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AESTHETIC CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN INDIA AND SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract

The countries in South Asia have a cementing bond and a shared history as being a culture cluster. But today this bond is loosened. The competitive egoism that makes them indulged in aggressive nationalism has weakened somewhat the cultural affinity and commonality. They are making mistakes by foregrounding individuality, forgetting their own indigenous collecting thinking. For improving relations, they need to forget and forgive the mistakes of one another. They need to take lesson from the Europe, North America and South America continents which decided to tread on the path of mutual cooperation, forgetting their heinous history of World Wars. South Asia also needs to follow the same path of mutual cooperation, focussing on the exchange of cultural heritage. At this juncture we would like to clarify that the present attempt does not mean to offer any theory. The present paper is an attempt at sharing how the various arenas of Indian aesthetic venture were once part of the countries of South Asia, how they established a bond of relationship between them and how even today they, going beyond the existing domain, can help India and the countries of South Asia come together.

Indian aesthetics is impregnated with puruṣārthas (the four ends of life) --dharma artha, kama and moksa(righteousness, worldly possessions, desires and liberation). All Indian theorists have preserved the tradition i their own ways. In his NāyaśāstraBharata (2nd century BCE) holds that dramatic presentation primarily aims at giving rise to rasa (aesthetic sentiment) in the aesthete and later this experience is followed by moral improvement. He further says that dramatic presentation imparts harṣa (pleasure) to all who are unhappy, tired, bereaved and ascetic. The disciples of Bharata, after witnessing the drama, and analyzingthe effect it has on them, realize

that it brings about identification with the focus of the dramatic situation, to the effect that the audience realize through experience (because of generalization) that the four recognized objects or four ends of life, dharma, artha, kāma, mokṣa ought to be pursued. Bhāmaha (6th century) states that kāvyā (literature) promotes puruṣārthas (four ends of life)—dharma, artha, kāma, mokṣa (righteousness, worldly possessions, desires, salvation). Vāmana (8th century) mentions kīrti and prīti in the first section of the first chapter of his Kāvyaśāstra. He holds that “kāvyā, when excellent, accomplishes perceptible as well as imperceptible results,—bringing about, as it does, pleasure and fame.”⁶ Thus he uses prīti in the sense of aesthetic pleasure as one of the purposes of poetry, the other being kīrti (the reputation). Mammata (10th century), describing explicitly kāvyapūjāna (the purpose of literature), says that kāvyā is for attaining yaśa (fame), artha (wealth), vyavahāra (practical knowledge), śivetarakṣati (destruction of evil), sadyahparamānand (aesthetic pleasure), and for attaining kāntā (instructions). Of these six purposes or functions of kāvyā, described in the verse, the first four are applicable to the poet while the remaining two apply to sahr̥daya (the reader). Like Bhāmaha and Vāmana, Ānandavardhana (9th century) and Abhinavagupta (10th century-11th century) and Pandiaraja Jagannatha (16th century) talk of prīti in the sense of aesthetic pleasure as one of the purposes of kāvyā. Rajshekhara (10th century) in his treatise also holds ānand (aesthetic pleasure) as the purpose of kāvyā in his own way.

Bharata's theory of rasa consists in the fact that it has erected its magnificent edifice on the solid foundation of the commonality of bhāva (emotional states). It has three factors-- kāraṇa (causes, such as the surroundings, the object of emotion) kārya (effects such as physical reactions brought forth by emotions) and saha-carībhāva (accompanying emotional states) which in kāvyā are known as vibhāva (determinants or stimulus of the rise of an emotional state) anubhāva (physical constituents expressive of what is going on in the heart or the mind of main characters) and vyabhicāribhāvas (transitory emotional states which go along with and consequently reinforce prevailing mood or emotional disposition) respective

The rasa siddhānta is based on the four kinds of abhinaya(acting/expression)— āngikaabhinaya (voluntary non verbal expression) to depict emotions/feelings of a character being played by the actor, vācikaabhinaya (verbal expression) to express emotions/feelings, tone, diction, pitch of a particular character, āhāryaabhinaya (costume and stage expression) to enhance expression, sāttvikaabhinaya (involuntary non-verbalexpression) expressed by the presence of tears, mark of horripilation, change of facial color, trembling of lips, enhancing of nostrils) to express the deepest emotions of a character. Thus the main topic dealt with in the Nāṭyaśāstra is the harmonious and creative use of language-- both verbal and non-verbal— which makes the expression a highest kind of poetry.

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According to Bharata, each one of us is fitted with a built-in structure of sthāyībhāvas (the permanent emotional state) which are the modified forms of basic drives or instincts as a result of centuries of evolutionary process of humanization and social living. These sthāyībhāvas which are chiefly eight in number— rati(delight), śoka (sorrow), krodha (anger), utsāha(energy), bhaya(fear), hāsa (laughter), jugupsā (disgust) --are heightened to rasadaśā (a relishable state) by the poet so that we have one rasa corresponding to each of them. The corresponding rasas of the sthāyībhāvasareśṛṅgāra (erotic love), vīra (heroism), karuṇa (pathos), hāsyā (laughter), bībhatsa (disgust), bhayānaka (fear), raudra (wrath), and adbhuta (wonder). A rasa is a result of a bhāva evoked by abhinaya (histrionic representation) of the vibhāva, anubhāvaand vyabhicāribhāvas. Bharataholds :

Nāṭya ,as I have devised, is lokavṛttānukaraṇam(imitation of actions and conducts of people), endowed with various bhāvas (emotional states) and avasthās (situations). This will relate to actions of men, good, bad and indifferent, and will give courage, amusement and happiness as well as hitopdeśa (good counsel) to them all.

(Bharata.I.114)

Nāṭya will thus be instructive to all, through bhāvas depicted in it, and through rasas (sentiments) arising out of it.

(Bharata.I.115)

...human nature with its joys and sorrows is depicted by means of abhinaya (histrionic

representation) like (i.e., vācīkābhīnaya (verbal representation), āṅgīkābhīnaya, āṅgīkābhīnaya (physical representation), and sattvīkābhīnaya (psycho-physical representation), it is called nāṭya.

(Bharata.I.122)

In his Abhinavabhāratī, a commentary on the Nāṭyaśāstra, he holds that rasānubhūti takes place through impersonalization or universalization. According to him, the sāmājika has within him purvavāsanās (latent impressions of emotions experienced previously). The sthāhibhāvas lie dormant in the form of vasanā. When he reads or watches such a clear abhinaya of appropriate vibhāvas, anubhāvas and vyabhicāribhāvas, these vāsanās are evoked and developed to such a pitch that they are realised in their universal form, devoid of personal or individual qualities (sadhāraṇīkaraṇa). Accordingly, the sthāyībhāva becomes the respected sentiment of ordinary men and women. In the impersonalised state, the sāmājika transcends his subjective, objective and neutral states and has ekākībhāva (single sentiment). Here vibhāvas, anubhāvas and vyabhicāribhāvas and sthāyībhāvas, all abandon their local, individual or temporal associations or limitations and acquire a sort of universalization rather than sādharmaṇīkaraṇa (generalization). It is because of this process of impersonalization in the mind of the saḥṛdaya, the rasa experience takes place, giving rise to repose in the mind of the sāmājika.

In the process of rasa experience the sāmājika turns from laukik (worldly) into alaukik (supra-human) and hence now he experiences aesthetic pleasure even in weeping. At this juncture the sāmājika is neither subjective, nor objective, nor neutral. Here it is noteworthy that the sāmājika transcends the world due to the liquefaction of citta. Citta is like sealing wax and gets melted in the company of heat and finally turns into a liquid form. Now rajas and tamas are also liquefied and so citta experiences universal rhythm followed by rasa. Now citta transcends the worldly limits. It is rajas and tamas that makes citta have different experiences of life. They limit the realization of citta but the moment these guṇas are melted, the limitations of citta are removed and we have rasa. The liquefaction of citta takes place after rajas and tamas get subdued for the time being, affording scope for the sattva to inundate the inner consciousness.

Such a highly refined art might have earned so enthusiastic an appreciation in South Asia. This theory must have attracted the writers of South Asia, also for the simple reason that their emotional state is very akin to the natives of India.

... theatre in Asia is conceived of primarily as a performing art, the text is not accorded priority, and there is little tendency to look first at a play in terms of its meaning. The theatrical art is regarded as a whole. Thus the meaning of a play may be stated through elements of form, or conversely, certain meanings will imply expression through certain forms.... In Asian theatre, colour, rhythm, harmony and balance are legitimate concerns of artist and audience.

Kapoor xiii

The classical South Asian dancer, equipped with a repertoire of gesture language, alternates between nṛtta (pure dance), nṛtya (interpretive dance) and natya (dance with a dramatic element). Traditional theatre throughout South Asia is a combination of music, dance, mime, stylized speech, and spectacle. The classical and folk actor must be a dancer, a singer, and a mime in one.

Even folk performers follow some of its conventions; e.g., the Kandyan dancers of Sri Lanka preserve some of the whirls and spins described in the Nāṭyaśāstra. Despite the influence of the different religious waves that swept the subcontinent through the centuries, the forms of South Asian dance and theatre were always able to preserve their ancient core.

I visited Burma in 2016 during my visit to Manipur and came to know about its borrowed dance-drama forms “from neighbouring India. Here Sangīta, a Sanskrit term is used to denote classical theatre of Thailand. Thai dance and drama is very similar to those mentioned in the Nāṭyaśāstra. The shadow play known as WayangKulit was introduced to Indonesia along with other aspects of Hindu culture during great period of Hinduization” (Bowers 218). Even Japanese theatre seems to be at least partly indebted to Indian influence”(Bowers 321). Bharata’s Nāṭyaśāstra which was available to the classical Malaysian culture without Abhinavagupta’s celebrated commentary Abhinavabhārati guided the Malaysian art.

Like Indian aesthetics, Indian art and literature has had relationship with the countries of South Asia. J C Sharma in his paper in a book the Mekong-Ganga Axis edited by Prof Kapil Kapoor reproduces the following quotation from a famous book L’Inde Civilisatrice: Aperçu Historique by Sylvan Levi to see the traces of Indian art, literature and aesthetics in the world:

The expansion of Indian civilization to those countries and islands of the Orient where Chinese civilization, with strikingly similar aspirations seemed to arrive ahead of it, is one of the outstanding events in the history of the world, one which has determined the destiny of a good portion of mankind. “Mother of Wisdom” India gave her mythology to her neighbours who went to teach it to the whole world. ... Mother of Law and Philosophy, she gave to three quarters of Asia a god, a religion a doctrine and art. She carried her sacred language, her literature, her institutions into Indonesia, to the limits of the known world, and from there they spread back to Madagascar and perhaps to the coast of Africa where the present flow Indian Immigrants seems to follow the faint traces of the past....” (Quoted in Mittal&Bhushanxiii)

The traditional dance and shadow puppet theatres in many South East Asian regions such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Java still present the themes of Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata in their own artistic grandeur. The Jakarta puppet-shadow plays such as WyangKulit or WayuangKulit and the WayangPurwa uses human characters instead of puppets. The music orchestra of Zakartana theatre is called gamelan. The latest versions have performance not the narrative. In Bali, both the performative and narrative forms exist. Here Rāmākathā is performed in front of the temple which houses a formless deity called Ananta. Despite Thailand officially being a Buddhist country, it continues to relish the essential human values of Rāmāyaṇa through its Khon and Lakhon forms of dance-drama tradition based on Ramakien, the Thai version of Rāmāyaṇa.

There theatre exists in three forms: shadow puppet theatre, masks dance dramas and ballet theatre. The Hikayat Seri Rāma. It is performed with the help of the shadows of puppets made out of leather. The occasion of performance is is the wedding or the seven-day long harvest season. The Laotian performance text of PhraLakPhraRām (Sri Lakṣmaṇa Sri Rama) manifests itself through music, images, dance drama and painting. The text is oral. In Kambodia, Ramakerti, known through the stone images of the Angkorvat group of temples. The performance media are dance drama called khols, shadow puppets and the ballet. In the Myanmarian the Rāmavatthu and Rama Ṇagyinhave extensively Indian Rāmāliḷās as the context of performance.

The two Hindu epics, the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata, storehouses of dramatic personae of traditional dramas, have been absorbed by these countries as part of their own cultural heritage. Some dance forms and gesture vocabulary that died out in their land of birth have been preserved in Bali. For a discussion of the dance and theatre of Southeast Asia, it is interesting to note the different names in different South-East Asian versions of this Indian epic. Here Javanese Rāmāyaṇais known as RāmāyaṇaKākawin. In Cambodia, it is known as Rāmakerti in Laos as PhraLakPhra Ram (Sri Lakṣmaṇa Sri Rāma), in Malaysia as Hikayat Seri Rāma, in Indonesia (Bali) as Rāmāyana and in Thailand as Rāmāyana. If one sees the aesthetic ingredients of various traditional and artistic interpretations of these Indian epics in different South-East Asian versions, one receives an all-Asian intonation beyond their Indian identity. Southeast Asian countries embraced Buddhism or Islam, they continued performing dance dramas with Hindu gods and goddesses, adding to these their own local myths, costumes, and masks.

The general theme remains the same in all these versions except for few exceptions. For example, the first half of the Javanese RāmāyaṇaKākawin is similar to the source and the subsequent part departs radically from the original version. The subsequent part is in the form of the omnipotent Javanese deity Dhayana who is the guardian god of Java Semar that is known as Twalen in Balinese literature. The guardian god has deformed sons named Gareng, Petruk and Bangong who become clowns that would light up the performance of Rāmāyaṇa. It is illustrative of the accommodative ability of Rāmāyaṇa to allow space to the local cultures in its fold. In Thai version of the story of Rāmāyana, Hanuman is married. The Malaysian Rāmāyaṇa known as Hikayat Seri Rama is “the story of great magnificence, renowned and mentioned in all quarters by people above and below the wind,...that concern Maharaja Rāvaṇa with ten heads, and twenty hands. Great was his empire, four sites were there for his empire, given by AllāTālā” (Shellabear 1). In it

Rāvaṇa is described as receiving boon not from Brahma but from Allah. Even Dasratha is shown as a great grandson of Prophet Adam. Thus the kathāis domesticated in consonance with the new local religion of Islam and its cultural requirements. Further when Rāvaṇa abducted Sita and approached King Sugriva, for help to find out Sita, Sugriva sent his men in search of SitaYavadvipa, an island of Java or Sumatra. The version of Rāmāyāṇa in Kombodia known as Rāmakerti was made under the Khmer influence. Accordingly the names were indigenised. Rama became Preah Ream, an incarnation of Vishnu and he was married to NeangSeda who mothered two children. Similarly, Lakṣmaṇa became Preah Leak and RavaṇaKrong Reap. It followed most of the story of the original Rāmāyāṇa but reveals a variety of indigenisation. Rāma's character has been moulded in accordance with the Theravada ideal of a hero who is an image of the Buddha. His character and behaviour has maitri (friendliness), karuṇā (compassion), mudita (altruistic), upekṣā (equanimity) which form the sublime way of the Buddhists. Patanjali mentions these virtues as maītri, karuṇā, mudita and upekṣā in his Yogasutra. In Laos Rāmāyāṇa was articulated as PhraLakPhra Ram (Sri Lakṣmaṇa Sri Rama) in the form of dance drama. In it, Hanuman's character and role undergo drastic change. He is depicted as the son of Rama. He assumes the form of monkey for three years after eating a fruit called nikhot. He lives in the company of Nang Phengsi who is a daughter of a sage. Since she loved Hanuman, she too eats the fruit and gets changed into monkey to be like Hanuman. Similarly, in Mahābhārata also some variations are available. In Indonesian edition, Draupadi is married to only Dharma or Yudhishtira, the eldest of the five Pāṇḍava brothers. The native culture of South East Asian countries on the banks of Mekong river, is also inflected by Indian culture over centuries. The area earlier subsumed under BṛhatBharata (Greater India) has now assumed considerable geo-political importance.

This sharing of the same kind topography, though with a difference of degree, and aesthetic culture is not accidental but it is due to our same nature of emotional being or personal man. We are face to face with this great world and our relations to it are manifold. One of these is the necessity of food, cloth and materials from nature. Then we have our mind must find out reason in things. There is yet another man i.e. personal man who is above the needs, both of body and mind and wants to find something to fulfil its need of love. It is the highest in man and has personal relations of its own with the great world, and comes to it for satisfy personality (Personality 3-4). This personal man is our emotional being evolved in accordance with the climatic conditions. This personal man or emotional being is made by the additional energy sources required to maintain average temperature. The common thread that takes into fold the

emotional being of South Asia countries is the average temperature which accounts for common aesthetic attitude. If we compare South Asia with Europe in this regard we can understand this diametrically different attitude. People in Europe in which the maximum temperature varies from $+20^{\circ}$ C to -10° C have diametrically different attitude from the people living in South Asia in which temperature varies from $+35^{\circ}$ to $+10^{\circ}$. People in Europe cannot live without the additional sources of energy for heating their homes and for dispersing darkness of long winters while people living in India do not need additional sources of energy for this purpose. As a result, the people accept natural conditions and adjust rather than try to change these conditions with the help of technology. This climatic scene and our attitude to it form our basic emotional state of being and design our aesthetics. On this count the countries of South Asia have similar lack of urgency for additional energy sources. They have their peculiar emotional state and approach to life, society, art and aesthetics.

The current trend of ethnographic thinking in South Asia causes cleavage between people and deviates us from understating the Asia as a cultural cluster. Political boundaries are not stable, they are of shifting nature. These countries are suffering from competitive egoism and aggressive nationalism which affect their growth adversely. They need to refrain from their narrow approach. For improving relations, South Asian countries need to forget and forgive the mistakes of one another. They can win over if they share themselves with others through their discipline of art, literature and aesthetics. They need to establish relationship the way they had cross-fertilization between different cultures not by military force but by peaceful and harmonious means. They need to come at a common platform. Art and aesthetics could be one of the common platform to establish the feelings of harmony among the countries of South Asia; they need to think in terms of cultural clusters in which boundaries crumble down.

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