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**The Aesthetics of Emotional Acting:
An Argument for a Rasa-based
Criticism of Indian Cinema and
Television**

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**PhD South Asian Studies
The University of Edinburgh
2016**

DECLARATION

This thesis has been composed by me and is my own work. It has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Piyush Roy

25 February 2017

For
Thakuba (Aditya Prasanna Madhual), Aai (Malatilata Rout), Julki *apa* and Pramila
Panda aunty

II संप्रेषण का कोई भी माध्यम कला है और संप्रेषण का संदेश ज्ञान है. जब संदेश का उद्देश्य उत्तेजना उत्पन्न करता हो तब कला के उस रूप को हीन कहते हैं. जब संदेश निश्चार्थ प्रेम, सत्य और महान चरित्र की रचना करता हो, तब वह कला पवित्र मानी जाती है II

निर्देशक चंद्रप्रकाश द्विवेदी, उपनिषद् गंगा, एप. 8, ऊपवेद (2012)

Any means of self-expression is an art and the message of self-expression is knowledge. When the purpose of the message creates agitation, that form of art is considered inferior. Bad arts are used only to satiate the hunger of the body and the thirst of the eyes. When the message creates selfless love, truth and great character that art is considered to be sacred.

Director Chandraprakash Dwivedi, Upanishad Ganga, Ep. 8, Upaveda (2012)

ABSTRACT

The thesis explores elements of Sanskrit drama studies, its philosophy of aesthetics, Hindu theology and Indian cinema studies. It seeks to identify and appreciate the continual influence of a pioneering and influential idea from the Indian subcontinent's cultural memory and history – the 'theory of aesthetics', also known as the '*Rasa* Theory'. The *rasa* theory is a seminal contribution of the ancient Indian Sanskrit drama textbook, the *Natyashastra*, whose postulates have provided a definitive template for appreciating and analysing all major fine arts in the Indian sub-continent for over two millennia. No criticism of an art form in India is more devastating than the allegation that it is devoid of *rasa*. Though '*rasa*' has many literal meanings like taste, essence and ultimately bliss, in *Natyashastra* it is used to signify the "essence of emotion" or the final emotional state of 'relish/reaction/aesthetic experience' achieved by a spectator while watching a performing art. The thesis uses this fundamental aesthetic influence from India's cultural memory and heritage to understand its working in the shaping of emotive performances, and the structuring of multiple genre mixing narrative styles in Indian cinema. It identifies and explains how the story telling attributes in Indian cinema, still preserve, transmit and represent, drama and performance aesthetics established 2000 years ago. The chapters are divided into two sections – evidence-led correlation confirming the direct influence of *Natyashastra* guidelines on Indian filmmaking practices, and arguments-driven proposals on how to use the *rasa* theory for appreciating cinematic aesthetics.

Section One, comprising of the first three chapters, engages with direct evidence of the influence and use of *Natyashastra* prescriptions and *rasa* theory expectations in the early years of Indian cinema, when the movie industry was intimately tied to theatre for creative guidance. Section Two, comprising of chapters four to six, goes beyond these conscious engagements to explore the continuing relevance of the concepts of *bhava* and *rasa* for studies and methods in film appreciation, and their potential usage in discussing alternate modes of cinematic expression, like melodrama. In this section, recommendations are made on how to re-read and review influential and representative cinematic achievements from different eras, regions and genres of Indian on-screen entertainment, using the *rasa*

theory for better understanding of foundational cinematic attributes like plot construction, performances and directorial achievement in non-realism prioritising on-screen narrations.

The thesis shows how to appreciate expressive acting, song and dance performances and melodramatic narratives/ movies using the *rasa* theory's prescriptions on good acting in a *navarasa* exploring drama. It calls for a greater engagement with the theory's aesthetic appreciation ideas, beyond its current peripheral acknowledgement in academic scholarship as an exotic and ancient review model with doubtful contemporary relevance. My conclusions offer a valuable guide for a fair and better appreciation of dramatic, stylistic and stereotypical acting in cinema that Western models of film criticism privileging the realistic form have been inadequate in comprehending. These findings propose a mode of inclusive aesthetic criticism that enjoys broad application across a wide range of cinematic art genres and national cinema styles using non-Euro/American modes of storytelling, towards the establishment of a humanist film education.

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As a film writer and critic for national Indian dailies and editor of the film magazine *Stardust*, the genesis of this project was kindled much before my actual undertaking of the same. Thanks are due to all the story tellers and filmmakers, I have encountered, enjoyed listening to, or watched, and who have consciously and subconsciously influenced my knowledge and expectations from a good cinematic work.

The thesis features an eclectic list of interviewees, including some legendary, influential and leading stars and filmmakers from India's multiple language cinemas. I would like to thank each of them heartily for their time, patience, offer of access and detailed interactions. Over thirty celebrity interviewees have been listed in the bibliography, but the number of interactions that have contributed to the understanding of the ideas discussed in the thesis go far beyond. Not all my interviewees have been accommodated in this thesis, but I would like to express my gratitude to the doyens of Indian cinema like Shamshad Begum, Dev Anand, Manoj Kumar, Khayyam, Gopal Ghosh, Sarat Pujari and K. Vishwanath, for sharing their lived anecdotes and memories of working in the Golden Age of Indian cinema. These have provided illuminating insights into ancient performance traditions that are still shaping film making practices in India.

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GLOSSARY

A

<i>Aascharya</i>	Surprise
<i>Abhidhanakosha</i>	A lexicon that list names
<i>Abhinaya</i>	Acting or a histrionic representation
<i>Abhisarika nayika</i>	A heroine driven by love or infatuation, who let's go of the shyness expected of her gender, and takes the initiative to meet her lover.
<i>Adhbuta</i>	Marvellous
<i>Adhunika</i>	A modern social drama in the Odia language mostly translated from its Bengali genre counterparts.
<i>Aharya</i>	Costumes/ Ornaments
<i>Alankara</i>	Means of embellishment
<i>Amrutamanthan</i>	The churning of the ocean
<i>Anand/ Ananda</i>	Joy/ Bliss
<i>Angavastra</i>	Upper garments
<i>Angika</i>	Bodily gestures and physical movements
<i>Anubhavas</i>	The consequents/ Verbal, physical and involuntary emotional reflexes or reactions to an action trigger
<i>Apahasya</i>	Vulgar/ obscene laughter
<i>Apsaras</i>	Celestial maidens and nymphs
<i>Apun</i>	A colloquial reference for the self in Mumbai's Hindi lingo
<i>Artha</i>	Wealth
<i>Ashta-nayikas</i>	A collective name for the eight types of heroines, who represent the eight different mood states of a woman in love as described in the <i>Natyashastra</i> .
<i>Atahasya</i>	Boisterous/loud laughter
<i>Atimaharathi</i>	A great warrior mentioned in the epics, who is capable of fighting 7,20,000 warriors simultaneously.

<i>Audarya</i>	A sense of civility or respect in all situations
<i>Ayojaka</i>	Conceptualiser

B

<i>Bhakti</i>	Devotion
<i>Bhagavata Mela</i>	A folk theatre form from Tamil Nadu
<i>Bhagavata Tungis</i>	An enclosed place (specific to Odisha) where a group of performers sing phrases from the Gita.
<i>Bhajan</i>	A devotional song
<i>Bhangi</i>	Gestural acting
<i>Bharatanatyam</i>	One of the eight classical dance of India. Its origin has been sourced to temple dancing traditions in South India
<i>Bhava</i>	An emotional mood or state of mind
<i>Bhavai</i>	A folk theatre form from Gujarat
<i>Bhavayanti</i>	To originate
<i>Bhay/ Bhaya</i>	Fear
<i>Bhayanaka</i>	Fearful
<i>Bhoga</i>	Food offered to the gods
<i>Bibhatsa</i>	Odious
<i>Biryani</i>	Flavoured rice dish cooked with meat or vegetables

C

<i>Champu</i>	A genre in Indian literature that originated in Sanskrit poetics. It consists of a mixture of prose and poetry passages with verses interspersed among prose sections.
<i>Chanda</i>	Is a style of rendering poetry typical to Odia literature where the verses stress on rhythm.
<i>Chausath Kalas</i>	The 64 different traditional arts, a mastery of which formed an integral part of the development of a cultured individual in ancient India.

<i>Chitra purvaranga</i>	A dramatic presentation embellished with song and dance
<i>Chittavrittis</i>	Cognitive/ mental tendencies
<i>Cheer haran</i>	The act of disrobing of a woman
<i>Churidar-kurta</i>	Traditional clothing worn by women in North India. It comprises of a long shirt worn over loose trousers.
<i>Cinéma vérité</i>	True/ Truth cinema. This was a French film movement of the 1960s that showed people in everyday situations with authentic dialogue and naturalness of action.
<i>Comme ci, comme ça</i>	A return-on-investment venture

D

<i>Dakhini nacha</i>	A local dance form prevalent in Eastern India that is seen as a predecessor of its extremely stylised classical dance form of Odissi.
<i>Dana vira</i>	A hero famed for his generosity
<i>Dashkathia</i>	A group folk dance from Odisha where the performers use a pair of sticks.
<i>Dastan</i>	Epic Persian adventure sagas
<i>Daya vira</i>	A compassionate hero
<i>Desi</i>	A colloquial term referring to something Indian
<i>Devadasi</i>	A temple dancer
<i>Devaloka</i>	Land of Gods
<i>Dharma</i>	Righteousness
<i>Dharma vira</i>	A hero who fights for the establishment of law, righteousness and other noble values.
<i>Dhairya</i>	Serenity/ Patience/ Fortitude
<i>Dhvani</i>	Suggestion/ The meaning of an art form
<i>Dipti</i>	A heightened state of expectation of love
<i>Doshas</i>	Faults or lacunae, [here] in context to one's character
<i>Dwapara Yuga</i>	One of the four <i>yugas</i> the Earth timeline has been categorised into

in the Hindu scriptures.

G

<i>Gambhira</i>	Serenity
<i>Gandharva</i>	Reference to a type of musical theatre in which young boys essayed the female parts on stage.
<i>Gandharvas</i>	Celestial musicians
<i>Ghazal</i>	A song of love in the Urdu language
<i>Ghagra-choli</i>	Traditional outfit worn by Indian women consisting of a long skirt and a corset like blouse
<i>Ghrna</i>	Disgust
<i>Gita Govinda</i>	Jaideva's 12 th century CE epic poem depicting the love between Radha and Krishna
<i>Gitinatya</i>	A musical drama form typical to Eastern India
<i>Gopis</i>	Village maidens

H

<i>Hasa</i>	Mirth
<i>Hasita</i>	Slight laughter
<i>Hasya</i>	Comic
<i>Itihasa</i>	History; It also is a reference to 'mythological' epics like the <i>Ramayana</i> and the <i>Mahabharata</i> that are considered to be documents of ancient Indian history.

J

<i>Jashn</i>	A performative folk form from Kashmir
<i>Jatra</i>	Professional theatre form prevalent in the Eastern parts of the Indian sub-continent, primarily (undivided) Bengal, Odisha and Assam.
<i>Jugupsa</i>	Disgust

K

<i>Kama</i>	Sex/ Lust
<i>Kanti</i>	A beautiful state of being in expectation of love
<i>Kalahantarita</i>	An impatient heroine separated from her lover over a quarrel
<i>Karmayogi</i>	A selfless doer, who carries on without worrying about the fruits of His/her labour
<i>Karuna</i>	Pathos/ Compassion
<i>Katha</i>	A story; can also refer to the telling of a story.
<i>Kathak</i>	A classical Indian dance form from North India
<i>Kathakali</i>	A highly expressive traditional Indian dance from Kerala
<i>Kathakas</i>	Bards cum storytellers
<i>Kavya</i>	A poem
<i>Khandita nayika</i>	A heroine enraged with her lover for cheating on her
<i>Kimbadanti</i>	Story from local mythology or folk lore
<i>Kirtan</i>	A continuous rendering of devotional songs in a group setting
<i>Kirtankar</i>	A person who leads or sings in a <i>kirtan</i>
<i>Koodiyattam</i>	Stylised theatre from Kerala, where the main characters speak in Sanskrit, while the side characters spoke in Malayalam.
<i>Kroadha</i>	Anger

L

<i>Lalita</i>	Sportiveness (not to be confused with the protagonist of <i>Lalita</i> , the film)
<i>Lasya</i>	Grace
<i>Laya</i>	Rhythm
<i>Leela</i>	Divine play
<i>Lila</i>	A play; can also refer to a musical theatre form of Odisha
<i>Lokadharani</i>	A realistic drama performed to natural acting featuring ordinary characters.

M

<i>Madhurya</i>	Moderation/Self-possession
<i>Makhan Chor</i>	One who steals and eats cream; a term of endearment referring to the child avatar of Lord Krishna and his love for cream.
<i>Maargi</i>	Classical theatre
<i>Mahabharata</i>	The world's longest epic poem revolving around an ancient war between cousins.
<i>Mahakavya</i>	An epic poem evoking all the nine <i>rasas</i>
<i>Malikas</i>	Song form from Odisha, featuring elements of <i>chanda</i> and <i>champu</i> (see above).
<i>Mangalsutra</i>	An auspicious necklace presented to a bride at her wedding as an indication of her marital status.
<i>Masala</i>	Reference to an Indian film form that mixes the attributes of dominant Hollywood genres like musical, comedy, action, melodrama, etc. in one film.
<i>Maya</i>	Illusion
<i>Mayavi</i>	A magician or an expert in skills at creating an illusion.
<i>Moksha</i>	Liberation
<i>Mausi</i>	Aunt
<i>Mise-en-scène</i>	The set design aspects of a theatre or film production
<i>Mukta mancha jatra</i>	Open air theatre

N

<i>Nataka</i>	Play
<i>Natya</i>	Dance drama
<i>Natyacharya</i>	A teacher of theatre trained in traditions of the <i>Natyashastra</i>
<i>Natyadharmi</i>	A stylised play with song and dance elements featuring larger than life characters from the epics.
<i>Natyakaar</i>	Another term for a <i>natyacharya</i> in the Odia language
<i>Natyashastra</i>	The Sanskrit drama treatise written by Bharata muni.

<i>Natyaveda</i>	Another reference to the <i>Natyashastra</i> as the fifth Veda
<i>Natwari</i>	The dance performed by Krishna on the hood of snake Kaliya
<i>Nautanki</i>	A highly dramatic performance full of exaggerated emotions
<i>Navarasa</i>	The nine universal human emotions according to the <i>Natyashastra</i> .
<i>Nayaka / Nayika</i>	Hero / Heroine
<i>Nirdeshaka</i>	Director
<i>Nirveda</i>	Detachment
<i>Nrityanatya</i>	Dance drama

Q

<i>Odissi</i>	Stylised 20 th century version of a classical Indian dance performed to <i>Natyashastra</i> guidelines. It was revived from elaborate dance depicting architecture motifs on the temples of Odisha, especially Konark.
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P

<i>Pala</i>	A sung folk form when performers sing to devotional poems
<i>Paatra</i>	A Sanskrit term used to describe a character; in some Indian vernaculars it refers to a vessel
<i>Praglabhya</i>	Maturity
<i>Prajojoka</i>	Producer
<i>Prema rasalilas</i>	A dance-drama portraying various aspects of love
<i>Proshitabhartruka</i>	A heroine missing her sojourning husband/lover
<i>Purana</i>	A record of ancient events.
<i>Purusartha</i>	Purpose of life. Hindu scriptures list them as <i>dharma</i> , <i>artha</i> , <i>kama</i> and <i>moksha</i> .

Q

<i>Qawaali</i>	Sufi devotional song form performed in a group
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R

<i>Raga</i>	A traditional melodic pattern or mode in Indian music
<i>Ranga</i>	Colour
<i>Ramayana</i>	The oldest Sanskrit epic from India that depicts the story of Lord Rama.
<i>Ramleela</i>	A North Indian folk form depicting tales from the <i>Ramayana</i> .
<i>Rasa/ Rasas</i>	Emotions/ Sentiments
<i>Rasalila</i>	A musical dance drama depicting tales of Radha and Krishna
<i>Rashtra-debata</i>	A deity worshipped by an entire kingdom/state
<i>Rasika</i>	An empathetic spectator with an evolved taste for appreciation
<i>Rasautpatih</i>	Also spelt as <i>rasoutpatih</i> . It refers to the moment of the birth of a <i>rasa</i> or the experiencing of a <i>rasa</i> by a <i>rasika</i> .
<i>Rati</i>	Love
<i>Raudra</i>	Furious

S

<i>Sadharanikarana</i>	The universalisation of an emotion
<i>Sahrydaya</i>	A viewer in a similar emotion state or total identification with the drama situation of a performer or on-screen character.
<i>Samana/ Samanya</i>	Of equal measure/ sharing similar or equal attributes
<i>Sambhoga</i>	The experiencing of a joyous state of love-in-union
<i>Sangeet natak</i>	A song and music predominating theatrical form typical to Western India, especially Maharashtra.
<i>Sattva guna</i>	Character trait
<i>Sattvika</i>	State of emotion/ Pertaining to emotions
<i>Sattvikabhava</i>	Involuntary emotional reactions
<i>Seva</i>	Service offered as a ritual to an elder patron, king or a deity
<i>Shanta/ Shanti</i>	State of calm/ Peace
<i>Sharanagat</i>	A state of complete surrender to the divine
<i>Shastra</i>	A guiding text or a book of codes

<i>Shero-shayari</i>	A rhetorical and stylised poetic articulation of ideas and stories
<i>Shoka</i>	Sorrow
<i>Shyama</i>	Light Blue
<i>Smriti</i>	Scriptural knowledge, which was remembered and passed on by generations of sages and the learned before being written or codified.
<i>Smita hasya</i>	Modest smile
<i>Sobha</i>	Beauty radiated as a radiant glowing state of being post the experiencing of love
<i>Sringara/ sringaar</i>	The erotic/ romance
<i>Sruti</i>	Scriptural knowledge heard directly from the God or gods
<i>Stamba</i>	A shocked state of being rooted to a spot
<i>Sthayibhava</i>	Permanent emotional mood-states-of-the-mind
<i>Sthairya</i>	Steadiness
<i>Suddha purvaranga</i>	A simple drama depicting daily life featuring ordinary characters.
<i>Suchaka</i>	Originator
<i>Sutra</i>	Code or a text on rules
<i>Sutradhar</i>	Narrator
<i>Svadhinabhartruka</i>	A heroine with a husband who, captivated by her beauty, is perpetually by her side in near complete subjugation to her charms.
<i>Swang</i>	Performance style from the Punjab region of the Indian sub-continent.
<i>Swadana</i>	The act of partaking or relishing
<i>Swadeshi</i>	Made in India or in one's own country
<i>Swaraj</i>	Self-rule
<i>Swayamvara</i>	A ritual contest where eligible grooms (often princes and royalty) undergo a contest of prowess to win a princess as a bride.

I

<i>Tamasha</i>	Entertainment/ Spectacle
<i>Tandava</i>	Shiva's cosmic dance
<i>Tala</i>	Rhythm timing; also a unit of measurement for time and space
<i>Tatvagyana</i>	An emotional state of detachment born within one's self from the awareness or knowledge that the world is an illusion.
<i>Tejas</i>	Spirit
<i>Terukkuttu</i>	Folk theatre form in South India

U

<i>Upahasya</i>	Ridicule
<i>Upahasita</i>	Ridiculing laughter
<i>Upanishads</i>	Sacred Hindu texts containing the essence/end chapters of the <i>Vedas</i> . They focus on themes like the nature of God, paths to salvation, etc.
<i>Utsaha</i>	Energy

V

<i>Vachika</i>	Verbal or pertaining to speech
<i>Vasakasajja nayika</i>	A heroine all dressed up, eager for union with her lover
<i>Veda</i>	The oldest scriptures in Hinduism, these are considered to be revelations seen by/revealed to ancient sages after intense meditation.
<i>Vedic</i>	Pertaining to or recommended by the <i>Vedas</i> .
<i>Veer/ Vir</i>	A hero
<i>Vibhavas</i>	Determinants or the words, causes and actions leading to the happening of actions and events in a way that they generate certain <i>bhavas</i> .
<i>Vidushaka</i>	Jester
<i>Vihāsita</i>	Open laughter
<i>Vilasa</i>	Graceful bearing

<i>Vipralabdha nayika</i>	A heroine deceived by her lover
<i>Vipralambha bhava</i>	The sorrowful/ love sick mood state of waiting for a lover
<i>Vira</i>	Heroic
<i>Viraha</i>	Sadness born of separation from a loved one
<i>Virahotkanthita</i>	A heroine distressed by separation
<i>Virangana</i>	A heroine with courage as her character's dominant trait
<i>Vismaya</i>	Astonishment
<i>Vyabharibhavas</i>	The 33 transitory mental states mentioned in the <i>Natyashastra</i> .

Y

<i>Yagna</i>	A <i>Vedic</i> ritual of fire sacrifice
<i>Yagnakund</i>	The sacred altar for performing a <i>yagna</i>
<i>Yuga</i>	A unit of time used for measuring the Earth's age/period of existence in Hindu scriptures

Z

<i>Zamindar bari</i>	Palatial residences of landowning lords mostly in rural settings
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INTRODUCTION

BHARATA TO BOLLYWOOD

The conception of art as an activity and an independent spiritual experience, freed of practical interest, which the intuition of Kant perceived for the West, was already in 10th century India, an object of study and controversy.

(Raniero Gnoli 1956: XXXII)

The *rasa* philosophy or wisdom goes back for many thousands of years and somewhere in the collective subconscious it has become ingrained in Indian filmmakers, myself included. Yet, in the various contradictory philosophies of film criticism, an orthodoxy has crept in, leaving the *rasa* theory unkindly looked upon in some critical and academic circles. This could be considered intellectually fascist.

(Bengali cinema director Srijit Mukherji interview, 2015)

Indian cinema in the twenty-first century, popularly known as ‘Bollywood’, is along with the Taj Mahal, Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi, one of the most robust and universally recognised contributions of India to global culture. In spite of ‘its predominant narrative styles not conforming to the first world European and/or American cinema narrative structure’¹, its diverse regions of filmmaking, and the many contradictions surrounding the appreciation of its indigenous aesthetics, Indian cinema is acknowledged as an influential national cinema. It functions as an important socio-cultural tool of entertainment, engagement and change for its audience. Simultaneously, it has also emerged as an industry of immense global reach and financial worth. It is mainly led by four of the largest language cinemas – Hindi, Tamil, Telegu and Bengali – but films in the remaining 18 official Indian languages (listed in the eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution) and those outside of it, like Bhojpuri and English, together constitute for the Indian film industry’s annual output of over 1,000 films a year. Today, Indian movies are screened in theatres and cinemas in over 100 nations from the USA to Japan, New Zealand to the Netherlands. They are also enjoying an increasing distribution presence in the dubbed film circuits of Africa, Europe and the Middle-East and a rise in local viewership

¹ Thomas 2010: 22-24.

among hitherto unknown destinations like ‘Peru in South America’². Overseas telecast rights and international ticket sales of some select Hindi films, especially independent and art-house titles, have been generating a bigger income share than the earnings from their distribution in India.³

India has been the largest movie-making nation in the world for over three decades. It is, moreover, increasingly viewed as the world’s second-most important film industry, after Hollywood, and arguably more important than the European film industry.⁴ Since Sony Pictures’ 2007 Diwali festival debut with the film *Saawariya* (The Lover, 2007), every major Hollywood studio (Warner Brothers, Fox Star, Disney, Sony Pictures and Viacom 18) is either making or distributing films in the Hindi language with more than an office presence in Mumbai, the epicenter of India’s national language cinema in Hindi. Fox Star and Viacom 18 have already made films in other Indian language cinemas like Tamil, Telegu and Bengali,⁵ and Indian film production companies, like Reliance Big Pictures, are co-producing Hollywood films. By 2003, within five years of being granted an industry status by the Indian government, 30 film production companies were listed on the National Stock Exchange. Half of the Best Hindi film nominees at the 2011 Filmfare Awards had at least one foreign national heading one of its technical teams. The Indian International Film Awards, which began at London’s millennium dome in 2000, has emerged as the biggest event export of any national film industry. Every year there is an Olympics style bidding by cities across the globe for the chance to host it. Numbers have always been Indian cinema’s biggest advantage. Post 2000, it has been acknowledged as the most viewed cinema worldwide; peaking to 2.6 billion cinema admissions in 2012, in contrast to Hollywood’s 1.36 billion.⁶ Another record of sorts was achieved in 2011, when just the making of a video of a yet to be shot Tamil film song, Why this Kolaveridi? went viral on YouTube. It garnered over five million hits in a week and crossed the one crore

² Hirzer (in) Dudrah, Mader & Fuchs 2015: 183.

³ Vajdovich 2010.

⁴ Epstein 2011.

⁵ Verma & Khan 2011.

⁶ McCarthy 2014.

mark in 10 days, highlighting one of India's larger regional language cinema's potential global appeal.

The distances between industries may be shrinking, collaborations between technicians increasing and the appeal of Indian cinema widening, but the genre still continues to confuse viewers outside of India. Much of Indian cinema, especially its popular 'all India form' often erroneously identified with Bollywood,⁷ remains initially amusing and perplexing to non-Indian audiences and critics in its 'epico-mythico-tragico-comico-super-sexy-high-masala-art form in which the unifying principle is a techni-colour-storyline'⁸. Its aesthetics are Indian cinemas' strongest identifier, differentiator and attraction for traditional fans. However, in the absence of fair appreciation models of its defining attributes, both within India and the West, they continue to suffer a crisis of recognition.⁹

India has one of the lowest percentage of admissions for Hollywood films at '6 per cent (in 2010)'.¹⁰ This implies that its film going audience (despite having access) watches less American movies than many other film going audiences in the world. The Indian audience appears to return to familiar films or those they have grown up with after occasional partaking of other world cinema aesthetic experiences. According to Rachel Dwyer, 'It is the only cinema apart from Hollywood, which is more popular than Hollywood in the country it is made. And that is something unique about Indian cinema' (Dwyer interview, 2015). So what is that unique attraction in its telling? It is one that is missing in other national cinemas, but present only in Indian cinema, and for its fans and consumers necessitates a researched engagement. There is a need, given the 'inadequacy of existing

⁷ 'A [pan-Indian] idiom and industry [Bollywood] that appropriated aspects both from indigenous popular film and theatre genres and from Hollywood, subordinating them to an all-encompassing entertainment formula designed to overcome regional and linguistic boundaries' (Chidananda Dasgupta (in) Rajadhyaksha 2003: 33).

⁸ Stadtler 2005: 517; Rushdie 1996: 148-49.

⁹ Thomas 2008; Dudrah 2006; Ray 1976.

¹⁰ Epstein 2011.

Euro-American film theory models',¹¹ for contributions towards an empathetic criticism of Indian cinema; to strengthen emerging arguments for appreciating Indian cinema on terms of reference that engage with its diversity rather than dismissing it with an essentialisation as is often encountered in practice.

Indian cinema: definitions and divisions

Describing all Indian language cinemas with the term Bollywood, which originated as a reference to films made in the Indian national language of Hindi from Bombay or Mumbai's Hindi film industry, is a minor indicator of the above mentioned tendency towards essentialisation. It has now mutated into a brand and genre in itself, in both media references and academic discourses. Hindi cinema or Bollywood has, however, been equally passionately and convincingly claimed as the dominant narrative form and storytelling convention in all Indian cinema.¹² This has been evidenced in films from India's regional cinemas, which share the Bollywood format of a blending of numerous emotion-evoking modes like action, comedy and 'melodrama'.¹³ They use larger than life characters, spectacle, songs, dialogue and dance to weave an integrated whole that prioritises the establishment of an affective or emotional connect over appealing to the intellect of its audience. Terming this particular idiom of cinematic storytelling as the 'Bollywoodisation of Indian cinema', Rajadhyaksha identifies it as the most homogenising influence and recognisable factor amongst all Indian mainstream language cinemas.¹⁴ It is termed 'commercial cinema' too, because of its profit-based motivations. I will refer to this body of cinema as popular cinema in my thesis.

The other major category within Indian films, based on aesthetic criteria and a notional privileging of being driven purely by artistic motivations by critics and/or 'anglophone

¹¹ Booth 1995/2000; Lutgendorf 2007; Thomas 2008; Hogan 2009.

¹² Dasgupta (in) Rajadhyaksha, 2003; Yadav 2001: 42.

¹³ 'Melodrama is a performance review term that was originally referred to a dramatic presentation interspersed with songs and music. Today, it is generally regarded as an expressive form characterised by the sensational portrayal of and appeal to heightened emotions' (Dickey 1995: 135). Rules of melodrama further 'require a universe clearly divided between good/morality and evil/decadence' (Thomas 1995: 163).

¹⁴ Rajadhyaksha 2010.

Indians'¹⁵, is the off-beat or art-house cinema. Its corpus is primarily comprised of the emotionally understated, realistic, 'intellectual' films that were made from the late 1960s onwards, subsequent to auteur Satyajit Ray's successful international debut with the Apu trilogy of films (1955-59). They were often made with state funding. The greatest differential of this category of cinema was its subscription to the canons of Euro-American film theories with a perceived (and often stated) total rejection of popular cinema's filming codes. Predominantly located within Bengali and Malayalam cinema, the number and influence of these films increased after the emergence of director Shyam Bengal's pioneering New Wave cinema in Hindi (*Ankur*, The Seedling, 1974), coupled with intermittent bursts in Odia, Assamese, Kannada and most recently, English.¹⁶ For categorisation purposes, I will refer to these films as parallel cinema and not art-house as they are often referred to, in agreement with actor-scriptwriter Salim Khan's argument that since filmmaking is an artistic exercise, all cinema is art, with the sole distinction being whether it represents good or bad art.¹⁷

These artistic and commercial categorisations did not always exist in Indian cinema discourses or film criticism. For instance, many acclaimed films from the golden era of Hindi cinema (1950s-60s) can be considered as forbears of both subsequent popular and parallel cinema-making styles.¹⁸ The classics of that era, like *Mother India* (1957) and *Mughal-e-Azam* (The Great Mughal, 1960), which script-writer Salim Khan refers to as art films, were commercial blockbusters featuring most of the popular cinema attributes listed above. Also, many New Wave cinema directors of the 1970s and 1980s, after making their mark through films in the parallel cinema category, post critical acclaim and with access to larger funds, shifted to the popular style of filmmaking in the 1990s in order to

¹⁵ Kesavan 2012: 13.

¹⁶ Hood 2000; Rajadhyaksha & Willeheim 1994.

¹⁷ 'It is useless to grade a film into parallel cinema, art film, experimental cinema and so forth. I feel a film should be good or bad. To me, *Mother India* and *Mughal-E-Azam* were art films. *Munna Bhai* and *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* are art films. Filmmaking is an art and if you make a good film, it's an art film' (Salim Khan to Shrivastav 2012).

¹⁸ Hood 2000: 3.

take their films to a bigger audience.¹⁹ Finally, the post-2000 entry of blockbuster Indian films like *Lagaan* (Taxation, 2001), *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (Sometimes Happiness, Sometimes Sadness, 2001) and *Devdas* (2002) in non-South Asian Diaspora spaces in Europe, and *Muthu* (1995) in Japan, has been in their art-house, mini-theatre and/or camp circuits. Films regarded as ‘popular’ in India were received as art-house cinema outside of the sub-continent, when selected for showcase in first world international film festivals like the Cannes, Toronto and the like.²⁰ The borrowed categories of aesthetic divisions inspired by Euro-American distribution are thus incomplete and non-absolute. The accompanying appreciation parameters that have come to define filmmaking styles within Indian cinema have been consistently rejected by most of its cinemas. Some of the finest actors have frequently acted in both these forms to equal acclaim and great filmmakers and stars have worked alongside them, causing Indian cinema’s current global spread. Actor-turned-acting guru Anupam Kher states, ‘Just because realistic acting looks fascinating, it does not mean that the acting done by mainstream actors in India is easy to do. It is easy to simplify and do realistic acting. It is very difficult to do dramatised acting’ (Kher interview, 2015). If Raj Kapoor’s socialist melodramas made Indian cinema popular in the erstwhile USSR, China and Eastern Europe in the 1950s, Amitabh Bachchan’s angry young man *masala* films widened its appeal in the Middle-East and Africa in the 1970s. Shah Rukh Khan’s post 1990s’ aspirational candyfloss romances have inspired cultural engagements like Bollywood-style dancing classes in Europe beyond its South-Asian diaspora.²¹ For ‘holding the largest audience from diverse places and cultural backgrounds in the contemporary world of cinema’,²² Khan was the subject of a multi-disciplinary international conference organised by the University of Vienna in 2010 focussing on the contribution of his stardom to Hindi cinema’s (post-2000) gaining of popularity among mainstream Euro-American audiences. His 2015 bestowal of an honorary doctorate by the University of Edinburgh, a first for an Indian cinema star, is a big step forward in the

¹⁹ Roy 2010.

²⁰ Brunow 2010; Srinivas 2010.

²¹ Dudrah, Mader, Fuchs 2015.

²² Mader 2010.

acknowledgement of the discipline of film studies and the place of Indian cinema within it.

Traditionally, Indian cinema had been accessed through unofficial channels of distribution across the globe; since 2000, it has increasingly been distributed in Europe and USA with Western audiences getting an opportunity to seriously engage with it in art-house and mainstream cinema spaces with sub-titles. The reception has not always been one of uncontested enthusiasm; but the playing field at least is more even than before. Indian film and music critic Rajiv Vijayakar states:

If you are giving somebody a burger every day he is going to eat only the burger, until you feed him something else like a *biryani*. Even then, he would not be able to make a choice between whether his burger was better or the *biryani*. He may not even like the *biryani* instantly. He has to keep eating the *biryani*, until he develops a taste for it and only then will he be able to decide whether they are both equally good or which one is better (Vijayakar interview, 2012).

Around the beginning of the first millennium C.E., sage Bharata in the ancient Indian dramatic textbook of *Natyashastra*, had also used a similar taste and reception analogy to frame one of the most seminal ideas of Indian aesthetic appreciation, the *rasa* theory of aesthetic taste and appreciation. This theory will provide the main focus in this thesis, which investigates its use and viability for the analysis and appreciation of Indian cinema.

***Natyashastra*: essence and origin**

The origin of the *rasa* idea, after two millennia of scholarly deliberations by critics and Sanskritists in India and the West, can be traced back to the 2000-year-old textbook of Sanskrit drama, the *Natyashastra*. It is considered to be the foundation of Sanskrit drama and the first most exhaustive, comprehensive and encyclopaedic practical manual of dance, acting, music and theatre in India. Deliberating at length on stagecraft and performing arts, it describes and categorises the different kinds of drama, acting and direction, along with the varied aesthetic experiences of the audience. According to South India's prominent twentieth century dramatist-scholar, Adya Rangacharya, *Natyashastra*'s creator, the sage Bharata, 'has not only defined for us characters on the stage, but even

characters in the auditorium (the audience)²³ based on the nature of their reactions to onstage acts. Schwartz sums up its scope and significance, as ‘part theatrical manual, part philosophy of aesthetics, part mythological history, part theology’,²⁴ and part psychological in its ‘analysis of the mental states of spectators watching a performance, and the nature and effects of the pleasures derived thereof by them’²⁵.

Though attributed to the mythical sage, Bharata, art historian Kapila Vatsyayan acknowledges a counter view that the name could have been an acronym for the three syllables – Bha (*Bhava* or mood/state of mind), Ra (*Raga* or melody) and Ta (*Tala* or rhythmic timing) – essential for any artistic performance.²⁶ This acronym of ‘Bharata’ then possibly went on to become a common name for sages, dramatists or actors working over a couple of centuries formulating the foundation principles of Sanskrit dramaturgy that has come to define the *Natyashastra* in its present form. However, when the name Bharata is used in this thesis, it is intended to refer to an individual and not an abstract term.

The *Natyashastra* compendium of dramatic lore, in accord with the traditional Indian practice of prescribing the authorship of any ancient work (e.g. the *Vedas*) to the gods or sages of yore, in its first chapter ascribes its authorship to Lord Brahma. Its genesis was in response to a request by the gods to create something that would educate and inspire its readers about the nature and behaviour of the world by imitating its conduct through various stages and situations, to be rendered by physical and other forms of acting, by depictions communicating the emotions of the entire triple world.²⁷ Since the work was intended to be entertaining while enlightening, its presentation had to be pleasing to the eyes and the ears so that it was accessible to all, from the evolved immortals of the celestial world to the demons of the netherworld, along with the entire diversity of the human race

²³ Rangacharya 1966: 73.

²⁴ Schwartz 2004: 12.

²⁵ Raghavan 1940: 73-81.

²⁶ Vatsayan 2007: 6.

²⁷ NS 1.14-15 (Chapter and verse references from the *Natyashastra* when cited will be prefixed by NS, as an abbreviation for *Natyashastra*, followed by the chapter number and the verse numbers in the sequence of their appearance in the original Sanskrit drama text. The English translations of the *Natyashastra* by M.M. Ghosh and Adya Rangacharya in English have been referred to for the same); Bhatt 2004: 4.

in between. As a result Brahma composed the fifth Veda or the *Natyaveda*,²⁸ incorporating elements from all the arts, sciences and ethics (Tandon, interview, 2015). He took ‘the words from *Rig Veda*, music from *Sam Veda*, movements and make-up from *Yajur Veda*, and emotional acting from *Atharva Veda*’,²⁹ and gave it to Bharata,³⁰ and his sons or pupils to practice and perform the lessons of a good, civilised and moral life for the entertainment and enlightenment of all. Dance already existed when drama was created, with Shiva being the acknowledged god of dance. However, when Shiva saw the first performance of drama, though appreciative of Brahma’s creation and the efforts of Bharata and his actors, he thought it was too plain. Brahma then asked Bharata to take inspiration from Shiva’s *tandava* (cosmic dance) and created the *apsaras* (celestial nymphs) to perform them with grace (*lasya*), since he felt that no male other than Shiva could perform the graceful aspects of his *tandava* as elegantly. Experiencing the aesthetic appeal of Shiva’s dance movements, Bharata incorporated dance to beautify drama and transformed it from a *suddha* (plain) *purvaranga* to a *chitra* (beautiful) *purvaranga*, thus giving birth to the concept and realisation of the first operatic Sanskrit dance drama.³¹

Within the fable on the origin of drama is embedded a significant guiding principle that has become the *raison d’être* of all Indian performance forms, including cinema, namely the integral role of music and dance in any dramatic performance. According to Mukherji:

Bharata’s *Natyashastra* tells of a storytelling tradition through music and songs, which is why I am personally unapologetic about using music and songs to take my story forward. The West might have denounced and forsaken the musical genre in the 1940s and 1950s, but for me, music and songs is as much of a tool as a trolley shot, a jump cut or a particular sound design. We tend to stress unnecessarily on a song or music being a song or a music when it could very well be another cinematic tool for the storyteller, which it is for me, and which it has been for the Indian sub-continent. That is why the use of music has been one of the biggest unifying factors for Indian cinema (Mukherji interview, 2015).

²⁸ Its divine origins apart, the *Natyashastra*’s elevation to the status of a *Veda* in many commentaries highlights the significance attached to its undisputed status as guide in the shaping of subsequent cultural meanings.

²⁹ NS 1.17-18; Rangacharya 1966: 1.

³⁰ Bharata was the first artiste Brahma chose for the exposition of drama.

³¹ Raghavan 1940: 2-4.

This should not to be confused with an unequivocal recommendation of the musical format without any reservations. Bharata warns in his review of *Amrutamanthan* (The churning of the ocean), the first ever drama performed in the mythical land of the gods that music and dance should not be overdone or else both the performers and the viewers will feel the strain.³² This divine claim to its origins endorses the influential and divine status of the *Natyashastra* in the Indian aesthetic scheme, but it does not exactly contribute towards ascertaining a credible upper limit to the date of its authorship. The broad consensus amongst modern (post-1900) commentaries insists that it existed before the beginning of the Christian era. Bharatanatyam dancer and scholar, Padma Subrahmanyam contends that the *Natyashastra* is pre-*Ramayana*, since there is no mention of its hero, Rama, in the drama treatise.³³ Its lower limit is a more assured, pre-Kalidasa, pre-450 AD period. This has been endorsed by the eminent Sanskrit dramatist himself in his reference to the Bharata legend and in his attribution to the sage of the idea of the eight *rasas* in his 5th Century C.E. romantic drama *Vikramorvasi* (Urvashi Won by Valour).³⁴

The theory of *rasa*

One of the most intriguing aspects of Bharata's exhaustive treatise is its theory of aesthetics, developed by later commentators into the Sanskrit drama's influential *rasa* theory. Though *rasa* has many literal meanings like taste, extract, juice, essence and ultimately bliss, in *Natyashastra* it is used to signify the essence of an emotion as a sentiment or the final emotional state of 'relish/satisfaction/reaction/aesthetic experience' achieved by a spectator while watching and experiencing a performing art.³⁵ According to Kane, 'This also is the most seminal contributor principle, which when extensively deliberated removes all perceived notions of neglect of [any proper] aesthetic appreciation in Indian drama traditions given its [obvious] fondness for ethics and frequently

³² Raghavan 1940: 3.

³³ Subrahmanyam, 2010: 21.

³⁴ Kane 1994: 43.

³⁵ Sanskrit words and terms when translated to English often suffer a loss in translation for the lack of an exact equivalent, and also for their individual cultural endowment with many meanings. Hence, occasional use of multiple words will recur in my dissertation to bring out a term's closest possible understanding.

enveloping frameworks of metaphysical speculation'.³⁶

According to Bharata, *rasa* is born in the union of the play with the performance of the actors and is to be realised by the audience. Its articulation by Bharata, however, suffers from the established predilection of ancient writers for concise definitions and summary explanations, followed by limited illustrative articulation. This ensures that later commentaries are valuable sources for analysis and interpretation. Since the *Natyashastra*'s prime focus was dramatic representation, and not the *rasa*, which is first described in the context of drama as a means to appreciating dramatic art and not vice versa, Bharata dedicates only two (chapters six and seven) of its thirty-six chapters to a summary listing and description of the *rasas* and their constituting *bhavas*.³⁷ Scholars like Subrahmanyam have opted to view this only summary introduction to *rasa* as an indicator of the fact that the concept was already in practice at the time of the writing of the *Natyashastra*, with its practitioners being aware of its significance in any performative form. By listing it at the beginning of his treatise, Bharata was only reinforcing its already acknowledged pre-eminence before deliberating at length on other lesser known aspects and attributes of the dramatic art.

***Natyashastra* in review: commentators and commentaries**

The *rasa* idea, however, has been consistently evolving and extensively engaged with to become Sanskrit drama's most debated subject, to be acknowledged, used and/or challenged by dramatists, writers and critics for over two millennia for various interpretations.³⁸ Evolving insights within subsequently emerging Indian philosophical

³⁶ Kane 1994: 8.

³⁷ Rangacharya 2010.

³⁸ These include Bhamaha's *Kavyalankara* (Embellishments of Poetry, late 7th century CE), Dandin's *Kavyadarsa* (Mirror of Poetry, early 8th century CE), Anandavardhana's *Dhvanyaloka* (Aesthetic Suggestion, 9th century CE), Bhattanayaka's *Hridayadarpana* (Mirror of the Heart, early 10th century CE), Dhananjaya's *Dasarupaka* (10th century CE), Bhojaraja's *Shringaraprakasa* (the longest work in Sanskrit theoretical literature, 10th century CE), Abhinavagupta's *Abhinavabharati* (late 10th century), Mahimabhata's *Vyaktiviveka* (early 11th century CE), Mammata's *Kavyaprakasa* (Light on Poetics, 11th-12th century CE), Saradatanaya's *Bhavaprakasana* (12th-13th century CE), Vishvanatha Kaviraja's *Sahityadarpana*³⁸ (Mirror of Composition, 14th century CE), Bhanudatta's *Rasamanjari* and *Rasatarangini* (Bouquet of *Rasa* and River of *Rasa*, 15th century CE) and Jagannatha's *Rasagangadhara* (late 17th century

systems have further shaped and influenced the application and understanding of the *rasa* concept in aesthetic appreciation.³⁹ This can be attributed to two reasons: the first being Bharata's cursory enunciation of a *sutra* of immense psychological insight and significance that immediately demanded a clearer articulation by its every subsequent commentator. The second was the unquestioned acknowledgement by all commentators of the *Natyashastra* on *rasa*'s status as a cornerstone of aesthetic appreciation. They systematically worked towards converting it into a fundamental aesthetic conception for all Indian art forms, starting with drama and dance, then poetry, literature and now cinema. There are many treatises expounding the theory of *rasa*, but this thesis will situate its understanding and interpretation of the concept to its most authoritative source, the *Natyashastra* (as translated by Ghosh 1961 and Rangacharya 2010), and its most influential commentary by 11th century CE Kashmir philosopher and aesthician Abhinavagupta, titled *Abhinavabharati* (as discussed by Gnoli 1956). The *Abhinavabharati*, according to all its subsequent medieval commentators and modern Sanskrit scholars, marks the highest critical and intellectual achievement in the history of the evolution of the '*Rasa* School of appreciation'⁴⁰. It is the only source that reviews the lost original works and views of most pre-10th century commentators of the *Natyashastra* like Bhattalolata, Sankuka, Bhattanayaka and Bhattatauta.⁴¹ Abhinavagupta, also wrote an influential commentary on Anandavardhana's path-breaking '*dhvani* theory'⁴²

CE). These are the works that have been acknowledged by most of their modern, 20th century commentators and interpreters (Kavi, De, Kane, Krishnamoorthy, Pandey, Gerow and others) for bringing in new perspectives in varying degrees to Sanskrit Poetics' perennially engaged discipline of *rasa* criticism, in contrast to other ancient and medieval age commentators like Bhamaha, Udbhata, Bhatta Lolata, Sri Sankuka, Bhatta Nayaka, Bhatta Tauta, Ruyyaka, Vidyadhara, Bhanudatta amongst others, who articulated their positions around one or more of the above mentioned dominant commentaries of the day. The significance of their commentaries, like Bhanudatta's *Rasatarangini* (15th century CE) is more in their encyclopaedic completeness than for making any new, incisive contribution to the *rasa* debate (Gerow 1977:284).

³⁹ Vatsayan 2007.

⁴⁰ Sarma 1994: 6-8.

⁴¹ Vatsayan 2007: 138.

⁴² 'Anandavardhana with his sound principle of *rasa-dhvani* (the aesthetic suggestion of an art form), worked out in full the practical implications of the aesthetic principle of *rasa* in every literary genre, and reinterpreted all the earlier categories of poetics in the light of this vital principle' (Krishnamoorthy 1974: 8) to for the first time, extend its influence beyond the scope of drama to every form of art, like poetry, literature, etc.

(*Dhvanyaloka* 9th century CE), which suggested that in the dominant *rasa* of an aesthetic work could also be located the essence of its creator's aesthetic suggestion.

Bharata's text comes first since it is universally accepted as the generator of the concept of *rasa* and provides the earliest and most fundamental, if succinct, template with which all subsequent discussions and commentaries were made. However, *Abhinavabharati* lent a strong metaphysical foundation to the *rasa* concept; making it an accepted truism in Sanskrit Poetics, 'never to be set aside by rival systems and improved only in detail by later speculations'.⁴³ Gnoli highlights its subsequent rising status in *rasa* criticism stating:

Abhinavagupta's conclusions in *Abhinavabharati* with rare exceptions were accepted by all later Indian aesthetic thinkers to be unanimously considered the most important text in the whole of Indian aesthetic thought.⁴⁴

Lal and Nandy acknowledge its influence on all Indian theatrical forms, the predecessors of their respective regional language cinemas, observing that:

His [Abhinavagupta] framework has, over the centuries, been in dialogue with the tacit aesthetic frames that inform the various modes of popular self-expression, ranging from *Kathakali* (South India) to *Ramleela* (North India) to *Jatra* (East India).⁴⁵

Moreover, after Abhinavagupta, there was a major lull in the analysis of Bharata's *rasa sutra* in terms of the addition of any radical new contribution or theoretical shift. Jagannatha's late seventeenth century *Rasagangadhara*, the last major medieval century interpreter of Bharata's *rasa sutra*, indicates too the strong influence of Abhinavagupta, who is paraphrased in many parts of the text.⁴⁶ Formal articulations on Sanskrit drama principles in the English language did not commence until the mid-nineteenth century appearance of English translations of ancient Sanskrit dramas and the occasional surfacing of manuscripts of the *Natyashastra*, starting with William Jones' first translation in English of Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* (The Recognition of Shakuntala 5th century CE) in 1789, and followed by H.H. Wilson's *Theatre of The Hindus* (1826). A critical re-

⁴³ De 1959: 177.

⁴⁴ Gnoli 1956: xiii.

⁴⁵ Lal & Nandy 2006: xvi.

⁴⁶ Sarma 1994: 81.

engagement with Sanskrit aesthetics in the modern era happened only after M. Hiriyanna's pioneering and imaginative *Art Experience* (1919), which has since guided a generation of twentieth century scholars (Ghosh, Pandey, Gnoli, Krishnamoorthy, Raghavan, Sankaran, Rangacharya, Gerow and others) to 'carry his observations as a talisman for investigating the contours of Indian aesthetics'.⁴⁷ Other contributions included the updated twentieth century commentaries and translations of the *Natyashastra*,⁴⁸ *Dhvanyaloka* and *Abhinavabharati* and their interpretations of the *rasa* theory. Highlighting the paradigm shifting status and influence of Hiriyanna's work, art historian Kapila Vatsayan observes:

No longer is it necessary to understand Indian aesthetics by referring to Plato, Aristotle and others. Nor is it any longer necessary to prove that there is a long and most sophisticated philosophic discourse on aesthetics.⁴⁹

K.C. Pandey's *Comparative Aesthetics 1 & 2* (1950) constitutes one of the first notable post-independence compendium commentaries. While discussing the *Abhinavabharati* in the background of the history of Indian aesthetic thought, Pandey's work studies the problems in aesthetics from the viewpoints of different dramaturgists and poets in the background of Eastern (Sanskrit drama) and Western (Aristotle's Poetics) thought. A comparative analysis of the various commentators of the *Rasa* School is also the focus of Kane, De and Krishnamoorthy's critical engagement with the evolution of the *rasa* theory. Kane's *The History of Sanskrit Poetics* (1994), provides a chronological overview of the commentaries on *Natyashastra*. Its approach however is more encyclopedic and informative than argumentative. S.K. De's *Some Problems of Sanskrit Poetics* (1959) is fairly argumentative, yet locates a decline in the study of Indian aesthetics in the post-Abhinavagupta period to the confusion of its medieval commentators. From the many rules, canons, meandering divisions and sub-divisions of the *Natyashastra* and its commentaries, as discussed by Kane and De, K. Krishnamoorthy's *Essays in Sanskrit Criticism* (1974) narrows down the *rasa* doctrines and points-of-view to those relevant to

⁴⁷ Vatsayan 1997: xii.

⁴⁸ M. Ramakrishna Kavi edited the first critical edition of the *Natyashastra* (1926). Other important English translations are by Manomohan Ghosh (1950/1956), an unidentified board of scholars (1980s) and Adya Rangacharya (latest reprints of which are dated 1990s onwards).

⁴⁹ Vatsayan 1997: xii.

contemporary aesthetic criticism. Edwin Gerow's *Indian Poetics* (1977), a seminal overview on Indian aesthetics by a Western scholar, engages the relevant themes of the *rasa* theory in an aesthetic analysis in the context of the twentieth century commentaries of interpreters such as Gnoli, De, Kane, Krishnamoorthy, *et al.* More recently Gerow (2002), in *Rasa and Katharsis*, compares attitudes of appreciation between Sanskrit and Western drama concepts and explores the translatability of the Indian *rasa* aesthetic to film analysis. He tests the applicability of its categories for film classification by using a limited sample of Indian and European art house films. He does this by noting a film's dominant themes before attempting to locate their closest *rasa* counterpart from the *navarasas*. These works have helped broaden our understanding of the canon of Indian aesthetics at the deepest level, enabling us to explore and expand the scope of their universal ideas and ideals to newer artistic mediums like cinema.

In this thesis, I refer to Gnoli's *Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta* (1956) as my primary reference text for reading the *Abhinavabharati*, along with the English translations of the *Natyashastra* by M.M. Ghosh and Adya Rangacharya. Apart from making a strong case for the contemporary relevance of the *rasa* interpretations of Abhinavagupta, they argue for the study of Indian aesthetics on its own terms, instead of locating it within comparable Western theatre frameworks.

Drama to cinema: a tradition in perpetuity

These ancient, yet still prevalent guidelines were appropriated by Indian cinema – the latest in India's vibrant tradition of fine arts – and evolved into unique on-screen expositions. Thus, without being consciously aware of it, 'the Indian filmmakers became the heirs of the great Sanskrit dramatists'.⁵⁰ Vijay Mishra, though agreeing with cinema's status as an heir of theatre, does not seem convinced by the argument that filmmakers are mere subconscious carriers of the tradition. Since cinema grew out of theatre, he insists that 'the producers and directors were always conscious of the spectator as audience-in-

⁵⁰ 'Indian theatre from ancient times was an amalgam of dance, drama, music, and poetry, and the film, with the introduction of sound, was able to incorporate all these elements with ease' (Massey 1992: 67-68).

performance aware of the range of *rasas* built into the structure of the play'.⁵¹ For instance, the almost mandatory format of interspersing of songs in film narratives has been conclusively sourced 'to the Indian tradition of music and song as part of dramatic expression going back two thousand years to the Sanskrit theatre'.⁵² According to Lutgendorf:

The *Natyashastra* format of alternately spoken and sung performance, which gave great emphasis to poetic and musical expression of emotion, survived the demise of Sanskrit drama towards the end of the first millennium [following the Mughal invasion] and became characteristic of a range of regional folk dramatic forms using vernacular languages; it was transferred to the urban proscenium stage by the theatre troupes of the nineteenth century, [and] after the introduction of film sound to India in 1931, [became] the standard format for commercial cinema.⁵³

Sanskrit drama, lost royal patronage in most of North India post 1100 CE, given the different artistic sensibilities of its new Muslim rulers, but it did not vanish from the Indian landscape. Dramas and commentaries still continued to be written in Sanskrit. Although, they were not being acted as often as during the Gupta age or the era of Harshavardhana, thus lending credence to claims of the Sanskrit theatre actually dying in the medieval period of Indian history.⁵⁴ Their more modest, adaptable, travelling avatars like the *jatras* of Bengal, the *nautanki* of North India,⁵⁵ the *terukkuttu* of the South, and other regional and folk drama forms that needed no stage or state patronage, continued a life of unbroken continuity in the rural space. Looked down upon by the educated, and not preserved in any written form until the late nineteenth century CE, these forms of drama enjoyed a much more active life in relatively modest venues through constant enactment, unlike the Sanskrit dramas. The latter were constantly written and commented upon, but were seldom acted and primarily limited to the private theatre of local Maharajahs, Nawabs (e.g. Kathak's nineteenth century revival under Wajid Ali Shah of Oudh) and joint family *Zamindar baris* of cultured aristocracy like the 'Tagore family of Bengal'.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Mishra 2009: 441.

⁵² Morcom 2007: 3.

⁵³ Lutgendorf 2011: 235.

⁵⁴ Barnouw-Krishnaswamy 1980: 70-71.

⁵⁵ Hansen 1991.

⁵⁶ Barnouw-Krishnaswamy 1980: 70-71.

Local saints of the fourteenth-seventeenth century ‘*Bhakti Movement*’⁵⁷ (Ravidas, Sankardev, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Vallabhacharya, Surdas, Mirabai, Kabir, Tulsidas, Tukaram, Dhyaneswar, Namdev, etc.),⁵⁸ contributed to the flow of dance and music through devotional songs (e.g. Chaitanya’s *kirtans* and Lalan Fakir’s Baul songs in Bengal),⁵⁹ as their preferred mode of discourse and worship. The ‘Islamicate’⁶⁰ traditions of *dastaans* (epic Persian adventure sagas like *The Arabian Nights*) and the performance traditions of Sufi mysticism further amalgamated with North India’s *katha* style of performance narrations by *Kathakas* (bards come story-tellers) to give birth to two of the Indian sub-continent’s most loved medieval century cultural forms that still enrich and inspire its filmic dance (*Kathak/Natwari*)⁶¹ and music, ‘namely the light classical song genre of *ghazals* and *qawwalis*’.⁶²

The Sanskrit theatre traditions meanwhile continued to be patronised in the Hindu kingdoms of the East (e.g. the Ganga dynasty’s introduction of the performance of Jayadeva’s *Gita Govinda* as a ritual service in Puri’s Jagannath Temple in Odisha from the thirteenth century),⁶³ and South India, (e.g. Kerala’s *Koodiyattam* and *Kathakali*),⁶⁴ where it remained relatively insulated from the Muslim cultural invasion.⁶⁵ This can be evidenced in the locating of most of the nineteenth century manuscript discoveries of the *Natyashastra* in South India apart from the momentous discovery of the first manuscript of the Kashmiri Abhinavagupta’s *Abhinavabharati* in modern times in Kerala.⁶⁶ Vatsayan has recorded the discovery of various manuscripts of *Natyashastra*’s root text in different parts of the sub-continent from Nepal to Bengal and Kashmir to Kerala in vernacular scripts like Newari, Devanagari, Grantha, Tamil and Malayalam between the eleventh-

⁵⁷ Lele 1980.

⁵⁸ Aggarwal 2015.

⁵⁹ Ghose 2010.

⁶⁰ ‘A reference not to the impact of Muslim religion, but to the influence of a cosmopolitan urbanized culture that set norms for much of western, central, and South Asia for roughly a thousand years’ (Lutgendorf 2011: 244).

⁶¹ Khan 2015.

⁶² Lutgendorf 2011: 244-247; Rajan 1998.

⁶³ Dhar 2007: 43-45.

⁶⁴ Ram 2011: 164.

⁶⁵ Vatsayan 1996.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

eighteenth centuries. She argues that the rest of India too participated in the continuing transmission of the *Natyashastra* ‘as a living vibrant tradition where the practise and performance and its crucial discourse were complementary and mutually supportive’.⁶⁷ Hansen locates a consciousness about Sanskrit drama traditions in the Indian sub-continent’s performative tradition, noting that ‘most of the generic labels for folk theatre in North India like *mancha*, *lila*, *jatra*, and the like are derived from words meaning ‘stage, play, show, processional theatre’ with an element of spectacle, which was integral to some of the greatest Sanskrit dramas.⁶⁸ The *Jashn* of Kashmir, *Gitinatya* of Odisha, *Swang* of Punjab, *Kathakali* of Kerala and *Gandharva/Sangeet natak* of Maharashtra also share a similar generic nature of being staged performances with theatrical acting.

The *Natyashastra*’s prescriptions of theatrical art as practised in the times of Kalidasa, thus had ‘remained an invisible law’⁶⁹ that bequeathed to the Indian sound film of 1931 ‘a river of music that had flowed through unbroken millennia of dramatic tradition’⁷⁰. Indian filmmakers also introduced songs to counter the influence and appeal of foreign made films. This eventually became a successful survival strategy; it made Indian cinema’s song-interspersed format a signature attribute of its cinematic storytelling that has come to define its uniqueness amongst other world cinema.⁷¹ Any subsequent experimental or sustained rejection of this song-and-dance format has failed with the Indian audience, for being ‘foreign or un-Indian’⁷² like the Hindi parallel cinema movement that had peaked in the 1970s, and withered away by the 1980s. According to Om Puri, one of the movement’s influential lead actors:

⁶⁷ Vatsayan 2007: 36-37.

⁶⁸ ‘The *Manch/a* of Madhya Pradesh (from Sanskrit *manchakam*, ‘stage’), the *Ram Lilas* [also spelt as *Ramleela*] and *Rasa Lilas* of Uttar Pradesh (Sanskrit *lila*, ‘sport, play’), Maharashtra’s *Tamasha* (Arabic *tamasha*, ‘entertainment, spectacle’), Bengal’s *Jatra* (Sanskrit *yatra*, ‘procession, pilgrimage’). In the parallel etymology conjured by Hindi scholars, *nautanki* has been traced to *nataka*, the Sanskrit high drama, via a hypothetical term *nataki*. The argument is inconclusive in the absence of references to *nautanki* the dramatic literature’ (Hansen 1991: 13).

⁶⁹ Bowers 1969: 18.

⁷⁰ Barnouw-Krishnaswamy 1980: 72.

⁷¹ Chatterjee, Gulzar, Nihalani 2003: 4.

⁷² ‘In India, songs-and-dances have never been seen as popular [massy] or escapist, because its origins lie in classical, folk and ancient theatre traditions. We know something the West doesn’t. Song’ n dance can hold up a film’ (Kabir 2001: 70-71).

Indian art house [parallel] cinema directors made one mistake. They eschewed the song-and-dance format because they felt it was below them. I feel that they should not have resisted the format because we Indians have always used music to communicate – be it in the street theatre, *nautankis*, and *jatras*. They should not have hesitated to use music as a tool to make the [Indian] audience understand and connect with their films.⁷³

Puri's observation also contradicts the myopic limiting of the origins of Indian cinema's song-and-dance spectacles by many Indian film theorists, exclusively to Bombay's Parsi theatre of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Hogan equates this oversimplified notion of apportioning the history of all Indian melodrama to Parsi theatre akin to finding the origins of tragedy in Europe, erroneously, in its nineteenth century-opera, for instance.⁷⁴ Even if one assumed this view to be true, then how one does explain the similar *rasa*-evoking attributes in the cinemas of South India, Bengal or Odisha, which did not have the specific Parsi theatre backdrop. The narrative style of these language cinemas was inspired by their region's respective folk theatres, as discussed above. According to the celebrated senior Bollywood critic and film writer Ali Peter John:

Only Parsi theatre cannot be the mother influence of all Indian or Hindi cinema. It only appealed to makers in Bombay and that too just a handful of them like those educated in English. Parsi theatre was the only source of entertainment at that time for the elite so whatever they saw there, those who did not have original ideas copied them and put them on screen. The whole group of Golden Age filmmakers like Bimal Roy, and others, who brought about the idea of social relevance in Hindi films, worked independent of any Parsi theatre influence. There is something charmingly Indian about even his [Bimal Roy] most commercial film *Madhumati* [1958]. Not everyone working in the Hindi film industry in the 1950s-70s was educated, but they were aware of the idea of the *navarasas*. In the south, the foundation and knowledge of the *Natyashastra* was much stronger as South cinema is theatre... (John interview, 2012).

Thus what arguably works for the proponents of Indian cinema's Parsi theatre traditions is their focussing only on Mumbai's Hindi cinema, whose early adventure films and Shakespeare-based plays did gain inspiration from Parsi theatre's song-interspersed, spectacular presentations. Writers and actors moving from Mumbai's declining Parsi theatres to films, forming the new creative industry's initial talent pool, brought the

⁷³ Puri 2006: 14.

⁷⁴ Hogan 2008: 41.

influence of their acting backgrounds to the new medium. Moreover, three of the silent cinema and early sound era Mumbai studios, Imperial, Minerva and Wadia Movietone, were owned by Parsis. Stating the usage of ‘Parsi theatre’ as a separate drama categorising terminology to be a misnomer, veteran Bollywood director Lekh Tandon explains:

The term, Parsi theatre, should not be construed as a separate theatre category. The Parsis only put in their money and managed the administration of these theatre productions. Once these gained in popularity and turned into successful theatre ventures because of the honesty, integrity, business acumen and entrepreneurship skills of their Parsi owners and managers, they started to be called as Parsi theatres by their audience and reviewers, primarily for their being owned by members of the Parsi community. But the source of many of their performances and themes still happened to be Sanskrit plays and Indian epics (Tandon interview, 2015).

However, two of Hindi cinema’s other early film genres, mythologicals and devotionals, in their performance and presentation styles were closer to then influential and successful Marathi musical theatre led by Bal Gandharva. Popularly known as the *Gandharva* era when boys essayed female parts on stage, these musicals both in their staging and choice of subjects adhered to tenets of Sanskrit dramaturgy and were designed to evoke *rasa* realisation amongst fans or *rasikas*.⁷⁵ Their acting style, stories, costumes and set design, according to Marathi cinema director and maker of *Harishchandrachi Factory* (Harischandra’s Factory, 2009), Paresh Mokashi, ‘were imitated by Dadasaheb Phalke when he started making India’s first indigenous feature film, *Raja Harishchandra* (1913)’ (Mokashi interview, 2010) and ‘by his successors from the silent movies to the early talkies’⁷⁶.

The *Natyashastra* postulate that an ideal play should evoke all the principal *rasas* – the more the better, since a drama, and likewise a film, is meant for and seen by persons of different tastes – perhaps best explains the distinctive ‘*masala*’⁷⁷ nature of most Indian films, and their intended audience’s ease in relating to its format of multiple emotions,

⁷⁵ Jadhav 2011.

⁷⁶ Rangoonwalla 1979: 12.

⁷⁷ A mixing of the attributes of dominant Hollywood genres like musical, comedy, action, melodrama, etc., effected by a skilful integration of songs, dances, fights, emotions and other [*navarasa* evoking] mood effecting entertainment attributes in a single film to lend it a uniqueness that makes its classification under any singular Western genre a distortion.

genres, plot and mood transitions. And even where one *rasa* is dominant, Malayalam cinema writer-director Anjali Menon observes, ‘Other *rasas* may enter and leave. That openness in our dramatic structure, which we see in all our movies is a bequest of India’s theatre traditions. So one needs to understand what Indian theatre was all about to understand why our films are the way they are’ (Menon interview, 2015). A damning criticism often voiced by Indian viewers is that a film lacks the anticipated range of emotions.⁷⁸ This differentiation in expectation from a cinematic narration predictably baffles Western film critics, uninitiated and unaware of the *rasa* theory and its aesthetic anticipation from a performance.⁷⁹ Western films are often referred to as cold and ‘no close copy of Hollywood has ever been a hit’.⁸⁰ According to script-writer Anjum Rajabali:

Hollywood films are considered “dry” here. That is, not enough emotions. When you Indianise a [Western/Hollywood] subject, you add emotions. Lots of them. Feelings like love, hate, sacrifice, or revenge, pangs of separation. But, in a Hollywood film if a hero and heroine were to separate and you had five scenes underlying how they are suffering because they miss each other, people might find that soppy and corny too. Not here. Our mythology, our poetry, our literature is full of situations where lovers pine for each other. Take the *Mahabharat* and you will see what I mean. Every situation has feelings, dilemmas, other kinds of conflicts, confrontations, sacrifices, moral issues coming up all the time, etc.⁸¹

This centrality of emotion to the Indian arts, including Indian cinema, can be directly traced to the centrality of the *rasa* theory in Indian tradition. ‘Just as Aristotelian ideas of unity and Romantic theories of expression have influenced European drama and films, the theory of *rasa* has had effects across Indian arts’.⁸² Yet, using *rasa* as a tool of aesthetic analysis for evaluating a film’s structure, purpose, acting achievements and artistic merit remains a rare undertaking in mainstream film reviews, and only a handful of films have been brought under its ambit in academic engagement.

⁷⁸ Sample a trade press review of a film that failed at the box-office: ‘*Deshpreme*’s situations are neither melodramatic, nor do they occur spontaneously... Thirdly, emotional appeal is lacking. Although there are a few scenes which try to arouse feelings, they fail to hit their objective’ (Thomas 2008: 26).

⁷⁹ ‘While sudden shifts of *sthayibhavas* (emotions) – from, say, joy to sadness or love to disgust – are often viewed negatively by Western critics, they are appreciated by Indian audiences as providing the emotional diversity characteristic of traditional Indian narrative...’ (Booth 1995: 175).

⁸⁰ Thomas 1995: 162.

⁸¹ Rajabali (to) Ganti 2004: 183.

⁸² Hogan 2008: 3.

Love, disgust and wonder: the shifting affections in Indian film criticism

The study of Indian cinema as a subject of critical engagement almost coincides with the release of *Raja Harishchandra* in the early twentieth century. Its director, the now acknowledged ‘premier pioneer’⁸³ and ‘father of Indian cinema’⁸⁴, Dadasaheb Phalke was an avid critic and commentator on the cinema of his day and released a *Making of Raja Harishchandra* featurette after his film. The featurette and his writings focused on educating his viewers about the new medium and its possibilities. His precedent was actively followed and extended to a critical analysis of the emerging creative medium and its signature narration attributes by many of his successors. These included the Bengali auteur Satyajit Ray⁸⁵, Bollywood showman Subhash Ghai, litterateur and Tamil cinema script writer M. Karunanidhi, whose writings on the screen and off strengthened the mid-twentieth century Dravida language and identity movement, to Anurag Kashyap, one of the most influential filmmakers from the post-2000 independent Indian cinema movement. Outside the filmmaking fraternity, the first burst of serious film criticism on Indian cinema in English is attributed to the caustic and critical Baburao Patel, whose *Filmindia* (one of the earliest film magazines published in India in the 1930s), spared none. He went from being an editor of note and a filmmaker to an elected member of the Indian Parliament. According to writer-playwright Saadat Hasan Manto:

Baburao wrote with eloquence and power. He had a sharp and inimitable sense of humour, often barbed. There was a tough-guy assertiveness about his writing. He could also be venomous in a way, which no other writer of English in India has ever been able to match.⁸⁶

India’s oldest surviving film magazine, The Times of India group’s *Filmfare* and The Indian Express group’s film weekly, *Screen*, while cultivating the first dedicated stream of film journalists, further enriched the literature on Indian cinema writing in English. Their archives remain one of the most valuable documents of the golden years of Indian

⁸³ Garga 2012: 43.

⁸⁴ Jain, Rai & Bose 2013: 10.

⁸⁵ Ray’s explorative book on Indian aesthetics, *Our Films Their Films* apart, he wrote many essays on films and filmmaking practices of his own, and his contemporaries.

⁸⁶ Manto 2003: 123.

cinema, when, as senior journalist Raju Bharatan recalls, ‘a lot more was written on cinema than its celebrities’.⁸⁷ *Stardust, Star & Style, Cine Blitz, Movie and g* were some of the notable film magazine additions in the 1970s and 1980s that went beyond their fanzine premise to periodically engage with critical reviews of seminal films of the day and offer an appreciation of the craft of its directors and actors.⁸⁸ The scope for film journalism widened in popular media with the growth and maturing of the film industry and the emergence of review columns in mainstream dailies as regular serious engagements with cinema writing. Most of the above mentioned magazines also started increasing the breadth of their reviewing and commentary on cinema to include analytical pieces on the best, the influential and the challenging. Baburao’s influence and success, though not repeated, did set a template for writing on mainstream popular cinema with acerbic potshots by most elite/upper-middle class and/or anglophone Indian critics.⁸⁹ This can be evinced in the critiques of the immediate successors of Baburao’s writing legacy, film historian Firoze Rangoonwalla or Marxist critic Chidananda Das Gupta, with a preferential bias in favour of reviewing all Indian films using the canons of Euro-American film theories, models and notions of review.⁹⁰ This was affected by either ‘apologetically’⁹¹ playing down or ‘ironically’⁹² ignoring the Indian aesthetic traditions that had been shaping and defining Indian cinema narratives since its inception.

A major factor in the relegation to the background of any serious engagement with the indigenous aesthetics of Indian cinema was the tremendous international reception and celebration of Satyajit Ray’s Bengali cinema debut with his films in the Apu Trilogy (1955-59).⁹³ Those films also marked the first serious academic engagement in the West

⁸⁷ Dubey 2006.

⁸⁸ Roy 2013: 123-124.

⁸⁹ Kesavan 2012: 14; ‘It reflects a colonially fixated mindset of a minority, but vocal anglicized Indian intelligentsia that equates Western appreciation, as a more desirable barometer for recognising internal worth’ (see also Thomas 2008).

⁹⁰ Roy 2015: 11.

⁹¹ ‘...What is disturbing in the writings – of Indian upper-middle class intelligentsia and government cultural bodies – is the tone of defensive apology to the West and the shamefaced disavowal of what is undoubtedly a central feature of modern Indian culture’ (Thomas 2008: 23).

⁹² ‘It seems ironical that for many critics a major failing of Hindi commercial cinema is the very fact that it incorporates traditional, indigenous attributes into a modern, Euro-American mass medium’ (Booth 1995: 186).

⁹³ Roy 2015: 11.

with any form of Indian cinema and its filmmakers. This engagement went beyond its status as an exotic or ‘incomprehensible other’ as it drew plaudits from both emerging film theorists (e.g. Andre Bazin) and globally acclaimed directors like Akira Kurosawa and Martin Scorsese.⁹⁴ The possibility of reviewing Indian cinema as a worthy equal alongside First World, European and/or Hollywood cinema made both its governmental sponsors and mainstream film critics campaign for more Ray-like, realistic cinema which conformed to Western canons of filmmaking. It emerged by positioning itself as a parallel entity distinct from the privately/studio made mainstream or popular cinema. While it is unfair to assume that Ray and his cinematic successors did not adhere to the aesthetic traditions of Indian cinema, their films did nonetheless look and feel less melodramatic than the mainstream popular Indian cinema coming out of Mumbai. Moreover, the volumes of popular cinema’s formulaic productions diffused the worth of many of its auteur filmmakers and made sweeping generalisations, like categorising all Indian cinema within a generic title of ‘Bollywood’; an easy and arguably lazy way to study them within first world cinema discourses. By using dominant canons of Western filmmaking often in ‘convenient and deliberate ignorance’⁹⁵ with their inherent aesthetic standards, Indian popular cinema was, whenever ‘taken seriously’⁹⁶ subjected to an ‘impertinent and unfair criticism’⁹⁷. As a consequence, any film in the popular format was declared inferior irrespective of its merits, as was, by extension its unique culture and performance tradition specific attributes. These came to be reviewed as faults to many – ‘loose and fragmented narratives, realism irrelevant, psychological characterisation disregarding, elaborate

⁹⁴ Roy 2015: 11.

⁹⁵ ‘The grand, reductive theories (that have influenced the scholarly study of Western cinema) – Structuralist, Marxist, Freudian – though each have something to offer; the analysis of individual films, especially those that are recognised as enduringly significant, rarely relies on any of them exclusively. Yet when the critical lens is turned to a non-Western culture, sweeping theory may appear more seductive: a handy substitute for having to bone up on a dauntingly multifaceted context’ (Lutgendorf 2007: 248).

⁹⁶ ‘The most striking aspect of First World [Europe and Hollywood] discourse on Indian popular cinema (Bollywood) has been its arrogant silence [and] complacent ignorance’ (Thomas 2008: 22).

⁹⁷ ‘Two central objections to all the criticism [of Indian cinema] do stand out. One is the insistence on evaluating Hindi cinema in terms of Western film-making practices, which Bollywood has itself rejected, a blanket refusal to allow its own terms of reference to be heard. The second is the reluctance to acknowledge and deal with the fact that it clearly gives enormous pleasure to vast pan-Indian (and Third World) audiences’ (Thomas 2008: 24).

dialogue prizing, music essential, spectacle privileging, audience emotion exciting fare'⁹⁸
– in comparison to the restrained and realism prizing Euro-American narrative models.
According to director Srijit Mukherji:

If you say that only a particular kind of cinema is cinema and make a distinction between high and low art, and in the same breadth you are condemning the caste system, which has been plaguing our country for years, you are actually somewhere not being intellectually consistent. For instance, when you condemn a religion or a philosophical thought which says that all other philosophies are wrong or false and it is the only true and one way of reaching God as a fundamentalist view, and at the same time you are applying a similar thought process in cinema, and calling only a kind of cinema is “cinema” and the rest are not, then you are demeaning the art and trivialising a pursuit which integrates the best bits of science, art and commerce to come together in one unified creative form... What I have experienced in my personal journey until now is that there exists this high-brow intellectual orthodoxy regarding certain canons of Western mode of treating cinema, the parameters of which obviously do not apply in the Indian context. Yet, year after year we tend to evaluate or judge a lot of Indian cinema on the basis of those parameters. The parallels are fascinating if you look at the definition of orientalism by Edward Said, you will understand that much of the intellectual writing is the result of a political position of these people in a very post-colonial paradigm. Hence, these obviously are intellectually suspect, as they look down upon and patronise basically a lot of creative output from this part of the world on the basis of notions, parameters and yardsticks set by the West. We need to formalise and recognise the fact that the West does not evaluate a Harry Potter movie on the same parameters as a *Schindler's List* [1993]. But unfortunately when it comes to this part of the world, we start putting everything on the same plane and then denouncing one and uplifting the other, which is pathetic (Mukherji interview, 2015).

Western film criticism, taking its cue from this defensive apology and the ‘guilty pleasure’ taken in popular Indian cinema as expressed by its own critics, especially in the English language media, either indulgently exoticised popular Indian cinema as baroque and pastiche, or superficially dismissed it as a simplistic, escapist, populist, massy (mass-market), low-brow cinema, comparing it unfavourably with its more ‘confirming parallel cinema’⁹⁹. According to British critic, former Edinburgh International Film Festival director and documentary filmmaker, Mark Cousins:

⁹⁸ Thomas 1995: 162.

⁹⁹ ‘Indian art cinema is enthusiastically received in the West, [as it] much confirms to conventions [like concern for continuity and realism, focusing on non-spectacular, realistic stories with short narrative spans, unfolding at a slow pace sans any songs-and-dances], made familiar within European art cinema, thus ensuring that Western audience assumptions about filmic form can remain unchallenged...’ (Thomas 2008: 23).

Many [critics/filmmakers] in America and France feel that because they sort of invented cinema, they kind of own it in some way. It is hard for the Western world to believe that other countries and continents have not only taken it all [of cinema] but run with it very well. It also has a real lack of interest, a blindness, a blinkered attitude towards other cinemas... Indian cinema kind of blossomed after independence. Indian cinema of the 1950s, 60s and 70s was a riot of ideas and dramas. But because Britain and the West had cut India off in terms of its expectations, and in terms of its curiosity, it then sort of did not want to know about the triumph of the Hindi cinema. I would also argue that Western film culture and Indian film culture were out-of-phase in some way. By the time of the great Bollywood films of the 1970s, we had in the West, Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, and the like. Their films were also about the angry young man just as *Zanjeer* [Chains, 1973] was, or *Sholay* [Embers, 1975] was. But we were so fascinated by our angry young man, our Robert DeNiro that we did not pay any attention to [Amitabh] Bachchan [also known as Indian cinema's angry young man] (Cousins interview, 2014).

John W. Hood in *Essential Mystery: The Major Filmmakers of Indian Art Cinema* (2000) articulates this biased mindset of considering India's parallel category of cinema to be aesthetically superior to its popular counterpart when he lists the former category's complete dissociation and playing down of popular Indian cinema attributes to be its greatest virtue and value. The cinema of Ray and his successors like Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Shyam Benegal, G. Aravindan, Buddhadeb Dasgupta, Govind Nihalani and Ketan Mehta, is, according to Hood 'free to experiment with form, style, structure and more polished actors given to greater realism, in the absence of stereotypical roles'.¹⁰⁰ The films of now unanimously acclaimed popular Hindi cinema auteurs like Guru Dutt, Bimal Roy, Raj Kapoor and Mehboob Khan, are dismissed by Hood with a cursory acknowledgment of their having 'a notable degree of artistic sophistication'.¹⁰¹ Under Hood's aesthetic parameters, these acclaimed popular Indian filmmakers still remain inferior to their more artistic parallel cinema counterparts, who shoot with 'a more widely developed aesthetic sense like restrained pace, no or fewer song and dance, short narratives, no melodrama'.¹⁰² Hence, it is not surprising that in contrast to a plethora of writings on Indian parallel cinema filmmakers since the 1970s, one finds only occasional scholarly engagement in the book with the auteurship of Raj Kapoor,

¹⁰⁰ Hood 2000: 5.

¹⁰¹ Hood 2000: 3.

¹⁰² Hood 2000: 3-8.

Bimal Roy, Mehboob Khan, Guru Dutt or Gulzar (a filmmaker from India's 'middle-of-the-road' cinema genre)¹⁰³. Studying this category of filmmakers in monograph studies or as research-led academic book explorations is a post-2000 phenomena led mostly by post 1990s journalists or journalist-turned-academics like Nasreen Munni Kabir, Anupama Chopra, Rinki Bhattacharya, and Saibal Chatterjee, amongst others. While Rachel Dwyer's critical analysis of the films of Yash Chopra remains that rare serious academic treatment of the works of a popular director from the non-golden era of Indian cinema, the Dudrah, Mader and Fuchs edited *SRK and Global Bollywood* (2016) is the first and only academic book length research driven review of the legacy of an Indian superstar to date.

Rangoonwalla's informative but often derisive, *A Pictorial History of Indian Cinema* (1979), while attempting a chronological recording of all Indian cinema, takes an extremely critical position of popular cinema makers. It sees 'rays of hope' only in the works of Satyajit Ray and his legacy's torchbearers like Mrinal Sen, Shyam Benegal, *et al.* The opening line of the book states the writer's bias: 'It may sound ridiculous to say that motion pictures in India "began in a hotel"¹⁰⁴ and are still there, but both the past and the present [the late 1970s] give enough evidence of that'.¹⁰⁵ The book does, however, discuss popular Indian cinema specific genres, raises valid concerns about the high number of purposeless films being made in the mainstream format, and provides a listing of landmark filmmakers and films in Hindi and major regional language cinemas up to late 1970s. In *Seeing is Believing* (2008), senior film critic Chidananda Das Gupta, while terming Bollywood 'a variety performance', regrets its 'use of a vocabulary not understood abroad (i.e. the Euro-American West)'.¹⁰⁶ This attitude contributes little towards a fair understanding of the indigenous or different narrative attributes and motivations of Indian cinema, and continues to shape much film criticism within India. It is then, conveniently invoked as a legitimate excuse for ignoring its popular cinema in

¹⁰³ A typical Indian cinema term referring to films opting for a restrained balance between its popular and parallel cinema attributes.

¹⁰⁴ India's first exposure to motion pictures happened at Bombay's Watson Hotel on July 7, 1886, when the Lumiere Brothers' Cinematographe showed six soundless short films.

¹⁰⁵ Rangoonwalla 1979: 10.

¹⁰⁶ Das Gupta 2008: 55-56.

serious film analysis studies in the West. According to Kesavan:

The truth is that it is not Bombay's cinema but our understanding of what a good film ought to be that is derivative. For anglophone Indians whose definitions of fictional art are derived from books and films in English (or French or Russian or Japanese), the Bombay film begins to seem like second-rate mimicry or a guilty pleasure. Salman Rushdie, in whose fiction Bombay cinema plays a large part, makes this case bluntly: "Most Hindi movies were then and are now what can only be called trashy..." The real problem that the anglophone Indian has with Bombay's films isn't their tackiness: it is the absence of realist conventions. He might adore Priyanka Chopra and worship Shah Rukh Khan, but he can't help notice that their films are made up of stock elements that seem out of sync with rational modernity, which is underwritten by the rules of realism. A film culture where the musical is so completely the norm that a film without songs is remarked on is obviously a local aberration, an aesthetic dead-end. Paradoxically, the Hindi film's success in film markets other than India confirms this conclusion. To be popular in the Middle East, Central Asia, parts of Russia and Africa is to be a cinema for backward peoples as yet undisciplined by realism, reason and modernity. A cinema that doesn't bear witness to the real world is either escapist entertainment that you can enjoy in an ironic way or something you choose to watch because you were socialised into this cinema as a child and watching Hindi movies is your way of staying connected to that lost hinterland, that Bharat-which-is-not-India. To think in this way is understandable but wrong... Something is lost, of course, when the Bombay film-maker forsakes the cultural and linguistic intimacy of realism, but, as [films like] *Sahib, Biwi aur Ghulam* [Master, Madam & Servant, 1962] teaches us, much is also gained. So Rushdie's right — and he isn't. Much of the output of Bombay's film industry is trashy, but the aesthetic that makes the bad films is also responsible for the good ones.¹⁰⁷

It is the reassessment of this aesthetic, and the offering of clarity on its misperceptions along guidelines that are empathetic to its arguably non-realist conventions, which is the focus of this thesis.

An overview of academic writing on Indian cinema

Shaped predominantly by critics and rarely by researchers, the first books on studies of Indian cinema set the discourse of two irreconcilable streams – parallel and popular – but primarily engaged with history. They charted compilation lists, encyclopedias, star biographies and occasional directorial oeuvre analysis. This can be seen in a representative sample of some of the first book publications on Indian cinema, namely Firoze Rangoonwalla's *Indian Filmography, Silent and Hindi Film: 1897-1969* (1970), Rajendra

¹⁰⁷ Kesavan 2012: 13-16.

Ojha edited *75 Glorious Years of Indian Cinema: 1913-1988* (1988), *BV Dharap's Indian Film* annuals spanning from 1920-1985 and *The 100 Luminaries of Hindi Cinema* (1996) by ex-Movie magazine editors, Dinesh Raheja and Jitendra Kothari. Instead of educating the audience about the uniqueness of Indian cinema aesthetics, their primary concern was to present an authentic and educational chronology of the major events in the film industry's evolution in the twentieth century. Amongst these elaborate journalistic introductions to the Indian film industry, Erik Barnouw and S. Krishnaswamy's *Indian Film* (1980) can be viewed as the first major academic book on Indian cinema. Though chronological in structure, coming in the 50th year of Indian cinema, *Indian Film* presents a detailed study of the processes, performance and products of the Indian film industry from three of its major centres of production, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai. It begins with the late nineteenth century, when cinema was first introduced into India months after the first public screening of a film in France. Inter-cut with brief biographies on leading filmmakers and the socio-political influences on the medium, it highlights Indian cinema's 'extraordinary hold over its audiences, offers an understanding of its song and dance traditions, multi-lingual nature of enterprise, secular foundations, financial structure and Maharajah like superstars'.¹⁰⁸ The book also acknowledges Indian cinema's foundations in the sub-continent's Sanskrit drama traditions. The revised second edition additionally documents the growth in the Indian parallel cinema movement from the period of the declaration of Internal Emergency (under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975) to Satyajit Ray's completion of 25 years of filmmaking (1979). Published at a time when serious/academic research on Indian cinema was negligible, Barnouw and Krishnaswamy conclude this edition by contentedly noting that they find themselves in a relatively more gratifying atmosphere of film research at the turn of the 1980s. This is acknowledged by Lal and Nandy in their introduction to *Fingerprinting Popular Culture* (2006), where they date the beginning of proper research of popular cinema in Indian intellectual and academic circles a little after and in response to the Indian Emergency.¹⁰⁹ Lal and Nandy note that by the late 1980s this 'powerful, pan-Indian, politically meaningful kitsch had

¹⁰⁸ Barnouw-Krishnaswamy 1980: vii.

¹⁰⁹ Lal and Nandy 2006: xxii.

even the most incorruptible film analysts reluctantly admit to its ability to say something even if unwittingly, incompetently, inartistically'.¹¹⁰

Epic revivals and diaspora dreams

Since its publication in the 1990s, Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willeheim's *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* (1999) remains the most valuable compendium among all major lists on Indian cinema to date. While retaining the chronological presentation of popular writing, its seminal contribution is its brief, yet illuminating introductions to over a thousand landmark Indian films (many for the first time) from all the sub-continent's regional cinemas from 1913 (*Raja Harishchandra*) to 1992. The compendium's critical reviews, ranging from the psycho-analytic to the technological, echo the 1990s' emerging portrayal of Indian cinema as an influential national cinema. In terms of book contributions, which revealed new insights or furthered the education on Indian cinema aesthetics, some of the most influential titles from the 1990s include Sumitra Chakravarty's *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema: 1947-87* (1998), Rachel Dwyer's *All You Want Is Money, All You Need Is Love: Sex and Romance in Modern India* (2000), Vijay Mishra's *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire* (2002) and Madhava Prasad's *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* (1998). Referring exclusively to Hindi cinema, these scholarly texts predominantly locate the discussion of Indian cinema in the context of a modern nation state. They explore the role of socio-politico-economic and mythico-epic legacies in the shaping of its films. Their methodology draws on theories about the nation and feminism, Marxist-cultural and socio-economic concepts, along with emerging Euro-American screen theories.

Chakravarty identifies and reifies a unique national identity or 'Indianness' in Hindi cinema by drawing on Hindu philosophical principles in her investigation of cinema as 'imperso-nation' and 'masquerade'. In the cultural aspirations of the post-liberalised newly emerging middle-class of the 1990s, Dwyer reads the shaping and success of the

¹¹⁰ Lal and Nandy 2006: xxv.

decade's dominant, new cinematic genre of super hit, big-budget romances. In the case of Madhava Prasad, though he does deliberate on melodrama in Indian cinema at length (with an exhaustive list of representative films from Hindi cinema's golden era to the 1990s), his arguments are exclusively based upon prominent European theories (Peter Brooks, Colin MacCabe, Mary Ann Doane, Etienne Balibar, Harry Levin, and others) without recognising 'that there could be or exist other more revealing ways to categorise these films within the Indian aesthetic traditions'.¹¹¹ Mishra, however, locates the unique aesthetics of popular cinema narratives in India's *dharmik* or religious traditions, and evidences it through the recurring references to its epics, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, as a moral and narrative influence. There is an attempt to achieve the all-encompassing representation claims of *Mahabharata*'s commentators that 'what is not here is nowhere else to be found'.¹¹² Using selected Hindi films he argues for judging and analysing them 'as one interconnected, heterogeneous genre' to which he affixes the term a 'grand syntagm', as reference to 'a sentimental melodramatic romance that functions as one heterogeneous text under the sign of a transcendental *dharmik* [or religious] principle'.¹¹³ Thus *dharma*, or the morality principle, remains the broader, all enveloping organising principle that according to him straightens the perceived knotty inconsistencies of Indian film narratives. He looks at significant films from the 1930s and 1940s like *Acchut Kanya* (Untouchable Maiden, 1936), *Aadmi* (The Man, 1939), *Devdas* (1936) and *Kismet* (Fate, 1942), which, he argues, established their form using the poetics of melodrama and extends that approach to *Mother India* (1957) and the films of two Hindi cinema auteurs, Raj Kapoor and Guru Dutt. He highlights three concepts – epic genealogy, the persistence of *dharmik* codes and the power of the renouncer – as the key legacies of the epic precursor texts to cinema.¹¹⁴

Manjunath Pendakur in *Indian Popular Cinema: Industry, Ideology and Consciousness* (2003), traces back Mishra's aesthetic influence argument to the source of the structure of

¹¹¹ Hogan 2003: 41.

¹¹² Mishra 2002: 5.

¹¹³ Mishra 2002: 13.

¹¹⁴ Mishra 2002: 5.

the epics, arguing that Indian popular cinema draws heavily from Indian folk and cultural traditions and combines them with extraneous elements, like Hollywood, to create a pastiche. He asserts that ‘the look and feel of Indian popular cinemas has not [actually] changed much since its origins because of its still being rooted in its indigenous theatrical traditions’.¹¹⁵ Using influential South Indian films as reference, he maps the similarities between the narrative attributes of the pan-Indian *masala* film and those of the Indian epics and rural and folk theatre to make a credible and strong argument against the crediting of Bombay’s Parsi Theatre as the *only* great influence on Indian cinema’s early filmmakers. Suggesting that the *Natyashastra* could have influenced the Parsi theatre itself, he states that ‘there were other highly popular and powerful theatrical traditions in the country that had made their contribution to India’s cinematic traditions’.¹¹⁶ Pendakur is, however silent on how to extend this linkage towards any constructive analysis of films.

Ravi Vasudevan’s edited early-2000 book, *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema* (2000) uses psycho-analytic methods to read the shifting codes and dissolving identities in three popular Hindi social films from the 1950s – *Andaz* (Attitude, 1949), *Awara* (The Vagabond, 1951) and *Baazi* (The Bet, 1951).¹¹⁷ Other essays in the book discuss the political aesthetics shaping the messages and certain deliberate narrative and character constructions in a sample of significant regional language films from Tamil and Bengali cinema like *Parashakti* (The Goddess, 1952), *Harano Sur* (The Lost Melody, 1957), *Roja* (The Rose, 1992) and *Kaadhalan* (Lover, 1994). Jyotika Viridi’s *Cinematic ImagiNation: Indian Popular Films as Social History* (2003) aims to ‘break the ice between incomprehensible theories and the masses to make Hindi cinema more meaningful’.¹¹⁸ It looks at how a nation implants itself in popular imagination in the context of gender, family, sexuality and community using a post-facto analysis of a diversity of popular Hindi films from different eras.¹¹⁹ The intention is to understand how these films represent a

¹¹⁵ Pendakur 2003: 116.

¹¹⁶ Pendakur 2003: 105.

¹¹⁷ Vasudevan 2000: 99-121.

¹¹⁸ Viridi 2003: xiii.

¹¹⁹ The films on study include *Aan*, *Madhumati*, *Pratighat*, *Bombay*, *Mr and Mrs 55*, *Purab Aur Paschim*, *Shree 420*, *Johnny Mera Naam*, *Karma*, *Gumrah*, *Sangam*, *Seeta Aur Geeta*, *Insaf Ka Tarazu*, *Bobby*,

changing India in the context of their evolving on-screen evocations of themes such as gender equations, representation of villainy, threats to the nation and globalisation.

Globalisation of Bollywood is the focus of recent academic engagement with the Bollywood experience and its reception in the Indian Diaspora. Rajinder Kumar Dudrah's *Bollywood: Sociology Goes to the Movies* and *BollyWorld* (co-edited with Jigna Desai, 2006) look at the contemporary culture of Hindi cinema with an ethnographic and sociological focus. The former deals with its consumption by Indians in the UK, and the latter looks at its receiving among second and third generation Indians in Nigeria, South Africa, Germany and the USA. They explore how trans-national aesthetic impulses and multiplicities of reception are influencing the aesthetics of the popular Indian film today. Crossover aesthetics under a new coinage, the 'Brown Atlantic', evidenced in South Asian Diasporic Cinema as an 'interstitial cinema located between Hollywood and Bollywood' is the focus of Jigna Desai's reading of the role of film in shaping South Asian Diasporic cultures and social formations like gender, race, sexuality, etc. in *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film* (2004). The framework rests on theories of post colonialism, capitalism engendered migratory processes, feminism and queer criticism. The Rachel Dwyer and Jerry Pinto edited *Beyond the Boundaries of Bollywood the Many Forms of Hindi Cinema* (2011) seeks to explore and engage with the many circulating and emerging meanings of Bollywood, reflecting the changing attitudes to its consumption within and outside India in a globalising world in the wake of the granting of industry status to moviemaking in India. The Dudrah, Mader and Fuchs edited *SRK and Global Bollywood* (2015) seeks to offer an understanding of the tremendous post-2000 consumption of, and attraction for popular Indian cinema beyond the above discussed diasporic boundaries amongst new international audiences in nations as varied as Peru to Italy.

The turn of the millennium brought a renewed focus on compilation lists of influential twentieth century Indian films to educate new audiences outside of South Asia, and

Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak, Hum Aapke Hain Kaun, Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge, etc.

especially in the West. This accompanied a growing consumption of Indian cinema across the globe via collections of CDs/DVDs and in the form of satellite telecasts. Primary amongst the compilations are *Stardust's The 100 Greatest Films of All Time* (2000)¹²⁰, Gulzar, Govind Nihalani and Saibal Chatterjee's edited *Encyclopaedia of Hindi Cinema* (2003), Subhash K. Jha's *The Essential Guide To Bollywood* (2005), Ashok Banker's *Bollywood* (2001) and Rachel Dwyer's *100 Films* (2005). These review a fairly overlapping list of landmark Hindi films in terms of their plot and performance analysis, impact at the time of release, directorial achievements and overall influence in retrospect. While the first two titles additionally offer an appreciation of the quality of the music and lyrics in a film's overall achievement, Banker arrives at his era specific list of critically acclaimed trendsetters based on their impact at the time of release and subsequent legacy of influence on the Hindi film industry. The *Encyclopaedia of Hindi Cinema* uses explorative essays by reviewers and interviews with senior film industry practitioners to engage in a critical discussion on the need for, and desirability of the Indianisation of universal cinematic storytelling tools. These tools include editing, sound, special effects, stunts, scripts, costumes, music, lyrics, the technique of flashback, and similar narration specific attributes, in order to create a 'unique inimitable brand of cinema'.¹²¹ However, all these publications limit their purview to Hindi films only.

Back to the basics

From an informative, documentary-like chronology of landmark events and influential meaning makers (filmmakers, actors and music directors), Indian cinema study in the over 100 years of the industry's existence has definitely come to make more than just a collation of multi-disciplinary engagements. Academic writing on Indian cinema, while consistently widening the scope of its encyclopaedic research, has been engaging with aspects of film production and reception, the ideologies that shape its meanings and the increasing spheres of its influence (local and global). The rise in post-colonial and

¹²⁰ This publication features critical reviews on landmark Hindi films by five contemporary and influential Indian film writers/critics Ashok Banker, Ashwin Varde, Deepa Gahlot, Rajiv Vijaykar and Subhash K. Jha.

¹²¹ Chatterjee 2003: 3.

transnational scholarship calling for a reassessment of ‘the hegemony of Western and Hollywood cinemas in media, film and cultural studies... for new theoretical and methodological approaches to Indian cinemas’ has further contributed to popular Indian cinema being ‘finally acknowledged’ with its signature film-making attributes by academics and film critics in India and the West since the 1990s.¹²² This has not only opened film theory to a huge body of cinematic work (over 50,000 feature films have been made since the advent of sound in Indian cinema in 1931, with over 15,000 in Hindi cinema), but, as Philip Lutgendorf suggests, has introduced possibilities for exploring an Indian style of film-making, setting new directions in film criticism, genre, and culture studies. He contends:

That this enormous and influential body of popular art is now beginning to receive scholarly notice suggests the need for, at least, systemic realignment (as when a big new planet swims into our ken); a more audacious suggestion is that its ‘different universe’ might make possible an Einsteinian paradigm-shift by introducing new ways of thinking about the space-time of cinematic narrative... as the distinctive conventions of this art form, which have tenaciously resisted the influence of Western cinemas, did not arise in a cultural vacuum.¹²³

Between Rangoonwalla, Das Gupta and Hood’s valorising of Indian parallel cinema and Rajadhyaksha, Dwyer and Banker’s illuminating reviews of popular Indian cinema, coupled with new ethnography-based insights into audience appreciation of Bollywood, the evolving Indian film form’s signature storytelling practices, performance cultures and continuance in essence of ancient aesthetics did somehow get pushed to the periphery of academic scholarship. This has also been the case with its actual meaning-makers – directors, actors, music directors, lyricists, singers and technicians – amidst a surge of audience experience and engagement-driven research that has been shifting the focus in contemporary Indian film studies from creation to consumption. As modern tools and parameters of social sciences like psycho-analysis, ethnography, nation, identity and the economics of filmmaking compete to provide better elucidation, Vasudevan regrets, ‘The filmic dimension of film studies seems to have been lost in the process of trying to

¹²² Desai and Dudrah 2008: 1.

¹²³ Lutgendorf 2011: 228-229.

understand the political economy and sociology of the cinema institution'.¹²⁴ Attributing this skew in focus in Indian cinema studies to most prominent Indian cinema scholars coming from a social science instead of a film studies background, Wright comments:

...in exploring the cinema within the prism of political, historical and sociological frameworks, the film text itself (in terms of its formal aesthetic and stylistic values) can [and has] become peripheral or of secondary importance – simply an accessory to serve socio-political thoughts and functions. Indian cinema's history is therefore rather exclusively seen as driven or shaped not so much by its aesthetics or technological changes as by, primarily, cultural, political and social factors. This vernacular, although by no means unimportant, can become a great obstacle when we try also to consider and engage with the cinema as an art form in its own right.¹²⁵

The illuminating work of now acknowledged academic authorities on Indian cinema like Rajadhyaksha, Dwyer, Thomas, Madhava Prasad, Mishra, Vasudevan *et al*, as Lal and Nandy note have unquestionably made it 'no longer necessary to make a case for the study of popular Indian cinema'.¹²⁶ Their reading of Indian cinema through the prism of universal socio-cultural, psychological and Euro-American screen theories has undoubtedly brought its study legitimacy and respect. Their work has also consolidated its status as an influential national cinema, which is as much shaped by its subject as it is shaping the socio-culturo-politico-ideological terrain both in India and beyond. This new-found assertiveness has simultaneously been raising a demand and interest in reviewing Indian cinema's narratives beyond confirmation seeking and laborious identifications with established Western canons, to a possibly simpler appraisal using the existing indigenous aesthetic canon; the *rasa* theory that not only provides 'more illuminating reviews of its signature attributes',¹²⁷ but also celebrates its traditions of continuity for a fairer appreciation of the Indianness of its art form. Assertions regarding the Indianness of Indian films have been emerging in a variety of overlapping scholarly approaches – 'cultural-historical, psychological/mythic, technological and political-economic'.¹²⁸ While the latter two occur more in the context of the nature and evolution of the industrial medium

¹²⁴ Vasudevan 2011: 24.

¹²⁵ Wright 2015: 25.

¹²⁶ Lal and Nandy 1992: xi.

¹²⁷ Ram 2011: 164.

¹²⁸ Lutgendorf 2007: 228-230.

of cinema, it is the former two that tap into resources from the Indian cultural heritage. They do so in order to create a study of Indian cinema ‘as a credible and not just an exotic other’¹²⁹ to Western cinemas, but also for an understanding of its specific philosophical influences, advances and the different choices of its narrative style. It is in these areas that one can locate engaged scholarship that argues for the influence of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* in the shaping of the epic-melodramatic structure of Indian cinema and for the emerging *rasa*-based studies of cinema. The influence of the epics has been discussed to the extent of becoming an uncontested truism, yet films covered under *rasa*-based analysis are limited to barely more than a score and these are predominantly from its popular Hindi cinema, apart from a few films by Satyajit Ray. According to author, poet and Indian culture critic Reginald Massey:

Most Indian films provide a vehicle for all of Bharata’s *rasas*, a harmonious blend of which was his prerequisite for good drama. The Indian film, therefore, at least the film, which caters to a mass audience, retains almost all the ideals which Bharata set down. [However] whereas Bharata reflected the taste and style of his time, the film of today echoes contemporary taste and style: Bharata set forth what might be regarded as the high culture of his time; film, dogged as it is by the need for commercial success, mirrors the common culture of its day although still purveying “courage, amusement, as well as counsel” to the spectator.¹³⁰

Bharata’s *Natyashastra* and its seminal *rasa* theory, is often noted as one of the major influences on the structure and form of Indian cinema (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, Dissanayake and Gokulsingh, Dudrah, Desai, Morcom, Ganti, Thomas, Pendakur, Raghavan, Raghavendra, *et al*). Yet, actual links between Indian filmmaking practices and the Sanskrit drama treatise’s prescriptions have rarely been investigated beyond cursory acknowledgements of Indian cinema’s song-and-dance format and its epic-melodrama narrative structure as a tradition inherited from the *Natyashastra*. The habit has instead been to lapse back into a mind-boggling maze of colonial, post-colonial and modern Euro-American film theories to review the aesthetics of Indian cinema.

***Rasa* theory in contemporary Indian cinema studies**

¹²⁹ Lutgendorf 2007: 228-230.

¹³⁰ Massey 1992: 68.

Rasa as a criterion for aesthetic evaluation of Indian films has been traditionally doubted (Rajadhyaksha, Lal and Nandy) and occasionally critiqued (Dwyer and Patel)¹³¹. But, from being a passing footnote in a few scholarly works up until the 1980s, it has gradually been asserting itself as the most influential element in Indian cinema's narrative structure (Raghavan, Massey and Booth). This post-2000 trickle of interest has turned into a stream of intellectual debate (Gerow, Cooper, Joshi, Hogan, Lutgendorf, Grissom, Mishra¹³², Jones, Yadav, Sarrazin, Ram *et al*), culminating in the argument for a *rasa*-based analysis of Indian cinema. It has been contended that it is one of the best, or, the *only* template for an informed and empathetic understanding of each of the unique narrative attributes and genres of Indian cinema. According to Habegger-Conti, '*rasa* is the main difference between Hollywood films and films made in India'.¹³³ Arguing that 'the *rasa* theory can serve as a better guide for judging Western melodramas in contrast to Aristotelian criteria'¹³⁴, Hogan has proposed the bringing of other 'European, East Asian and African films'¹³⁵ under its purview. Gerow has attempted a review of the auteurship of a few European art house filmmakers using the concept of *rasa dhvani*.¹³⁶

The breadth of scholarship on *rasa*-based analyses of films is still restricted to a sample of a few early Bengali films of Satyajit Ray (Cooper, Grissom, Gerow and Hogan), some classic Hindi films such as *Sholay* (Booth, Hogan and Raghavendra) and a few contemporary Hindi blockbusters like *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Something, Something Happens, 1998) and *Rang De Basanti* (Colour it Saffron, 2006) (Joshi, Jones). Building the case for a *rasa*-based analysis of the scenes and songs of the 1990s blockbuster Hindi film *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, Joshi explains why understanding the influence and working

¹³¹ Dwyer and Patel 2002: 28.

¹³² From a fleeting acknowledgement of the *Rasa* Theory, (which Mishra admits is little used in cinema theory) in *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire* (2000) that briefly mentions the dominant *rasas* of select films on review like PC Barua's *Devdas* being a 'maybe *karuna*', or the nascent experiments within Indian Gothic in films like *Mahal*, *Madhumati* being 'may have been *bhayanaka* or *bibhatsa*, he articulates a more emphatic engagement with its influence in the context of audience responses in *Spectres of Sentimentality: the Bollywood Film* (2009).

¹³³ Habegger-Conti 2010: 2.

¹³⁴ Hogan 2008: 118.

¹³⁵ Hogan 2003: 50.

¹³⁶ Gerow 2002: 271-275.

of the *rasa* theory could teach us ‘how to watch [or better appreciate] a Hindi film’.¹³⁷ Adding to emerging scholarly arguments acknowledging Sanskrit drama as the aesthetic forbear of the Hindi film, Joshi connects Bollywood’s epic template ascribing ‘unreal’ aesthetics with its narratives’ focus on the providing of affective (emotional) realism to its viewers with the aim of generating *rasa*. This, he argues, is in contrast to Hollywood’s prioritising of the need for satisfying its primary audience’s expectations for cognitive (logical) realism in their viewing experience.¹³⁸

Darius Cooper’s *The Cinema of Satyajit Ray: Between Tradition and Modernity* (2000) and Patrick Colm Hogan’s *Understanding Indian Movies: Culture, Cognition, and Cinematic Imagination* (2008), coming post-2000, significantly engage with and argue the advantages of a dedicated *rasa-based criticism* of Indian films. Cooper for the first time articulates the idea of connecting *rasa* with the review of a director’s achievement, while Hogan offers a broad template for making a *rasa*-based analysis of a significant sample of popular and parallel films. While engaging in an auteur appreciation of Satyajit Ray through assessing the socio-political moorings of his characters, his political vision and the merits of his last works, Cooper’s analysis of Ray’s early classics the *Apu Trilogy* (1955-59) and *Jalsaghar* (The Music Room, 1958), using *rasa* theory parameters makes it a pioneering work in the application of *rasa* aesthetics to Indian cinema.¹³⁹ Cooper’s *rasa*-based analysis looks at the choice of narrative, plot construction, acting, character motivations, cinematography and the setting up of the *mise-en-scène*, in terms of

¹³⁷ Joshi 2004: 22.

¹³⁸ ‘Cognitive realism seeks to make the film viewer’s perception mimic her perception as it operates in real life; the film uses all its techniques to make the viewer believe that what’s seen is really happening, or could quite possibly happen. Events flow in a cause-effect relationship, and the film’s *mise-en-scène* (stage setting) strives for maximum fidelity to “real life.”... In contrast, Hindi cinema stresses not the accurate depiction of events but the emotional import of those events. The techniques of filmmaking serve to bring the film to life not in a cognitive, but in an affective sense... Under cognitive realism, the activity of the viewer is geared towards understanding situations, predicting likely outcomes based on available information, and proposing solutions to certain enigmas. These predictions may be then fulfilled or subverted by the narrative. The viewer is constantly asking questions like “What will happen next?” In contrast, the viewer of affective realism is not interested in what will happen next, but in how a particular onscreen event *feels*. To experience a depicted emotion in as much depth as possible is the reward for a viewer of Hindi cinema’ (Joshi 2004: 22).

¹³⁹ This is delved upon in the first chapter of *The Cinema of Satyajit Ray*.

achieving the dominant *rasa* of *adbhuta* (wonder). He locates the dominant *rasa* in the protagonist's point-of-view concerning the viewing and experiencing of events in a narrative, while identifying the contributing play of the other sub-*rasas* (*karuna* or pathos in *Pather Panchali*, 1955, *sringara* or romance in *Aparajito*, 1956, and *shanta* or quietude in the reconciliatory climax of *Apur Sansar*, 1959) as desired by the *rasa* theorists. He makes a note of *rasa* in international sitarist Ravi Shankar's background score of the film although he does not elaborate much on the working of the music. Ray's tragic elegy to landed aristocracy, *Jalsaghar*, he interprets as a work of *karuna rasa* with *bhayanaka* (the terrible) as its sub-*rasa*.

Hogan takes the *rasa* analysis further by bringing in new elements of identification for the reading of a film's *rasa* apart from those noted by Cooper. Taking classic acclaimed films by three of popular Indian cinema's finest filmmakers – *Mother India* as a work of the pathetic or *karuna rasa*, *Bandit Queen* (1994) as a work of *raudra* (the fury/anger) *rasa* and *Shree 420* (Mr. 420, 1955) as *hasya* (the comic) *rasa* – he shows how similar situations can be presented in different ways (through varying character reactions) to evoke different *rasas*. He further shows why these films, from the popular and parallel streams, adhere to epic influences and Marxist ideas and remain open to successful psychological, feminism and other interpretations, yet when analysed from a *rasa* unity perspective make for a more meaningful review. Hogan argues that this knowledge and ability to recognise the dominant *rasa* of a film helps us better appreciate their emotionally powerful culminations, to thus make for a more memorable viewing experience. Most importantly, what these two books achieve can be viewed as a paradigm shifting correction in Indian cinema appreciation studies; the introduction of a common criterion for analysing all Indian films.

Bringing the works of two acclaimed directors (Ray and Raj Kapoor), who according to Lal and Nandy have been perceived as catering to different tastes, audiences and grammars of filmmaking, onto one aesthetic platform highlights the significance of

attempting a *rasa*-based analysis of all Indian films.¹⁴⁰ In a single nativist masterstroke that calls for an understanding of the existing knowledge on aesthetic criticism before accepting or discarding it for the new, *rasa* theory offers to merge the increasingly overlapping parallel-popular divide within Indian cinema. For nearly half a century, this aesthetic divide has been denying the possibility of reviewing products of the same context and culture of filmmaking together. This has been due to a constructed notion of dissimilarity about their aesthetic achievements by critics hinging on either sides of the post-1970s popular-parallel debate. Academic flexibility in this context is further warranted in order to acknowledge the shift in the filmmaking styles of some of the valorised by Hood, parallel cinema directors of the 1970s like Shyam Benegal, Govind Nihalani, Ketan Mehta and others. By the 1990s these directors had moved on to make star studded films in the popular format, albeit uniting their past and present work, utilising a still recognisable common template of *rasa* aesthetics. According to Cooper, the stimulus to study Ray's cinema using the *rasa* theory was to correct the 'rigid, misleading one-sided contextualisation of Ray's cinema and give them the Indian dignity they deserve... [since] the subtlety of his emotional complexity is not an eschewing of tradition, but fine tuning them to its best aspired positions...'¹⁴¹ He argues that just because Ray did not make any mythological or epic melodramas and his films were better understood by Western audiences and reviewers, it is absurd to categorise them as 'art [only], un-Indian or subscribing only to western norms of filmmaking'.¹⁴² Similarly, it is also erroneous to categorise all popular Indian cinema as un-artistic because it does not subscribe to the canons of classical Euro-American film theories. Even popular filmmakers evince a lot of Hollywood and other cinema influence in their work, though whatever is borrowed from Hollywood and other world cinema sources is 'cleverly given a local patina'¹⁴³ – be it Sriram Raghavan's James Bond inspired thrillers or Imtiaz Ali's *desi* romcoms.

¹⁴⁰ Lal and Nandy 2006: xiv-xv.

¹⁴¹ Cooper 2000: 72-75.

¹⁴² 'Ray has learned a lot from Western cinema but not to the exclusion of Indian arts or aesthetics... his films are highly sophisticated in a classical Indian sense to those who have imbibed Indian aesthetic taste...' (Cooper 2000: 73).

¹⁴³ Pendakur 2003: 116.

In the eclectic introductory food imagery used by the *Natyashastra* to elucidate the concept of *rasa* and its tasters, the ideal *rasika* is a ‘cognoscente’¹⁴⁴. ‘Such food is not only prepared by gourmets, it is meant for the consumption of epicures’.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, high art like Ray’s is for the cognoscenti, for *rasikas* who can appreciate the nuances of experiences whose essences, the *rasas*, are distilled and represented for their enjoyment. Good cinema by raising the bar for its connoisseurs need not necessarily belong to another space, because just as all art cinema is not in the league of a Ray film, similarly all popular films are not indiscriminately consumed by audiences. This is evidenced for instance in the high incidence of consistent rejection of unimaginative formulaic films by Indian viewers. According to S.S. Rajamouli, director of *Baahubali: The Beginning* (2015), the costliest film in the history of Indian cinema (until 2015):

Almost all the *masala* films have an item song, a certain number of fights or heroism envisioning scenes, etc. But then why only certain *masala* films do well, and others do not. There must be something different in the *masala* film that became a hit, and there must be something lacking in the one that did not run well. Hence, by default it means that the *masala* film also has a certain grammar. To catch the audience pulse, the so called *masala* ingredients of a *masala* film have to be knitted in a certain way for the people to say it was good and go back to watch the film again. We regularly use the term that the audience are “Gods” and in certain [patronising] contexts, also call them the “innocent audience”. For me, the audience is neither innocent nor God. I look at them as intelligent fellow human beings. Their intelligence [to sense, review, reject or accept a film] comes from years of watching films (Rajamouli, interview, 2015).

Traditionally, not all *natakas* (plays and dramas) were song-and-dance spectacles and two broad categorisations can be delineated among their multiple formats on the basis of the nature of their dramatisation. The first of these is the *natyadharmi*, which had *natya* or dance as its essence with well-known stories from the epics as themes. This kind of drama primarily happened within ornate sets, showcasing stylised acting with elaborate dialogue and powerful action. The second is the *lokadharmi*, which had social significance as its essence. This kind of play included action and acting that was expected to be natural with an absolute rejection of stylised postures and other exaggerated forms of performance.

¹⁴⁴ Ram 2011: 161.

¹⁴⁵ Ram 2011: 161.

These sets of characteristics can be viewed as anticipating the differing formats of the popular and parallel Indian cinema categories respectively. Rangacharya ascribes the post-Indian independence zealotry of revivalist theatre specialists keen on valorising all ancient drama traditions to the propagation of the idea that all Indian drama was about music, dance and stylised acting. Music and dance were essential, but only for *natyadharmi* presentations, which were in complete contrast to their *lokadharmi* counterparts, though both still had to be able to evoke *rasa*.¹⁴⁶ Critics of the efficacy of applying *rasa* theory prescriptions to non-traditional narratives need to realise that sage Bharata too, in recognising the need to place the practice of drama within elements of continuity, flow and change, consistently reminds readers that his text can be interpreted and changed according to the needs of time and place.¹⁴⁷ Anandavardhana echoes that in the hands of a genius, even seemingly old ideas can be represented surprisingly anew.¹⁴⁸ Thus the *rasa* theory's application as a tool of appreciation transcends a film's surface packaging of evolving technologies, audience tastes, narrative themes, formats and pace, to reveal into what defines its core and unites the elements of that package. In other words, the universal themes that trigger universal emotions, which are recognised and felt by all human beings. This lends credence to the possibility of a film's *rasa* being a better differentiator for Indian genres than the genre categories of the West. Indian viewers habitually categorise films based on plots, themes and the emphasis of narration into locally recognised genres like mythologicals, devotionals, family socials, gangster films, comedies, romances, revenge dramas, lost and found films, etc. They are able to make this differentiation between seemingly similar films by using a potpourri of elements, including romance, action, comedy, and drama, which are also used to distinguish various Western genres.¹⁴⁹ Jones hints at exploring the possibility of using *rasas* for a fairer categorisation of Indian cinema genres in order to correct, what Ganti notes, is a common Western criticism that Indian cinemas tend to over deploy an excessive range of

¹⁴⁶ Rangacharya 2010: 350-351.

¹⁴⁷ Vatsayan 1997: 43.

¹⁴⁸ Mookherjee 1968: iii.

¹⁴⁹ Ganti 2004: 139-141.

universally recognised genre characteristics, often in the space of a single film.¹⁵⁰ Jones argues:

While the comparison of a *rasa* to a mere genre of film does some disservice to the concept of *rasa* and the deep emotions that it connotes, it is a fair comparison as certain genres seek to enlist certain emotions from an audience. While not every *rasa* has a corresponding genre many parallels can be seen, if only on the surface level between for example – *sringara* and romance; *hasya* and comedy; *karuna* and melodrama; *raudra-vira* and action; *bhayanaka-bibhatsa* and horror; *adbhuta* and fantasy...¹⁵¹

Thus arguments for a *rasa*-based analysis of Indian cinema have evolved from a cursory acknowledgement of a traditional influence on storytelling styles, to the areas of film, genre and auteur appreciation analysis. Yet, a detailed theoretical study of the parameters and procedures to identify and explore the evocation of *rasa* within changing film forms and film narrative attributes still elude this emerging perspective. Moreover, the sample of study is predominantly limited to a few Hindi films and the celluloid works of one Bengali auteur.

A rasa-based criticism of Indian cinema: the methodology

This thesis aims to contribute to the strengthening of emerging arguments for a *rasa* theory based analysis of Indian cinema in contemporary film scholarship. It uses an empirical and evidence based analysis through a mix of data collection methods: research of archival and historical data indicating a conscious engagement with *rasa* theory in practice; interview-based observations and arguments exploring a conscious and/or subconscious (traditions-driven) carrying over of *rasa* ideas in actual practise; and analytical plot, performance and auteur achievement reviews of landmark Indian films based on the aesthetic appreciation prescriptions of the *rasa* theory. The part-academic study and part-interviews based nature of investigation of this thesis and its multi-disciplinary approach means that in order to engage with a diverse readership across academia, media and the

¹⁵⁰ ‘These perceptions reveal a misunderstanding of the concept of genre and are founded upon notions that genre categories specific to American or European cinema are somehow universal, timeless, and absolute. Genres, however result from a combination of film industry marketing strategies, audience expectations, film criticism, and academic analysis’ (Ganti 2004: 139).

¹⁵¹ Jones 2009: 37.

film industry it will be presented as an analytical, evidence driven argument with relevant academic style referencing through six chapters.

From the officially acknowledged beginning of feature film making in India, Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), to a selection of popular drama episodes from Indian television's most ambitious post-2000 TV series, Star Plus's *Mahabharat* (2013-14), this thesis will engage with a century of India's diverse and prolific film industries (regional language cinemas and the national film industry in Hindi) and television. Actors, writers, technicians, directors, producers and critics from India's four major movie making zones – East (Bengali/Odia), West (Marathi), South (Tamil/Telegu/Malayalam) and North/Central (Hindi or Bollywood) – have been interviewed for a practical understanding of the depth and extent of engagement with *rasa* theory ideas in evolving filmmaking practices. Open-ended explorative questions were asked to identify awareness, observation and analysis of any evidence of conscious or sub-conscious engagement with the *rasa* achievement idea in their work. The manner in which the interviewees were involved in the processes of subscribing to, and reinventing the narrative, music, sets, characterisation and other elements of cinematic performance using the *rasa* evoking paradigm (if any and to what extent) has been explored. The dissertation's research questions also focus on the identification of a common directorial intention uniting a representative body of films from a director's oeuvre, through where evidenced, in the realisation of the most dominant *rasa* of their films. Follow-up interviews were undertaken in three phases of fieldwork in 2013, 2014 and 2015 with a cinematic output's primary collaborators and effectors (actors and technicians), financial beneficiaries (producers and distributors) and reviewers (distributors and trade analysts). Audience interviews, though desirable in a study of film appreciation, have not been explored in this thesis. Since the idea of a *rasa*-based appreciation of cinema is still an emerging argument in Indian cinema studies, I have opted to have my proposed approach first validated by the film industry, its most important meaning makers and critics, before engaging with the consumers of their artistic efforts. Audience endorsement has, however, been taken into account while making the research sample, with popularity (e.g. box-office success) being

a decisive criterion in the selection of a film or TV show for study, irrespective of its genre and style of making. Moreover, the film consuming experience and engagement of the audience, both in India and the diaspora, has been the focus of many contemporary anthropological and ethnography-centric studies on Indian cinema in recent years. This thesis intends to bring back into academic discourse the voices of some of Indian cinema's senior, traditional and influential meaning makers, along with newly emerging directors and actors by engaging them in critical reflections on their work.

Data for the thesis has been collected from investigation into relevant documented evidence from the National Film Archives of India, library sources (of university and publications) and the private collections of interviewees. Detailed and open, qualitative interviews adhering to the thesis' scope of enquiry, were conducted over a period of three years (2012-2015). These include nearly 40 interviews conducted through audio, video and by email of actors, directors, critics and film technicians from six major Indian language cinema industries (Hindi, Bengali, Odia, Telegu, Marathi and Malayalam), spanning eight locations (Mumbai, Pune, Kolkata, Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Hyderabad, Umergaon and Delhi) across India. Some of these interviews also happen to be the last recorded interactions with influential Indian cinema legends – like the first female playback singing star of Indian cinema, Shamshad Begum, Odia cinema's first superstar Sarat Pujari, and Indian National award winning Odia directors Gopal Das and Nirad Mohapatra – who have passed away since. All the interviews have been primarily conducted in English, but wherever views have been expressed in Indian vernaculars like Hindi, Odia, Marathi, etc., I have translated and used the essence of their arguments. The English translations of the film dialogue and lyrics discussed in the thesis too have been translated by me, unless stated otherwise.

Theoretical evidence is explored through an eclectic mix of films, which apart from being pioneering or landmark moments in their respective movie industries, represent films from each of India's four major movie making zones. Between them, the films cover all the signature Indian cinema genres like mythological, devotional, social, *masala*; and

common and prevalent box-office categories like blockbuster, classic, popular, parallel, cheesy/B-movie – and span a timeline of nearly a century of cinematic history. The films also happen to be inter-industry joint ventures, made as collaborations featuring cast and crew from more than one regional Indian film industry. The selection of trend setting, classic films from India's major language cinemas starting from the Silent era to the present day will enable the thesis to explore changing *rasa* imperatives over a period of social, political, cultural and technological change in the medium and its narrative backdrop, the Indian nation.¹⁵² Though Dasgupta did propose mainstream Hindi cinema as an 'all India film' working with an all-encompassing entertainment formula designed to overcome regional and linguistic boundaries, and Rajadhyaksha echoes its pan-Indian 'national and most influential presence' as the Bollywoodisation of Indian cinema, the films for study in this thesis have been selected to achieve an equal proportion in the representation of Hindi and other regional language cinemas. All films have been selected on the basis of the following criteria: a discernible multi-ethnic participation in their making, involving talents and sensibilities of at least two or more major Indian language cinemas; the achievement of a degree of pioneering impact on release and/or in the case of an older film its retrospective acquiring of a cult or classic status; acknowledged box-office success (highlighting its acceptance by the audiences at the time of release); and critical acclaim (endorsement by critics and academics, and wins, if any, at two of India's oldest and prestigious award ceremonies, the Filmfare awards and the Indian National Film awards).

In my thesis, I intend to engage with parameters discussed within existing references to *rasa*-based analysis of films, and investigate new perspectives, such as the success of a performance and/or expressive acting in song-and-dance choreographies aimed at heightening the emotive impact of lyrical/musical scenes. It is crucial that I will be using a wider sample of hitherto unstudied regional language films (e.g. from Marathi and Odia), beyond Hindi and Bengali cinema from some of the major filmmaking eras in Indian

¹⁵² Screen India 2009.

cinema's 100-year-old plus history. This will help enrich and diversify the growing engagement in *rasa*-based scholarship within Indian cinema studies, and explore how they could enable a fairer appreciation of its signature attributes across regions, languages and genres. I propose to achieve this through the study of the processes of *rasa* realisation in a film's narrative format, using the *rasa* theory's prescribed elements for the effecting of the *rasa* of a dramatic performance – its unifying theme, characters, continuity links (music scenes or songs) and directorial intention. Booth attempts a structural review of the *rasa* of a film by a scene-by-scene analysis of the dominant emotions evoked and the time dedicated to their evocation per scene, in contrast to looking at the overall length of a sample film (*Amardeep*, Immortal Light, 1958) to arrive at the film's dominant *rasa*. Subsequent *rasa* analysts, Cooper, Hogan, and Jones, have opted for a broader full narrative span by exploring the overall *rasa* in the drama heightening moments and events of their sample films. Raghavendra too lists the various sub-narratives and character relationships in *Sholay* as embodiments of different *rasas* like hatred, love, melancholy, adventure and comedy, each of which is shown to have its own climax (or 'little endings'¹⁵³) that are not necessarily subordinated to the film's overall end.¹⁵⁴ I will follow a similar pattern for my analysis of a film's plot or theme to locate its dominant *rasa*. Both Cooper and Hogan highlight 'character motivations'¹⁵⁵ and difference-in-response to similar situations (action motivations)¹⁵⁶ for establishing the *rasa* focus of their characters. The role of 'mood music and colour'¹⁵⁷, 'costumes'¹⁵⁸ and the bearing of characters will be studied, and the nature of their overt or covert presentation over time

¹⁵³ This refers to the presentation and denouement of a dramatic confrontation within a scene or an event in a way that it offers a feeling of temporary closure or resolution within its drama's space to be able to be relished/viewed as a standalone mini-plot highlighting an independent sentiment of its own, outside of that of the larger narrative.

¹⁵⁴ Raghavendra 2006: 41.

¹⁵⁵ 'For instance, early in her life, whenever the character of Phoolan Devi is abused (emotional or physical) in *Bandit Queen*, she doesn't weep or lament her fate (that would have led to a pity evoking response in the audience like many other characters in similar situations); instead she curses back her abusers, and tries to combat or resist them (building a more vengeful reaction to abuse thus effecting *raudra* or the *rasa* of anger). Character motivations can thus be reviewed to establish a narrative's dominant *rasa*' (Hogan 2008: 137-138).

¹⁵⁶ Cooper locates it in the protagonist's action motivations in his analysis of Ray's Apu Trilogy.

¹⁵⁷ Nakkach 1997.

¹⁵⁸ Ganguly 2012.

will be noted. What we are shown or invited to see in a film is the director's prerogative. Hence, the nature of the use of these integral drama elements will be studied for analysing directorial motivations, or the *rasa dhvani* of a film, which will be aided by a study of the lyrics of a film's title track or song, where existent. Significant, representative and accessible films from each decade since the making of the first Indian feature film, *Raja Harishchandra* (1913) will be selected keeping in mind the above parameters, while also allowing for the possibility of exploring the entire gamut of *navarasas* within the major Indian film genres.

Overview of chapters

The chapters in the thesis are broadly categorised into two sections: evidence-led correlation confirming the direct influence of *Natyashastra* guidelines on Indian filmmaking practices, and arguments-driven suggested outcome prescriptions on how to use *rasa* theory for appreciating cinematic aesthetics. Section one, comprising of three chapters, engages with direct evidencing of the influence and use of *Natyashastra* prescriptions and *rasa* theory expectations in the early years of Indian cinema, when the movie industry was intimately tied to its theatrical umbilical cord for creative guidance. Section two, comprising of chapters four to six, goes beyond these conscious engagements to explore the relevance of the concepts and ideas discussed in section one for a new medium of artistic expression, like cinema, coming into its own with an assertive, imaginative and identity-establishing detachment from that theatrical cord. In this section, arguments are made for a re-reading of influential and representative cinematic achievements from different eras, regions and genres of Indian on-screen entertainment, using the *rasa* theory to understand and appreciate foundational cinematic attributes like plot construction, performances and directorial achievement.

Chapter one, *A tale about nine sentiments: portraying bhava and rasa on film*, introduces the concept of the *navarasas* (the nine permanent human sentiments to be achieved by an ideal drama according to the *Natyashastra*), their trigger *bhavas* (performance emotions and expressions), and explores how they are actualised within the cinematic context. This

is done using a memorable Hindi film experiment from the 1970s, *Naya Din Nai Raat* (1974), which was made with clearly stated goals aimed at educating the audience about the nine prescribed *rasas* in a drama and guiding them towards identifying and appreciating their exposition through the film's nine different emotional sentiment evoking acts by its lead star-actor, Sanjeev Kumar. *Naya Din Nai Raat* (New Day New Night, 1974) was a joint production venture between the Hindi and Tamil film industries featuring actors, writers, lyricists and music director from the Hindi cinema, and a technical crew from South India led by popular Tamil cinema director A. Bhimsingh. It also was one of the first major Hindi remakes of an influential Tamil film, *Navarathri* (Nine Nights, 1964), which had been made as a vehicle to showcase the acting talent of one of the greatest stars and most influential artists from its classic era, Shivaji Ganesan.

Chapter two, *Rasa and Phalke: tracing Natyashastra influences in the filmmaking of the premier pioneer of Indian cinema* explores the influence of the *Natyashastra* and its writer, sage Bharata, in the shaping of the casting decisions, directorial style and purpose of movie making on Dhundiraj Govind Phalke, the most prolific filmmaker and guiding influence in Indian film history's first two decades of the silent era of cinema. Also known as the 'father of Indian cinema'¹⁵⁹, Phalke was, like many of his successors attracted to the craft of filmmaking by Euro-American films. However, his pioneering impact lay in a deliberate initiating of the first processes of Indianisation of an international art form. This set in motion certain signature styles of differentiation-in-adaptation to create a prodigious offspring that has today arguably mutated far from its foreign parent DNA. Inspired by the Indian independence and identity-seeking movements of the early twentieth century, Phalke wanted to establish a *swadeshi* film industry. His methods were Western, but the end product was a distinct Indian art form. Using Phalke's only surviving films *Raja Harishchandra* (King Harishchandra, 1913/17) and *Kaliya Mardan* (The Taming of Snake Kaliya, 1919) and his explanatory essays, interviews and lectures on making movies as reference, this chapter will argue for a discernible adherence to *Natyashastra* traditions in

¹⁵⁹ Jain, Rai & Bose 2013: 10.

his processes. It will contend that Phalke's conscious insistence through his own work and articulation in the public media did influence the choice of subjects, emergence of genres and acting and direction styles in the first two decades of Indian cinema. The chapter thus highlights the influence of the *Natyashastra* and its *rasa* traditions on the father of the Indian cinema on a personal level and the origin of Indian cinema at a larger industry level, while exploring the idea of extending the concept of *dhvani* (the suggested meaning or purpose of an art form) to auteur review.

Chapter three, *Rasa in review: exploring Natyashastra legacies in the birth of Odia cinema*, takes the evidencing of the influence of *Natyashastra* on early Indian cinemas from beyond the Central/West, birth space of Indian cinema to an Eastern Indian film industry, the Odia language cinema. It engages with reviews of the first Odia language film, *Sita Bibaha* (Sita's Marriage, 1936) at the time of its release, and the second Odia film *Lalita* (1948) in retrospective, to demonstrate the influence of, and the engagement with *rasa* theory prescriptions in film criticism. Apart from being a historical landmark, *Lalita* is not only a representative film of Indian cinema's early talkie era but is also a joint co-production project between two of Eastern India's biggest film industries, Bengali and Odia, with a near equal cast and crew participation from both. The film, based on an ancient religious Odia fable, was entirely shot in a Calcutta studio. Using *Lalita*, the second and oldest available Odia film as case study, this chapter will evidence the revival and reconnection with Sanskrit drama traditions in its narrative's construction, presentation (*mise-en-scène*) and performance styles. This will also counter popular notions that tend to equate the narrative attributes of all early Indian cinemas with the Parsi theatre. It will instead argue that the coming of cinema had in many regional movie industries provided their pioneer filmmakers with an opportunity to revive and reengage with the performance traditions of the Sanskrit theatre, which had been steadily receding from public performance by the turn of the twelfth century. The chapter will highlight the effect of *rasa* theory in film criticism through a critical evaluation of *Lalita*'s attempts for cinematic correction of the causes of failure of the first Odia film *Sita Bibaha* (1936) based on film reviews. It will be shown how the concept and evocation of *rasa* was and remains

a major parameter of review in the critical discourse of some regional cinema industries to date.

After exploring and evidencing of direct *Natyashastra* and *rasa* theory influences in the birth moments of two different regional Indian cinema industries from the Western and Eastern parts of India, chapter four, *Rasa in adaptation: analysing the emotive ingredients of a masala film*, will engage with a *rasa* theory based re-reading of the narrative structure of *Sholay* (Embers, 1975). This is a landmark film that over the years has come to be a monument of post-independence Indian culture and a classic, which critics and filmmakers have frequently celebrated as a decisive moment of change and influence in the history of Indian cinema. Hindi cinema fans and critics have repeatedly reviewed *Sholay* as the greatest Bollywood film ever, and four decades after its release, it remains an ideal manifestation of Salman Rushdie's description of the Indian film format as an 'epico-mythico-tragico-comico-super-sexy-high-masala (mix of conventional Western cinema genres) art'.¹⁶⁰ In this chapter, *Sholay*'s retrospective labelling as the perfect *masala* film will be sourced to its being able to successfully evoke all the *navarasas*. This will be achieved through a scene-by-scene analysis of the evoked emotions (dominant or otherwise) of its myriad sub-plots that lead to its grand heroism celebrating narrative. I will also analyse the continuing influence of the *rasa theory* prescription that a good dramatist (or director) should, while attempting a perfect blend of *rasas*, be able to unite them under one dominant, lasting *rasa*. The dominant projected emotion in the nature of its characters, each of whom is constructed as a trigger of a certain *rasa* in the audience, will also be discussed. Seminal scenes of the film, directly inspired by 1960s' Hollywood Westerns, will be compared to explore how the *rasa*-evoking needs of an Indian film differentiate this Curry Western from its Spaghetti Western sources. After establishing in the previous chapter the evocation of *rasa* as a theoretical expectation in the review of a cinematic work, this chapter will engage with the manifested aspects of practical performance modifications, characterisation and plot construction undertaken with the

¹⁶⁰ Rushdie 1996: 148-149.

aim of a deliberate evoking of *rasa* in adaptation.

Chapter five, *Rasa in characterisation: reviewing gender and character stereotypes as rasa achievements in Maya Bazar and Madam X*, will evidence the adherence to *rasa* postulates in on-screen acting on the basis of a diverse sample of performances from two distinct genres of Indian cinema, featuring films from two different eras and regions of filmmaking. It will also explore the theory's usage in the understanding of some of the dominant formulas and stereotypes relating to characterisation in popular Indian cinema, especially in an actor's portrayal of characters with discernible performance binaries like male and female or good and evil. Just as the *Natyashastra* broadly categorises the *rasas* to be evoked in performance as pleasurable and non-pleasurable, Indian cinema too has traditionally categorised characters and character attributes within stereotypical binaries of positive and negative or masculine and feminine. This chapter will argue that the ideal or expected formulaic *bhava* attributes for the on-screen characterisation of heroes and heroines, or for the differentiation of heroes from villains, can be better appreciated through a *rasa*-based investigation. K.V. Reddy's path-breaking 1957 bilingual, *Mayabazar* (Market of Illusions), remains an influential genre landmark within the Indian mythological film and a reference for model screenplay in South Indian cinemas. The highlight of the film, a magical love story from the *Mahabharata*, is its heroine's dual personality presence, differentiated by the nuanced emotive reactions of actress Savithri. A plot twist has her character impersonated by an illusionist demon, who as a man trapped in a woman's body reveals the *rasa* directives in play; the actor's portrayal of the reactions of male and female protagonists to similar situations is conducted in accordance with ideal notions of masculine and feminine *bhavas* of acting. This chapter will establish how the specific *bhavas* that Savithri selects and rejects from the nine prescribed *sthayibhavas* (primary human emotions) to distinguish, personify and limit her woman-as-woman part from a man-as-woman character reinforce Sanskrit dramatic conventions around ideal male and female portrayals in Indian cinema. *Madam X*, a representative landmark in the star driven, often cheesy, Hindi cinema thrillers from the 1980s and 1990s too has one lead actor/actress, Rekha. She essays two diverse roles with opposite character

motivations – one is positive and the other is negative and the villain of the film. These characters are differentiated by a distinct set of dominant character attributes evoking specific *rasas* in performance. In the character attributes or choice of *sthayibhavas* that Rekha deploys to distinguish her evil protagonist from the good double, there is a reinforcement of the *Natyashastra* binary regarding pleasurable and non-pleasurable *rasas* shaping the expectations around pleasurable and non-pleasurable characters.

After exploring the practical evidences and sub-conscious influences of *rasa* theory on direction, film appreciation, plot construction and characterisation in an Indian filmed narrative, chapter six, *Rasa in performance: Draupadi's insult and a plea for vengeance in nine emotions*, will discuss and educate on how to study and appreciate the rich, varied and multiple *bhava* manifestations in the *abhinaya* (acting) achievement of an Indian actor in a dramatic performance, often erroneously dismissed as melodrama. This will be done by carrying out a detailed performance analysis of the protagonist in a significant sequence from Indian satellite television's most ambitious costume drama TV series, *Mahabharat*¹⁶¹ (Sept. 2013-Aug.2014). The selection of the TV series will also broaden the ambit of Indian on-screen entertainment being studied in this thesis, from cinema to television. From its first episode, *Mahabharat* (2013-14) became the most popular mythological on Indian TV, and entered the top five fiction show listings subsequent to its episodes centering on the pivotal dice game. The ratings peaked in the week depicting Draupadi's insult in the court of King Dhritarashtra during the game of dice. This chapter seeks an engagement with *rasa* theory prescriptions for the evoking of the *navarasas* within the performances and the presentation of the *Mahabharata* war's most influential motivating factor, depicted over five episodes from the entry to the exit of Draupadi. This engagement will be explained through an analysis of the dominant character *bhavas* of each major player in the scene, the use of relevant (prescribed) mood/personality enhancing colour in their costumes, and the sequencing of drama events aimed at providing the audiences with a sumptuous relish of maximum *rasas*. On set interviews

¹⁶¹ The TV series is hitherto spelt as *Mahabharat* throughout the thesis, to differentiate it from references made to the actual epic, spelt as *Mahabharata*.

with some of the scene's influential meaning makers will be examined to indicate both conscious and subconscious references to Sanskrit drama prescriptions. Contrary to popular notions and contemporary criticisms of the increasing westernisation of the Indian entertainment space, chapter six looks at this interpretation of an ancient tale in a new visual medium, which is shaped by young Indian talents exposed to alternate and less emotive styles of filmmaking, to reaffirm the robustly flowing stream of *rasa* consciousness in the modern Indian creative space.

The chapters in this thesis have thus been conceived as a series of independent arguments from different eras of filmmaking, film industries and mediums, covering a century of Indian on-screen entertainment across genres, regions and mediums to evidence and acknowledge a unifying usage and influence of *rasa* theory prescriptions across Indian cinema and television. This contributes towards strengthening the central argument of the thesis for a greater engagement with a *rasa*-based analysis of Indian cinema. Between them, the chapters cover all the aspects of a filmed narrative – plot construction, *mise-en-scène*, performance, costume, music, dance, lyrics, editing, cinematography and direction – to offer an alternate appreciation template for attempting a *rasa* theory-based approach to film criticism.

CHAPTER ONE

A TALE ABOUT NINE SENTIMENTS: PORTRAYING

BHAVA AND RASA ON FILM

Greetings to art lovers. Poets, actors and other artistes recreate human emotions again and again. Experts and well-read elders believe that a human being's life has nine qualities/sentiments/characteristics, which they have named the navarasas. These are – the erotic, comic, heroic, furious, pathetic, odious, marvellous, terrible and peaceful. To the mother of arts these are like a nine diamond jewellery set. In the necklace of life, these are the nine sustaining beads. A life without the experiences of the rasas is incomplete/meaningless. But the wise ones steer away from their temptations, while the others renounce the world after experiencing them.

Excerpted from the introduction narrations of *Navarathiri* (Tamil, 1964), *Navrathri* (Telugu, 1966) and *Naya Din Nai Raat* (Hindi/Urdu, 1974)

The audience does not have to know the *rasa* theory. They do not have to know the technicalities behind the making of a film to enjoy the final product. These are additional guidelines available for us [producers, directors and actors] to use the medium better.

(Malayalam cinema writer-director, Anjali Menon interview, 2015)

1.1 Introduction

The experiencing of the *rasa*, or the most pervading dominant sentiment suggested by a work of art, by a spectator has been celebrated as the apogee of achievement, and the purpose of every art form in the Indian aesthetic tradition of appreciation. Whether this cognition happens as an absolute identification (empathy) or in varying degrees of understanding within a spectator for a creator/performer's trigger emotion, is a measure of the *level* of success of a creative effort. As a critical expectation in the review of a drama ('there is no *natya* without *rasa*'¹⁶², this has been recognised by critics and commentators of Indian aesthetics to have been concretised, expounded and handed over as a seminal rule of performance, first recorded in the 2000-year-old Indian textbook of Sanskrit drama, the *Natyashastra*. *Rasa*, as a term, however has been in circulation from time immemorial

¹⁶² NS 6.31-33 - *Natyashastra* will be abbreviated as NS in citations of chapter and verse references from the Sanskrit drama text. These will be cited throughout the thesis as NS, followed by the chapter number and the verse number by which they appear in the text of the *Natyashastra*. The English translations of the *Natyashastra* by M.M. Ghosh (1961) and Adya Rangacharya (2010) in English will be the reference texts for the verse selections.

like most Indian/Hindu ‘*sruti* scriptures’¹⁶³, like the Vedas, or influential religio-cultural guide/reference texts like the *Natyashastra*, whose origin is attributed to the *Vedas*. Initially, ‘*rasa*’ mainly referred to literal meanings like liquid, juice, taste, etc., but post *Natyashastra*, it has primarily come to signify a ‘sentimental state of being’ or the final emotional state of ‘relish/reaction/aesthetic experience’¹⁶⁴ achieved by a spectator while watching a performing art like dance, music and theatre, savouring a visual art like painting and sculpture, or reading a literary art like poetry, novel, etc.

1.2 The Number of *Rasas*

In the ‘original’ text of the *Natyashastra*, attributed to sage Bharata, eight *rasas* are listed, corresponding to eight *sthayi*/ (permanent)-*bhavas*/ (emotional mood-states-of-the-mind). These are ‘love (*rati*), mirth (*hasa*), sorrow (*shoka*), anger (*kroadha*), energy (*utsaha*), fear (*bhaya*), disgust (*jugupsa*) and astonishment (*vismaya*)’ (NS 6.17). Their corresponding *rasas* are ‘erotic/romantic (*sringara*), comic (*hasya*), pathetic (*karuna*), furious (*raudra*), heroic (*vira*), fearful (*bhayanaka*), odious (*bibhatsa*) and marvellous (*adbhuta*)’ (NS 6.15). The *sthayibhavas*, in various combinations with 41 other transitory (*vyabhicari*) and involuntary/instantaneous (*sattvika*) *bhavas* in a dramatic performance, kindle one or more of the *rasas*, which are universally recognised and are common to all human beings.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Scriptures in Hinduism are broadly divided into two categories – i.e. *sruti* or ‘that which was heard, often directly from the God/or gods’, and *smirti*, ‘that which was remembered and passed on by generations of sages and the learned’ before being written or codified.

¹⁶⁴ Sanskrit words and terms when translated into English often suffer a loss in translation, especially those endowed with multiple religio-cultural meanings. Hence, occasional use of multiple words to explain a term’s best possible meaning will recur.

¹⁶⁵ The *Natyashastra* and its subsequent commentaries (like Abhinavagupta’s) together distinguish a total of 49 *bhavas*, divided into three categories in a hierarchy, in which the higher category encompasses the one below. At the bottom are the eight so-called involuntary emotional reactions (*sattvikabhavas*) like sweating, trembling, weeping, paralysis, horripilation, fainting, change of colour and change of voice. Above them are 33 transitory mental states (*vyabhicaribhavas*) like apprehension, stupor, joy, cruelty, anxiety, shame, etc., which represent minor incidental feelings. Finally on top are the permanent emotions or *sthayibhavas* (*rati*, *hasa*, etc.). The 41 emotions (8 + 33) in the third and second category respectively, in various combinations, feed and contribute to the creation of a permanent emotion, which are compared to kings surrounded by a large retinue of servant sub-emotions. For example, the transitory mental states manifesting *bhayanaka rasa* are cruelty, anxiety, etc. with their *sattvikabhavas* being sweating, trembling, etc. Or a work pervading with the permanent emotion of love, may have jealousy, anxiety, joy, sadness, anger and other *vyabhicaribhavas* functioning as its transient accessories, all suggesting and sustaining the *sringara rasa*. It is because of this superiority among emotions that the permanent emotions can generate *rasas* (Tieken 2000: 21-122; Gnoli



1956: 29-30; Rayan 1965: 251; Marchand 2006: 7).



Still-1 (*Navarasa Collage*): ‘Is sansaar ke maala mein nauras ke manke hain – *aascharya, bhay, karuna, kroadh, bhakti (shant), bibhats, sringaar, veer aur anand (hasya)*. Jo log gyani hote hain, wo in rason ka bhog karne se pehle hi apna aanchal bacha lete hain, aur kuch log in rason ka bhog karne ke paschat prabhu se lau laga lete hain’ (Sanjeev Kumar as Rahasyanand in *Naya Din Nai Raat*. Dialogue by Rajinder Krishan, 1974). See opening quote for translation.

Thus there is no *rasa* without *bhava*, because ‘just as by the combination of various spices, vegetables, and other auxiliary food parts, a cooked dish is brought forth with a distinct taste of its own, which is different from any of its constituent materials, similarly the *bhavas* (*sthayi, vyabhicari* and *sattvika*) along with different kinds of *abhinaya* (histrionic representation) cause the *rasas* (sentiments) to originate (*bhavayanti*)’¹⁶⁶. According to the *rasa* theory’s foundational *sutra*: ‘*vibhavanubhava-vyabhicari-samyogad rasamishpattih*’¹⁶⁷, a *rasa* is born in a *rasika* (an empathetic spectator with an evolved taste) ‘out of the union of the *vibhavas* or determinants (the words, causes and actions leading to the happening of actions and events in a way that they generate certain *bhavas*), their corresponding *anubhavas* or consequents (the verbal, physical and involuntary emotional reflexes or reactions to a *vibhava*), and the connecting *vyabhicaribhavas* (various combinations of the thirty-three transitory emotional mood-states-of-the-mind) that arise in-between, to manifest, accentuate and establish a ‘*sthayibhava*’.¹⁶⁸ The recognition and experiencing of this *sthayibhava*, in an empathetic spectator ‘free of the seven *doshas*’¹⁶⁹, leads to the savouring of the *rasa* within him/her, as it ‘touches one’s heart and spreads through the body as fire spreads in dry wood’¹⁷⁰, leading to a state of aesthetic rupture or

¹⁶⁶ NS 6.34/35.

¹⁶⁷ NS 6.32.

¹⁶⁸ ‘Thus, though the *sthayibhava* is not mentioned in the *rasa-sutra*, it is the *sthayibhava* that evokes *rasa*, and *rasa* results from the enactment (*abhinaya*) of *vibhava, anubhava, vyabhicari/sanchari-bhava* and *sattvikabhava*, all of which have as the object of their representation the *sthayibhava*’ (Kapoor 2006: 153-154).

¹⁶⁹ ‘Lack of verisimilitude, immersion in temporal or spatial determinants which are exclusively one’s own or exclusively those of another, being at the mercy of sensations of pleasure, etc., (which inhere solely in one’s own persona), defective state of the means of perception, lack of evidence, lack of pre-eminence and the allowing of doubts’ (Gnoli 1956: 77-78).

¹⁷⁰ NS 7.7.

ananda (bliss).

Some later commentators of the *Natyashastra*, upgraded *nirveda* (detachment, which was recognised by Bharata as the most important *vyabharibhava*) to the status of a *sthayibhava*, while others suggested the addition of a new *sthayibhava*, called *tatvagyana* (an emotional state of detachment born within the self from the awareness or knowledge that the world is *maya* or illusion). Both these arguments however agreed on calmness or the sentiment of being at peace or peaceful (*shanta*) as its corresponding *rasa*.¹⁷¹ Following the endorsement of its inclusion by Abhinavagupta in the *Natyashastra*'s most influential critique and commentary text, *Abhinavabharati*, (in 11th century CE), *shanta* has come to stay as one among the nine desired aesthetic experiences, or the *navarasas*, that are born from 'the *only* nine permanent mental states'.¹⁷² That these are to be achieved by/realised through a creative effort aspiring to be recognised as 'ideal' has been a guide canon of Indian aesthetic criticism for over a millennia now. These nine, also are the *only rasas*, and no other, because *only* they are 'listed in the *itihasa* (epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*), *purana* (records of ancient events) and *abhidhanakosha* (lexicons that list names)'.¹⁷³ Though the conception of *rasa* was dealt chiefly in relation to poetry and drama, 'in effect it encompassed all arts which were subject of the eye and the ear,'¹⁷⁴ and hence we can include cinema. As Hiriyanna notes, 'It [the *rasa* theory] is general and furnishes the criterion by which the worth of all forms of fine art may be judged'.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Kapoor 2006: 174-180.

¹⁷² 'These are of the nature of inborn drives or states resulting from the impressions of many lives and all human beings are born with these drives – they are genetic endowments. The meta-rule for human nature is "dislike of sorrow (*dukkha*) and eagerness for happiness (*sukha*)". So, every human being: seeks pleasure (this indicates the *sthayibhava, rati*), for pleasure laughs at others (*hasya*), suffers on being separated from the source of pleasure in the form of a loved object or person (this indicates *shoka*), on account of such a separation develops anger (*krodha*), on account of helplessness is afraid (*bhaya*), yearns for and makes efforts to acquire or achieve something (this indicates *utsaha*), is full of dislike for unpleasant things (*jugupsa*), is surprised at unexpected deeds or conduct or thoughts (this indicates *vismaya*), and has the urge to renounce all these burdens or constraints (*nirveda*). No one says Abhinavagupta, is born without these *chittavrittis* (cognitive/mental tendencies); the only difference is that some of us have more of one and some of us have less. In some people these are directed at proper objects/persons, in others at undesirable, and only those are worthy of being emulated, enjoined or presented that are helpful in the realisation of the four ends of life (*kama, artha, dharma, moksha*)' (Kapoor 2006: 161).

¹⁷³ Kapoor 2006: 179.

¹⁷⁴ Jain & Daljit 2005: 5.

¹⁷⁵ Hiriyanna 1997: 72.

1.3 *Rasa* in Cinema

The determinants, consequents and *bhava* states leading to the creation of *rasa* through a cinematic telling can be thus located.

Determinants (*vibhavas*): The physical stimulants of a narrative like the plot, theme, setting, cinematography, contexts of time and space, the dramatic problem and the nature of its resolution, variety of characters, their motivations, and the like.

Consequents (*anubhavas*): The feelings and emotions generated as reaction to the above determinants, like the context of a story ('awe' for a fantasy backdrop, 'fear' for a disaster setting, etc.), the difference in the resolution of a plot ('tragic' for a romantic tale like *Romeo & Juliet* or joyous for a 'happily ever after' ending love story like *Abhigyanam Shakuntalam*), the quality of *abhinaya* (acting skills on display), levels of intensity and authenticity in performance achieved by the individual actors, their respective talents, etc.

Emotional mood-states-of-a-human-being (these will be henceforth referred to as 'moods'/*bhavas* in the thesis): The *vyabhicaribhavas* or transitory mental states connect and arise in various combinations with the eight involuntary expressions of emotion to generate a dominant *sthayibhava*, as a master motif, to which all other emotional experiences are subservient. This is the birth trigger for the lasting/end *rasa* that the audience leaves a film or dramatic tale with. Hence while the end sentiment of a tragedy like *Hamlet* or *Devdas* is a kindling of the *rasa* of pathos, a situational comedy like *Padosan* (The Neighbour, 1968) will leave the audience in a comic *rasa* state. *Rasa* is achieved in the audience or the viewers as a reaction to the experience of a scenario, or a film in entirety; and not in the actor, whose *abhinaya* (performance) is *only* the source of the *bhavas* that trigger the *rasa*. Schwartz explains:

Although the *rasas* may be understood as sentiments, they are never achieved by sentimentality. They may appear to result from emotion, but to be emotional is to lose any possibility of attaining the goal. One *must* distinguish between any personal ego oriented function and the actual, transpersonal, transcendent purpose. To fail is to embrace mediocrity, to be seduced and entrapped by *maya*.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Schwartz 2004: 15-16.

The actor is thus just a container (*paatra*)¹⁷⁷ for *bhavas* to reside in, and his character behaves as per the dominant *bhava* that is manifested within him at a given moment.

In *Naya Din Nai Raat* (*New Day New Night*, A. Bhimsingh 1974), a landmark Hindi film from the 1970s, the nine *sthayibhavas* have been turned into nine physical characters or *paatras*, each of who is the container of one dominant *sthayibhava*, and hence though portrayed by the same actor, they totally vary from each other. In this chapter, I will identify and locate each of *Natyashastra*'s 49 listed *bhavas* (Table 1) in the on-screen performances of the lead actors of a film case study, and explain, how in combination with various determinants and consequents, they convey and/or achieve the *navarasas* within a cinematic scenario.

1.4 Navarathiri to Naya Din Nai Raat

Naya Din Nai Raat, marked the last and most ambitious adaptation in a series of cinematic experiments, featuring some of the most talented and 'influential' actors from three of India's largest film industries. The film is presented as an anthology of sub-plots, featuring varied *rasa* evoking experiences in a lady protagonist/heroine, who meets nine characters, each of who has one of the nine *sthayibhavas*, as his dominant state of being (in that particular encounter scenario).

The history of Indian cinema abounds with many triumphs of performance that have emerged in the course of the drama of a narrative. *Naya Din Nai Raat* is a case study reference to those celluloid creations where the drama flowers in the acting capabilities of individual actors. Yet, it is not a star vehicle conceptualised to highlight the talent of its lead actors *only*. Instead, as the film's opening narration elucidates, the film was conceived as a 'unique on-screen effort' (Dilip Kumar, 1974)¹⁷⁸ to showcase, and educate the

¹⁷⁷ *Paatra*, the Sanskrit term used to describe a character, also means 'a vessel from which you can drink something. Anything you pour into the vessel – buttermilk, sweet milk, alcohol, juices – it readily accommodates it. As long as it is filled with something, it remains as if it is made to contain only that. Similarly, the actor's mind is like an empty vessel. You can fill it with the feelings of any character – Rama today, Ravana tomorrow. After doing the role, his mind becomes empty again, like the vessel i.e. emptied after use' (Mishra 2010: 101-102).

¹⁷⁸ Dilip Kumar, a legendary Hindi cinema actor, who narrates the opening quote of the film *Naya Din Nai*

audience, about the significant role of the *navarasas* in everyday life, and highlight the necessity for their presence in a good human drama, as stated in the introduction – ‘Gyani logon ka kehna hai ki jeevan mein nauras na ho to jeevan sampurn nahi hota, yani zindagi muqammil nahi hoti’ (‘The wise elders have reflected that a life without the experiences of the *navarasas* is incomplete/meaningless and unworthy of living’, Krishan 1974)¹⁷⁹.

In adherence to the *Natyashastra*’s prescribed style of a *sutradhar* (narrator) first introducing a play, its purpose and appeal to spectators, the film’s opening commentary also introduces the nine *rasas*, with a special mention of the ‘immense’ talent required to convey the dramatic scope of its ‘rare narrative effort’ – ‘Film Naya Din Nai Raat mein hamare mulk ka ek qabil aur nihayati honhar adakar in naurason ka abhinaya kar raha hai’ (‘In this film a very talented and sincere actor of our country is portraying the *navarasas*’, Krishan 1974). It ends with a hopeful plea to the spectator for appreciation and encouragement – ‘Hindustani film industry mein ye ek achuti mishal, ek kabile kadar koshish hai. Umeed hai, aap ise pasand pharmayenge’ (‘This being a unique and applause worthy experiment in the history of Hindi cinema, we hope you will relish it’ Krishan 1974). The use of the Urdu term ‘pasand pharmayenge’ is not just a mere wish that the film works for the audience, but a hope that it will generate audience endorsement. The outcome of such a form of enjoyment lies not only in experiencing pleasure for the duration of the film followed by forgetting, but in the hope of an aftertaste long and memorable enough to make its viewer spread the word about watching the film. In the nature of this request is revealed a unique aspect of the *rasa* appreciation process. According to mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik:

The two-way relationship between the performer and audience, is not just sensory, emotional or intellectual, but also commercial. The artist churns *rasa* in the senses and the heart of the audience through the performance. She offers *bhoga* (food) to satisfy his craving. His attention and adulation contributes to the quality of the performance... [In the context of cinema this can be argued to be achieved in the

Raat introducing the concept of the *navarasas*, will be referred as D. Kumar to avoid any confusion with the film’s hero, Sanjeev Kumar, who will be referred to as ‘Kumar’ only.

¹⁷⁹ Noted Indian poet, lyricist and screenwriter from Hindi cinema’s Golden Age, Rajinder Krishan also credited as Rajendra Krishan wrote the dialogue and the songs of *Naya Din Nai Raat*. The film was one of the last commercial successes of his prolific writing career that started in late 1940s. He will be cited for all the dialogue clips used in this chapter.

repeat viewings of a film by a viewer or his word-of-mouth attracting of other viewers to a film, thus helping a good ‘hit’ film to turn into a blockbuster.] Then he pays her with appreciation, adulation, praise, and of course money. A ‘two-way’ relationship is thus concluded.¹⁸⁰

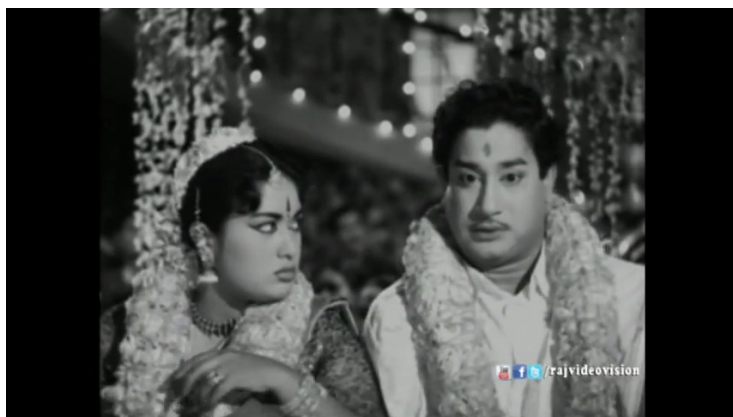
Adherence to *Natyashastra* prescriptions are further evinced in the film’s sticking to the eight *rasas* originally mentioned in Bharata’s treatise. The ninth, later addition *shanta rasa*, is not mentioned in the film’s introduction, which lists ‘*aascharya* (hairat/marvellous), *bhay* (khauf/fearful), *karuna* (raham/pathetic/compassion), *kroadha* (gussa/furious), *bhakti* (ibadat/devotion), *ghrna* (qarahat/disgust), *shringaar* (ishq-mohabbat/romantic), *veer* (dileri/heroic) and *anand* (sukoon/joy)’ as the nine *rasas* to be achieved through performance. The introduction includes Urdu synonyms (mentioned above within brackets) of the *sthayibhava* terms in Hindi/Sanskrit, acknowledging the then prevalent style of using Hindustani (mix of Urdu and Hindi) dialogue, a literate tradition considered to be one of the greatest legacies of the ‘Golden Age of Hindi cinema’.¹⁸¹ According to the era’s most influential and acclaimed actor, Dilip Kumar, the ‘appeal and essence of all memorable performances and celluloid creations of the era lay in its *shero-shayari* (rhetorical/stylised and poetic) articulation of ideas and stories’ (Alter interview, 2013), which were closer to the classical/theatrical notions of good acting discussed in the *Natyashastra*.

Naya Din Nai Raat was not the first such trial in Indian cinema where a single actor essays multiple characters from different age groups, with varying character motivations and dominant emotion states. The experiment was first attempted by Sivaji Ganesan, a legendary Tamil actor, trained in the *Natyashastra* tradition of Tamil Nadu’s company theatres, in the Tamil film *Navarathiri* (Nine Nights, A.P. Nagarajan, 1964). The film was remade in Telegu with Akkineni Nageshwar Rao (ANR) as *Navarathri* (Nine Nights, T. Rama Rao, 1966). *Naya Din Nai Raat* was conceived as *Navarathiri*’s Hindi remake to introduce the idea to a larger pan-Indian audience under the directorial baton of A. Bhimsingh, one of the most successful South Indian directors of the era to ‘crossover’ to

¹⁸⁰ Pattanaik 2015.

¹⁸¹ Early-1940s to mid-1960s.

making Hindi films. Dilip Kumar, also an actor from the classical acting tradition, was initially approached for the role because of his reputation in acting abilities and influence in then Hindi cinema, being in comparable league with that of Ganesan and ANR in the Tamil and Telegu cinemas respectively. Sanjeev Kumar, an emerging actor-star of the 1970s eventually performed the role. This was a time when the first set of frontline artists (actors playing the roles of heroes/heroines) trained in film schools exploring Western/European styles and attitudes to acting (e.g. the Stanislavsky model), ‘along with the teaching of *Natyashastra*’s theories and postulates’ (Alter interview, 2013), were entering the Hindi film industry. The lead pair of *Naya Din Nai Raat*, hero Sanjeev Kumar, was trained in the ‘realist leftist’¹⁸² theatre culture, while heroine Jaya Bhaduri was an acting graduate from the Film and Television Institute of India. They exchanged the exaggerated classical theatrics of Ganesan’s stylised act for a subtle (in expressions) realistic acting style that while adhering to the ancient Indian principles of dramatic performance, adapts its realisation to the sensibilities of a contemporary visual medium in close-up like cinema. They experimented with a relatively less stylised acting interpretation of the universal and timeless aspects in the performance guidelines of the *Natyashastra*, in comparison to a literal adherence to its every dated recommendation by Ganesan in *Navarathiri*.



Still-2: Savithri and Sivaji Ganesan in a scene from *Navarathiri* (Nine Nights, 1964)

Ganesan and ANR in their film’s narration are introduced using exalted, theatrical epithets

¹⁸² Kumar had started his acting career with the Indian People’s Theatre Association and the Indian National Theatre.

like ‘Nadigar Thillagam’ (the pride of actors)¹⁸³ and ‘Natasamrat’ (king among performers) respectively, while Sanjeev Kumar gets a more subtle accolade of just being a ‘qabil aur nihayati honhar’ (talented and sincere) actor. Ganesan’s extended monologues in classical Tamil in most of his character parts are exchanged for conventional, everyday dialogue in *Naya Din Nai Raat*, with the inclusion of longer conversation scenes between its hero and heroine. The screenplay too is updated to better connect the rapidly changing situations in the original film, and incorporate a relatively greater degree of cinematic realism and narrative continuity. For instance, while the thirty-plus ‘Natishiromani’ (queen among actresses) Savithri looks too old to pass off as a college girl in both the Tamil and Telegu films, her counterpart in the Hindi film, a twenty-something Jaya Bhaduri looks more the part.

Ganesan’s *Navarathiri*, like most of his acclaimed on-screen acts was theatre on screen, while Kumar’s take was theatre to cinema. It emerged as a valuable study of continuity in dramatic traditions, making it an important reference film for understanding *rasa* achievement in cinematic scenarios, their trigger *bhavas* in acting and eventual blending in the service of offering a wholesome cinematic entertainment experience. Both the South Indian films, also stick to the nine *rasas*, enjoying maximum consensus, i.e. ‘arpudham (marvellous), bhayam (fearful), karunai (pathetic), kovam (furious), saantham (peaceful), aruvaruppu (disgust), singaaram (erotic), veeram (heroic), anandam (comic)’ (*Navarathiri* 1964),¹⁸⁴ while their Hindi remake opts to exchange *shanta* (peace) with *bhakti* (devotion). However, since both *shanta* and *bhakti* subscribe to *moksha* (liberation) as their *purusartha* (purpose of life) goal, the difference is primarily an exercise in nomenclature ‘with *bhakti* actually being considered a part of the *shanta rasa* by Abhinavagupta’.¹⁸⁵ The narrative of *Naya Din Nai Raat* is constructed in a way that the *vibhavas* causing the *sthayibhavas* and their resultant *anubhavas* are enacted between its hero and heroine on the screen itself, with the heroine being the first site of a *rasa*’s realisation. This, then becomes the dominant or uniting sentiment for the audience to experience, extracted from

¹⁸³ Translated by Roshini Dubey.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

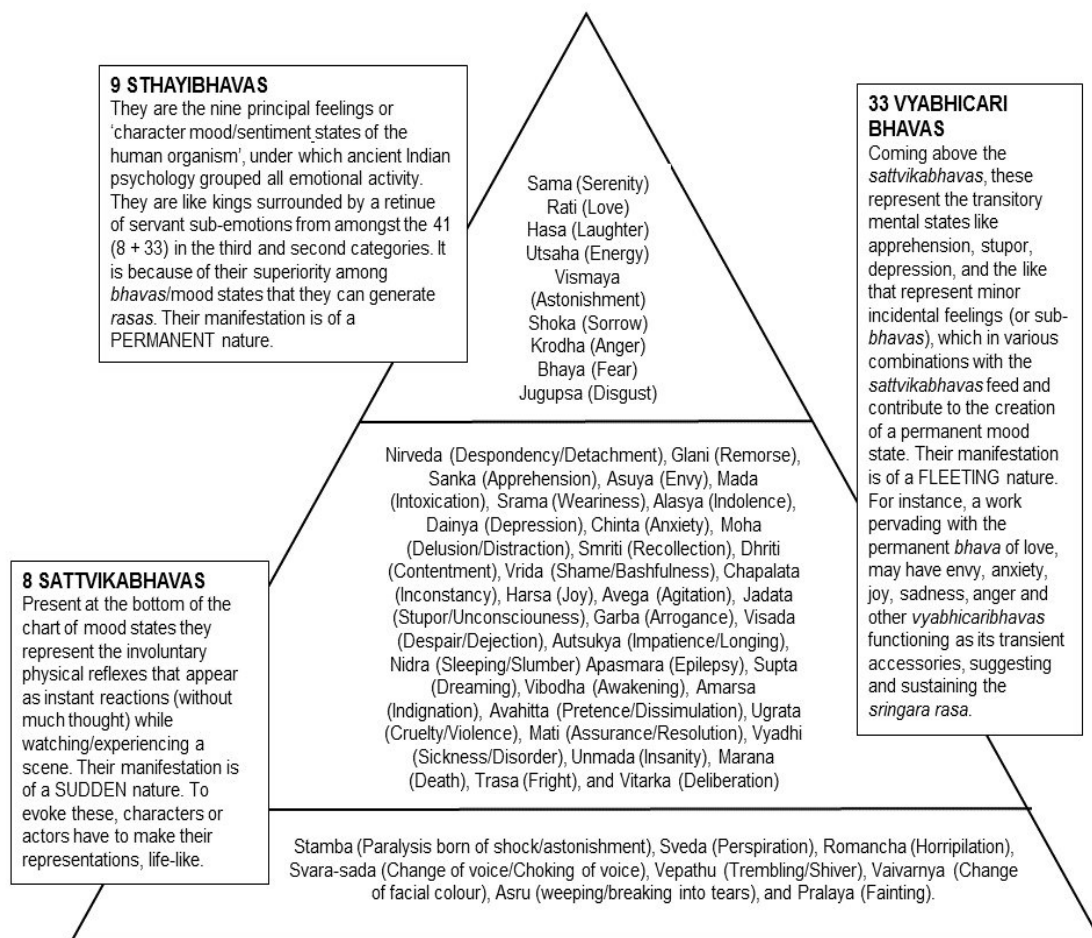
¹⁸⁵ Kapoor 2006: 180.

the emergent scenario involving the two, based on the nature of the unfolding events, and their connecting action-reaction mood states and type of resolutions offered, each of which are customised towards the cognition of a particular *rasa*. For instance, the fight sequence in the scenario highlighting the furious *rasa* is one of gore and blood, while the one in the comic scenario is a no-injury inflicting, almost *Chaplinesque* dramatised choreography aimed at evoking laughter.

1.5 A tale about nine sentiments

I will now discuss each of these ‘encounter’ sub-plot scenarios, arguing that their on-screen achievement of a *rasa* adheres to the *Natyashastra*’s prescriptions on the evoking of the various *rasas*, using the 49 prescribed *bhavas* as listed below.

Table 1: The Hierarchy of *Bhavas* as listed in Chapter 7 of the *Natyashastra*



The *bhavas* in performance will be showcased in **bold**, to highlight their first manifestation in the film. Sushma (Jaya Bhaduri), the film's heroine, is a young girl in love with Anand (Sanjeev Kumar). Unknown to Sushma, her father (Om Prakash) arranges her marriage with Anand. Instead of ascertaining the identity of her groom, she rebels against the idea of an arranged marriage and after a heated argument with her father, flees from her home. Thus begin a series of *rasa* experience encounters as she embarks on an uncharted journey, meeting different characters portrayed by the film's hero, Sanjeev Kumar. The dominant personality trait or mood state of these characters and the situational context in which they meet and interact with Sushma set the drama for her experiencing of the *navarasas*.

Encounter 1: *Rasa – Bhayanaka*



Still-3



Still-4



Still-5



Still-6



Still-7



Still-8

After the end of the film's credit roll, an **agitated** Sushma, **envious** of her lover's supposed marriage to another girl, is seen contemplating jumping to **death** from a cliff, in a state of **depression** and **despair**. A suave, middle-aged aristocrat, Mr. Sarang (Kumar 1974), pulls her back from committing suicide (still-3), forcibly drags her into his car (still-4) and drives her to his home. Her first reactions on entering Sarang's huge, but empty mansion are discomfort and **fear**, as she looks around with **uneasiness** (still-5), displaying signs of **shiver** and **stamba** (being rooted to a spot). Soft-spoken, with a glassy voice that could be interpreted as chilling, Sarang ignores Sushma's resistance, and declares that she should obey him for his having given her a second life. His 'unusual' dictatorial approach and continued exercising of authority over Sushma (still-6), followed by a lament on his lonely life as a widower, instead of generating any sympathy, trigger **indignation** within Sushma, as she starts feeling wary and **fearful** of the thought of Sarang trying to woo her. In spite of his kind act, and attempts at initiating a conversation, Sushma rebuffs him with **arrogance**. Her **anxiety** subsides momentarily when Sarang's daughter enters the scene (still-7), and he reveals that his love for his dead wife was not 'so ephemeral that he would latch on to any beautiful young distraction [like Sushma]' (Krishan 1974). The revelation should have ideally kindled compassion within Sushma for her host, but she looks visibly uneasy. Her anxiety (still-8) returns when Sarang informs that he would drop her at her father's home the next morning. The scene here cuts to a song moment featuring Sarang's daughter singing a lullaby to make Sushma feel at home. She **dreams** of dressing up for her marriage but the **recollection** of a contrary reality, soon returns her to the present and she goes off to **sleep**. Next morning, Sarang's daughter informs him about Sushma having

left their house. Sushma's flight, is in reaction to one of the suggested *bhayanaka rasa* triggering scenarios – 'apprehension of danger'¹⁸⁶ – in this case, the fear of being caught and forced to marry against her will by her father.

Encounter 2: *Rasa - Bibhatsa*



Still-9

Still-10



Still-11

Still-12

Next, Sushma is inadvertently conned by a society lady into a prostitution den, where she is sent to pleasure a rich, drunk client (Kumar 1974). Her first reaction on entering the bordello is one of **agitation** and **disgust** (still-9), for the ambience, its people, and their actions, which she quickly camouflages, as mock joy. She **dissimulates** her **indignation** for the waiting customers and the attending madam, through a **pretense** of fake smiles, and **change of voice**, while on constant look out for an opportunity to escape. The *rasa* of

¹⁸⁶ NS 6.80.

disgust is heightened by the dark ambience of the bordello, as we are introduced to her client, first as a heavy voice that gives her the jitters, who then is revealed as a huge, grumpy **intoxicated** (still-10) man with an unkempt bearing. Dressed in a dark blue jacket, he makes threatening lunges at Sushma, which she tries to ward off through fake coquettishness, though her real reactions of **disgust** – ‘narrowing down of the mouth and eyes (still-11), looking the other way and trying to move around the room imperceptibly’¹⁸⁷ – are evoked in her on-camera asides (still-12) off her client. She plays a charade of falling in love with her client to plan her escape, but lands up in a police station, where she starts acting like a mad person, to secure release. Thus among the ‘three kinds of odious sentiments’¹⁸⁸ suggested in the *Natyashastra*, Sushma’s second encounter ends up as one of the nauseating kind.

Encounter 3: *Rasa* – *Shanta*

Sushma’s ruse of acting **insane**, convinces the police that she is mad and Sushma is sent to a mental asylum, where she continues her charade. Its resident doctor, Kruparam (Kumar 1974) however sees through her act. Kumar’s aged doctor is **serenity** personified (still-13) throughout in spite of Sushma’s over-the-top actions, and philosophical outbursts ranging between the transitory mood states of **longing** and **despair**.



Still-13



Still-14

Unperturbed and observant, Kruparam indulges her wild chat in spite of being

¹⁸⁷ NS 6.74.

¹⁸⁸ NS 6.81.

immediately aware of her **pretense**. He maintains an equanimity of tone and disposition throughout their interaction and tries to reason with her, which makes her feel safe and agreeable to the idea of staying in the hospital. She now becomes a reflection of Kruparam's calm bearing, when packed into a room full of 'mad' women patients, with whom she play acts another charade of riddles and games, with **detached** (still-14) engagement, to not lose her **calm** and be able to patiently plan an escape.

Encounter 4: *Rasa - Raudra*



Still-15



Still-16



Still-17



Still-18

Sushma's next encounter on the road lands her in a dacoit's (Kumar 1974) den. Dressed in flaming red and yellow, the heavily built fierce looking man is introduced with every prescribed consequent manifestation of anger like 'red eyes, knitting of eyebrows, defiant bearing, biting of lips, agitated pressing of one hand with the other...etc.'¹⁸⁹ (still-15).

¹⁸⁹ NS 6.69-72.

Sushma reacts with most of the *Natyashastra* suggested emotional reflexes like shrieking, **perspiration**, trembling and choking of voice (still-16) before fainting (still-17) into a near paralytic freeze attack on her sudden sighting of him. **Fright** is her first reaction to this avatar of *raudra*. The dacoit bumps into Sushma while fleeing from the police after the revenge killing of an upper-class landlord, who had killed his younger brother for falling in love with his daughter. His flashback is a near complete list of determinants suggested for evoking the *raudra rasa*, like ‘anger, abuse, insult, untrue allegation, threatening, and revengefulness’.¹⁹⁰ The dacoit’s story evokes empathy within Sushma, as she tries to **deliberate** with him for a surrender and second chance at life, but it is foiled by an attack on the dacoit by the murdered landlord’s accomplices. They stealthily enter his den and a long fight ensues, involving ‘beating, breaking, crushing, cutting piercing, taking up arms, hurling of missiles (bullets in this case, still-18)’,¹⁹¹ which ends with the dacoit killing all his enemies, but not before he too is stabbed to death. Righteous anger is kindled in Sushma, as she helplessly watches him die in a pool of blood, and **breaks down into tears**. However, as some policemen reach the dacoit’s hideout, she flees from the spot.

Encounter 5: *Rasa - Adbhuta*



Still-19



Still-20

¹⁹⁰ NS 6.69-72.

¹⁹¹ Recommended actions for portrayal of the *raudra rasa* (NS 6.69-72).



Still-21



Still-22



Still-23



Still-24

To avoid being caught or being questioned for being at the scene of a crime, Sushma borrows a saffron garb and joins a wandering preacher, Swami Rahasyanand (Kumar 1974) and his followers on a *bhajan* singing procession through a city. This is the first time we see her in a state of **joy** (Still-19), singing and dancing in **contentment** (Still-20). True to the meaning of his name (a man of mystery), the swami becomes the *vibhava* for a series of surprises – pleasant and unpleasant for Sushma. She experiences curious **wonder** with the marvellous sentiment radiating her being as Rahasyanand becomes the source for a series of *adbhuta rasa* determinants like – ‘expounding the philosophy of life and Bharata’s *rasa-sutra* in simple words (still-1), the performing of magical acts and the bearer of a hypnotic persona with a charming disposition (still-21)¹⁹². The feeling of being **awakened** (still-22) to the *adbhuta rasa* for Sushma, however is soon turned into

¹⁹² NS 6.75.

bibhatsa, when she discovers the true identity of the swami as a smuggler of antique idols. The setting too changes from the brightly lit, hued in yellow and saffron lighted environment of a prayer hall perpetuating an aura of wonder, to a dark and dingy underground vault, where Sushma for the first time resorts to **violence** and aggression in self-defence as the swami tries to rape her (still-23). She wounds the swami with an idol's trident and escapes (still-24).

Encounter 6: *Rasa - Karuna*



Still-25



Still-26

Distracted and **depressed**, a hurriedly walking Sushma trying to flee from the location and memory of her unfavorable experience stumbles on an old leper, Seth Dhanraj (Kumar 1974), crouching beneath the shed of a tree (still-25). Her immediate reactions are **shame**, regret and **sorrow**, which turn to compassion and lending **assurance** on seeing him being shunned by all, including two policemen who refuse to touch or help her take him to a hospital. Dhanraj's story manifests most of the determinants of the *karuna rasa*, like 'separation from dear ones, loss of wealth and an affliction of illness that he attributes to bad *karmas* from a previous birth'¹⁹³. In one of Sanjeev Kumar's tougher character portraits in the film, he convincingly depicts its pitiable mood manifestations of sorrow through complimenting *anubhavas* like 'shedding of tears, lamentation, dryness of the mouth, change of facial colour (a radiant looking Dhanraj when wealthy, and a living

¹⁹³ NS 6.62.

shadow as a leper), drooping limbs, being out of breadth...'.¹⁹⁴ In Sushma, his pitiable state evokes the *karuna rasa* as compassion, which is shared by a young doctor, who takes Dhanraj under his care (still-26). This sub-plot, incidentally conveys the pathetic sentiment, using one of the three suggested scenarios for evoking the *rasa* in the *Natyashastra* – ‘loss of wealth, with hint experiences of one of the other two – as in bereavement’¹⁹⁵ from being abandoned by his relatives in the case of Dhanraj.

Encounter 7: *Rasa* – *Hasya*

After leaving Dhanraj in assured care, Sushma continues her journey, but **weariness** and **sickness** get the better of her (this is suggested, not shown), as she is brought into her next adventure and episode, in a state of **unconsciousness** (still-27) by a motley band of theatre actors. The actors, first introduced in a state of **indolent** chatter, come in all shapes and sizes, representing most of the suggested *vibhavas* of the *hasya rasa* like ‘wearing unseemly dresses with oddly placed ornaments, exuding unpolished behavior, having defective limbs, speaking incoherent words, etc. (still-28)’¹⁹⁶. Recommended to be shown in persons of the ‘inferior’ type, its *sthayibhava*, is manifested in the troupe leader (Kumar 1974), who exudes effeminate mannerisms like ‘throbbing of lips, nose and cheek, perspiration, frequent changing of facial expressions, and uncommon movement of limbs, like holding to the sides while speaking’, that evoke laughter in an onlooker. Hence, all the three kinds of suggested triggers for the comic *rasa* – ‘of limbs, dress and words’¹⁹⁷ – are portrayed.

¹⁹⁴ NS 6.63.

¹⁹⁵ NS 6.78.

¹⁹⁶ NS 6.49-50.

¹⁹⁷ NS 6.77.



Still-27



Still-28



Still-29



Still-30

Most of the actors and their leader in the sequence, when not performing, are dressed in the many shades of white, which is the suggested colour for *hasya rasa*. Sushma's initial reaction is one of curious surprise, but she soon relaxes in the assurance of their 'harmless' company. Taking a complete break from her miseries so far, she takes on the cheerful mood of her friends and sings and dances on the stage for the first time as a guest performer in their play (still-29). A molestation attempt by the manager of the theatre company, results in a fight between his goons and the theatre actors, which as per the dominant *rasa* of the sequence is shot as a comic 'free-for-all' (still-30) action sequence unlike the violent and bloody fight seen in the *raudra rasa* evoking scenario involving the dacoit. Sushma leaves her actor friends as well, but decides to don a male costume with a fake moustache, to camouflage her female identity from any further gender oriented attacks.

Encounter 8: *Rasa - Vira*



Still-31

Still-32

Sushma now escapes into the jungles where she encounters a boisterous hunter Sher Singh (Sanjeev Kumar), who rescues her and other village folk from a man-eater lion, showcasing most attributes of a brave, daredevil person. In an extended, almost hand to fist combat between man and beast (still-31), Sher Singh, displays all the suggested determinants for the *vira rasa* like ‘energy, perseverance, optimism, absence of surprise, and presence of mind, etc.’¹⁹⁸, represented through character *bhavas* like ‘firmness, tact, heroism, pride, energy, aggressiveness, influence and commanding speech (still-32)’¹⁹⁹. Sher Singh then invites Sushma to his home and hosts a lavish feast. His character thus manifests attributes of the ‘three kinds of heroism, those arising from making gifts, from doing one’s duty and by fighting one’s enemy’²⁰⁰. Inspired by her **courageous** mentor’s high energy levels, ‘boy’ Sushma tries to shed her **nervousness** and match up with equal enthusiasm, but the inconstancy in her behavior eventually reveal her female identity and reality to Sher Singh.

Encounter 9: *Rasa – Sringara*

A relative of Anand (Kumar), the boy Sushma was betrothed to by her father, Sher Singh informs him about her presence in his house, and the audience for the first time is shown the character, responsible for Sushma’s rebellious journey. Anand is introduced as a smart,

¹⁹⁸ NS 6.67.

¹⁹⁹ NS 6.68.

²⁰⁰ NS 6.79.

young man in a state of *vipralambha rati bhava* (love sick awaiting of one's lover) wearing a shirt hued in shades of green (the colour for *sringara*). He rushes to bring Sushma home, but she rebuffs him and hops onto an aerial ropeway carriage in **indignation** and still retained **jealousy** born of her misconception of his having married another girl. Her father now appears and reveals that the groom he had in mind for her was none other than Anand, who has still not married and has been pining for her return since she fled home.



Still-33



Still-34



Still-35



Still-36



Still-37

Cleared of her **delusion**, a **remorse** stricken Sushma, believes in Anand's assurances and lets him rescue her from the stuck ropeway. The two separated lovers thus get united, finally. They are next seen at their marriage ceremony displaying manifestations of the *rati bhava*, like exchanging 'graceful looks, sweet banter, smiles and pleasing attractive gestures through eyes and face'²⁰¹. *Rasa* triggers for *sringara* in *sambhoga* (love in union), are thus enacted through the three kinds of suggested manifestations of eroticism – 'complimenting words (dialogue), dress (wedding outfits) and action (love inspired act of

²⁰¹ NS 6.47-48.

heroic rescue)²⁰². Each of the surviving characters, whom Sushma met through her journey now arrive at the wedding as guests, evoking **recollections** of a rainbow of *rasa* experiences in Sushma as she introduces them to Anand. It is interesting to note that among all the characters present at the couple's wedding, only doctor Kruparam (representative of the *sthayibhava* of *shanta*), gets up to personally bless the newly wed, to perhaps mark a symbolic sign off wish for the return of a 'peaceful' and happily ever after state of being (*shanta*) for the runaway bride after a turbulent experiencing of the *navarasas*, as the credits announce 'The End'.

1.6 Rasa and Ranga (Colour)

Spectators coming to view an Indian dance or theatre performance traditionally often received hints about the dominant *rasa* of a scene or a play via the colouring of a set's backdrop (curtains, lighting, etc.) in the predominant hues of the prescribed colour of a *rasa*, or the installation of a *rasa*'s representative deity in the foreground. *Naya Din Nai Raat* conveys the *rasa* of each of its sub-plots, not only by adhering to the *Natyashastra*'s recommended cause and effect triggers for each of the nine *sthayibhava* embodied in characters played by the hero, Sanjeev Kumar, but also in its *rasa* enhancing cinematography and *bhava* complimenting colour in its choice of costumes donned by Kumar's nine characters. The *Natyashastra* associates each of the *navarasas* with colours that can heighten the dramatic impact of certain *rasa* centric moods in a performance – e.g. the aura of a frightened person is black, that of an angry person is red, of a grief stricken person is grey, and the like. *Naya Din Nai Raat* innovatively uses these possibilities of being made in 'colour', to dispel any confusion on the suggested dominant *rasa* of a scenario or the *sthayibhava* of its character, especially in encounters conveying multiple *rasas* like the episode involving Swami Rahasyanand. Being shot in colour, this is the added edge of an 'inspired' *Naya Din Nai Raat* over the 'original' Sivaji Ganesan (and also ANR's) film in black and white.

²⁰² NS 6.77.

Table 2: *Rasa* and *Ranga* (Colour) in *Naya Din Nai Raat* – An overview

Character	Rasa Suggested	Ranga Recommended by <i>Natya shastra</i>²⁰³	Ranga seen in character costumes	Cinematography/Lighting in the <i>mise-en-scène</i> of ‘maximum’ action in a scenario
Aristocrat	Fearful	Black	Black & White	A fleeting outdoor scene that promptly cuts to a dimly lit mansion.
Drunkard	Odious	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	A dark room with little lighting.
Doctor	Calm	White	White & Black	Brightly lit (in white light) hospital space.
Dacoit	Furious	Red	Red & Black	Shadowy outdoors, following into dark indoors of a crumbling mansion.
Swami	Marvellous	Yellow	Orange	Daytime outdoors, following into brightly lit indoors.
Leper	Pathetic	Ash/Pigeon coloured	Grey	Shadow and shades, leading into a moderately lit space.
Actor	Comic	White	White	Oscillating between dim indoors and a brightly lit performance stage.
Hunter	Heroic	Light Orange	Orange & Brown	In a jungle grappling with a lion (orange coloured beast), followed by interaction in room with lighting akin to sunset hues.
Lover	Erotic	Light Green	Light Green	Over a dense green forest, pursued by a hero wearing green. The heroine’s

²⁰³ NS 6.42-43.

				father even arrives in a green car
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1.7 Conclusion

A. Bhimsingh's 1974 Hindi remake of director A.P. Nagarajan's *Navarathiri* (1964), updates a regional classic's telling to modern, pan-Indian national sensibilities. Yet, in its conscious and noticeable adherence to the *Natyashastra*'s prescriptions in every department of filmmaking, from plot construction to 'aharya abhinaya' (the rules of dressing a character), it reaffirms the *still* continuing relevance and practice of making films guided by *rasa* theory postulates in India's most influential Hindi film industry of the 1970s, nearly six decades after the making of the first Indian film. The 1970s, were revolutionary times in the history of Indian cinema, in terms of experimentations within the film medium, when the segregation of cinema into categories of popular and parallel/art entered Indian cinema review discourses for the first time. Narrative experiments emerging from the popular cinema space like *Naya Din Nai Raat* and its source films, in spite of being made from three different Indian movie making centres and featuring two discernibly different performance styles, stand out as valuable, modern *carriers* of shared Indian performance traditions from antiquity. The degree of success of these films as 'rare' (since repeated only in Kamal Haasan's *Dasavathaaram*, 2008, also in Tamil) performance experiments that portray an array of 'imaginative characters that could come alive, evoking *rasa*'²⁰⁴ through the *abhinaya* talent of *one* actor only, may seem debatable today, given the changing tastes and expectations concerning cinematic acting. *Naya Din Nai Raat* is the unique *navarasa* extolling experiment's last and most cinematically updated version, made with talents from 'two of India's biggest and very diverse film industries'.²⁰⁵ Its appeal to posterity and significance, however, lies in its ability to continue attracting interest in retrospect from critics and true lovers of art as a valuable case study film. One that can be used to understand, recognise and reconnect with the foundational and most influential *rasa-sutra* of the *Natyashastra* on celluloid.

²⁰⁴ The introduction narrations of *Navarathiri*, *Navarathri* & *Naya Din Nai Raat*.

²⁰⁵ The film's lead pair were from the Hindi film industry, while its director and production house was from Southern India.

CHAPTER TWO

RASA & PHALKE: TRACING *NATYASHASTRA* INFLUENCES IN THE FILMMAKING OF THE PREMIER PIONEER OF INDIAN CINEMA

The *Natyashastra* happened first. Next came the Marathi theatre; then Marathi cinema happened from Marathi theatre, and Indian cinema happened first in Marathi.

(Marathi & Hindi cinema actor Vikram Gokhale, interview, 2013)²⁰⁶

I will make films on selected portions from old Sanskrit plays and new Marathi plays, on manners and customs in different regions of India, on genuine Indian humour, on holy places and pilgrimages, on social functions as well as on scientific and educational subjects... Moving pictures are a means of entertainment; but are in addition an excellent means for spreading knowledge.

(Filmmaker Dadasaheb Phalke 1913)²⁰⁷

2.1 Introduction

Cinema came to India within six months of its landmark, first ‘paid’ showcase in public with 10 short films by Auguste Marie Louis Nicolas and Louis Jean Lumière at the *Le Salon Indien du Grand Café* in Paris on December 28, 1895. On July 7, 1896, the Lumière Brothers screened six of those films at Bombay’s Watson Hotel. The films were subsequently shown in Calcutta and Madras, thus introducing Indian filmmakers to the seventh art. Local creativity and entrepreneurship immediately engaged with the new opportunity, starting with Hiralal Sen in Kolkata (in 1898) and Harishchandra Sakharam Bhatavdekar in Mumbai, who made the first ever film by an Indian, *The Wrestlers*,²⁰⁸ in 1899. Documentary was therefore the first Indian movie genre – pioneered by the prolific Sen and Bhatavdekar, and nurtured by the contributions of their enterprising Indian successors, European professional filmmakers, and amateur British officials keen on recording their experiences of India. The Indian experience of movie making as a

²⁰⁶ Vikram Gokhale is an actor and great grandson of the first female actor on Indian cinema, Durgabai Kamat, who acted in Dadasaheb Phalke’s second film, *Mohini Bhasmasur* (1913). Gokhale’s grandmother, Kamalabai Gokhale debuted as a child artiste in the film.

²⁰⁷ *Kesari* 1913: Aug. 19.

²⁰⁸ It was the recording of a wrestling match in Mumbai.

recording-on-film craft thereby began almost in coincidence with the birth of cinema in the world. Its first feature or story film, *Shri Pundalik*, got released a decade later on 18th May 1912, made by Ramchandra Gopal Torney from Maharashtra. In retrospective, as cine literacy gained currency, *Pundalik*'s pioneer status was renegotiated, since it was only a photographic recording of a Marathi stage play. But, its eventual missing in future recall and failure to be included in the Indian cinema honour roll in retrospective, could also be argued as a result of it not being a fully Indian enterprise. *Pundalik*'s cameraman was an Englishman (named Johnson) and its processing was outsourced to London.

It was the era of British India's first serious engagement with the ideas of *swaraj* (self-rule) and *swadeshi* (made in India/one's own country'), which inspired the dominant discourse and popular motivations in the socio-political space. The cultural space too was not alien to these ideas; being independent-spirited in aspiration and identity was not limited to the political only. *Pundalik* however, gave birth to the Indian Silent Cinema era's second major 'indigenous' film genre – the devotional. The era's most prolific and seminal genre, which went on to become one of Indian cinema's signature film genres – the mythological – was introduced a year later by another Maharashtrian, Dhundiraj Govind Phalke. Also known as Dadasaheb Phalke or the 'father of Indian Cinema'²⁰⁹, his debut, *Raja Harishchandra* (King Harishchandra), was released in 1913 and is considered Indian cinema's first 'truly indigenous' *swadeshi* film. This film, unlike Torney's *Pundalik*, was made with Indian capital by an Indian filmmaker, shot at Indian locations with an Indian only cast and technicians and told a very Indian story. Phalke proudly asserted, 'My films are *swadeshi* in the sense that the capital, ownership, employees and the stories are *swadeshi*'.²¹⁰ It was no mere coincidence that the film's choice of story affirmed another foundational attribute of Indian cinema – a conscious, convenient and recurrent referencing of the epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, for ideas, stories, character reference and drama. For a predominantly illiterate audience the plot and dialogue description slides of silent films were meaningless. They had to be told a familiar

²⁰⁹ Jain, Rai & Bose 2013: 10.

²¹⁰ Phalke 1918: Sept.

story and the epics were the Indian sub-continent's most told and known tales. Simultaneously, a re-engagement with the classical Indian Sanskrit drama or the *Natyashastra* was revived on celluloid. This especially related to its notions about the 'ideal' in the choice of stories, performances, presentation, and purpose of an aesthetic offering. These were aspects aspired to and constantly articulated by Phalke to educate his film industry colleagues, technicians, crew and the audience about the 'uniqueness' of the cinematic medium. The influence of the *Natyashastra*, as discussed and evidenced in the first chapter, was still a robust presence in the consciousness of Indian filmmakers in three of India's biggest and prolific movie-making centres even half-a-century after Phalke's debut. The connection with tradition was necessary to lend acceptance and appreciation to a new narrative medium tainted by the stigma of being foreign. Its purpose and possibilities were sought in a continuance of the 'entertainment with enlightenment expectations of Indian aesthetics from a good art',²¹¹ as prescribed in the *Natyaveda*, sourced from the *Vedas* (dating to antiquity) and formulated for mortal performers by Bharata muni (sage) as the *Natyashastra* in the 'pre-epics era'.²¹² Like most ancient Indian scriptures with an oral ancestry, the right to comment, critique and teach the *Natyashastra* or the *Natyaveda* had become an exclusive of 'Vedasampana shastris',²¹³ or scholars of the Brahmin community. Mythological *kathas* and religious *kirtans*, which took place in holy village squares and temple premises as the preferred venues for public engagements with a spiritual message, were normally led by members of the priestly class or artists under their direct supervision. Hence the birth of the 'premier pioneer of Indian cinema' in a culturally active Brahmin family associated with some of the finer arts was no coincidence.

2.2 Chapter overview

²¹¹ 'Any means of self-expression is an art and the message of self-expression is knowledge. When the purpose of the message creates agitation, that form of art is considered inferior. (Bad arts are used only to satiate the hunger of the body and the thirst of the eyes). When the message creates selfless love, truth and great character that art is considered to be sacred' (Dwivedi 2012); See also *Natyashastra*: Ch. 1 (Translations by Ghosh 1950; Rangacharya 2010).

²¹² Subrahmanyam 2010: Ep.1.

²¹³ Brahmin scholars trained in Vedic traditions.

This chapter, based on Phalke's published writings and passionately argued articulations on the film craft, will trace the founding influence of the *Natyashastra* and its postulates on every department of filmmaking from casting, acting, direction and screenplay to the shaping of his purpose for and expectations from the film form. This influence becomes even more significant in the context of Phalke's work. In the making of his first film, *Raja Harishchandra*, he personally led every department of filmmaking, not only as a producer-director, but also as the first writer, camera man, make-up man, costume designer, art director and cine-laboratorian. In Phalke's singular obsession for laying the foundation of a *swadeshi* cinema industry, his stated preferences (over the then prevalent Shakespearean and Parsi theatre style possibilities) and intentions for engaging *only* with the *Natyashastra*'s expectations from a dramatic art will be identified and discussed. Given the survival of only a few clips and one feature film from Phalke's prolific oeuvre of a hundred films, shorts and documentaries, the ephemeral nature of scattered historical sources, and a dependence on Phalke's writings to evidence his indebtedness to the *Natyashastra*, this chapter will study his life's work and review his bequest in a biographical narrative form. Secondary sources like biographies, published features, news reports and recollections of relevant interviewees will be utilised to provide additional insights into the socio-political context and creative influences on Phalke. Finally, a critical study of Phalke's surviving films will be undertaken in entirety (or in parts where only few scenes are available) to establish *rasa* evoking elements and *rasa*-specific unity in their themes and presentation.

2.3 Phalke's context and concerns

Phalke was a man of strong impulses and rigid convictions. He was not used to being dictated to and frequently left many a prosperous project, often after starting it, when his ideas and attitude towards his projects clashed with his colleagues, financiers or co-entrepreneurs. 'His spirit always rebelled against being anyone's slave; he was an artist and artists needed their freedom'.²¹⁴ In that ability to frequently let go and start afresh, he

²¹⁴ Phalke Summanwar 2012: 50.

followed the principles of a ‘*karmayogi*’ as discussed in the *Bhagavad Gita* – ‘of a selfless doer, who carries on without worrying about the fruits of labour’,²¹⁵ ascribing the consequences to the will of the almighty.²¹⁶ Dadasaheb Phalke’s great-grandniece, Sharayu Phalke Summanwar in her biography of Phalke, *The Silent Film* (2012), traces this attitude to his childhood grooming in a tradition of orthodox Brahmins from the Chitpavan community of Maharashtra, for whom an ‘uncompromised righteous living’ inspired by the Hindu scriptures defined the way of life. His father, Dajishastri Phalke was an equally inflexible man of principles. She writes:

Daji was a renowned Sanskrit scholar. He was a *puranik*, a Vedasampana shastri. And it was because of this that Dhundiraj and his brother Bapu knew the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the Vedas by heart; a fact that surprised his friends in later years. But for the Phalkes it was commonplace; their family performed all the Hindu rites except those connected with death... The lullabies that Dhundiraj’s mother and grandmother sang to him were in fact musical narrations of the great Hindu epics. It was no wonder that by the age of seven he could recite good parts of them by heart, in Sanskrit. At some level he seemed to interpret life itself through these epics; a fact that is almost incomprehensible to most people today. Shri Ram and Shri Krishna were not mere household names but dominant influences in Dhundiraj’s life. They were to greatly impact his work in later years.²¹⁷

Phalke recollected the first triggering of his desire to make movies as occurring after a chance viewing of *The Life of Christ* (in the Christmas of 1910); it obsessed him with the idea of pioneering an Indian film industry. He writes:

While the *Life of Christ* was rolling fast before my physical eyes I was mentally visualising the Gods, Shri Krishna, Shri Ramachandra, their Gokul and Ayodhya. I was gripped by a strange spell... I felt my imagination taking shape on the screen. Could this really happen? Could we, the sons of India, ever be able to see Indian images on the screen?²¹⁸

This urge to show and see Indian images on screen that was to soon consume Phalke as a life obsession was no isolated articulation, but a product of the Indian identity-seeking

²¹⁵ *Tasmad asaktah satatam karyam karma samacara, asakto hy acaran karma param apnoti purushah* (Therefore, without being attached to the fruits of activities, one should act as a matter of duty, for by working without attachment one attains the Supreme) - Bhagavad-Gita As It Is 3.19.

²¹⁶ ‘The lord deliberately kept me away from the Goddess of Riches during my period of education. Now, he feels that he has tested me enough. So he became kind and entered the hearts of other human beings and fondled me through them’ (Phalke 1918: Sept.).

²¹⁷ Phalke Summanwar 2012: 22.

²¹⁸ *Kesari* 1913: May 6.

tumultuous spirit of his times. He had seen films before, but there was something different stirring in the mood of his nation, an unstated atmosphere of assertion. Professionally, Phalke had just left a job and hence was more inclined to be risk-taking in a new career. Personally, he already had become a convert to, and a foot soldier of Bal Gangadhar Tilak's concept of cultural nationalism. The end of the first decade of the twentieth century heralded some assertive political times in India. Bal Gangadhar Tilak in the Western part of the Indian subcontinent, along with Bipin Chandra Pal in the East and Lala Lajpat Rai in the North had left the Indian National Congress' moderate attitude of seeking governing rights within the British Empire for the more aggressive demand of complete *swaraj* or self-rule. Termed by British authorities as the 'father of the Indian unrest,' he was anointed by his countrymen as Lokmanya or 'accepted by the people (as their leader)'. A Sanskrit scholar, teacher, reformist and journalist, Tilak's idea of *swaraj* was not limited to political freedom alone. It was conjoined to an overall revival of everything *swadeshi* in every sphere of life – economic, social, religious and cultural – starting with the transforming of the household Ganesha festival into a Sarvajanik Ganeshotsav (Public Ganesh festival, 1894) and the reconstruction and revival of Shivaji as a symbol of Maratha pride in popular imagination. To this end his clarion calls were as much for young patriots as young entrepreneurs in all walks of life. It was this climate of an all-inclusive *swadeshi* movement that inspired Phalke to make 'films on Indian subjects by the Indians, for the Indians', as he reflects:

This was the period of the *Swadeshi* movement and there was profuse talking and lecturing on the subject. For me, personally, it led to the resignation of my comfortable government job and taking to an independent profession. I took this opportunity to explain my ideas about cinema to my friends and to the leaders of the *Swadeshi* movement.²¹⁹

Filmmaker and author of *Tracking Phalke*, Kamal Swaroop traces a thought process in the above-mentioned reaction that was actively working towards countering the onslaught of Western images. He says:

So if they have Jesus, we will have Krishna... And then when Phalke realises that our mythological images could be infused with some sort of political messages and contemporised, the villain in *Keechaka Vadham* (The Killing of Keechaka)

²¹⁹ Phalke 1917: Nov.

becomes a guy like Lord Curzon or Bhakta Vidur (Saint Vidur) looks like Gandhiji [w.r.f. to shared imageries]. Phalke is aware of these possibilities as he is constantly following Tilak, who was the first to use these images as political weapons in mass gatherings working on the collective consciousness (Swaroop interview, 2013).

Phalke's mythological films also helped stir submerged feelings of national pride and identity by reminding Indians of their glorious heritage. Tilak's weekly paper *Kesari* in a review of *Raja Harishchandra*, published three days after the film's release on 6 May, 1913 celebrated Phalke's arrival as a pioneering influence in Indian cinema, declaring:

Most of the films shown in the cinematographs in Bombay were foreign and they had foreign images in them. But Mr. Phalke has changed all this in making his films. The images in his films are Indian and are drawn from the *Puranas* and are thus familiar to us all.²²⁰

It was followed by a long interview with Phalke in the *Kesari* (Poona ed.) that introduced its subject stating: '...for the last 2 months, the shows of 'Swadeshi' moving pictures made by Mr. Phalke are being arranged in Bombay and it is learnt that people are liking them very much'.²²¹ *Swadeshi* was not just a sentiment or state of perception and being, but also was an attractive advertisement and tagline for those intending to claim additional popularity in the local imagination. Phalke, who never shied away from highlighting his status as 'the Father of Indian cinema'²²² in the credits of his films (stills 1 & 2), shares interesting anecdotes about fellow filmmakers, one of whom to prove himself more *swadeshi* than Phalke had advertised his film as 'being more *swadeshi* as its camera was made locally' (unlike Phalke who had imported his machines).²²³ Another had advertised his film as being completely *swadeshi*, as it had been 'made by a person who has not gone abroad'.²²⁴ Phalke indulgently acknowledges the competition stating:

This phrase filled my heart with admiration for that man. I never dared to do that. I had been abroad thrice... in a way, the phrase 'made without going abroad' is serving the national cause. We, the lowly traders outside Poona have to be proud of the fact that India has been made ready for Home Rule by this sentence and will have to get inspired by it! Oh Mr. Montague! Why didn't you learn Marathi

²²⁰ *Kesari* 1913: May 6.

²²¹ *Kesari* 1913: Aug. 19.

²²² Phalke 1919.

²²³ Phalke 1918: Sept.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

language and see for yourself the fire that lies in our press advertisements?²²⁵



Stills 1 & 2: Introduction credits of *Kaliya Mardana* advertising the pioneering role of D.G. Phalke

The pre-independence era film critic and script writer K.A. Abbas, argues:

It is more than a historical coincidence that *Raja Harishchandra* was produced at about the same time that the Indian National Congress was beginning to voice the national aspirations of the Indian people.²²⁶

Tilak even invited Phalke to use the Indian National Congress platform at its Poona session in 1917 to raise funds for his fledgling enterprise. Tilak, unlike Gandhi, who headed the *swadeshi* movement after him, was not isolated or insulated from the influence of the entertaining arts, especially cinema. He had discovered and christened Marathi singer-actor Narayan Shripad Rajhans as Bal Gandharva, the greatest star-performer of early twentieth century Marathi theatre. That endorsement definitely boosted the career prospects and cult status of Bal Gandharva in comparison to his other talented contemporaries. When Phalke went through a crisis of resources and lack of funds in his filmmaking career during the World War I (July 28, 1914 – November 11, 1918), Tilak's paper, *Kesari*, supported his pleas for public funding and the need for his continuance for the survival of *swadeshi* cinema, through liberal reviews, interviews and printing of fund raising advertisements. For Phalke, Tilak, who was elder to him by 14 years, remained a life-long mentor, supporter, respected guide and trusted critic of his films and plays. For

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ Garga 2012: 50.

Tilak, Phalke was an Indian entrepreneur to be encouraged and enlisted. Phalke was invited by leaders of the Home Rule League to become a member with the assurance, that when India got Home Rule (after World War I, as many of its then members believed) there would be no problem in raising capital for him. When Phalke launched a ‘crowd-sourced funding scheme’ to generate capital, one of his fans wrote an article in the *Daily Sandesh* appealing to the 1500 heroes of Home Rule to donate five rupees each to get the *swadeshi* film industry going.²²⁷ After Tilak’s death, in the later years of World War I, the subsequent leadership of the ‘*swadeshi* movement’ and its Home Rule counterparts (before they merged in 1921) reacted with mere lip service to Phalke’s desperate pleas for funding. In despair, he lamented, ‘Let us admit with regret that India is still unfit to claim Home Rule’, adding in retrospect that ‘If my Indian enterprise had died, it would have been a permanent disgrace for the *Swadeshi* Movement in the eyes of the people in London’.²²⁸ The comparative ‘London’ reference was specifically made to highlight his refusal of lucrative offers by London-based producers to work in the UK, which followed the enthusiastic reception of his first set of films during his second visit to London in 1917. He had instead opted to struggle with an unpredictable career at home, attempting to nurture and establish what he then saw as a still fledgling *swadeshi* film industry. Perhaps it was this uncompromising equating of *swadeshi* with Indian-only stories and storytelling styles which meant that Phalke’s choice of feature film subjects never went beyond *puranic*, epic and Sanskrit drama sources, even when popular taste had started veering towards other themes and genres like the Parsi theatre-inspired fantasies or family socials and comedies inspired by Shakespearean dramas and European films. Phalke never made fantasy film adaptations of popular Parsi theatre themes like *Arabian Nights* and *Alif Laila* (products of an Islamicate cultural influence) or any Shakespearean drama. This was despite the fact he had played few minor Shakespearean characters in his theatre days at Baroda. Also, given the unavailability of female actors agreeing to act on screen, Phalke preferred casting young Indian boys in women’s parts (as was prevalent in many local Indian dance and theatre traditions), instead of casting British, Anglo-Indian or Western

²²⁷ Phalke 1917: Nov.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

actresses with an Indian screen name as Indian characters, as was common in Indian films of the Silent era. Phalke's motivations went far beyond the personal. He saw the establishment of the *swadeshi* film industry as a pioneer's responsibility, even if it came at the cost of his survival, sanity and financial security. He was driven by a firm *swadeshi* spirited 'conviction that the Indian people would get an occasion to see Indian images on the screen and people abroad would get a true picture of India'.²²⁹



Still 3: Male actors enact adult female parts in *Kaliya Mardan* (1917), while Mandakini Phalke (the little girl to the right) essays the role of a young boy Krishna.

2.4 The Phalke Film *Shastra*

Phalke's idea of *swadeshi* was not limited to telling Indian stories with an Indian cast and crew only. It was also about reintroducing his creative fraternity and successors to the traditional Indian style of storytelling and performance, and its appreciation as postulated in the *Natyashastra*. In spite of a decline in any public performing of Sanskrit language speaking dramas in the medieval century, critics and commentators consistently engaged with the *Natyashastra* as a dramatic treatise. In addition, performing Brahmin *kirtankars* like Phalke's father Dajishastri used it to educate and entertain audiences in temples and private functions through song narrations from the epics and the *puranas*. Phalke's exhaustive oeuvre of more than 100 films also sourced its stories from the *puranas*, the

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Sanskrit drama. Of the 138 silent films that were issued censor certificates for release in the first decade of Indian cinema (1913-1922), 95 were mythologicals, 14 devotionals, 14 socials (starting in 1920), eight historicals (starting in 1915), five classical or Sanskrit drama adaptations (starting 1920) and there was only one documentary (1918) and one fantasy film (1922). Among these, 25 mythological films and four devotional films were made by Phalke; first under his debuting, Phalke & Company Ltd., and then subsequently under the Hindustan Cinema Film Company. Phalke's pioneering role was thus not only in initiating the film industry in India, but in setting the agenda for its narrative choices, style, and identity, especially in its first formative decade. It is worth noting that of the 138 films made in the first decade of Indian cinema, there was only one fantasy film, a genre favourite of Parsi theatre themes.

The direction that Phalke's filmography gave to Indian cinema in its early years could in fact challenge a tendency in existing film scholarship to credit the signature narrative attributes of Indian cinema like stylised acting as a bequest of its immediately preceding urban Parsi theatre. However, attributes such as ornamental dialogue, song and dance structure, grandiose *mise-en-scène* and larger-than-life characters had significantly gained currency in popular narratives by the end of the second decade of Indian cinema, after the arrival of talkie films in 1931 with Ardeshir Irani's *Alam Ara*. This was the phase when Parsi theatre influences made their presence felt in the films made by some of the Bombay-based studios, while the other major Indian movie making centres like Calcutta, Madras, Lahore and Pune/Kolhapur were inspired by respective local folk theatre forms. These included the *jatra*, company theatre, Marathi *sangeet natak* performances, and other *desi* (local/folk/regional) theatre variations of the *maargi* (classical) source traditions of Sanskrit drama.²³⁰ Their performance conventions were not entirely outside of the *Natyashastra*'s rules and guidelines on dramatic representations. For instance, all the above mentioned performance characteristics of the Parsi theatre echoed the *Natyadharmi* performance style prescribed by the *Natyashastra*, a play in which speech is artificial and exaggerated with elaborate sentences using ornate language, forceful actions, graceful

²³⁰ Subrahmanyam 2010: Ep. 2.

gestures, emotive characters, and costumes not from common use. Phalke's dramatisation, contrary to the Parsi theatre style, also had a reference in the Sanskrit dramatic treatise in the *Lokadharmi* style of storytelling.

The *Natyashastra* discusses two very distinct styles of storytelling: the *Natyadharmi* and the *Lokadharmi*. The latter is a play in which the characters look common and normal and behave, act and speak naturally, without any change in gestures or stylised limb postures in themes of social significance.²³¹ Phalke, who frequently highlighted cinema's differences from theatre, opted for the *Lokadharmi* style in his dramatisation, which could be argued to be more cinema-friendly in its preference for capturing reality as it is. Unlike Parsi and other folk theatre-inspired films, especially those of the late Silent and early Talkie era that often were direct recorded reproductions of staged plays, Phalke's *mise-en-scène* exchanged the proscenium and its ornate, artificial indoors for real architectural monuments and natural locations. His actors were ordinary people who dressed and behaved like common Maharashtrian folk, and even his divine characters were shorn of heavy make-up or ostentatious costumes. The entire supporting cast in both *Raja Harishchandra* (still-4) and *Kaliya Mardan* (Still-5) is dressed in the daily wear of ordinary twentieth century Maharashtrians, contrary to the narrative's North Indian backdrop. They engage with a relatively less expressive, *Lokadharmi* (natural) style of acting, aiming at the maximisation of audience emotion through dramatic action.



Still 4 – A court scene from *Raja Harishchandra* **Still 5** – A dance sequence from *Kaliya Mardan*

²³¹ Rangacharya 2010: 115, 351.

Adya Rangacharya notes the bypassing of the equally important *Lokadharmi* style of performance in favour of the *Natyadharmi* style only. He locates this oversight in post-independence theatre specialists, who in their ‘enthusiasm to revive and reinforce the impact of India’s ancient dramatic traditions gave credence to the notion that all Indian dramas in the ancient Indian traditions *only* had music, dance and stylised acting as described in the *Natyadharmi* category in the *Natyashastra*’.²³² According to Rangacharya:

The correct position is that there could have been all kinds of dramas, the chief among which were *Lokadharmi* with natural acting and *Natyadharmi* with stylised acting.²³³

An erudite scholar of Sanskrit drama and the theory of *rasa*, Phalke had the critical acumen to distil the timeless aesthetic achievement guidelines of the *Natyashastra*, relevant to a new and evolving art form, in order to compliment the inherent character of the film medium. He was aware that the ‘screenplay was a play for the eyes, contrary to the stage play which was for the ears’.²³⁴ Phalke’s mythologicals therefore tend to contest notions that link the lack of cinematic realism in Indian cinema to its theatre traditions and explain its experimentations with naturalism as a later day Euro-American import. In his available films one can actually trace the birth of the first wave of Indian parallel cinema.

However, as the craft of filmmaking matured and technology enhanced the scope and possibilities for cinematic imagination, the subtle *Lokadharmi* approach to celluloid storytelling began transforming into the *Natyadharmi* style. Case in point is the dramatisation and presentation of the oldest surviving Indian Talkie, V. Shantaram’s *Ayodhyache Raja* (1931), which was also based on the legend of Raja Harishchandra. According to Paresh Mokashi, director of *Harishchandrachi Factory* (2009), a film on the making of Phalke’s Raja Harishchandra:

Phalke’s *Raja Harishchandra* though low on scale was high on natural and realistic acting; *Ayodhyache Raja* while being mounted on a grand scale is much more stylised in its acting (Mokashi interview, 2014).

²³² Rangacharya 2010: 351.

²³³ Rangacharya 2010: 351.

²³⁴ Phalke 1917: Dec.

Phalke critiqued this trend in his deposition before the Indian Cinematograph Enquiry Committee (1927-28), denouncing most of his contemporary film productions as lacking in technique, artistic merit, suffering from bad acting, and worst class photography by people who knew nothing about art.²³⁵ Based on genres, a breakdown of the 133 films released in 1929 indicates a shift in trend from the previous 1913-1922 figures. Previously mythologicals overwhelmingly led the tally, but by 1929 socials and fantasy/costume actioners are leading the list, with 40 plus releases in each category, followed by 14 historicals, 12 mythologicals, three devotionals and five classical drama themed films. Speaking at an address to the Madras Chamber of Commerce in 1940 on what a film should be, Phalke reiterated:

As films were essentially photo-plays, dialogue should be kept to a minimum. A movie should not be too long... Films should reflect India's cultural reality [and] stars must not be overpaid and addictions amongst them must be strictly discouraged.²³⁶

Incidentally, this was no prescription for the films of the Silent era only, as it was delivered nearly a decade after the dawn of the Talkie era in Indian cinema. In retrospect, Phalke was actually stating concerns subsequently raised by the Indian New Wave directors of the 1970s and their post-2000 independent cinema counterparts in their championing of the cause of cinematic realism.

If the maturity in a maker's craft is to be mapped through choices made towards the culminating phase of one's career, once again Sanskrit drama influences seem to dominate Phalke's choices. 1929 saw him make four Sanskrit drama adaptations – *Vasantsena*, *Malvikagnimitra*, *Malati Madhav* and *Kacha Devyani*. None of these films survive today, but his four elaborate essays on the art and craft of cinema leave little doubt about the greatest influence on the 'Phalke school of filmmaking'. He extensively read the likes of *Bioscope* and other Western cinema shaping journals on filmmaking, but when it came to setting standards for his *swadeshi* film industry, his guidebook was the *Natyashastra*. For

²³⁵ Rangoonwalla 1970: 72.

²³⁶ Phalke Summanwar 2012: 229.

instance, while discussing his ideas about ideal actors and casting, Phalke states:

The cinema demands a kind of real 'beauty' (which is the source of the happiness derived by looking at a person with a beautiful, healthy form) which gives rise to faultless visuals.²³⁷

Phalke's obsession with beauty and employing handsome actors for lead parts is a concern directly derived from the *Natyashastra's* chapter on actors. Again, when trying to convince ladies from cultured families to act in films, Phalke falls back on the *Natyashastra* to lend respectability to the medium, stating, 'In fact even in Sanskrit poetry, drama and dramaturgy support this view'.²³⁸ According to Swaroop:

Phalke's essays on actors and his experiences with casting, and the section on his expectations of the looks, talents, make-up, expressions, etc. of actors... can be directly sourced to *Natyashastra* postulates (Swaroop, interview, 2013).

The screen test scene for potential actors in Mokashi's *Harishchandrachi Factory*, a film depicting the making of *Raja Harishchandra*, reinforces the *Natyashastra's* influence as the guiding text in Dadasaheb Phalke's film factory at Nashik. In regard to his propriety parameters and purpose of good cinema, he states, 'The structure of a good film having a good, human, emotional, interesting and moral story leads us along the path of the Good!'²³⁹ Phalke reaffirms his expectation of enlightenment through entertainment, a stance born of the intense ethos of religiosity inherent to the performance of all traditional Indian arts as recommended by the proponents of the *Natyashastra*, and endorsed by its commentators down the ages. It is to be noted here that Phalke was reengaging with what he thought to be the ever-relevant ideas on good aesthetic achievement as enshrined in the *Natyashastra*. This was in contrast to the literal bringing of Sanskrit or other theatres to cinema, which was the method of many of his un-cinema trained contemporaries and successors who just copied theatre on to cinema. Phalke's farewell message to the Indian film industry at its Silver Jubilee celebrations draws a symbolic, dramatic closure to his career. He compared the film industry to Shakuntala, and himself to her forgotten ascetic father, Kanva Muni, incantation and instruction included. As with Bharata muni's constant

²³⁷ Phalke 1918: Feb.

²³⁸ Rangoonwala 1970:102. (Ladies from cultured families for acting in films – Talk by D.G. Phalke)

²³⁹ Phalke 1918: Sept.

self-referencing in the original *Natyashastra*, he drew parallels between his life's ironies with that of a character from one of the greatest Sanskrit dramas.²⁴⁰

2.5 A *Rasa*eur of *Adbhuta*

The *rasa* theory 'places the suggestion of emotion as the highest form of suggestion, higher than the suggestion of a fact or idea and the suggestion of a figure or image... Art suggests emotion. Emotion is suggested meaning'.²⁴¹ According to Jain and Daljit:

For Bharata, 'mere narration' or 'bare utility' weren't art... That which afforded useful information, or created utility, could be arts of secondary type... Arts were [higher] arts only when they excited the senses and aroused emotions, and created '*rasa*', in which the mind perpetually rejoiced.²⁴²

Hence, it can be interpreted that in an art work's most dominant sentiment resides its most important suggestion/meaning or its creator's intention. This test of greatness, or an artistic work's ability to evoke only one *rasa* as predominant and others as subordinate, the *Natyashastra* observes to be normally achieved by a one who is 'mature and expert enough',²⁴³ i.e. an evolved master of the form *only*. In films, this can be interpreted to define a great director as one who, while evoking the nine principal *rasas* in his film, is able to unite them under one *rasa* that the audience eventually leaves with. This can be

²⁴⁰ "My dear children,

I have stepped into the 70th year of my life...

At this point I remember Shakuntala and her ascetic father Kanva Muni from the Mahabharata. Shakuntala was raised frugally by her poor father in a sage's ashram, on the fruits of the forest; she had to wear leaves for clothes.

The same is true of my own beloved daughter – the Indian cinema [Note this is very Hindu/Sanskrit association of equating art to a feminine deity].

When Shakuntala grew up to be talented and beautiful, she married a handsome prince and moved on to live in luxury in his royal abode. She was waited on hand and foot! How happy Kanva muni must have been to see his daughter thus. Just so is my happiness on seeing my precious daughter (the film industry) prosper. I am here today to celebrate my daughter's 25th birthday. Which father wouldn't be thrilled to see his daughter's prosperity? But there is always a shadow under a light. So enchanted is my daughter with her new found wealth, that alas, she has forgotten her own father. Her father has been cheated of even his meager possessions: the ashram is no more and the uprooted trees, bare of the leaves that long ago clothed her. But yet, she refuses to acknowledge her father.

I suppose, though, that finally his daughter will do what is right by him."

(Phalke's 'Thank You' speech as read by director Gajanan Jahagirdar at the Silver Jubilee celebrations of the Indian film industry at Bombay in May 1939) (Phalke Summanwar 2012: 226).

²⁴¹ Rayan 1965: 250.

²⁴² Jain and Daljit 2005: 5.

²⁴³ Schwartz 2004: 13.

also read as an argument in favour of a director being a film's most important/decisive meaning provider, which is a founding 'auteur theory'²⁴⁴ postulate. This is because the single *rasa* that they would opt for as the lasting impression of their work from the pool of nine *rasas* at their creative disposal is a clearly individual choice. In the context of *rasa* evoking cinema, such a great director I have termed a '*rasaeur*'.²⁴⁵ He, like his great director counterpart in Western film theory – the auteur – is not only opting for a consistent cinematic *dhvani* (meaning) that 'defines his body of work internally and distinguishes it outwardly from others',²⁴⁶ but is also challenging and refashioning the conventions of his work system in the process.

Phalke debuted on stage playing bit parts in Shakespearean theatre, but his first direction was a college production in Sanskrit, called *Veni Sanhar*. He honed his cinema skills on a diet of *Bioscope*, but for his suggestions on filmmaking he referenced and contextualised the *Natyashastra*. He learnt his craft from the Western film, but used it to express Indian themes and impulses. He let himself be shaped in the interaction of the West and the East, but the values he sought to establish were of the classical Sanskrit theatre. Of these values, the highest and most universally desired, as discussed in the first chapter, has always been the evocation of *rasa*. *Rasa* evocation was the primary goal in the films of Phalke, not least because of their skew towards the *Lokadharmi* style of dramatisation, which like every prescribed performative style in the *Natyashastra* had to evoke *rasa*. This will be evidenced in an episodic study of Phalke's only completely available film *Kaliya Mardan* (The Taming of Snake Kaliya, 1919), along with references to *Raja Harishchandra* (1913/17) and other available film clips.

Kaliya Mardan depicts some of the childhood adventures of Lord Krishna and begins with a prelude sequence, equivalent to a 'director-as-*sutradhar*/narrator' master class on *bhavas* or facial expressions, which Phalke reviews as 'one of the two major means [the

²⁴⁴ According to the auteur theory, an auteur director is one who either breaks the conventions of his work system or refashions and challenges its existing conventions, most importantly, to create a signature cinematic world-view that 'defines his body of work internally and distinguishes it outwardly from another body of work' (Nowell-Smith 1967: 137).

²⁴⁵ I have used this term to define a director who not only manages to evoke each of the *navarasas* in his film, but is also able to unite its meaning/suggestion under a single dominant *rasa* (Roy 2013).

²⁴⁶ Nowell-Smith 1967: 137.

other being a good physique] of attracting spectator interest for an actor of the film play'.²⁴⁷ Before the commencement of the film's actual adventure story, we see its lead protagonist perform in close-up a series of expressions introduced by a title card declaring, 'study in facial expressions by a little girl of seven' (stills 6-12).

Stills 6 – 12: A sample representation of some of the nine *bhavas* as portrayed by Mandakini Phalke, the child protagonist of *Kaliya Mardan* playing little Krishna.



Utsaha (heroism)

Shoka (sorrow)



Vismaya (astonishment)

Bhaya (fear)



Hasa (laughter)

Krodha (anger)

²⁴⁷ Phalke 1918: Sept.



Sama (serenity)

The narrative then proceeds towards working out their corresponding *rasa*-evoking events through a series of different action scenarios. The film's drama highlight of the taming of snake Kaliya occurs towards the fourth quarter of its narrative time with the rest of the film proceeding through a series of specific *rasa* evoking docudrama-like vignettes from a mischievous but kind-hearted kid's daily life.

The film's first episode is themed around the sentiments of hurt and revenge. The setting is Brindavan by the river Yamuna, where a *gopi* (village maiden) is shown to be indulgent towards little Krishna. She however, is shown to be rude to Krishna's friends in his absence. Krishna plots a tit-for-tat for the *gopi* around his '*makhan chor*' (stealing the cream) exploits. The episode ends with Krishna's insulted friends having a hearty laugh as the rude *gopi* is wrongly accused of stealing cream, which had actually been stolen by them. The narrative then depicts two different episodes depicting Krishna's *karuna* (compassion) for the poor and the weak as he shares his gifts with the former and gets his friends to help the latter. The evocation of this *rasa* is hinted in the film's title cards, which state that these little acts of kindness were preliminary hints for the greater acts of universal good that he was destined to perform later in the film. The next, third episode depicts little Krishna as a prankster pulling a practical joke on a sleeping couple. He ties the beard of the husband with the plait of his wife. Evoking the comic *rasa* is the theme of this episode that cuts to various *gopis* and the harassed couple complaining to Krishna's parents about his mischief. On being reprimanded, Krishna sulks, but following elaborate cajoling and apology by the *gopis* he wins their hearts by his melodic flute play. As they get into a dance trance, Krishna quietly escapes to the banks of the Yamuna, where the

film's title plot of the defeat of snake Kaliya begins. A fight ensues between the 'brave' little kid and the giant snake, celebrating the heroic *rasa* 'composed' as a dramatic action evoking awe. In the fusion of these different episodes, Phalke endorses the *rasa* theory postulate that a good work of drama should try to provide its audience with an eclectic spread of *rasa* experiences. The climax of *Kaliya Mardan* has a five-headed snake emerging out of the river with Little Krishna dancing on its head to make awe or *adbhuta* the lasting *rasa* in this cinematic experience.



Still 13: The special effects in the climactic scene of *Kaliya Mardan*



Still 14: A trick-photography action moment from *Raja Harishchandra*

Phalke's first film, *Raja Harishchandra* too contains a trick-based scene; the king Harishchandra is conned into saving three vices being burnt in a *yagnakund* (sacred altar for sacrifice) by sage Vishwamitra. The vices are interestingly portrayed as three hyperactive girls who we see in flames from the waist upwards as the rest of their bodies are strategically covered by the sage's silhouette. The other 'trick of camera' that can be seen in the salvaged remnants of the film is the sudden appearance and disappearance of Lord Shiva in the film's climax. When Indian cinema's first auteur took his films abroad for an international showcase, all of this made the contemporary foreign press in London note that 'from a technical point of view, Phalke's films are excellent'.²⁴⁸ These special effects may not seem awe inspiring today, but for audiences in those days these tricks or special effects were the biggest attractions of a Phalke film. Early Indian cinema movie mogul, J.B.H. Wadia, in his experience of watching Phalke's first blockbuster *Lanka Dahan* (The Destruction of Lanka, 1917) recalls:

Lanka Dahan was a minor masterpiece of its time. The spectacle of Hanuman's figure becoming progressively diminutive as he flew higher and higher in the clouds and the burning of the city of Lanka in table-top photography were simply awe-inspiring.²⁴⁹

Thus, one can name Phalke to be the Méliés of Indian cinema. George Méliés, the father of special effects in French cinema had a studio and trained hands to realise his vision. Phalke just had himself and his imagination and yet the magician never tired from introducing new tricks as cinematic special effects were called then, bettering their promise and scale of ambition with every subsequent film.

Phalke expressively stated on his desired experience from his filmmaking journey: 'O God! May I remain a child forever! As I grow my beard and moustaches, let my inner heart always have the purity of a child!'²⁵⁰ A childlike curious wonder pervades the choice of subjects in Phalke's filmography, in which often the attraction of a spectacle defines

²⁴⁸ Rangoonwalla 1970: 74.

²⁴⁹ Garga 2012: 55.

²⁵⁰ Phalke 1918: Sept.

the climax or the core drama of a narrative (*Lanka Dahan*, *Kaliya Mardan*, *Jarasandha Baddha/The Killing of Jarasandha*, *A Quarrel Game of Narada*, *Rama Ravana Yuddha/The Fight between Rama and Ravana*, *Draupadi Vastrahan/The Disrobing of Draupadi*, etc.). The story becomes a vehicle for creating the *rasa* of *adbhuta* or wonder. This is quite evident in the delineation of the drama in both his available films. Even in a tale of loss and deep pathos like *Raja Harishchandra*, the focus is on the possibilities for adventure or surprise in the journey of the protagonists. Phalke's filmmaking career was forever driven by an urge to create a bigger spectacle than before. His career's last two film projects – a sound film, *Setu Bandhan* (The Bridge on Sea, 1932) and Phalke's first Talkie film, *Gangavataran* (The Descend of Ganga, 1937) – both carved their drama around events of grand spectacle from the epics. They rode in on advertising that pitched them as 'a spectacle to beat all spectacles'. *Adbhuta* remains the dominating *rasa* of *rasaaur* Dadasaheb Phalke's cinematic bequest of spectacular drama themes.

2.6 Conclusion

Phalke's first public engagement as a performer was as a *kirtankar* singer. He moved on to performing bit parts in Shakespearean plays, but made his directorial debut on stage with a Sanskrit drama. Subsequently he conducted magic shows, made films that abounded with tricks or special effects, took a break from filmmaking to script a mammoth seven-act play staged over two days, and then returned to filmmaking, reaching the climax of his career with a spectacular Talkie preceded by four adaptations based on some of the most acclaimed Sanskrit dramas. Theatre and film almost co-existed in his rather belatedly commenced career as a filmmaker in his forties. Yet what Phalke chose to tell, and how he told it, set the bar, parameters and reference points for what a signature Indian narrative on celluloid was to be. In his tone of assertive prescription and his inclination towards revelation and codification, it could well be argued that Phalke saw himself as the Bharata muni of Indian cinema. A figure who in the context of filmmaking in India, almost assigned to himself the responsibility of recording a film *shastra* (a guiding text or book of codes) for his successors, akin to the *Natyashastra* in its prescriptive tone, and examples illustrating the 'dos and don'ts' for anyone intending to contributing to the film craft. His

was a pioneer's impact and he went on to become the box-office leader in the first decade of Indian cinema, while influencing most of the genre, plot and performance style choices in its Silent era. Most actors and technicians in the early years of Indian cinema were often discoveries or drop-outs from the Phalke Film Factory, as noted by Phalke in his deposition to the Indian Cinematograph Enquiry Committee of 1927-1928. The 'father of South Indian cinema, J.C. Daniel, had sought guidance and training at Phalke's Nasik-based studio before venturing to make *Vigathakumaran* (The Lost Child, 1928), also the first Malayalam language film' (Kamal interview, 2013), just as Phalke had visited Cecil Hepworth's studio off London for his education in filmmaking.

Phalke's means were Western, but the ends were uncompromisingly *swadeshi*. This was to be achieved, in Phalke's vision, by opting to reengage and reintroduce his countrymen and fellow filmmakers, to India's eternal aesthetic traditions enshrined in the *Natyashastra*. He unpacked its ideas on performance, purpose and appreciation, previously limited to elite discourse, through his extensive commentaries in press and public lectures. Simultaneously, he trained an entire generation of actors, technicians and filmmakers to be mindful of 'entertainment with enlightenment', a tenet that would guide narrative concerns in popular Indian cinema. Most importantly, he brought into the domain of Indian filmmaking, the concepts of *bhava* and *rasa*. He emphasised their relevant presence in acting, direction and the presentation of a film in sync with the limits and possibilities of the medium. In doing so, he set in motion certain signature performative and narrative styles of differentiation in most of Indian cinema that are still evident, creating a prodigious offspring that has managed to imaginatively mutate away from its foreign parent's DNA.

CHAPTER THREE

RASA IN REVIEW: EXPLORING NATYASHASTRA LEGACIES IN THE BIRTH OF ODISIA CINEMA

Every *rasa*, even acting has to be of a certain optimum – e.g. the ‘look’ in looking is different from that in staring. We should not give four doses of *sringara* where two is necessary, but how many are to be given depends on the creator. Sadly, what we see today is everything going beyond the optimum, exceeding its limits... The limitations have been fixed by the experienced in guides like the *Natyashastra*.

(Legendary Telegu cinema director-actor K. Vishwanath interview, 2015)

Without melodrama there cannot be any drama. That is the faith in India. Universally too one cannot jump to the drama stage without some melodrama. In the beginning, melodrama was given importance in all theatre traditions of the world – sung sequences, dialogue duels, etc. are all elements of melodrama. Once melodrama comes in, lyrics follow, and once lyrics come, there will be music, *tala*²⁵¹ (span), *laya* (rhythm)... This has been given priority in India. We do not accept a drama that is devoid of music. It has been thus in the past, and continues to be so today. Our finer point in narrating something is poetic, and that’s why it has happened in our films too.

(Actor-director and a doyen of Odia cinema, Sarat Pujari interview, 2013)

3.1 Introduction

In cinema’s early, foundational years, the depiction of drama on-screen in every major film industry across the world has been scripted by their theatre traditions to varying degrees. Cinema’s subsequent global evolution has coincided with an increasing experimental disassociation from its theatrical umbilical cord as it carves a medium-specific niche of its own. In India, the regional and state-specific language cinema industries have followed a similar trajectory. This is reflected in ‘the adherence to drama and performance guidelines as suggested in the *Natyashastra* in the initial attempts and experiments at movie making by most regional cinemas including the Odia language cinema’ (Pujari, interview, 2013). Filmmaking practices in many of these industries still continue to retain evidence of a conscious or subconscious engagement with *Natyashastra*

²⁵¹ *Tala* ‘is a unit of measurement for time and also for space, for it means, span’ (Subrahmanyam 2010: 38).

postulates on the nature, purpose, and appreciation of a cinematic creation. The previous chapter highlighted this foundational influence of the *Natyashastra* and its seminal theory of the *rasas* on the premier pioneer of Indian cinema, Dadasaheb Phalke and his craft. It also explored a possible correlation between his choice of plots and style of cinematic expression being inspired by his personal identification with a *swadeshi* ideology.

This chapter aims to contribute to the thesis' unifying argument for recognising the influence of *Natyashastra* guidelines on filmmaking practices across India, and a *rasa*-based criticism of Indian cinema with film evidences from the early Talkie era, two decades after the commencement of the making of silent films. My evidence extends beyond the Centre-West origin space of Indian cinema to engage with the birth moment of the Eastern Indian film industry of Odia language cinema. It will seek to prove the influence of the Sanskrit theatre's recommendations on shaping song situations and dance segments in early Indian cinemas, and will engage with contemporary and retrospective reviews of the first and second released Odia language films, *Sita Bibaha* (Sita's Marriage, Mohan Sundar Deb Goswami 1936) and *Lalita* (Kalicharan Patnaik 1948), in order to examine the *rasa* theory's influence and continued shaping of film criticism discourses in the Odia cultural space and language media.

The Odia film industry is one of the oldest regional Indian language cinemas. It is second only to the Eastern part of India's most influential Bengali film industry in terms of the number of films released annually. The cinemas of West Bengal, Odisha, Assam (and Manipur in terms of critical acclaim) are collectively the source for over 95 per cent of the films released in Eastern India. Its formative years were shaped by constant collaboration with filmmaking talents in technical help and directorial supervision from West Bengal, with the production capital, acting and music talent being locally sourced from Odisha. This was not only because of a greater degree of shared cultural affinity between the neighbouring states of Bengal and Odisha, 'but also the fact that until the 1970s, Bengali cinema courtesy its originality and evolved sensibility had emerged as a huge creative influence across India, including its national language cinema made in Hindi' (Nanda

interview, 2013). The first two Odia films were shot in (then) Calcutta-based studios and most of the critically acclaimed films in the first half of the ‘Golden Age of Odia cinema’²⁵², the 1960s, were either based on Bengali novels, or ‘directed by Bengali filmmakers from Kolkata or Bengali-speaking culturatti residing in Odisha like Nitai Palit’ (Nanda interview, 2013). Nurtured by Bengali filmmakers, writers and technicians in its infancy and influenced by the dramatic traditions of South Indian cinemas (especially Telegu and Tamil) in its post-1970s maturity, the narrative style of Odia cinema has constantly negotiated between the subtle and the theatrical, the realistic and the fantastical, fusing local Odia folk traditions of the *jatra*, *rasalila*²⁵³ and *gitinatya* with the *Natyashastra*’s *rasa*-evoking prescriptions for an ideal dramatic achievement, especially in its early years.

Most of the directors, writers, actors and musicians, who were involved in the foundation and establishment of the filmmaking enterprise in Odisha, hailed from two of its major drama performing platforms existing in the early twentieth century. The first of these was the touring *mukta mancha jatra* (open air theatres), with its *rasalila* troupes primarily enacting mythical tales and catering to the masses. These were performed in rural and temporary open urban spaces like playgrounds and fields, by artists for whom the performances were a means to earn their livelihood. The other was urban theatre groups who performed in a proscenium-like stage at a fixed venue with elaborate sets and lighting, featuring *adhunik* (modern social dramas mostly translated from their Bengali genre counterparts) plays with high acting standards primarily directed by *natyacharyas*²⁵⁴. These were normally nurtured by the elite patrons and middle class youth clubs and attracted educated talent from the middle and upper classes for whom theatre was a hobby they pursued along with other life-sustaining professional callings.²⁵⁵ *Sita Bibaha* and

²⁵² ‘The 1960s and 1970s are known as the two golden decades of Odia cinema’ (Chakra 2013: 65).

²⁵³ This is different from north India’s *ramleelas*, which henceforth will be differentiated as ‘*leela*’, instead of ‘*lila*’ as mentioned in the context of Odisha’s folk theatre.

²⁵⁴ Drama and theatre directors, who sourced authority as the most important meaning maker in a theatre set-up based on their researched knowledge and performed expertise of the *Natyashastra*, to train performers and direct plays in accord with its guidelines.

²⁵⁵ Deo 2014; Ghosh 2014.

Lalita, which were made from a talent pool sourced from the above two public performance platforms, apart from being landmarks in the history of Odia cinema, are also valuable representative films from Indian cinema's Talkie era. Both were joint co-production projects shot in Kolkata-based studios involving two of Eastern India's largest language cinemas, Bengali and Odia, with cast and crew collaboration from both industries.

My aim is to evidence a revival and reconnecting with Sanskrit drama traditions in filmmaking practices in the founding years of Odia cinema. The argument will be based on published print reviews and recorded recollections of audience response to *Sita Bibaha* (no negatives or copies of the film are available today), and an analysis of the presentation (*mise-en-scène*), characterisation and song-and-dance scenes in *Lalita* (the oldest available Odia film to view), with fresh insights culled from personal interviews with film archivist and critic Surya Deo, veteran Odia actor-filmmakers (Gopal Ghosh and Sarat Pujari)²⁵⁶ and Odia cinema's most prolific filmmaker and commercially successful actor-director turned politician, Prashanta Nanda. The influence of the *rasa* theory in Odia film criticism will be validated through a critical evaluation of *Lalita*'s cinematic advancement on, and correction of, the causes of failure of the first Odia film *Sita Bibaha* (1936) as highlighted by its reviews. In this way it will be established how the evocation of *rasa* was a major parameter of review from the early days of Indian cinema, and how it remains an important criterion in a vernacular film criticism discourse.

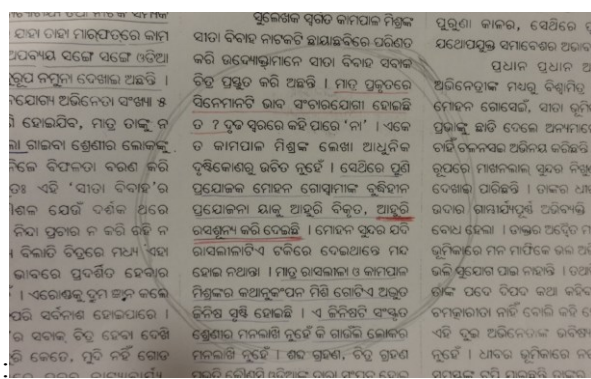
3.2 Reviewing the reviews of *Sita Bibaha* and *Lalita*

Sita Bibaha was released at the Laxmi Hall in Odisha's coastal temple town of Puri on 28th April 1936. This landmark moment in the history of Odia cinema had happened 27 days after the independent state of Odisha (then Orissa) was born on 1st April 1936, following the British Parliament's resolution in 1933 to reorganise states on the basis of linguistic identity. It was an ambitious venture because unlike most Indian regional film

²⁵⁶ Both the interviewees passed away subsequently, thus making these interactions their last professionally recorded interviews.

industries, Odia cinema was bypassing the Silent film phase to directly debut with a Talkie film. *Sita Bibaha* could have been an important cultural monument and moment in the myriad early twentieth century socio-political movements dedicated to the establishing of an independent Odia identity. Instead, ‘it was unanimously rejected by both the critics and the viewers’ (Pujari, interview, 2013). A review of *Sita Bibaha* by critic Atanu Patnaik, published in the *Utkala Dipika* on 1 May, 1936 (still 1) states:

Is this film (*Sita Bibaha*) worthy of conveying any *bhavas*? I could say an emphatic ‘no’! First of all, (the film’s source) Kampala Mishra’s play (1899) is inadequate from a modern perspective. Added to that, producer Mohan Goswami’s [still 2] unimaginative production has rendered it completely distorted, and completely devoid of any *rasa*. The result is an unusual product born from mixing *rasalila* and Kampala Mishra’s narration. It is worthy neither of the classes nor the masses.²⁵⁷



Still 1:



Still 2:

The critique of *Sita Bibaha* bases its criticism on the absence of two significant aesthetic terms from the *Natyashastra* – *bhava* and *rasa* – from the film’s viewing experience. What does the use of these over two millennia old terms in *Sita Bibaha*’s review tell us about the role and influence of the *Natyashastra* in the shaping of criticism debates within an emerging twentieth-century art form? The research into their use is particularly pertinent given the broad consensus among historians and art critics that the *Natyashastra*’s influence had almost disappeared by the turn of the twelfth century in North India and the fourteenth century in the South, due to the evolving socio-political contours in the Indian sub-continent of the period.²⁵⁸ The most significant factors involved, included: a decline in the political fortunes of local Hindu patrons; the rising influence of Islamicate and

²⁵⁷ Patnaik 1936.

²⁵⁸ Roy 2014.

European rulers and cultures with differing artistic and linguistic sensibilities; an overall fusion of cultural experiences; and change in popular tastes.²⁵⁹ The negligent use of Sanskrit in conversational usage, continuance of region-specific modern vernaculars and the emergence of new and popular lingua franca like Urdu, Hindi and later English, did result in the rigorous *Maargi* (or classical theatre) giving way to a more flexible folk theatre. An aesthetic guide motif that had been continuing uninterrupted for over two millennia however could not disappear without trace. Sanskrit theatre continued to thrive in the private drama and temple spaces of Hindu kings, in the personal *baris* of *zamindars* (in Bengal), in *Bhagavata Tungis* in the villages of Odisha and in a few publicly performed theatre forms like ‘Kerala’s *Koodiyattam* (where the main characters spoke in Sanskrit, while the side characters like the *vidushaka* or jester spoke in the vernaculars like Malayalam and occasionally even Hindi) and Tamil Nadu’s *Bhagavata Mela* tradition’.²⁶⁰ Although not always practised in public as a dramatic form, in essence, the performance postulates of Sanskrit dramaturgy continued to influence and shape the many *desi* offspring of the ancient Indian theatre. These are being performed to date, for example the *Therukuttu* (Tamil Nadu), *Bhavai* (Gujarat), *Sangeet natak* (Maharashtra), *Katha* and *Ramleelas* (of Central and North India), and the *Jatra* and *Rasalilas* (of Bengal and Odisha) among others. According to Subrahmanyam:

The *Maargi* theorised by Bharata survived in snatches unconsciously in most of the regional traditions, proving the imperishable nature of what the *Natyashastra* prescribed and its ability to transcend strong and specific regional identities... Roving theatre groups must have had a mastery over Sanskrit, enabling communication across regions.²⁶¹

Though the performing of plays and songs increasingly started happening in the existent and emerging Prakrit languages, they were ‘still being directed by *natyacharyas* well-versed in the *Natyashastra*’ (Ghosh, interview, 2014), while many drama, poetry and dance pieces continued to be written in Sanskrit, like Jaideva’s *Gita Govinda* (twelfth century CE) or Bhanudatta’s *Rasamanjari* and *Rasatarangini* (early sixteenth century CE). Sanskrit also continued as the language of record for critical debates and new

²⁵⁹ Subrahmanyam 2010: 21; Pujari 2013; Roy 2014.

²⁶⁰ Subrahmanyam 2010: 44.

²⁶¹ Subrahmanyam 2010: 35, 43.

commentaries on the *Natyashastra*. The production of these remained consistent for Sanskrit scholars and *natyacharyas* across medieval India, peaking with Abhinavagupta in Kashmir in the eleventh century CE. The performance of Jaideva's *Gita Govinda*, a 'dramatic lyrical poem'²⁶² in Sanskrit, was introduced as a *seva* (service) ritual by rulers of the Ganga dynasty in the Sri Mandir, or the Jagannath temple of Puri, in coastal Odisha from the thirteenth century CE. It continued to remain an influential and frequently performed dramatic work in Bengal and Odisha's religious folk theatre traditions of *rasalila* performances (performed only by boys up to the age of 14)²⁶³ and Radha-Krishna centric *prema rasalilas* (performed by adults portraying adult characters)²⁶⁴. These commanded the highest respect amongst the variety of performing arts that defined the vibrant Odia dramatic space at the time of the release of *Sita Bibaha* in the 1930s.²⁶⁵

The selection of Mohan Sundar Deb Goswami to direct the first Odia film was made to assure investor confidence. He had a patron-association with Odisha's then *rasalila* traditions, and his contribution to its popularisation had made him a cultural icon of Eastern India.²⁶⁶ Before making his cinematic debut with *Sita Bibaha*, Goswami was an acknowledged writer, poet, actor and *bhajan-kirtan* singer, 'who could play 27 different instruments and also served as a priest in the Puri temple'.²⁶⁷ In 1918 he founded a touring *rasalila* group, the Sriradha Kunjabihari Rasa Party, which performed to critical acclaim both inside Odisha and in places like Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. It earned a steady fan following in the Odisha, Bengal and Assam drama circuit.²⁶⁸ Producer Priyanath Ganguli of Kali Films, who produced *Sita Bibaha* was one such fan and he considered Goswami his guru.

Kalicharan Patnaik, the director of the second Odia film, started his performance career

²⁶² Miller 1977.

²⁶³ Khokar 2010.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ Deo 2013.

²⁶⁶ Deo 2013.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ Singh 2008: 32.

as the head of a local *rasalila* group before founding the Orissa Theatre, ‘which was one of the three major urban theatre groups operating in coastal Odisha around the time of India’s independence along with the Bharati and Annapurna theatres’ (Ghosh interview, 2014). He spent the last phase of his creative career popularising and enriching the Odissi dance form by contributing to the research and dissemination of its historical connections with the *Natyashastra*.²⁶⁹ Patnaik’s studied engagement with and referencing of the *Natyashastra* in theatrical practice was not unique to the Odia theatre space. The treatise was being engaged with as a revered guide and reference for many legends-to-be from the early years of most Indian language cinemas. Tamil cinema’s first superstar, Sivaji Ganesan in his *Autobiography of an actor* (2007) describes sleeping with the *Natyashastra* under his pillow as a trainee actor in Madras’ company theatres ‘hoping for a subconscious slipping of its vast knowledge into his conscious mind while asleep’.²⁷⁰ Hindi cinema’s first leading lady from the South, Vyjayanthimala Bali, ‘whose success is credited with having made training in at least one classical Indian dance form an unstated essential for subsequent Hindi film heroine aspirants’,²⁷¹ discussed in her autobiography *Bonding... a memoir* (2007) how the *Natyashastra* was the only manual she referred to in her training as a *Bharatanatyam* dancer. She described how that knowledge helped her sustain and enrich her long cinematic innings as a leading Hindi cinema dancer-actress in the 1950s and 1960s.²⁷² Her ‘dancing’ legacy successor in the 1970s, Hema Malini, says, ‘Film acting came easy to me because of my training in classical dance, which is all about how to express *bhavas* and convey *rasas*’ (Malini interview, 2013). Odia cinema’s first superstar Sarat Pujari states, ‘Because I used to research a lot on *Natyashastra* guidelines, when not rehearsing, I could draw my own interpretations on how to emote differently for cinema while remaining true to its expectations from good acting (Pujari interview, 2014).

In the previous chapter, it was discussed how the father of Dadasaheb Phalke, Dajishastri Phalke was a tutor of Sanskrit, a priest and a *kirtankar* trained in the *Natyashastra*, who

²⁶⁹ Minai 2013.

²⁷⁰ Swamy 2007.

²⁷¹ Khan 2015.

²⁷² Bali 2007: 48.

used to educate and entertain audiences in temples and private functions through song narrations from the epics and the *puranas*. Mohan Goswami himself was a popular *bhajan-kirtan* singer, actor and dramatist. He trained artists in his *rasalilas* and theatre groups in *rasa* evoking performance.

Working within a pan-Indian creative context where the *Natyashastra* was an integral guide for actors, writers and directors, how did Goswami's cinematic debut, *Sita Bibaha* become '*rasa sunya* or devoid of *rasa*',²⁷³ as it was unanimously condemned by its critics? Three broad reasons offered for the film's failing were: 'Goswami's ignorance of the film form',²⁷⁴ the mid-way takeover of the film's direction and making by the Kolkata-based technicians of Kali films that overrode Goswami, and the mid-way loss in interest of the film's producer due to production delays and frequent squabbles between the cast members from Odisha and the Bengali crew. As a result the film's producers just wanted to finish the project and move on. Actor-dramatist, Kartik Kumar Ghosh, one of the few film crew members from Odisha, who collaborated on the Odia translation of the screenplay of *Sita Bibaha* has stated:

The quality of the film suffered because of creative squabbles on the sets, indiscipline among cast members and the lack in authentic performance and delivery styles of most actors who were *rasalila* performers with no prior experience or training in acting for cinema.²⁷⁵

Though the credits of *Sita Bibaha* declare Goswami as the film's originator, conceptualiser, producer and director (*suchaka, ayojaka, prajojaka, nirdeshaka*)²⁷⁶, 'the film was produced by Bengali entrepreneur Priyanath Ganguli under the banner of Kali Films and directed by Prafulla Sarkar, a director employed with Ganguli's studio with assistance from cameraman Noni Sanyal'.²⁷⁷ The critic, Surya Deo blames the film's failure on 'Goswami's complete dependence on the crew from the Bengali film industry, which was unaware of the regional aesthetic styles of Odisha and the expectations of the

²⁷³ Patnaik 1936.

²⁷⁴ Goswami had never witnessed a film on-screen before getting roped into making one. This was because the only two places where films were screened in his home town Puri were located in bad reputation (infamous for prostitution and frequented by men of ill-repute or low caste and class) areas, visiting which was unbecoming of a Brahmin and a recognisable cultural icon like Goswami.

²⁷⁵ Ghosh 1985.

²⁷⁶ Singh 2008: 42.

²⁷⁷ Singh 2008: 39-42.

local Odia audience'.²⁷⁸ The most significant contribution of the film's Odia team members was the music composed by Haricharan Mohanty, which was 'tuned to authentic Odia folk and traditional devotional singing styles based on songs written by Goswami and popular literary compositions like the 'Bitalaku alingana' (Embracing the depths) *chanda* excerpted from Odia Kabi Samrat (King of Poets) Upendra Bhanja's popular medieval *kavya* (epic poem) *Baidehi-sa-Bilasa* (Sojourning with Sita)'.²⁷⁹

The severity of the indictment and commercial rejection of *Sita Bibaha* meant that it took almost twelve years for the second Odia film, *Lalita* (1948) to get made. Gopal Ghosh, lead actor and a producing partner of the second in production, but third to be released Odia film, *Sri Jagannath* (1950) says:

In India, unlike Hollywood, the dominant narrative themes in the early years of movie making for a long time followed the trend of Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra*, selecting tales from *itihasa* (history) and *kimbadanti* (local mythology and folk lore), before attempting social dramas. In Odisha too, we opted for a safe and well-known story from local lore on the making of its most revered shrine, the Sri Mandir at Puri, dedicated to *rashtra-debata* (state deity) lord Jagannath. But given the disastrous performance of *Sita Bibaha*, generating funder confidence was a big challenge because of which we decided to launch a public limited company called Rupa Bharati Public Ltd. Co. (Ghosh interview, 2014).

Before the public limited company could take off, a private limited company funded by the royal family of Dhenkanal (a central Odisha province) under the banner of Great Eastern Movietone started and released *Lalita*, which was based on a short love story based sub-plot, also from the making of the Jagannath temple legend.

3.3 The auteurship of a *Natyacharya*

Irrespective of who took the final creative decision, Goswami's was the official name on record responsible for the *Sita Bibaha* disaster. Gopal Ghosh stated that 'the film's poor quality reaffirmed the notion that Odia films would not work unless helmed by technical talents from Calcutta' (Ghosh interview, 2014). He had seen the film during its initial release in 1936 at the age of 16. One of the criticisms of *Sita Bibaha*, published in a review in *Desha Katha* (5 April, 1936), suggested that 'instead of searching for/employing

²⁷⁸ Deo 2013.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Odisha's *natyakaars* and *natyacharyas*, and (better) plays in the Odia language, the producers, Kali Films, have opted for an easily available source. The result is not only a waste of money but also presents a distorted image of Odia art'.²⁸⁰ The critique can also be seen as articulating an elite bias that popular art forms are frequently subjected to on the basis of the class of their consumers or for their use of narrative conventions presumed to be simple and less intellectually stimulating. Goswami, as based in a lesser and mass-consumed drama form like the *rasalila*, is thus supposed to be less qualified to work within a new dramatic form like cinema in comparison to a *natyacharya* like Kalicharan Patnaik, with experience in a more evolved drama form like the urban theatre. According to Ghosh, 'To revive the lack in confidence of the Odia audience in the ability of Odia filmmakers it thus became necessary that the second film be directed by a *natyacharya*' (Ghosh interview, 2014). One of the foremost authorities on the performing arts of Odisha, Patnaik was also popularly acknowledged as the Bharata muni of the modern Odia dance and drama space for his pioneering contribution towards the shaping of the modern Odia theatre. He had fused Western stagecraft techniques with the performance styles of folk and Sanskrit theatre and helmed the revival and codification of the *Odissi* dance in the mid-twentieth century. The highlight of the need for a *natyacharya*, a theatre guru well-read and trained in the traditions of the *Natyashastra*, also indicates an endorsement of the relevance of Sanskrit theatre traditions in critical aesthetic debates around the time of the making of *Sita Bibaha*.

The making of *Lalita*, like *Sita Bibaha*, was outsourced to studios in Kolkata, where it was made with help from Bengali technicians like Gaur Goswami and Suren Pal (music directors), Banshi Chandragupta (art direction), Baidyanath Chatterjee (editing) and Kalyan Gupta (technical advisor), but attempts were made to not repeat the disconnect of Odia audiences with *Sita Bibaha*. It was hoped that this would be assured by entrusting greater autonomy in its direction to a *natyacharya*, whose credentials are visibly highlighted in the film's opening credits as a valuable suffix to his name – Story, Dialogue,

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

Direction: Kabichandra Kalicharan Patnaik Natyacharya (still 3) – just as many subsequent Indian films would highlight the prowess of their technicians by frequently suffixing their names with their degrees in the credits.



Still 3: Director credits of *Lalita* in English

According to film historian Bhim Singh:

With Kalicharan Patnaik oscillating back-and-forth between Calcutta and Odisha, the job of completing *Lalita* too, eventually fell on its technical consultant Kalyan Gupta (who was soon to court international acclaim as the production manager of Jean Renoir's *The River*, 1951), just like Prafulla Sarkar had directed *Sita Bibaha*, while the film's credits acknowledged Mohan Goswami as its director.²⁸¹

While not completely denying Singh's observations, Deo argues that Kalicharan Patnaik's involvement and impact on the making of *Lalita* was comparatively more than that of Goswami on *Sita Bibaha*, with Patnaik's directorial signature being distinctly visible in the film's song moments. This perhaps explains the abrupt oscillations in *Lalita*'s *mise-en-scène* between song-and-dance sequences shot on elaborate sets with changing screen backdrops retaining the Orissa Theatre influence, and actual outdoor shots that hint at emerging experiments with realism in Bengali moviemaking. *Lalita* does at times indicate an unimaginative replication of the *Natyashastra*'s theatre-specific dramaturgical prescriptions on emoting, production and set design aimed at just evoking a *rasa*, instead of an evolved approach to sustaining the *rasa* in accordance with the limits and possibilities offered by the cinematic medium. Deo says:

Kalibabu definitely directed the song sequences, which are good compositions that became quite popular with the viewers, and remain a highlight of the film to date. But most of them appear like inserts interrupting the film's narrative

²⁸¹ Singh 2008: 66.

continuity, especially the dance numbers that appear to have little connect with their preceding or following drama sequences (Deo interview, 2014).

Lalita however, is not completely devoid of attempts at authenticity and integration of elements from the local Odia culture. For example, the practice of caste system is displayed in how a tribal family treats a Brahmin guest; social attitudes are included in the highlighting of the concept of ‘atithi devo-bhava’ (guest is god); scenes explore greater characterisation nuances, such as the depiction of Lalita’s inner conflicts post the sudden disappearance of Vidyapati; and a perceptible consideration for local sensitivities is shown in the depiction of mythological miracles integral to the Jagannath temple making story.

3.4 *Sita Bibaha vs. Lalita*

Lalita in retrospect, may seem to be a quaint mixture of evolving cinematic sensibilities in Bengal and the *jatra* and *rasalila* form of acting in Odia theatre. The criticisms of *Lalita* notwithstanding, there can be no doubt that while *Sita Bibaha* was a flop, *Lalita*, though not a hit, recovered the cost of its making ‘as acknowledged by its producer Gourendra Pratap Singh Dev’.²⁸² It was only the third Odia film, *Sri Jagannath*, which was based on the same legend as *Lalita*, but shot with greater cinematic imagination (outdoor locations, flashback sequences, natural acting, etc.) and released after *Lalita*, that Odia cinema got its first critical and commercial blockbuster. It also became a huge hit in neighbouring states like West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh, where it was dubbed and re-released in the Telegu language. Deo reviews the achievement levels of these films on the *rasa* parameter, as progressing from ‘no *rasa* in *Sita Bibaha*, to first attempts at *rasa* realisation in *Lalita*, followed by maximum achievement of *rasa* in *Sri Jagannath* (1950)’ (Deo 2014). He explains:

Sita Bibaha was basically a static camera recording a play. It was like a recitation by actors with no *bhava* (in its performances) or relevant supporting facial expressions. In *Lalita* there is greater focus on *bhanga* (gestural acting), than *bhava* (emotion expressing acting). We can at least see the character of Lalita emoting various *bhavas* (mood states) of joy and despair in the presence and absence of Vidyapati. It marks a conscious effort towards engaging with some cinematic values. The fundamental difference between the two is that one can notice a conscious effort being made for the first time in *Lalita* to portray *bhavas*

²⁸² Singh 2008: 67.

and evoke *rasa*. Those who have seen *Sita Bibaha* opine that no such efforts were tried in it. *Sita Bibaha* was primarily a *gitinatya*, *Lalita* at least had dialogue and conversations that contributed towards articulating character motivations. Kalibabu (Kalicharan Patnaik) was a great actor, dance teacher and theatre director but not technically sound with regards to the cinematic language. So the cinematic quality of *Lalita* though better than *Sita Bibaha* was still of a middling standard, which was finally corrected in the third Odia film *Sri Jagannath*, in its competent merging of the cinematic medium's possibilities at conjuring a believable spectacle in the outdoor along with realistic performances by Odia actors that lent a regional flavour and authenticity to its narrative. For *rasa* to be felt by the Odia audience the subject and its telling had to be in sync with local culture, customs and modes of being and behaving. While the selection of a story based on the best known, most popular lore around the making of the temple of the state deity, Sri Jagannath, was a wise decision to address box-office concerns around attracting Odia audiences after their unanimous rejection of *Sita Bibaha*, *Lalita*'s limitations lay in its limited engagement with the possibilities of the cinematic medium and the casting of yet another incompatible lead pair [like *Sita Bibaha*] (Deo interview, 2014).

According to actor Kartik Ghosh:

Leaving aside lead actor Makhanlal Bannerjee, none of the performers in *Sita Bibaha* were able to strike a chord with the audience. The heroine looked elderly and healthier than the hero. There was also something unnatural about the way the spoken language sounded in the film, as it had been translated from Bengali to Odia.²⁸³

The actors in both *Sita Bibaha* and *Lalita* were regular theatre performers and had no previous knowledge or experience of acting for cinema. *Sri Jagannath* however had a mix of local Odia actors from traditional and new performing mediums, hence their acting and dialogue delivery was relatively more authentic and relatable to the Odia audience. Gopal Ghosh, who was initially approached to play the lead male role of *Lalita*'s lover and husband, Vidyapati, in Patnaik's *Lalita*, says:

Lalita was mostly shot indoors like a lavish stage play with painted screens in the background, some of which could be seen shaking in the final frames. The heroine Uma Bannerjee at that time was on a contract with Calcutta's Star theatre and could only shoot in the evenings because of which all her shots [except one brief running shot] had to be shot indoors. Uma, who was the widow of Makhanlal Bannerjee, the hero of *Sita Bibaha*, was senior in age and experience to the film's debuting hero, and looked more like his *mausi* (aunt), if not mother. Her pronunciation of Odia was defective with a heavy Bengali accent. The hero played by Lokanath Mishra, who went onto become a member of the Indian Parliament and governor of Assam, had joined the cast because of his interest in theatre, but

²⁸³ Ghosh 1985.

he had no previous professional experience in acting. Their casting was a visual mismatch and the discomfort was too telling for the audiences to be convinced or feel any lasting *rasa* of *sringara* or romance in their on-screen love story (Ghosh interview, 2014).

3.5 *Sringara rasa* in *Lalita*

I will now discuss, what Deo suggests to be some of the elements of ‘blindly adhering’ (Deo interview, 2014) to the *Natyashastra* in *Lalita*’s structure and characterisation that are representative of and common to filmmaking styles in India’s early Talkie era. This will be followed by a detailed analysis of its aesthetic achievements – namely, the emotively performed, *bhava* rich lyrical music scenes – and discussion of how they enhance the evocation of the narrative’s dominant *rasa* of *sringara*.

3.5.1 Narration and characterisation

The characters in *Lalita* in their *angika* (physical), *vachika* (verbal), *aharya* (ornamental/costume) and *satvika* (emotional) *abhinaya* (acting)²⁸⁴ literally embody the prescriptions for playing their type of parts, as recommended in the *Natyashastra*. All the tribal characters, including the protagonist Lalita, the daughter of tribal chief Biswabasu, speak in a comparatively higher decibel, in animated tones, and appear easily excited or moved to extremes of emotions. King Indradyumna and the head priest on the contrary speak in exalted intonations and appear in control of their emotions even in the face of disappointments and provocations. The Brahmin hero and army commander, Vidyapati too shares their regal aptitude for a controlled display of emotions, though he speaks in a relatively normal, common man’s Odia.

The narrative of *Lalita* is taken from a sub-plot in the popular Odia legend on the building of the Jagannath temple in Puri, which is also considered as one of the four holy destinations for Hindus. The original story has King Indradyumna and his queen Gundicha as its protagonists. Indradyumna organises a search for lord Krishna’s material remains at

²⁸⁴ The term *abhinaya* according to the *Natyashastra* is not just about merely acting out a part, but ‘connotes a carrying forward of ideas with involvement, evoking as a consequence, an aesthetic experience in the audience’ (Subrahmanyam 2010: 24).

the end of the ‘*Dwapara yuga*’²⁸⁵. They are discovered by his commander Vidyapati and brought to Puri, where the king then builds a grand temple to lord Jagannath, who Vaishnavite Hindus believe to be the present day manifestation of Krishna. It is primarily a devotional tale as seen in two subsequent Odia blockbusters titled *Sri Jagannath* (in 1950 and 1979). The film *Lalita* retells the above legend as the love story of Lalita and Vidyapati, celebrating the *sringara rasa*. It inserts narrative novelties to enhance the *romantic* telling or the *sringara rasa* in its drama, through discernible plot inspirations, arguably from Kalidasa’s *Abhigyanam Shakuntalam*, (The Recognition of Shakuntala), featuring the separation-and-union of its lead pair of lovers. The film’s favouring of love songs over devotional songs, unlike other films on the same theme, can be interpreted as a deliberate distraction in the service of evoking its dominant theme *rasa* of *sringara*. However under this uniting arch of *sringara*, the film tries to conform to the *rasa* theory postulate regarding the need of a good drama to serve a variety of *rasas*, while uniting them under one dominant *rasa*. Its narrative has sub-plots and supporting characters serving as triggers for conjuring the other *navarasas*. These include the heroic as present in Vidyapati and Biswabasu’s lady warriors, the marvellous as represented by the sequence of events leading to the discovery of the cave of Nilamadhaba and most of the group dance sequences, *hasya* is evinced through the caricatured court priests jealous of the head priest, the furious is illustrated by Biswabasu as a result of Vidyapati’s betrayal of his trust, and fearfulness is present in Biswabasu’s tribesmen over a rumoured attack by king Indradyumna’s army. According to Nanda:

A film having characters embodying various *rasas* is a requirement here [in Odisha/India], and we are used to it. In all those entertainment forms that predated cinema in Odisha, like *jatra*, *pala*, *dashkathiya*, *gitinatya*, etc. the *navarasas* have been played. So having all the *rasas* in their entertainment has become a requirement of our audience. If you do not give it to them in a drama or cinema, the audience feels that there is something missing somewhere. Even if you take just one *rasa* and make a film, the other eight have to be incorporated in different measures. You cannot just ignore them. Sometimes when we ignore the *navarasas*, people accept those films too, but those are exceptions not the rule (Nanda interview, 2013).

²⁸⁵ It is the third of the four *yugas* (ages) described in Hindu scriptures that ended at the moment of Lord Krishna’s renouncing of his material body to return to his eternal abode 36 years after the *Mahabharata* war.

3.5.2 Dance and music

The dance and music scenes of *Lalita*, according to Deo remain ‘the only timeless elements in an otherwise dated film’ (Deo interview, 2014). They also identify and accentuate the directorial contribution of Kalicharan Patnaik, a dancer-actor and dance guru of repute. He says:

Kalibabu was a believer of the Vaishnava cult and a performer of *rasalila*. He was a musician, who performed and critiqued the then existing Odia dance forms and had an understanding of how to use them with various forms of typical Odia *raga malikas* like *chanda*, *champu*, etc. This makes the song sequences of *Lalita* an authentic representation of then existing dance traditions of Odisha and a valuable cultural document for art historians. The dance sequences in the technically superior *Sri Jagannath*, which released after *Lalita*, too pale in comparison to the brilliance of *its* choreography and song compositions. The film also features the first ever on the screen portrayal of a dance form, the *Dakhini nacha*, which could be identified as the closest precursor of the *Odissi* dance form, which was subsequently recovered from the temples and codified into its modern form in the 1950s and 1960s (Deo interview, 2014).

Released in 1948, at a time when the filmmaking craft was already on the cusp of experimenting and interacting with ‘emerging realism imperatives in world cinema’²⁸⁶, *Lalita* had opted to tell its tale in the stylised theatrical tradition of the early Indian Talkies, when ‘the advent of sound made Indian filmmakers revive the *Natyashastra* inspired popular Indian drama tradition of song-and-dance interspersed narratives almost with a vengeance’ (Benegal interview, 2015). Frequent musical breaks occur in *Lalita* to accommodate seven songs and three dance sequences in the 90-minute long film. It begins with a hymn to Lord Jagannath in the *Natyashastra* tradition of invoking a god like Shiva, Ganesha, or Indra before the start of a performance or play. The film uses documentary footage of the Jagannath temple to go with its opening hymns. It thus acknowledges the realism aspects of the cinematic medium, while retaining a narrative opening convention prescribed in the *Natyashastra*. It also moves from a pure recording of a play on stage or indoor sets (as in the case of *Sita Bibaha*) to cutting its action occasionally with real life, outdoor shots.

²⁸⁶ 1948 marked the height of the Italian neorealism movement that had started after World War 2 and influenced filmmaking across the world including Hindi cinema.

The film's three dance sequences come as pure dance events without any singing. This is in conformation with the idea of inserting dance as a means of embellishment or *alankara* in a *natyadharmi* play, which is aimed at evoking the *adbhuta rasa* in the audience as an element of joyous wonder.²⁸⁷ The film begins with an aesthetically choreographed dance sequence, a *chitra purvaranga* act, which seems to be being performed in the *devaloka* (land of gods) as it ends with a dialogue between the god of love, Kamdev and his wife Rati, with the latter challenging Kamdev to prove the prowess of his flower arrows on Lalita. The next dance performance, a robust group dance by tribal characters with choreography similar to Western Odisha's Sambalpuri folk dance is inserted prior to the film's first major confrontation sequence between the royal forces and Biswabasu's tribesmen. It is experienced from a perspective of curious wonder as two urban pundits snatch a glimpse of an exotic and tribal art form. The film's third and penultimate dance sequence (still 4) is presented as a *devadasi* performance celebrating the consecration of the new of temple of Lord Jagannath. Performed in the then prevalent *Dakhini nacha* (dance) style, the dance piece is now regarded as an influential predecessor of subsequent *Odissi* dance sequences on screen.



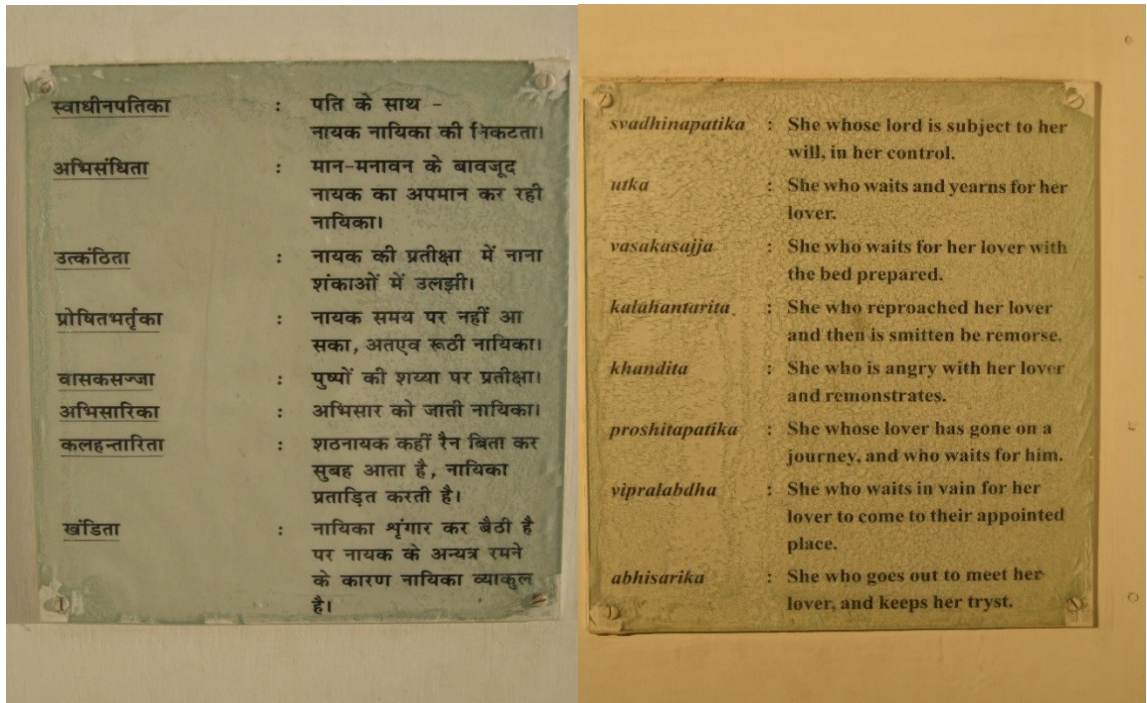
Still 4

The abrupt nature of the appearance of the dance sequences in *Lalita* can be seen as evidence of Patnaik's comfort with, and control and continuance of, the theatrical style of storytelling, instead of a relatively linear and logical cinematic structure. Their afterthought-like insertion is not unnatural if placed in the context of an introductory

²⁸⁷ Roy 2014.

precedence fable from the performance event of Bharat muni's first drama in the *devaloka*, titled *Amrutamanthan* in the *Natyashastra*. The first chapter of the *Natyashastra* mentions how after Bharata muni composed the first drama, dance sequences by *gandharvas* and *apsaras* (celestial musicians and nymphs) were inserted as an afterthought on Lord Brahma's suggestion to make the performance more entertaining, complete or beautiful looking, and appealing to all.²⁸⁸

3.5.3 The love songs of Lalita



Stills 5 & 6: Patna museum displays explaining the various *ashta-nayika* moods; photographs courtesy: V.P. Sahi (2012)

The *rasa* achievement in *Lalita* is arguably the most pronounced in its songs, some of which like Lalita's introduction song, 'Thare kiri basanta' (Patnaik 1948)²⁸⁹ / 'Slowly o

²⁸⁸ NS 1.42-51.

²⁸⁹ Kabichandra ('a king among poets') Kalicharan Patnaik, along with directing *Lalita* (1948), also wrote its dialogue and songs, and played an integral part in the composing of its music. The 'integral involvement and contribution of a director in the creative aspects of a film's music, dance and songs, was quite common in the Talkies era of Indian cinema' (Begum interview, 2013). This also highlights the role and significance of those elements in a filmed narration. Kalicharan Patnaik will be cited for the Odia lyrics of all the songs

spring’ (Roy 1993)²⁹⁰, became popular with audiences and are the most remembered bequest of the forgotten film in popular imagination. These are conceived as lyrical scenes ‘in the *Radha-Krishna premalila* tradition of performing the *Gita Govinda*’ (Deo interview, 2014). Like the verses of *Gita Govinda* ‘where Radha is visualised in a series of [*ashta-nayika*] moods in Krishna’s presence – angry, jealous and resentful of his dalliance with other *gopis* (village maidens), wilting in pangs of separation from Krishna, etc. – all dictated by the one basic emotion of love for Krishna called *rati*, which is the *sthayibhava*’,²⁹¹ the lyrics of the songs in *Lalita*, through similarly inspired situations and reactions, articulate the stated and unstated (in love) *bhavas* of its protagonist. This, contributes to the film’s overall impact as a dramatic work evoking the *sringara rasa*. *Lalita* is established as the ideal *Natyashastra* heroine in the film’s songs. They become a vehicle for presenting most of the ‘*ashta-nayikas*’²⁹², a collective name for the eight types of heroines, representing eight different mood states in relation to their heroes within the two extremities of the being-in-love mood state, which are *sambhoga* (the experiencing of a joyous state of love-in-union) and *vipralambha* (the experiencing of a sorrowful state born on love-in-separation).

Lalita’s introduction song presents her as a *vasakasajja nayika* (a heroine eager for union, stills 7 & 8), ready, decorated and playful in the full bloom of youth, expecting to meet a lover or fall in love. She sings, ‘Thare kari basanta pheriona, phulamana kari chori...’ (Patnaik 1948) / ‘Slowly o spring look back; why have you stolen the heart of the wild flower’ (Roy 1993).

discussed in this chapter.

²⁹⁰ The English translations of the songs of *Lalita* used in this chapter are based on the film’s subtitles by Leela Roy of NFDC Bombay. She will be cited as ‘Roy 1993’ in accord with the Censor Board of Film Certification’s issue date of a fresh certificate as mentioned in the copy of the film accessed for study. The subtitles as the film’s digital copy indicates were added at a later date after the film’s original release.

²⁹¹ Subrahmanyam 2010: 50.

²⁹² NS 24.210-224.



Still 7: The poster of the film, *Lalita*, highlighting an on-screen shot from the Thare kari basanta song portraying the *bhava* of a *vasakasajja nayika*. Still 8: A scene from *Lalita*'s introduction song.

She next meets Vidyapati, whom she falls in love with at first sight (still 9), as the god of love, Kamdev, plays cupid. The mood of the *vasakasajja nayika* continues into the next song, 'Ae dhani Jamuna ku jaye...' (Patnaik 1948) / 'The damsel goes to river Yamuna' (Roy 1993). This is a celebratory description of the adornments and decoration of a heroine-in-love in sweet anticipation of returning to her lover. The song is sung by *Lalita*'s friends, as they discuss the radiance of her being and the beauty of her adornments, teasing her about her first experiences of love:

[Song 2: Translated lyric excerpts from stanzas 2 & 3]
 The damsel goes to Yamuna, her beauty endless in blue attire
 The sounds of bells on her feet, tinkling.
 The pot on her shoulders makes her beauty endless...
 Her mind dances in love, the cupid has struck (Roy 1993).

The influence of *Gita Govinda* and the Radha-Krishna *prema-rasalila* is evident in the lyrics' reference to the Yamuna river where Radha used to go with her water pots to furtively meet Krishna, though in the case of *Lalita*, she says she is going to the banks of the river Mahanadi. According to Deo:

The gestures, choreography and flirtatious interaction of *Lalita* with her friends are inspired by similarly performed *rasalila* songs, while the nature of their interactions and imageries used can be sourced to situations in the *Gita Govinda*, which thus also reaffirms the latter's influence on performed arts in Odisha (Deo interview, 2014).



Still 9



Still 10

The Radha-Krishna reference returns again in the next song, ‘Banaphula Radhe Krishna bolo he’ (Patnaik 1948) / ‘O’ wild flower sing Radhe Krishna’ (Roy 1993), where Lalita’s unstated emotions and pining for Vidyapati are heightened by comparing her longing to the mythical heroine Radha’s longing for Krishna. It is sung by a friend of Lalita (still 12), who articulates the heroine’s moods of the *virahotkanthita nayika* (one distressed by separation, still 13):

[Song 4: Translated lyric excerpts from stanzas 2 & 3]
 O wild flower sing Radhe Krishna, my lord is here
 What is it that makes the stranger your own?
 In the moonlit night, why don’t I get sleep?
 Have I not cared for all your pining?
 My heart has heard all your beatings... (Roy 1993).

The choice of the Radha-Krishna *rasalila* imagery of anticipation and restlessness evoked in the song helps further accentuate the unstated onscreen mood state of the separated lovers, Lalita and Vidyapati.



Still 11 Portraying the *bhavas* of a *virahotkanthita nayika*

Still 12

The film's penultimate song, 'Pheri ana-a-na aau thare' (Patnaik 1948) / 'Why don't you look O' traveller at those left behind' (Roy 1993), happens after Vidyapati's uninformed abandoning of a sleeping Lalita to attend a call of duty to king Indradyumna. It is once again sung by a third person bystander, articulating Lalita's hurt and angst as a *vipralabdha* (a heroine deceived by her lover) and a *proshitabhartruka nayika* (a heroine missing her sojourning husband/lover, who is absent from home). Lalita is seen sitting distressed with her hair hanging loose (stills 13, 14 & 15) in conformation with the *bhava* state's suggested description in the *Natyashastra*.²⁹³ The song is performed by a sombre male voice in an empathetic state of visible distress (still 17). It conjures associations and imagery of loss to further amplify protagonist Lalita's state of heart-break, thereby accentuating the audience's experience of the *rasa* of *sringara* in *vipralambha* (love-in-separation):

[Song 5: Translated lyric excerpts from stanza 3]
 So many unspoken words
 Those moonlit soaked half made garlands
 Those watery eyes of the wild deer
 Let they be left behind.
 If thoughts come to you in lonely nights
 Do not look back O' traveller
 Do not look back..... (Roy 1993).

²⁹³ NS 24.218.



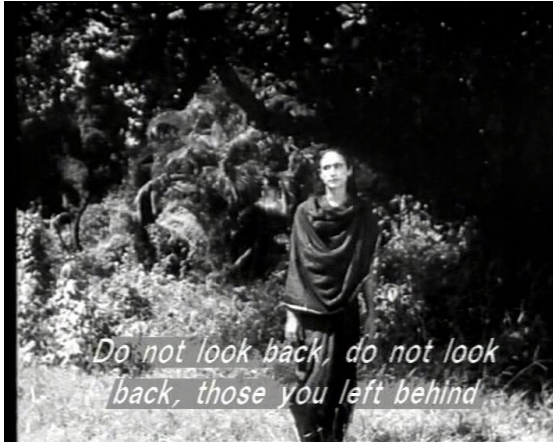
Still 13



Still 14



Still 15



Still 16



Still 17

Between these song sequences, Lalita gets to embody the other *ashta-nayikas* in passing or in totality, including the '*abhisarika nayika*'²⁹⁴ – a heroine driven by love or infatuation, who lets go of the limits of her modesty or the shyness expected of her gender, and takes the initiative to meet her lover (still 18). Lalita initiates the love and courtship scenes depicted in the film, since Vidyapati is depicted to be of a shy nature. Subsequent to her marriage to Vidyapati, she is primarily seen in the role of the *svadhinabhartruka nayika*, that is, a heroine with a husband who, captivated by her beauty, is perpetually by her side in near complete subjugation to her charms (still 19). In the framing of their romantic scenes, it is interesting to note how Lalita frequently assumes a higher perspective position (still 19) and an active action role (e.g. initiating interaction, still 18) conventionally reserved for the male (for example the character of Krishna initiates most action in the Radha-Krishna images, still 20).

²⁹⁴ NS24.219.



Still 18: The *abhisarika nayika*

Still 19

Still 20

Lalita, however, is never seen as a *kalahantarita* (an impatient heroine separated from her lover over a quarrel, still 21), or a *khandita nayika* (a heroine enraged with her lover for cheating on her, still 22), as the nature of the development of the film's romantic plot and its allied tensions do not require any articulation of those role types.

The film, in its characterisation and the behaviour of its lead protagonist in both its song and drama situations, thus adheres to acting guidelines prescribed in the *Natyashastra* when selecting and rejecting relevant *ashta-nayika* types suitable to the nature of its heroine. These eight archetypal emotional situations of the romantic heroine have been depicted and have inspired recurrent themes, images and character inspirations in Indian paintings (stills 19-20), sculptures, literature, and classical dance.



Still 21 & 22: Patna museum displays; photographs courtesy: V.P. Sahi (2012)

They find a cinematic interpretation in protagonist Lalita's various *bhava* states in love, endorsing Deo's review of the filmmaking as a conscious attempt to evoke some element of *rasa* through complimenting lyrical and expressive acting, compared to the no-*rasa* evoking performances in *Sita Bibaha*. The songs offer an eclectic mix of Odia *raga-sangeet*, rendered in the traditional singing style of devotional songs (*bhajans*), *chanda*, interactive *gitinatya* (musical dramas) and *nrityanatya* (dance dramas) style of conversational lyrics, along with mood-highlighting lyrical commentaries in the three-stanza poetry format of most Indian film songs.

The acting in the songs may seem emotive or theatrical in light of changing audience sensibilities, but the presentation of the songs in *Lalita* is not completely unaware of the cinematic medium's possibility to distinguish between the diegetic and non-diegetic sound sources. In contrast to the early Talkie films where the characters, irrespective of their background being musical or not, had to sing songs because of the unavailability of playback singing, in *Lalita*, the hero Vidyapati for instance, in deference to the reserved nature of his character never sings himself. For instance, in the song 'Pheri ana-a-na' (Patnaik 1948), he has a wandering minstrel articulate his unstated emotions. These considerations for logic with regards to a singing source indicate an acknowledgement and use of evolving film music styles in *Lalita*. This sits in comparison to *Sita Bibaha*, which had a plethora of songs in traditional '*bhakti sangeet, chanda, kirtan, pala* and *gitinatya* formats',²⁹⁵ performed in the *rasalila* style, where everybody sang irrespective of the plausibility and possibility for singing in the context of their characters. *Lalita* therefore makes a conscious attempt to consistently adhere to characterisation, acting, music and dance guidelines in the *Natyashastra*, while occasionally integrating some of the theatre to film transitions necessary for better cinematic impact. Nonetheless, it totally fails to achieve a consistent sustaining of the *rasa* impact by short-changing the relatively more true-to-life medium of cinema with some avoidable odd compromises. Prominent

²⁹⁵ Deo 2013.

among these oddities, as already discussed, are its choice of an incompatible looking lead pair, the film's protagonist actress speaking Odia with a Bengali accent, and the shooting of most of the film's drama moments inside painted sets. These make *Lalita* more of a commendable theatre effort on celluloid, rather than a pure product of cinematic achievement.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter provides evidence and interview-based observations from a significant Indian film industry in the Eastern part of the Indian sub-continent. It argues that the advent of cinema in India, across regional movie industries, attracted pioneers who saw in filmmaking an opportunity to re-engage with the aesthetic values prescribed in the *Natyashastra* to achieve a moving and impactful storytelling experience. While the films under review happen to be the first and second releases in the history of Odia cinema, the integral involvement of Bengali technicians, writers and directors in studios based in Kolkata can also be considered as valuable evidence on filmmaking practices in the then Bengali cinema. It is no coincidence that *Sri Jagannath* (1950), the third and most successful film in the foundation phase of Odia cinema (after insinuations of the first two films being ghost directed by Bengali directors), was 'officially' helmed by a Kolkata-based Bengali filmmaker, Chitaranjan Mitra, heralding the beginning of a glorious era of co-production in Odia cinema that featured talent from West Bengal and Odisha. This output in retrospective is now reviewed as the Golden Age of Odia cinema. The chapter also finds adherence to *Natyashastra* postulates in the emotive nature and articulation of song and dance sequences in Indian cinemas. It uses *bhava* and *rasa* concepts to identify and appreciate the *ashta-nayika* mood states of a heroine in love, providing a valuable template to review the performance, music and lyrics achievements in the music scenes often dismissed as melodramatic. These *ashta-nayika* mood states and their articulation in a gestural-lyrical form is a recurring motif in the song and dance sequences in romantic Indian films celebrating the *sringara rasa*. *Lalita*'s concluding dance piece is now acknowledged as a ground-breaking moment in Odisha's post-independence classical dance revival movements

aimed at making *Odissi* – one of India’s oldest classical dance forms – synonymous with Odia culture and tradition. This is the first time any *Odissi*-like dance form was recorded on cinema.

The evidence of this and preceding chapters further aims to argue against research positions that tend to equate the unique narrative attributes of all early Indian cinemas to the Parsi theatre. It is worth noting that at the time of *Lalita*’s release, the Parsi theatre had already marked its ‘influence’ in the Indian Talkie film scene (starting with *Alam Ara*, 1931) and on the narrative styles of certain Hindustani (a mix of Hindi and Urdu) language speaking cinemas made from India’s most prolific film industry at the time, operating out of Bombay (now Mumbai) in India’s Western coast. By then, the cinema from Bombay had already emerged as the dominant Indian national cinema post-independence. Yet *Lalita*, the second Odia film and a representative case study of filmmaking practices in the Eastern coast of India, opted to seek box-office security and a favourable critical response by telling a local legend in the trusted and admired dramatic template of the *Natyashastra*. The level of *rasa* evoked and intensity of *rasa* achieved in the audience by the *Lalita* viewing experience may be an issue of debate, but *bhava* and *rasa*, as integral elements and parameters for film criticism and appreciation as reinforced by critic Surya Deo, remain as relevant today as in the reviews of the early Odia films eight decades ago.

CHAPTER FOUR

RASA IN ADAPTATION: ANALYSING THE EMOTIVE INGREDIENTS OF A MASALA FILM

Look at any big hit film in our cinema, and it will intentionally or unintentionally have the *navarasas*. A careful viewing of *Sholay* [Embers 1975] too will reveal the *navarasas* to you. As a filmmaker or a writer, whether you are aware of, or unaware of the *rasas*, whether you are intentionally or unintentionally adding, incorporating or triggering the *rasas*, the *navarasas* are bound to be evoked in every good film. Without them, a film cannot be successful.

(Salim Khan interview, 2013)

Time and again if we see the few films that have worked beautifully commercially and got critical acclaim – whether it was *Sholay* [1975] or *Mr India* [1987] or *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* [1995] or now *The Dirty Picture* [2011] – are the ones which have completely explored the *navarasas*.

(Vidya Balan interview, 2014)

4.1 The *masala* film

Sholay (Embers 1975), arguably ‘one of the world’s favourite movies’,²⁹⁶ has been repeatedly reviewed by Hindi cinema fans and critics as the greatest Bollywood film ever’.²⁹⁷ Even four decades after its release, a 3D version of the film in January 2014 attracted media attention and fan interest equivalent to the release of a new film. According to a review by senior critic Subhash K. Jha in which he compares *Sholay* with Hindi cinema’s biggest hit of 2014, *Dhoom 3*:

Undoubtedly, the current films that seem to make so much money seem to pale into flamboyant insignificance when weighed against the hefty impact of *Sholay*. As many as 38 years have passed since *Sholay* and its astonishing lines (Salim-Javed at their pithiest) created immediate and enduring history. With each viewing of *Sholay*, I come away wiser and richer. Yes, this is what ‘Bollywood’ entertainment should always be but seldom is.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ Harris 2008.

²⁹⁷ *Sholay* was declared the ‘Film of the Millennium’ by a BBC India poll in 1999, topped the British Film Institute’s ‘Top 10 Indian Films’ of all time poll in 2002, was awarded a special ‘Best Film in 50 Years’ honour at the 50th Filmfare Awards, 2005 and in a March poll 2015 by Time Out featuring critics, curators and film academics from the UK, USA and India (voting together for the first time), *Sholay* was voted the ‘best Bollywood film of all time’.

²⁹⁸ Jha 2014.

To highlight the film's continuing impact on the Indian film industry, filmmaker Shekhar Kapur divided its history into two eras, that of one before *Sholay*, and the other after *Sholay*.²⁹⁹ The film's characters today are part of India's culture lore, almost as recognisable as the protagonists of the great epics of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.³⁰⁰ They have been observed to enjoy a near sacrosanct status among many of the film's fans to the extent that any tampering with the film tends to stoke tempers akin to 'blasphemy'³⁰¹ as evident from the reaction and reception to director Ram Gopal Varma's remake of the film as *Ram Gopal Varma Ki Aag* in 2007.³⁰²

Amitabh Bachchan, an actor in the original *Sholay* and an Indian cinema legend at the time of the remake's release, was criticised for trying to reprise the role of *Sholay*'s celebrated villain, Gabbar Singh, in *Aag* (Ram Gopal Varma 2007).³⁰³ *Sholay* continues to remain the final word and a textbook reference for generations of subsequent Indian filmmakers aspiring to make the perfect 'masala' film.³⁰⁴ The term 'masala' entered the Indian cinema lexicon in the 1970s. It is argued by veteran film critic Ali Peter John to have gained credence among box-office analysts as film trade terminology coined in retrospect to identify films that tried to replicate *Sholay*'s multi-genre mixing and multi-emotion evoking style of storytelling for similar success.³⁰⁵ According to veteran critic Ali Peter John, 'Prior to *Sholay*, all mainstream films [successful or flop] were called entertainment films' (John interview, 2014).

²⁹⁹ Sharma 2012.

³⁰⁰ Chopra 2000: 3; Jha 2015.

³⁰¹ Sharad150 2007.

³⁰² User reviews and ratings for Ram Gopal Varma's Indian Flames (imdb.com 2016)

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ '*Sholay* really changed the way filmmakers made movies and will always be remembered as a classic. Be it the sharp and witty dialogue by Salim-Javed or the iconic characters of the movie, everything about *Sholay* stands out. In fact, when I was making *Paan Singh Tomar*, the dacoit scenes were inspired by *Sholay*. What makes a film iconic? Script? Characters? Performances? *Sholay* scores on all these counts and on some more as well. It is a memorable film and is deeply rooted in our culture and traditions. Over the years a lot of our movies and directors have been inspired by *Sholay* which is a testament to the movie's brilliance' (Dhulia to Sharma 2012).

³⁰⁵ John 2013.

In a TV interview around the release of the 3D version of *Sholay*, its co-script writer Javed Akhtar corroborated that *masala* is a post-*Sholay* term. Discussing the film's writing process, he said, 'We were just writing interesting characters that were fascinating us. We were not trying to make a *masala* film'.³⁰⁶ In perhaps what can be regarded as an indulgent moment of self-review by *Sholay*'s writer duo Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar, they list some of its attractive ingredients and acknowledge the film's guaranteed emotive potential by having one of the heroes, Veeru, sum up his on-screen story mid-film to an audience of villagers declaring, 'Ye mat pucho chacha tumhare aansoo nikal aayenge... is mein emotion hai, drama hai, tragedy hai' ('Don't ask me the details uncle, you will start crying. In my story there is emotion, drama, tragedy'; Salim-Javed 1975)³⁰⁷. These narrative attributes are now considered essential for a *masala* film. Some critics also contend that the term, *masala* film, came to be associated with *Sholay* post its review as a 'curry western by film critics in the West [Europe/USA]'.³⁰⁸ They did this as an observation on *Sholay*'s liberal borrowings of dramatic situations and confrontation moments from some landmark movies in the mid-1960s' Hollywood sub-genre of Spaghetti Westerns.³⁰⁹ *Sholay* however, was also inspired by some popular dacoit-themed Hindi language films that preceded its release. Today, *masala* as an aesthetic term is broadly understood to be a cocktail of action, emotion, drama (or melodrama), song and dance, which 'the Indian filmmakers [making popular cinema] and the film-consuming public have embraced, as a rejection to realism that is seen as part of an arguably different Western aesthetics'.³¹⁰ From a conservative, Western film criticism perspective, the *masala* film has occasionally been criticised, ridiculed and/or misunderstood, as a lesser genre for putting 'the sacred and the profane into the same pot',³¹¹ in its mixing of the signature and the inflexible (hence 'sacred') attributes of universally recognised Hollywood cinema genres, such as

³⁰⁶ Akhtar (to) Masand 2014.

³⁰⁷ Though actor Dharmendra speaks the lines in the film, the dialogue are cited to their original creators and the writers of *Sholay*, Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar.

³⁰⁸ Kabir 1999: 58.

³⁰⁹ 'There are direct references to *Once Upon A Time In The West* and *One-Eyed Jacks*, and the spirit of *Butch Cassidy*, *The Magnificent Seven* and *The Searchers* runs throughout *Sholay*' (Harris 2008).

³¹⁰ Subramani 2013.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

tragedy, comedy, romance, adventure, horror and others, into one hybrid film.

4.2 A fresh perspective

While not contesting the above interpretations, I would like to contribute to a broader understanding of the term. My argument is that the ‘*masala film*’ is merely a post 1970s’ Indian film industry classification for any movie that, in accordance with the ideal dramatic achievement criteria of the *Natyashastra* discussed in the previous chapters, is able to evoke the *navarasas* in its narrative. I will contend that instead of commonly presumed attributes of a *masala* film – song, dance and melodrama – the perfect *masala* film is *actually* one that is able to cohesively present a diversity of *rasa*-embodying characters and *rasa*-evoking drama situations within one grand narrative. By engaging with the *rasa* principles of the Sanskrit drama, this chapter will further aid the appreciation of the emotive achievements of a Hindi or an Indian film narrative; it will engage with alternate parameters for film criticism that offer a fairer review of plots and characters often erroneously dismissed as melodramatic or stereotypical.

Sholay’s retrospective labelling as the perfect *masala* film, one that generations of subsequent filmmakers continue to aspire to and are inspired by, was a post-release phenomena. Myriad theories and arguments have been offered since to analyse the film’s unparalleled success. *Sholay* ran for over five continuous years in Mumbai’s Minerva theatre from its release on the Indian Independence day in 1975.³¹² The film worked well because it was able to evoke and fuse each of the nine *rasas* to memorable effect. My argument for this will be constructed as follows. First, a sequence-by-sequence analysis of the entire film will be undertaken, looking at its evocation of all the prescribed primary *rasas*. This will include a discussion of the dominant projected *bhavas* of each of its memorable characters, as evidence of the film’s success in conceiving characters embodying each of the *rasas* as a mood state or a dominant character trait. It has already been discussed how *Sholay* has come to be acknowledged by the Indian film industry as

³¹² Jha 2015.

the perfect *masala* film. I will also examine whether *Sholay*'s continuing popularity among new viewers and existing fans can be attributed to the culmination of its visual experience in the *shanta rasa*. In sum, I would like to propose that in a narrative's ability to convincingly suggest and blend each of the *navarasas* into a unified emotional experience, as is the case with *Sholay*, there lies a potential recipe of how to make a successful Indian *masala* film. A detailed analysis of the plot structure of the most successful *masala* film, based on the dominant sentiments of each of its scenarios, will thus help clarify that while the *masala* film is an important genre in popular Indian cinema, it is unfair to equate every example of popular cinema as a *masala* film. Hindi film script-writer and secretary of (Bollywood's) Film Writer's Association, Kamlesh Pandey argues:

Not every film can have all the *rasas*, though no film can be without the *rasas*. It may have two, three or all the nine, but this depends on the requirements of the story (Pandey interview, 2013).

The previous chapters of this thesis have so far have established a conscious awareness and influence of the *Natyashastra* and the *rasa* theory in Indian filmmaking and reviewing processes with a sample of films from different regional film industries. After establishing the evocation of *rasa* as a theoretical expectation in the review of a cinematic work in the previous chapter, this chapter will consider the nature of its realisation in the practical aspects of plot construction and characterisation. Hence in-depth interviews will be referenced as empirical support for my theoretical argument that the need to evoke *rasa* shapes the *masala* film and differentiates the Indian film writing process from its Western counterparts. Interviewees include two of Hindi cinema's most successful post-1970 writing influences, Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar³¹³, who also are the story, script and dialogue writers of *Sholay*, contemporary screenplay writers like Kamlesh Pandey, one of post-2000 Hindi cinema's most feted and critically acclaimed actress, Vidya Balan and directors known to write their films, such as Nirad Mohapatra and Chandraprakash Dwivedi. Finally, two seminal scenes from *Sholay*, featuring the *entry* and *exit* of its most memorable character, Gabbar Singh, will be compared, to establish how the *rasa* evoking needs of an Indian *masala* film differentiate this Curry Western from its Spaghetti Western

³¹³ Javed Akhtar's quotes have been accessed from secondary book and online interview resources.

sources. These scenes were inspired by a landmark Spaghetti Western film *For a Few Dollars More* (Sergio Leone 1965), from Sergio Leone's 'Dollars Trilogy'.³¹⁴ A selection of the film's dialogue will be cited to discuss their evocation of *rasa* and impact on the overall film experience. I will present some of *Sholay*'s most frequently repeated and remembered dialogue in their original Hindi language, as an acknowledgement of their continuing popularity in Indian popular culture, along with their translations in English by me. The writers of *Sholay*, Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar, will be cited for all the dialogue discussed in the chapter as SJ, an abbreviation of their popular on-screen name of Salim-Javed.

In the remainder of this thesis, starting with this chapter, I will be proposing methods on how to use and extend the aesthetic appreciation templates offered by the *rasa* theory as a practical recognition and valuation guideline for ascertaining the creative merits of an Indian feature film, its performance achievements and 'different to the norm' narration priorities and the nature of pleasure sought and expected by its viewers. Detailed case studies of a sample of a diversity of influential, genre and region representing Indian films provide the foundations for this. Ultimately, I will indicate how to use a *rasa*-based criticism of a film for a fairer and better review of the 'profane, misunderstood or different' attributes of popular Indian cinema. These attributes have been successfully entertaining nearly half of the global movie going audience, while constantly challenging the 'sacrosanct' First World codes for identifying a good film.

³¹⁴ The Dollars Trilogy, is a series of three films directed by Sergio Leone – *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *For a Few Dollars More* (1965) and *The Good, the bad and the Ugly* (1966) – that established the Spaghetti Western genre (also known as Italian Western and/or European Western in contrast to the American Western).

4.3 Analysing *Sholay*'s scenarios in terms of their dominant *rasas*


Table 1

Timeline	Description of scenario	Character in focus	Character <i>Bhavas</i> and <i>Rasas</i> conveyed	Dominant <i>Rasa</i> evoked
00:00-03:40	A jailor arrives at a deserted railway station and is received by an aide of Thakur Baldev Singh. As the credits roll, the audience is introduced to the topography of the scene of the drama, the village Ramgarh.	Ramgarh	An upbeat tune evoking elements of energy, surprise and adventure plays in the background.	Curiosity is kindled among the audience (evoking an element of the <i>adbhuta rasa</i>), for what will happen next.
03:41-06:01	Thakur Baldev Singh is introduced. The jailor talks to him with awe reserved for a much admired senior. Thakur ³¹⁵ , instead of exchanging any pleasantries, immediately requests the jailor to help him in finding two petty thieves. Surprised by the request, the jailor dismisses them as good-for-nothing characters, full of vices. Thakur thinks otherwise, and delves into a flashback to highlight their virtues.	First, Thakur Baldev Singh, and then two 'courageous thieves' Jaidev and Veeru.	Thakur is presented as a serious, matter-of-fact person, who does not betray any emotion. He nurtures a secret purpose and a rage within, which perpetuates the <i>rasa</i> of wonder around his unusual disposition.	An element of wonder (<i>adbhuta</i>) as curiosity is perpetuated, first in the Thakur's request being termed 'unusual' and then for Jaidev and Veeru, because of the two contrasting reviews about their worth, as shared by the jailor and Thakur.
06:02-16:57	The flashback scene is a set up for <i>Sholay</i> 's most	Jaidev and Veeru	Veeru comes across as a talkative and	Spectacular fight scenes and stunts


³¹⁵ Though 'Thakur' is normally used as a designation of address, I will use it as a proper noun to refer to Baldev Singh's character in this chapter.

	<p>spectacular action sequence (also a first in Indian cinema at the time of its release), featuring a gang of dacoits on horseback, chasing, ambushing and then trying to loot a goods train. Thakur, with the help of Jaidev and Veeru, whom he was taking to the jail in the train, foils the ambush.</p> <p>The ambush is preceded by a conversation between the trio, which highlights that each is a brave heart by choice, and that they share a common passion for playing with fire. This is the reason why Thakur, although owning enough land, opted to join the police force, and Jaidev and Veeru chose the life of an outlaw, for the relentless adventure of the calling, pursuit and escape included.</p>		<p>humorous character. Jaidev is reticent and introspective (as if he does not give a damn), while Thakur shows attributes of a compassionate human being who is able to see through and trust the real worth of even his prisoners. Veeru boasts that together they could engage at least 10-15 challengers. Thakur challenges them to prove their word when the dacoits suddenly attack. The duo's compassionate '<i>daya vira</i>'³¹⁶ side is revealed, when after defeating the bandits they decide to take an injured Thakur to the hospital instead of using the</p>	<p>perpetuate the sense of <i>adbhuta</i>/awe, but in service of the <i>vira rasa</i> that establishes the three as the film's 'hero' characters. The scene is presented as a ballad-like testimony to not only reveal the courage quotient of Jaidev and Veeru, but also to establish them as good human beings on the wrong side of law.</p>
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³¹⁶ A '*vira*' or a hero, depending on the nature of the motivation leading to his act of heroism is categorised as a *daya-vira* (one driven by the compassion for a cause, protection of weaker human beings, etc. like Lord Rama), *dana-vira* (driven by acts of charity like Raja Harishchandra or King Harshavardhana) and *dharmavira* (who fights for the establishment of *dharma*, law, righteousness and other noble values like Arjuna in the *Mahabharata* or Thakur in *Sholay*).

			opportunity to escape by letting him die.	
16:58-17:30	The flashback ends and the narration returns to the conversation between the jailor and Thakur, with the latter assessing the ‘misunderstood’ Jaidev and Veeru as natural <i>viras</i> , who are – ‘mischievous, but brave, dangerous because they know how to fight and wrong, but humane’ (SJ 1975).	Jaidev and Veeru	Other noble attributes of Jaidev and Veeru (e.g. <i>karuna</i> as compassion for a fellow human), beyond their already displayed bravery is highlighted.	<i>Vira</i>
17:31-23:59	The film’s first song scene – ‘Yeh dosti hum nahi todenge’ (We will never break this friendship. Bakshi 1975) ³¹⁷ – is an ode to Jai and Veeru’s friendship. It is accompanied by some comic encounters of the duo on the road. 	Jaidev and Veeru	The third person perspective up until now towards Jaidev and Veeru, changes to one of direct engagement as the audience is introduced to the platonic love, intimacy and the potential sacrifice in their bonding as they express a lifetime of togetherness and the putting of friendship before life through the lyrics of the song.	Though bromance is the focus of the song’s lyrics, the events in the song introduce into the film its first humorous sequences aimed at evoking the <i>hasya rasa</i> (still-1).
	Still-1			

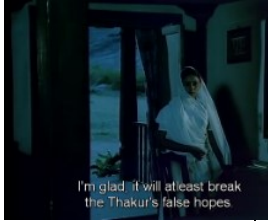
³¹⁷ Anand Bakshi is the lyricist of all the songs of *Sholay*.

24:00- 26:29	Introduction of Surma Bhopali, (played by ‘comic actor’ ³¹⁸ Jagdeep), a lumberjack and acquaintance of Jaidev and Veeru, whom they co-opt into a plan whereby the former will hand them to the police and pocket the prize money (announced for their capture). The amount would then be shared by the trio after they escape from the jail.	Surma Bhopali	Surma is introduced as a loud and exploitative trader, who speaks in a comical and exaggerated Hindi dialect. The mood is humorous. The non-exploitative side of Jaidev and Veeru is hinted in their offering to share the prize money with Surma.	<i>Hasya</i>
26:30- 29:18	Introduction of a jailer from the British era, played by Asrani, a Hindi-cinema-supporting actor popular for his comic parts. His marching entry is parodied to a tune of the song, He’s a jolly good fellow, in the background. Jaidev and Veeru are entrusted into his custody.	A comical jailer hailing from the British era	Modelled on Charlie Chaplin’s caricature of Hitler from <i>The Great Dictator</i> (1940), still-2, he too behaves in an exaggerated manner and fumbles with his orders, which make him an object of ridicule among his prisoners.	<i>Hasya</i>  Still-2
29:19-	Introduction of barber	Hariram	Hariram is	<i>Hasya</i>

³¹⁸ Actors, who have been successful in certain characterisations, especially those working within the popular cinema star system, have frequently been limited to repeating a recognised stereotype through their careers. So a popular onscreen villain like Pran is continually assigned to play challenging negative roles, while comedians like Jagdeep, Asrani and Keshto Mukherjee (all starring in *Sholay*) have reprised many comic characters. As a result so strong is their association with an acted emotion that a mere sighting of them in a scene, is often used by writers and filmmakers to deliberately hint regular audiences about the happening of a funny sequence.

30:48	<p>Hariram as the jailer's informer. Jaidev and Veeru start planning their escape by leaking misleading information to Hariram.</p>  <p>Still-3</p>		deliberately given a comical hue by the casting of popular comedian Keshto Mukherjee (still-3) in the part.	
30:49-35:49	More humorous interactions of the comical jailer with prisoners of different shapes and sensibilities (from the menacing to the sexual) is followed by Jaidev and Veeru's trick escape with a fake pistol.	The Jailer	The escape is planned as a con game, which lends it a comical instead of the thriller emotion, typical to jail-break sequences.	<i>Hasya</i>
35:50-38:05	Jaidev and Veeru collect their share of the ransom money from Surma, after catching him off guard through one of his narrations of false bravado to naive listeners.	Surma Bhopali	Surma's embarrassment and caught-in-a-bind body language, heighten the sequence's mirth metre.	<i>Hasya</i>
38:07-38:40	Before Jaidev and Veeru can escape, they are caught by the police and sent to the custody of the jailer seen in the film's opening sequence.	Jaidev and Veeru	There is an element of surprise as the conmen get 'conned' by their fate.	A fleeting feeling of <i>adbhuta</i> , underlined by <i>hasya</i> .
38:41-	Thakur meets the duo on	Gabbar	A fleeting sense of	Though fleeting


41:35	release, and offers them a great deal of money to work for him. When asked about the nature of work, he stokes their appetite for adventure, before striking a goal-driven, hard bargain saying, ‘The payment will be whatever you quote, the work will be whatever I say’ (SJ 1975). He then asks them to catch dacoit Gabbar Singh alive for him, but refuses to reveal any motive.	Singh is introduced as a ‘wanted’ criminal evading the law, who also happens to be canny and brave.	foreboding is evoked in Jaidev and Veeru, but their competence is assured when Thakur justifies choosing them to catch Gabbar because, ‘Only an iron can cut iron’ (SJ 1975). While the surprise around the Thakur’s quest for Jaidev and Veeru is finally quelled, fresh suspense is generated around his motive for wanting to capture Gabbar, apart from the character of Gabbar himself.	<i>rasas</i> of surprise, fear and repressed anger are evoked, <i>vira</i> remains the connecting <i>rasa</i> evoked through the nature of a tough challenge (finally) thrown, and promptly taken. The scene also marks a decisive turn in its brave but purposeless lead duo, being presented for the first time as potential heroes.
41:36-46:37	Jaidev and Veeru arrive in Ramgarh, and get introduced to a feisty, free-spirited and garrulous horse cart driver, Basanti.	Basanti	While it is love at first sight in Veeru for Basanti, Jaidev reacts to Basanti’s non-stop chatter with comic irritation.	Though there is an undercurrent of <i>hasya</i> ; triggering of <i>sringara</i> is the scene’s most perceptible <i>rasa</i> .
46:38-49:37	Thakur receives the duo with a matter-of-fact reiteration of his demand, pays them their second, post-arrival instalment and the audience is introduced to the only	Thakur and his family	The mood of suspense returns, along with disgust over Veeru’s suggestion to rob Thakur’s unguarded	<i>Bibhatsa</i> is the scene’s trigger <i>rasa</i> for the film’s potential heroes, who are still being driven by their

	other family member in his huge mansion, his widowed daughter-in-law, Radha.		safe. Jaidev and Veeru still seem to be tied to their petty thieving predispositions.	unscrupulous urges.
49:38-51.45	Jaidev and Veeru undergo a surprise attack by Thakur's men hiding in their room. They defeat all in a hand-to-hand combat as Thakur is assured that the vigour of his choices has not diminished with time.	Jaidev and Veeru	Having established the shooting skills of Jai and Veeru in the train robbery event, the surprise fight sequence highlights their combat abilities and other physical and mental attributes expected from a fighting hero.	Vira
51.46-53.44	Jaidev and Veeru plan to rob Thakur's vault at night, but are caught by the young widow, Radha. She gives them the key and asks them to 'take everything and then leave,' as that will give her father-in-law respite from misplaced hopes from rogue strangers (like them).	Radha	<i>Disgust</i> is the trigger <i>rasa</i> for Jaidev and Veeru's treacherous act, but Radha's unconventional reprimand (hinting sarcasm, still-4), shames them and awakens their humanity.	Bibhatsa  Still-4
53.45-54.32	The inherently nice, but roguish duo are reformed, as Jaidev returns the key to Radha and assures her that no breach of trust will happen again.	Jaidev and Radha	A hero's word is given; Radha's doubts soften for Jaidev, who already is shown to be intrigued by her. The	Sringara , inspired by respect and compassion for a fellow loner (in Jaidev).

			beginning of a second love story is thus hinted.	
54.33-55.36	Introduction to Basanti's family and her lone guardian, an elderly aunty, who is referred to as 'Mausi' ³¹⁹ by all.	Mausi	Mausi's interaction with Basanti, once again highlights how the latter's talkative nature unintentionally makes her an object of comedy.	Hasya
55.37-57.29	Introduction of an elderly blind Muslim cleric, Imam sahib and his son, Ahmed	Imam sahib	Basanti helps the blind Imam reach the masjid, as the latter talks about similar acts of compassion by fellow villagers.	Karuna is further perpetuated in Ahmed's insistence to not leave his blind father alone in the village for better career prospects.
57.30-1:00:56	Basanti meets Veeru in a mango orchard, where he tries to flirt with her more audaciously.	Basanti and Veeru	The, until now, one-sided Veeru-Basanti romance is hindered by unintended confusions that lend a comic flavour to their romance.	Sringara is the dominant <i>rasa</i> as Veeru attempts to kindle feelings for him within Basanti.
1:00:57-1:02:37	Radha shares a smile for the first time over town-boy Jaidev's nascent attempts at shepherding.	Radha and Jaidev	A kindling of feelings between the silent Radha and a brooding Jaidev is	A restrained manifestation of sringara , in contrast to Basanti-

³¹⁹ Though 'mausi' is a Hindi term for an elder aunt from the maternal side of relations, however as in the case of the Thakur, it is used by all inhabitants of Ramgarh as a proper noun to address Basanti's aunt.


			hinted.	Veeru's loud histrionics.
1:02:38- 1:06:37	The narrative cuts from individual/couple personal stories to a collage view of life in Ramgarh village, which is interrupted by three dacoits of Gabbar. As they terrorise the villagers, Thakur challenges them. Jaidev and Veeru defeat them in a gun battle as the villagers cheer their saviours.	Gabbar Singh's dacoits	The mood changes from helplessness and terror on the part of the villagers to fear among the bandits as they flee the village after being disarmed by Jaidev and Veeru.	Bhayanaka is the dominant <i>rasa</i> , experienced by first the villagers and then the dacoits. In the audience too, a foreboding is created for Gabbar's reaction.
1:06:38- 1:13:00	The much discussed dacoit Gabbar Singh is finally introduced, first as a cold, dispassionate voice interrogating his three scared dacoits, who had fled Ramgarh, set to an ominous background score. Suddenly, he yells (and we see him in entirety for the first time), at his team for not staying on to fight Thakur's two aides, and plays a game of Russian roulette, which the three bandits survive. But just as they burst out laughing at their narrow escape, he shoots them point blank and declares – 'Death to the	Gabbar Singh	The fear of Gabbar is established through the unpredictability of his character. For example, after giving his men an assurance of forgiveness, he kills them in cold blood when they are least expecting it, and then pauses to survey the reactions of his remaining men before justifying his cruelty (still-5). According to <i>Sholay's</i> co-script-writer Javed Akhtar, 'Gabbar is a strange	The <i>rasa</i> of bhaya permeates the scene, first evoked among Gabbar's three deserter bandits in anticipation of the quantum of punishment, and then in the audience for the villagers of Ramgarh, as the scene ends with Gabbar hinting at revenge on the Holi festival.

	<p>cowards!’ (SJ 1975). The fable of curiosity woven around Gabbar so far, is thus shredded to reveal him as an agent of terror, prone to acting whimsically, like the killing of his own men to simply to make a statement. The act highlights his disregard for human life and reveals a psychotic character that revels in wanton spilling of blood. This is then reinforced in scene after scene, featuring his killing of weak, defenceless villagers, an adolescent lad and a little boy with no direct challenge or enmity.</p>		<p>man... There are eight or nine scenes in which Gabbar appears but in each of these scenes you’re always on the edge, guessing what his next move will be’.³²⁰ This lends to his fearsome character a sense of the <i>adbhuta</i>.</p>	 <p>Still-5</p>
1:13:01-1:18:40	<p>The film’s second song sequence occurs as a festival dance number, where the villagers led by Veeru and Basanti celebrate the festival of colours, Holi.³²¹ But while the villagers are dancing to an assurance of freedom</p>	Basanti-Veeru and Jaidev-Radha	<p>The lyrics of the song ‘Holi ke din dil mil jaate hain’ (forget friends, even enemy hearts get united on the occasion of Holi, Bakshi 1975) articulate a progress</p>	<p>The song, featuring the film’s two lead romantic pairs, is a natural vehicle for <i>sringara</i>, though a sense of <i>bhaya</i> lurks in the background.</p>


³²⁰ Kabir 2006: 61.


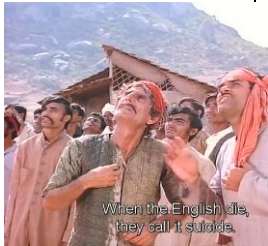
³²¹ Such abrupt changes-in-mood between scenes (e.g. from a cold blooded triple killing to one of song and dance) though not unnatural for audiences looking for a *rasa*-driven emotional roller coaster in their film viewing experience, often tend to draw criticism from viewers and critics used to a linear development or a gradual transition between emotions.


	from Gabbar's terror, the audience is aware that it is only a temporary respite. The threat of Gabbar's revenge thus lends a feeling of fear to a seemingly joyous event.		in the relationships of Basanti- Veeru and Jaidev-Radha.	
1:18:41- 1:28:32	Gabbar and his dacoits plunder and attack Ramgarh. Chaos reigns, and in spite of a fight where the odds heavily outnumber Jaidev and Veeru, they use strategy, and with timely help from Basanti force Gabbar and his men to retreat. Thakur, who remains a mute spectator through the shootout, is unable to provide Veeru with any cover at a strategic moment of need, because of which he calls him a coward and threatens to exit the mission.	Gabbar, Jaidev, Veeru and Basanti	Gabbar's arrogance, self-obsession and cruelty are juxtaposed against the magnanimity of Jaidev and Veeru, who risk their lives willingly for a just cause like true <i>dharma viras</i> . Thakur's inability to help at a strategic turn in the fight, when Gabbar is close to capturing Jaidev and Veeru, creates the curiosity for another back story and revelation.	Vira rasa is in focus through the bravery of Jaidev, Veeru, and of Basanti (for the first time). Its impact heightens in the context of their achieving an awe inspiring victory by making Gabbar flee in spite of his superiority in numbers.
1:28:33- 1:47:09	The film's second flashback reveals the story behind Thakur's obsession like motivation to capture Gabbar. Gabbar had massacred Thakur's entire family (two sons, daughter,	Thakur	Thakur's flashback has trigger elements for most of the <i>rasas</i> , from <i>vira</i> in his daring pursuit and capture of Gabbar Singh, to <i>bibhatsa</i> in	Raudra is the culminating <i>rasa</i> of the sequence as manifested in the Thakur's raging visage (still-6) at the end of the


	<p>elder daughter-in-law and grandchild) in cold blood. Raging with vengeance when Thakur singlehandedly lands in Gabbar's hideout, the latter chops off his hands and condemns him to a life worse than death. It is at this juncture that Jaidev and Veeru are made aware of the reason of his inability to help them in the gun battle, and the film reaches its 'intermission' with a pre-climactic dramatic revelation.</p>		<p>the sadistic nature of the latter's revenge. <i>Karuna</i> is evoked among Jaidev-Veeru for Thakur's tragedy. They now empathise with his righteous anger and in a subsequent scene offer to return his advance money and fight without recompense a fair cause.</p>	<p>narration.</p>  <p>Still-6</p>
1:47:10-1:48:10	<p><i>Sholay's</i> second half begins with the police arriving in Ramgarh to investigate the dacoits' attack during the Holi festival. Thakur assures that Gabbar will be handed to the police dead or alive.</p>	Thakur	<p>Subsequent to the pre-intermission revelation of his <i>only</i> weakness, Thakur, like a true <i>vira</i>, is once again back in command.</p>	<i>Vira</i>
1:48:11-1:50:02	<p>Jaidev and Veeru offer to return Thakur's payment money, but he warns them that they only have to catch Gabbar, and 'not kill him'. He then directs them to the wandering Gabbar's next hideout, and suggests that it is a good opportunity to</p>	Jaidev and Veeru	<p>With the second suspense element in the plot, i.e. Thakur's revenge against Gabbar now explained, fresh suspense is built around his insistence on wanting him to be</p>	<i>Vira/Heroism</i> <p>continues as the driver <i>rasa</i>, as the film's triad of heroes, readies their first assault against the villain Gabbar. But while anger fuels Thakur's</p>



	capture him.		captured alive since he has now been revealed to be physically unable to punish him. <i>Adbhuta</i> as suspense returns as the support <i>rasa</i> to the film's emerging unifying <i>rasa</i> of <i>vira</i> revolving around an increasing band of brave men and women.	revenge, Jaidev and Veeru are driven more by compassion for the villagers and Thakur's loss.
1:50:03-1:54:01	The film's third song, an erotic dance number, 'Mehbooba o' mehbooba' (Darling o' darling, Bakshi 1975), visualised as a gypsy couple performing to Gabbar's pleasure, is shown as Jaidev and Veeru destroy his stock of arms and ammunition. Gabbar escapes the attack and Jaidev gets injured.	Gabbar Singh	<i>Sringara</i> is the theme of the gypsy couple's song, interspersed with moments of fear and heroism for Jaidev and Veeru's daring.	<i>Sringara</i> , though the nature of its manifestation in this situation, is oriented towards lust, not love.
1:54:02-1:55:57	Radha on seeing an injured Jaidev breaks her widow's restraint, rushing out with her head uncovered (still-7) and showing visible distress that reveals to Thakur her growing feelings for Jaidev.	Radha and Jaidev	The so far unarticulated love story of Jaidev and Radha gets articulated as Jaidev's eyes and pensive notes on the	Though <i>sringara</i> drives character reactions, <i>karuna</i> is the dominant <i>rasa</i> . While <i>karuna</i> is manifested in Radha's concern

	 <p>Still-7</p>		<p>mouthorgan seek Radha's attention. Compassion drives their unspoken love, just as mirth drives the Veeru-Basanti romance track.</p>	<p>for Jaidev's safety, in Thakur it is revealed in his compassion driven understanding of his widowed daughter-in-law's need for a companion. This empathy makes him react to a possible scandal with calm and not anger or reprimand.</p>
<p>1:55:58-1:58:20</p>	<p>The narrative shifts to sub-plots featuring supporting villager characters like Imam sahib, his son Ahmed, Basanti and the village postman. Imam tries to convince Ahmed to leave the village for better job prospects, but he insists again on not leaving his blind father alone.</p>	<p>Imam and Ahmed</p>	<p>Another manifestation of the <i>karuna rasa</i> as affectionate concern between parents and children that naturally encourages them to make mutual sacrifices is shown.</p>	<p><i>Karuna</i></p>
<p>1:58:21-2:06:51</p>	<p>Veeru stages a marriage proposal to Basanti as a ruse implying divine intervention, but is caught in the act. As an angry Basanti tries to leave, Veeru pursues her with a song, 'Koi haseena jab rooth</p>	<p>Veeru and Basanti</p>	<p>Mirth (as romantic banter) is the conveyed emotion in the actions and reactions of Veeru and Basanti in tandem with the</p>	<p><i>Sringara</i></p>

	<p>jaati hai' (When a damsel gets angry, she looks even more beautiful, Bakshi 1975). He now directly articulates his love for Basanti, which is acknowledged and reciprocated by the latter by the end of the sequence.</p>		<p>former's prankster nature and the latter's comic garrulousness. But its end purpose is to take their love story to the next stage of a mutually-reciprocated affair, from its one-sided progress until now.</p>	
<p>2:06:52- 2:17:05</p>	<p>Veeru asks Jaidev to argue his case for marriage with Basanti with her guardian aunt, Mausi. Continuing the narrative's comic mood from the previous sequence, Jaidev deliberately ruins his friend's cause by exaggerating his vices. Mausi naturally rejects Veeru, and the latter tries to change her decision by attempting public suicide in a drunken state from atop a village tank.</p>	<p>Mausi and Veeru</p>	<p>The sequence highlights the comical vein in Veeru's character, seen in flashes until now, to its full humour potential. His literal over-the-top (still-8) drunken attempt at suicide is ably complemented by Jaidev's deadpan comedy, the villagers' confused interpretation of Veeru's threats (still-9) and Mausi's dramatic rebuttal, to make it one of Hindi cinema's most reprised comic sequences.</p>	<p>Hasya</p>  <p>Stills 8-9</p> 


<p>2:17:06- 2:20:36</p>	<p>In typical <i>masala</i> style of storytelling, the narrative once again switches from one extremely contrasting emotion to another in consecutive scenes, as the narrative cuts from a hilarious sequence to one of extreme barbarity as Gabbar captures and tortures Ahmed to death.</p>  <p>I'm going to torture this bastard to death!</p> <p>Still-10</p>	<p>Ahmed</p>	<p>Ahmed's unusual defiance before Gabbar generates the <i>vira rasa</i>. Gabbar's opting to torture the teenager to death (still-10), instead of just shooting Ahmed, because he feels it would be less painful, generates both fear and disgust.</p>	<p>Bibhatsa, for the gruesome nature of Ahmed's death, which is indicated by Gabbar trying to blind him before killing.</p>
<p>2:20:37- 2:28:17</p>	<p>Ahmed's dead body arrives in Ramgarh on his horse, with a note of warning from Gabbar that more killings of innocent villagers will follow if they do not hand over Jaidev and Veeru to Gabbar. The scared villagers want to turn in the duo, but Imam pleads for calm, and argues that in spite of losing his son, he would rather opt to die with dignity than live a life of fear and servitude. His exit</p>	<p>Imam sahib</p>	<p>The scene triggers a series of <i>rasas</i>, starting with pathos for the Imam's loss, disgust at some of the villager's fear-induced intention to turn in Jaidev and Veeru, to one of anger and revenge in the latter for Gabbar. His unusual calm in spite of a great personal loss</p>	<p>Shanta is the continuous <i>rasa</i>, evoked in the Imam's ability to not only face the death of a loved one with contemplative calm, but also make an example of it (still-11) to return sanity to the villagers losing their courage and</p>




	<p>plea that in spite of bearing the world’s heaviest burden – ‘a father having to carry his son’s bier’ (SJ 1975) – he will oppose the surrendering of Jaidev and Veeru, and ask God why He didn’t give him more sons to sacrifice for a just cause, establishes the Imam as both the hero, and a restorer of the heroic sentiment in the sequence.</p>		<p>highlights his compassion, strength of conviction, and fearlessness.</p>  <p>An honourable death is anyday than a life of humiliation</p> <p>Still-11</p>	<p>compassion to fear.</p>
2:28:18-2:30:45	<p>Jaidev and Veeru return Gabbar’s challenge by killing four dacoits and sending a warning that henceforth they will kill four of his men for every villager felled. A furious Gabbar threatens a complete massacre of Ramgarh.</p>	<p>Gabbar Singh</p>	<p>The courageous streak in Gabbar is hinted at for the first time, when he reacts to the threat with a competitor’s glee over the meeting of a worthy challenge – ‘ab aayega majaa’ (now the real fun begins, SJ 1975)!</p>	<p>As bodies threaten to pile up on both sides, <i>bhayanaka</i>, amplified by vengeful heroism is the scene’s sign-off <i>rasa</i>.</p>
2:30:46-2:31:31	<p>A quick cut to Thakur’s aide, Raamlal, readying a boot with nails, as the Thakur looks on with a surety of will approving the unusual nature of the footwear. An ominous background score similar to the one playing when Gabbar killed the Thakur’s</p>	<p>Thakur</p>	<p>Suspense is generated by an unusual creation, which is heightened by an eerie sounding complementing mood music.</p>	<p><i>Adbhuta</i></p>

	grandchild plays in the background.			
2:31:32-2:37:22	<p>The reticent Radha shares a laugh with Jaidev as he tries to sustain a conversation, but does not speak. Raamlal remembers how she once was an extremely boisterous girl. The flashback continues into an evening sequence where Radha acknowledges and returns Jaidev’s gaze, as he plays a pensive tune on his mouthorgan.</p>  <p>Still-12</p>	Radha	<p><i>Karuna</i> as pity is effected in the contrast between the boisterous Radha of the past and her present silent lady-in-white avatar. The poignancy of the emotion is heightened by her parting dialogue in the flashback sequence – ‘Wouldn’t the world be so dull, without these colours?’ (SJ 1975, still-12).</p>  <p>Still-13</p>	<p><i>Karuna</i> is manifested through its support emotions of pity (for Radha’s fate in Raamlal, still-13) and compassion (in Jaidev). It is this compassion that builds empathy and encourages Jaidev to make the tough decision of proposing marriage to a widow, which would normally be frowned upon in a rural society.</p>
2:37:23-2:42:00	<p>Jaidev discusses his decision to marry Radha with Veeru; Thakur discusses the possibility of her remarriage with her father, and Radha indicates her assent to the developments with a muted</p>	Radha	<p>Compassion and genuine care motivate the Thakur to take a decision that challenges social norms, as indicated by the surprise of</p>	<p><i>Sringara</i> is the driver <i>rasa</i> as the film’s second love story inches towards a happy culmination, and the two heroes</p>

	smile. Jaidev and Veeru discuss giving up their life-on-the-run to marry and settle in Ramgarh as farmers.		Radha's biological father. <i>Karuna</i> is an important support <i>rasa</i> in the scene, with flashes of <i>hasya</i> thrown in Veeru's asides, albeit all united under an arch of <i>sringara</i> .	dream about the bliss of conjugal life.
2:42:01-2:56:48	Basanti is kidnapped by Gabbar's men. As Veeru singlehandedly follows to rescue her, he too is captured and Basanti is forced to dance and entertain Gabbar and his bandits to save Veeru's life. Gabbar warns her that the life of Veeru will last as long as her feet move, as she dances in scorching heat singing – 'Jab tak hai jaan, jaane jahaan main nachungi' (I will dance to the last drop of my breath, Bakshi 1975).	Basanti	The scene begins with a thrilling cart and horse chase that highlights Basanti's grit and courage. She is not afraid of Gabbar, but out of love for Veeru, even dances on glass pieces thrown at her feet by Gabbar. The sequence provides yet another example of Gabbar's sadistic pleasure at inflicting torture (aimed to evoke disgust), while establishing Basanti as a <i>virangana</i> by disposition.	The <i>rasa</i> of <i>sringara</i> is highlighted and celebrated as the romance of Basanti and Veeru emerges triumphant in spite of difficult tests and unsavoury provocations.
2:56:49-3:01:30	Jaidev arrives just before Basanti is about to faint out of exhaustion and provides	Jaidev	Heroic skill in putting up a doughty fight in spite of the	<i>Vira</i>

	cover for her and Veeru to escape with some of Gabbar's ammunition. The dacoits chase the trio, and a gun battle ensues on a bridge in which Jaidev is shot at and injured. Yet, he convinces an unwilling Veeru to go to the village for Basanti's safety and gather support and ammunition, as he offers to keep guard until his return.		odds heavily against them is displayed by both Jaidev and Veeru.	
3:01:31-3:11:32	Jaidev singlehandedly kills a few dacoits. But as his stock of bullets get over, in a near suicidal attempt to hold the dacoits from further advance he comes out of his protected cover behind the rocks to blow up a bridge separating him from the dacoits. He is grievously wounded and dies in the arms of his best friend Veeru, as a sad version of their friendship song – 'yeh dosti' (this friendship) – plays in the background to heighten the impact of his melancholy passing. Filled with the renewed energy of revenge, Veeru gallops towards Gabbar's hideout to	Jaidev	Jaidev dies with the sole regret that he widowed Radha for a second time. Veeru's sorrow is increased manifold when he realises that Jaidev deliberately played the loser to save his life in a tossing-of-a-coin-game to decide, who between the two would stay back and fight the dacoits (still-14). Grief thus becomes the ammunition for his revenge resolve as he declares, 'Ek ek ko chun chunke	<i>Karuna</i> as pathos defines the impact of the actions and reactions in the sequence, be it the sacrifice like death of Jaidev, the end of hope for Radha, or the end of a lifelong friendship for Veeru. The impact is heightened further in the heroic nature of Jaidev's death, with the villagers turning up to mourn him, and the playing of a poignant ode to his

	<p>finish the final climactic battle.</p>  <p>Still-14</p>		<p>marunga' (I will personally kill each one of them, SJ 1975).</p>	<p>passing.</p>
<p>3:11:33-3:22:16</p>	<p>Veeru ravages Gabbar's den and single-handedly neutralises his few remaining fellow dacoits. He then defeats Gabbar in a literal hand-to-hand combat. But before he can kill him, the Thakur arrives to exact his revenge. Gabbar wonders how he can fight him without arms, to which the Thakur replies – 'Snakes are to be crushed by feet, not the hands' (SJ 1975). As Gabbar coils into a snakelike bind (still-16), the Thakur's nailed boots are revealed. He pins him to the ground and eventually kills him by pushing him onto a pointed nail on a pillar.</p>	<p>Thakur and Gabbar</p>	<p>Anger and revenge drive the unconventional heroism (both in a handicapped Thakur killing a seasoned dacoit and Veeru's single-handed vanquishing of few dacoits) on display in this sequence. Gabbar meets a gruesome death and Thakur experiences catharsis as he finally mourns the death of his loved ones (he is never shown grieving his loss until the climax). As Veeru drapes the shawl hiding the Thakur's</p>	<p>Though <i>vira</i> is the most manifested <i>rasa</i> in terms of the stunts and fights on display, <i>shanta</i> is the lasting <i>rasa</i> as Gabbar's death allows both Thakur and Veeru to mourn their loss (still-17) and achieve a sense of closure and calm (still-18, in which the <i>bhava</i> on Veeru's face is a manifestation of <i>shanta</i>), to be able to attempt a new life without any burden of the past.</p>

	 <p>Still-16</p>		<p>disability and shame, he weeps on his shoulder and a new bond is made.</p>  <p>Still-17</p>	 <p>Still-18</p>
<p>3:22:13- 3:23:13</p>	<p>Jaidev is given a hero's funeral by the villagers, as Radha watches from a distance and closes the window of her room. This can also be interpreted as a symbolic closure of any hope for change or the return of happiness, as she withdraws into the silent anonymity of the Thakur's mansion.</p>	<p>Radha</p>	<p>The mourning of the death of a hero and the death of any hope for a better life for Radha as she returns to her previous state as a lonely widow.</p>	<p><i>Karuna</i></p>
<p>3:23:14- 3:24:24</p>	<p>Veeru is united with Basanti who is waiting for him on a train. He leaves Ramgarh with Basanti, as Thakur sees them off at the railway station. Thakur's parting words, offer empathy, as he says – 'I cannot share your grief, but I can understand it' (SJ 1975). And the film's end</p>	<p>Thakur and Veeru</p>	<p>A new beginning (for Veeru and Basanti), closure of past wounds (for Thakur), and the making of new bonds for life based on empathy (Thakur and Veeru) suggest a return to calm and stability in</p>	<p><i>Shanta</i></p>

	credits roll.		the tumultuous lives of the two survivors out of the film's three heroic protagonists.	
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Sholay, offering a roller coaster of the eight *rasas* listed by sage Bharata, culminates in the *shanta rasa*, for both its on-screen characters and off-screen viewers. This is the preeminent mood state and the ultimate goal of a dramatic aesthetic experience as recommended by the *Natyashastra*. According to actor-filmmaker and Indian Film Censor Board member Chandraprakash Dwivedi:

The purpose of all *rasas* is to finally create *shanta* (quietude), a state of tranquility and equanimity. The purpose of all arts is to finally take you to a level where you are one with the reality, so that you are *shant* (calm). All the *rasas* occur because you are not *shant*. You are angry because you are not *shant*, you are laughing because you are not *shant*... That's why we say 'om *shanti*, *shanti*, *shanti*' at the end [e.g. of prayers and *yagna* offerings]. That is what is desired from life, and that is what is desired from all art forms (Dwivedi interview, 2013).

Each of *Sholay*'s independently popular sub-plot episodes have achieved 'a throbbing autonomous life of their own',³²² in public memory in retrospect: the spectacular train robbery in the beginning (evoking *adbhuta*); comic encounters with the British era jailor (*hasya*); Gabbar Singh's playing of Russian roulette in the ravine with his scared henchmen (*bhayanaka*); his massacre of the Thakur's family (*bibhatsa*); Veeru's suicide drama atop a water tower (*hasya*); the poignant death of the Imam's son (*karuna*); Radha's unspoken love (*sringara*); Jaidev's heroic sacrifice (*vira*); and Thakur's climactic killing of Gabbar without arms (*raudra*). However, after evoking every *rasa* sentiment individually, they are still able to subsume their varying emotive collage within an emotionless state of calm. Like the multiple colours of a rainbow revealed through the prism of a raindrop, they are subsequently returned to the singular white of the sunlight. This ability to evoke a true *shanta rasa* experience, which also is the culminating *rasa* sentiment of the *Mahabharata*, as an epic poem as reviewed by Anandavardhana,³²³

³²² Jha 2014,

³²³ Rao 2014:257.

makes *Sholay* arguably India's third most popular 'epic' after the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.³²⁴ Indian national award winning writer-filmmaker Nirad Mohapatra explains that to be able to conjure *shanta* as the ending emotion of an aesthetic experience is a rare and difficult cinematic achievement. In this ability the reason can be found for *Sholay*'s lasting appeal as a story that has been able to enthrall viewers across generations, unlike other equally successful *masala* films that have failed to retain a timeless appeal. According to Mohapatra:

To sum your narrative with the *shanta rasa* you do not end a film at a point where the emotion is very strong. You have to basically go a little further and beyond that event to neutralise its impact. A *shanta rasa* ending does not mean that the audience will sort of forget the film; it rather means that it has actually sunk in. The [vocal] emotions may get neutralised, but the subject stays in the mind... If you finish a story abruptly, where an emotional catharsis happens [for instance concluding *Sholay* at the point of the completion of Thakur's revenge], you do not carry its impact beyond the theatre. It is all over then and there. But to make it linger in your mind, you have to go beyond a cathartic moment. *Shanta rasa* is basically a tranquil state of mind where the audience is no longer agitated by any overwhelming emotion, which is achieved by taking the events in a story, a little after the [conventional/happy] end (Mohapatra interview, 2013).

Mohapatra has explained the working of the *shanta rasa* impact in the context of the ending of Yasujirō Ozu's *Tōkyō Monogatari* (*Tokyo Story*, 1953), which he argues to be a rare world classic achievement in the *shanta rasa*. According to him:

The film's narrative does not end with the mother's death where everyone is crying and pathos is reigning supreme. It instead goes a little further to show how the father is coping up with his loss, how the children are reflecting on their disappointing lives, and other events built after the tragic moment of a death that help neutralise a powerful emotion to eventually sign off with a shot of a river with steamers moving on, almost in a tranquil (*shant*), life goes on kind of note (Mohapatra interview, 2013).

Sholay also opts for a similar resolution, offering glimpses into the lives of each of its four surviving lead characters (Thakur, Radha, Veeru and Basanti) subsequent to Jaidev's death, thereby trying to come to terms with a carrying-on-with-life attitude instead of despair. A relevant example is Veeru's decision to leave Ramgarh. He had come to Ramgarh with Jaidev, and though earlier in the film he had wished to settle in the village,

³²⁴ Roy 2016.

in the changed context the location would have also constantly reminded him of his loss. Therefore, for a new beginning and a calmer emotional state, he seeks a destination away from the village. Thakur’s last words to Veeru, ‘I cannot share your grief, but can understand it’ (SJ 1975), delivered for the first time in a non-commanding tone and with empathy, also suggests the passing of turbulence and a possible return to the state of *shanta* in his life.

4.4 Overview of the dominant *bhavas* of *Sholay*’s major characters


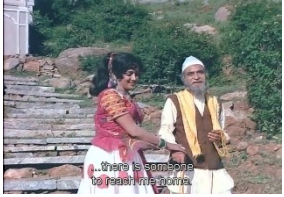
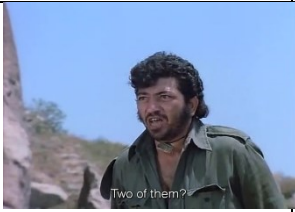
Sholay not only achieves a harmonious blend of various *rasa*-evoking scenarios, each of its major characters also manifest the *sthayibhavas* of the various *rasas* as recognisable character traits. Dwivedi observes, ‘Every character has a personality, and that personality also creates *rasa*’ (Dwivedi, interview, 2013). Meticulously written introductory scenes for every character highlight this dimension of characterisation. These are ‘typical to popular Hindi cinema narratives whereby the trait of a character is established at the very moment of his or her appearance’³²⁵ through relevant dialogue and encounters that establish their nature. The following table (Table 2) represents an overview of the dominant *bhava* states and their supporting sub-moods, alongside a complimentary expression image from the introduction scene of each of *Sholay*’s major characters:

Table 2: The dominant *bhavas* of *Sholay*’s major characters

Sl. No.	Characters (by order of entry)	Introduction scene expression/mood (Stills 19-28)	Dominant <i>Bhava</i> state	Dominant Rasa/Rasas Evoked
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³²⁵ ‘Characters [in Hindi films] are not good or bad because of their personal idiosyncrasies, but rather due to their traits. Usually, the particular quality of a character is established at the very moment of his or her appearance. Being dutiful makes for a positive character. So does being religious. Being kind and forgiving is again being ‘good’. This has an interesting obverse. Dereliction of duties on the part of some characters immediately portrays the ‘evil’ or negative side... evil expresses itself in many ways. A member in the family who causes strife and unhappiness in an essentially happy family is evil. In a love story, parents can be despotic... oppressive social beliefs and practices sometimes substitute the obvious villain, as in Bimal Roy’s *Sujata*’ (Zankar 2003: 356).

1	Thakur		Fury <i>also brooding and hurting (in a constant state of repressed anger, fuelled by an obsession with revenge).</i>	<i>Raudra/Vira</i>
2	Veeru		Merry <i>also funny, mischievous and courageous</i>	<i>Hasya/Vira</i>
3	Jaidev		Courageous <i>also compassionate, energetic and introspective</i>	<i>Vira</i>
4	Surma Bhopali		Loud <i>also funny in a perpetually exaggerated state of being</i>	<i>Hasya</i>
5	The British Era Jailor		Hyperactive <i>also loud and confused</i>	<i>Hasya</i>
6	Basanti		Funny <i>also romantic, courageous and high on energy</i>	<i>Hasya/Sringara</i>
7	Radha		Sorrow <i>also silent and reflective</i>	<i>Karuna</i>

8	Mausi		Funny also loud, chatty and curious	<i>Hasya</i>
9	Imam sahib		Calm also determined, brave and composed	<i>Shanta</i>
10	Gabbar Singh		Ferocious also sadistic, unpredictable and full of surprise	<i>Bhayanaka/ Bibhatsa/Adbhuta</i>

In this clarity and consistency in the dominant mood states of the characters, embellished with memorable complimentary mood dialogue and actions, perhaps lies an explanation as to why every character in *Sholay*, including those making a fleeting appearance, is still etched in the minds of its viewers. Akhtar locates their combined memorability in the contrasting emotional nature of their individual traits, stating:

You have Thakur on one side, Gabbar on the other. Thakur is clean and impeccable. He is always clean shaven, his hair is made, he is crisp, and to the point. On the other side, Gabbar is dirty and gregarious. You have two friends, one is extremely boisterous, and another is sober and deep. You have two girls in the film, one is extremely talkative, and the other is totally silent. One is colourful, another is totally devoid of any colour in life, and quiet. These foils are perfect and because you have both the ends of the spectrum, the story covers almost all kinds of emotions.³²⁶

According to his co-writer Salim Khan:

Rasa is evoked by even each of the smaller characters in *Sholay*. This subconsciously comes into our writing because those traits are within us. As a nation too we evoke the *rasas* in the way we live, and naturally they seep into our work. But if we start inserting it by proportion, it will not work because we do not have a formula for how much of which *rasa* should be inserted (Khan interview, 2013).

³²⁶ Akhtar (to) Masand 2014.

In Khan's review there can be found an endorsement of my argument that a good *masala* film will subconsciously factor in situations and characters that embody the various *rasas*. Akhtar, recalls the writing process of *Sholay*: 'This was not done intentionally, we were just making the story, it happened'.³²⁷ The entry scene of each of the major characters in the film (Table 2) establishes certain *bhava* states that the characters carry into their every subsequent appearance, including their positive or negative reactions to a situation, in accordance with the dominant mood trait of their character. For instance, the widow Radha is reserved and silent throughout the film, whether experiencing an attraction for Jaidev or on hearing Thakur's decision on her remarriage to Jaidev. On the other hand, Basanti is in a perpetual state of high energy and constant chatter, whether it is a scene of comic banter with Veeru or goading her horse to gallop faster when pursued by Gabbar's dacoits. According to Akhtar:

Master plots are inspired from basic human instincts [i.e. the *sthayibhavas*], and so are made up of stories that represent one particular instinct: love, hate, curiosity or whatever. So if your story relies heavily on one particular human instinct, the character will be obsessed with love or hate.³²⁸

Sholay's myriad characters and their stories encompass a range of human instincts. The success of this kind of approach in conceiving a character is indicated by the fact that they are still remembered by their on-screen names. Filmmaker Tigmanshu Dhulia says:

A character like Asrani's [playing the British era jailor], who probably had a screen time of less than ten minutes, is etched in people's minds forever. Or for that matter Samba (played by MacMohan) who barely has three lines. But ask anyone even today and they will tell you who Samba was and what his lines were.³²⁹

Most of these characters, as highlighted above (Table 2) embody one or two 'complementary *sthayibhavas*'³³⁰ as character traits that they retain throughout. Yet it can be argued that the unusual popularity of one character, who in spite of being the villain, ended up becoming one of Indian cinematic history's most popular characters, Gabbar

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

³²⁸ Kabir 1999: 33.

³²⁹ Dhulia (to) Sharma 2012.

³³⁰ Veeru and Basanti, as opposed to most of *Sholay*'s positive characters that primarily embody a singular mood state (see Table 2) equally trigger the double sentiments of comedy and romance, which is in tandem with the *Natyashastra*'s recognition of *hasya* as *sringara*'s most complimenting *rasa*.

Singh, lay in his conceptualisation as a character embodying a mix of multiple positive and negative *bhavas*. These include anger, fear, disgust and dare, along with an aptitude to surprise and a sense of humour (albeit sadistic) that render him different from the stereotypical, purely evil villainy that Hindi cinema viewers had been used to seeing in its popular cinema until then.³³¹ According to Akhtar:

One thing you would notice in our villains whether in *Sholay*, *Mr. India* [1987], *Zanjeer* [Chains 1973] or in *Shaan* [Pride 1980], these villains are not lechers. Even when he [Gabbar] is looking at Basanti and asks her to dance there is no sexual innuendo in it – he just wants to torture her and Veeru. That’s about all. He is not interested in her. They all also look powerful because they were not lechers. You cannot admire a lecher, you can admire an immoral person but that too should have a dignity. Our villains have always been very dignified, evil but dignified.³³²

If *Sholay* was the film with the perfect mix of *rasas*, Gabbar Singh was a character that attempted a merger of the distinguishing character attributes of then current hero and villain stereotypes. This was achieved with an imaginative blend of *bhava* traits that not only made the character larger-than-life, but also an on-screen achievement worth repeating for its fans, despite its conception and actions not being entirely original. For instance, Gabbar’s most brutal act of villainy, of a type seen for the first time on Indian cinema, features the point blank shooting of a child; it was copied from a similar moment featuring Henry Fonda in *Once Upon a Time in the West* (Sergio Leone 1968). His psychotic nature and menacing laughter were also inspired by the lead villain of *For A Few Dollars More* (Sergio Leone 1965). However, he courted an impact exclusive to debuting characters with never-before-seen attributes, because of his unexpected emotions in similar situations. For example, he treats women as objects of torture instead of lust and he guns down loyal but weak accomplices in order to make a statement on the uselessness of weak assistants. This novelty is the result of a different set of *rasa* evoking considerations at play in the process of the adaptation.

4.5 Rasa in Adaptation

The writers of *Sholay*, Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar, have on record acknowledged being

³³¹ Kabir 1999: 42.

³³² Akhtar (to) Masand 2014.

impressed and inspired by Sergio Leone's Spaghetti Westerns while conceiving their scenes.³³³ *Mera Gaon Mera Desh* (My Village My Country, Raj Khosla 1971), a hit film released four years before *Sholay*, also had a similar plot featuring *Sholay*'s leading star Dharmendra (Veeru) playing a courageous thief, who is hired by a landowning retired soldier to kill a dacoit named Jabbar Singh. Senior critic Subhash K. Jha however, still argues that *Sholay* remains as fresh a viewing experience today as it was at the time of its release, and Akhtar insists that 'there is yet to be another Hindi film since with as many memorable characters'.³³⁴ According to Salim Khan:

Sholay was not based on any one particular film, but was inspired by many films. Being influenced is not a crime; plagiarising or copying is. We had made *Deewar* [The Wall, 1975] using sources from *Mother India* [1957] and *Ganga Jumna* [1961], but no scene in *Deewar* is like any scene from the other two films, because of which *Deewar* is considered as one of Indian cinema's most original screenplays. Plots have always been taken and shared across cinemas because (as they say) there are only about 14 basic plotlines in the world. [Akhtar contends to there being 10 master plots]³³⁵ Hence overlaps are bound to happen as we tend to make films primarily on human relationships which are the same everywhere. Even *The Magnificent Seven* [1960] was inspired by *Seven Samurai* [1954], but what makes *Sholay* different is how we portrayed these relationships and the basic human emotions that shaped and defined them differently because of the different culture and approach to storytelling we hail from (Khan 2013).

In the above assertion can be seen the essence of the process of adaptation, or how a foreign plot source or character can be subjected to a reconstruction that highlights emotions by 'intelligent Indian intelligent script writers, who tend to transform a source idea into something so completely Indian culture specific and different' (Pandey, interview, 2013) that most of the resulting narratives have rarely been challenged on issues of copyright violations by their respective sources. Sam Joshi locates this differentiation between Hindi and Hollywood films' storytelling styles in the former's continuing adherence to the *Natyashastra*-prescribed need for the prioritising of affective (or emotional) realism over cognitive realism in a narrative.³³⁶ He argues that fans of cognitive realism expect their on-screen experience to mimic real life and hence the

³³³ Kabir 1999: 58.

³³⁴ Jha 2014; Kabir 1999: 58.

³³⁵ Kabir 1999: 33.

³³⁶ Joshi 2004: 22.

filmmaker tries to depict those events as logically as it could possibly happen in real life.

According to Joshi:

Events flow in a cause-effect relationship and the film's *mise-en-scène* (stage setting) strives for maximum fidelity to real life... Under cognitive realism, the activity of the viewer is geared towards understanding situations, predicting likely outcomes based on available information, and proposing solutions to certain enigmas... constantly asking questions like "What will happen next?" In contrast, the viewer of affective realism is not interested in what will happen next, but in how a particular on-screen event feels. To experience a depicted emotion in as much depth as possible is the reward for a viewer of Hindi cinema.³³⁷

Anu Gordon, a member of the audience at a 40-years-of-*Sholay* commemorating screening of the film in Edinburgh in 2014, while reflecting on her viewing experience, says:

I was engaged, I cared, which is essential for me to really enjoy a film, i.e. to care. Actually I cared very quickly, and as the film progressed I was caring more and more. When Thakur was kicking Gabbar in the end, I was glad! (Gordon interview, 2014).

Her expectations are akin to that of an ideal *rasika* as defined in the *Natyashastra* – a viewer, who relishes the *rasa* of a scene by savouring its corresponding *bhava*, which is generated by the actor/character on-screen and born of an experience of shared empathy called '*sadharanikarana*'³³⁸ (the universalisation of an emotion). She is a '*sahridaya*'³³⁹,

³³⁷ *Ibid.*

³³⁸ The concept of '*Sadharanikarana*—universalization or departicularization further illuminates the ways in which an aesthetic object achieves its effects. For example, a viewer watching a play about Joan of Arc feels sad when Joan of Arc is awaiting execution. What is the source of this emotion? The experience does not purely arise in the viewer, as the viewer has not been through the same experience as Joan of Arc. The actress may not be the source, as she is merely going through the motions. The writer may not be the source either, because she might well be describing something dispassionately. As for the character Joan of Arc—nobody can tell with certainty what emotion she was experiencing. And yet, the viewer is pervaded with the experience of grief. How has this come to be? The answer is that this experience occurs in a way independent of purely the character, writer, actor, or viewer in a general, de-particularized, de-individualized way. This process is *sadharanikarana*. In this way, aesthetic experience allows the viewer to feel intense emotion, but in a detached way that allows him to transcend his specific self, to be free of individuality... This detachment allows the viewer to experience an aesthetic "pleasure" even while watching films that espouse *rasas* like *Bhayanaka* or *Bibhatsa* which would never evoke enjoyment in real life' (Joshi 2004: 24).

³³⁹ 'When we taste, say, a sweet and spicy drink, we immediately delight in the taste. This process bypasses intellectual and complicated cognitive processes. We do not speculate on the ingredients of the drink, their relative proportion, the recipe, and then arrive at an estimation of the drink's taste before we render the judgment that the drink tastes good. Our enjoyment of the drink is instead spontaneous and instant; it does not require a time period of reflection because it occurs simultaneously with the act of tasting. Aesthetic enjoyment is of a similar nature; we do not meditate on the number of a painting's pigments before we find that we are enthralled by the painting. Similarly, in viewing a film, our emotional response is instantaneously evoked by the combination of *vibhaavas*, *vyabhicharibhaavas*, and *anubhaavas*. The mind contains the 'seeds' of *rasa*. These seeds are present in the mind due to past emotional experience, in current or previous lifetimes. Upon receiving the stimulus of *bhava*, they mature into *rasa*... But in order for this to occur, we

a sensitive viewer, who achieves a similar mood state as that of a character whose on-screen journey he/she can empathetically connect with. For this to happen, the impediment of a doubting/questioning mind has to be kept aside, ‘as often expressed in the patronising and unfair judgments of critics of popular Indian cinema, who suggest that one has to leave one’s brains at the theatre door before stepping in to watch a Hindi film’.³⁴⁰ This ‘need for Indian cinema audiences [at least of the popular or *masala* form] wanting to be moved by their cinematic experience’ (Mohapatra interview, 2013), makes its creators insert additions to create intense emotions, and subtract concerns about continuity or realism that could delay or diminish the emotional impact of on-screen action. According to Vidya Balan:

We not only dramatise and fictionalise, but also emotionalise a film. Films that have managed to marry commercial and critical success in India have always served the *navarasas* because it’s the recipe for a fulfilling [viewing] menu. You go into a cinema to be moved by all the emotions. It need not just be tears. It has to touch you in some way. For instance, I do not connect with action films because they are normally devoid of emotions. Different people connect to different things. A *navarasa* palette offers something for everyone to find a connection (Balan interview, 2014).

They heighten the emotive impact of a scene irrespective of whether it is logical or believable. According to Akhtar, ‘An Indian film writer is supposed to write a totally original script that has come before’.³⁴¹ This is done, as in the case of *Sholay*, by imbuing a familiar scene or character with a new set of emotions. Scenes are re-written for a relatively greater generation of *rasa*. Salim Khan explains:

Hollywood’s definition of genres need not necessarily match ours. We do not always laugh at their jokes. Cinema reception is also a cultural thing. We are much more expressive people. Their films are much shorter compared to ours, since they are normally limited to a linear emotional track, whereas we have multiple tracks,

must be open to emotional suggestion, taking on the role of a *sahrdaya* — the refined and sensitive viewer, whose mind ignites with *rasa* upon receiving a stimulus just like a piece of wood that catches fire as soon as it is set alight. Being open to affective experience means having to put ordinary cognition on the backburner. In the song, ‘You did not think of me’ [from *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, 1998] a dejected Anjali Sr. is shown walking through a dark tunnel in a ruined castle. This visual aims at delineating her emotional state. A viewer who asks questions like “Well, Anjali was on the college campus a minute ago, why is she in a castle? Is there a castle near the campus? This castle was seen in the dream-song earlier, so is Anjali awake or dreaming? The castle looks Scottish—but isn’t the film set in India?” will miss the point. Such a viewer is not a *sahrdaya* and will deprive herself of *rasa*’ (Joshi 2004: 24).

³⁴⁰ Vijayakar 2012; Kesavan 2012

³⁴¹ Kabir 1999: 34.

songs, etc. Agar single track ki kahani ho to majaa nahi aata hamare audience ko (a story with a single emotion track does not excite our audience as much). Our films are like our dawaats (meals) – kisi ko bulate hain to hamare yahaan dus dishes banti hai, halanki aadmi khata ek ya do jo use pasand hai (if we invite anyone, we make 10 dishes though an individual eats only the few that he likes). Even a vegetarian *thali* has 10 *katoris*... It is our culture *ki ek hi cheez mein sabke sab dal do* (Putting as many options as possible into one thing is our cultural trait). Even our weddings and mourning are ceremonial in nature often running for three to four to six days (Khan interview, 2013).

A relevant example is the unfolding of the massacre of Thakur's family in *Sholay*. This scene is based on a similar sequence from *Once Upon a Time in the West*. In the Hollywood film, Brett McBain and his three children are murdered in cold blood by the hired gun, Frank (Henry Fonda), of a railroad tycoon. They are shot to freeze frame falls, like the massacre of Thakur's family members. In both films little boys are shot point blank (stills 29-30), but while Frank gives a reason for his gruesome act in that the boy had heard his name and hence could reveal him to the police, Gabbar's shooting of Thakur's grandson is left open to interpretation. It may have been to establish a new low in his character's sadism, or because of the boy's defiance (still-31) and refusal to plead with Gabbar for his life, or it may have been to justify Thakur's emotional decision to attempt a futile and dangerous single-handed revenge in the subsequent scene. Lending reason to Frank's brutality helps a viewer conditioned to looking for cognitive realism to understand the motive behind an unusual act and be satisfied with a believable logical justification. By not giving a reason for Gabbar's brutality to a viewer conditioned by the claims of affective realism, 'who is more concerned about how an event feels rather than why it happened or what will happen next'³⁴², the feeling of disgust is heightened. Each viewer then has to decide for themselves the justification for Thakur's subsequent 'reckless and doomed' attempt at revenge against Gabbar.

³⁴² Joshi 2004:22.



Still-29



Still-30



Still-31

It is McBain's new wife and only surviving kin, Jill McBain (still-32), who discovers the massacre of the McBain family. This takes place nearly half-an-hour later, after witnessing a riveting action sequence in a tavern involving what will be the film's two male lead protagonists. By the time Jill discovers the massacre, the shock impact of the murder has already been diluted for the audience by the intervening event with a different emotional import (*vira*). Later in the film she is aided by two outlaws of similar character to Jaidev and Veeru in wreaking revenge upon Frank. The McBain family massacre and its discovery take into account logical time and distance gaps between events and the physical limitations of the wronged character's abilities.



Still-32

Still-33

The scene of Thakur's discovery of his family's massacre comes immediately after Gabbar's act, with the directorial aim of weaving a consistently heightened thread of complementary negative sentiments, from shock, to disgust, to anger. Lusting for vengeance, Thakur immediately takes off to kill Gabbar alone. This is a consciously suicidal act. Jill does not react in the same manner but rather prepares for the moment when she will have the edge and ability to extract revenge. Predictably Thakur is captured, and Gabbar chops off his hands. Thakur's reaction is justified in terms of an emotional response to a grave personal provocation. By putting these scenes of action and reaction immediately after each other, the *rasa* of *raudra* as vengeance is, for an emotionally attuned *sahridaya* viewer, effected to an intense degree. It is supported by disgust and sadness to create an emotionally integrated stand-alone tale of revenge that makes for a keenly felt cinematic memory. Aware of her limitations as a lone woman in tough terrain, Jill McBain's restrained and delayed attempting of revenge is a believable and logical resolution to an unfair challenge, but it lacks *Sholay*'s audience-moving emotional impact. For instance, the moment of Jill's witnessing of the dead bodies of the McBain family is much less dramatic compared to that of Thakur's viewing of his dead kin. The dead are revealed to Jill immediately on arrival, as her expression changes from surprise, to shock, to sorrow, to a final lament of 'Dear God' (still-34), when she sees the corpse of the youngest McBain. Villagers offer their condolences as a mellow poignant soundtrack plays in the background, and she tries to get on with the business of justifying her presence.



Still-34



Still-35



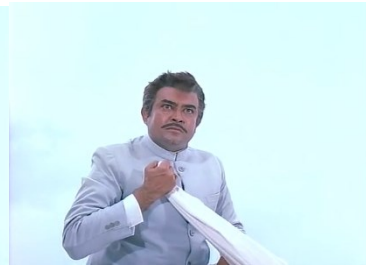
Still-36



Still-37



Still-38



Still-39

Thakur, on the other hand, does not witness the faces of his dead family members at first sight. He just sees a line of bodies wrapped in white sheets from head to toe. As he approaches against the background of a menacing soundtrack, the same music heard earlier at the moment of Gabbar's killing of Thakur's family,³⁴³ a gust of wind reveals the identity of the bodies one after another and his shock changes to anger. He eventually reaches a mood state of maddening rage that remains throughout, as he personally pulls off the sheet covering his dead grandchild, which incidentally does not get blown away naturally like the others. The body of the dead child is not shown (still-36) unlike its equivalent in *Once Upon a Time in the West* (still-35). Instead, the effect of its sighting plays out in a series of close-ups of changing intense emotion on Thakur's face (stills 37-39); what he saw is left to the viewer's imagination. His facial expressions, ranging from extreme grief to uncontrollable rage, are necessary to justify his subsequent decision to singlehandedly pursue and punish Gabbar. The tears that he holds back at that moment feed, sustain and justify his raging persona throughout the film. He mourns his dead only

³⁴³ The eerie soundtrack is replayed again when Thakur extracts his revenge by killing Gabbar to thus maintain an emotive continuity of a vengeful mood extolling music through the most dramatic events of *Sholay* involving Thakur and Gabbar Singh.

after achieving his revenge by killing Gabbar in the end. The continuity in his character's anger is thus maintained throughout, from his stern entry, through his no-nonsense negotiations with Jaidev and Veeru and his raging attempt at revenge, to a violent end combat with Gabbar. It is in this retaining of the relevant *rasa* throughout a film, over concerns of logical development and other cognitive realism imperatives, that make an Indianised (or *rasa*-ised) Curry Western diverge from its Spaghetti Western sources. Similar drama moments form a totally different, signature and novel viewing experience. According to Khan, 'Having too many emotional tracks is a more difficult script to write than a single track story' (Khan interview, 2013). In Pandey's opinion, 'Perhaps the only thing that Bollywood filmmakers take while adapting a Hollywood film is the plot. But the rest of it you have to make acceptable to the Indian audience' (Pandey interview, 2013). I will now discuss this process of adaptation with reference to the *entry* and *exit* sequences of *Sholay*'s most memorable character, Gabbar Singh, which were inspired by similar scenes in Sergio Leone's classic Western, *For a Few Dollars More* (1965).

4.5.1 The introduction of Gabbar Singh

Indian cinema archivist, biographer and documentary maker, Nasreen Munni Kabir has reviewed the introduction scene of Gabbar Singh in *Sholay* as 'the last word in how to introduce a character to the audience... The location, different shot compositions, music, dialogue and [actor] Amjad Khan's performance all combine to make this a flawless scene'.³⁴⁴ The scene begins with a top-down shot from the summit of a hillock to the accompaniment of the threatening sounds of a gong. As the camera pans down, we see a pair of boots restlessly pacing up and down the rocks with the background score mixing a beat of eerie menace with boot stomps. A belt dangling loose from the subject's hand grazes over bare rocks. The scene takes place nearly an hour into the film. The audience's curiosity about the personality of the character has been roused by various references and discussions through which he is revealed as being either a fierce opponent (by the Thakur) or a scary dacoit and oppressor (by the villagers). Initially only the character's voice is

³⁴⁴ Kabir 2013: 32.

heard enunciating in tones of calm interrogation, starting with a reflective ‘Hunn...’ as he asks:

Gabbar: Kitne aadmi the? (How many people were there?)

Dacoit: Sardar do aadmi... (Boss... only two)

Gabbar: Hunn...Do aadmi... SUAR KE BACCHON!!!³⁴⁵ (Two people... SONS OF SWINES!!!) (SJ 1975).

As he yells a curse at his three runaway bandits, the camera reveals the face of Gabbar for the first time, in an expression of palpable rage. He resumes the interrogation in his deadpan voice, with the words:

Gabbar: Wo do the aur tum teen, phir bhi wapas aa gaye? Khaali haath? Kya samajh kar aaye the ke Sardar bahut khush hoga? Shabashi dega, kyun? DHIKKAR HAI!!! (They were two and you were three. Yet you have come back empty handed. What were you thinking... boss will congratulate you? SHAME ON YOU!!!) (SJ 1975).

The scene proceeds in the form of a monologue, with Gabbar oscillating between deadpan and sudden bursts of angry yelling. This establishes both a sense of dread and of awe, highlighting the unpredictable nature of his character. In the film’s subsequent engagements with Gabbar, this attribute recurs as he frequently thwarts the conventional expectations outlined by the behaviour of on-screen dacoit characters in predecessors of the genre, like *Mera Gaon Mera Desh* (Raj Khosla 1971). This unpredictable behaviour lends Gabbar’s evil acts a sense of wonder, arousing a curiosity concerning ‘how next?’ (as opposed to ‘what next?’). This results in a relishing of the *adbhuta rasa* by the audience, even when his actions range from the fearful to the disgusting. Gabbar cultivates the aura of fear around himself when he asks one of his henchmen, Samba, about the prize money on offer for his capture. On Samba’s declaring the amount to be Rs. 50,000, Gabbar explains, ‘And this high price money is because in every village within 50 miles radius from here, whenever a child cries at night, the mother says, “Go to sleep my child, or Gabbar will come”’ (SJ 1975). Akhtar highlights this unique style of self-reference for Gabbar Singh as a deliberate writing strategy used to intensify his fear factor through a fear fable. He explains:

When I was writing it, I thought it was below Gabbar’s dignity to have to say himself, ‘I

³⁴⁵ The upper and lower case is to distinguish the varying decibel levels in the dialogue-delivery of Gabbar Singh.

have a 50,000 rupees reward on my head'. A man with his kind of arrogance and conceit would more likely ask a subordinate – or rather order him – to boast his worth.³⁴⁶

A dacoit works in the business of fear. Gabbar embodies that fear, but it is compromised by his henchmen running away from their confrontation with Jaidev and Veeru in Ramgarh. Fear has to be re-established in the rebel village, but before that an example has to be made for his men as well that cowardice, even among his loyalists, will not be forgiven. He stages an unpredictable game of the absurd. He borrows a revolver with six bullets, blows off three random shots in the air, rotates the bullet cylinder and starts to shoot his three men, one after the other. Interestingly, all his first three hits are blank shots. The music turns to one of gradual dread as Gabbar's voice drops to a tone of conciliation, but for the audience it is just a temporary lull before another storm. Gabbar expresses surprise and starts laughing uncontrollably, declaring, 'What a miracle, all the three bastards have been saved!' (Amjad Khan 1975, *Sholay*). The other dacoits follow the leader and as their communal laughter grows into a crescendo, the three dacoits realise that they have been saved by an unusual stroke of luck. They start with unbelieving fits and bursts, and soon join the roar with hearty laughs. Just when the tension seems to have been relieved with laughter all around, Gabbar turns on his unsuspecting targets and mows them down with the three remaining bullets, one after the other, with a cold-blooded precision that barely allows them any moment to react. The sound of the gunshots abruptly turn the roars of laughter into silence in a shockingly memorable scene, which in its unpredictable unfolding, leaves an effect of lasting awe. Gabbar then justifies the punishment in a deadpan, emotionless voice without any regret declaring, 'Jo dar gaya, samjho mar gaya' (Death to the cowards! SJ 1975).

That quick felling of three can be sourced to a similar moment featuring Clint Eastwood's 'Man with No Name' character in *For a Few Dollars More* (Leone 1965). Gabbar's menacing laughter and streak of unpredictability (still-41) has been sourced to another character from the film, an opportunistic and similarly psychotic gangster, El Indio, played

³⁴⁶ Kabir 1999: 59.

by Gian Maria Volonté (still-40).



Still-40



Still-41



Still-42

Indio's introductory scene in the film has him rescued from a prison cell by his accomplices through a long shoot-out sequence that has all but one policeman killed. Indio leaves only one policeman alive to tell the tale of his exploits to feed the cult of fear around him in the area. He says, 'I am leaving you so that you can tell everybody what takes place here...' (Vincenzoni 1965)³⁴⁷ and utters a menacing laugh. The scene then cuts to a poster advertisement offering a hefty reward of \$10,000 (still-42) for Indio's capture, and two bounty hunters are shown pondering over the dare. Indio does not know about it. The sum is noticed by the bounty hunters for whom it is an attraction, rather than by the outlaw as with Gabbar, who discusses his reward money just for effect. The Rs 50,000 reward on Gabbar is never reiterated as an inducement for Jaidev and Veeru. After the film's interval they become true righteous heroes (*dharma viras*) and want to capture him for the larger social good, and not personal gains. In *For a Few Dollars More*, Indio then proceeds to exact his revenge on the person responsible for his arrest and kills his entire family, just

³⁴⁷ Luciano Vincenzoni is the dialogue writer of *For a Few Dollars More* (Leone 1965). One of Italy's most successful and prolific screenwriters, he was internationally best known for his two Spaghetti Western collaborations, *For a Few Dollars More* (1965) and *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* (1966).

as Gabbar kills the family of Thakur for sending him to jail.

Gabbar cultivates his aura of fear first among his own men by killing his three defeated dacoits. Next, he exports that fear to the villagers through a severe act of revenge. He however does not act on it immediately and waits instead for the Holi festival when the villagers will be least suspecting. The narrative then cuts to a colourful Holi song, where the villagers celebrate their newfound freedom, get drunk, and Veeru and Basanti sing a song to articulate their budding romance. As the defenses and preparedness of the villagers start crumbling, the engagement of the pre-warned audience with the joyous sequence is defined by the emotion of dread, as they anticipate Gabbar's approaching attack. The irony of the attack is further heightened by its occurrence immediately after a celebration.

In *For a Few Dollars More*, Indio's retributions are planned, justified by a motive (however sinister) and acted out in a logical manner that makes their occurrence look fairly plausible. For instance, his rescue from the jail is made possible with the help of his men. It is never a one-man show of bravado, allaying any concerns of plausibility on the part of more questioning viewers. The focus in Indio's gun battles is on the success of a strategy; unlike Gabbar's introduction, where the killing of his men focuses more on chance, drama and applause-eliciting dialogue, as explained by Akhtar while discussing the scene featuring Samba. Both Indio and Gabbar are stylised villains, but Gabbar's undulating style of delivery – from subtle, to loud, to deadpan – contributes as much to his character as his acts, while Indio's evocation of dread is developed primarily by his actions.

The creators of Gabbar Singh and actor Amjad Khan use all the four recommended performance aids for a character as outlined in the *Natyashastra*. They use the *angika*, *vachika*, *aharya* and *sattvika* varieties to highlight his unconventional appeal. His gestural (*angika*) behaviour conveys his unpredictability, as Gabbar constantly moves throughout his introduction scene. He first surveys his three men from a distance, sits down and chats with them, then gets up and runs to a colleague for a revolver, before returning to circle them as if scrutinising a potential prey. He then walks some distance away, but not too far to be able to shoot from close range. His verbal (*vachika*) performance is set at a

complementing pitch; he speaks through memorable one-liners that are delivered in oscillating decibels, almost as a performance for the benefit of the other dacoits in his group. He constantly talks to them, though rarely pauses to react or allow them a reply. His costume (*aharya*) too is contrary to the landscape and the context he inhabits. While all of the dacoits in the film are dressed in *dhoti-kurta* like the traditional dacoits of Chambal, Gabbar is made to stand out in a pant and shirt costume to accommodate the film's producer G.P. Sippy's fascination with Fidel Castro. Finally, Gabbar's emotions (*sattvika*) are articulated through a riot of expressions, starting with shock, then turning to anger, followed by surprise, leading to mirth, which is actually a screen for sarcasm. His final expression is one of disgust, in order to justify his brutal killing of his men for their cowardice.

Gabbar is an agent of fear, but unlike Indio, he practices his sadism with a hint of the unexpected. This enables his character's dominant *bhava* of dread and disgust to also become the trigger for a pleasurable *rasa* like *adbhuta*, which perhaps explains his character's tremendous post-release popularity amongst all age groups, including children. According to Akhtar:

So often people ask, here was Gabbar who is totally unscrupulous, ruthless and sadistic [yet] why he became so popular, and why he became so popular among children? [Because] you admire unrestricted power; you admire people who are a law unto themselves. That's why you admire Robin Hood or any underworld character like Al Capone. You see that complete absence of any conscience is somewhere admirable, like how when you look at a python or a shark, you are fascinated!³⁴⁸

If *Sholay*'s attraction was its potent mix of contrasting counter-emotional characters that both complement and contribute, Gabbar becomes the most impactful of them all in his ability to have some of those contrasts reside within his personality. He is a sadist who performs some disgusting actions, but he also has a sense of humour. His acts are aimed at nurturing a reign of terror, but he delivers them with such unpredictability that he also makes the audience curious about how he will plan his next move. For instance, in the

³⁴⁸ Akhtar (to) Masand 2014.

scene where he captures Basanti, the hitherto conventional behaviour of a villain in an Indian film would be to try to outrage the modesty of the heroine. However, he just asks her to dance and entertain his men in a cinematically unconventional manoeuvre. Yet, in his further stipulating that her lover will only be allowed to live as long as she continues to dance, the evil in his nature is manifested. Subsequently, when he makes a tired Basanti dance on broken glass in order to break her spiritedness, the sadistic streak in his nature comes to the fore. The audience meanwhile wonders how this unusual scene of torture will resolve itself. According to Anil Zankar:

Gabbar Singh's black sense of humour is extremely sadistic. He is merciless in his anger. In fact, he is the towering personality dictating the course of the story. The heroes have to measure up to him and his henchmen. From here on, Hindi cinema saw the emergence of the seemingly omnipotent oppressor as the villain. Significantly, he is the one who sets up the context and action of the story.³⁴⁹

For an audience for whom the 'how' of an action is the prime attraction over the 'why' and 'what' of it, Gabbar thus emerges as an unusual entertainer. He actually makes the audience derive pleasure from seemingly unpleasant *rasas* like *bhaya* and *bibhatsa*, which thus make him all the more memorable.

4.5.2 The death of Gabbar

The sequence begins with Thakur walking towards Gabbar, who, already battered by Veeru and just released from his murderous grip, lies curled up on the ground like a snake (still-16). He gets up to face the new challenge. The spiked nails under Thakur's boots have been deliberately revealed to the audience, but remain unknown to Gabbar, who now seems to be contemplating the idea of an easy escape. The drama is once again built around how the armless Thakur will extract his revenge on Gabbar after he asks the physically more able Veeru to leave. To Gabbar's sarcastic quip about how he will fight without hands, Thakur retorts, 'A snake is crushed with feet not hands Gabbar; for you my feet are enough' (SJ 1975). He then leaps from his high vantage position on a rock to fell Gabbar with a kick to the chest, with his thorn-laced shoes (still-46). He next crushes his left arm, repeating the very same words that Gabbar had said before amputating his arms, 'There is

³⁴⁹ Zankar 2003:365.

a lot of life in these hands' (SJ 1975). Closure is reached for, both in action and emotion, through a repetition of dialogue (stills 43-44). The final triumph is achieved when Thakur mutilates Gabbar's right hand, shouting, 'Gabbar ye haath mujhe de de...' (Give me your hands Gabbar. SJ 1975, still-44) to the latter's repeating of a painful yell of 'No'. His victim is now thoroughly squashed like a snake, as was warned in the beginning. Thakur completes the task with a strategic pushing of Gabbar onto a bare nail, which is attached to a pillar the latter unknowingly tries to recline on. It is a near five minute long sequence and Thakur too falls and receives a few hits before recovering to finally kill Gabbar.



Still-43



Still-44



Still-45



Still-46



Still-47

The turn of events is counter-intuitive. The very nature of such a mismatched fight sequence between an able-bodied rogue and an aging, disabled man leads us to logically expect a different conclusion. In a realistic scenario, Thakur would have let Veeru achieve the revenge on his behalf (like Jill McBain). However, that would have cheated the audience of the pleasure gained from witnessing the 'how' of Thakur's resolving of the mismatched duel, one that had been promised from the early moments of the film.

A comparison with the resolution of a three-man climax depicting the death of Indio in *For a Few Dollars More* further elucidates the contrast. The film has a bounty hunter,

Colonel Douglas Mortimer (Lee Van Cleef) join causes with a rival 'Man with No Name' (Clint Eastwood) to track and kill El Indio. Indio has a musical pocket watch that he plays before engaging in gun duels. Flashbacks reveal that he had taken the watch from a young woman, after killing her lover/husband, and raping her. She committed suicide. In the climax, Mortimer and Indio face each other, as the 'Man with No Name' sits down to watch their face off (still-48). 'Now we start' (Vincenzoni 1965) he says with a chuckle, sitting like a referee to ensure a fair fight. It was Mortimer's personal desire to engage with Indio alone, like Thakur wanting to fight Gabbar alone. The watch plays again. During the standoff, 'Man with No Name' looks into Mortimer's pocket watch and sees the same photo as in Indio's watch. The music finishes and Mortimer guns down Indio in one quick shot as the latter dies without much ado (still-49). He then takes away the pocket watch. There is no close-up revelation of the pain or suffering of the crouched Indio, no prolonged fight sequence, or dramatic outpouring of grief from Mortimer on the fulfilling of a revenge urge carried throughout the film. Mortimer's motive for killing Indio is casually revealed as he parts with a goodbye (still-51), instead of any cathartic outpouring. When the 'Man with No Name' gives him back Indio's other watch and remarks about Mortimer's resemblance with the girl's photo in it, he candidly answers without any emotion, 'Naturally, between brother and sister' (Vincenzoni 1965). His revenge complete, Mortimer declines any share in the reward money and they part.



Still-48

The climax of *Sholay*, which also is about one man exacting revenge for the murder of innocent family members, nonetheless offers an entirely different intensity of music, drama and dialogue-driven emotional catharsis (stills 44-45). There is enough time for

elaborate conversations between Thakur and Veeru: ‘the remembering of a dead comrade and a passionate discussion over who gets to kill Gabbar’,³⁵⁰ as the object of their hate listens confused, wondering about his fate. Akhtar says:

Our cinema is still heavily influenced by traditional theatre, and so cinema relies heavily on the spoken word. For us, it is an audio-visual medium and the ‘a’ is a very, very capital.³⁵¹

The quiet of the Spaghetti Western is thus exchanged for verbosity in its Curry/*masala* counterpart. In *For a Few Dollars More*, the link between one of its protagonist’s back-story and his motive for revenge is only casually hinted at, because the attraction of a Spaghetti Western is in its action, not emotion. In *Sholay* the back-story is revealed in an elaborate pre-climactic intermission, it remains in the foreground throughout to make a subsequent spectacular display of heroism on-screen seem plausible to its audience, who want to be ‘moved’ by their cinematic experience. Hence, the personal loss story is developed and built through strategic revelations with varying emotional impacts, which a viewer predisposed in favour of cognitive realism might denounce as melodrama. This heightened emotional effect not only lends a sentimental justification to the unusual bravado and sacrifice of its heroes, but also makes them *feel* believable and possessed of their own logic.

The tactical narrative style of the Spaghetti Western is exchanged for a riot of emotions in the climax of the Curry Western. Accordingly, the aged Thakur does some gravity-defying jumps to singlehandedly kill Gabbar, while Veeru just disappears, when he should have been present like the ‘Man with No Name’ to ensure a fair fight. But asking these questions, instead of being moved by the overflowing avenging emotion of the climax, will deprive the logic-seeking viewer of any chance to relish the surfeit of *rasa* on-screen. The desire for *rasa* demands the prolonging of Gabbar’s pain in the end. Shot with detailed blows and blood soaked close-ups, his demise is portrayed as fit justice for the blood of

³⁵⁰ Thakur: Veeru Gabbar ko mere hawale kardo.

Veeru : Nahi Thakur, main ise zinda nahi chodunga.

Thakur: Wada mat bhulo.

Veeru: Mujhe sirf itna yaad hai ki is kamine ki aadmiyon ne mere Jai ki jaan li hai...

Thakur: Tumhe usi Jai ke vaade ka waasta hai (SJ 1975).

³⁵¹ Kabir 1999: 57.

the many innocent people he has spilled until then. This is necessary in order for *rasa* seeking audiences to leave their three-and-a-half-hour long *Sholay* experience feeling ‘good, as in emotionally fulfilled or satiated’ (Pattanaik interview, 2015).



Still-49



Still-50

After killing Gabbar, Thakur breaks down into copious weeping in the arms of Veeru (stills 17-18), as the latter suddenly reappears in the scene. The music transforms the creaking revenge tune into a melancholic chorus as both men lament their loss, while gaining strength from each other (still-18). According to Gordon:

Thakur’s catharsis in the end – since he had not mourned the loss of his family at all – was one of the things that for me made the film superior to any Western I have ever seen. It was that the men were weeping, they were showing their feelings, whereas in the American Westerns they are always stone faced. That difference and humanness for me made *Sholay* a richer film (Gordon interview, 2014).



Still-51



Still-52

Thus, in the successful catharsis of a character, the relishing of *rasa* by a *sahrydaya* audience is maximised, so that the movie maintains its impact long after it has been witnessed in the cinema. As Gordon says, ‘When Thakur was kicking Gabbar in the end, I was glad. Now, I can watch *Sholay* all over again’ (Gordon interview, 2014). Offering an insight into how the concern of achieving *rasa* in the audience guides the writing

process of a Hindi film script, or dialogue writer re-fashioning a story, Pandey says:

I consider theatre and film as a gym for emotions. We [the Indian/Hindi cinema audience] go to the cinema to exercise our emotions. We live the lives of the characters in the film vicariously – we laugh, cry, feel angry – and we come out of the theatres feeling much lighter, fresher and even stronger without realising. So tomorrow even if I face a tragedy in real life like the movie I am better prepared because I have lived through somebody else's tragedy in the theatre. That is why the story is so important. We cannot do without a good story. And a good story cannot happen without evoking the *rasas* (Pandey interview, 2013).

4.6 Conclusion

Sholay has plot motivations and a few lead characterisations similar to Spaghetti Westerns, a genre that stylised action in international cinema. However, it is ultimately a distinctly Indian, *navarasa* evoking film. Spectacular action and stylised characterisation do happen, but they are always secondary, supporting elements next to its primary emotive core. Every major scene in the film can also be interpreted as part of a pairing, or face-off between sets of complimentary or contrasting emotions. These foreground a variety of human bonds, including sacrificial love between two friends, romantic love between two couples, compassion between single guardians and their wards, courage amongst three heroic figures fighting evil, and hate between a police officer and a dacoit. Their impact lies in their being articulated by characters representing the universally recognised *sthayibhavas*. Such characterisation may make some of the characters look stereotypical, but they are sharply personalised and contextualised within the space of an event or the span of a scenario. This ensures that they convincingly evoke the various dramatic *rasas*, imprinting them indelibly in the minds of their audiences, from the illiterate to the intelligent. After making its audience laugh, feel angry, disgusted, surprised, grieved, charmed by romance and awed by some spectacular display of physical bravado, *Sholay* is able to leave that same audience in the desired aesthetic state of the *shanta rasa*, as recommended by the *Natyashastra*. In this fulfilling blending of the *navarasas*, lies the most plausible formula for the making of the perfect Indian *masala* film, as testified by the still enduring 'best in Bollywood' legacy of *Sholay*, four decades after its making.

CHAPTER FIVE

RASA IN CHARACTERISATION: REVIEWING GENDER AND CHARACTER STEREOTYPES AS RASA ACHIEVEMENTS IN *MAYABAZAR* AND *MADAM X*

The Indian play demands of an actor total submission to a particular emotion. If you are sad you are really sad... we are very vocal that way. We are not inhibited in expressing ourselves and our feelings.

(Theatre director-actor Vijaya Mehta 1995:37)

We definitely knew that one of the characters was Rama, and the other Raavan in *Madam X*.

(Filmmaker Deepak Shivdasani, interview, 2014)

5.1 Introduction

Appreciating melodramatic acting and stereotypical characterisations has been the Achilles' heel of Indian film criticism, especially when encountering performances within popular Indian cinema. The first Indian feature film, *Raja Harishchandra* (Phalke 1913), told the tale of an ideal husband and wife, who upheld truth and righteousness at the cost of tremendous personal sacrifice. Harishchandra was an ancestor of Rama, the hero of the oldest Indian epic the *Ramayana*, and 'a consistent influence on the idea of ideal hero characterisations in Indian stories' (Kapoor, interview, 2013), irrespective of whether it was being told in literature, dance, drama and cinema. His wife, Sita, across film genres, 'remains one of the most enduring heroines in Indian culture'.³⁵² The biggest obstacle in their love story, Raavan, is acknowledged as a defining reference for on-screen villainy. Negative heroes and heroines have always been an aberration and never a norm in Indian cinema.³⁵³ Vijay Mishra locates the pre-eminent association of on-screen lead characters with *dharm*/righteousness as a key legacy of the pan-India recognised epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.³⁵⁴ He also attributes some signature aspects of Indian film narration, such as epic genealogy and the persistence of *dharmik* codes, to the same source. Since their creation, these epics have commanded a vibrant cultural presence in

³⁵² Somaaya, Kothari & Madangarli 2012: 16.

³⁵³ Zankar 2012: 357.

³⁵⁴ Mishra 2012: 5.

the Indian aesthetic imagination and retained a continuing influence in the daily life and moral consciousness of Indian civilisation. The necessity for memorable characterisations in Indian cinema to be supported by impactful dialogue is almost as integral to a stylised performance as ornaments on a bride. Scriptwriters credit this to the still continuing tradition of an oral transmission and consumption of the epics in both public and private spaces (Khan, interview, 2013; Pandey, interview, 2013). According to Kishore Namit Kapoor, founder-teacher of the Mumbai-based KNK Acting (Lab) Institute whose alumni include many post-2000 Bollywood stars, ‘While the *Ramayana*’s influence can be seen in most of our films portraying the hero, villain and heroine as – Rama, Raavan and Sita – like black and white characters, the *Mahabharata* provided the template for the multi-starrers’ (Kapoor interview, 2013). Empirical evidence testifies to the recurrent depiction of the characters from the epics in every Indian storytelling tradition, whether in art, literature, dance, drama and cinema. Over 90 per cent of the films made in the first decade of Indian cinema were based on stories from its two epics. This contributed to the establishing of a distinct Indian film genre, the mythological, as already discussed in chapter two.³⁵⁵ Film writers and reviewers explain the preference for adapting epic heroes, or conceiving contemporary characters with attributes akin to the epic heroes, courtesy of their ability to embody and evoke universally recognised *rasas*. This makes them identifiable and hence able to establish a connection among a diverse and primarily illiterate audience.³⁵⁶ ‘The characters are not good or bad because of their personal idiosyncrasies, but rather due to their traits or *bhava* attributes that create a dominant *rasa* about and around them’.³⁵⁷ The traits of the eight kinds of heroines-in-love (*ashtanayikas*) have already been discussed in chapter three. The *Natyashastra* also lists seven ‘graces’³⁵⁸ that naturally apply to ideal women characters – *sobha* (beauty as a

³⁵⁵ ‘The epics and myths of the country, would seem to present the most widely acceptable base for the artistic development of the Indian cinema’ (Chidananda Das Gupta to Chakrabarty 1993: 125).

³⁵⁶ ‘*Mahabharata* is one of the greatest screenplays ever written and *Ramayana* is the greatest story ever told. Both have exerted tremendous influence on our cinema, our story telling, our story writing, and personally on me a great deal’ (Salim Khan interview, 2014).

³⁵⁷ Zankar 2012: 357.

³⁵⁸ ‘The emotion belongs to the body because of immediate effect on it, expression follows emotion, and grace accompanies expression. *Bhava* is so called because it makes the audience to feel because of words, gestures, etc. (NS 24.10-11)’ (Rangacharya 2010: 185).

radiant/glowing state of being post the experiencing of love), *kanti* (a beautiful state of being in expectation of love), *dipti* (heightened *kanti*), *madhurya* (moderation), *dhairya* (serenity), *praglabhya* (maturity) and *audarya* (a sense of civility or respect in all situations).³⁵⁹ Eight kinds of acting emotions for the ideal hero/man too have been enumerated. These are *sobha* (skill/brilliance), *vilasa* (graceful bearing), *madhurya* (self-possession), *sthairya* (steadiness), *gambhīrya* (serenity), *lalita* (sportiveness), *audarya* (nobility) and *tejas* (spirit).³⁶⁰ A female or a male character behaving contrary to the above attributes, as manifested by their dominant *bhava*-guided traits, therefore by default embodies a negative female (e.g. a vamp) or a negative male (a villain) character. These attributes are normally established in a character's introduction scene, as discussed in chapter four in the context of the introductory scenes of each of *Sholay*'s significant characters.

5.2 The four types of *abhinaya*

After discussing the influence of the *rasa* theory in plot construction, this chapter explores how the knowledge of the *rasa* theory and its guidelines on portraying the ideal hero, heroine or villain can help us appreciate the consistency of *bhava*. This knowledge can also aid our recognition of the continuity and unity achieved by the evocation of the *rasas* in a seemingly stereotypical or 'expressive'³⁶¹ dramatic performance that is often dismissed as loud or theatrical. According to Devdutt Pattanaik:

Not every hyper realism film works, and not every melodramatic film works [with the audience]. So clearly it is not melodrama that works, there is a vocabulary and a language in the melodrama that some people are better at than others (Pattanaik interview, 2015).

I intend to explore how to identify and appreciate the working of that vocabulary in the craft of an actor. Two sets of on-screen performances will be discussed in order to understand how the maintenance of their character's *bhavas* is a necessary *abhinaya*

³⁵⁹ NS 24.22-29.

³⁶⁰ NS 24.30-39.

³⁶¹ 'In our cinema, we project our emotions. We are basically very loud people. Even for someone doing subtle acting, he or she has to be more expressive, [especially] at least in the song sequences' (Kapoor interview, 2013).

achievement for actors to generate and realise specific *rasas* in the audience.

Bhavas are artistic expressions achieved by actors through varying combinations of the four types of ‘equally important *abhinaya*(s) or performances’³⁶²: *angika* (bodily gestures/physical), *vachika* (speech/verbal), *aharya* (costumes/ornamental) and *satvika* (emotions/emotional).³⁶³ They lend feeling to a conveyed thought or performed action to create a corresponding lasting emotional sentiment or *rasa* in the audience. The intertwined working of the above elements towards the cognition of an acted feeling is succinctly described in the following *sutra* – ‘Yato hastasto-tatoh drishtih-yato drishtih tatoh manah-yato manas-tatoh bhavah-yato bhava-statoh rasah’ (The eyes follow the movement of the hands; where the eyes go, mind follows; where the mind goes, feelings follow; and where the feelings go, sentiments follow!).³⁶⁴ According to Rangacharya:

When the emotion is impressively expressed, it (*samanya abhinaya*) is of a high kind; when it just equals i.e. is not dissonant with words and gestures, it is middling; and when it fails to register it is inferior (NS.24.1-2). The word *abhinaya* is usually translated as ‘acting’; but that, according to Bharata, is not correct. *Abhinaya*, from *ni* ‘to carry’, with prefix *abhi* – towards means that which carries (the meaning of the play) towards (the audience). So, words (*vachika*) with physical gestures (*angika*) to suit the emotion ‘*sattva*’, as well as make up and costumes (*aharya*) constitute *abhinaya*.³⁶⁵

This not only creates the ability to generate a feeling, or make the audience feel an important aspect of the Indian way of acting, but also highlights the need for complimenting dialogue, gestures and costumes to enhance that impact. Kapoor observes:

That so much importance is given to dialogue writers in our cinema is yet another indicator of the fact that a lot of our ideas/notions around film acting have come down from the *Natyashastra*, whether an actor has studied it or not, or a director

³⁶² According to the *Natyashastra*, an emotion is best conveyed or felt the most when the words, tone and gestures that constitute or feed it are all *samana*, i.e. equal or most suited to each other, for the outcome to be celebrated as a work of *samanya abhinaya* (NS 24.1-8).

³⁶³ In acting, the reactions (*anubhavas*) to a cause (*vibhava*) could be conveyed as mere automatic gestures like speaking in a breaking voice to convey sorrow (*vachika abhinaya*) or a trembling of body parts to show fear (*angika abhinaya*), without involving the inner performer. Only when the reaction is in sync with the internalised state of being of a character, then its true *sattvikabhava* is conveyed. ‘An actor who has understood/imbibed the inherent *sattva* (emotional) graph of an elevated hero like Rama or Sita, will react with relatively less gestures and more internalised emotion than while playing a common man, in the context of similar provocations’ (Subrahmanyam 2010: 50).

³⁶⁴ Dwivedi 2012.

³⁶⁵ Rangacharya 2010: 185.

is consciously following it or not... (Kapoor interview, 2013).

This chapter will evidence the adherence of *rasa* postulates in on-screen acting using a diverse sample of performances from two distinct genres of Indian cinema. It will feature films from two different eras, regions and genres of filmmaking: *Mayabazar* (K.V. Reddy, 1957), an influential classic from India's Southern film industry, and *Madam X* (Deepak Shivdasani, 1994), a Hindi cinema thriller representative of the star-driven Bollywood *masala* films of the 1980s and 1990s. It will also consider using the theory in the understanding of some of the dominant and recurrent stereotypes around characterisation in popular Indian cinema, especially in an actor's portrayal of characters with discernible performance binaries, for example the male and the female or the good and evil. Just as the *Natyashastra* broadly categorises the *rasas* to be evoked in a performance as pleasurable and non-pleasurable, Indian cinema too has traditionally categorised characters and character attributes within stereotypical binaries of the positive and the negative or the masculine and the feminine. This chapter will argue that the ideal or expected formulaic *bhava* traits for the on-screen characterisation of heroes and heroines, or for the differentiation of heroes from villains, can be better appreciated by evaluating the extent of *rasa* achievement and *bhava* consistency in their performance as a lens for review.

5.3 *Mayabazar* and the Indian mythological film

The *Natyashastra*'s continuing influence on Indian cinema's narrative and performance aesthetics is most evident in films of the mythological genre. Here the *rasa* achieving performance imperatives have gone beyond a notional continuity to absolute adherence in the structuring of the emotional grammar and graph of a narrative, and the shaping of the presentation, disposition and categorisation of characters and their acts. A significant early Indian cinema genre, the mythological film has often been dismissed as inferior cinema because of its overt adherence to *Natyashastra* guidelines and region-specific folk theatre indulgences. The latter include fantastical *mise-en-scène*, dialogue driven drama, epic story lines and extravagant production values. These elements have often made the genre look like a photographed play by unimaginative filmmakers. The acting, following the

theatrical grammar of maximisation of emotions through representative character types, also puts melodrama over realism. It prioritises heightened *rasa* realisation over relatable acting. If you are sad, you are crest fallen; if you are angry, you are raging mad; and if you are happy, you are bursting at the seams! The goal of a performance was to epitomise the *bhava*, and personify a *rasa* through the enactment of its most identifiable and representative behavior, mood and disposition.

Of all Indian language cinemas nowhere has the ‘mythological film’ survived the longest as in the cinemas of South India, especially the Telegu cinema, where it was a dominant genre right up to the 1970s, starting from its early 20th century inception. In this context, I now introduce writer-director K.V. Reddy’s path-breaking 1957 bilingual production, *Mayabazar* (Telegu-Tamil), which was ‘based on a popular play with multiple on-screen adaptations’,³⁶⁶ and featured some of the legendary star-actors of South Indian cinema, including N.T. Rama Rao, Akkineni Nageshwar Rao, S.V. Ranga Rao and Savithri. This film brought about a welcome change to ‘the mythological template’ through its humanisation of gods and portrayal of extraordinary characters as ordinary human beings for the first time. It needs to be mentioned here that the film was voted ‘the greatest Indian film ever’³⁶⁷ in a 2013 online poll commemorating 100 years of Indian cinema that encompassed all Indian language cinemas. Technically, just as *Deewar* (1975) ushered in the idea of a model screenplay in Hindi cinema, ‘a screenplay with a life of its own’,³⁶⁸ *Mayabazar* for the first time highlighted the significance of the screenplay over the story, scripting an influential turn in the genre’s evolution in the cinemas of South India.

The success of its structure has since been abundantly repeated, making it an influential landmark in the genre. According to S.S. Rajamouli, a popular and influential twenty-first

³⁶⁶ ‘The popular [North Indian] play [*Mayabazar*] found its way to cinema thanks to Baburao Painter who made it thrice as a silent movie (1919, 1921 and 1923) with his prodigy V. Shantaram as Lord Krishna. The first talkie version of *Mayabazar* directed by Nanubhai Vakil came in Hindi in 1932. R. Padmanabhan made a Tamil movie in 1935 and the next year P.V. Das brought it to Telugu cinema... Though there were several movie versions in various Indian languages, the 1957 Vijaya Productions’ *Mayabazar* is still considered the best for its all-round excellence’ (Narasimham 2015).

³⁶⁷ The poll was conducted and published by CNN-IBN (May 2013).

³⁶⁸ Rajabali 2003: 313.

century filmmaker from the Telegu cinema:

Mayabazar is the greatest classic and absolute influence of all times, not only on me and my generation of filmmakers, but the entire Telegu film industry. Many of the super hit films of today cannot even come close to the magical screenplay of K.V. Reddy written in the 1950s, where each and every bit of the film, tells you so much story (Rajamouli interview, 2012).

The film further offers a sumptuous '*rasa swadana*' (a relishing of all the *navarasas*), skewed in favour of the pleasurable *rasas* of *sringara*, *hasya*, *vira* and *adbhuta* to be reviewed and received as a complete *masala* entertainer. The film depicts a magical love story from the *Mahabharata*. Its highlight, in terms of drama and performance, comes in the form of its heroine Sasirekha's dual personality premise, and the interpretation of this by actress Savithri. An interesting plot twist has her character replaced by a male illusionist demon Ghatokacha. This means that Savithri has to oscillate between two diverse personas, one a bashful and in-love young princess and the other a demonic (Ghatokacha-as-Sasirekha) princess in a fun and havoc-making mode.

I will now explore specific *bhavas* (expressions) from the nine prescribed *sthayibhavas*, or primary human emotions, which Indian actors select and reject in their achievement of 'ideal' *Natyashastra*-prescribed notions of masculine and feminine performance. The vehicle for this is a critical study of heroine Savithri's choice of different *rasa*-enhancing *bhavas* in her double-act, depending on the gender of her character; how she distinguishes, personifies and defines a 'woman-as-woman' Sasirekha, in contrast to a 'man-as-woman' Sasirekha, in three similar situations in a love story revolving around courtship, rebellion and marriage. A freeze frame analysis of her diverse *bhavas* on display will be utilised. I will henceforth refer to the 'real' female Sasirekha as just 'Sasirekha', and the 'male' Ghatokacha impersonating Sasirekha as 'the male Sasirekha', respectively.

Sasirekha, the daughter of the king of Dwaraka, Balarama and his wife Revathi, is betrothed to Abhimanyu, the son of Subhadra and the third Pandava prince Arjuna, in their childhood in the presence of her paternal uncle, Krishna. They grow up nurturing their love for each other. When misfortune strikes the Pandavas and they lose their kingdom in

a game of dice to their evil cousins, the Kauravas, Revathi is no longer keen to honour the commitment of giving her daughter to the progeny of wandering mendicants. She rejects Subhadra's reminder request to marry their now adult children in love, when the latter comes to Dwaraka with Abhimanyu to stay with her brothers. Balarama meanwhile, in a parallel plot twist, is conned by the eldest Kaurava, Duryodhana and his villainous uncle Shakuni into agreeing to marry Sasirekha to Duryodhana's son, Lakshman Kumar. This is when Krishna steps in with a secret plan to unite the pining lovers, aided by Abhimanyu's cousin born to an *asura* queen, Ghatotkacha, who also is an illusionist demon king. The '*mayavi*' (magician) Ghatotkacha replaces the real Sasirekha with an illusion of him as the princess, while his talented assistants construct an illusory palace to hold the groom's party at bay. The Kauravas' real intentions are exposed after a comedy of mistaken identities and magical mayhem unleashed by Ghatotkacha and his partners-in-magic under Krishna's all-knowing direction. Eventually the lovers are united and the family is reconciled.

5.4 *Mayabazar*: Different genders, different *bhavas*

5.4.1 Sasirekha in courtship

With the romantic story about star crossed lovers from childhood defining its narrative crux, *Mayabazar* features elaborate courtship and romance sequences that progress through four lyrical scenes or song sequences. Here I will compare and contrast the first meeting sequence between an adult Abhimanyu and Sasirekha (still-1) with that of the 'male Sasirekha' and her second suitor Lakshman Kumar (still-2). Both scenes take off with a song sequence articulating the love-struck excitement of the two men at their first sighting of the gorgeous princess in a palace garden.



Still-1



Still-2

Abhimanyu and Lakshman Kumar indulge in a liberal wooing of Sasirekha. However, while for Abhimanyu the female is an object of subtle, indulgent affection (still-3), Kumar's overtures border around aggressive, possessive affection. With both suitors, she plays 'difficult to get' (stills 1&2), but while she enjoys the attention of Abhimanyu, she mocks and rejects the unwanted affections of Kumar.



Still-3: Sasirekha in joyous *rati bhava*



Still-4: Sasirekha (male) steals a *kroadha-vira* gesture

Given the delicate disposition of Sasirekha, and her stock reactions of apprehension, anxiety and helplessness (*vyabharis* of *rati bhava*) in adverse situations, Kumar's aggression would ideally have had her cowering or fleeing the scene, evincing the *rasas* of fear and disgust. Nevertheless, Ghatotkacha-as-Sasirekha stands his ground like a natural *vira*, fending for himself, returning Kumar's aggression with mockery and stern rebuttals (stills 4-5).



Still-5: The disgusted rebuff of an unwanted suitor

Still-6: 'Male' Sasirekha maintains direct eye contact

In Abhimanyu's company, Sasirekha glows, sings and prances around in joyous abandon as he sings – 'You are as beautiful as I had imagined' (PNR 1957)³⁶⁹ (still-1). He humours her coquettishness as they re-visit their mutual comfort from childhood, leading to love in adulthood. The lovers reappear in two more songs, one enjoying a boat ride and the other in *vipralambha* (love in separation) mode, pining for the absence of the other.

The *bhavas* used to differentiate their interpersonal relationships in these scenes of togetherness, highlight the diverse set of expressions in use for members of different genders or differently gendered dispositions. With Abhimanyu, Sasirekha shares the equation of a passive recipient – be it in her explorative waking up to 'wondrous love' in their first meeting in pure *rati bhava*, when expressing 'joyous love' (indicating a growth in the intensity of their love that now allows stolen physical intimacies in *hasya-sringara*) in the second song, or in suffering from 'painful love' (love-in-longing) while portraying *shoka* (pathos/pity) in the third, evoking the *karuna rasa*. In all these three sequences she is the receiver of affection, who needs to be pampered in the first interaction, appreciated and cared for in the second, and protected in the third sequence. In each of the scenes the male sets the tone of interaction with the female strategically placed on the lower pedestal of a receiver (still-3). Most importantly, she always looks up to her man for love, care or

³⁶⁹ The dialogue and songs of the original Telegu language version of *Mayabazar*, which is the reference film in this chapter were written by South Indian cinema's 'wizard of words' (Narasimham 2015) Pingali Nagendra Rao. He would be cited for the film's song and dialogue references as PNR.

comfort. Though in bliss, she remains in essence a receiver, never driving or leading any act of romance. The relationship dynamics change drastically when Abhimanyu meets the ‘male Sasirekha’ for the first time. She not only talks back and mock reprimands him as an equal, but also maintains direct eye contact (still-6) to the former’s evident surprise. The change in body language, she eventually explains to Abhimanyu’s visible relief and joyous acceptance is because ‘she essentially is a he; his brother’ (PNR 1957). Thus, as the character of Sasirekha switches genders, their temperaments and roles in courtship change, from being an object of desire (as female) to become a desiring object (as male). The male’s role to lead all interaction in courtship is retained in a repeat of the sequence between Kumar and the ‘male Sasirekha’. It is interesting to note that while Abhimanyu is represented in an image of the heroic male in their first interaction, (which perhaps explains the oddity of his arriving with a bow and arrows to a meeting with his lover), Kumar in his first meeting is not only shorn of any weapons of masculine significance, but is deliberately presented as a character with effeminate mannerisms. He sulks, mocks and hurts easily and is dressed in a garish costume with hints of a drape like a sari. Moreover, in deference to the ‘male’ Sasirekha’s inherent stronger masculinity, Kumar takes the receiver role of the female. The superior male, Ghatotkacha the demon, gets to set the terms and tone of the courtship game, as in the case of Abhimanyu with Sasirekha. Ghatotkacha opts for derision, complimented by an aggressive set of emotions bordering on anger, disgust and ridicule (stills 4-5) allowed only to the ‘male Sasirekha’. Even in the expression of positive emotions, Sasirekha’s joy never goes beyond an ‘appropriate’ *smita hasya* (modest smile), whereas the ‘male Sasirekha’ exalts in an entire gamut of laughs from *upahasya* (ridicule) to *atahasya* (boisterous laughter).³⁷⁰

³⁷⁰ The *Natyashastra* lists six types of laughter for actors depending on the nature of their characters – *smita* (gentle smile) and *hasita* (slight laughter) for noble men and women, *vihāsita* (open laughter) and *upahasita* (ridiculing laughter) for common men and women, and *apahasita* (obscene laughter) and *atīhasita* (boisterous laughter) for the loud and demonic.



Did you see, brother?

Still-7: The diverse nature of the two Sasirekhas is best expressed in the contrasting body language and expressions of their lone face-off scene in the film. While the female Sasirekha (left) stands in passive expectancy, head lowered, an apprehensive image of delicate femininity, the ‘male Sasirekha’ (right) is one of confidence and aggressive masculinity, head up, ready to lead from the front matching attitude-and-posture with her male compatriot.

5.4.2 Sasirekha in protest

In romantic tales, rebellion is a predictable reaction of young lovers to the censorship of adults. In spite of *Mayabazar* being shot as a mythical story with modern sensibilities, its protagonists never cross the ‘expected ideal’ of gendered behaviour in their responses to reprimand. When the romance between Abhimanyu and Sasirekha is censured, his first reaction is that of an intense character type steeped in the *vira rasa* and he takes recourse to righteous anger. Abhimanyu challenges his elders to a duel before being calmed by uncle Krishna. Sasirekha on the contrary, is resigned to her fate after a meek protest for which she is slapped by her mother. Sulking, she opts for the muted, *viraha* route of release – a picture of self-pity embodying the *karuna rasa* (still-8). She sings sad songs of pining, awaiting rescue by her lover. Being female, her rebellion is limited to waiting for her love to find a way out, instead of taking any concrete action to undo the wrong.

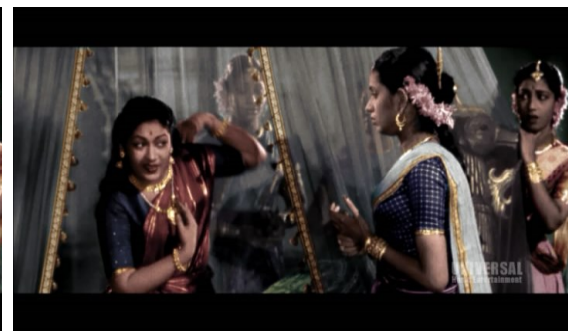


Still-8: Sasirekha in *shoka bhava*

Still-9: 'Male' Sasirekha demonstrating anger

The 'male Sasirekha' however reacts like Abhimanyu, with righteous anger fuelled by a feeling to punish the wrong doers (still-9). S/he takes upon herself the onus of finding a way out of the predicament by playing a difficult suitor. Her masculine spirit naturally allows her to echo the just anger of Abhimanyu. However, she channels it into a challenge that is permitted by her gender cover; s/he makes her suitor an object of mockery in perfect synchrony with Ghatotkacha's nature as a hot-headed brave-heart with a comic disposition. She constantly mocks and teases Kumar, forcing him into uncomfortable situations.

If Sasirekha's fear is the emotional response to her resignation to the status quo, daring is the reaction of the 'male Sasirekha'. Yet, the censure of Sasirekha is stricter; it involves physical restraint, given her weaker gender. Ghatotkacha's indiscretions, on the other hand, are met with gentle admonitions by Krishna and shocked pleading by her confidante maid. The 'male Sasirekha' is twice admonished for transgressing the subtle body language expected of her 'female' cover when he gets carried away by his inherent masculine nature. Incidentally, these reprimands do not come from any detractor but from the two characters sympathetic to her cause – Krishna and her maid confidante.



Still-10: Male ‘Sasirekha’ is requested to be subtle Still-11: Male ‘Sasirekha’ becomes subtle
 Ghatotkacha’s prompt subsequent corrections, going from boisterous to meek and restrained in order to continue the charade above suspicion, are amusingly contrite, but only reinforce the boundaries of the *emoting* repertoire available for the ‘ideal’ woman. They cannot exceed the subtle *rasas* (stills 11, 13). The ‘ideal’ heroine, as upholder of the ‘ideal female’ on-screen, even in the company of other ‘not-so-ideal’ women, has to operate within the subtle *bhava* stock of coyness, blushing and awe; it is only the excuse of a different gender that allows her to portray more aggressive emotions without looking inappropriate.



Stills 12-13: Krishna’s pointed insisting of the ‘male Sasirekha’ to stick to a more gender correct body language has her promptly change posture from a defiant and manly ‘cross of arms’ to a more submissive ‘folded arms’ positioning like the other women in the frame.

5.4.3 Sasirekha in marriage

The union of star-crossed lovers is the ultimate drama denouement of the story and their marriage is the film’s climactic event. Both the Sasirekhas go through their marriage ceremonies, one as a desired culmination and the other as the final set-up act for exiting a charade. Sasirekha goes through the ceremonies as an image of restrained joy. Though happy, her disposition is demure. With her head bowed she rarely looks at the groom, who sits in a regal posture, lording over the ceremony with natural articulate excitement (still-14). Her reactions maintain her character’s mood of being in a perpetual gender conforming state of passive reception.



Still-14: Sasirekha gets married to Abhimanyu



Still-15: The 'comic' marriage proceedings of 'male' Sasirekha and Lakshman Kumar

The same rituals involve a more equal male-female participation in the marriage ceremony of the 'male Sasirekha' and Kumar. Like the groom in the previous marriage, she does not mute her excitement. She engages Kumar's gaze (still-21) and returns it with more than equal confidence, which has him frequently cowering and occasionally backing-off. While the script wants Ghatotkacha-as-Sasirekha to trigger unsavoury actions that change the course of the ceremony, for the audience it is the knowledge of her superior gender that makes her dominant presence look natural. To scare Kumar off the marriage, she conjures three illusions every time he attempts to tie the *mangalsutra* (wedding necklace) around her neck. She appears as a monkey, a tiger and a demon, triggering corresponding feelings of laughter, fear and disgust in him respectively.

5.6 Different characters, different *bhavas*

After discussing how certain *bhavas* are preferred as character attributes and used to distinguish between gender categories of the male and the female, in a recognisable perpetuation of a classically prescribed acting template, I will now discuss how certain *sthayibhavas* in the personality of characters are similarly selected and rejected to differentiate the heroic from the villainous, or the good from the evil. This time I will use a case study from the film, *Madam X*. According to its director Deepak Shivdasani, the film's makers, writers and lead actor Rekha, were aware from its conception that its counter protagonists would be reflective of 'Rama and Raavan', the ideal hero and villain stereotypes from the epics. This will be evidenced and analysed through a study of the

film's lead actor, Rekha's choice of a distinct set of contrasting *bhavas*, presented as personality-specific mood states, to distinguish the evil Madam X³⁷¹ from her good double.

Madam X, released 37 years after *Mayabazar*, is a film in popular Indian cinema's action/thriller genre inspired by a 1970s' crime thriller, *Don* (1978). The continuing popularity of the film's theme saw it being remade a decade after *Madam X*, as a modern twenty-first century action thriller *Don: The Chase Begins Again* (2006). Based on genre attributes, *Maya Bazar* and *Madam X*, may appear to belong to categories with contrasting expectations and pleasures. Yet, their core drama is driven by two roles with opposite character motivations essayed by a single actor.

Madam X revolves around a fictitious Mumbai-based lady don, who is ruthless, greedy and outside the reach of the law. Her protection from state prosecution is a high-ranking public servant, a mysterious character 'X', who is her partner in profit. Into this comfortably operating scenario enters an honest police officer, Inspector Vijay, who intends to end Madam X's Mafia Empire and expose her mentor 'X'. He captures her in a covert combat operation and trains and sends her lookalike, a smart street performer Shalu, to lord over her businesses and reveal her illegal wealth and secret hideouts to the police. By the time Shalu becomes aware of X's identity, the real Madam X with the help of her Man Friday, Champak Lal, escapes Vijay's detention and captures Shalu and her siblings. In a protracted climactic combat with myriad twists and a physical catfight between the fake and the real Madam X, good triumphs over evil, in the signature narrative resolution style of a melodrama. Madam X succumbs to her injuries, albeit in triumphant arrogance, mouthing her oft-repeated signature line, 'Hum hain Maut ki woh express, duniya jise kehti hai Madam X!' (I am that death heralding express, which the world knows as Madam X, Anwar Khan 1994)³⁷². The film, thus begins, ends, and revolves around Madam X, who

³⁷¹ The character of Madam X will be mentioned without italics to distinguish it from the film *Madam X*.

³⁷² The dialogue writer of *Madam X*, Anwar Khan will henceforth be cited by his initials AK, and not just his surname Khan to avoid any confusing with script-writer Salim Khan, who will continue to be cited by his surname. All the English translations of AK's Hindi/Urdu dialogue are by me.

according to director Shivdasani was deliberately conceived as a ‘character driven character’ (Shivdasani interview, 2014), of a type that the audience had never seen before. Her novelty and attraction ‘like in the traditional stories was that she was conceived as a pure black character. There is no grey in her, like there is no grey in Raavan’ (Shivdasani interview, 2014). Coupled with her unique and elaborate wardrobe, another first for any character in Hindi cinema, negative or positive, this combined shock with wonder (like another unique and memorable Hindi film villain, Gabbar Singh from *Sholay*, discussed in the previous chapter), to create a character that is remembered even after two decades.

5.5.1 The dressing and dialoguing of Madam X

Along with the casting of Rekha, a leading star-actress with a ‘fashionista’s sensibilities’³⁷³ in the title role, the detailed attention paid to the costumes and dialogue, or the *aharya* and *vachika* aspects of *abhinaya*, has also contributed to the film’s retrospective recall. In a review published eighteen years after the film’s release, journalist Shikha Kumar states:

Painstaking attention has been given to Madam X’s lifestyle. She has a witch-like cackle, goes horse-riding on the beach (still-16), smokes cigarettes and wears boots that are brought to her in a tray by her beloved Zaka. Fashion-wise Rekha takes this film to a whole new level. She dons blinding outfits, ranging from mink coats, spiked gloves, capes and long matching boots, with over-the-top headgear. There’s a blue outfit to go with a sequined silver headgear that would put Lady Gaga to shame (still-17).³⁷⁴



Still-16



Still-17

³⁷³ Though four individuals are credited for the costumes of Madam X, according to director Deepak Shivdasani, it was actress Rekha, who designed them in reality, and acquired permission from an international fashion magazine for her character’s unusual hats, while the film’s official designers only aided their stitching process (Shivdasani interview, 2014).

³⁷⁴ Kumar 2012.

While an actor's emotive identification with a character is 'universally privileged'³⁷⁵, the *Natyashastra* places equal importance to all four aspects/areas of acting in order for an actor to be able to best convey the sentiments of a character. According to sage Bharata (or the *Natyashastra* perspective on good performance), 'acting is nothing but a process of creating sentiments in a discernible enough manner to be realised by the audience'.³⁷⁶ Therefore, an actor's identification with the emotion/*sattvika* attributes of a character is as important as its visual presentation and the content and style of its speaking. This becomes even more essential when a larger-than-life portrayal like Gabbar Singh (*Sholay*, 1975) or Madam X needs to engage an uninitiated (to popular Hindi cinema) audience expecting logic or some assurance of 'cognitive realism'³⁷⁷ in their viewing experience. These are characters whose actions are unreal, emotions are loudly expressed, costumes kitschy and unnatural and nature of speaking exaggerated. But to fans of affective realism, who want to feel or get awed by the uniqueness and the impact of a character, these are what makes a character like Madam X an all-round, consummate achievement. They are able to offer something 'never-before-seen' and unique in every aspect of their characterisation. According to the director of *Madam X*, Deepak Shivdasani:

My dominant emotion expectation from Madam X was one of rarity, surprise, larger-than-life... It's not a normal run-of-the-mill character. Imagine how you would react if somebody says 'I will be a Madam X'. You will wonder 'what'? You never know what that one person in a crowd of 500 or 1000 gets fascinated by? It could be Madam X's personality [based on her dominant *sattvika*/emotion attributes], her wardrobe [the *aharya*], looks, mannerisms [*angik*/gestural expressions], anything... But I was sure the character would get eyeballs. You cannot see a Madam X walking on the road or a next door neighbour looking like her. Neither would you want or like to see your wife dressed as Madam X. It's a rare species, a thing out of the orbit. Hence it was created with all these add-ons like she would have a reply to any given situation, and that she would talk in similes and metaphors [speech elements accentuating the impact of *vachika abhinaya*]. That was the brief given to the dialogue writer. So we created all those unbelievable things into her, and that is how we made her, and that is why you are talking to me about her because she was not one of those regular things. You are asking about her because she is rare, she is someone you have not come across. You may laugh at her, but you cannot forget her (Shivdasani interview, 2014).

³⁷⁵ The Stanislavski principle on characterisation popular in acting schools in the West, teaches actors to 'feel and express' (Mishra 2010:99).

³⁷⁶ Mishra 2010:102-103.

³⁷⁷ A concept introduced and discussed in the previous chapter.

Hence, it is no coincidence that Madam X dresses in a uniquely-fused fashion ‘never seen before on Indian cinema’ (Shivdasani, interview, 2014), and refers to herself in the third person or in the plural ‘hum’, instead of the singular ‘main’ or ‘apun’ (the colloquial version of ‘main’ or ‘I’ as used by her ‘ordinary/street smart’ doppelganger, Shalu).

According to scriptwriter Salim Khan:

In Hollywood there are no separate credits for dialogue writers. There, the dialogue come within the screenplay. It is only in our [Indian] cinema that we have separate credits for dialogue writers in film titles (still-18) (Khan interview, 2013).



Still-18: The opening credits of *Madam X*

highlight the name of its dialogue writer Anwar Khan in the final segment of credit roll that lists the film’s most important/influential contributors like the director, producer, cinematographer and music director.

Kamlesh Pandey, secretary of the Film Writers’ Association (Mumbai), defines this need for having good, or ‘clap worthy’ dialogue as an expectation unique to Indian cinema audiences. He sees it as resulting from the many still continuing traditions of oral transmission in practice in the nation’s numerous socio-cultural spaces, such as in the performed narration of stories from the epics at festivals, the chanting of holy mantras during rituals, and the communal singing of devotional songs. According to Pandey:

Good dialogue in Indian films is a tradition dating back to the *puranas*, epics and the Upanishads, which are endowed with meaningful statements, dramatic statements, classic and eternal ideas. We enjoy listening to good words as part of our tradition of oral culture of listening to recitations and readings of the Gita, the epics, the *puranas*, the poetry of the saints, etc. Hence dialogue is an integral part of our narratives and so are the lyrics of the film songs. The appreciation for movie songs can be argued as an extension of the public patronage of Bhakti/Sufi poetry traditions. People went to see a film like *Saudagar* [Subhash Ghai, 1991] because of the relentless banter [between its opposing lead characters in the traditional theatrical mode]. But now we are moving to a more colloquial everyday speech, which cannot be dramatic all the time (Pandey interview, 2013).

In the above observation lies a possible reason for the ‘unspectacular box-office performance’³⁷⁸ of *Madam X*. Perhaps by the time of the release of the three-years-in-the-making film, the sensibilities that desired a *Saudagar*-esque action film, with legendary superstars delivering verbose dialogue in exalted speech, had given way to a preference for crossover romances in conversational speech and led by a triumvirate of rising, young stars-to-be, such as Aamir Khan, Salman Khan and Shah Rukh Khan.³⁷⁹ *Madam X*, thus remains one of the last Hindi films in the action genre to use rhyming, poetic dialogue with abstract metaphors in a Hindustani (Hindi-Urdu mixed) lexicon. Hindi cinema, incidentally, ‘had started to abandon this kind of classical or theatrical dialogue template by the middle of the 1990s’ (Shivdasani, interview, 2014). The similes, choice of language (Hindustani) and rhyming of dialogue in the introductory monologue of Madam X, establish her character’s penchant for verbosity as a distinct personality attribute, which is maintained throughout the film in her every subsequent appearance:

Madam X: Jis tarah Yamraj ko sirf yamlok hi dekh sakta hai,
 usi tarah Madam X ki shaqal bhi sirf uska samrajya hi dekh sakta hai.
 Jo bhi hamari jhalak dekhne ki zurrat karta hai,
 wo jalkar aise dhuan ho jaata hai,
 ki na zameen ko uski khaakh milti hai, aur na hawaon ko uski raakh! (AK 1994).
 (Just as only hell can witness the god of death, similarly only the empire of
 Madam X can see her in person. Any outsider attempting that dare will be burnt
 in a way that neither the earth gets their debris nor the wind their ashes).

This, is ‘the vocabulary and the language in the melodrama’ (Pattanaik interview, 2015), which calls for an alternative and exclusively emotion-appreciating prism of review, like the *rasa* theory. A theory beyond those that are trained to prioritise and appreciate only adherence to realism, or *cinéma vérité* storytelling. Using a sample of the speech, costume, behaviour and dominant emotion traits incorporated into the characterisation of Madam X as reference, I will now explore how the protagonist actress of *Madam X*, Rekha uses these as effective differentiators to establish and distinguish her villain from her heroic doppelganger. The analysis will be done in the context of three significant plot moments,

³⁷⁸ *Madam X*, according to filmmaker Deepak Shivdasani was not a flop as commonly assumed, but a *comme ci, comme ça* return-on-investment venture (Shivdasani interview, 2014).

³⁷⁹ Shivdasani interview, 2014.

by looking at the specific *bhava* reactions of either character to similar situational and people provocations. Furthermore, I will be retaining the original lines of Madam X delivered in Hindustani, especially in the context of her longer dialogue and monologues, to convey the flavour in the phrase, the imaginative choice of words and the play with images that are as much a character in themselves, as the protagonist's unusual range and choice of costumes.

5.5.2 The introduction scenes of Madam X and Shalu

The introductory scene of Madam X is arguably one of the longest for a title character in Indian cinema. It starts with an anecdotal interaction, highlighting the character's aptitude for ruthless vengeance. She kills an agent, who tries to double cross her by trying to secretly capture her image while striking a deal over the sale of a smuggled antique piece. She then triggers a massive explosion that decimates an entire police force that had gathered to capture her. This follows her declaring her signature line on being 'an agent of death', who the world dreads as Madam X. The line is repeated at strategic drama moments throughout the film.



Still-19: Introduction of Madam X in a veil

Still-20: Introduction song sequence of Shalu

The film's opening credits now roll, accompanied by a song in English, which states: 'She is mysterious, she is wanted, she is coming...' (Jaipuri 1994).³⁸⁰ This then changes into a Hinglish title track that articulates the nature and attributes of Madam X through a 4.10

³⁸⁰ Urdu poet and two-time Filmfare Best Lyrics winner, Hasrat Jaipuri, started his film career writing songs for hit Raj Kapoor films since the late 1940s. *Madam X* was one his last major film projects where he wrote all the songs.

minute long song sequence, featuring ten elaborate costume changes, shot in fifteen different locations and picturised through 98 editing cuts. The name Madam X is uttered 36 times, like a chorus chant in the background score. The lyrics of the song, further feed her ‘agent of death’ imagery stating:

Jab jab saamne aati hai, ek qayamat chaati hai
dusti hai vo logon ko, jab naagin ban jati hai
duniya se dharti kahan hai, us ne jo aafat macha di
logon ki neendein uda de, vo hosh sabke mita de (Jaipuri 1994).

(Her every vision is like a judgement day encounter; she stings people like a snake; unafraid of the world, she has been creating havoc; she gives many a sleepless night, while her mere sighting can strike others to numbness).

These attributes are revealed as clues to the puzzle that Madam X is presented to be. They are an answer to a repeating question that is articulated as a parable – ‘No one knows her; nobody has seen her; none can capture her... [So] who is, who is, who is... Madam X?’ (Jaipuri 1994). This metaphorical referencing of Madam X in the song, coming after her simile laden self-introduction, achieves a consistency in the twin elements of song and dialogue as an effective *vachika abhinaya* (high on dialogue) performance.

Madam X conducts her routine, functional conversations with other characters in similes and metaphors, be it as a pompous declaration of her skills (‘The art of treading carefully, Madam X has learnt from the tigress on a hunt in a jungle’); a rare generous appraisal of the talent of a loyal assistant (‘Champak Lal is no lame horse, but a winning aide like the race horses’); a threat to an enemy (‘Rai Bahadur, enmity with Madam X is like getting stuck with the sting of a poisonous Scorpio that will neither let you die nor relieve you from perpetual pain’); a casual observation (‘Those who view with the eyes of the mind rarely use the eyes on their face’); or a callous mocking of the personal loss of an honest officer (‘Inspector Vijay, your girlfriend was not born to take wedding vows around the sacred fire with you, but be the fire of the funeral pyre, that I could use to light my cigarette with!’).³⁸¹ These lines provide a glimpse into how the transitory mood states (*vyabharibhavas*) of Madam X happen to be negative. She expresses arrogance, cruelty

³⁸¹ AK 1994.

and vengeance, thus consistently contributing to her overall persona as a singularly black character sans nuance. The lines also indicate the detail that has gone into integrating the sadism and ruthlessness in her villainy. Minute aspects of her characterisation are considered, so that even a dialogue delivered in the passing is in accord with the dominant evil or negative *sattva*/emotion of her persona. This ensures that the *rasas* of fear and disgust are continuously evoked by Madam X. The content of the film’s dialogue, their relative verbosity and the manner of their delivery, however, varies from character to character. The dialogue of the real Madam X further accentuate the opposing traits of the two characters when compared to the straightforward dialogue of Shalu as Madam X. She uses no similes – ‘It is you, who got fooled into not being able to recognise me Mathur, not me’ and only sparsely uses metaphor – ‘Zamana badal sakta hai Mathur, lekin Madam X nahin’/ ‘The world may change Mathur, not Madam X!’ (AK 1994).

In terms of fashion choices, when she first is introduced to us, Madam X is dressed in masculine pant-and-shirt outfits with matching colour coordinated crowns in dark colour shades like red, dark blue, purple, dark green and black. Incidentally, red (still-21), dark blue and black (still-22) are the recommended colours for the unpleasant or negative *rasas* like anger, disgust and fear respectively.³⁸² The film’s opening sequence with the double agent is shot in the dark of night and lit to a dark blue hue in which Madam X appears chaperoned by shadow-like aides dressed in black (still-19).



Still-21



Still-22

The only time Madam X is seen wearing something light or in the colour of a pleasant

³⁸² NS.6.42-43.

rasa, like a white outfit (the colour for *hasya*, or comedy in her introduction song sequence), the accompanying visuals either have the white peppered with dominant black stripes (still-23), or she is shown grinning in pride or laughing loudly in bouts of *upahasya* (ridiculing laughter), *apahasya* (vulgar or obscene laughter showing grinning teeth, still-24) and *atahasya* (excessively loud laughter, still-25). While white is the colour that complements the comic *rasa*, according to the *Natyashastra*, the types of laughter Madam X is seen expressing are listed as identifiers of lower or demonic characters, and unbecoming of the positive and the noble.³⁸³ The next scenario where Madam X is seen in a white costume happens when her good double, the heroine Shalu masquerading as Madam X, is depicted singing a romantic song wooing Inspector Vijay (still-33).



Still-23

Still-24: In a state of *apahasita*

Still-25: In a state of *atihāsita*

The introduction of Madam X's 'good' lookalike Shalu, also happens through a song sequence, which serves as a self-stated lyrical introduction to her character and characteristics. Shalu's entry happens after over a third of the film's runtime in a five-minute long sequence. For the first 45 seconds we just see different parts of her person, starting with the feet, hands, hips, lips, and then her entire figure under a veil, before Shalu's face is revealed to a shower of confetti. Even Madam X is revealed after a 2:20 minute long prelude that has her articulating her mystery, and why she reveals herself to only those she deigns fit for the honour. While the first close-up of Madam X shows her in a state of uncontrollable rage, shouting an order (still-26), Shalu's first close-up, which also focuses on her gazing pointedly at the audience (still-27), is highlighted as one that is sharp and observant through complimenting lyrics stating, 'whoever crosses my way steers away, cut but by the sharpness of my gaze' (Jaipuri 1994).

³⁸³ NS.6.53-60.

Shalu is dressed in a traditional Indian female outfit of a *ghagra-choli* in a predominantly orange hue with ample hints of yellow (still-27) – colours that the *Natyashastra* associates with pleasurable, positive *rasas* like the heroic and the marvellous, respectively. These attributes are then verbalised in the lyrics of the song, where she declares herself to be a sharp and perceptible person, who ‘while being nice to the good, is not meek-hearted and can be bad to the bad-intentioned like a Rampuri knife’ (Jaipuri 1994). Her adeptness with knives while highlighting her street-smart nature, also establishes courage as her dominant character trait. This lends plausibility to her subsequent selection for a daring operation, as she reveals that she ‘may look innocent but can turn as potent as a bullet’ (Jaipuri 1994). The metaphors that introduce Shalu thus use simple rhyming connections, in contrast with the abstract associations and impossible assertions articulated by Madam X. For example, when asked about how she intends to rescue one of her captured aides from the jail, she responds, ‘No company in the world has made a lock, whose keys Madam X does not have’ (AK 1994). This contrast is further evident when Shalu’s above-mentioned lines are compared with some of Madam X’s dialogue discussed earlier.



Still-26: An angry stare (aimed at evoking fear) is the *sattva bhava* conveyed in Madam X’s first look/address to the camera and the audience; Still-27: Courage as dare, is the establishing *bhava* of Shalu’s first moment of direct eye-contact/address to the viewers.

Shalu’s introductory song sequence ends with her first meeting with Inspector Vijay, with the lyrics hinting at the kindling of a possible romantic association between the two. This is conveyed in the lines of the song’s third stanza, where the *vira rasa* (heroic) conveying theme suddenly turns to *vipralambha shringara* (love in anticipation), as Shalu articulates the expectant anticipation of a girl wanting to fall in love, singing, ‘How I wish a big-

hearted man came in my dreams and lifted my veil. I would play hard-to-get, I would play coy, I would feel embarrassed and refuse to lift my veil...’ (Jaipuri 1994).

5.5.3 Interaction with Men (friends and foes)

Madam X primarily interacts with three aides – her Man Friday Zaka, her ace accomplice and secret admirer Champak Lal and her mentor/partner in crime Mr. X/Mathur, who is later revealed to be the police commissioner of Mumbai. The real Madam X interacts with each in a matter-of-fact manner, sans any emotion, in accordance with her character ‘having no emotional quotient’ (Shivdasani, interview, 2014). She maintains a guarded distance with her aides that demands fear and perpetuates her hierarchical status (still-28). She treats her mentor, Mathur, not as a superior, but as an equal, to whom she states her decisions. She never seeks his opinion or consultation, but expects and demands his cooperation to implement her decisions. Loyalty born of a fear of harsh retribution drive these interactions. She also shows elements of anger, irritation (over the failure of her aides), and arrogance in her never consulting (anyone on any decision), and evokes the *rasa of bibhatsa* in her relishing the act of killing or torturing the harmless kin of her opponents, like the girlfriend of Vijay and the siblings of Shalu, respectively. Shalu as Madam X, while continuing with the charade of Madam X’s daring and arrogance, is also the trigger of pleasurable and positive *rasas* like love and humour, along with compassion for her enemies. She is seen romancing Inspector Vijay and opts for flirting (comic love) instead of fear as a strategy to allay Champak Lal’s doubts and retain his loyalty (still-29).



Still-28



Still-29

Thus Shalu's Madam X, does not compromise her character's inherent positive attributes – of courage, love, humour and compassion – but refashions them to humanise her interpretation of Madam X. This contributes to and perpetuates, without any blurring, the clear distinction between the heroic and the villainous in their adherence to the Rama and Raavan stereotypes. This is hinted at in Shalu's first interaction with her close aides in her Mafia den, where she says, 'Madam X has changed. Her heart, Her values, and Her thought processes have changed' (AK 1994).

Vira, or courage manifested through heroic acts, is a positive *rasa* that both Shalu and Madam X share in their daring, energetic and courageous behaviour. They both lead their own battles and never shy from a challenge. Madam X engages twice in hand-to-hand combat with Inspector Vijay, while Shalu grapples with Zaka and has a physical fight with Madam X in the climax. But while Shalu fights *only* in self-defence or to protect loved ones, Madam X fights for vengeance, perpetuating the 'she stings like a snake' imagery from her introduction song. She repeatedly gives elaborate speeches on the grave consequences for anyone daring to challenge or confront her.

Madam X's interactions with other men are either framed by her looking down at them (stills-28, 32), or by her talking to them with herself in the foreground making a direct address to the audience, while the object of her conversation looks up to her from the background (still-30). With opponents challenging her on an equal footing, like Vijay, she always maintains contact at the eye level. Shalu however, when masquerading as Madam X, in the presence of the man she loves comfortably, adopts a beseeching looking-up-to-her-man posture, like the female Sashirekha (still-33).



Still-30



Still-31



Still-32



Still-33

In spite of being a brave heart, in the presence of Vijay, she frequently lets him be the driver of dramatic action. In scenes where the dominant sentiment is that of a non-pleasurable or negative *rasa* like fear and disgust, while Madam X *always* triggers those emotions in the other, Shalu experiences them. This happens in her state of constant apprehension over her fake charade being revealed (when with Commissioner Mathur or Zaka, still-31), and in her carrying of a feeling of guilt when she commits her first act of murder. The three murders that Shalu effects as Madam X – first of Zaka, then Champak Lal and finally Madam X – are shown as unintended killings, done in self defence or to protect the weak. Once the act is done, she immediately shifts into mood states of guilt and regret, in accordance with the compassionate streak highlighting the *daya vira* (the kind-hearted hero) nature of her character.

5.5.4 Final face-off

A final face-off between the hero and the villain, in which the latter is vanquished for the return of order and upholding of justice, shapes the climax of *Madam X*. This is, as appropriate for any ‘good wins over the evil’ moral drama, revolving around characters with epic ambitions or inspired by epic texts. The climax unfolds as a 15-minute long sequence that begins with Champak Lal seeing through the charade of Shalu. Using her siblings as hostages, he gets Shalu to take him to the hideout where Vijay has imprisoned Madam X and rescues her. Madam X now wants to wreak vengeance on Shalu and her siblings, whom she brings to her den and uses as a bait to make Shalu agree to surrender to the law as Madam X. This would then enable the real Madam X to disappear with all

her wealth. However, after three dramatic confrontations – first between Shalu and Madam X, next between Shalu and Champak Lal and finally between Shalu and Madam X – Madam X is killed when a gun being tossed between her and Shalu in a lengthy cat fight accidentally fells Madam X in a shower of bullet fire.

Shalu in accordance with her character's positive/heroic attributes, kills in self-defence, while Madam X indiscriminately guns down half of a police force, along with a minister leading the group in the climactic battle. Viewed in the context of a need to evoke or heighten the impact of the positive heroic *rasa* over the negative *rasas* of fear/terror and disgust, in the service of a good wins over evil ending, the events in the scene are consistent with the dominant *bhava* traits of the characters. Shalu retains a hero's dominant *rasa* of *vira* throughout, first in her ability to take the torture inflicted by Madam X with resilience and then as she fights back at an opportune moment. Shalu's compassion is reinforced as she considers a dying Madam X with regret instead of displaying the emotion of a joyous victor. She never kills for revenge or pleasure, but to protect the weak and the righteous.

Guided by the rage of revenge Madam X undertakes some daring acts, but when caught on a back foot she does not mind exchanging courage for subterfuge, thus consistently retaining the black streak of her character. When Shalu gets the better of her in their first fight, Madam X tries to disarm her by revealing her siblings in her captivity. Fear of Madam X's actions and disgust at her treachery are the connecting theme throughout. This is highlighted in Shalu's final castigation of Madam X, stating, 'Looking at you, I feel disgusted about myself as I wonder why God gave me the looks of a devil like you' (AK 1994). She then spits on the face of Madam X (stills 34-35), as an extreme reaction of disgust.³⁸⁴

³⁸⁴ NS.6.72-73.



Stills 34-35: Shalu spits (still 34) on Madam X (still 35) in an extreme articulation of her feeling of disgust for the latter

In her first sighting of Madam X, Shalu is shown peeping at Madam X from behind Inspector Vijay, trying to steal a glimpse unseen, perhaps intimidated by the former's ferocity. Disgust for Madam X's ruthlessness turns that fear into resistance (still-36), reiterating the courageous streak in her character. However, once she kills Madam X, we see her revert back to a pity mixed with fear and disgust that make her avoid looking at Madam X in her dying moments (still-37). Fear and disgust are thus the two dominant *rasa* reactions consistently evoked by Madam X, from each of the film's male (Vijay) and female (Shalu) hero characters.



Still-36



Still-37

The colours of the costumes of Shalu and Madam X in the climax, while complementing their mood states at that moment, are consistent with the character traits that each retained in their respective interpretations of Madam X throughout the film. Madam X appears in her trademark masculine outfits in dark shades. When first seen confronting an angry and disgusted Shalu, she is dressed in dark brown pants and a coat, while Shalu is seen in a blazing red (the complementing colour of the *raudra*/furious *rasa*) *churidar-kurta* (still-

36). However, when both are dressed as Madam X in the final fight, the Rama-Raavan imagery is hinted at. Madam X wears a black outfit in contrast to Shalu as Madam X, who dons a *shyama* or light blue colour outfit akin to the complexion of Lord Rama in religious art (still-37). Shalu's Madam X is further adorned with a blue-green peacock feather in her cap (still-38), an exact replication of the way it adorns the crown of Lord Krishna (still-39), the avatar of Lord Vishnu that follows Rama in Hindu mythology.



Still-38



Still-39

The costume as an integral part of the character building aspect is reinforced during Madam X's pre-climax punishing and castigation of Shalu for daring to not only impersonate her actions, but also for trying to fit into her clothes. Stating that they were no mere clothes but a visual manifestation of her fearful reputation of a ruthless criminal, Madam X tells Shalu:

Madam X: Tune un juton ko pehnne ki jurrat ki jiski aedhi ke neeche jurm ki duniya palti hai; Tune hamaara wo taaz pehen-ne ki himmat ki, jise banane ke liye humne sainkdon saye kar diye; Kaas ki tu police record me hamara khooni karnama padh leti, hamara libaas pehnne ke bajaye, tu kafan pehen leti... (AK 1994)

(You dared to wear those shoes under whose ankle the world of crime thrives; you aspired to wear that crown to make which I killed many... Wish you had also read my blood curdling exploits in the police records before agreeing to impersonate me; Instead of wearing my costume you would have preferred to don the white of the coffin instead!).

Complimenting dialogue play an integral part in perpetuating the exclusivity and eccentricity of Madam X, making her a spectacular achievement in *vachika abhinaya*. The film takes frequent liberties in logical continuity but the emotional consistency is maintained throughout, as discussed with respect to both Madam X and her counterpart Shalu. Logically, after being pumped full of bullets, Madam X should have died immediately. But she lives long enough to sign off her epitaph herself with her signature

line about being ‘an express of death’, for one last time, thus satisfying the audience’s expectation of a grand exit in logical accordance with her larger-than-life existence throughout. Madam X breathes her last, with a thunderous laugh and a grandiose monologue, like demonic characters in classical theatre, after she declares:

Madam X: Koi hume maarkar hamara ant kya karega, mitne wale nahi hain hum... Zindagi ko apne qaid me liye ghumte hain hum, koi zindagi se hume juda kya karega... (Ha Ha Ha...) Kyunki hum hain Maut ke woh express, duniya jise kehti hai Madam X (AK 1994).

(How anyone can put an end to me by simply killing me, because I am not someone whose memory can be easily erased! I have moved around carrying life in my bondage, how can someone free me from living? [Laughs uproariously] Because I am that death heralding express, which the world knows as Madam X!).

The immortality that Madam X claims (as articulated as a creative wish by its creator Shivdasani while conceiving the character) has eventually come to her in a way. It is present in the ‘continuing recollection of her character among fans of popular Hindi cinema today’,³⁸⁵ and in the way Madam X stands out as a memorable performance in the ‘eclectic and dense’³⁸⁶ filmography of actress Rekha, despite the film’s lack of commercial success at the time of its release. Dressed in black and awash in the red of her own blood (*aharya abhinaya*), raging with fury (*sattva abhinaya*), and making insane claims of immortality (*vachik abhinaya*) with animated gestures (*angik abhinaya*) in the face of sure death (still-37), Rekha’s performance as Madam X, thus ends as a masterclass in the achievement of *samanya abhinaya*. It is a synchronised performing of each of the four types of acting prescribed in the *Natyashastra*, seamlessly blended to leave the memorable *rasa* impact of an inflexibly black or evil persona. The final scene then cuts to Shalu and Vijay singing a love song, marking the fulfilment of her need for love and the lonely Vijay’s need for companionship, as the credits declare a happy ‘The End’.

³⁸⁵ Kumar 2012.

³⁸⁶ Rekha was one of Indian cinema’s leading actresses from the 1970s to early 90s, acclaimed for her performances in popular and parallel cinema with a filmography of over 300 films. *Madam X* remains one of her most unconventional, often remembered, loved and loathed on-screen characterisations.



Still-40: Frequently depicting contrasting emotions in the same frame, especially in the confrontation scenes between Shalu and Madam X, actress Rekha's performance in *Madam X* is a master class in *sattva*/emotion consistent acting.

5.6 Conclusion

The *Natyashastra* prescribes and prioritises nine *bhavas* as *sthayis* or constant feelings, which are considered to be primary, permanent and universal to all human beings. In a performance working towards a dramatised achievement of these *navarasas* they are generally realised through a mix of *rasa*-representing character types, often dominated by at least one of these primary emotions. For instance, in *Mayabazar*, the beautiful 'female' Sasirekha embodying elements of the *rati bhava* in her mood, costumes and behaviour, triggers the sentiment of *sringara* in her young beholders. Abhimanyu through his energetic and valorous acts becomes an on-screen trigger for actions evoking the *vira rasa* in the audience, just as the villainous Shakuni triggers the sentiment of *bibhatsa*, the illusionist Ghatotkacha *hasya* and *adbhuta*, and Krishna, through his nonplussed bringing of calm in the lives of the disturbed protagonists and their relatives, becomes a source of *shanta rasa* for all. Similarly in *Madam X*, while Shalu and Inspector Vijay constantly engage in courageous activities that make for the narrative's *vira rasa* evoking moments, Madam X becomes a consistent catalyst for acts of the *bhayanaka* and the *bibhatsa*, albeit with an ample touch of the *adbhuta* – in the nature of her dressing and the manner of her

exalted speech in metaphors and similes – which makes her the film’s biggest attraction.

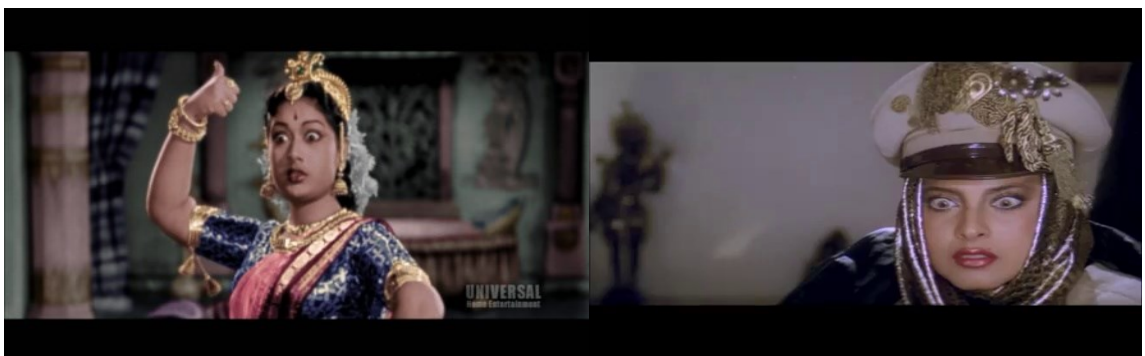
Each character profile, while personifying a singular *rasa* type, however also abounds with fleeting glimpses of most of the other primary feelings, natural to all human beings. But it is in the discrete *bhavas* of a ‘masculine’ Ghatotkacha-as-Sasirekha, in contrast to a feminine Sasirekha, that *Mayabazar* perpetuates the idea of different *bhavas* for different genders. Occasionally the ‘male Sasirekha’ does become an agent for the evocation of the sentiment of wonder, given his character as an illusionist, but what we definitely not see him become is a trigger for any of the *rasas* exclusive to the female Sasirekha, like fear and pity. The ‘female’ Sasirekha strictly expresses herself within a stock set of feelings comprising of love, pity, fear and wonder, evoking the *sringara*, *karuna*, *bhaya* and *adbhuta rasas* respectively, while the ‘male’ Sasirekha gets to broaden the *rasa* set for performance by calling into play acts and expressions of valour, comedy, anger and disgust that trigger the *vira*, *hasya*, *raudra* and *bibhatsa rasas* respectively.

In the clear absence of any negative *rasa* evoking *bhava* (like anger, fear or disgust) in the actions or the personality of Shalu, and in their exclusive manifestation in the villain Madam X only, *Madam X* reaffirms the prescribed *bhava* segregation for good and bad characters. The range of attributes of an evil Madam X never enter or explore even a hint of the pleasurable *rasas*, limiting her mood states to portraying the negative/non-pleasurable *bhavas* of *raudra*, *bhaya* and *jugupsa* only. Even when elements of a positive *rasa* like *vira* are triggered through Madam X, the manifestation is always negative as they are fed by negative *bhavas* like rage and senseless violence. Similarly, Shalu as Madam X occasionally does commit a necessary killing, but what immediately follows is her guilt, where Madam X murders without compunction. Shalu, in a way is a relatively more layered character, but there is a clear demarcation of traits (sadistic enjoyment of violence, unbridled rage, etc.) and body language (bulging eyes, hyperbolic speech, costumes in dark shades) that she never appropriates, just as Madam X is never seen joking or sharing kindness even with her aides. Shalu as the positive Madam X, thus not only softens the edge of Madam X’s negative *bhavas*, but also like Sasirekha, and in spite of

being forced to play her part in a more violent and action oriented space, never compromises on the seven graces (such as beauty, propriety, serenity, maturity or civility) of the ‘ideal’ woman. Though a Mafia boss, she still has compassion for her enemies, rarely loses her calm when tortured, and even gets to sing a love song that enables her to portray the three graces of *sobha* (glowing in the experience of love), *kanti* (radiating in a state of expectant love) and *dipti* (heightened *kanti*) (NS 24.22-29) – those exclusive to a heroine in love.



Stills 41-42: Actresses Savithri (left) and Rekha (right) portray the graces, *sobha* and *kanti*
 In actress Savithri’s opting to differentiate the two Sasirekhas through a selective lending of specific *rasa* enhancing *bhavas*, complimenting and identifying the ‘masculine’ and the ‘feminine’, *Mayabazar* makes its strongest case for a possible acknowledgement of categorising universal human emotions on the basis of gender. In actress Rekha’s opting to differentiate the evil Madam X from her good double, through a selective lending of another set of specific *rasa* enhancing *bhavas* that separate and celebrate the good from the bad, *Madam X* both endorses and perpetuates the *Natyashastra*-recommended *bhava* traits that are be used to differentiate the hero from the villain.



Stills 43-44: Actors from two different eras and genres are united in their similarly performed *angik abhinaya* (gestural expression) of a *bhava* (*raudra/anger*) as suggested by the *Natyashastra*.

The ability of an actor to maintain distinctness in the *angika*, *sattvika*, *vachika* and *aharya* traits of his/her extremely diverse characters, for maximum impact and to enable differentiation between black and white characters, can be reviewed as an achievement and not a limitation. The basis for such an achievement lies in not allowing the characterisation to become diluted by a need to explore the ‘grey’. This is not simply the perpetuation of a stereotype, but a complex aesthetic achievement in consistent characterisation that is steadfast in its *rasa* state and *bhava* traits throughout. In a popular art like cinematic melodrama, a codifying text like the *Natyashastra* recommends that certain *bhavas* will have the most impact when represented by a certain gender or character type. This is a general guideline for performance and for its review which is based on common human experiences. However, by letting one actor be the vehicle for the *rasa* – articulating both the masculine and the feminine, and the good and the bad – *Mayabazar* and *Madam X*, in spite of coming from two different eras, regions and genres of filmmaking, evidence a faith in a good actor’s ability to break stereotypes.

CHAPTER SIX

RASA IN PERFORMANCE: DRAUPADI'S INSULT AND A PLEA FOR VENGEANCE IN NINE EMOTIONS

For all those who say that the Indian audience is no longer attracted to the traditional styles of storytelling they should watch the entertainment content on Indian television. Ninety percent of what is consumed by audiences on a daily basis on TV, at a much more prolific rate than cinema, is not only theatrical in its style but also belongs to an earlier era of filmmaking.

(Director Chandraprakash Dwivedi interview, 2013)

I am a young guy making the *Mahabharata*³⁸⁷. After *Mahabharat (2013-14)*, the old style of making periodicals and costume dramas will no longer work in India. We have thus set a benchmark in a way. Normally TV soaps are written in the simplest possible manner to appeal to the lowest common denominator as people are not supposed to be thinking while watching TV. Our thought was to also attract those who want to engage with some thoughts and philosophies. The crux was to entertain people and through that give a message.

(Director Siddharth Tewary interview, 2014)

6.1 Introduction

In the 100th anniversary year of the Indian film industry, as debates, reviews, and expectations concerning the 'best' in Indian on-screen entertainment continue to fuel global impact aspirations, its oldest genre – the mythological – made an ambitious comeback. *Mahabharat* (Swastik Productions, 16 Sept. 2013-16 Aug. 2014) was the most expensive fiction series on Indian television. The series was telecast daily, at a primetime evening slot, five days a week on the Star Plus channel.³⁸⁸ Its creative director, a 35-year-old business graduate turned filmmaker, Siddharth Tewary, is a young Indian representative of the current millennium's filmmaking generation. He has professionally engaged or worked with Euro-American technicians, is a viewer of international cinema, experiments with new technologies in filmmaking and 'has never been a conscious student

³⁸⁷ The original Sanskrit epic will continue to be referred to as *Mahabharata*. The 2013-14 TV adaptation of the epic telecasted on Star Plus India will be henceforth referred to as *Mahabharat (2013-14)*.

³⁸⁸ Star Plus is a Hindi language general entertainment channel, which is part of 21st Century Fox's Star India network.

of the Sanskrit theatre or studied about its *rasa*-evoking prescriptions from drama' (Tewary interview, 2014). Yet for dramatisation of the most expensive, 'high-risk-themed',³⁸⁹ series on Indian television, which aimed to set a benchmark for costume dramas in on-screen entertainment, Tewary opted for a 'perceived to be melodramatic',³⁹⁰ traditional Indian format of storytelling 'that prioritises a multiple-emotion evoking narration over one that focuses on one or a few emotions in service of a relatively linear, character-driven style of storytelling'³⁹¹.³⁹² According to Tewary:

Action without emotion is zero! However, if you are making the *Mahabharata* for the West [i.e. the USA and Europe] you cannot make it the way we have done. You have to understand that their lifestyle and culture is different and condition your telling accordingly. For instance, there, if something does not fit you in a store you do not give it for alteration, you go for the next option that fits best. There the shops shut at 6 pm, here business picks up after 6 in the evening. I could just go on about the differences... Fact is that our worlds are different. If you are making *Mahabharata* for that world, you might do it the way Peter Brooks adapted the epic,³⁹³ but it did not appeal to me. I am a massy guy in my head so too much intellectualisation does not work for me. A show has to talk to me, make me think, but in an entertaining way, it has to move me emotionally (Tewary interview, 2014).

On telecast, Tewary's *Mahabharat* (2013-14) garnered the highest TVTs (Television Viewership in Thousands) for a mythological in the present millennium on Indian satellite television (Table 1). It is the only televised version of the *epic* to have enjoyed a full run since B.R. Chopra's landmark 1988 adaptation for India's national broadcaster Doordarshan, after three other TV series on the *epic* were pulled off mid-air due to lack of

³⁸⁹ Three television adaptations of the *Mahabharata* (Between 1997-2008), before Tewary's version on Star Plus had been abandoned midway due to lack in viewership.

³⁹⁰ A show like *Mahabharat* (2013-14) would normally be categorised or reviewed as a melodrama, going by the conventional understanding of 'melodrama' to be a dramatic work that exaggerates plot and characters in order to appeal to the emotions, often with strongly stereotyped characters. Language, behaviour, or events which resemble melodramas are also called *melodramatic*. In (Western) scholarly and historical musical contexts *melodramas* are dramas of the 18th and 19th centuries in which orchestral music or song was used to accompany the action.

³⁹¹ Shah Rukh Khan 2012.

³⁹² This can alternately be interpreted that the expectation from an 'ideal' drama/cinema in the Indian context (i.e. a sumptuous evocation of myriad *rasas*) is different from the idea of the 'ideal' in the Western/Euro-American context or parameters of film criticism, which celebrates an isolated engagement with fewer or a singular *rasa*.

³⁹³ Peter Stephen Paul Brook is a France-based, English theatre and film director, who had made a nine-hour long stage play adaptation of the *Mahabharata* with an international cast of actors that was first performed in 1985. This was later abridged and showcased as a six-hour-long TV mini-series and a TV film in 1989.

viewers. It also is the only Indian television series in current times to enjoy repeat telecasts beyond its regular run, with a dubbed re-telecast on six regional language television channels (Bengali, Marathi, Odia, Malayalam, Tamil and Telegu), and serialised international broadcasts in Indonesia (ANTV, starting March 2014) and Mauritius (MBC Digital 4, starting December 2015). From its first episode, *Mahabharat* (2013-14) became the most popular current mythological show on Indian television, and entered the top five fiction show listings after its episodes on the game-of-dice event (Table 1).

Table 1: A comparative review of *Mahabharat*'s (2013-14) TTV ratings

The viewership ratings of few sample weeks from the *Mahabharat* TV series' year-plus telecast on Star Plus is compared with proportionate TTVs of leading shows in other popular Indian television genres like the historical, reality shows and socials. The *Mahabharat* (Star Plus) series can be seen to be having a consistent lead over its next, No.2 mythological show, *Devon Ke Dev Mahadev* (Life OK). The numbers within brackets next to a show's rating points (column 2) indicate its overall ranking among all shows telecasted on Indian General Entertainment Channels in that particular week.

Dates	<i>Mahabharat</i> (Star Plus) No.1 Mythological	No.2 Mythological	No.1 Historical/ Costume Drama	No. 1 Reality Show	No.1 Social	No.1 Channel TTVs ³⁹⁴
8-14 Dec. 2013	3.6 (4)	N/A	Jodha Akbar: 4.9 (1)	Comedy Nights with Kapil: 3.6 (1)/ Bigg Boss 7: 2.8 (3)	Diya Aur Bati Hum 5.7 (1)	Star Plus: 579 (Million TTVs) Colors: 449 (Million TTVs) Zee TV: 439 (Million TTVs)
12-18 Jan 2014	3.6 (4)	Mahadev 3.3 (2)	Jodha Akbar 9.8 (1)	Comedy Nights with Kapil 5.2 (1)/India's Got Talent 3.7 (2)	Diya Aur Baati Hum 6.4 (1)	Star Plus: 626 Zee TV: 471 Colors: 467
9-15 Feb 2014	7.5 (3)	Devon Ke Dev Mahadev 2.9 (3)	Jodha Akbar 11.6 (1)	Comedy Nights with Kapil 9.1 (1)/India's Got Talent 5 6.6(2)	Diya Aur Baati Hum 13.3 (1)	Star Plus: 702 Colors: 504 Zee TV: 457
9-16 March 2014	3.0 (4)	Devon Ke Dev Mahadev: N/A	Jodha Akbar 5.0 (1)	Comedy Nights with Kapil 3.9 (1)	Saath Nibhana Saatiya 5.9 (1)	Star Plus: 727 Zee TV: 501 Colors: 466
6-12 April	9.1 (2) Telecast of the	Devon Ke Dev	Jodha Akbar 9.3	Comedy Nights with Kapil 9.1	Diya Aur Baati	

³⁹⁴ Television Viewership in Thousands (indiantelevision.com: Mahabharat 2013-2014).

2014	Cheer Haran episodes	Mahadev 2.4			Hum 13.4 (1)	
13-19 April 2014	7.7 (3)	Devon Ke Dev Mahadev 2.1 (6)	Jodha Akbar 10.5 (1)	Comedy Nights with Kapil 8.5 (1)/ Fear Factor: 7.3 (2)	Diya Aur Baati Hum 14.5 (1)	Star Plus: 790 Colors: 433 Zee TV: 473
11-17 May 2014	6.0 (4)	Devon Ke Dev Mahadev 1.7 (7)	Jodha Akbar 8.9 (1)	Comedy Nights with Kapil 5.5 (1)/Khatron Ke Khiladi 5.3 (2)	Saath Nibhana Saathiya 9.8 (1)	Star Plus: 681 Zee TV: 394 Colors: 367
8-14 June 2014	6.5 (3)	Devon Ke Dev Mahadev 1.9 (7)	Jodha Akbar 7.7 (1)	Comedy Nights with Kapil 5.9 (1)/Jhalak Dikhhala Jaa 5.6 (2)	Diya Aur Baati Hum 9.4 (1)	Star Plus: 626 Zee TV: 376 Colors: 366
13-19 July 2014	9.4 (2) (9.1) Abhimanyu Vadh	Devon Ke Dev Mahadev 2.0 (3)	Jodha Akbar 9.3 (1)	Comedy Nights with Kapil 6.8 (1)/ Jhalak Dikhhala Jaa 5.6 (2)	Diya Aur Baati Hum 10.5 (1)	Star Plus: 712 Zee TV: 436 Life OK: 361
10-16 August 2014	(9.1) 8.5 (3) End of War	Devon Ke Dev Mahadev 1.7 (3)	Jodha Akbar 7.5 (2)	Comedy Nights with Kapil 6.9 (1)/ Jhalak Dikhhala Jaa 4.8 (3)	Diya Aur Baati Hum 10.7 (1)	Star Plus: 689 Zee TV: 453 Colors: 411

The ratings peaked in the week depicting the disrobing of queen Draupadi in the court of King Dhritarashtra, which is the climactic sequence within the game-of-dice event. A moment of high drama with immense consequences that eventually led to the *Mahabharata* war, this significant sequence in the game-of-dice event will henceforth be referred to by its reference term in the epic, as the ‘*cheer haran* sequence’. Since viewership rating statistics are a recognised television industry yardstick for ascertaining the popularity of a television show, I will conclude the previous chapter’s arguments for a *rasa-based analysis* of Indian acting with evidence from television. This becomes necessary, since television is the most consumed medium of on-screen entertainment in India, after cinema.

Having discussed the distribution, working, and evoking of the *rasa* imperative in an entire narrative’s plot construction (chapter four) and in the dominant mood states and

traits of a character throughout a film (chapter five), this chapter, will focus on the intricacies and the nature of multiple *rasa* achievements within the smallest narrative unit of a filmed story – i.e. a sequence or a scenario. It will discuss how the knowledge and awareness of the *bhavas* and *rasas* can help identify and review the success of a range of expressions in a multiple-emotion conveying performance of an Indian actor. This type of performance is often erroneously under-appreciated or dismissed as melodramatic. Indian drama categories of review will also be explored to understand why according to the *Natyashastra* not every stylised dramatic presentation with song, music and expressive performances is a melodrama and how the knowledge and nature of *rasa* evocation can help distinguish ‘melodrama’ (as understood in the Indian drama context) from a good drama. Just as every *masala* film is not *Sholay*, similarly dismissing every emotive act that is accompanied by song, hyperbolic dialogue, or music as melodrama, is too simplistic and inadequate. Mukesh Singh, one of the ‘episode directors’³⁹⁵ of *Mahabharat* (2013-14) explains:

It is wrong to generalise that the Indian audience only likes melodrama and that all the performances in Indian films and television shows are melodramatic. There is a term in the *Natyashastra* called *raso-ut-patih* [the birth of a *rasa*]. If a person watching a drama is not able to feel anything then there is no *rasoutpatih*. When actors acting in a scene are not behaving according to the situation, by being either over the top [this could be closest to what is understood as ‘melodramatic’ in the context of traditional Indian drama appreciation] or by under playing or underperforming [this is a common complaint of Indian audiences against realism-driven European/Indian parallel cinema performances]³⁹⁶ the emotional state of a character in their performed actions and reactions, then they are not going to touch your heart. And if a performance is not touching your heart, then there is no *rasa*. An actor has to understand the situation and play accordingly. When their interpretation is completely in sync with the situation and the emotion graph of a character, that is drama [this is the

³⁹⁵ In any mega-episodes spanning mammoth television serial like the *Mahabharat* (2013-14), different episode directors are employed on a shooting location or a set to simultaneously shoot multiple sequences of a televised episode. Different episode directors are also employed to shoot indoor and outdoor sequences. Their differently shot content, is then sent to the editing studio, often a few kilometres away in the nearest city (e.g. Mumbai for the *Mahabharat* TV series, which was shot in Umergaon in the neighbouring state of Gujarat) for final editing and re-fashioning into a logically narrated sequence that is then sent to the channel for telecast. This final making of an episode is overseen by a creative director, like Tewary, who ranks above the episode directors in the hierarchy of television content makers.

³⁹⁶ Rajabali (to) Ganti 2004: 183.

highest/most admired form of performance, which a critic unaware of the *rasa* theory or the art of *rasa*-evocation is prone to erroneously under value as melodrama] (Singh interview, 2014).

In the above observation perhaps lies an insight into why Tewary's *Mahabharat* (2013-14) became popular with the Indian audiences, while Ekta Kapoor's equally ambitious *Kahaani Hamaaray Mahaabhaarat Ki* (*The Story of our Mahaabharat*, 9X 2008) failed 'for being too loud or melodramatic with inconsistencies between its actor performances' (Shukla interview, 2014), and Chandraprakash Dwivedi's *Ek Aur Mahabharat* (Zee TV 1997) was taken off air after only 14 episodes for being too subtle/realistic in comparison to the stylised/dramatic acting expectations from epic characters. According to the *Natyashastra*, the performer and the audience, the actor and the viewer are necessary participants and accomplices – *sahrydayas* – in the *bhava* generated and the *rasa* realised experience, as previously discussed in chapter four. A viewer, or a critic ignorant of the style, nature and the history of influences on a performance, and the context of a character, will not be able to fully relish its *rasa*. For instance, without the knowledge of the specific set of emotions expected to be prioritised in a dramatic performance with epic motivations, (as discussed in chapter five), one will not be able to identify and appreciate the layers of intricate *bhavas* being conjured in the fleeting facial expressions of an actor's interpretation. Such a viewer or a critic will continue to misread the complexities in an expressive art form as exaggerated and unreal.

This thesis, through multiple case studies and interviews has established how the expectations from a dramatic art or an aesthetic performance can vary between cultures. This chapter, through a detailed analysis of every passing mood/*bhava* state and their corresponding *rasa* reactions/expressions on a protagonist's visage within one particular dramatic scenario, will discuss the emotive range and the impact of an actor's performance in a highly dramatic sequence. It will explain how even within a character's seemingly singular *rasa*-dominating performance, a complex play of fleeting emotions (often missed) can be noticed and appreciated by a *sahrydaya* (empathetic) viewer with an awareness and knowledge of the *rasa* theory, leading them to experience true *rasoutpatih*.

This will be done through a freeze-frame study of the range of expressions enacted by actress Pooja Sharma (who plays queen Draupadi), in the *cheer haran* sequence. The frames and the reactions they represent will identify the myriad emotive layers in her complex dramatic performance and aid an appreciation of how Draupadi is able to retain and evoke a consistent character sentiment throughout the sequence. *Bhava* consistencies of other major characters and the use of *Natyashastra*-recommended personality enhancing colour in costumes will be identified. Finally, an understanding will be offered, based on interviews with the cast and crew of *Mahabharat* (2013-14), of the conscious and sub-conscious processes at play on a contemporary Indian shooting location, which work towards the goal of providing the audience with a sumptuous relishing of *rasa* through a roller-coaster multi-emotion experience akin to a good *masala* film. This chapter, while contributing to the dissertation's uniting argument on the influence and relevance of the *rasa* evocation idea in Indian on-screen entertainment, will reveal how competent storytellers use its 'eternally relevant recommendations' (Singh interview, 2014) in actual practice to enhance the appeal of a dramatic experience.

6.2. Mahabharata: an epic in nine rasas

Mukesh Singh, the on-the-set episode director of the *cheer haran* sequence says:

Yanna Bharate, tanna Bharate (what is not in the *Mahabharata*, is not in India) thus goes the introduction of the epic. I would rather say that whatever does not exist in the *Mahabharata*, does not exist anywhere in the world. All the types of emotions, characters and characteristic nation states existent in the world are described in this story. Any human emotion or character that you can imagine, you will find in the *Mahabharata*. Any story that consists of all the nine *rasas* is called a *mahakavya*, and that's why the *Mahabharata* is called a *mahakavya*. Other stories that have one, two or fewer number of *rasas* are called *kavyas* (Singh interview, 2014).

If the *Mahabharata* is a *mahakavya* evoking the nine *rasas*, its *cheer haran* sequence, is a micro manifestation of that dramatic promise. What starts as a sorrowful event of extreme disgust – the molestation of a lady by the male members of her family on a public platform – ends up leaving its audience with a feeling of wonder and the victim in a state of calm! In this traversing from an extremely negative emotion to one of positive elation, lies the dramatic appeal of the sequence in its ability to let a dramatist or director explore

the possibility of evoking multiple *rasas* in the audience. According to Tewary:

The *Mahabharata* is the biggest *masala* story in the world. There is pathos, and there is wonder in the same sequence – that is the beauty of the epic. You cannot think of a better story in your lifetime. Just look at the way the story connects. What happened years ago connects to events right in the end... That way the *Mahabharata* is a tremendous potboiler drama, the biggest soap opera era, superbly written with great conflicts (Tewary interview, 2014).

The makers of *Mahabharat* (2013-14) reinterpret and present the action in the sequence in such a manner that they are not only able to achieve the above mentioned *rasas*, but a sumptuous serving of all the *navarasas* to retain audiences through its 14-episode spanning telecast, despite their prior knowledge of the story. According to Tewary:

You will find many versions of the epic across India and more if you venture into South-east Asia. People retelling it as a story too add their own interpretations. It has had public and personal interpretations, so I thought I will make my own interpretation, try and ask questions and do whatever appeals to me. I have stuck to the basic crux, but we have taken little creative liberties in how we want to tell it because it is an epic poem into which people have been writing out their interpretations. Ved Vyas [the original author of the Sanskrit epic *Mahabharata*] and the subsequent writers did not give us a screenplay; they had just written a poem. You have to decipher it, understand it and make your own version. That is why I think people have liked this perspective (Tewary interview, 2014).

In Tewary's version, the *cheer haran* sequence is presented as its makers' comment on and 'support to the public and media outrage across India that followed the Delhi gang rape incident of 16 December 2012' (Jain interview, 2014). These new elements of confrontation and dramatic twist are introduced to serve all the *rasas*, most of which are evoked by characters embodying at least one each, from the nine permanent mood sentiments. The scene's heroine and protagonist Draupadi, however gets to evoke most of the nine sentiments to varying intensities as is permissible within and consistent with her character's dominant *bhava* trait of a courageous heroine.

This chapter will explore in detail the five episodes (*Mahabharat*, ep. 153-157) from Draupadi's entry to her exit in king Dhritarashtra's court, specifically focusing on the *cheer haran* sequence within the game-of-dice event. The entire game-of-dice event in the television series makes for nearly 280 minutes of dramatised content, in the longest on-screen depiction of the event in an Indian cinematic or television adaptation of the

Mahabharata. It thus allows ample narrative opportunity for the show's makers and immense performance possibility for its 'talented' actors to showcase a gamut of conflicting emotions to sumptuous *navarasa* impact.

6.3 Summary overview of the *cheer haran* sequence

The game-of-dice event begins with the five sons of Pandu, the Pandavas and their common wife Draupadi, entering the court of Pandu's elder brother, king Dhritarashtra of Hastinapur, after having accepted his invitation to a celebration in their honour. This is the only moment (still-1) when Draupadi is shown in a state of joy (as bliss born of contentment) and presented as a vision of resplendent *sringara*, as manifested in her character's choice of tasteful clothing, make-up and adornments.



Still-1: Draupadi in a joyous state of *sringara*

The occasion is the eldest Pandava, Yudhistira being declared the emperor of the entire Bharatavarsha (then existing Indian sub-continent). The reception is organised by Dhritarashtra's son and crown prince, Duryodhana, the first cousin of the Pandavas. The Pandavas have been warned by Dhritarashtra's prime minister and their uncle Vidur to be on guard. But they still accept the invitation, secure in the assurance of the strength of their *dharma* (righteousness). The highlight of the celebration is a game of dice, where the opposing players, Duryodhana and Yudhistira, agree to play as stakes, possessions that they are or can be 'proud of',³⁹⁷ beyond inanimate possessions. The intention of

³⁹⁷ This is a strategic subterfuge planned by Duryodhana's uncle Shakuni for a possible staking of individuals.

Duryodhana and his scheming uncle Shakuni is to rob the Pandavas of their kingdom through trickery. The prime motive behind the setting up of the game however is the insult of Draupadi. As the scene unfolds, that insult is manifested as a disgusting act against the modesty of a woman, and the deliberate humiliation of a lady, who is the princess of one nation (Panchal), the empress of another (Indraprastha) and the eldest bride of a third (Hastinapur). This is done by getting Yudhistira to first pawn and lose his personal wealth, next his kingdom, then his brothers and finally himself and Draupadi as slaves to Duryodhana. Duryodhana then orders Draupadi, who is residing with his mother, queen Gandhari, to come to Dhritarashtra's court. Draupadi refuses his messenger's request, stating that she is nobody's slave, and argues that no one other than herself has the right to barter her freedom. An enraged Duryodhana deposes his younger brother Dushasana to bring Draupadi, and commands that on encountering further resistance, he should forcibly drag her to the court.

Until now (in the television series) Draupadi has been presented as a dutiful daughter, a caring friend, a loving wife, and a beautiful princess covertly and overtly desired by kings and princes. She has been a passive recipient of affection and attention, but the *cheer haran* sequence is a turning point in her character's journey and the epic's drama. It is Draupadi's moment of greatest histrionic impact in the multi-plot epic's narrative that celebrates myriad heroes. She is not only the focus of the *cheer haran* sequence, but also of one of the most dramatic action moments in the epic so far. The nature of her reactions establish her as a *virangana* or a heroine, with courage as her character's dominant emotional trait. Hence, unlike Gandhari, who is a compassionate heroine, or Subhadra, who is a romantic heroine, Draupadi is a courageous heroine, whose reactions are aimed at evoking the *vira rasa* fuelled by righteous anger towards any act of injustice. According to Tewary:

Born of fire, Draupadi is fire [personified]... Unquestioned submissiveness just does not go with her character. She wears red because she is not someone you can push, shove or ignore. She stands for independence, she never allowed the entry of any of the other wives of the Pandavas into her palace. She is somebody with fire, you touch her and she will burn you, but that aspect to her is revealed only after the *cheer haran* sequence not right after her birth (Tewary interview, 2014).

6.4 Portraying courage through multiple emotions

The ‘Indian epics have been open to interpretations in their retellings’,³⁹⁸ and the *Mahabharat* (2013-14) series is no exception. In creative director Siddharth Tewary’s retelling of the *cheer haran* sequence, Draupadi is the focus of the drama, and not the Pandavas. She is the hero of the scene and is presented as a *virangana*, with courage being her dominant *bhava* (mood state) and *sattva guna* (character trait). However, in Tewary and his team’s presentation, the sequence additionally weaves in the mood states of seven other permanent *bhavas*, united under a common arch of *heroism* and consistently feeding the need for a perpetuated evocation of the *vira rasa*. As the game of dice begins in Dhritarashtra’s court, Draupadi is shown as constantly updated about proceedings. Unlike other film and TV adaptations (e.g. *Mahabharat* 1988), she is not a helpless receiver of bad news, and tries to stop the game when Yudhistira loses his youngest brother and Draupadi’s fifth husband, Nakula. In her public chiding of Yudhistira – ‘How could you lose my husband...’ (Bhuta 2014)³⁹⁹ – is a demonstration of the *rati bhava* that a wife has for her husband. As a loving wife, she rushes to the rescue of her husband, which is a reaction born of love but manifested as heroism as she does not ask for help (yet), but tries to redress the wrong with her still existing powers as an empress. It is her character’s dominant trait of courage that makes her intervene to prevent an injustice, while queen mother Gandhari, who too could have stopped the game, instead opts to lament, hoping that other family elders will correct the wrong. Both the ladies have been established as virtuous women, but the different ways in which they react to a similar provocation is a manifestation and reiteration of their respective personality’s dominant character traits – i.e. courage for Draupadi and compassion for Gandhari.

Draupadi’s fearlessness is further established, as she is the only person in Dhritarashtra’s court who tries to stop an injustice in a decisive manner, and insists that she will not leave

³⁹⁸ Ramanujan 1999; Tewary 2014.

³⁹⁹ Mihir Bhuta, a popular writer in Gujarati and Hindi theatre and the Hindi film and TV industry, wrote the dialogue of *Mahabharat* (2013-14). They became a highlight of the TV series for their thought provoking insights emphasising the contemporary relevance of the epic’s eternal struggle stories and moral dilemmas. Since the *cheer haran* sequence happened towards the series’ telecast phase in 2014, the dialogue from those episodes will be cited as (Bhuta 2014). The translations are mine.

until the game is abandoned. She eventually has to leave the court when requested to by Yudhistira and Dhritarashtra quoting rules of propriety. As Yudhistira starts losing one after another, her other husbands and finally himself, in Draupadi (now in her private chambers), we see a change in mood from confidence to dread born of foreboding. The *bhava* expressed is that of fear, and the *rasa* evoked is that of the happening of something terrible with Draupadi.



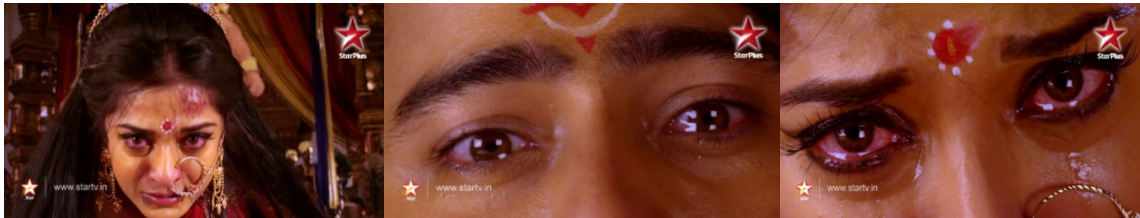
Still-2: Expressing fear; Still-3: The courage trait in Draupadi guides her to fight for self-defence, instead of trying to flee.

When Dushasana barges into her chambers, Draupadi draws a sword and tries to resist. The *bhava* is that of courage in trying to resist an attack through a duel, and the *rasa* evoked is heroism (still-3). She pushes him and heads towards the room of queen mother Gandhari (the mother of Duryodhana and Dushasana). Her gait is in control, not a flight in fear, though her mood is fearful. In these character-specific, dominant behavioural nuances in her reactions, lies a proof of an actor's ability to generate and maintain a consistent emotion state throughout his/her on-screen presence. This facilitates the audience's ability to feel or experience a perceptible emotion for *rasautpatih*. According to the production-controller of *Mahabharat* (2013-14) Kuntal Shukla:

Unless an actor is able to identify and grasp the dominant emotion trait of a character, there will be no truth in his/her interpretation of its nature/state of being. Once you get the true emotional nature of a character correctly, and are then given complementing costumes to wear, which you should be able to carry comfortably, the dominant sentiment state of the character automatically gets conveyed (Shukla interview, 2014).

Before Draupadi can enter Gandhari's room, Dushasana physically stops her and drags her by the hair to Dhritarashtra's court. Natural emotions evoked by such violence against

a woman are outrage in the angry, or sorrow in the compassionate, but in the context of its perpetration by a younger brother-in-law against his elder sister-in-law the emotion turns to disgust. This disgust is magnified by the helplessness of the elders of Draupadi's family, especially Bhishma and Drona, who as '*atimaharathis*',⁴⁰⁰ though each singularly capable of protecting Draupadi, opt to do nothing. There is no scope for any element of romance in such a scene, but the feeling of love (as empathy) is fleetingly displayed in a shot-counter-shot sequencing of close-ups (stills 4-6) as Draupadi's eyes meet those of her third husband, Arjuna, when she is dragged before the Pandavas to the centre of Dhritarashtra's court.



Stills 4-6: Draupadi's personal shame is manifested as anger and disgust (still-4), when she raises her face for the first time to survey the silence of Dhritarashtra's courtiers after being thrown into the centre of the court by Dushasana. It turns to sorrow and a silent request for help (still-6) when her eyes meet those of a tearful Arjuna in empathetic pain (still-5).

None of the other Pandavas dare to look at Draupadi as she surveys their silence, first with a hope of some form of intervention to relieve her from her ordeal, then with a 'silent plea for rescue',⁴⁰¹ which soon turns to sorrow and eventually disgust over their inaction. Only Arjuna returns her gaze, in which their mutual pain is conveyed and acknowledged (stills 5-6). Later in the sequence, when Duryodhana orders her disrobing, Arjuna is the only Pandava who reacts with some protest action by dousing the court room lights.

Finally, when Draupadi in a fit of rage disowns her husbands, it is Arjuna again, who initiates a dialogue with her on behalf of her husbands, asking her to forgive them as a

⁴⁰⁰ *Atimaharathi* is a warrior capable of fighting 12 Maharathis (a warrior capable of fighting 60,000 warriors) simultaneously. Rama, Lakshmana, Vali, Ravana, Hanuman, Bhishma, Drona, Ashwatthama, Karna, Arjuna, Balaram, Jarasandha and *devas* like Indra were *atimaharathis* according to the epics.

⁴⁰¹ Draupadi is never seen begging for help from anyone in true consistency with the *virangana* trait/courageous nature of her character. She instead chides Yudhisthira for staking her honour in a game-of-dice and demands intervention from those valorous courtiers in Dhritarashtra's court, known for their righteousness (Bhishma and Drona) or sagacity (Vidur).

friend, if not as a wife. The *Mahabharata* epic, reveals towards the end that Draupadi loved Arjuna the most, amongst all the Pandavas. He also was the only man with whom she got to share a sentiment of undivided love, for the few moments from his winning her in a *swayamvara*,⁴⁰² to the event of her having to marry Arjuna's other brothers. That unstated special bonding between Draupadi and Arjuna is constantly alluded in their exchanged expressions of empathy, and in Arjuna undertaking some protest within the allowable limits of his bondage to lessen Draupadi's shame. It is no coincidence that the event's final word of warning from a Pandava prince on the ominous repercussions awaiting the Kauravas for insulting Draupadi is also attributed to Arjuna by the makers of the television series.



Stills 7-8: Draupadi's sorrowful demand for justice (still-7) turns to sorrow as pity (still-8) on seeing the helplessness of the court elders in their collective inability to stand-up to an injustice perpetuated by a crown prince.



Stills 9-10: The acting range and talent of Pooja Sharma, playing Draupadi, is displayed in her ability to hold a fluid and flawless transition between diverse emotion states from sorrow (still-8) to disgust (still-9) to anger (still-10) in close-up in a time span of few seconds.

⁴⁰² A ritual contest that frequently occurs in the *Mahabharata*, where eligible grooms undergo a contest of prowess to win a princess as a bride. It was a common marriage custom among the royalty in ancient India.

Draupadi's *bhava* at this point is one of sorrow as she requests her five husbands, father-in-law Dhritarashtra, 'adopted guardian' Drona, uncle-in-law Vidur and the family's eldest member, grandsire Bhishma to provide her with relief as their rightful duty. She never pleads. She questions their silence, inaction and the merit in their morally weakening interpretation of *dharma*, with her tone varying from sorrow to anger. She asks:

If everyone sitting in this court is acting in accordance to their *dharma*, then is it *dharma* that is responsible for the insult of a woman? Is it *dharma* that allows men to exploit women? (Bhuta 2014).

The *rasa* of sorrow is further enhanced when the pleas of the *atimaharathis* are ignored, and they are insulted or forced into silence by Duryodhana. Draupadi watches the debate first with sorrow for the helplessness of the elders in the court, then reprimands in anger as Karna and Duryodhana insult her, and eventually with disgust as she realises the pointlessness of the discussions where everyone is trying to defend their inaction in self-serving interpretations of *dharma*. The *daya vira* (compassionate hero) streak in her heroism is highlighted when her empathy for the helpless elders pleading with Duryodhana for respite, makes her command them to 'be silent' and stop degrading themselves further. She then invites Dushasana to fructify his brother's order to disrobe her, declaring:

The shine on each of your righteous halos has long ebbed. None of you can protect me anymore. If my sanctity is to be upheld, then the lord himself will offer me sanctuary. Come Dushasana, test your strength (Bhuta 2014).

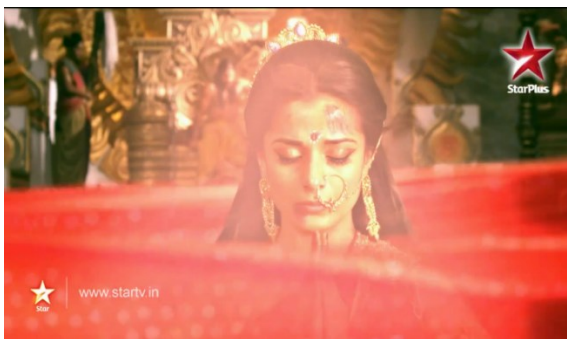
Draupadi's inherent courageous state of being that had been guiding her reactions of self-defence until now, is accentuated to a heightened state of heroism, setting the stage for an unusual act of courage, evoking its most complimenting *rasa*, that of wonder, in her ability to achieve personal calm amidst provocations of immense turbulence. She then enters a state of complete *sharanagat* (surrender to the divine), akin to a true devotee, closes her eyes and prays to Lord Krishna for rescue. Her face is lit up to manifest and elicit *vismaya*/wonder regarding the calm she can gather amidst such turbulence as the series leads its audiences to one of the epic's biggest spectacles. The *rasa* of wonder is now evoked as yards of saris start cascading down from all corners to drape Draupadi's shame

(still-11), as Dushasana keeps pulling her never ending sari until he drops down from exhaustion.



Still-11

In prayer and oblivious of the action or the spectacle around her (still-12), when Draupadi finally opens her eyes after the miracle of the unending sari ends, her face radiates an expression of complete calm (still-13). Actress Pooja Sharma at that moment is an image of one of the most difficult *bhavas* to portray in acting, that of inner peace (still-13).



Still-12



Still-13

Depicting a state of no emotion, she then admirably extends that accomplishment first to the *angika* (gestural) and *sattvika* (emotional) aspects of her act, and then to the *vachika* (verbal), as she begins speaking in a controlled tone of raging emotion, to bring a curse on Dhritarashtra's court. From a state of calm she metamorphoses into a picture of rage

(still-14), bathed in the halo of a goddess born, stating:

I am no more a human, but death incarnate. I am the death of every evil being in this court of sin. Today I have wept the tears of all the unfortunate women in the world. This entire court will now be swept away (Bhuta 2014).



Still-14



Still-15

At this point, Draupadi's mother-in-law, Kunti and queen mother Gandhari rush into the well of the court, and try to calm her. Next Arjuna appeals her to regain her self-control, and Draupadi is shown remembering Krishna's advice to never let go of restraint. That realisation releases her from her super human (goddess like) state of trance, allowing her to regain her human identities of princess, queen and a bride. The memories and the emotion of humiliation return too, which change her *bhavas* from anger to sorrow (as self-pity), and she breaks down in the arms of Kunti (still-15). This is the first person she allows to touch and console her in the entire sequence. King Dhritarashtra, chided by the disgusted reaction of his wife queen Gandhari, the angry warnings of Kunti, and a fear of Draupadi's curse, pleads for Draupadi's forgiveness and requests her to ask for a boon. She first asks for the independence of her husbands, and then a return of their kingdom. Duryodhana objects and another debate commences, over which a disgusted Draupadi, angered by the indecisiveness of the men, curses them, stating:

Beware you upholders of *dharma*. Duryodhana will definitely pay for his sins, but before that everyone present here who let that sin happen without protest too will be punished for their silence (Bhuta 2014).



Still-16

Draupadi, then walks out with a victor's gait, with courage and confidence strategically framed within a halo of fire (still-16), as the lone embodiment of the *vira rasa* in a room full of shamed male heroes and villains. Shukla reviews Sharma's performance in the *cheer haran* sequence as a true work of *samanya abhinaya*, where all the four aspects of acting complement each other to generate *rasa*. He says:

I was very impressed with Pooja's voice modulation. Born from the holy *yagna*⁴⁰³ fire, Draupadi by nature, is a fiery personality. Hence she does not have to shout to convey her anger. Even if she is silent, the energy of her persona is reflected in the very nature of her being, and felt by the audience. This is how a good actor's performance normally generates the feeling of *rasa* in the audience. A mastery of the *bhavas* is essential in a medium that works with close-ups. In this serial the camera does not act – you will not find the zip, zap and zoom movements that you see in other serials, in our *Mahabharat*. Either the camera or the actors should move, both should never move simultaneously, especially while conveying an emotion (Shukla interview, 2014).

Stating that only when an actor achieves complete identification with a character that he/she is able to generate *rasoutpatih*, the on-set director of the sequence, Singh, says:

I was amazed by the emotive capabilities of so young an actor and the way she [Pooja Sharma] had managed to portray so many *bhavas* in that one sequence. If you are trying to show I am sad, or trying to show you are happy... there is no

⁴⁰³ A *Vedic* ritual of sacrifice.

rasoutpatih. You have to feel the happiness inside. Feel *vira rasa* inside, feel *bibhatsa* (disgust) inside, feel *raudra* (anger) inside, you do not have to try to show okay now I am feeling *bibhatsa* (disgusted), just feel it. If you try to show, it is melodrama, if you feel what you are showing, then that is drama. That was the idea of Bharat muni (Singh interview, 2014).

The success of *rasoutpatih* in Sharma's performance is further evidenced in the felt manifestation of the *rasa* of sorrow; among her co-actors in the scene, who also were the first to witness her performance. They reacted with spontaneous tears. According to Tewary:

The *cheer haran* was a difficult sequence to shoot because everyone was crying on the sets. The actors playing the Pandavas were actually crying over the helplessness of their characters. They could feel it, sitting there, and not being able to do anything (Tewary interview, 2014).

Crew and cast members responding with the desired emotional reaction to a sequence is often the first unofficial test that directors rely on while shooting. That take is then canned with the hope that it will evoke similar sentiments in the audience watching it at a later date.

The *cheer haran* sequence finally ends in accordance with another *Natyashastra* guideline; a dramatic performance should conclude with a message or education for its viewers. In *Mahabharat* (2013-14), the *sutradhar* (narrator) of the series, Lord Krishna, makes a direct address to the audience, urging them to contemplate over mankind's repeated exploitation and subjugation of women down the ages. It ends with a warning that 'whenever and wherever any woman is humiliated and exploited in some form or the other the seed for a battle, or another *Mahabharat* is sown' (Jain interview, 2014). Krishna's critique is a conscious addition by the series' makers towards finishing the scene in a heightened state of the *vira rasa*. This is offered in the assurance of definite punishment for the perpetrators of a heinous crime by none other than God himself. According to Saurabh Raaj Jain, who plays the character of Krishna in *Mahabharat* (2013-14):

What happened with Draupadi is not a solitary, but a repeating incident that we have been encountering day after day in our news and media space. Today, it is a trauma that everyone could relate to. The thought of Krishna's monologue after

the *cheer haran* was related to the Nirbhaya incident. The learning in the thought was that *Mahabharats* will keep happening if these kind of things are going to happen. The high TRPs are perhaps because everybody today can relate to these types of incidents. So even if someone is watching our *Mahabharat* for entertainment, if he ends up learning something, then that would make a huge difference to the society. Bharat muni's entire purpose behind creating the *Natyashastra* was to highlight the need for enlightenment with entertainment... (Jain interview, 2014).

The *cheer haran* sequence thus marks its second end (after Draupadi's exit), also in the *vira rasa* as Krishna warns of retribution on those committing crime against women, after a sumptuous serving of the *bibhatsa*, *bhayanaka*, *raudra*, *karuna* and *adbhuta rasas*, interspersed with events that offer a spattering of the *sringara* and *hasya*.

6.5 *Rasa* achievements in character acts

The performance of the 'hero' of the scene, Draupadi, is consistent throughout with the courageous trait *in* her character. Its impact is heightened in the sequence's grand denouement with an act of wonder/*adbhuta*, (which also is the *vira rasa's* most complimenting *rasa* state).⁴⁰⁴ However, what makes actress Pooja Sharma's interpretation of Draupadi in *Mahabharat* (2013-14) a histrionic achievement is her ability to evoke a gamut of *rasas* through manifestations of seven other permanent *bhavas* (except *hasya*) in a sequence – *fear-love-grief-anger-disgust-wonder-calm-anger/valour* – that, in the nature of their manifestation, contribute towards establishing her character's dominant *rasa* of a *virangana*/brave heroine. Since the *rasas* are an outcome of permanent sentiments that are fundamental and universal to all human beings, a well-etched character having nuance is bound to trigger them. 'All heroes and anti-heroes have the same permanent sentiments. It is the treatment that an actor gives to a character that makes it different'.⁴⁰⁵ According to Shukla:

Every character is a summation or product of the *navarasas*. Situations trigger *rasas*. If I am [a product of both positive and negative *rasas*], then I can choose to be a sinner, a rapist, or a good person. All the *rasas* are in me, so I can be anyone or react in anyway. It all depends on whether my reaction to a provocation is positive or negative. Krishna used his valour to try to drape Draupadi in infinite yards of saris. Dushasana used his valour to keep on pulling the unending saris

⁴⁰⁴ NS.6.40-42.

⁴⁰⁵ Mishra 2010: 102.

until he fell from exhaustion. But since Krishna's show of strength was for a good cause, it evoked the *rasa* of compassion, while Dushasana's strength was spent on evoking something disgusting. A good drama is thus a mix of characters evoking different *rasas*, and hence every character happens to embody at least one dominant *rasa* (Shukla interview, 2014).

Based on the reactions of some of the leading characters in the *cheer haran* sequence, Singh says, 'Bheema represented the *raudra rasa*, Arjuna *vira*, Yudhistira⁴⁰⁶ *shanta*, Duryodhana and Dushasana *bibhatsa*, while Karna was a combination of various *rasas*' (Singh, interview, 2014). Thus, while the *cheer haran* sequence not only has characters embodying the various *rasas*, even their behavior towards Draupadi is conditioned by a diversity of individual emotions triggered by her character. Her questions evoke the *rasa* of *bibhatsa* in Karna, as it is born of a belief system that equates a woman marrying five men to a prostitute. In Duryodhana, they evoke the *raudra rasa* because his reaction to Draupadi is conditioned by the memory of a past insult. Among the elder courtiers, like Bhishma and Vidur, it evokes the *karuna rasa*, while the Pandavas' reactions of helplessness frequently tip over into anger that is manifested in the many oaths of future retribution by Bheema and Arjuna. Yudhistira, true to his character's dominant *bhava* of *sama*, remains silent throughout, as a '*paatra*'⁴⁰⁷ containing the *shanta rasa*. The clearly identifiable sentiments of the different characters in the *cheer haran* sequence; their dominant character *bhavas* and *rasas*; and their mood-appropriate clothing colours are briefly summarised below, highlighting again, an Indian drama's broad adherence to *Natyashastra* prescriptions (see Table 2).

⁴⁰⁶ A break-up of Yudhistira's name – one who is constant/calm in a state of war i.e. *yudh-me-sthir* – itself indicates calmness to be his character's dominant trait.

⁴⁰⁷ 'The word '*paatra*' [used for a character] in Sanskrit also means a vessel from which you can drink anything. Drinking salted buttermilk from it, makes the vessel salty to taste. Sweet milk makes it sweet. Use the '*paatra*' to drink the juice of fruits or alcohol. As long as it is filled with something, it remains as if it is made to contain only that. The mind of the actor is like an empty vessel. You can fill it with the feelings of any character. After doing a role, as the actor gets off the stage, his mind becomes empty again, like the vessel that is emptied after use' (Mishra 2010: 101-102).

Table 2: *Bhava* co-ordinated costumes for heightened *Rasa* impact

Name of Character	Dominant Character Emotions (<i>Bhavas</i>) Expressed	Dominant <i>Rasa</i> /s Evoked by their Actions	<i>Rasa</i> -Specific Costume Colours as recommended by the <i>Natyashastra</i>	Colour of the Costumes by actors worn in the <i>cheer haran</i> scene
Duryodhana	Anger-Disgust	Disgust	Blue	Dark Blue and Red
Shakuni	Fear-Disgust	Fear and Disgust	Black	Black
Dushasana	Anger-Disgust	Fear and Disgust	Blue	Dark Blue
Karna	Anger	Fear and Disgust	Yellow-Orange	Light Orange
Bhishma	Sorrow	Sorrow	Pigeon Grey	Ash Colour
Dronacharya	Anger	Sorrow	Pigeon Grey	Red
Vidur	Courage-Sorrow	Sorrow	Orange	Orange
Draupadi	Courage-Anger	Heroism and Anger	Red-Orange	Red
The Pandavas		Pity		
Yudhistira	Calm-Sorrow	Pity and Disgust ⁴⁰⁸	Pigeon Grey-Blue	Blue and Yellow
Bheema	Heroism-Anger	Anger-Pity	Red	Orange and Yellow
Arjuna	Heroism-Love-Anger	Heroism-Pity	Orange-Pigeon Grey	Cream and Yellow

⁴⁰⁸ Though the character of Yudhistira is calm and righteousness personified throughout the epic, the game-of-dice is the only sequence where his actions (like putting his family members on stake) and subsequent non-action and restraining of his brothers from mitigating Draupadi's insult based on a flawed and self-serving interpretation of *dharma*, evoke disgust.

Krishna	Sorrow-Anger- Heroism	Heroism- Wonder	Orange-Yellow	Yellow
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Stills 17-18: The ‘evil’ Kauravas (still-17) are draped in darker shades of blue (the colour complement of the emotion of disgust), whereas the ‘good’ Pandavas (still-18) are dressed in lighter shades of the positive heroic emotion complementing colours, (exception Yudhistira). Given the disgusting nature of the actions committed, the sequence’s *mise-en-scène* (especially lighting) too is hued in a complementing darker hue of blue.

6.6 *Bhava/Rasa* training for *Mahabharat* (2013-14)

Most of the actors playing the lead characters in *Mahabharat* (2013-14) had to undergo an acting workshop to prepare for their roles, where they were made aware of the acting guidelines in the *Natyashastra*. Saurav Gurjar, an Indian national level kick-boxing champion, making his debut in the character of Bheema reveals:

We were taught about *bhava* and *rasas* in an acting workshop that we had to undergo before the commencement of actual shooting. But unlike most other actors in my age group, I was aware of it, since I had studied in a Hindi medium school where these concepts were taught to us. Knowledge of the *rasas* is important for every actor, but it is even more helpful for those acting in a mythological because one has to go through the displaying of a greater roller coaster of emotions in this genre. I believe, that any actor who wants to make a mark in his career, should attempt to act in an adaptation of the *Mahabharata* at least once, because it has all the *rasas* and characters with every possible *bhava* (Gurjar interview, 2014).

The ‘roller-coaster’ acting that Gurjar is referring to is basically the stylised form of *Natyadharmi* performance that the *Natyashastra* extensively discusses, especially in the context of epics with larger-than-life characters. According to Shukla:

Unlike the regular *saas-bahu* (family socials) type of drama in close-ups, the drama in a mythological has to be achieved in collaboration with all the actors and their acting styles happening in the same wave length, which is why a

common workshop becomes necessary as was done with this *Mahabharat*. Otherwise actors with varying calibers will bat at varying wavelengths like what happened in Ekta Kapoor's *Kahaani Hamaaray Mahaabhaarat Ki* (its actors Ronit Roy, Jaya Bhattacharya, Anita Hassanandani... all were on different wavelengths) because of which it could never connect with the audience. One even needs a different posture and modulation to deliver the dialogue in a mythological. Doing an epic series is a group art, and the actors in this serial have been successful to a great extent in generating the right *bhavas* and *rasas*. Many times, when we were shooting at the outdoors, I have seen so many viewers falling at the feet of Saurabh Jain, [the actor who plays Lord Krishna]. Ye unke bhaav utpan karne ki ability ke success ka proof hai ki wo serial ke bahar bhi apne liye darshakon mein bhakti ras ka bhav generate kar rahe hain (This is a proof of the success of the actor in expressing the true *bhava* of his divine character through his performance that even outside of the show, he is able to generate the feeling/*rasa* of devotion among his viewers) (Shukla interview, 2014).

Actor Saurabh Raaj Jain, who plays one of the most popular characters in *Mahabharata*, Lord Krishna, credits his character's popularity to its ability to evoke the *navarasas* that make him both human and relatable, and hence contemporary. According to Jain:

The concept of the *navarasas* is extremely relevant and something every actor should be aware of and know how to evoke to become a versatile actor. Krishna embodies the *navarasas* and the *chausath kalas* (64 arts). So if you are portraying Krishna always as that smiling, twinkling character, then where are the *rasas* and the *kalas*? Why does Krishna have that slightly heavier make-up than his contemporaries? Because fine dressing too was part of one of his *kalas*; and so was his embodying the whole diversity of human emotions... That was the image I was working to achieve in my interpretation of Krishna. We were definitely conscious about how to make our Krishna different from previous portrayals, how to make him contemporary. In our creative discussions we realised that in spite of being a God he was born in a human form and I personally believe that *Mahabharata* is history, not mythology. So all the emotions that come with the human species have to be with him as well. That focus on bringing out that human side of God, eventually became the most endearing difference of our Krishna (Jain interview, 2014).



Stills 19-21: (L to R) Actor Saurabh Raaj Jain as Lord Krishna displays the *bhavas* of sorrow, *smita hasya* (smirk) and anger, through the *cheer haran* sequence miracle and subsequent direct address to the audience.

The self-reviews of Gurjar and Jain provide insights on the benefits of the knowledge of *bhavas* and *rasas* in the enhancement of their craft courtesy of their training under *Natyashastra* guidelines. Shukla, who has worked as a crew member on successful television shows across popular TV genres like the social and the mythological, says:

Every actor and director working in India is consciously or unconsciously following the prescriptions of Bharata muni. Those who are untrained actors, they learn and perform by watching the trained actors. Those who are trained, are taught about sage Bharata's *Natyashastra*, while also being exposed to Aristotle's ideas on acting. The difference between the two is like that between a tabla (an Indian drum) and a drum. Both are leather instruments, but while the tap on a *tabla* will make its Indian listener spontaneously shake a limb to a rhythm that's recognised from within, the same reaction does not happen to a drum's beat. Fact is that we have got used to things that are emotive or strike an emotional chord within us. Take our cinema for instance. Any film that has been successful from *Baazigar* (Abbas Mastaan 1993) to *Delhi Belly* (Abhinay Deo 2011), have at the fundamental level been very strong at evoking emotions. Sage Bharata's ideas enjoy universal resonance, be it in certain aspects of Aristotle's theory or the visual pleasures of *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola 1972). It is these *navarasas* that makes our cinema different from other world cinemas (Shukla interview, 2014).

A creative openness towards a fusion of influences, while retaining the Indian core in their interpretation is arguably echoed in Shukla's very choice of words as he seamlessly flits between English and Hindi, acknowledges Greek and Indian philosophies on aesthetics, and employs examples from Bollywood and Hollywood. In these illuminating reviews by creators of drama, both behind and in front of the camera, and on good and bad acting, along *rasa*-based parameters, it is revealed that within a stylised performance, lies an intricate art form. One that is arrived at via intense training and a studied or guided knowledge in traditional Indian performance aesthetics.

6.7 Constructing *rasa* in post-production

Rasa is evoked in filmed content at two levels. The first is on the set itself, among the crew and onlookers present during the shooting of a sequence. The second is in the conscious decisions taken by its makers; through deliberate changes to conventional shooting practises, and the heightening of a sequence's emotional impact through editing choices made during post-production. According to Tewary:

On television and even within our *Mahabharat* TV series, we normally do not shoot the plot of an episode or an event in the linear way in which it appears on telecast. One sequence from one episode and another from another episode can often get shot on the same day and then joined on edit. But we shot the *cheer haran sequence* as a linear narrative. It took us a month to write the sequence. Next we sent the script to the sets and asked every actor to read it, including the technical crew working on the episodes. Then we had a discussion with everyone on why this is the most important sequence and discussed each character's emotional journey through the whole sequence and told them to ask any relevant question pertaining to their role. So it was not like [as is the common practice for shooting on television] the actors were coming to the set on the day of the shot and asking and understanding about their scene for that day... My way of working is to not memorise the lines, but to feel it, in order to be able to add value to the emotion while speaking. I wanted people to feel how that girl who was being dragged felt, so the entire dragging sequence was done as one long take for the viewers to feel Draupadi's emotion and I also shot the scene in close-ups on her face at 100 frames in slow motion to heighten that feeling and convey each of the emotions [e.g. the changing *bhavas* in freeze frames discussed above] that she was feeling as the sequence was happening. Even the way she was thrown [into the well of the court], and the way a lone spot light was made to fall on her when she makes that decisive line asking all to "shut up" and the way she changed the emotion in her voice for that moment, that entire environment and the synchronisation of emotions of everybody who was standing in that frame is what I think made it so impactful. I really felt at that moment that we had actually shot something worthwhile (Tewary interview, 2014).

Saurav Gurjar, who played the character of one of Draupadi's five husbands, Bheema says:

We shot that sequence over nine days, and for those nine days even off the sets we all were in a somber mood. For the first few episodes we all were literally crying (still-22). Any compassionate human being, whether he can help or not, will definitely feel pained on hearing a woman's calls in distress. In the initial days of shoot, the tears would naturally come in each of us, but once the shooting started getting stretched we did use glycerin (Gurjar interview, 2014).



Still-22: Saurav Gurjar as an emotional Bheema

To evoke that ‘worthwhile experiencing of *rasoutpatih*’ on the set and sustain it among a television audience that is partaking the scene at a later telecast, with myriad distractions, calls for a post-production heightening of *rasa* through editing. The choice of which *bhava* reactions of the actors to use is part of a conscious technical manipulation. On the editing table, they are put together in a sequence, with emotive ‘shot-counter-shots’, and the action is re-organised around the entire event to achieve the desired *rasas* at an optimum level of engagement. The aim is to make the audience feel for Draupadi like Gurjar as stated above, and to be compelled to return every night throughout the week-long telecast of the *cheer haran* sequence until they witness her vindication. According to Tewary:

On TV, we do not have the advantage of the undiluted hold of the 70mm. Here the concern is about whether the eyes of an actor are talking or catching attention? Is the emotion right? Is the performance right? How are they portraying the writing visually? Any form of entertainment, any story without emotion will not work. Nobody is interested in two people fighting. Action without emotion is zero. My biggest agenda is to always catch the emotion and get its graph right. I have to understand each person’s emotions as to who would be doing what, and whose close-ups need to be put in and for how long in the final edit from the entire shoot. This is an important call as it is on the script table and the edit table, where a serial or a film is made (Tewary interview, 2014).

For instance, the character Karna’s reaction towards Draupadi may have been motivated by his disgust for her having five husbands, but the way it is edited and presented in the *cheer haran* sequence evokes the *rasa* of disgust towards him in the audience. Repeated close-ups of tears falling from the eyes of the helpless Pandavas or the righteous male elders in the court like Bhishma, Vidura and Drona, may seem melodramatic, but effectively contribute to the sequence’s potential to evoke *karuna rasa* in the audience. Both Duryodhana and Shakuni react with disdain to Draupadi’s faith in the almighty to protect her. Yet, the series’ directors, to further enhance the impact of the *adbhuta rasa* with a sense of temporary closure, insert another miracle not mentioned in the original text that has all the men folk who were watching the ‘wrong in silence’ (Tewary interview, 2014), getting stripped of their ornaments and upper garments. In this dramatic detour from the core text, the show’s makers create a possibility for the evocation of the only other *rasa* missing in the entire event, *hasya* as righteous joy. As the men in Dhritarashtra’s

court behold the scene in awe, fleeting moments of mirth are constructed around the conspiracy's two main architects; Duryodhana, is suddenly caught gaping vacantly, while a visibly perturbed Shakuni is given an extra spin as he is disrobed, conjuring hints of the *hasya rasa*. This unexpected comic twist is hinted at in Krishna's faint smirk (still 20) before he effects the partial disrobing of the men in Dhritarashtra's court. A teary-eyed Krishna (still 19) is another departure from the previous on-screen avatars of Krishna, who is seen beaming while conjuring the sari spectacle around Draupadi. Krishna's character is expressing a felt *rasa* reaction of *compassion* for Draupadi's sorrow.⁴⁰⁹ Tewary explains:

According to some versions of the *Mahabharata*, Krishna never came and Draupadi was actually disrobed. But we took the call of going with the popular perception otherwise somebody would have burnt our office. The guiding thought however was to get the emotions right. If the emotions are wrong then you cannot tell a story right, it's over. If God came and gave her the sari, could it happen that He just came there, gave the sari and everyone just stood like that and said – “Wow”! It could not have happened like that; there had to be a take to it. We had to show something to today's viewers that whenever you do something like this to a woman this is going to happen. Our writer Mihir Bhuta suggested that the *angavastra* (upper garments) of the male characters should go, to which Arav Chawdary, [the actor who plays Bhishma] suggested, “Why only the *angavastra*, every male ornament should go as well”. So on the set, during shooting, we decided to disrobe everybody and it ended up being a huge talking point, courting tremendous audience appreciation (Tewary interview, 2014).

⁴⁰⁹ ‘In all the *cheer haran* sequences that we have seen on-screen so far, Krishna is always seen smiling while generating those endless saris for Draupadi. But our Krishna is seen and shown to be sad and angry while giving her the sari. Why? Because he is in a human form! If a similar incident happens with your friend will you be smiling while helping her even if you are God? I have always tried to give these little nuances in my interpretation while performing to give that human touch to Krishna’ (Jain interview, 2014).

6.8 Conclusion



Still-23: In yet another Sanskrit drama tradition of beginning a performance with an invocation to the Gods, every morning, prayers are offered to Lord Ganesha before the commencement of the day's shooting on the sets of *Mahabharat* (2013-14). Episode director Mukesh Singh is seen in folded hands, second from right; Still-24: Creative director Siddharth Tewary (in a red shirt in the centre) and production controller Kuntal Shukla (in a yellow T-shirt to Tewary's left) on the sets of *Mahabharat* (2013-14) in Umergaon in Gujarat, India; photograph courtesy: Team *Mahabharat* (2013-14).

The increase in online and DVD access to various world cinemas (especially Euro-American) and their alternate styles of storytelling among Indian audiences and filmmakers, especially in the experimental and independent Indian cinema spaces, may fuel the notion that the Indian on-screen entertainment is abandoning its traditional storytelling roots and dramatic styles. Yet, if viewership is the recognised yardstick of popularity of a film or television show, 'the *masala* genre of movies consistently topping annual Indian box-office blockbuster charts',⁴¹⁰ and the nature of shows leading the GEC ratings (Table 1) tell a contradicting story. A review of the most successful box-office hits of Hindi cinema in the first decade of the new millennium based on their *rasa*-generating ability, also indicates the continuing adherence to the evoking of the *navarasas* as a *masala* formula format.⁴¹¹

While observing the shooting on the sets of *Mahabharat* 2014, I had noticed one of the series' episode directors, Loknath Pandey, asking his actors before the retake of a fight/war sequence, '*aur energy lao, aur emotions lao...*' ('Bring more energy into your act, show

⁴¹⁰ Vijayakar 2016; Koimoi.com Team 2016.

⁴¹¹ Shukla 2014.

more emotions...’) Energy is *utsaha*, emotions are *bhavas*. The names of the terms have changed but the expectation remains the same. According to Shukla, ‘This knowledge comes from his memory of good things that he has seen or good dramatic experiences he has enjoyed in the past. This is why the Indian acting style is different from the West because we still knowingly *or* unknowingly are 100 per cent following the dictates of Bharat muni’ (Shukla interview, 2014). The filmmaking techniques have evolved, but the ultimate goal of telling a filmed story remains the same; the aim is to achieve a level of emotion and the creation of a feeling, or *rasa* in the audience, as discussed by creative director Siddharth Tewary or prodded from his actors by episode director, Pandey. Both of them had never read the *Natyashastra*. The show’s production controller, Kuntal Shukla and senior episode director Mukesh Singh however, had both been students of Sanskrit drama. They credit the high TRP ratings of *cheer haran* sequence to the way it was written, conceptualised and presented to evoke all the *navarasas*. According to Singh, ‘This sequence evokes all the *rasas*. Nothing is left. It has *karuna*, it has *adbhuta* (in the way Krishna saves Draupadi), it has *bibhatsa* in the act of a man trying to molest a woman in front of her kin, it has *vira rasa* in the conduct of Draupadi throughout or the oaths for vengeance taken by Bheema and Arjuna in the end...’ (Singh interview, 2014). Tewary reviews the impact of the *cheer haran* scene stating, ‘In that one *cheer haran* scene there is anger, pathos, sense of wonder...’ (Tewary interview, 2014). If one compares the comments of Tewary and Singh, they are both talking about similar goals and identical parameters for the success of a scene or a show. Only the terms used are different: the *navarasas* become *masala*, singular terms for emotion like *karuna* and *adbhuta* are exchanged for their English counterparts pathos and wonder. This shared knowledge on the expectations from, and attributes of a good performance allows different sets of creative people from different generations and schools of filmmaking to be able to work together towards realising the ideal in an entertainment show that also enlightens. Simultaneously, the core, uniting argument of this dissertation, the need for and relevance of a *rasa* theory-based studying of Indian on-screen performances, direction and allied creative achievements, is once again reaffirmed.

By taking the scope of research and review from cinema into television, this chapter, further extends the applicability of a *rasa*-based criticism. Finally, this chapter broadens the discussion in the second section of the thesis, on how to use a *rasa* template that applies to plot and character generalisations to dissect and distinguish the often ignored emotive layers within individual dramatic performances. Most importantly, this chapter, moves beyond a theory-based review and evidencing of *rasa* achievements in a finished creation, to explore its conception, modification and evocation on a shooting location as a drama creating work activity in progress. By using extensive analytical interviews with actors, directors and crew-members at work, it considers the actual recording and review of the *rasa*-evoking processes in practice, both on location and in its post-filming editing studios.



Still-25: On the sets of *Mahabharat* (2013-14) Saurabh Raaj Jain as Krishna (in the chariot in the centre) gets ready to shoot for the war sequence against a green screen; photograph courtesy: Team *Mahabharat* (2013-14).

Not every member from the cast and crew on the sets of *Mahabharat* (2013-14) may use Sanskrit drama terms like *bhava* and *rasa*, but they consciously or subconsciously work towards their achievement, as is evident in the analysis of the performances and presentation in the service of a particular *rasa*. This indicates how even on a contemporary Indian drama set populated by a predominantly 20-30-year-old cast and crew, a two-thousand-year-old concept still continues to teach and guide actors. It aids them in maximising the emotion generated by their work, while offering those outside fresh insights into the emotion-evoking strategies of modern Indian content makers. This, once again reaffirms the conscious and sub-conscious flow of *rasa* realisation within Indian art forms and its best artists.

CONCLUSION

We need a broader humanist film education. We need to generate a new group of critics and taste makers who can talk about emotion and melodrama freely. People, who are not so schooled in the Western idea of neo-realism, and that's what they are looking for everywhere. They should be able to see the melodrama in its true context and not as a failure... And if they do, then they will get the central idea of *masala*, of mix, of something that can be both inwards and outward and that you don't have to choose and appreciate the fact that getting both of this at once, better captures the flavour of being alive.

(Critic & filmmaker Mark Cousins, interview, 2015)

Sometimes it's best to leave an actor where he is best accepted. John Wayne never got off his horse in his entire career, nor did Charlton Heston from his chariot. Sean Connery was best known as 007, as was Shah Rukh [Khan] for his romantic adventures.

(Superstar actor Amitabh Bachchan, interview, 2011)



Still-1: Actress Lisa Haydon attempts an expression from a *navarasa* reference chart in the green-room of the character of an Indian star, played by Akshay Kumar in a scene-grab from *The Shaukeens* (Abhishek Sharma 2014). Though satirical, it reinforces the acknowledgement and awareness of the concept of *rasa* among the makers in mainstream Indian cinema.

Mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik, in a comment on Indian civilisation's tremendous appetite for assimilation and localised adaptation of foreign influences, has said, 'Whatever comes into India, tends to become Indian' (Pattanaik interview, 2014). The 'Indian' experience and interaction of the seventh art, cinema, has been no different. Conceptualised in the

West, and coming into India months after its birth, it has, as discussed, grown into a vibrant and robust cultural form with a signature identity of its own. Under the influence of a civilisation whose scriptures have been orally performed for generations, and thousand-year-old epic tales and their stylised *rasa* embodying characters are part of daily life, rituals, references, culture, art and festivities, the medium of cinema has been re-imagined and localised, i.e. it ‘became Indian’. Its ‘Indian’ attributes, however suffer a crisis in understanding when experienced in a context beyond that of its core customers. The causes of this have been discussed. An alternate ‘fair and informed’ perspective has been offered as one of the outcomes of this thesis.

All national cinemas have cultural specificities typical to the context of their production, and performances across the world play by distinct styles and rules on how best to engage and move an audience. Conventions of actual practice are formulated and continued from one generation to the other by incorporating what impacts their audience the most. Every actor/filmmaker, had always started as a viewer, and the elements and aspects of storytelling that had delighted them the most as they grew up watching and ‘experiencing cinema as an activity enjoyed communally’⁴¹², they try to re-create for their audience.

Emotion is one of the most compelling means of impression and communication in any performative mode of expression, either evoked by an individual or as a collaborative effort as in theatre or cinema. It is also the most abused and misunderstood term, because the degrees of expression of an emotion can immensely vary depending upon different influences such as culture, context, class and civilisation that shape the worldview of a viewer and a critic alike. The consequence is the seeking of an easy generalisation for that which is incomprehensible and uncommon to the usual, or an arrogant dismissal of the other, often as inferior. The bulk of Indian cinema productions have invariably been reacted to in this manner for more than a century both in the Euro-American West and by

⁴¹² This is especially relevant in the context of Indian film viewing habits as echoed by a range of interviewees from its diverse regional cinemas, spanning eight decades of movie watching memories between them (Begum interview, 2013; Benegal interview, 2015; Ghosh interview 2014; Menon interview, 2015; Nair interview 2013).

the anglophone Indian intelligentsia through a fair length of its century-plus existence. Popularly, but erroneously known as Bollywood, mainstream Indian cinema's late twentieth century recognition as an influential cinematic style that has been entertaining nearly half of the global movie going audience, has facilitated its ascendance as a subject for critical academic study in the current millennium. The focus so far has primarily been to study it as a cross-cultural influence on a diverse and growing viewership across the globe. Indian cinema has also been studied as a representation, no doubt invaluable, of India's past and present history, and (patronisingly) as an exotic cinematic form to be celebrated or experienced for its emotional hybridity. The role of India's drama traditions in shaping the unique attributes of its narratives, the aesthetic unity in their multi-emotion palette and acting achievements in the stylised and stereotypical performances, especially within the *masala* form of storytelling is an enigmatic subject as yet barely addressed in a convincing fashion.

This thesis contributes towards the cultivation of an understanding of that enigma by introducing and engaging with a systematic appreciation process using tools of reference from the well-known-dramaturgical conspectus, the *Natyashastra*. The theoretical framework offered is that of Indian aesthetics' seminal, relevant and still influential, *rasa* theory. It has been argued that this is a valuable guide for better appreciation of the melodramatic, the stylistic and the stereotypical tendencies in India's multi-lingual modes of cinematic storytelling. These aspects, Western models of film criticism that privilege the realistic form of the cinematic art, have been inadequate in comprehending, and hence unable to generate an empathetic review or a fair understanding of the distinguishing characteristics of Indian cinematic genres. This further warrants the need for referring 'to an indigenously generated and tested model or theory of appreciation for an essentially home grown variant of an international art form' (Balan interview, 2014).

The deployment of the fundamentals of *rasa* theory, *bhava* and *rasa* in the context of cinema has been explained in the body of the thesis. An evidence-based argument has been constructed concerning the founding influence of *Natyashastra* on early movie-making

practices in cinemas across India. This is because ‘one needs to understand what Indian theatre was all about [in terms of the nature of its origin and ideas on the purpose of its existence, its presentation styles and aesthetic guides for review] to understand why our films are the way they are’ (Menon interview, 2015). This theoretical enquiry has been a cornerstone of this thesis. It studies landmark and representative films from Indian cinema’s Silent, *Raja Harishchandra* (1913) and *Kaliya Mardan* (1919), and early Talkie era, *Sita Bibaha* (1936) and *Lalita* (1948) from two different moviemaking centres in the West (Maharashtra) and the East (Odisha/West Bengal). It critically engages with one of the greatest achievements from the Golden Age of Indian cinema, *Mayabazar* (1957), a landmark and influential Hindi film, *Sholay* (1975), a cult representative of its ‘East-West’ fusion experiments from the 1980s and 1990s, *Madam X* (1994), and a critically acclaimed, popular post-2000 Indian television series, *Mahabharat* (2013-14). Between them, the thesis sample has covered the span of a hundred years of Indian on-screen entertainment across genres, eras, mediums of consumption (film to television) from all the four major filmmaking regions in India (Central/North, West, South and East). As well as identifying hitherto ignored *Natyashastra* prescriptions in early Indian filmmaking, it has been revealed how the evocation of *rasa* was an integral aesthetic aim, defining the purpose of the auteurship of the ‘father of Indian cinema’⁴¹³, Dadasaheb Phalke. By using film reviews from India’s regional language media I have also shown how the evocation of *rasa* has been an important aesthetic expectation and concern in early attempts at film criticism. This challenges a comfortable and an often repeated erroneous academic position that links the origin attributes and styles of all Indian cinema to the Parsi theatre, as immediate predecessor.

Analytical discussion on how to acknowledge a *rasaeur*, a term coined to describe a director who not only manages to evoke the *navarasas* in his film, but is also able to unite its meaning/suggestion under a single dominant *rasa*, is further expanded in the context of the auteurship of Phalke as a ‘*rasaeur*’ of the *adbhuta*. Using Phalke’s notes and articles

⁴¹³ Jain, Rai & Bose 2013: 10.

from pre-independence Indian journals and newspapers discussing the influence of the *Natyashastra* on his work, and detailed interviews with a sample of thirty-eight technicians, actors and filmmakers across age, region, industry and significant periods of Indian film history, practical insights from stakeholders within the Indian film craft have been described. Some of the interviewees, including veteran stars and technicians in their 80s and 90s, who following years in retirement had almost vanished from public memory, have been accessed for the purpose of academic enquiry to get first person experienced insights into the aesthetic traditions shaping India's pre-independence Talkie era and the post-independence Golden Age of its film industries. In their shared perspectives on the need for *rasa* evocation as the desired purpose of all on-screen entertainment, the existence of a common aesthetic tradition for India's diverse language cinemas is reinforced. These findings aim to address the scepticism often expressed concerning the influence and applicability of *rasa* theory by many leading academic experts of Indian cinema.⁴¹⁴

Thereby I stress that there should be greater engagement with the practical creators of an art form and their approach to the processes of production that extends beyond accepted academic interpretations of their creations. This nature of established academic assessment of Indian cinema, especially based on globally accepted norms can be problematic, misleading and even disparaging to an art form if the standards of acceptance or parameters of review are oblivious or insensitive to the idioms of culture and tradition shaping local creativity. Unfortunately, even the reviews of Indian films in popular national media, especially in the English language, continues to be assessed through the lens of Western film reviews based on Euro-American templates of film criticism.

This thesis has endeavoured to repudiate the patronising and 'negative reviews'⁴¹⁵ of three of Indian cinema's most misunderstood narrative idioms: the multiple-emotions evoking *masala* form of narration, the plethora of stylised/stereotypical characterisations, and its

⁴¹⁴ Dwyer and Patel (2002), Rajadhyaksha (2003), Lal and Nandy (2006).

⁴¹⁵ Baburao Patel (in Manto 2010), Rangoonwalla (1970), Dasgupta (2008), Hood (2000).

predilection for expressive performances and ‘melodrama’⁴¹⁶. The methodology has involved the detailed analysis of film scenarios and character performances using the *bhava* and *rasa* paradigms. These are used to extend the usage of the aesthetic appreciation templates offered by the *rasa* theory as a guide to ascertain the merits, the nature, and the extent of *rasa* realisation in plot construction, characterisation and performance. This is accomplished in the context of an entire narrative’s plot development and a schematic scene by scene breakdown and analysis of the landmark and much analysed Hindi film *Sholay* (1975), through a fresh review perspective. The intricacies and the identification of multiple *rasa* evocations within the smallest narrative unit of a filmed story, i.e. a single sequence, is offered from the *Mahabharat* (2013-14) TV series.

By means of a varied sample of song and dance featuring music sequences and dialogue highlighting drama scenes, the thesis facilitates identification of the layers of expressed and suggested emotions within song, dance and dialogue driven scenarios and performances. The success of an acted performance in its ability to achieve unity within the four types of equally important aspects of *abhinaya*(s) as suggested by the *Natyashastra* – the *angika* (bodily gestures/physical), *vachika* (speech/verbal), *aharya* (costumes/ornamental) and *sattvika* (emotions/emotional) – is discussed through a diversity of character achievements across genres. The dressing up of characters in costumes that complement their dominant *bhava*/mood states as prescribed by the *Natyashastra*, and the use of specific colours in the *mise-en-scène* to heighten the *rasa* impact of an on-screen action has been noted in examples from film and television. However, the extent to which the choice of a particular colour can enhance and impact the on-screen emotion can be further explored.

⁴¹⁶ In this thesis, the term ‘melodrama’ has been used as per its understanding as a Western performance review term. It therefore refers to a dramatic presentation interspersed with songs, dance and music, has sensational portrayals appealing to heightened emotions and a narrative world generally populated by clearly divided good and evil characters. The understanding of ‘melodrama’ as a review term in the context of an Indian/Sanskrit drama review however can be for significantly different performance attributes (or their lacunae) as discussed by TV director Mukesh Singh (interview 2014). But whenever used in this thesis, the term ‘melodrama’ stands for its Western/Euro-American connotations.

The *bhava* and *rasa* concepts have been further used in the thesis to discuss acting achievements within seemingly stylised or stereotypical acts on the basis of their adhering to expected behaviours of the good and the bad, or the masculine and the feminine as prescribed by the *Natyashastra*. Such characterisation may make some characters look stereotypical, but through an analysis of three lead performances in *Mayabazar* (1957), *Madam X* (1994) and *Mahabharat* (2013-14), it is explained how competent actors have been able to make them sharply personalised and contextualised throughout the span of a film. This knowledge and awareness of *bhavas* and *rasas* will help acknowledge and appreciate the layers of expressions portrayed in the multiple-emotion conveying performance of an Indian actor. This has been done through an analysis of every passing mood/*bhava* state and the corresponding *rasa* evoking reactions/expressions on a protagonist's visage through a freeze-frame of close-ups.

Appreciation is generated for a good stylised act, or a successful stereotype through an elucidation of the processes that lead to its achievement. These have been shown through actor and director interviews to have been achieved through intense training and a studied knowledge of intricate and demanding traditional performance guides. This training has been argued to equip an Indian actor to rise to the challenges of both stylised and realistic acting as is evident in the filmography of the actors discussed in the thesis such as Savithri, Sanjeev Kumar, Jaya Bhaduri, Amjad Khan and Rekha. Whether a 'lack in its training makes it difficult for someone schooled only in realistic acting from attempting a convincing stylised interpretation', as argued by acting-guru and actor, Anupam Kher, is, however, subject to further investigation and research (Kher interview, 2015).

In contrast to the preoccupations of a predominantly rational and realism-oriented idiom of film criticism, a *rasa*-based analysis thus brings the focus of critical attention back to emotion and its various modes of expressive articulation. Simultaneously the *rasa* theory's acknowledgement of understanding art in the context of the culture – of its creators, their created characters and their behaviour – is a valuable recommendation tool for reviewing stereotypical and stylised performances. Stereotype, as highlighted by Amitabh Bachchan,

is integral to all genres of filmmaking. These often seem stylised when the on-screen behaviour of characters to universal action triggers tend to differ between national cinemas courtesy their incorporating of region-specific nuances on dressing, talking, gesturing or expressing. These are also shaped by local ideas and expectations on ideal behaviour by gender, role, position of influence, context of a character and the like, which define the style differentials within stereotypes.

The moving of audiences by appealing to their ability to feel is arguably more impactful than one made purely to the intellect, courtesy an emotive appeal's possibility to *also* impress a range of viewers from varied educational and regional cultural backgrounds. Realism is a debatable prism to judge value as highlighted by director Siddharth Tewary (interview 2014) and argued by actress Vidya Balan, because 'the reality or the experiences shaping the daily life of a person in India, may not be the same as the reality of someone in the Western world' (Balan, interview 2014). On the contrary, the *navarasas* representing universal human emotions are felt and recognised throughout the human race, albeit to varying degrees. It is perhaps for this reason that Indian cinema has so easily achieved a dominant position in the entertainment culture not only throughout South Asia, but also across the Middle East, North Africa, Russia, Eastern Europe, Central and South-East Asia.

By arguing for a universally recognised attribute like emotion, whose achievement is measured primarily by a narrative or a performance's ability to convey feeling or evoke a desired emotion in the audience, the *rasa* theory offers a potentially more inclusive model of aesthetic criticism to fill the gap lamented by Mark Cousins in the opening quote. Moreover, emotion as a tool for aesthetic appreciation can also help to look beyond an increasing preference towards reviewing films, especially in popular *Natyadharmi* cinematic genres like the Sci-fi, fantasy, adventure, epics, etc. on their technical advancements and quality of presentation that embellish an on-screen narrative's outer package. These are primarily based on the level of advancement in technologies of production, the use of better quality CGI generated visuals, ambitious narrative backdrops,

increased pace of narration and the like. A performance and emotion prioritising review dealing with a story's core can help ascertain an on-screen narration's success in cohesively connecting the above mentioned elements to felt impact. The methodology offered on how to review, understand and appreciate foundational cinematic attributes like plot construction, performances and directorial achievement from an exclusively emotional perspective, do not, however, exclude the possibility of considering alternative perspectives. How this template can be used to appreciate acting achievements, plot denouement, and unity aspects of realistic narratives can be explored through further research.

Philip Lutgendorf in his path-breaking essay, *Is there an Indian Way of Filmmaking* (2007), has viewed the entry of the exhaustive corpus of Indian cinema into global film studies in the beginning of the twenty-first century as a fit cause for 'systemic realignment... an Einsteinian paradigm-shift introducing new ways of thinking'.⁴¹⁷ I conclude that the inclusion and engagement with *rasa* theory in contemporary film studies is the next logical step towards acknowledging the narrative, dramatic and performative diversity within that corpus. As a tool of film criticism, the *rasa* theory challenges the 'sacrosanct' First World codes for identifying a good film and allied misplaced notions that would impose a putative aesthetic hierarchy on all cinematic genres and styles. It also is an invaluable interpretative model that enables us to appreciate the diversity within an Indian cinematic corpus of more than 50,000 films, to facilitate a more informed decision about the good, the bad and the beautiful within it from the cinematic perspective.

An awareness of the concepts of *bhavas* and *rasas* in acting, and the *rasa* methodology's expository techniques and their possibilities at interpreting a range of acting can be further explored and imitated by people studying other 'melodramatic or misunderstood world cinemas'⁴¹⁸ that celebrate style, stereotype and emotion. It can also help us better

⁴¹⁷ Lutgendorf 2007.

⁴¹⁸ This could include a majority of films from the rest of the Indian sub-continent, Nollywood (Africa), the Middle-East and the Third World.

appreciate the drama achievements in non-realism prioritising on-screen genres, namely animation, epic fantasies, costume dramas, classic melodramas, musicals, family drama and the like. This will establish the foundations for a ‘humanist film education’ that will enhance our pleasure from the myriad storytelling possibilities to be found within global cinema.



Stills 2-6: (L-R) *Adbhuta*, *karuna*, *hasya*, *raudra* and *shanta* – a sample of five of the nine *rasa* states performed by the author of the thesis as part of a performance exercise on how to be aware of and use the various facial muscles and face parts towards the generation of an expression; photograph courtesy: Suratarangini JenaRoy.

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