

SCHWARTZ, SUSAN L. *Rasa: Performing the Divine in India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. xv + 118 pages. Photos, glossary, bibliography, index. Hardbound US\$59.50/£38.50; ISBN 0-231-13144-5. Paper US\$22.50/£15.00; ISBN 0-231-13145-3.

The book under review deals with *rasa*, the most important concept in Indian art, particularly in music, dance, and drama. This compact and well-prepared book consists of the following four parts: 1) A Taste of Things to Come: An Introduction; 2) *Rasa* in Theory: Text and Context; 3) *Rasa* in Practice: Drama, Dance, Music; 4) Transformations in Time and Space. In the Preface, the author proposes to introduce readers to the theory and application of the aesthetic principle *rasa* by showing how this principle originated, mostly based on textual studies, and how it has been applied in a range of Indian performance traditions analyzing the actual dance-drama styles.

It is interesting to note that *rasa* means taste, flavor, and essence, as is discussed in Part 1. Seeing *rasa* in philosophical context (Part 2), we are soon buried under the profound spirituality of the Indian World, but feel rather relieved to know that the word can be also used in the context of gastronomy—India is in fact one of the richest countries of cuisine with varieties of tasty dishes. Or we may take it in this way: most of the Indian performing arts, if not modern creations, originated and developed as a part of religious rituals and practices, with no question of whether they were Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, or Christian, or with no distinction between the classic or popular. In any case, performing arts are to be presented before the gods in a wider sense, to play for the gods, and play with the gods. Therefore, distinctions such as between the worshipper and the worshipped, the performer and the performed, or the player and the audience disappear. It is a form of commensality, in fact, with or without the food consecrated.

There are eight fundamental *rasa* to be expressed in performing arts or forming their base: *śringāra* (love), *hāsya* (comic), *karuṇa* (pathos), *raudra* (anger), *vīra* (heroic), *bhayānaka* (fear), *bībhatsa* (disgust), and *adbhuta* (surprise). They are related with yet another important concept, that of *bhāva*, and each *rasa* corresponds with eight fundamental *bhāva* or *sthāyi-bhāva*: that is, *rati*, *hāsa*, *śoka*, *krodha*, *ursāha*, *bhāya*, *jugusā*, and *vimaya*, according to Bharata's *Natyasastra*, the most elaborate theoretical book on performing arts. *Rasa* is the result of *bhāva*, as the sentiment of love, *śringāra*, is derived from the emotion of love, *rati*. In later years, possibly in the fifth century CE, a more spiritual aspect of *śānti* (peace) was added. In a South Indian Kathakali dance drama, a tenth *rasa*, *lajja* (shyness) is added to give feminine charm to the actor, where the feminine roles are always played by a male, as in Japanese kabuki.

The author tells us that there are even forty-nine *bhāva* that interact to influence *rasa* response, but details are not given, possibly in order not to confuse the readers more. In any case, the concept of eight (or nine and even ten) *rasa* reminds one of the four moods

or human emotions expressed in Japanese performing arts, *ki-do-ai-raku* (joy-anger-sorrow-comfort in secular context), but *rasa* is more elaborate, precise, and profound.

How is each of these *rasa* originated and developed may be a difficult topic, but the author discusses at least the *śringāra rasa* in detail, examining it in different contexts of performing arts, exploring its relationship with the concept of *bhakti* or devotional love between the gods and men, or with the *Sūfi* idea of ecstatic unity between God and men (that is again related to the Hindu philosophy of non-duality, *advaita*). Other *rasa* could also have been discussed more, such as *śānti rasa* in *lāsyā* (tranquil and graceful) form as the reflection of the ideal of *mokṣa* (enlightenment), or the relationships between the *tāndava* (fierce) expressions with *raudra* or *vīra rasa* and the various forms of martial arts. The author rightly refers to the relation between Kathakali and the martial art of Kalaripayattu in Kerala, and there are many more such cases.

Part 3 deals with the actual performing arts like Bharata Natyam, Kathakali, and Kathak, showing how the various *rasa* are personified through facial expressions (*mukha-abhinaya*) or hand-finger gestures (*hasta-mudrā*), though detailed explanations of the latter with vivid examples are unfortunately not given. However, the photos showing the eight to ten *rasa* through the facial expressions both in Bharata Natyam and Kathakali, are quite informative. We can know how the different types of sentiments are actually to be expressed, and still, how the common *rasa* can be differently expressed according to the types of performance, comparing, for instance, the same *hāsyā rasa* (comic) or *bībhatsa rasa* (disgust) of Bharata Natyam and Kathakali. Or the prominent difference may be due to the characteristics of each performance type, or by the fact that one is played by a female and the other by a male. The male actors playing female roles in Kathakali and many other Indian performances could have been discussed more, not only as the social/gender topic but in relation with transformation from the secular/mundane to the unusual sacred world in performing arts. Make-up applied with scrupulous care in Kathakali or Yakshagāna (in Karnataka), or the masked performances like Chhau (Bengal/Bihar/Orissa) or Bāonā (Assam) could have been discussed also in this context, though we know that the numbers of performing arts in India that could be discussed here is limitless, indeed.

The last Part 4 is important for it considers the present state and the future of the “traditional” Indian performing arts in contemporary societies. The author questions on the meaning of these “classical” arts and the “authenticity” especially among the NRI (non-resident Indians) in diaspora, but we may also inquire into the meaning of “Indian” music and dance performed by Non-Indians in the USA, Europe, or Japan.

Finally, a word may be said about the transliteration of Indian words in Roman script adopted in this work and others. The author has eliminated all diacritical marks so that it makes the text “accessible to the widest possible readership at an introductory level,” but by doing so, the words that look quite similar but have totally different meanings would have caused confusion, like *kali* (dark, black) and *Kālī* (Consort-Goddess of Siva), or *rasa* and *rāsa* (= *rās* in Hindi as in *rās līlā*, or the circle dance in praise of Lord Krishna). In order to avoid such a confusion, the author adopted a transliteration such as “*raas lila*,” but does not maintain consistency—this should have been rendered “*raas liilaa*” if the longer vowels are to be shown with the repeated vowels. We would, however, prefer to adopt the minimum diacritical marks at least for the three longer vowels, ā, ī, and ū. That should not be too difficult nowadays in printing technology due to the use of computers.

Another problem is the way by which to show the plural forms of Indian words. I feel very uneasy seeing these words spelled with an English “s,” like *rasas*, *ragas*, *mudras*, *hastas*, etc., lest the plural sign “s” may be misunderstood as a part of the word. We can omit the last “s,” since we know that even in English there are many words that have the same form

both in singular and plural forms. While “s” is sometimes really a part of the common or proper nouns in Hindi and Sanskrit, as in Ushas (Goddess of Dawn) or Apsaras (nymphs), we have to know also that in modern Hindi the final “a” is often omitted, leaving the last “s” right before the lost “a.” In this way, a minimum use of diacritical marks may cause interest but not troubles and confusion to the readers even at the “introductory level.”

The glossary and index at the end of the book are helpful, the end notes are well cited, and the well-selected bibliography is a good guide for the more serious readers. This handy book would certainly serve as a good and reliable introduction for those interested in Indian art and culture, especially to dance, theatre, and music, viz. *sangīṭ-nāṭak* as it is called in India, as a composite genre and as a whole where the parts are inseparable from one another, and where *rasa* underlies, leads, and rules the whole entity.

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