rasa of each performance against its traditional depiction. In the Conclusion I will reflect on the content and outcome of my research and the primary results. Appendix 1 contains a glossary of foreign terms.

Occasionally, I use highly contested terms, such as 'eternal consciousness' or 'the absolute' which, although debated within western cultural theory, are necessary to explain certain concepts in a concise manner. This is unavoidable as English translations of Sanskrit terms are either too diffuse or overly precise; it is especially true with the concept of rasa, which cannot be encapsulated in one word. It has been difficult to find a straightforward definition that makes sense to a western scholar or audience member, mostly because we are trained in, or used to, a different type of aesthetics. What we see as over-acting, for example, is in fact a very subtle play of thousands of gestures that can take a lifetime of training for both the performer and the audience to comprehend. As with all classical art forms, there is no shortcut to its full appreciation except by a road of interdisciplinary inquiry in an often life-long quest.

Chapter One

Indian Classical Dance encompasses eight main styles which are grouped into South Indian - performed to Carnatic classical music, and North Indian - performed to Hindustani classical music. Respectively, Bharatanatyam from the pool of Southern dances, and Kathak of the Northern group, are the most widely practised styles. Both rely heavily on music and Vedas (the oldest layer of Sanskrit literature), and – Bharatanatyam being originally a temple dance – on religious scriptures. All forms are highly codified with numerous meanings assigned to each of the dozens hand gestures, and with facial expressions conveying the subtleties of the abstract concepts, such as emotions. The emotions that theatre, and dance, can represent *and* evoke in the audience have been classified in the rasa theory, where rasa is described as an aesthetic experience.

According to Bharata Muni, the assumed author of *Natya Shastra*, rasa can be compared to a sensation that a person with a sophisticated palate receives from the flavour of intricately prepared food. It is not the flavour itself, but the relish of it. And just as the flavour, being the result of a combination of different ingredients and cooking skills, gives rise to the **relish**, so do numerous components of a rasa, represented by the adequate acting technique, give rise to the **rasa**: "just as well disposed persons … enjoy [food] tastes and attain pleasure and satisfaction, so the cultured people taste [components] and derive pleasure and satisfaction" (NS 302). These components, called *bhava,* are explained in Chapter Two; they will prove essential to the understanding of what is the essence of rasa. The theory elaborated in the following chapters defines rasa as a *state*, which combines mental, emotional and spiritual aspects. That state is achieved by a mental, emotional and spiritual engagement of the spectator[4] with what is presented to him. Methods of presentation, called *abhinaya* – meaning the acting technique, will be outlined in Chapter Two. Bharata Muni in *Natya Shastra* describes eight rasas, which are elaborated below. The specifics of the ninth rasa – santam (peace) – added in the tenth century by the scholar Abhinavagupta, are discussed subsequently. Since *Natya Shastra* is a compendium for the *natya* – performance art which encompasses dance, drama and music – for the description of representation of each rasa in dance I will refer to *Understanding Bharatanatyam* by Mrinalini Sarabhai.

Within the eight rasas specified in *Natya Shastra*, four are considered the "original" ones: sringara (erotic), raudra (furious), vira (heroic) and bibhatsa (odius). From the "mimicry" of those arise respectively: hasya (comic), karuna (pathetic), adbutha (marvellous) and bhayanaka (terrible) (NS 310). Wherever I list the full set, I have maintained the order, with the derivative directly under its source. It is not to be inferred that one is the precondition of another. Instead they are

independent and their division reflects the nature of the feelings, and their manifestation, in real life as understood by Indian aesthetics (as different cultures create different links between these emotions): hasya (comic) being emulation of srinagara (erotic) etc. In the source literature, as seen below, the erotic is mainly discussed in terms of love, and the same goes for the comic and laughter. I leave it to the reader to judge whether laughter is the emulation of love in real life, and proceed with rasa description as conceived by Bharata Muni.

1.1. The eight rasas

In dance, the **sringara** rasa is often considered to be the mother of all rasas as it has the capability of including all others. Just as love can manifest in almost any possible emotion know to humans, so can sringara be the result of a combination of different states. The sringara rasa (the erotic sentiment) arises in the effect of love (erotic or platonic), and at the same time can be its manifestation. Sex or prayer can give rise to sringara, and can also be represented by it on stage. *Natya Shastra* says that “the Erotic Sentiment includes conditions available in all other Sentiments”, and that all psychological states can make up sringara except for “fear, indolence, cruelty and disgust” (NS 318-319). In later commentaries it is said that this sentiment has a twofold character: that which stems from the union of lovers, and that which originates in separation. The first aspect of union within sringara is further divided into the “restrained” type, characterised by shyness, and the “perfect” type which is “the reunion after separation and all the full expression of love” (UB 40). Separation sringara itself is of five types: the feeling a heroine experiences before meeting her beloved one, next is the longing of lovers who are near each other geographically but for some reason not together, then the longing caused by long distance separation, fourth being indignation from an argument, abuse, doubt or jealousy, and the fifth type is attributed to a curse, which may result in “desire, change of complexion, loss of appetite, love sickness and death” (UB 42). Each of these five types has a codified representation. These five types of sringara in separation are to be depicted by a hand gesture symbolising a flower (*sola-padma*),[5] with the hand held respectively at the height of chest, lips, forehead, eyes and dropping to the ground symbolising death (UB 40-42).

SRINGARA						
UNION		SEPARATION				
Restrained	Perfect	Separation	Abandonment	Indignation	Dwelling abroad	Curse

The *Natya Shastra* does not go into much detail regarding the essence of the feeling, only remarking that it "is generally happy … relates to the union of man and woman … and has as its basis a bright attire for whatever in this world is white, pure, bright and beautiful is appreciated in terms of … love" (NS 318, 320). From the work of later scholars, as evidenced in *Comparative Aesthetics*, we learn that sringara stands for a much larger concept than eroticism. According to Bhoja, an eleventh century philosopher king, sringara is "aesthetic experience at the highest level … the experience of definite self-consciousness, self-feeling or ego" and can only be experienced by those who have that capability in them: "Sringara, because of which the different emotions of love etc. arise in the aesthete and which, being fully manifested or brought to light or to the conscious level from subconscious, is relished by those who have it" (CA 197, 199). The requirement for the spectator to be able to experience a certain emotion in order for the rasa to happen fits with Bharata Muni's qualifications for an ideal playgoer.[4] The fact that rasa is evoked not only due to what happens on stage, but also on the account of the audience, brings me closer to the realisation that it is an outcome of a constant mediation between the viewer and the art work.

There are numerous ways sringara can be employed in a performance. At either end of the spectrum we find exaggerated and subtle depictions. The exaggerated facial expressions,[6] demonstrative body language, make-up and glaring costumes are used to either caricature a character or portray characters of lower origins. We will not see gods Krishna and Radha represented in this way but rather lustful demons, antagonists of the main hero or heroine, or shepherds in the woods. It is important to remember that not every stylistic device has rasa as its aim, even though a mixture of such may result in one for a particular spectator. On the subtle end, the facial expressions will involve glances without eyebrow or lip movement, arms will be closer to the body, dress in shades of celestial white and blue, and the entire performance being of a somewhat more elusive and sophisticated style. Professor Suresh Desai in a personal interview elegantly describes how desire, and what may follow, can be gracefully depicted on stage:

> While drawing water from a spring or well, Radha sees Krishna and is utterly embarrassed about having her hair down. It was probably for her morning bath, plus she was alone and did not expect visitors anyway. She offers the sacred brass water vessel to Krishna and while presenting it in front of him, her hair gently brushes over Krishna's feet – Radha thus communicating 'I'm at your feet, at your disposal, do with me what you please'. They dance together" (Desai).

Contemporary performance of the sringara rasa will be analysed in more detail in Chapter Three, as

it is the predominant rasa in all three case studies.

The representation of **hasya** rasa is said to have its origin in the emulation of love. With the same broad spectrum of stylistic devices as sringara and all other rasas, its function ranges from parody to laughing cues, as in modern sitcoms. It is usually employed to depict negative or somehow disadvantaged characters that are being laughed at for reasons such as: physical disability, lower caste, tawdry clothes (fashion itself is a highly codified art both in modern India and its ancient art), lack of modesty, daydreaming, belligerence or greediness. The characters can be portrayed either in a funny way which would make the audience laugh, or they can be ridiculed by means of gossip, slander, quarrel or "mentioning of different faults, irrelevant words" (NS 322). The latter (ridicule) is called "self-centred" and the former (funny) "centred in others". It is further classified in the *Natya Shastra* as being of six types that belong to three classes of characters – inferior, middling and superior – each having the self-centred and other-centred type (NS 323).

	Superior characters	Middling characters	Inferior characters
Self-centred hasya	Slight smile	Gentle laughter	Vulgar laughter
Hasya centred in others	Jesting smile	Scornful laughter	Excessive laughter

From *Understanding Bharatanatyam* we learn about differences in abhinaya of the different types of hasya. The slight smile of superior characters has subtle glances, such as the faint smile with minimal movement of the cheeks and not showing the teeth. In the jesting smile the teeth show slightly and the eyes are glowing. In the gentle laughter of the middling characters, the eyes and cheeks are contracted to form a joyful expression accompanied by a "sweet sound". In the scornful laughter the actor is to bend the neck and slouch a bit, with blown up nostrils and squinting eyes. The vulgar laughter of inferior characters happens at the wrong time, with their eyes wet and shoulders shaking. In excessive laughter the actor will add holding his sides (UB 43).

Raudra rasa (furious), although not reserved for inferior or antagonistic characters only, such as arrogant or snobbish men, is most often depicted by the man-eating demons *Rakshasas* who, being popular in folklore, are almost always used to represent extreme anger. They are known to have several heads and arms, red hair and black faces, and are excessively violent in everything they do, "even in their love-making" (NS 329). The raudra rasa is usually represented by the chopping off of limbs, stabbing, cutting and other means of slaughter. Bharatanatyam does not contain such graphic depictions, firstly because it developed as a temple dance and so was pure

from any violence, and secondly because it has been primarily a solo dance, apart from a few recent innovations. In a classical performance one female dancer takes on a role of different characters, mostly without the change of costume, and spectators are expected to recognise each of these through the conventions this thesis outlines. Hence, the dancer will use facial expressions to represent anger of different grades (the lower the character the larger the anger) and re-tell the story with intricate hand gestures and arm positions representing the drawing a sword, death, or the drinking of the enemy blood in extreme cases, and contributing to the entire atmosphere with hard stomped footwork. Abhinavagupta says that the aesthetic experience of anger arises through “contemplation on the actor representing such [angry] character” and does not involve the viewer's identifying with what is being portrayed (CA 221).

Karuna rasa (pathetic) can have three types of causes: bereavement, bankruptcy, and crime. With quite a span of topics, karuna is basically sadness, and just as different things make different people sad, so all of these causes have a place in theatre. It is to be represented by crying, falling to the ground in despair, breathlessness, delusion and fainting, and so forth. Grieving for lost loved ones is the most common depiction. It can also manifest itself as compassion towards those less fortunate. There are several theories on how this rather painful emotion can be aesthetically experienced. In *Comparative Aesthetics*, Abhinavagupta explains that spectators must personify with the sorrow in order experience karuna. His later commentators say this is only possible because the grief represented is only grief represented, devoid of the original pain, and thus possible to contemplate (CA 215). However, the matter can be approached in two alternative ways, depending on the personal association with the situation. For one, watching grief may not always cause pain, but also catharsis based on a release of painful feelings. Secondly, seeing a repulsive character sorrowful for his crimes, or an enemy distressed over his lost fortune, will manifest itself in satisfaction or even pleasure. Therefore, with both views being valid, the karuna rasa will actualise individually depending on what the spectator, and the actor, carry within.

Vira rasa (heroic) is reserved for noble characters such as kings, gods, heroes and heroines. Vira comes in different shades from ridicule to glory, and can stand for courage as well as arrogance. Once again, the more exaggerated the depiction, the lower the attitude towards the character, despite him being of a high standing. It can manifest in characters and audiences of “the noble minds only” regardless of their social rank for it is the “right object that inspires the right enthusiasm” - that is the performance being played by noble characters (CA 212). Therefore, vira rasa has the potential of portraying characters of lower origins as heroes, or examples to be

followed. Here is demonstrated the didactic function of Indian classical art. *Natya Shastra,* by illustrating the good and the bad deeds of creatures of different origin, shows the right conduct of behaviour to the common man. In this sense the primary text can also be considered as a reflection of contemporary laws and unspoken rules for behaviour. The main purpose of dramatic art was to give instruction but in a pleasant manner so as to also acknowledge hedonistic pleasures (CA 17).[7]

Adbutha rasa (marvellous) has a pleasant nature represented by sighing, eyes wide open and blinking. It is evoked by encountering something that is not thought of as possible on an empirical level and should be reserved for the climax scene, preferably towards the end of a spectacle (CA 219). All things magical, celestial beings, phantasmagoria, illusory acts, fulfilment of desires, etc. will find their expression in adbutha. Interestingly, "wonderful speech, seeing beautiful images and forms" at a "temple or audience hall" – i.e. watching a performance – can also be found in the pool of determinants for this rasa (UB46). The story within a story formula, or self-reflexivity, in dance mirrors a common structure of the Sanskrit literature, including scholarly work, such as *Natya Shastra,* where Bharata Muni relates the content of the fifth non-existent *Natya Veda* to a group of sages in a form of a dialogue. With such multilayeredness it is often difficult to follow what happens in a dance performance, especially when one is not familiar with the thousands literary, folk and religious compositions. In this respect, Indian classical dance can be considered a dramatic art.

Bibhatsa rasa (odious) emerges from disgust and is of three types: "nauseating … from a sight of stool or worms, simple, and exciting … from the site of blood and similar objects" (NS 338). Here we can see the rasa flowing from its very description. To imagine a feeling of a disgusting excitement, and that at a sight of blood, or similar objects, is presumably sufficient of an explanation here.

Bhayanaka rasa (terrible) derives from experiencing fear which the *Natya Shastra* sorts into feigned fear, fear from wrongdoing, and fear from danger. It is represented by shaking hands, wide opened eyes scanning for danger, and backward movement. This rasa is reserved for characters of lower origin, children and women for, according to the cultural norms of the time, their fear is genuine. However, venerable characters can occasionally display feigned fear as well, such as in the case of a scholar in front of a king, or a king in front of a god (CA 219). We see very clearly the social conventions governing the stratified Indian society here. In spite of nobility inherently having no fear whatsoever, it is still expected to simulate it in certain situations as to show respect to those

even higher up the social ladder.

1.2. Santam rasa

The **santam** rasa (peace, tranquillity) was introduced by Abhinavagupta in the tenth century as a result of his research into previous scholarly work on the *Natya Shastra*. The complete writings have been lost and we know about them only from references in his own writing which, even though incomplete, have been collected under the name *Abhinvabharati*. The passages on the santam rasa have been both praised and contested by later medieval scholars. Nowadays it is universally agreed that there are nine rasas, collectively known as the navarasa. However, the function of this ninth rasa remains ambiguous. There are different opinions among scholars and dance masters whether santam is to be understood as an underlining thread that connects all the other eight, or rather is the result of all the others, whether it should be represented on stage or evoked as a result of the flow of the other rasas, or perhaps transmitted from the dancer who achieved it, and how exactly should that be done. Below I summarise the theory behind the santam rasa, followed by its practical interpretations among current professionals.

According to Abhinavagupta, santam is the most important, basic and independent rasa which can also be represented on stage (CA 221). It is a spiritual state of detachment characterised by recognising the lack of value in the pursuit of objects, the deliberate focus on lofty ideas and sublime meanings, as well as the realisation that these can all be rejected. It has a cathartic function (CA 240-241). The concept is quite large, and it would be impossible to explain its diverse aspects here, as the original text uses terminology from Hindu philosophy and religion which are neither translatable nor easily summarized to non-practitioners. The idea is that one of the states that art can induce is comparable to the highest state of soul emancipation, found in eastern religious and mystical systems. K.C. Pandey mentions sources which criticise this view, on the grounds that attachment is part of mortality and cannot be completely uprooted, and refutes such criticism as it would deny all "aesthetic experience because such a freedom [of detachment] is involved in all [aesthetic experience]" (224). In other words, santam is present in all other rasas. It is compared to a state of "perfect Self-realisation" which a yogin enters in trance – a state so powerful that can last beyond the practice of trance but can be interrupted by episodes of practical life (CA 240-241).

The early opponents of admitting santam as the ninth rasa espoused the view that since theatre is about presentation, and since santam is the cessation of all physical and mental activity, it therefore cannot be represented on stage. Abhinvagupta's opinion on this matter is that santam can

be represented on stage by a careful choice of the protagonist, whose goal is the attainment of liberation and "the realisation of the Ultimate, or the Self" – like a yogin. He also adds that santam is never a primary rasa (in representation) but subordinate to srinaga (erotic), or vira (heroic) (CA 241). Let us see what contemporary experts consider santam to be.

Professor Suresh Desai speaks not so much of santam, but of *bhakti*-rasa, as that stemming from sringara. Bhakti is a general term for devotion and can be used to create compounds, such as for example bhakti-yoga (yoga in Hinduism being a spiritual and mental practice). According to him, santam can be bhakti-rasa, however bhakti-rasa does not have to be santam and can be attributed to other rasas as well. He emphasises the link between santam and sringara (erotic):

> Brahma created the world and in it the *Ananda* [eternal bliss which accompanies the ending of the rebirth cycle in Hindu philosophy]. What the artists do is to recreate that world. Both Aristotle and Bharata Muni speak of that – Aristotle calls it imitation, and Bharata Muni uses the world *anukruti:* anu – following, kruti – creation. Thus every creator follows the supreme creator, which gives him a particular delight, comparable to the delight, *not* satisfaction, that the supreme being had while creating the universe. When the artist creates, he or she tries to convey that which cannot be expressed otherwise. In portraying a situation, or a character, or an abstract emotion, he creates that which is rasa. When the bhavas [rasa components] are artfully combined together, as in the example of love between Radha and Krishna from *Gita Govinda*, the union between the two becomes the union between the art and the whole universe. Sringara turns into bhakti-rasa (Desai).

Kumudini Lakhia, the founder of Kadamb school, does not consider santam to be representable on stage, with the exception of old Sanskrit dramas. Instead she delineates bhakti-rasa for that purpose, and sees santam for an impression felt inertly as a culmination of the other rasas:

> There is no santam rasa in dance. How long can you stand still and people think 'come on come on get on with your dance'? There is a lot of santam in the old Sanskrit dramas though, not in the modern day dramas. When you do bhakti [prayer] you feel the santam inside. It does come out of you, for somebody, for the infinite, for the nature ... but what you *feel* is santam, that ultimate satisfaction, which you can call love. You can't dance santam rasa, it can't [be used to] communicate. It happens after, it's not like now I'm santam so I will create, no. After I have created, and after I have experienced, there comes santam. It is a total culmination of all your activities – mental and physical (Lakhia).

We can start to notice how profoundly different is the very conception of rasa among singular authorities.

For Mrinalini Sarabhai, the founder of Darpana, every rasa arises from santam. It is all prevailing and ubiquitous, and a source of all action whether mental of physical; it even covers the seemingly contrary view of Kumudini Lakhia. This is what Ms Sarabhai had to say when asked what santam means to her:

> It is peace. I think it is the underlying emotion for every rasa. Every rasa you start with santam rasa. Before you go on to something, you have to first start thinking about it, and then you might feel your anger, or love, or just feel anything. But the underlying theme is santam, for santam is the basis, and the most basic, of all rasa.
> - It is interesting to hear, being that Kumudini Lakhia says santam emerges at the end.
> I would say the end is the beginning of it. There is the santam and after you have santam then you start giving (Sarabhai, Mrinalini).

Hence, there is the book and there is the practice, and what one brings into it. It is clear that even among contemporary professionals there are contradictory stances about this rasa on a practical, philosophical, and personal levels. It can take a lifetime to figure out what rasas are, or perhaps it just takes time for them to happen on another personal level.

For a detailed picture of santam I recommend another useful work, worth at least a brief attestation here. The previously introduced *Santarasa* by Masson and Patwardhan, is a vast and ambitious undertaking that deals primarily with santam by looking at the original text of *Abhinavabharati*, the background of Abhinavagupta's aesthetic theory in great detail, and includes the alleged manuscript[8] of the *Natya Shastra* where all nine rasas were described (91). It also provides the original (incomplete) and translated text of *Abhinavabharati* together with all the existing passages mentioning santam before Abhinavagupta. In essence, the book summarises santam as that which “might be translated as the imaginative experience of tranquillity” (iii) and attributes the confusion surrounding its meaning and application to the fact that most scholars work with secondary literature rather than with the original text, subsequently recalling all the existing writing on santam prior to Abhinavagupta. We must not forget that the body of work that comes after him is considerably larger. The subject is vast and I may only hope that this work will serve as a mini-compendium guide to those who wish to familiarise themselves with the subject.

The above discussion on santam rasa demonstrates different understandings of what is, not

only santam, but rasa in general. Furthermore, the strong relationship between santam and sringara, embraced in the views of contemporary experts, reflects the inseparability of love with an aesthetic experience, mentioned in the description of sringara earlier. This inseparability is vital to the dance analysis in Chapter Three, since sringara is the predominant rasa in all three case studies.

Chapter Two

The description of rasas presented in Chapter One is by no means complete. For the thorough understanding of the rasa theory and its implementation, it is imperative to grasp the meaning of two technical terms briefly introduced before: bhava and abhinaya. In short, bhavas are the formal components of rasas. It is what the actor does to convey a certain mood, as well as the context in which it is presented. Bhavas lead to rasas. Abhinaya is the acting technique which guides the performance of these emotional components on stage. The knowledge of abhinaya is essential to the application of rasas in a performance. Similarly, the knowledge of bhavas will be indispensable in learning what the essence of rasa is.

2.1. What is bhava?

Theorists of rasas maintain that in order to convey a certain emotion, the actor must experience it himself. Only in this way can the emotion be experienced by the spectator. In reality, emotions are aroused by events or situations which have strong personal meaning. In theatre however, these events or situations are fabricated, and by default cannot produce similar impact as if they were experienced in real life since they relate “neither to the actor nor to the spectator … in the manner it was related to the historical character that is represented” (CA 23). Because the representation of an emotion is only a representation, the real thing cannot emerge. Therefore, as Pandey explains in *Comparative Aesthetics*, bhavas have been defined as “the medium to a state of mind” in order to “distinguish them from emotions that arise in real life”. In short, bhava is the representation of an emotion that serves as an agent in the process of bringing up rasa in the spectator. It is a mental state caused by the surrounding context that leads to an emotion, and not the experience of that emotion yet. At this stage it might be helpful to think of rasa as the overall sensation – mental, emotional and bodily – that comes *after* experiencing an emotion, and bhava as all that constitutes the emotion.

BHAVA → EMOTION → RASA

The emphasis in bhava is on the fact that it is the mental state which *may* lead to an emotion “in a manner quite different from that, in which emotion arises in actual life”, but is not the emotion in itself (CA 26). Therefore, bhava, as seen above, does not directly lead to rasa, but is the actor's mental state that evokes an emotion in him and subsequently in the spectator, which in turn is one of

the several preconditions to rasa. The specifics of the relationship between bhava and rasa are further explained in 2.1.1 where I discuss two specific examples, as well as in 3.3 where I address the essence of rasa.

The literal translation of the Sanskrit word bhava means to pervade or to infuse. Bharata Muni describes bhavas as Psychological States and groups them into four varieties – Durable Psychological States, Complimentary Psychological States, Determinants and Consequents – which influence one another in order to create rasa. For simplification I will call them primary and secondary bhavas, as further explained. The Durable Psychological States, or the primary bhavas, are those which *may* produce rasas, when they come together with a combination of secondary bhavas, described further below (NS 302-304). These primary bhavas correspond to the eight primary rasas as follows:

Rati – love, gives rise to sringara (erotic)
Hasa – mirth, gives rise to hasya (comic)
Krodha – anger, gives rise to raudra (furious)
Soka – sorrow, gives rise to karunya (pathetic)
Utsaha – courage, gives rise to vira (heroic)
Vismaya – astonishment, gives rise to adbhutam (marvellous)
Jugupsa – disgust, gives rise to bibhatsa (odious)
Bhaya – terror, gives rise to bhayanaka (terrible)

The total number of bhavas, grouped in the four types charted below, is questionable since Bharata Muni lists more examples than he actually proclaims to (which may as well be the result of multiple authorship). Pandey himself states in *Comparative Aesthetics* that bhavas cannot be strictly categorised (27). The implication is that modern classification, which stems from various scholarly interpretations, commentaries and elaborations on *Natya Shastra*, allows for the infinity of representation of human emotions.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="5">BHAVA</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">SECONDARY</td><td>PRIMARY</td></tr>
<tr><td>Determinants
(vibhava)</td><td>Consequents
(anubhava)</td><td colspan="2">Complimentary
Psychological States
(vyabhicarinah)</td><td>Durable
Psychological States
(sthayibhava)</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="2">Involuntary
(sattvikabhava)</td><td>Voluntary
(vyabhichari bhava)</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Complementary Psychological States are:

> discouragement, weakness, apprehension, envy, intoxication, weariness, indolence, depression, anxiety, distraction, recollection, contentment, shame, inconstancy, joy, agitation, stupor, arrogance, despair, impatience, sleep, epilepsy, dreaming, awakening, indignation, dissimulation, cruelty, assurance, sickness, insanity, death, fright and deliberation (NS 287).

Out of these, Involuntary effects of emotion are distinguished separately: “paralysis, perspiration, horripilation, change of voice, trembling, change of colour, weeping and fainting” (NS 287). These are unconditional impulses which cannot be prevented or forced when an emotion in real life occurs. Their representation is possible only under the condition of the highest concentration as they “cannot be mimicked by an absent-minded man” (NS 385).

Only the eight primary bhavas are able to turn into rasa. They are considered principal on the account that they are composed of the other bhavas in various combinations, but not the other way round. Determinants and Consequents are manifold, as seen in the following example.

To illustrate the relationship between primary and secondary bhavas I will inspect the characteristics of bhaya (fear).[9] Bharata Muni states that fear “relates to women and persons of the inferior type” and arises from “an embarrassment due to offending one's superiors, seeing terrible objects and hearing awful things”. It is caused by Determinants such as “roaming in a forest, seeing an elephant and a snake, staying in an empty house, rebuke from one's superiors, a dark rainy night, hearing the hooting of owls” and brings in effect the Consequents such as “trembling hands and feet, palpitation of the heart, paralysis, dryness of the mouth, licking the lips, perspiration, tremor, seeking safety, running away, loud crying and the like”. The poet continues that bhaya should be represented in a performance by “tremor of the limbs, panic, hurried movement, widely opened eyes”, and specifically “fear in men arising from terrifying objects … by dancers with slackened limbs and suspended movement of the eyes” (356). It is interesting (if not entertaining) to see how culturally ingrained norms, superstitions and stereotypes are validated by the still highly revered *Natya Shastra,* thus perpetuating their representation into the twenty first century. The question whether this can be considered guarding an artistic legacy, or whether it is a reflection of the culture – as is theatre – shall remain to be answered by cultural anthropologists.

2.1.1. Bhava and rasa

Learning about bhavas, and about the Durable Psychological States in particular, brings us closer to the understanding of what rasa is. Now we know what rasa is not. It is not an emotion, as often mistakenly simplified in both western academia and by practitioners of Indian classical dance. The relationship between rasas and primary bhavas is complicated and encompasses various approaches. I will illustrate the most important aspects using the examples of sringara rasa (erotic) and santam rasa (peace), and their relationship with the corresponding bhavas.

Abhinavagupta makes the division between erotic love and that which is caused by art very clearly by enumerating their contrasting qualities. He ascribes rati to the former and sringara to the latter. Love in ordinary life, according to him, is between "two people of opposite sex" who desire one another, the sight of the couple conjures the image that "she is his wife" and arouses "yearning for the enjoyment" they are assumed to revel in, and it "does not persist". Conversely, love in art "persists through all states and is perfectly free from all elements of pain and sorrow. Its fruition is in perfect happiness, in the erotic aesthetic experience, technically called sringara". From this quite an enigmatic explanation follows that experiencing the sringara rasa cannot be reduced to sexual excitement for the lack of "the external objective act" which is "the most important constituent" of love in actual existence (CA 204). Rati however, if skilfully represented on stage, can evoke sringara in the spectator.

He further explains that as much as rati is about the sensual union of lovers, sringara even more so is about "spiritual union of two groups of ideas" which result in the ultimate happiness from self-realisation (CA 204). I find this explanation of their parallelism particularly compelling, given the ecstasy of synthesizing a new thought from existing ideas – that brief moment of epiphany. Two groups of ideas may also refer here to those of the spectator, with his entire intellectual and emotional background, and those conveyed by the medium of performance. Then again, rasa becomes the product of a continual interaction between the viewer and the art object (dance performance) at a psychological level. And even though certain stylistic devices, or bhavas, that may be used in evoking the aesthetic experience of love can be perceived as impure – such as seductive moves or provocative "bright" clothing, these are just means to an end which is "not contemptible but bright and lovely" (CA 206).

Despite the different approaches to sringara, its representation in contemporary dance practice is predominantly erotic, albeit performed with great subtlety – such as the infatuation with a male god as seen in *Mira,* analysed in 4.1. Bearing in mind that bhava is a precondition for rasa – and so is rati for sringara – the practice, in my view, constitutes a means of representing the same

state which may result either from love between people – erotic or platonic, or that which can be induced by art. Since theatrical representation is by default devoid of participation in the erotic, the appreciation of its skilful representation will yield the aesthetic experience espoused by Abhinavagupta. The two ideas – of erotic love and that which is caused by art – even though quite separate on a philosophical level, become inseparable in the act of art making. I will accordingly take a twofold approach to the concept of sringara in the following chapters on theory and dance analysis.

As we have seen in 1.2, santam rasa is an elusive concept with multiple possible interpretations. Regarding its origin, there are several approaches as to where it comes from in terms of bhava composition. In my view, all of them are valid and not mutually exclusive. One school holds that all eight primary bhavas give rise to santam, others that any one of them can have that function. Abhinavagupta gives testimony to having worked with two versions[8] of the *Natya Shastra* where underlying conditions of santam had been elusively mentioned (CA 221). Even though the sources are not clear, *Comparative Aesthetics* states that two sthaibhavas (durable psychological states, or primary bhavas) had been recognised to be the source of santam: *nirveda* (CA 229) and *sama* (CA 226). Nirveda literally means the source of detachment, disregard of worldly objects, or insight, and arises from "the realisation of the Ultimate" (CA 229). Sama is the "absence of all affections of the mind" (CA 237). The anthology briefly references all known commentaries on santam in brief, which explore its philosophical aspects, rather than the practical application. They include Sanskrit passages and numerous secondary references, therefore I will abandon the attempt of summarising it here and refer the reader to the original (CA 219-250). The apparent lack of codified representation of the nirveda and sama bhavas reflects their fleeting ambiguous nature, and the impossibility of representing and evoking santam with a unified set of stylistic devices, as is the case with the other eight rasa-bhava pairs. The matter of representation brings us to the second technical term, abhinaya, which outlines acting techniques that are at the basis of all Indian classical dances.

2.2. What is abhinaya?

Abhinaya, which denotes the art of representation, describes the ways of acting in four areas: Gestures (*angika*), Words (*vacika*), Dress and Make-up (*aharya*), and Temperament (*sattvika*), which are to be combined in order to adequately represent different types of play (NS 395). The Sanskrit terms form compounds with the word abhinaya to denote either the means or

genitive. It follows that angika-abhinaya is the art of representation through gestures, and sattvika-abhinaya refers to the art of representing states of temperament. These terms are used somewhat differently in the contemporary practice of Bharatanatyam. There is a distinction between abhinaya – meaning movement depicting specific emotions or moods, and *nritta* – meaning non-representational rhythmical movement. Facial expressions fall under the abhinaya but, for example, angika-abhinaya may be either. The steps, basic positions and movement transitions generally fall under nritta, for even though they do carry codified meaning, are not generally employed to depict emotions. In the subsequent chapter I will focus on the rasa-abhinaya of face and hands due to the limits of this work, but more as a result of the vast nature of the subject. Bharata Muni's classification spans seven chapters (VIII – XIII, XXIV) where he minutely describes the types of movement of different body parts together with their meaning and method of execution.

The movements of major limbs are classified into twenty four single and thirteen dual hand poses, twenty nine positions of the arms, thirteen movements of the upper body and five types of movement of thighs, shins and feet respectively, as well as thirty two gaits. Each of the movements and positions are explained in detail and have a defined use. Of those, hand gestures are particularly relevant as their use is indicated with reference to the sentiments. Consecutively, it is stated that "the combined movement of hands and feet in dance is called the *Karanas* … which are one hundred and eight in number" (NS 110-113). Karanas are poses, or more accurately transitions between positions of body parts, from which all movements in Indian classical dance are derived. The full set is beautifully sculpted on the walls of the twelfth century Chidambaram Temple in Tamil Nadu.

Natya Shastra states that rasas are created by facial expressions: "different gestures of the head … support many Sentiments and States", and all schools of Indian classical dance adhere to this principle (397). The fact that students are taught the rasa-abhinaya only in their fifth year of the seven year basic training shows the importance of perfect execution and personal maturity. The movements of the head and face employed in representation of emotions, each of them elaborated in *Natya Shastra*, include: thirteen types of head movements, thirty six glances in eight modes, nine movements of the pupil, nine movements of the eye-lashes, seven movements of the eyebrows and seven of the chin, six types of actions of the nose, cheek and lip, four kinds of the colour of the face, and nine movements of the neck. Out of the whole range of abhinaya, in the following section I will discuss those movements which are of importance in the application of rasas in Bharatanatyam: facial expressions and hand gestures.

2.2.1. Abhinaya in Bharatanatyam

Dance originated as a stylistic devise in drama. Drama is to be understood in the sense of natya, which in (ancient) India indicates an inseparable trinity of dance, music and literature performed on stage: “Use of Gestures etc. (abhinaya) devised by the experts for drawing out the sense of songs and speeches in a play led to the making of dance (nritta)” (NS 189). Therefore, Bharata Muni's definitions are not meant for dance on its own, but for dance as one of many components in theatrical representation. As natya developed throughout centuries, on different cultural, historical and religious backgrounds of India, dance has gained importance to the point of becoming an independent art. We are not to consider folk dances here, which naturally have existed independently of scholarly prescriptions. The editor of *Natya Shastra* explains that the “codified dance” which Bharata Muni speaks of, “should be distinguished from the folk dance” and that the former “is mostly to accompany the adoration of gods, but its gentler form relates to the Erotic Sentiment” (NS 198). *Natya Shastra* does not speak of the sentiments being expressed by dance only, but by the employment of all the three arts together. It describes music (where rasas are further divided into tones with different shades), poetry, and their execution with painstaking attention to detail. In this sense, the practicality of *Natya Shastra* to the application of rasas in dance is limited, and for the purpose of inspecting how rasas are employed in the performance of Bharatanatyam as it exists nowadays, I will refer to contemporary literature authored by its practitioners.

In *Understanding Bharatanatyam,* Mrinalini Sarabhai, explains that the main difference in technique between Indian dances and those of the west is that in the former the most minute parts of the body play a major role in representation, hence the meticulous division into separate components of the body parts such as the head; even the pupils, eyelashes and eyebrows have separate functions assigned (UB 56). They combine with numerous movements of eyebrows, nose, lips and cheeks (viz. contracting, trembling, lowered, blown, blossoming and natural) that are conducive to the accurate expression of different feelings. Somewhat confusingly, the book separately describes the glances of the eyes that express rasa, those that express permanent states, or primary bhavas, and those that express transitory states. Further, there is a description of movement of the pupils “to be used in all Rasas and Bhavas” (UB 62). It is not clear if the relationship between rasa and bhava explained previously applies in all instances. From personal observation and interviews with choreographers I conclude that they can be employed interchangeably or concurrently (in which two cases the meaning of rasa is drastically departed from that conceived in *Natya Shastra*), as well as along with Bharata Muni's requirements, dependent on what is the purpose of dance and the idea carried across, for Bharatanatyam is no longer a temple dance but a

stage art and its main purpose is aesthetic pleasure and artistic expression. The nine glances employed in the expression of rasas, together with their purported execution, can be seen in Appendix 2.

The number of hand gestures in Bharatanatyam is different than that mentioned in *Natya Shastra*. Different styles of dance have a different number of *mudras* (as hand gestures in dance are known) with different meanings assigned to them – from religious to purely decorative. Moreover, there are minor variations in execution, number and meaning within the same dance style. I will hold on to the definition of abhinaya used by Darpana Academy. Unlike the facial expressions, mudras are not assigned to specific rasas or bhavas but each has numerous designations in providing the context for the presentation of the states and sentiments. I have not found a source text that would officially classify them under Determinants, but deducing from their function, I am confident that they can be thought of as such. There are twenty eight single and twenty four combined mudras. They can be seen in Appendices 3 and 4 respectively. In order to illustrate their usage I will describe the most commonly featured, and also one with the greatest amount of possible functions, *pataka* mudra, together with *mayura* mudra which seems to have more specific application.

Pataka, meaning flag, is considered to be "the first of all hands originating from Brahma" it is always used in the beginning of the dance[10] and its designations range from abstract ideas such as "abode of the Gods, one's own self, equality, prowess, seven cases (in grammar), course of good deeds, or forbidding things" to more earthly representations like "day, month, year, rainy season, water-laden clouds, river, wind, moonlight, night, horse, shield, sword, cutting, taking an oath, silence, reclining and walking" (UB 68). Being able to demonstrate reclining and walking, or course of good deeds and forbidding things, with the same gesture leaves me wondering whether any descriptions of dance can ever be accurate. Especially when the same concepts are often mentioned in the recommended usage of different mudras (see Chapter IX of *Natya Shastra* and Chapter 10 of *Understanding Bharatanatyam* for detailed description of each of the hand gestures).

Even though mayura, as opposed to pataka, does not feature in *Natya Shastra*, it is one of the basic and prevalent gestures in Bharatanatyam. Its literal meaning is peacock, and apart from its obvious reference to the bird, it can represent subjects of such a vast range as from "vomiting" to "sprinkling water from river as in prayer" and "wiping away tears" to "argument about shastras and the renown" (UB 69). As we can see, the possibilities in producing meaning when combing several mudras in a sequence are endless. These are even more so if we add the possible facial expressions, the karanas, the music, and place it on top of the endless stories of gods and heroines. In the context of its later commentaries and elaborations, *Natya Shastra* seems to complicate things even more

rather than it explains. As the editor promptly observes, "it is an ocean, certainly a confluence" and "an attempt at analysis can only be inadequate" (NS xxii). Despite his discouragement, in the following chapter, I will attempt to define the essence of rasa. Now that we have explained the auxiliary concepts and theory of what makes rasa and what rasa is not, that task should bring us closer to the intended aim of this thesis.

Chapter Three

This chapter aims to contextualise the hitherto theory for a smooth transition towards the analysis of the case studies. To provide a comprehensive image of the rasa theory, it is necessary to address the historical and religious backgrounds. These will be helpful in drawing the results of what is the essence of rasa. The history, and especially the twentieth century history, of Bharatanatyam plays an important role in understanding the changing impact of theory on the actual performance. The ensuing reflection on conducting research in a cross-cultural mode aims to position this thesis from a cultural perspective and to contextualise the subsequent dance analysis.

3.1. Historical background of Bharatanatyam

Bharatanatyam was a temple dance practised by Devadasis. These were female dancers dedicated to specific temples across southern India who passed on the knowledge of this sculpturesque dance form in a maternal lineage. Their dance was purely spiritual and devotion was the highest aim of its practice. The high standing of Devadasis and the dance itself fell into disrepute and subsequent decline around the middle ages when wealthy princes and provincial magnates became personal patrons of the temples. The dancers, as well as other temple staff - pundits, gurus, monks, cooks and maids - became heavily dependent on donations by local moguls, who in turn often abused their advantageous position by imposing adultery on the females. At the same time in Northern India during the Mughal Empire, the invaders saw only the entertainment value in Hindustani dance, and by funding the performers expected more ornamental and bold representation. Performances of classical dance started losing their pure spiritual dimension and moved from temples to courts and social functions to entertain the guests of the rich. Eventually the practice and tradition of temple dance – especially Bharatanatyam – fell into decline and was discontinued due to being considered low, vulgar and indecent for any respectable woman. This state of affairs continued until the early twentieth century when the upper-caste theosophist and choreographer Rukmini Devi Arundale (1904-1986) took on the ardours task of reviving Bharatanatyam to its former glory. In order to achieve her aim, Rukmini Devi had to introduce drastic adjustments into the form to change the perception of it by removing all representation that might allude to the sringara rasa.

Sringara rasa, which in Bharatanatyam originally expressed the highest and purest form of love for God, had been scorned after the transition from temple to stage, and considered as a set of

seductive gestures to produce adulterous images. Rukmini Devi completely removed the notion of Sringara, thus eradicating any possible representations of – and erroneous reading into – eroticism. Despite protests and general contempt, even for this new purified form, she performed Bharatanatyam all over the world. Eventually her aim was realised, with every respectable Indian family sending their daughters to classes, and with schools popping up all over the world since the late twentieth century. Removing sringara, however, resulted in the emergence of two different factions: exponents and opponents of Rukmini Devi's purification measures. While both sides agree that these were necessary means to an end, the latter maintain that sringara has always been inseparable from the dance, and that the times are safe for Bharatanatyam to continue its full legacy. The most eminent advocate against removing sringara from Bharatanatyam was Tanjore Balasarwati (1918-1984) who was a seventh generation Devadasi from a prominent matrilineage of artists.[11] At that time, Devadasis were mostly still considered prostitutes, even though they were dedicated to a temple for worship as little girls for the rest of their lives. In a personal interview with Kumudini Lakhia, the founder of Kadamb dance school, she reflects on the aesthetic split in Bharatanatyam:

> I remember many seminars where Balasaraswati was talking about it in the fifties. She came from a different background, from the Devadasis, and her purpose was different. Rukmini Devi's purpose was to resurrect Bharatanatyam. Today it is alive in the world because of her. She gave it kind of a nice glossy look and put it on stage; while it was just thumping around temples in the forests. She first had to purify it, in order to bring it to the light, and also for the girls from Brahmin families to come and learn it, otherwise they would not. And you wouldn't be here either. So now there are different Bharatanatyam [sic], which is what Rukmini Devi put on the platform. The fight was very relevant. They both had their purpose and they were both right. Rukmini Devi had a purpose of taking Bharatanatyam into a different century. And Balasaraswati had a purpose of guarding the heritage of Bharatanatyam (Lakhia).

Considering the prominent place that srinagara rasa occupies in the Indian aesthetic theory, it seems almost unimaginable that Bharatanatyam could do without it. Yet, such drastic stylistic intervention proved to be necessary – and very efficient – in lying the foundations for the future return in its practice that embraces all aspects of this powerful dance form. Today, the Kalakshetra[12] dance academy, set up by Rukmini Devi in 1936, still enjoys popularity with its puritan dance training. Its style is recognised by angular contours, straight lines, bound flow, and avoidance of the

hip, chest, neck and lip movements, and of the unconstrained throw of the arms and legs. Nowadays the boundaries between different styles of Bharatanatyam are becoming less pronounced however, as dancers often receive their training from different schools of abhinaya, and even in different dance styles, in order to maximise their movement vocabulary so that it better responds to the demands of contemporary choreographic innovations.

3.2. Importance of religion

Bharatanatyam, along with other South Indian dances, has its origin in Shaivinism, while Kathak and the other North Indian dances derive from Vaishnavism. These are two of the four major branches of Hinduism devoted to the veneration of gods Shiva and Vishnu respectively. While Hinduism has been called the religion of two million gods, there are three main deities, or two – depending on how the matter is approached. The following is a gross simplification, but in the writer's opinion it is sufficient for advancing the main subject of this thesis.[13]

On the literary level, there is the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva – also called the Trimurti. Respectively, they are responsible for creation, preservation, and transformation through destruction. These gods have numerous avatars, spouses – who also have avatars, and offspring, whose stories do not always follow the linear time-space continuum, and often overlap or cross one another in phantasmagorical configurations. On the spiritual level, there is Brahman, not to be confused with Brahma, and Shakti. Brahman is the impersonal Absolute; it is a concept that connotes the Ultimate of everything. Shakti is the primordial cosmic energy behind any creation, in some views also beyond Brahman. Often referred to as The Great Divine Mother, Shakti is personified by numerous female goddesses, usually the spouses of one of the Trimurti. Shakti is a concept, as well as its manifestation in female fertility. These two deities-concepts enjoy infinite and continuously evolving interpretations, and are applied to the different branches and sub-branches of Hinduism, that are also continuously evolving, conjuring multi-layered amalgamations of concepts. These dynamic concepts were initially elucidated in the four Vedas – the oldest scriptures of Hinduism and the oldest layer of Sanskrit literature.[14] See Appendix 6 for a simplified graph of the main Hindu deities.

Jessica Frazier discusses the inseparability of Hindu art and religion in “Arts and Aesthetics in Hindu Studies” (2010). She says that Hinduism allows for multiple embodiments of divinity, from images and objects, to ideas and places, to people; hence visual arts, or any arts “communicating through the language of iconography”, such as Bharatanatyam, naturally become

the vehicles for the sacred scriptures. In academia there is a general “secularist prejudice against religious arts” which, Frazier says, needs to be overcome in order to recognise that the Indian arts can be considered “the key to ... Hindu theological thought”. She explains that the images of Hinduism, represented in non-textual media such as painting, or performing arts, are read today by Hindus as “visual theologies”. A good example of such integrity between art, religion and everyday life is a fact that usual Indian audiences come typically well equipped with a “learned lexicon of gestures” as an efficient tool for interpreting the “narrative embedded in dance” (3-5).

Natya Shastra lends itself a divine origin by proclaiming to be “the *Natya Veda* devised by Brahma”, or the fifth lost great Hindu scripture written by God. This fifth Veda was “compiled from the four” existing Vedas in response to a request by the king of gods for “an object of diversion, which must be audible as well as visible ... which will belong equally to all the Colour-groups”. We learn from the notes that *Natya Veda* is “alleged to have been composed by Brahma in about 36000 slokas” (NS 10, 12). Since the *Natya Shastra* is composed of 6000 slokas (line verses), the translator of the 1950 edition assumes that the original work “had been lost for ever” (NS xxxvii). The *Natya Shastra* is a compendium on stage production for “the sages who know the mystery of the Vedas … and are capable of putting it into practice … for the benefit of the people” (NS 15, 19). It does not prescribe the stories, but only the appropriate manner of presenting them. It follows that, since the performing arts have a divine origin they should only be devised for the worship of gods; this explains the heavy reliance on Sanskrit literature, itself the foundation of Hinduism.

From what I have gathered though experience, there is no strong division in representation of Vaishnavistic and Shaivinistic myths or concepts (see section 3.2 above) among different dance styles. *Gita Govinda*, for example, is a common inspiration source in both Kathak and Bharatanatyam. It is an extensive twelfth century work which describes the mostly erotic relationships between Krishna (an avatar of Vishnu), and several female cow herders, in particular Radha. Krishna and Radha have a permanent place in all branches of Indian classical dance. Similarly, the adventures of Nataraja (an avatar of Shiva), lend inspiration to all dance forms since he is considered India's traditional god of dance. Manomohan Ghosh, the translator of *Natya Shatra,* in his introduction explains that with time the “dances and songs in honour of a deity like Shiva, who later came to be styled as the great dancer-actor Nataraja … gradually assumed the form of regular dramatic spectacles and the range of subjects treated was extended beyond the legends connected with the exploits of a particular deity” (Ghosh, LV). The importance of religion will be described further in Chapter Four, where by means of performance analysis, I demonstrate how these stories serve as the underlying thread in contemporary Bharatanatyam – either through their presence or accentuated absence.

3.3. The essence of rasa

Natya Shastra mostly deals with the representation of rasas and lacks their straightforward definition. To sum up, rasa is compared to the pleasure of flavour where both the skilful composition of ingredients and the inherent receptiveness of the connoisseur matter. Rasa literally translates as juice or essence. For each flavour, Bharata lists the desired ingredients from the secondary bhavas and commends that those which relate to the predominant sentiments of a play should be assigned to male characters. Even though the variety of all rasas rarely manifest together in actual life, on stage – if done skilfully – will yield the most sterling effects. Therefore a fully achieved work of art will flow with all nine rasas, and one of them will be more predominantly portrayed (NS 391-392). So much for the technicalities, but what really *is* rasa? As we have seen in the interview extracts above, the meaning of what inherently is rasa depends – as Bharata Muni acutely predicted – on the person who experiences it. Clearly it is not merely a side aspect of a performance but is being given central position in theatre theory – where natya (acting, dance and music), and all the other aspects of a play, are solely the vehicle for rasa. In *Comparative Aesthetics* Pandey explains that "rasa is sometimes used for aesthetic experience, at others for aesthetic configuration and at still others for both", and even when meant in a technical sense, the concept retains its essential value of arising aesthetic pleasure (CA 188).

The relationship between the eight primary emotions that lead to rasas with rasas themselves deserves more focus as it "continues to be of utmost relevance in the most contemporary styles of music and dance" (NS xvii). The difference between rasa and bhava has been touched upon in 2.1. Bhava is the emotion that ultimately leads to rasa. A sequence of manifold situations, characters and supplementary emotions and thoughts, music, dance and set-up, when cleverly fused together will result in one of the primary bhavas. These, when added to the adequate qualities of a spectator, will result in a rasa. There is often a confusion between the two terms, as without deeper introspection, bhava is thought of as rasa. And in the same way that which is rasa, is boiled down to the represented emotion - bhava. These mistakes stem mostly from unawareness of the theory among the dancers who, in majority, start their seven year training in early childhood. It is further perpetuated by inadequate translations into ubiquitous websites not by Sanskrit scholars but by translators, or the very same dancers mentioned above. *Natya Shastra* makes it a bit confusing too; however, upon closer examination of several scattered passages on rasa and bhava, we learn that "the Sentiments arise from the Psychological States and not the Psychological States from the Sentiments" and an assumption that they both derive from mutual relationship is incorrect (NS 305). Rasa is evidently held in a higher esteem. From my understanding, rasa is a combination of

bhava, with all its skilfully executed components, *and* what the spectator contributes – such as aesthetic appreciation. This aesthetic appreciation is not rasa either but contributes to it, and it is that augmented reality which is rasa. It is then self-evident that the same performance may or may not induce the experience of rasa in different audience members. And even though that dividing line is very subtle and fluctuating, there can be no rasa without bhava for the latter is the active agent in bringing up the former.

It makes sense to assume that numerous circumstances can influence whether the viewer has the right type of specific rasa in him at the time of the performance. Whether it would be a temporary bad mood caused by such trifles as commuting, or more permanent state of sadness, or perhaps anger at having been ridiculed in the past, the spectator brings with him a whole range of auxiliary factors that may affect whether, and which, rasas flow. *Natya Shastra* beyond imposing strict demands on the qualifications of the spectator does not address the role of these personal factors in influencing the experience of rasas. It is generally assumed that certain actions of the performer will result in specific reactions for the viewer, depending always on their individual qualities and skills. Chapter XXVII of *Natya Shastra – Success in Dramatic Production*, in prescribing the audience's desired reaction to a successful play, considers different psychological and cultural traits of "cultured" and "ordinary" spectators very briefly; it does not address the issue of relationality of rasa these traits may influence (NS 1165). However, Bharata Muni attributes the success of a play to both human and divine powers. The latter can manifest in "wind, fire, rains, insects, fear from ... a serpent, stroke of lightning" (NS 1165). Undoubtedly these can influence not only the execution of the play, but also the spectator's temporary (and more permanent) emotional and psychological states which are not dependent on the show. In my understanding, since rasa is the desired outcome of a successful performance, and since these factors – which can obviously affect the mood of a viewer – are considered obstacles to a success, the influenced mood therefore can be considered the source of relationality of the rasa experience.

"The Spectator goes to the theatre for nothing but the experience of rasa" (CA 30).

3.4. Reflection on conducting research in a cross-cultural mode

Before I proceed towards the analysis of how rasas are applied in the three case studies, a final thought on doing research in a cross-cultural mode deserves mentioning. Approaching any culturally foreign subject academically requires thought-out self-positioning. My starting point was

Matha Nussbaum's rejection of the multiculturalist notion that “only members of a particular group have the ability to understand the perceptive of that group” on the grounds that “understanding is achieved in many different ways, and being born a member of a certain group is neither sufficient nor necessary” (82). In *Cultivating Humaninty,* where Nussbaum proposes a new model for higher education based on world citizenship,[15] she argues that in order to make conclusions about other cultures it is necessary to “understand the world from the point of view of the other” – preferably by learning the language and making a (temporary) home in that culture (11). Through placing myself in the culture of which the art reflection I undertook to study, I have become able to relate to the issues of ethnic and religious pluralism, economy, gender, philosophy and even nature and its importance in the lives of the people. This definitely offered me a greater understanding into the subject of dance which I have here investigated. But have I been able to understand it? After six months of hard work trying to adapt to the adamant social norms I declare that venture a failure. The most striking issue was the apparent lack of consistency as to when and to whom certain rules apply. Or perhaps it takes a much longer time to understand a culture on a level where insolence is no longer an issue for neither of the parties. As for understanding the art and philosophy of another culture, I believe Nassbaum's view is very adequate. This thesis, even though a drop in the ocean, has proven that the appreciation of foreign art forms comes with study and practice, and just like with the art forms specific to one’s own culture, requires a life-long engagement that most likely will never yield an all-knowing connoisseur.

Chapter Four

The analyses of the three case studies that follow aim at revealing how the previously described rasa theory is applied in contemporary Bharatanatyam. *Mira, Sampradayam,* and *LDR* have been created by three generations of choreographers within the same school of abhinaya and were chosen to reflect different approaches to rasas. For each of the works I will provide relevant contextualising facts, concrete observations and analysis of how the elements of rasa theory are present on stage, followed by a demonstration of how the predominant rasa – sringara, materializes in each instance.

4.1. Analysis of *Mira*

Mira (1980) by Mrinalini Sarabhai is loosely based on a story of a fifteenth century Rajput princess and poet, also known as Meera, who was deeply in love with god Krishna and perceived him as a husband. After her actual husband's death she was persecuted for her devotion by the rest of his family and continued to live her life as a vagabond poet advocating devotion to Krishna as a way of life through her more than 1300 *bhajans* (devotional songs). The performance *Mira* portrays the duality of a person's internal and external world, the social expectations and the inner realm. Two dancers portray the two different Miras – one that is young and passionate, innocent and naive, and the other one who is more mystical and introverted due to the experience of life's hardships. Mrinalini plays the mature Mira herself, while her daughter Mallika plays her other side. In a personal interview Mrinalini explains that

> Mallika embodies all the aspects of Mira that I think of, she is always one step ahead of me, also one generation ahead in time, and so can better portray certain things that I wouldn't because my century [that of Mira] was different and Mira is conservative in many ways, and couldn't express sringara in full. But this century is quite different, so Mallika can express that in a very open way (Sarabhai, Mrinalini).

The young Mira expresses all that comes with sringara in union, while the other one represents sringara in separation. For the analysis I am using a video registration of the performance, which is a three camera recording in a studio, without apparent stage or light design. It is not a registration of a stage performance, therefore we can assume retakes to perfect the video. It is striking that in

crucial moments for the expression of emotions, the video has a second transparent layer with a close-up of the dancers' faces. In this way sringara, being the main theme, is highlighted as otherwise the minute gestures of the face might be missed in a video. There are three additional dancers in folk costumes who represent Mira's social environment. The spatial design for multiple dancers is an innovative departure from the classical arrangement in Bharatanatyam, which is usually a solo performance.[10] In *Mira* it is employed to provide a more elaborate context for the predominant mood. The soundtrack comprises the original bhajans by Mira, later folk bhajans about her, an abstract *mridangam* beat with *bol* recitation,[16] as well as poetry recited by an unseen narrator and on one occasion by the young Mira herself. The lyrics employed in the soundtrack serve a contextualising function by actually telling the audience what Mira feels and what happens in her life.[17] I will recall some passages in my analysis. In this performance, to evoke sringara rasa, abhinaya is used along with story-telling. In the subsequent section we will see that not only facial movements and gestures are employed to represent sringara, but that the whole performance tells the story of Mira's life in order to convey the mood of great devotion and love beyond sanity.

It is stated in *Natya Shastra* that "Erotic Sentiment includes conditions available in all other Sentiments" (NS 319). Hence, in order to adequately represent the mood of sringara several other emotions and states are represented in the performance. Since the main theme is insanity caused by love, the performance begins in semi darkness to fierce music with hypnotic repetition 'people say Mira has become mad' announcing the direction of the story. Immediately after, the bright lights expose the dancer's face leading the audience straight towards sringara. As described in 1.1, brightness is associated with love (NS 318). First we see Mrinalini (the older Mira) casting glances "sideways, with a feeling of composure and happiness, the eyebrows slanting" (UB 59). From this moment the actual story starts with an introduction by the absent narrator that it is the time of *Holi* – a festival of colours, but Mira does not feel like playing with anyone. The narrator is female and tells the thoughts of Mira in the first person. The story that unfolds shows the difficulties of her life and inner rupture. Therefore, emotions such as fear arising from the cruelty of society, or wonder from imagining the awe-inspiring lover-god, will play a major part in portraying the complexity of sringara. It is important to note that the performance often features the young and the mature Mira at the same time. They do not represent different time periods of Mira's life but rather, two dimensions of her soul.

When Mallika (the young joyful Mira) enters, she dances in an expressively seductive way, with an enticing smile and more accentuated facial gestures than we see Mrinalini perform throughout the show. She cheerfully plays at the Holi festival while the mature Mira is contemplating. *Natya Shastra* distinguishes different signs of love for ladies, courtesans, and

maidens who have not “experienced the pleasure of intercourse” (NS 1058). The latter can experience eight stages of love: “longing, anxiety, recollection, enumeration of merits, distress, lamentation, insanity, sickness, stupor, and death”. Mallika adeptly expresses having romantic thoughts by “sportful movements, smiles and glances” with a free flow of unrestrained movement. She longs for her darling when she cannot “attain composure in stillness” but “enters and goes out of the place”, whereas Mrinalini is present on stage all the time with sustained movements (NS 1059-1065). When three dancers enter spiralling through the space in lavish folk costumes representing a wedding crowd, the mature Mira withdraws into her inner world with a worried expression and absent look. The narrator laments that she has to marry a mortal while at heart she has already been married to Krishna. Eventually she accepts the situation with composure and tranquillity, and joins the celebrations. The background song tells us that Krishna surely will make something good out of it.

Suddenly, to the accompaniment of frenzied beats and accelerating eerie vocals, we see the young Mira display profound distress when she is gesturally attacked by an angry family member. She falls to the ground in lamentation, her face expressing bhayanaka rasa (terror) with “her eyelids raised and kept fixed, the pupils gleaming and quivering”, her torso contracted, arms drawn inwards (UB 59). The mature Mira tries to protect her vulnerable youthful counterpart by deterring the aggressor with a strong upright position and hands stretched to the side in defence; that helps Mallika regain composure. She ponders that there is only love in her madness and that the world may see what they wish because she has finally found her beloved Krishna. She rises and dances frantically in fluctuating, oscillatory patterns across the entire performance area to the cheerful rhythm of a song which tells of the poisoned Mira who nevertheless happily dances for Krishna. The dance represents the insanity of a maiden's love with “steadfast gaze” alternating with “deep sighs” and failing to bring oneself “under control” (NS 1063). It accelerates until Mallika drops to the floor, presumably portraying the last stage of her love – death, which is said to arrive when all the means for achieving the union have failed and one is “burnt in the fire of love” (NS 1064).

When the narrator pleads to be taken to the house of her spouse Krishna, Mrinalini gracefully performs rasa in separation as if she had all the time in the world to indulge in luxuriating motions. Breathing deeply in recollection, with her eyes slightly closed, she exhibits different shades of sringara in separation by the flower hand gesture (sola-padma) on her chest and face. She then turns to the collapsed Mallika with a loving look in an attempt to resurrect her youthful persona. *Natya Shastra* says that a mature woman will show love with a “continuous look of blooming eyes, concealed smile and a down-cast face” (NS 1058). The tenderness displayed towards the child version of herself translates into deep devotion and trust in Krishna that he knows

what he is doing and will not let her die – literally and figuratively. When Mallika slowly raises, both dancers are in wonder – with the adbutha rasa displayed by “the eyelids curved slightly, the eyebrows raised in wonder and eyes delightfully opened wide” (UB 59). These are performed somewhat more powerfully by the young Mira with her lips opening in a smile. They both dance in joy and traverse the space in oblique patterns, expanding the space vertically with jumps, and eventually coming together in spirals of opposing directions. In the end the music slows down and they are both nearly still at centre stage, one in front of the other, becoming one whole person inside, united with Krishna. This results in a beautiful representation of the santam rasa which, as we have seen in 1.2, has a strong relationship with sringara.

A love affair with a god may seem sacrilegious for someone of a monotheistic background. In Hinduism however, the dividing line between religion and literature is very thin and the gods, or their avatars, are at once objects of deep spiritual devotion as well as fictional characters which can be equalled with present day movie idols, and so they are often fantasised about. Mrinalini admits having a strong connection with Krishna in real life, similar to the one she imagines Mira to have had:

> Since always, since I was born, I've seen Krishna in my dreams, and in my life. Every time I have trouble I ask him to clear it up for me. It is very instinctive, I didn't receive that from my upbringing. I certainly felt that Krishna was very near me and so I talk to him like a boyfriend, not really like a god (ead.).

She also admits to follow the *Natya Shastra* only to a certain extent: without distinction for inferior or superior characters, and with addition of her own imagination. We can see in the performance that an entire range of abhinaya is employed to represent different shades of the sringara rasa. More dynamically, it also breaks with the conventional solo choreography, providing a more intricate context for the portrayal of emotions, which intensifies the ideas conveyed by the performance. In the interview, Mrinalini says she had to find a new way to represent yet “another self, of which we all have several inside, though they don't manifest”. *Mira* represents those other selves explicitly, and is mostly a reflection of Mrinalini’s personal impressions. In her book *Creations,* she says that “there is a tremendous consciousness of myself in *Mira* … I had to sublimate that agony till it became an eternal problem that could be communicated”, but in an interview she refused to explain what specifically was going on in her life at that time, therefore any further interpretations must rest with the performance itself (72).

As explained before, sringara is the state one experiences as a result of erotic, platonic or

art-induced love, and the stylistic devices used in its representation are a means to evoke that elation. This performance uses an array of innovative methods to flesh out sringara in its totality. Next to the traditional rasa-abhinaya there is lyrical contextualisation and story-telling with movement that explores the space with geometrical forms in a design alternating between expansive and constricted. This is demonstrated when Mallika uses the whole stage and Mrinalini occupies a few areas only. Through subtle erotic depiction, *Mira* shows the sringara of a platonic devotional love towards a deity. In the following case studies we will see how the art-induced and the erotic sringara materialize.

4.2. Analysis of *Sampradayam*

The title of *Sampradayam* (2008) by Mallika Sarabhai translates roughly to mean history, tradition, or something that is passed on from generation to generation. It is an elaborate group performance in five parts to live music. At moments it features twelve dancers at the same time. For each of the parts there is a different set of monochromatic traditional Bharatanatyam costumes. Eight musicians, placed on a raised platform at the back of the stage, perform bhajans throughout the show. In *Sampradayam* these bhajans are recited in several Indian languages with English subtitles above the musicians. Between the parts musicians are given the stage to perform one of the bhajans without dance illustration. The bhajans are the main theme of the performance. However, more than to depict stories from them, the choreography emphasizes the lyrical expressiveness of the poems. Dancers perform shapes (karanas) with angular contours while moving in rows upstage to downstage and diagonally, in and out spirals, in an almost always symmetrical spatial design. These movements give the impression of stability and equilibrium, yet expose the diversity of composition with its tempo alternating between quick light jumps and slow lyrical gestures that stretch and extend to their fullest length. The space is explored vertically not only by the means of the jumps, but also with the scaffold holding the platform for musicians. The movement phrases of side bends, kicks and turns are all tightly synchronized, imparting the feeling of a unity, something that is full and intact. They are cheerful and for most part very energetic. The dance illustrates this quality in abstract movement, interwoven with occasional story telling. In a large choreography for a large auditorium, the minute gestures of the face, that we saw highlighted in *Mira* for example, inevitably get lost. It is therefore a choreographic choice to compose the dance on nritta, with its non-representational rhythmical movement.

Even though the main theme has a religious background, the performance is dynamically

entertaining with varied effort and contrasting dynamic qualities, and only one part of five presents the traditional story of love between Radha and Krishna. This is done in a more explicit way than what we have seen so far in descriptions of some examples offered earlier in this thesis. Even though the depiction of sringara does employ some of the facial expressions prescribed in theory, it is reserved for the short solo introduction to the scene when a female dancer (Radha) represents her love for Krishna and expresses grief that he is unfaithful "roaming in the forest, making love to all the women" – as the subtitles tell us. The remaining part of their encounter is performed with dance phrases that involve the whole body. The lyrics of the song tell us what the dancers are doing. Or in other words, the dancers are performing the story from the bhajan. Radha executes gestures that are reminiscent of calling somebody, and performs poses evocative of tender love care such as holding one's heart, embracing, rocking or stroking. Her heart calls Krishna by the means of her dance. When he arrives, she "feigns distress when actually there is delight" and promptly acts out "pretended anger" – as prescribed in the *Natya Shastra* – with knitting her eyebrows and turning away (NS 1013). Eventually Krishna convinces Radha that his love is genuine by wiping her tears and displaying similar postures as she did when depicting her love. Imitating the behaviour of a lover is considered a sign of genuine love, which clearly works for Radha as she brightens up and dances with Krishna in a dim bluish light of the forest (NS 1011). The dancers, dressed in sky blue costumes (one of the colours reserved for love, together with white), perform a duet, which is a rarity, especially when they are facing each other in a close swinging movement. Even though almost no traditional abhinaya for sringara rasa is employed, nor is there any physical contact between the dancers, the scene is very evocative of an erotic encounter. They pretend to exchange clothes, which is to signify the synthesis of wisdom and love, him and her.[18] There is an element of mystery left to their play – they stand very close to one another with Krishna's back towards the audience, his body concealing what happens when the two bodies, swinging from side to side, meet for a brief moment in an upright position. It is implied that the dancers might be touching their faces, or concealing kisses from the rest of the forest. The challenge to conventions in this seduction scene was so fascinating and exciting that I felt my heart racing, and noticed that the rest of the audience fixed their gaze on the stage in amazement. In synchronised and symmetrically opposite side bends and extended angular arm twirls, a frisky foreplay takes place, and the movements become more intricate and accelerate with the music. Radha frantically embraces Krishna with repetitive circular arm movements and Krishna energetically extends his arms as if through her hips, with palms shaking, fingers extended, until the music suddenly subsides and the two embrace in stillness, lights fading.

The predominant rasas employed are sringara (erotic), adbutha (marvellous) and hasya

(comic), but the work pursue all nine of them to an extent. They are also portrayed with nritta rather than rasa-abhinaya. Dancers form floor patterns in numerous constellations, with transitions into smaller and larger aggregations, jumps and spins. Every piece reflects the mood of the accompanying bhajan, yet without the melodramatic exaggerations still so common in contemporary classical Bharatanatyam. The music and light design fortify the atmosphere of each part. Sringara is predominant in all of them, and adbutha (marvellous) and hasya (comic) contribute towards its different shades. In the third part, the dancers perform devotional rituals by carrying a small temple onto the stage and burning candles and incense. The smoke is offered to the audience. This depiction is consistent with the characteristics of adbutha in *Natya Shastra*: "it is created by heavenly beings or events, temple, audience hall, illusory and magical acts" which result in the person having eyes wide open in amazement and a gentle smile (NS 336). As we have learned, not only the performance of the primary bhavas is necessary for the achievement of rasa. Determinants and consequents, such as those listed here, play an important role in creating the right context for a rasa to flow. Similarly, when depicting mirth, the focus lies in its determinants and consequents such as "change of dress" for each part, "moving the hips" or "holding sides" when, for example, performing a dance in celebration of goddess Paravati (embodiment of supreme female energy) in the last part (UB 42). This is not to say that facial gestures are not present, only that, due to the expansive spatial design, they give way to the more noticeable constituents of rasa. In *Sampradayam* the concept of rasas is employed in a much broader manner than in a traditional Bharatanatyam performance. In this way it more accurately reflects the concept of natya espoused by *Natya Shastra* – where dance, music and drama come together as a vehicle for rasa. Here, sringara materializes as a result of the skilful play between conventions, or a union between ideas, and as such can be likened to Abhinavagupta's approach where sringara is love that is caused by art (ibid. 2.1.1). When asked about the application of rasas in *Sampradayam* Mallika stated, "For me rasa is not only about abhinaya, it is in everything, and rasa theory is in relationships. In classical Bharatanatyam the actor doesn't engage with the audience eye to eye, but I do, and that instantly brings them in too" (Sarabhai, Mallika).

The absence of melodrama and the replacement of the illustration of a story by abstract movement constitute a bold departure from hundreds years of Bharatanatyam tradition. It has as many fans as adversaries, with plenitude of online reviews,[19] for *Sampradayam* has been one of the most popular productions of Darpana, running continuously since 2008 all over India and abroad. Some of the reviews attribute this popularity to the ability of the performance to preserve the traditional style, but to present it in a refreshingly new manner devoid of old style exaggerations.[20] Such an aesthetic shift is progressive as it reflects the tendency of moving away from rigid

prescriptions, yet retaining the beauty of three ancient art forms – dance, poetry and music. *Sampradayam* makes the importance of oral tradition clear by placing the chorus and the musicians on a pedestal above the dancers' heads. It avoids repetition of the stories, which the audiences are familiar with anyway, and instead translates them into abstract movement. In Mallika's words:

> *Sampradayam* is the celebration of the abstraction of Bharatanatyam and except for one song there is no story telling. It's about nritta, the pure dance, to this very celebratory music. They are celebrations with the body and each section employs the movements which are assigned to specific gods to connect with the mood of a particular god (ead.).

Mallika very skilfully combines the large movements, the codification of which is more general than that of the minor limbs, and generally abandons the minute gestures and facial expressions we find in *Natya Shastra*. This does not take away the appeal and refinement of Bharatanatyam but rather shows that it can be simply enjoyed in a more accessible way. Though Bharata Muni states that natya is to be understood by all sorts of people, he still holds high standards for the audience to be able to taste rasa. Mallika turns this notion around and makes Bharatanatyam enjoyable not by simplifying it but taking it to another level. By moving away from the mode of traditional representation she shows how potent the dance form can be by transforming itself into the performance language of a new century. Abstract movement has a long history in western contemporary dance, however performances of this kind are still very few and far between in India, and a fusion of both is mostly presented only in the west. *Sampradayam* cannot be described as a simple fusion. It is rather an independent development without a departure from the original steps but with plenty of improvisation on them. It may be a forerunner of a new style that is slowly emerging on the Indian dance scene, similar to the origins of modern dance from ballet. The title itself, meaning tradition, plays with the notion of traditional technique and presentation – both in dance and poetry. The innovative use of bhajans as a backdrop to abstract Bharatanatyam, together with the geometrical and architectural structure, which is simultaneously repetitive and sensitive, bring up the rasas in a new, subtle and balanced manner.

4.3. Analysis of *LDR*

Long Distance Relationship also known as *LDR* (2011) by Revanta Sarabhai, is about rasa in separation and all its different shades. There is no traditional abhinaya and the concept is expressed

in words and his unique raw dancing style, which he describes as "polymorphic practice". Its most striking features are perhaps the jagged lines his body assumes, which distort the symmetry of classical positions, and the asymmetric sequences of different movements on the left and right side of the body that give the impression of lopsided instability. He uses a range of contrasting shapes, such as angular – straight – curved or contracted – extended, performed at various levels from vertical to horizontal to oblique; a stark departure from the straight elongated lines begun from a vertical position, typical of classical Bharatanatyam. His movement is stripped off all decorative gestures, abstracting Bharatanatyam even further away from its traditional form. The performance is a collage of dance, theatre, video, text and soundscape. The fact that *LDR* was part of a masters graduation project for a university in England, might have lent a strong influence of contemporary western dance to it, or conversely has been the nourishing factor beyond the independent development of the form in general, or this specific choreographer in particular. Rigorously trained along Darpana standards, Revanta does not display his dexterity in his own work, the movement retaining only slim resemblance with the original karanas (ibid. 2.2). He holds a view on the abhinaya that it should reflect a feeling rather than create it:

> For me bhava is the expression, and it is the use of the expression that evokes a feeling in the audience. When I make work I don't think of the technique as something that will have an effect on the audience, but focus on the true feeling of the character and how a real person would feel in that situation. I ask myself, or the dancer, to feel a sense of anger, for example, rather than prescribe how to show it. I then might create movements to complement that, but they don't mean anything unless the feeling is imbibed. And that is an internal process of the performer, otherwise it comes out very mechanical. In *LDR* I was already working with the feelings that were internalised in real life. The idea was to make it visible to the audience, or rather to create a situation in which the audience could feel that (Sarabhai, Revanta).

This view corresponds with the generally accepted approach to bhava[21] that the personal state must precede the performer's actions in order for it to be experienced by the spectator (ibid. 2.1).

Revanta further explains on the website[22] dedicated to the project that "the performance takes cue from the demands on partners to perform relationship roles virtually and deals with a fundamental question – how can we find togetherness when living apart – through staging a multitude of voices that speak of waiting, desire and the silence in between separation" (ead.). At the start of the show, Revanta enters as if a late audience member and the musician, Sarathy

Korwar, reprimands him for being late as they have a show to run – that in itself being an interesting use of meta-theatre and self-reflexivity. He then tells a story from Indian mythology about a warrior sent into exile who convinces a rain cloud to carry a message to his wife. The music is a combination of live tabla drums and laptop DJing. At the backdrop there is an assortment of Skype video conferences, which often break, between several couples trying to maintain their relationships despite extensive travel. Revanta appearing on stage contrasts with the two dimensionality of the video.

Sringara in separation is the main theme of *LDR* and the performance represents its contemporary version through the use of contemporary stylistic devices such as collage and multimediality. The technology that is supposed to bridge the physical gap between couples, ironically, due to its technical limitations, contributes to misunderstandings. When Revanta performs movements reminiscent of caressing and holding, we almost feel the emptiness left after a Skype call fails (soka). Later, he dances with a hologram of another male dancer,[23] Ivan Perez, whose image gradually becomes fuzzy and blurry until he just walks off the stage leaving the real dancer in perplexity (vismaya). The message is that technology gives us only a perceived sense of closeness and cannot replace the real thing. Throughout the show his girlfriend is trying to reach him on the phone but time and again he is too busy to talk – performing at the moment. The time difference and being occupied with work adds to the frustration of not being able to connect, and of losing the partner (bhaya). Together with the musician Sarathy they playfully engage the audience in a mock show “So you think you can write a love letter” by relating the stories contained in them and asking for solutions (utsaha), eventually searching for Clone-A-Willy kit online (hasa). They give up trying to find unconventional solutions for loneliness when Revanta notices a red dress. He romantically dances with it, quite powerfully conveying the sense of longing. In one of the most evocative scenes he performs a bleak solo dance of despair, groping in the dark, throwing himself to the floor, with evocative sound scape of a chopped-up phone call (krodha). The empty space surrounds the dancer in an almost oppressive way. The absence and the presence are both depicted by the use of space and powerful movement as fundamental and inseparable notions in relationships (and dance). When asked about how he employs rasas in *LDR* Revanta explains:

> I didn't want it to be a show about a guy who misses his girlfriend and feels sad. I wanted the audience to think 'damn I really know how this feels like'. And this feeling is universal and so I wanted the show to convey that. Now, the navarasa are a spectrum, not separate things. They all permeate in an infusion of the right proportions to deliver that feeling. And santam is the canvas on which you paint (id.).

Revanta employs the elements of sringara in an even more general manner than we have seen in *Sampradayam.* He relies almost entirely on presenting determinants, consequents, and secondary bhavas – such as the enjoyment of objects of the other person, apparent lack of their company, hearing their words, playing with them online, and with audience in real time (to distract oneself from longing), discouragement, apprehension, dreaming, etc. – through text (talking and video) and music (live and soundscape). He employs nritta in place of rasa-abhinaya for the indication of different shades of sringara. Because any codification involves the knowledge of the governing rules for its decoding, and for the following appreciation, it is reserved for those who know the code. By departing from the rigid ancient rules of representation towards the form that reflects contemporaneity – in being more multilayerd yet less intricate within each layer – Revanta manages to successfully portray the universality of the feeling of separation for a much broader audience. His approach, evident in the above quote, that there are no individual disconnected rasas, and all nine of them blend into a specific feeling, goes in line with *Natya Shastra* stating that "Erotic Sentiment includes conditions available in all other Sentiments", and is apparent in the performance where a range of feelings is represented in order to convey the predominant mood (NS 319). The bhava types indicated in brackets in the above paragraph evoke their corresponding rasas with varied intensity and thus constitute sringara in separation in different proportions.

In search for the conveyable universality, Revanta sent out a hundred emails to a hundred friends of different ages and backgrounds asking them to make a short recording for their partners and actually send it to them, but also to permit him to use that in his creative process. This understanding manifests in the performance having two versions: for the western and Indian audiences. Initially made with the European audience in mind, created in England and developed in Holland, the show remains true to the internal feelings of the characters but also takes into account the surrounding context. The first version treats the stories from Indian mythology in a simplistic manner, whereas the later – elaborated in India into a full length evening programme – is more narrative and contains less sexual references, as well as abstracts the dance form in a milder manner. What both versions do however, is to convey the essence of the universal feelings humans experience in love across the globe regardless of background. Considerations pertaining to defining dance cross-culturally are also pointed out by Adrienne Kaepler in "Structured movement systems in Tonga".

Conclusion

Natya Shastra is a cook book, and just like most cook books does not describe the final flavour of a dish, but guides the cook how to get there. The long standing success of *Natya Shastra* lies in its ability to create a system in which the technical corresponds with the psychological and the spiritual – however complex they may be. By including all the other arts in the theatre, it creates a hypermedium able to express every human condition in any given period, ultimately becoming the reflection of its surrounding culture: “the history of the Indian arts speaks of the universal applicability of the theory in all the arts. Theatre itself ... is an all-inclusive category with several components and sub-systems” (NS xvii).

All through the text I have pointed out numerous loose threads to follow, as much to acknowledge the shortcomings of this research, as to indicate some directions to pick up in further research. Bharatanatyam's strong reliance on literature raises the question whether, and in what manner, dance can be classified as a postdramatic art. Next, if the story is removed from the representation, how abstract is the remaining abstract movement – since it has had such a long and ingrained codified history? Another interesting direction would be to explore dancing about dance in ancient and contemporary classical Indian dance. I have indicated the presence of meta-theatre and self-reflexivity both in *Sampradayam, LDR,* and several places treating theory.

Regarding the main research question – what is rasa and how it is applied – the outcome of this research is that rasa can be many things, which however, does not mean that anything goes. The theory, even though occasionally quite elusive in its metaphors, defines rasa as a state combining mental, emotional and spiritual aspects. That state is achieved by a mental, emotional and spiritual engagement of the spectator with what is presented to him. A particular kind of representation is required in order to evoke a particular kind of state. This can be achieved through either, or both, acting out (abhinaya) the emotions (bhava) that comprise the desired state, and representing that state itself through either, or both, portraying the state with rasa-abhinaya or nritta, and recreating the conditions conducive to that state with secondary bhavas (determinants, consequents and complimentary psychological states).

I would like to propose a unified view of rasa as being the outcome of intermediality. For the coherence of thought, what I consider intermediality to be is structured around two notions. The first addresses what is a medium – a physical carrier of information: text, film, painting, but also dance and music. When a performance is built on an interplay of different media – as is natya – it is by default inter-medial. Second notion addresses the concept of communication rather than

representation. Here intermediality refers to what happens as an outcome of different inputs and of constant mediation between the object (sending out signals via different media) and the receiver. When different media (constituents of rasa on a micro level, or different arts on a macro level) form a relationship, its outcome is sensory communication. This is natya producing rasa. Therefore, rasa can be understood as the outcome of intermediality.

Focusing on sringara in Chapter Three was a pragmatic choice. Sringara is said to comprise of all other rasas in different proportions, depending on its desired type and intensity. Therefore, in this limited space, it gave me the opportunity to describe the application of the other rasas in a nutshell, as well as to demonstrate that the nine rasas are a spectrum. Called erotic sentiment for the features of its means of representation, sringara can denote the relish of not only erotic and platonic love, but also that which is inspired by art (see chapter 2.1.1).

Rasa theory is a ready analytical tool for performing arts, and in fact has been applied outside of them as well.[24] The potential of rasa in contemporary dance lies in its applicability for composition as well as for aesthetics and philosophy. Regardless of whether the plot is present or absent in a contemporary dance performance, it is generally pervaded by emotion. Rasa theory can dissect that emotion into its constituents. In the instance of non-representational contemporary dance, it can provide architectonics for abstract design. As it explains the science of planning and constructing the plot, rasa theory can be adapted analogously to the latter, as well as directly in the aforementioned pieces containing a plot. In each instance, or in their combination, rasa theory can serve as a matrix for composition. With regard to aesthetics, rasa is a philosophical concept which addresses the fundamentals of an aesthetic experience, the agency of art and its relationality, and human psychological processes. As such it can be widely applied in theory of contemporary dance.

This thesis was written as an attempt to create a guide book which would explain what I, admittedly, have not fully grasped myself. It was an exercise in analytical thinking, gathering and processing research data, and a final work for the master’s programme. I have examined copious amounts of material, confusing not only due to the plenitude of foreign terminology, and totally alien abstract concepts, but also because the literature on the subject is obscure, with poor referencing, insufficient translations, and contradictory commentaries.[25] The subject being relatively unknown, required the introduction of auxiliary topics, which, vast in their nature, had to be thoroughly research in order to bring out the essentials. It took nearly a year to produce, including six months of field work. The limitations of my research largely reflect the complexity and paradoxes of its object for, as sage Bharata aptly states, it is not possible to know all that is related to theatre (NS 281). I hope this mini-compendium will serve as a starting point and a reference guide for further investigation to whoever finds the concept of rasas enchanting and wishes to

explore it within their own scope. I also hope that this work can be useful in providing theoretical background to Bharatanatyam students, and academics within the field of dance alike.

Appendices

Appendix 1.

Glossary of Sanskrit terms.

Abhinaya – acting technique.

Adbhutam – marvellous sentiment.

Ananda – eternal bliss which accompanies the ending of the rebirth cycle in Hindu philosophy.

Arangetam – the first public performance of a dancer.

Bhajan – devotional song.

Bhakti – practice of devotion, prayer.

Bhava – to pervade, to infuse.

Bhayanaka – terrible sentiment.

Bibhatsa – odious sentiment.

Bol – mnemonic syllable which defines rhythmic pattern in Indian music.

Hasya – comic sentiment.

Karana – classical dance pose, or movement transition.

Karunya – pathetic sentiment.

Mridangam – Carnatic hand drum.

Mudra – hand gesture in Indian classical dance.

Natya – the trinity of dance, music and theatre.

Navarasa – the nine rasas.

Nritta – non-representational rhythmical movement.

Rakshasa – man-eating demon.

Rasa – juice, essence.

Raudra – furious sentiment.

Santam – tranquillity, or peaceful sentiment.

Shastra – rules, or the science of.

Sringara – erotic sentiment.

Tala – rhythmical structure.

Trimurti – trinity of gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

Veena – Carnatic plucked strings.

Vira – heroic sentiment.

Appendix 2.

Execution of rasas through facial expression.

Reprinted from *Understanding Bharatanatyam* (n.pag.).

Appendix 2 continued.

Execution of rasas by facial expressions.

From *Understanding Bharatanatyam* (59).

Sringara (erotic rasa):

"With a feeling of composure and happiness, the eyebrows slanting and the eyes glancing sideways".

Hasya (comic):

"In turn contracting and expanding the eyebrows, the pupils quivering in confusion".

Raudra (furious):

"The look cruel, the eyes reddened and rough, the eyelids and pupils motionless, the eyebrows curved".

Karunya (pathetic):

"The eyelids lowered, the pupils gazing at the tip of the nose, the eyes filled with tears".

Vira (heroic):

"The eyes radiant, well opened, the pupils steady and majestic".

Adbhutam (marvellous):

"The eyelids curved slightly, the eyebrows raised in wonder, the eyes delightfully opened wide".

Bibhatsa (odious):

"The eyelids lowered crookedly, the pupils moving (literally jumping), the upper and lower eyelids close to each other".

Bhayanaka (terrible):

"The eyelids raised and kept fixed, the pupils gleaming and quivering".

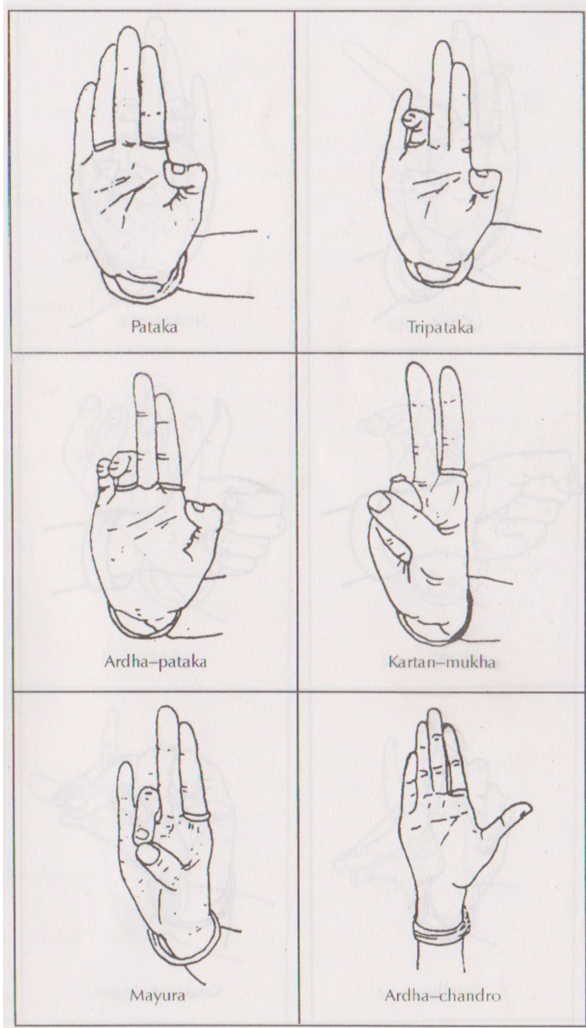
Santam (peace, tranquillity):

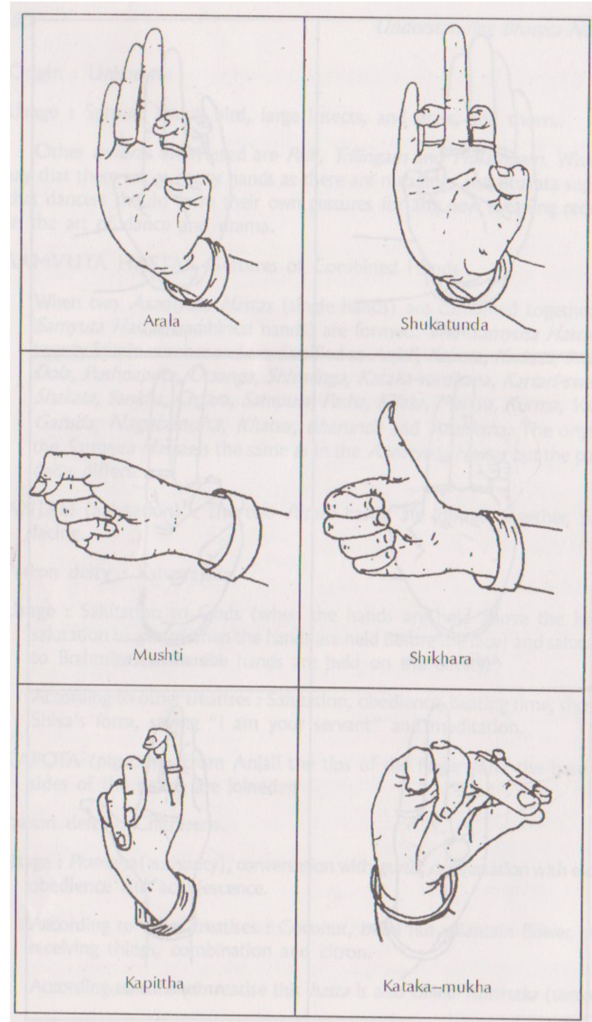
"The eyelids closed gradually, the eyes in gentle movement, the pupils moving towards the corners" (UB 59).

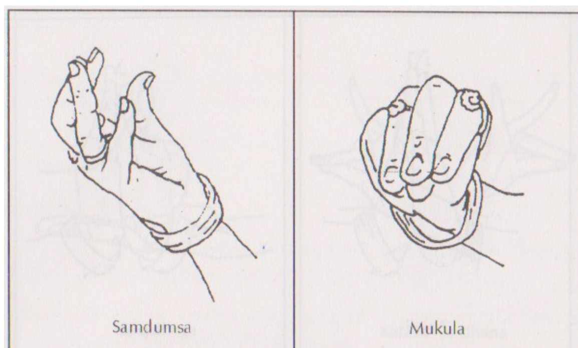
Appendix 3.

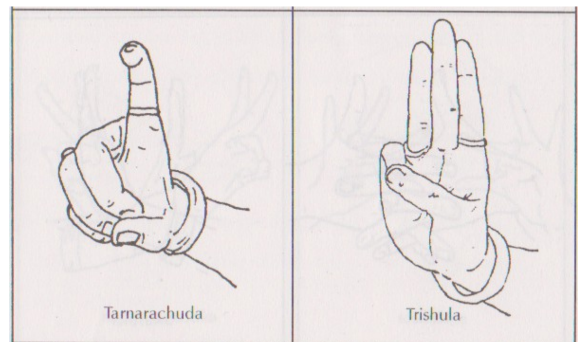
Single hand gestures in Bharatanatyam.

Reprinted from *Understanding Bharatanatyam* (n.pag.).









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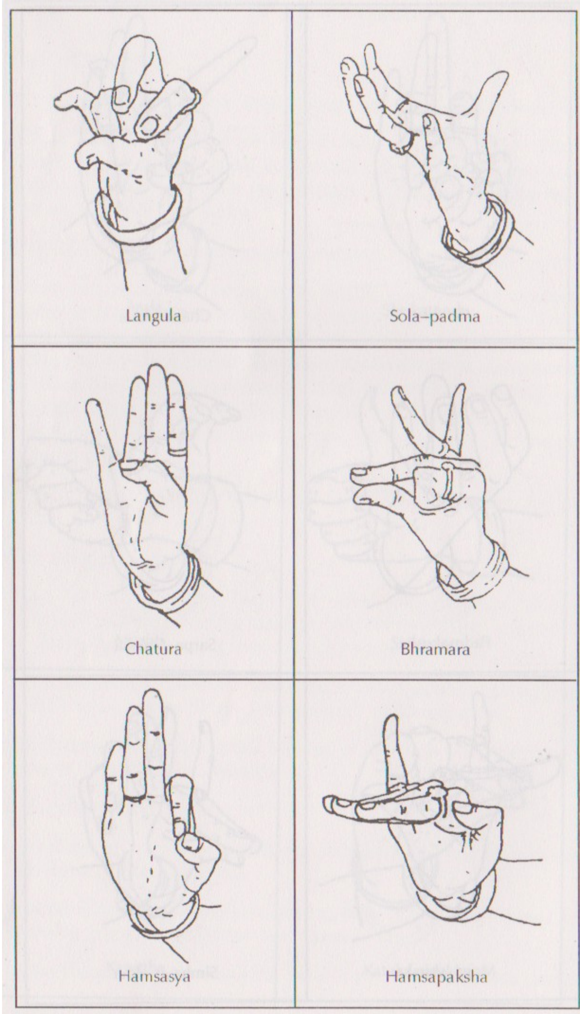
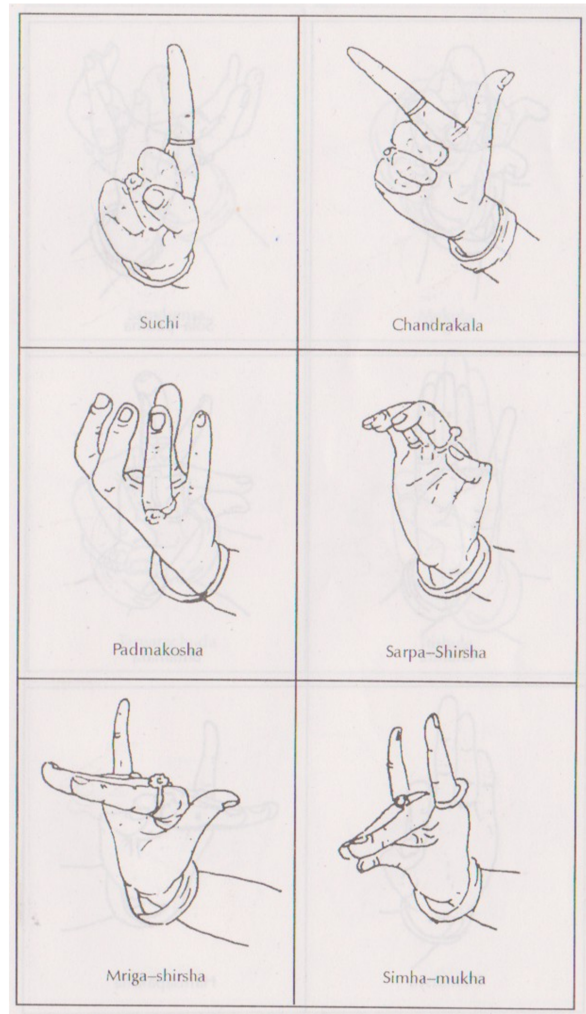
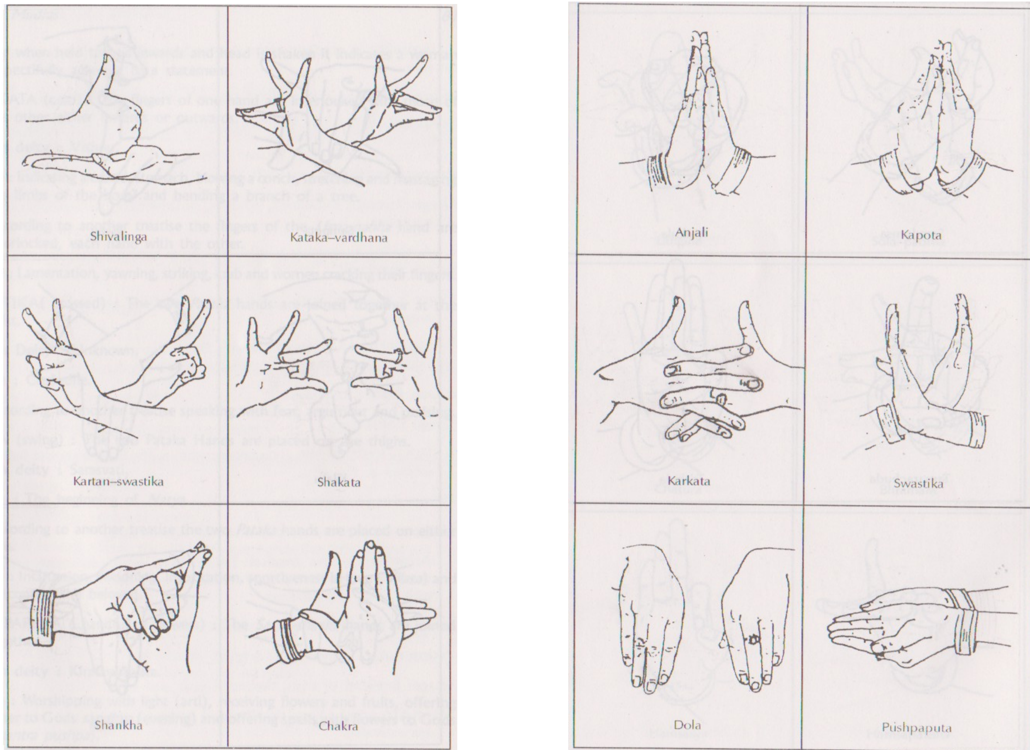


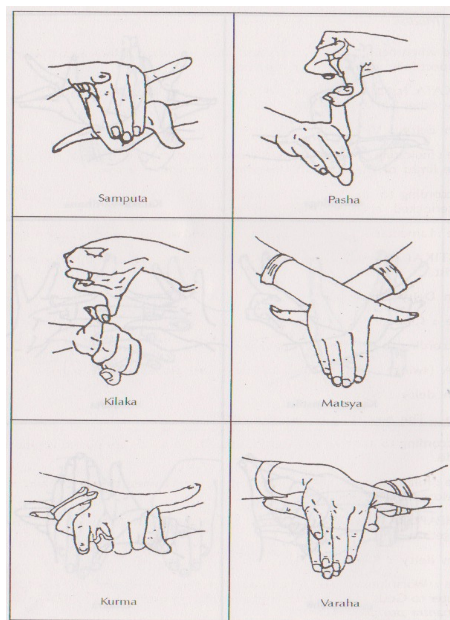


Appendix 4.

Examples of combined hand gestures in Bharatanatyam.

Reprinted from *Understanding Bharatanatyam* (n. pag.).





Appendix 5.

Traditional sequence in a Bharatanatyam performance**.**

Abstracted from

http://bharatanatyamclassic.blogspot.nl/2010/08/performance-of-dancers-in-bharatnatyam.html

Arangetam is the first public performance of a dancer upon completion of a seven year daily training (or longer when less intensive). It lasts two to three hours with a pause and has a prescribed composition to test the dancer's abhinaya and *nritta* (dance steps and body postures), as well as the mastery of the guru (dance teacher). It is always a solo performance. The presence of a singer and musician is required. The singer (or singers) will recite the lyrics of the stories, often in Sanskrit, which is not widely understood. Violin and *mridangam* (Carnatic hand drum) are compulsory, whereas *veena* (Carnatic plucked strings) and flute are optional. Ankle bells are also mandatory as they are considered to be devotional items. A small auditorium is preferred in order to be able to appreciate rasa-abhinaya. The structure is as follows:

- Either *pushpanjali* or *alaripu* serve as an introduction and the opening scene. The first is a short dance prayer and salutation to the guru and the audience, and also is intended as a warm-up. The second is just an abstract warm up to a specific *tala* – a rhythmical structure, with an increasing complexity of movement.
- *Jatiswaram* is an abstract piece performed to a different tala, with more elaborate footwork and body postures (nritta).
- *Shabdam* presents a story of praise for a god or a king in slow movements.
- *Varnam* is usually based on one of the epic or religious scriptures and can have sringara as a main theme. This is the most important piece where a dancer is expected to show off all the best he/she can. There is room for personal interpretation and individual expression.
- Pause.
- *Padam* - in a slow pace the dancer's abhinaya is put to test in depiction of a narrative that explores different shades of sringara. While the story is about a hero and a heroine, on stage it is only the heroine that confides her feelings, and dilemmas caused by the hero, in a conversation with a friend, who also serves as an intermediary between the couple.
- *Ashtapadi* is based on *Gita Govinda* (introduced in chapter 3.2) and explores the twelve different states of mind of Krishna in his love conquests: joyful, careless, bewildered, tender, longing, indolent, cunning, abashed, languishing, intelligent, blissful and ecstatic. It is followed by *devaranama* which is composed mostly of abhinaya and presents a piece of simple devotional literature meant for enlightenment of simple men by “preaching

philosophy of Love, Devotion and Peaceful Co-Existence".

This is a compulsory structure for an official arangetam. All the other occasions and types of performance have a structure based on it but are usually shorter and can include in the first part only varnam and either of the other three elements, and in the second part mangalam and either of the other three. Some performances do not include a pause and consist only of the introduction, the ending, and any of the other six parts. Modern Bharatanatyam (not to be confused with contemporary classical Bharatanatyam) performances often intentionally play with this structure or abandon it altogether.

Appendix 6.

Who is who in Hinduism – simplified sketch. Personal notes.

PARASHAKTI – divine feminine creative power, agent of all change, present also in the male potential.
SVAYAM BHAGAVAN – Sanskrit theological term for the concept of the Absolute, represented by The One Eternal Supreme Being.

TRIMURTI – three forms of Svayam Bhagavan:
- BRAHMA – creator.
- VISHNU – maintainer and preserver.
- SHIVA – destroyer and transformer.

Spouses:
- SARASWATI – knowledge, arts, nature.
- LAKSHMI – wealth and prosperity (material and spiritual).
- PARAVATI – destruction and rejuvenation, power and beauty, benevolent householder.

GODS: **VISHNU*** (riding on bird Garuda) — **LAKSHMI** (a.k.a. Maya)

Incarnations: (avatars)
KRISHNA (devotee of Shiva)
RAMA
KALKI
KAMA
MOHINI (female avatar)

RADHA
SITA
PADMA
RATI

Vishnu Purana depicts him awakening and becoming both Brahma – to create the world, and Shiva – to destroy it.

SHASTA (the teacher) *(offspring)*

SATI *(mother)*

GODS: **SHIVA** (a.k.a. Rudra) — **PARAVATI**

(offspring)
GANESHA (with elephant head) & KARTIKEYA

avatars:
NATARAJA (Lord of Dance)
HANUMAN (with ape-like face)
(RAMA – according to some sects)

DURGA (demon fighting)
KALI (ferocious)
CHANDI (a.k.a. Maa Durga, collection of all demi-gods and the Trimurti, represented black riding a lion)
10 MAHAVIDYAS (born from Sati)
52 Shakti Peethas (seat of Shakti as energy)
9 forms of goddess Paravati

GODS: **BRAHMA** (a.k.a. Vaagish – Lord of Speech and Sound) — **SARASWATI** (a.k.a. Vaac Devi – Goddes of Speech and Knowledge)

GAYATRI (originally came into being as a hymn to a sun god Surya)
or
SAVRITI

(incarnations and offspring)

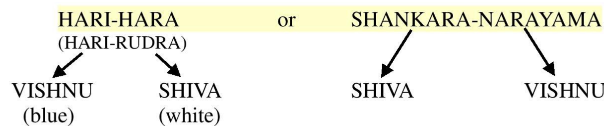
4 KUMARAS
(celibacy)

10 PRAJAPATIS
(The Lords of Creatures presiding over procreation, whom Brahma created from his mind)

SHATUPA
(daughter made of different parts of his body. Can take hundred forms)

DHARMA or YAMA
(god of death)
ADHARMA
KRODHA
LOBHA
…

EXAMPLE OF COMBINED DIETY FORMS:



Abbreviations

CA – Pandey, Kanti C. *Comparative Aesthetics, (Indian Aesthetics).* 4th ed. Varanasi: Chowkhamba Press, 2008.

NS – Puṣpendra Kumāra Śarmā, Abhinavagupta Fl., and Manomohana Ghoṣa. *Nāṭyaśāstram = Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharatamuni*. Rev. & Enl. 2nd ed. Delhi: New Bharatiya Book, 2010.

UB – Sarabhai, Mrinalini. *Understanding Bharatanatyam*. 10th ed. Ahmedabad: Darpana Publications, 2013.

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Performances

LDR by Revanta Sarabhai, 2011. Roehampton University London, Korzo Productiehuis Den Haag, Darpana Productions Ahmedabad. Video registration.

Sampradayam by Mallika Sarabhai, 2008. Darpana Productions, Ahmedabad. Video registration.

Mira by Mrinalini Sarabhai, 1980. Darpana Productions, Ahmedabad. Video registration.

Front cover image

Navras 1 by Sumit Mehndiratta, 2011. Acrylic on canvas. Private collection of Aleksandra Chmiel, Leiden.

Notes

1. It may strike the reader that some quotations of one line are referenced across several pages – i.e. (NS 15, 19). That is on the account that the present edition includes Sanskrit text, Romanised text and English translation with explanatory notes, in-line.
2. http://www.darpana.com
3. http://www.kadamb.org
4. *Natya Shastra* holds high standards for the spectator, assuming that experiencing a rasa is only possible when certain requirements are met. The necessary attributes of a qualified spectator are described in Chapter XXVII *Success of Dramatic Production* of *Natya Shastra*, and require a knowledge of arts, aesthetics and languages, the intellectual capabilities of concentration and understanding, the emotive aspects such as interest in performance, and an identification with the human condition, among many (NS 1173).
5. Hand gestures are elaborated in Chapter Two. Appendices 3 and 4 contain images and names of the basic hand gestures.
6. Facial expressions are elaborated in Chapter Two. Appendix 2 contains images and names of the nine facial expressions representing the nine rasas.
7. Drama is to be understood in terms of natya – the trinity of dance, music and literature. Bharatanatyam later developed as a temple dance and its purpose was primarily religious. I discuss the origin of dance as an independent art form in section 2.2.1.
8. Masson and Patwadrahan state that the other version of *Natya Shastra* discussed by Abhinavagupta most likely included interpolations by other scholars, often thought of as part of the original writings by Bharata Muni. Abhinavagupta was aware of this; he acknowledged in his own writing that even though Bharata Muni does not delineate santam rasa as such, he gives a descriptive account of it (92).
9. A detailed description of the components of each primary and secondary bhava, together with their execution, can be found in Chapter VII of *Natya Shastra.*
10. See Appendix 5 for the composition of traditional Bharatanatyam performance.
11. http://www.britannica.com/biography/T-Balasaraswati
12. Kalakshetra literally means a holy place of arts. Purist as it is, the academy requires its students and visitors to wear traditional Indian clothes. Even in the dorm jeans and t-shirts are not allowed. http://www.kalakshetra.in/
13. This summary is liberally based on *The Continuum Companion to Hindu Studies* by Jessica

Frazier. It was approved by Prof. Suresh Desai for accuracy.

14. See Chapter II *The Vedic Period* of A.A. Macdonell's classic work *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (Macdonell 29-39).
15. Nassbaum invokes the ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes Laertius, who defined himself as a citizen of the world and refused to be identified by the place or society of his origin (ead. 52). She defines a “world citizen” as a person “whose primary loyality is to human beings the world over, and whose national, local, and varied group loyalties are considered distinctly secondary” (Nassbaum 9).
16. Mridangam, as introduced in Appendix 5 on traditional sequence of Bharatanatyam performance, is a type of Carnatic hand drum. Bols are mnemonic syllables which define rhytmic pattern in Indian music, often recited at a fast speed instead of lyrics.
17. The songs and narration are in Hindi and Gujarati and were translated into English for my use by a native speaker Nipun Parikh.
18. The song tells us that Krishna offers his yellow cloth, traditionally associated with wisdom, an attribute of his. Radha offers her blue garments, a color associated with love and sringara.
19. See Leela Venkateraman's article “Mixed response” in *The Hindu:* http://www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/dance/mixed-response/article1089809.ece
20. See the review by Devesh Soneji, Professor of South Indian Religions at McGill University in Montreal, Canada: http://sampradayabhajan.blogspot.nl/
21. It is not clear from the *Natya Shastra* whether the actor experiences rasa, or has to experience rasa in order to evoke it in the spectator, as Bharata only approaches this matter on the level of bhavas (ibid. 2.1). In their commentary *Santarasa,* Mason and Patwardhan explain that there are opposing views on the matter, with some factions holding that “the aesthetic enjoyment of rasa takes place in an actor” and others maintaining that the actor “manifests the artificial effects” of emotions and never “relishes any rasa whatsoever” for he can not, for example, kill on stage (170). In the latter case however, it follows that the actor must be invested in a feeling of killing to the point he is able to evoke that feeling, and a resulting rasa, in a spectator. But perhaps rigorous training, excellent skills and years of experience can emulate that.
22. http://ldr.revantasarabhai.com/
23. Representing a homosexual relationship on stage is in itself a very brave move and a political statement considering India's criminalising laws towards homosexuality.
24. Marina Warner applies rasa theory in her book *No Go the Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling and*

Making Mock, which explores the function of fear in literature. Sumit Mehndiratta uses the rasa theory as a matrix in abstract painting, as seen in *Navras 1* on the cover of this thesis.

25. I encourage the reader, wherever possible, to refer to the original texts for an entertaining and insightful read. The language employed in the *Natya Shastra*, as well as in other source texts such as *Santarasa,* is somewhat old fashioned, yet perfectly understandable, and very often quite amusing – like the description of bibhatsa rasa (ibid. 1.1), or other interesting passages: "O the sinless one, you with your one hundred sons" (NS 16). Abhivagupta's *Philosophy of Aesthetics* in *Santarasa* literally flows with debauchery: "the three makras (ordinarily forbidden acts) – wine (Siva-rasa), meat and love making – when combined together, give the highest bliss (Ananda). This ritual expands the heart, by inducing a state from complete freedom of desire, since one's body and mind are mutually satisfied", and the editors are far from being bashful in explaining possible meanings of the original Sanskrit text: "the face of Shakti is the most important chakra of all, and it would seem that the man ejaculates in the mouth of the woman ... The semen should be passed back and forth from the mouth of the woman to the mouth of the man, and finally poured into into a consecrated vessel", we learn from the notes (42).

Front cover image: *Navras 1* by Sumit Mehndiratta, 2011. Acrylic on canvas. Private collection, Leiden.