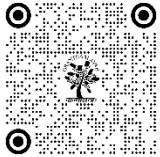


DHVANI AND DANCE- CAN THERE BE A RELATIONSHIP?

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ABSTRACT

Dhvani or the idea of suggestion being the main cause for the experience of 'rasa' as expostulated in Anandavardhana's seminal work *Dhvanyaloka*, became a game-changing idea in the field of poetics or aesthetics in its time. Not only was it comprehensive in its scope, but it also reinforced the pre-eminence of rasa in poetic works. The purpose of this article is merely exploratory in attempting to investigate if the concept of '*dhvani*' as an aesthetic lens can be applied to dance as a performing art that is as communicative in its scope and intent as poetry. The article has been written from the perspective of being a practitioner of dance and as one who has written on dance as well. Since this is unexplored ground, I am only hoping to skim the surface of what I think can be a potential area for more in-depth research.

Keywords: Dhvani and Dance, Performing Art, Experience of Rasa

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of aesthetics or poetics, pertinent to Sanskrit literature, has been extensive in India. Many ideas have been proposed and advocated over the years with thorough and impassioned arguments put forth by different proponents advancing their case, but none could be more wide sweeping in its reach and scope and more, experienced, than the principle of *rasa*. The *Natyashastra*, although a treatise on drama, places a premium on *rasa*. One may recall the oft quoted *rasasutra* from the 6th chapter of the *Naatyashastra*:

'Vibhavaanubhavavyabhicarisamyogad rasanispattih'

The *sutra* essentially means that *rasa* or an aesthetic mood is created by the coming together of determinants (*vibhavas*), consequents (*anubhavas*) and the fleeting states of mind (*vyabharibhavas*)

Vibhavas are factors that lead to the creation of *rasa* or mood. For example, in the case of *sringara rasa*, objective *vibhavas* would be the two lovers, in other words the key players responsible for the *rasa* being produced. Hence, it may be argued in drama for that is what the *Natyashastra* makes a case for, the creation of *rasa* is easily created with the enactment of the characters on stage. What creates *rasa* in poetry? In the absence of drama or enactment, *rasa* is evoked by the semantic power of the words.

While all the other theoreticians concentrated on the Ps and Qs on what makes a verse more beautiful, each advancing an idea like *alamkara* Upadhyay (2010), *guna*, or *riti* which were focused more on the ‘*sarira*’ or the body of a verse, the theory of *rasa*, reigning like a monarch over all the rest of theories, aimed directly at the ultimate goal of poetry- its *raison d’etre*, that is its soul.

As mentioned earlier while the *Natyashastra* dwells on the idea of *rasa* with relevance to drama, Udbhata is said to be one of the earliest literary critics to have given a lot of importance to *rasa* in the context of poetry. However, it was Anandavardhana who made *rasa*, the chief goal of poetry.

Riding into the foray, representing the ‘*navina*’ school of poetics, Anandavardhana, with his *Dhvanyaloka* or *Sahridayaloka*, posited something truly *avante garde*, as opposed to the theoreticians of the old guard such as Dandin, Vamana, Bhamaha etc. Although it is claimed that the idea of *dhvani* may not have been put forth by him but may have had some antecedents, he certainly makes a compelling and elaborate case for it and Abhinavagupta after him, roots for him in his *Dhvanyalocana*, a commentary on *Dhvanyaloka*. Both Anandavardhana and later Abhinavagupta, hail ‘*rasa*’ as the soul of poetry.

The *Natyashastra* ostensibly predates the *Dhvanyaloka*. As mentioned, the former is about theatre and drama and has some portions of it dealing with dance Ingalls (1990); most of the current day Indian classical forms are based on the treatise. *Rasa* is stated as being the most integral aspect of a performance and is dependent on *anubhavas*, *vibhavas* and *vyabhicharibhavas*. These factors must be present in a performance as expostulated in the *Natyashastra*, for the right *bhava* or mood to be created so that then the corresponding *rasa* is produced in the *rasika* or the viewer who is *simpatico* with the performance.

Anandavardhana agrees that the ultimate aim of any poetic work must be the evocation of *rasa* and that this experience of *rasa* can only be had through *dhvani*. It follows thus that *dhvani* is the cause as suggested by Anandavardhana and *rasa* is the effect.

2. SO, WHAT IS DHVANI?

Simply put, it is the power of suggestion. Anandavardhana posits that a poetic work has three types of meanings other than *dhvani*: *abhidha* (denotative meaning), *tatparya* (meaning of the sentence based on syntax) and *laksana* (secondary meaning). When the ‘*vyangatva*’ predominates over the ‘*abhidha*’ or the denotative meaning, a piece of writing is proposed to have *dhvani*.

Hiriyanna in his *Art Experience* speaks of *dhvani* as a method of art. He avers that the nature of art is not logical and the discovery of *dhvani* as a ‘method of art’ is significant since it may be extended to ‘other spheres of art’. Citing Anandavardhana’s work, Hiriyanna explains that when the subject of a poetic work is emotion, the resulting experience may be called ‘*rasadhvani*’; when the subject is an imaginative situation, the resulting experience is ‘*alankaradhvani*’; when the

subject is just a 'matter of fact' representation, then the resulting experience is 'vastudhvani'. [Hiriyanna \(1954\)](#)

Of course, Anandavardhana goes to great lengths to silence his critics on why what he proposes is truly original and not to be confused with various other alternatives that may be construed to be *dhvani*.

It is not obviously the scope of my paper to discuss the merits of his arguments but if we are agreed that '*dhvani*' or 'suggestion' is critical to eliciting *rasa*, in poetry or in drama, then we have a basis to investigate if the theory of *dhvani* which is admittedly pertaining to poetry may also be applied to dance. Can dance be found benefitting from the principle of *dhvani*?

3. THIS NATURALLY BEGS THE QUESTION, WHAT IS THE NECESSITY TO LOOK AT DANCE THROUGH THE PRISM OF *DHVANI*?

It is my submission that if this approach is found applicable, it may enhance our appreciation of dance and the performance of it too, in other words both the dancer and the spectator may benefit from this exercise.

Growing commercialisation of dance over the last few years has resulted in dance, and here I restrict myself to Indian classical dance, becoming increasingly jaded and lacking in substance, content and meaning. I use the term commercialisation broadly, wherein the word includes in its sway a certain widespread expectation of dance being entertaining over and above any other function that it may be designed to serve. This is my observation as a dancer and someone who has been writing on dance for a few years. It is my hope that by retraining our eyes to a framework that is rooted in a long enduring tradition of aesthetics, we will be able to renew our quest for *rasotpatti* through dance rather than leaving it to languish as a vehicle for visual gratification.

Therefore, coming back to the question: can dance, particularly, Indian classical dance forms, be studied under the lens of *dhvani*?

I am emboldened to say yes, even though I am still admittedly, only scratching the surface of this rather complex and virgin territory that throws up more questions than answers. I am hoping however to lay a groundwork for further exploration, however patchy or rough-hewn.

4. MY TWO CENTS

I place my assertion that yes, dance may benefit through the application of *dhvani* on the strength of the following:

- 1) *Kavyas* are broadly divided into two types- *sravya* and *drisyā*. *Kavya* or poetry which is merely meant to be heard is *sravya* and *Kavya* which is to be seen as a performance is *drisyā kavya*. This indicates clearly that some poetic compositions are expressly designed for visual presentation.
- 2) *Drisyā Kavya* as performance can either be dramatic in nature or it could be in the form of dance as *nritya* or *natya* where *kavya*, in its diversity, is an essential part of its presentation. Just as music is dependent on a textual or lyrical component, so is dance.
- 3) Since the principle of *dhvani* is relevant to *kavya*, it's my proposition that since *kavyas* may have the potential for a stage presentation in the form of dance, the principle of *dhvani* may stand good with respect to *nritya* and

natya as well where *nritya* may be regarded as representational dance and *natya* as dramatic dance.

5. NOW, THE LEGITIMATE QUESTION THAT ARISES IS, HOW CAN THIS PRINCIPLE OF 'DHVANI' BE APPLIED TO DANCE?

Dance, particularly Indian classical dance has been classified into *nritya*, *nritya* and *natya*. Dhanika who wrote a commentary on Dhananjaya's *Dasarupaka* speaks of *natya* and *nritya* as being representational but according to him, while *natya* leads to *rasa*, *nritya* leads to *bhava*. *Nritya* on the other hand, is *abhinayasunya*, that is without any *abhinaya*. However, *nritya* has *angaviksepa* which is common to *nritya* as well. *Angaviksepa* means throwing of limbs. Dhanika states that *nritya* serves as something that pleases the eye- '*sobhahetutva*' Varma (1957).

However, immortalised through the famous invocatory *shloka*, *Yatho hastasthato drishti, yatho drishtistatho manah*, in the *Abhinayadarpana*, we have been told of the four types of *abhinaya*- *Chaturvidha Abhinaya*- *angika*, *vachika*, *aharya* and *satvika*. Placed right at the top of the list, *angika abhinaya* therefore has a place of pre-eminence in emoting. The various *bhavas* displayed through gestures, body inflections and flexions etc, and facial contortions as delineated in a detailed manner in the form of *bhedas* of the *upangas* and *pratyangas*, lead to *rasa* through their application in *nritya* and *natya*. Thus, the role of the body, from head to toe, and its many applications in a stylised manner plays an important in expression of a *bhava*, thus making it a critical instrument of dance for the production of *rasa*.

Indian dance being a composite form of performance, cannot be independent of music, literature, and drama. The many variants of presentations in the category of *nritya* and *natya* which rely on a literary composition for expression (these vary depending on the dance form, of course) include pieces that are following in nature:

- 1) Depictive
- 2) Narrative
- 3) Attributive
- 4) Reflective
- 5) Philosophical
- 6) Romantic

The above list is by no means exhaustive but covers the myriad formats in which the dancer engages with her audience and without a lyric or literary composition these would be ineffectual. Dance in these cases is dependent on the semantic power of the verses, lyric or play being depicted. Communication of the idea or the story or the emotion as the case might be being portrayed by the words through medium of dance is key. There are many kinds of compositions that populate a dancer's repertoire (again depending on the dance form) such as *shloka* (an invocatory piece to a deity), *keertana* (usually addressed to a deity), *padam* and *javalis* (love lyrics) and even dramatic material like *kalapams*.

On the other hand, *nritya* or pure dance, has no literary base, no words except syllables or melodic notes, imitating the rhythmic patterns being played by the accompanying percussionist. Yet, there is some communication albeit without words.

Undoubtedly, in both cases, to varying degrees, there is experience of *rasa*. The inalienable component of Indian dance that makes this experience possible thus is *abhinaya*. *Abhinaya* is emotive expression as a means of communication with the

audience that the dancer uses with incredible ease and felicity. As discussed above dance employs *angika*, the body; *aharya* or attire; *vachika*, speech, recitation, singing of words or lyric; and lastly, *satvika* or instinctive spontaneous expression to express or emote.

The most important factors which aid in the production of *rasa* in a performance are *vibhavas*, the determinants as discussed above. *Alambana vibhavas* are the key causal players i.e the main characters that evoke the corresponding *rasa*. In a performance, the actors or the dancers become the *alambana vibhavas* who portray the ideas being presented in the poetic work. The *uddipana vibhavas* or supporting elements that lend themselves to the creation of the mood are just as important. These can easily be recreated in a performance. Citing P.S.R Appa Rao in her scholarly work, *An Indian Analysis of Aesthetics*, Madhavi Puranam explains how *abhivyakti* or the process of how *rasa* is created, with the use of *vibhavas* in a dance or dramatic presentation. The *vibhavas* appeal to the senses of the spectator, both visually and aurally, traveling to the heart causing an emotional response coupled with a journey of imagination. This process leads the spectator to experience profoundly the *vibhavas* which may be the primary characters, feelings, events, or circumstances being sung or depicted. [Puranam \(2015\)](#)

In the *Dhvanyaloka*, while discussing the origins of *rasa*, it is suggested that *rasa* lies in the conglomeration of *vibhavas*, *anubhavas*, *sthayibhava* and *vyabhichari bhavas*. Further, the *rasa* arising from dramatic presentation is called *natyad rasah*. In this connection, it is advanced that *vibhavas* and *anubhavas* are presented with dramatic aids such as music, acting and dialogue. It is clearly mentioned here that the *rasa* in poetry is similar to the *rasa* in drama and that although the perception of the *rasa* in both mediums is different by virtue of their employment of different means, the same '*sarani*' or scheme holds for both art forms. [Ingalls \(1990\)](#)

One would be emboldened by this statement and include dance in this purview as well as dance employs the same means- *vibhavas*, *anubhavas* to elicit *rasa*.

The question being explored in this essay is, can dance as an independent carrier of meaning, a performing art, have the power of suggestion, or *dhvanyatva* to evoke *rasa*?

It follows thus that for dance to elicit *rasa* by the means of *dhvanyatva* or *vyangatva*, where suggestion brings about *rasa*, the following possibilities present themselves:

6. VACHIKA ABHINAYA

As mentioned, the repertoire of dance performance comprises of many kinds of literary compositions that are sung as per the demands of the theme and nature of performance. *Vachikabhinaya* would mean that the dancer also sings the words out herself which is increasingly rare these days. It also means that the dancer emotes through the miming of these words.

In pieces like a *keertana*, a *shloka* or a *shabdham*, the purpose or function of the dancer is to dutifully depict the intent of the composition being sung which is usually a straightforward description, eulogy or tribute to the king or deity.

However, a composition like *padam* or *javali* usually directed at eliciting *sringara rasa*, has ample scope for exploration through ideas with the aid of *vibhavas*. While these may be 'depicted' through dance, would it be accurate to assert that *dhvani* has been created through dance?

In the truest sense, it wouldn't be accurate to say in such a case that dance has created *dhvani* because the suggestion or *vyangatva* is emanating from the words or

the lyric being danced to. For us to claim that dance as a medium of expression is capable of eliciting *dhvani*, then mere *vachikaabhinaya* no matter how creative, cannot be proffered as an example of an instrument through which dance has been used to create the effect of *dhvani*.

7. ANGIKA ABHINAYA

For dance to have its own inherent potential for suggestion or *vyangatva* other than words, it must rely on a tool or instrument that is unique only to it. *Angika abhinaya*, or in other words, the use of the body as a tool to express or emote through gestures, gesticulations, and other physical adaptations of different parts of the body is an aspect of dance that is not to be found in any other performing art.

It may not be wrong to argue that *angika abhinaya* be counted as one of the means, which is truly central to dance, by which suggestion or *dhvani* can be created thus leading to *rasa*.

The question that arises here is that for *dhvani* to operate, some kind of meaning or indication of a meaning must be created other than what is apparent or literal. This apparent meaning may emanate from the lyric being danced to. It follows therefore that dance can create *dhvani* when the *angika abhinaya* being employed by the dancer indicates a meaning or an interpretation that suggests at something other than what is literally being stated through the lyric or the words being sung. Mere word by word depiction through the physical application of the body cannot be established as *dhvani*. The use of gestures, eye movements and the body would have to be such that it creates a design that leads to establishing ideas being presented in the lyric without the enactment being literal. In fact, while speaking of *angika abhinaya*, the Nartananirnaya, a text on dance from the 16th century, much later than the Dhvanyaloka, speaks of *cittavritti-arpika*, enactment which is referential in treatment while alluding to a particular *bhava*. Sathyanarayana (1998) *Cittavritti-arpika* is depiction through symbolic, not literal actions of the body. This may be the idea we are looking for- the evoking of *dhvani* through *angika abhinaya* in dance.

My proposition is in accordance with what is argued in the *Dhvanyaloka*, if a dancer can create a suggestion of a meaning through her *angika abhinaya* other than what is being stated simply or literally in the words being danced to. But even more importantly, if that depiction of a suggested meaning leads to *rasa*, then we can assuredly claim that the principle of *dhvani* may be applied to dance.

8. AHARYA ABHINAYA

Uddipana Vibhavas are important constituents in the contribution towards creation of the corresponding *anubhavas*. These are usually suggested in the poetic work as mood enhancing elements such as a gentle breeze, a garden, the moon but may also be employed in a dramatic or dance presentation through the use of *aharya* i.e the costume of the actor or the dancer; through stage decor or the very design of the stage itself.

Is there scope for this type of *abhinaya* to be suggestive? Can *dhvani* be a method for further inducement of *rasa* employing *aharya abhinaya* as a means in dance?

I modestly offer that yes, the power of suggestion in the manner in which a dancer is portrayed through either her costume or make up in playing a part or a *vibhava* can have a powerful impact on the mind of the spectator. For *dhvani* to be

applied as a principle in the use of the *aharya* of the dancer, one must take care that the *aharya* either in the form of the costume, attire, make up, stage design or decoration is suggestive and not literal in its implication of meaning. Hence, the *uddipana vibhavas* in the form of *aharya* which could be the manner in which the dancer is dressed either through the choice of color or fabric or pattern 'suggests' the mood she is intending to create in the spectator. To my mind, Kuddiyatam and Kathakali are two excellent examples of traditional performing arts that use *dhvani* in their use of *aharya abhinaya* as an integral part of their performance leading to *rasa*.

9. RHYTHM AND TALAM

Rhythm or keeping time in a certain cycle of beats is inherent in music but it has much more scope for creativity in Indian dance. Most Indian dance forms play around with rhythmic patterns- therein lies the skill of the dancer to produce those patterns through intricate footwork, most conspicuously noticed in Kathak. It is my hypothesis that *dhvani* in dance may perhaps be sought in the world of rhythm as well. For rhythm too has a profound impact on the mind of the *rasika*. The *rasa* experienced may not be of an emotional nature but there is definitely a sense of catharsis, when the patterns fall in line with the time cycles.

Hence, I propose that if rhythm has the potential to evoke *rasa*, then perhaps it has the potential to invoke *dhvani*. There is explicit rhythm and implicit rhythm in dance. Explicit rhythm is when the singer's notes, syllables being played on the cymbals, the percussion and the footwork of the dancer are all aligned and in harmony. Implicit rhythm occurs the dancer's rhythmic footwork is layered or hidden by music and melodic components. I am tempted to explore the terrain of implicit rhythm as a potential field for discovery of *dhvani* in dance. Here is a seed of an idea that may yield interesting results upon further research.

10. CONCLUSION

Dance, as a performing art, anchored on the desire to communicate and communicate in a way that it can lead to the experience of *rasa*, can benefit greatly from the principle of *dhvani*. The power of suggestion within dance, as discussed above, lies in creative utilisation and application of *angika abhinaya* and *aharya abhinaya*. It would be worth one's while to even explore how *dhvani* may be connected to rhythmic patterns in dance through the principle of *sphota*. As explained earlier, this is only a preliminary investigation of whether my hypothesis has any merit and my finding is that yes, there is grounds for further research through theory and praxis.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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