



# RASA- ELEMENTS IN KATHAKALI AND THEIR APPRECIATION - A SUBJECTIVE VIEW

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**Abstract:** Kathakali, the traditional dance-drama form of Kerala contributes to the *rasānubhooti* of *sahṛudaya*-spectators through a unique combination of *bhāva*, *rāga*, and *tāla*, in line with the instructions of classic texts on dance/dramaturgy such as the *Nātyaśāstra*, *Bālarābharatam*, and *Hastalakṣaṇa-dīpikā*. This is achieved through a blend of *vācika*, *āṅgika*, *sāttvika*, and *āhārya abhinayas* (supported by *tāla-mela*). A few examples of these based on the *āṭṭakkathas* of Irayimman Thampi have been given. Using a variety of hand-gestures (*mudras*), looks (*druṣṭis*), facial expressions (*bhāvas*), body-postures, and steps (*kalāśas*), the actor invokes and develops a variety of *rasas* in *sahṛudayas* (spectators). The spectators possessing the required knowledge of the sign-language of Kathakali, plot of the story, meaning of the verses, aesthetic sense and imagination, attain a state of *tanmayībhāva* with the actor and experiences the *rasas* at their peak.

**Index terms:**

Kathakali, *rasānubhooti*, *sahṛudayas*, *rasa-elements*, *abhinayas*, *bhāvas*, *tanmayībhāva*.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Kathakali - a dance-drama form indigenous to Kerala, captivates the attention of *sahṛudayas* (spectators) around the globe, especially with respect to its *rasa* components. *Rasa* is said to be something that which can be relished / enjoyed, according to its definition as - “*Rasyate, āsvādyate iti rasah*”. However, the degree of relish of anything varies over a wide range, depending upon the nature of the enjoyer; which means that it is very much subjective. This is particularly true when it comes to Kathakali, where-in various *elements of rasa* are blended harmoniously and synergistically for invoking different *rasas* in the spectators. Also, this is done by following very much, the instructions/guidelines of basic texts on dance/dramaturgy such as the *Nātyaśāstra*, (Madhusudan Shastri, 1971, Adya Rangacharya, 1996, and Naveen Bhat, 2017), *Bālarābharatam* (Sāmbāśiva Śāstrī, 1935), and *Hastalakṣaṇa-dīpikā* (Kadattanāttu Udaya Varma Thampurān, (1921) and the established ‘standard practices’ of Kathakali (*cittas*). Besides, during the evolution of Kathakali as a performance-art, various improvisations have come up in the *abhinaya* (particularly in *manodharmābhīnaya*) with the objective of maximising the *rasānubhooti* of the *sahṛudaya*-spectators. A brief overview of some of the *elements of rasa* in Kathakali with a few specific examples from the *āṭṭakkathas* of Irayimman Thampi, some of the inherent factors of the spectators enabling the appreciation of *rasa* and a possible mechanism for its experience, are presented in this paper.

## 1.1. Some basic observations on *nātya-śāstra*

Many of the standard rules and conventions to be followed in the performance of dance and drama have been laid out long back by Bharatamuni in his *Nātya-śāstra*, and Bālarāmavarma Mahārāja in his *Bālarāmabharatam*.

At the outset of his seminal work on the *Nātyaśāstra*, Bharatamuni briefly mentions the basic components of *nātya* performance ((Madhusudan Shastri, 1971), as -

*Rasa bhāva hyabhinayah dharmī vrutti pravṛuttayah  
Siddhih svarāstathādodyam, gānam, raṅgasya saṅgrahah.* (NS. 6.10)

These include, the *rasas* (to be invoked in the spectators), the *bhāvas* (to be expressed by the actors), the *abhinayas* (four types), the *dharmīs* (two types), *vruttis* (four types), *pravṛuttis* (four types), *siddhis* (two types), *svarās* (seven types), *ādodyam* (four types), *gānam* (five types), and *raṅgah* (three types)(Adya Rangacharya, 1996). Details of these have been explained by Naveen Bhat (Naveen Bhat, 2017).

Nine *rasas* have been mentioned in the *Nātya-śāstra* (Madhusudan Shastri, 1971) as-

*Śrṅgāra-hāsyā-karuṇā, raudra-vīra-bhayānakāḥ  
Bībhatsādbhuta-śāntāśca, nava nātyarasāḥ smṛutāḥ.* (NS. 6.15)

The relish of *rasas* by the *sahṛudayas* has been explained (Adya Rangacharya, 1996) as follows — “Those who are connoisseurs of tastes enjoy the taste of food prepared from (or containing) different materials; likewise, the intelligent, healthy persons enjoy various *sthāyī-bhāvas* related to the acting of emotions”. This is mentioned in the *Nātya-śāstra* by the following verse:-

*Bhāvābhinaya-sambaddhān sthāyī bhāvastathā budhāḥ  
Āsvādayanti manasā tasmānātya-rasāḥ smṛutāḥ.* (NS.6.33-34)

The meaning derived by the *vibhāvas* leads to the *anubhāvas* (in the characters). Such an expression (*abhinaya*) based on words, gestures, and mental states is known as *bhāva* (Naveen Bhat, 2017).

*Vibhāvenāhruto yo artho hyanubhāvaistu gamyate.  
Vāgaṅga-sattvābhinayaih sa bhāva iti saṃjñitah.* (NS.7.1)

This is further indicated in the *Nātya-śāstra* by the following verse:-

*Vāgaṅga-mukha-rāgeṇa, sattvenābhinayena ca  
Kaverantargataṁ bhāvam bhāvayan bhāva ucyate.* (NS. 7.2 )

Thus, *bhāva* is said to be the expression of the inner state of the author/character through words, gestures, colour of the face, and *svāttikābhinaya*. Eight *sthāyī-bhāvas* are mentioned in the *Nātya-śāstra* by the verse,

*Ratirhāsaśca śokaśca krodhotsāho bhayaṁ tathā  
Juguptsā vismayaśceti sthāyī-bhāvah prakīrtitāḥ.* (NS.6.17 )

Thirty-three *vyabhicāri-bhāvas* (fleeting emotions) are mentioned in the *Nātyaśāstra*, (NS.6.18-21). Besides, eight *svāttika-bhāvas* are also given, as -

*Stambhah svedo atha romāñcaḥ svarabhaṇgo atha vepathuh  
Vaivarṇyam aśru pralayah ityāṣṭau sāttvikāḥ smṛutāḥ.* (NS.6.22)

Four types of acting (*abhinayas*) such as *āṅgika*, *vācika*, *āhārya*, and *sāttvika* have been described in the *Nātya-śāstra* (Madhusudan Shastri, 1971).

*Āṅgiko vācikaścaiva hyāhāryah sāttvikastathā  
Catvāro abhinayā hyete vigyeyā nātyasamśrayāḥ.* (NS.6.23)

A brief description of the ‘*saṅgraha* of acting’ has been given by Adya Rangacharya in the following words (Adya Rangacharya, 1996) “Accordingly, there are four ways of expression (or acting) viz. physical, verbal, material and emotional.

*Dharmī* (characteristics) are of two kinds: *Lokadharmī* and *Nātyadharmī*.

There are four kinds of *vṛttis* on which *nātya* is based, viz., *Bhāratī*, *Sāttvatī*, *Kaiśikī* and *Ārabhaṭī*.

*Pravṛttis*, i.e., styles are also of four kinds, viz., *Āvantī*, *Dākṣiṇātya*, *Orissī* and *Māgadhī* (*Pāñcālī* is considered as the fifth).

Success (*siddhi*) is of two kinds: divine and human.

*Swaras*, both vocal and instrumental, are seven in number. (These are - *Shadjah*, *Nishādah*, *Rushabhabhah*, *Gāndhārah*, *Madhyamah*, *Pañcamah*, and *Dhaivatah*.)

*Ātodya* - instrumental music is of four kinds: *Tata* (stringed), *Avanaddha* (percussion), *Ghana* (bells, etc.), and *Suṣira* (wind instrument).

Singing with rhythmic beats is of five kinds: (1) while a character enters, (2) while he/she exits, (3) to express inner emotions, (4) to please the audience, and (5) to convey a *rasa*.

The theatre house has already been described as of three kinds: *vikṛṣṭa* (oblong), *caturasra* (square), and *tryasra* (triangular)”(Adya Rangacharya, 1996).

## 1.2. Concept of *rasa* in *nātya*

The prime objective of *nātya* is considered to be the enjoyment of the spectators, according to the *Nātyaśāstra*. This is indicated by its declaration as, “*Na hi rasādrute kaścidarthah pravarttate*”, in the sixth chapter. Further, the *rasa-sootra* says that this occurs by the combination of *vibhāva*, *anubhāva* (“*Tatra vibhāvānubhāva-vyabhicāri-saṃyogāt rasaniṣpattiḥ*”). The inter-relationship between *bhāva* and *rasa* is given by the verses 34-38 in the same chapter, as —

*Nānbhinaya-saṃbaddhān bhāvayanti rasānimān*  
*Yasmāttasmādamī bhāvā vijñeyā nātya-yoktrubhīḥ.* (NS.6.34)

*Nānādravyairbahuvidhairvijñanām bhāvyate yathā*  
*Evaṁ bhāvā bhāvayanti rasānbhinayehiḥ saha* (NS.6.35)

*Na raso bhāvahīno asti, na bhāvo rasavarjītaḥ*  
*Parasparakrūtā siddhīḥ tayorabhinaye bhavet* (NS.6.36)

*Vyañjanauṣadhi-saṃyoga yathā annām svādutām nayet*  
*Evaṁ bhāvā rasāścaiva bhāvayanti parasparām* (NS.6.37)

*Yathā bijād-bhaved vṛukṣo vṛukṣāt-puṣpām phalam yathā*  
*Tathā moolām rasāḥ sarve, tebhyo bhāvā vyavasthitāḥ* (NS.6.38)

Thus, Bharata maintains that the expressions of *bhāva* in *abhinaya* are based on the root cause of *rasa*. Similar observations have been made by various other authorities, as well. According to the author of *Saṅgīta-ratnākara* the objective of *nātya* is the creation of uninterrupted bliss/ecstasy to the spectators, as indicated by the verse (Madhusudan Shastri, 1971) -

“*Nātya-śabdo rase mukhyo, rasābhivyakti-kāraṇam*  
*Caturdhābhīnayopetām lakṣaṇāvṛuttito budhaiḥ.*  
*Narttanām nātyamityuktaṁ sattvatrābhīnayo bhavet.*  
*Kāvyabaddhām vibhāvādi vyañjayanyo naṭe sthitah*  
*Sāmājikānām janayan nirvighna-rasa-saṃvidām”*

Thus, *abhinaya* is said to be the exercise of the actor to create *un-interrupted rasa* to the spectators, wherein the verse-bound components such as *vibāva* get expressed.

The nature of *bhāva* and *rasa* have been covered in detail, in the section of *Bhāvādi niroopanām*, in the *Bālarāmabharatam* (Sāmbāśiva Śāstrī, 1935). In the introduction to the text, the author comments that “*Bhāva-rasārtha-kriyākārityam Bharatavām*” and says, “ ...this definition has been applied to the *abhinaya* of the various parts of the body, such as *aṅga*, *upāṅga*, and *pratyāṅga*. Accepting *rāga*, *tāla*, and other musical accompaniments as the external means of expressions, the author deals in great detail with the various internal and external gestures, giving definitions and applications to one and all of them...” The

significance of the trios - *bhāva*, *rāga*, and *tāla*, with respect to *rasa* has been highlighted here, by the verse

*Bhāvo rāgaśca tālaśca bhāratyā amśasambhavāḥ  
Tadānanda-rasopetā bhāratī jayatānmudā.* (1.42)

*Bhāva* holds prominence in the *nātya*, since it is based on *rāga*, and *tāla*. Hence, it is said,

*Rāgatālau gruhītyaiva bhāvayityakhilam svayam  
Ato bhāvapradhānatvād bharataṁ bharatoditam.* (1.75)

The nuances of the various components of *nātya* have been mentioned here, as—

*Nartakānām viśeṣena rasānanda-vivardhini  
Saṅgīta-tāla-rasika-bhāvajñā-priyakāriṇī.* (1.92)

*Ātmānandakarollāsa-hāva-bhāva-samanvitā  
Aṣṭādaśāṅga-sahitā pratyāṅga-rasavardhini.* (1.93)

*Āṅgikaih sāttvikaiścaiva vācikaiśca viśeṣataḥ  
Āhāraiśca rasair-bhāvair-āṅgopāṅga-samujjvalā.* (1.94)

*Karaṇasthāna-gamana-padakarma-prasādhini  
Śiro-netra-karāṅghristha-rasa-bhāva-kriyojjvalā.* (1.95)

It is said that the *bhāva* is to be expressed by the head; *rasa* by the eyes; meaning by the hands (*mudras*), and the *kriyā* by the legs (“*Śirasi bhāvah; Nayanayoh rasah; Hastayoh arthah; Padayoh kriyā*”)(Sāmbaśiva Śāstrī, 1935). The role of the actor to act as a ‘bearer, media and connector of emotions of the character’ has been pointed out by Shridevi (Shridevi, 2020). The interconnectedness of *rasa* and *bhāva* has been described by Vijayapal in the following words (Vijayapal Pathloth, 2020). “*Rasa* is an individual experience brought through the expression of *Bhāva*. The *Rasa* is created or promoted in the mind of a spectator by the *Bhāva* being expressed. ... *Bhāva* can be considered as the physical body and *Rasa* being its soul...” (Vijayapal Pathloth, 2020).

### 1.3. Elements of *rasas* in Kathakali

In a recent review, Sheelu Singh Bhatia had described the various *bhāvas* expressed by Kathakali actors and the corresponding *rasas* invoked in the *sahṛudayas* (Sheelu Singh Bhatia, 2023). Aymanam Krishna Kaimal mentions about the origin of various standard practices (*cittas*) of Kathakali (Aymanam Krishna Kaimal, 1998). He says, “*Kottayam katha*”s gave rise to the emergence of a special art-form having more integrity and capability to express the *rasas*. Commonly accepted standards in the style of acting, including *kalāsas* and hand-gestures (*hastamudras*) came into being. The standard practices of acting in *Kalyāṇasaugandhikam*, *Kirmmītravadham*, and *Kālakeyavadham* strengthened the technical sphere of Kathakali like never-moving foundation stones. In *Bālarāmabharatham*, twenty seven *samyukta-hastas* and their pattern of use are described in the section on *āṅgikābhinaya*. In addition to *Hastalakṣaṇa-dīpikā* the *mudrās* such as *Bāṇam* and *Bhadra* being used in Kathakali are taken from *Bālarāmabharatham*”(Aymanam Krishna Kaimal, 1998).

Seven established stages of Kathakali are *Keli*, *Śuddha-maddalam*, *Toṭayam*, *Vandana-ślokam*, *Purappād*, *Melappadam* and *Kathābhinayam* (Karmachandran, 2008). The synchronised performance of percussion instruments such as *ceñda*, *maddalam*, *ceñgila*, *ilattālam*, and *īṭakka* is something that which can be relished by itself, by all the *sahṛudayas*.

The four types of *abhinaya* mentioned by Bharatamuni in his *Nātyaśāstra*, viz., *vācika*, *āṅgika*, *sāttvika*, and *āhārya* contribute a lot for enhancing the *rasa* component in Kathakali. This is supported by the *tāla-mela* provided by the percussion instruments.

During the *colliyāṭṭam* stage of the *vācikābhinaya* the meaning of the verses (*padas*) sung by the singers (*ponnāni* and *śiṅkīti*) are expressed by the actors through hand-gestures (*mudrās*), facial expressions (*bhāvas* and *rasa-druṣṭis*), postures/stances and steps. The structure of the *āṭṭakkatha* script, the changing *bhāvas* of

the actor in tandem with the verses, the mode of rendering verses by the singers, the *rāgas* of the verses, the *tāla-melas* of percussion, and the speed of paces of acting (*kālam*) of the verses are some of the factors contributing to the *rasānubhooti* of the spectators. Certain specific *rāga*-s are prescribed for the enrichment of specific *rasa* (Aymanam Krishna Kaimal, 1998, and Kannan, 2011). Thus, the *rāgas kalyāṇi* and *śaṅkarābharana* are used for *śrīngāra*, *kāmodari* for *vīra rasa*, and *mukhāri*, *punnāgavarāli* and *ānandabhairai* for *karuṇa rasa*. Arathy mentions that “*rasas* reside in different *rāgas* and their modulations in tone” (Arathy, 2019).

Quite often, after the *colliyāṭṭam*, during the stage of *manodharmābhinaya* (*ilakiyāṭṭam*) the actor presents descriptions of the past or present context, using *āṅgikābhinaya* alone, (with *mudrās* and *dṛuṣṭis*); without the aid of verses (Chavara Appukuttan Pillai, 2011). Some of the other techniques of *ilakiyāṭṭam* are *tanteṭṭam*, *terukooṭṭikeṭṭal*, *paṭappurappāṭu*, *yuddhavaṭṭam* and *mallayuddham*” (Sadanam P.V. Balakrishnan, 2005). This is an occasion in which the *sahṛdayas* / spectators who know the *sign-language* of Kathakali, and the plot of the play, can enjoy a lot in the world of imagination.

There are three styles of acting in the *āṅgikābhinaya* of Kathakali as *nṛuttam*, *nrutyam*, and *nātyam* (Mātaśśeri Mādhava Wārier, 1955). Regarding the three styles of acting and the *kalāśas* (steps) at the end of the *colliyāṭṭam*, M.K.K. Nāyar makes the following observation (Nāyar, 1990). “In *nṛuttam*, hands and feet are moved in tandem with the *tāla*. During *nrutyam*, the twelve *aṅgas* and *upāṅgas* are moved appropriate to the context. In *nātyam*, meaning of words are shown by acting. The specialty of the *nṛuttam* in Kathakali are the *kalāśas* contained in it. These depend upon *tālas* such as *campa* and *cempaṭa* and their *laya-vinyāsas* such as *vilambam*, *madhyamam*, and *drutam*. Each *pada* (verse) is divided into *pallavi*, *anupallavi*, and *caraṇam*. After each *caraṇam*, depending upon the *tāla*, the actor takes a *kalāśa*. There are different variants of it suitable for the context. The steps (*kalāśas*) taken at the end of *caraṇas* of the verses are of eight types. These contribute a lot in expressing the nature of the character and the *rasa* element appropriate to the occasion (particularly *raudra-rasa*). Some of the *kalāśas* are *vattam veccu kalāśam*, *kalāśa* for feminine characters, *atakkam*, *itakkalāśam*, *lakṣmi-tālam*, and *iratti*. Others are,

- (i) *Etuttu-kalāśam*: With prominence of *vīra-rasa*, this is used for *porvili* (call for fight).
- (ii) *Aṣṭa-kalāśam*: In times of emotional upsurge of a character; particularly happiness, the actor conveys this to the spectators through *Aṣṭa-kalāśam*” (Nāyar, 1990).

“*Kalāśābhinaya* gives perfection to the *mudras* and *bhāvas* of *padārthābhinaya*”(Sadanam P.V. Balakrishnan, 2005).

In *āṅgikābhinaya*, the special dance forms such as *sari*, *kummi*, *pantaṭi*, and *keki āṭṭam* add very much to the *rasānubhooti* of the spectators (Sadanam P.V. Balakrishnan, 2005). The Bālarāmabharata concept that *bha-ra-tam* (or *nātyam*) is a harmonious blending of *bhāva*, *rāga*, and *tāla* suits Kathakali, very well.

*Sāttvikābhinaya* may be considered to hold a prominence among the four types of *abhinayas* in Kathakali, since it reflects the mental state (*sthāyībhāva*) of the character through facial expressions (*bhāvas*) of the actor, which in invoke corresponding *rasas* in the spectators. “*Sātvika abhinaya* is, indeed, the soul of *abhinaya* on the Kathakali stage”(Sadanam P.V. Balakrishnan, 2005). “In *sāttvikābhinaya*, the facial expressions of the actor representing major human emotions such as happiness, sorrow, vengeance, irritation, anger, shyness, etc., are universal and appealing to the *sahṛdayas* / spectators”(Aimanam Krishna Kaimal, 1977). *Sātvikābhinaya* is something that can be relished by the elite spectators who have a high degree of aesthetic sensibility and ability to move along *in tune with* the mental state of the actor.

“Bharatamuni implies the dress-code of Kathakali by *āhārya*. The different ornaments such as *kundala*, armlets, bangles etc., and the colours for facial painting prescribed in the *Nātyaśāstra* are being used in Kathakali, too”(Unni N.P., (2014). According to Śailaja, “*abhinayas* such as *āṅgika*, *vācika*, and *sāttvika* depend on the *āhāryābhinaya*, since it is through the actor (limited as a character), the former three are to be expressed” ( Śailaja, 2019). “The dress-code in Kathakali is mainly classified in five types as, *Kari*, *Pacha*, *Minukku*, *Tādi*, and *Katti*. It varies with the basic nature as *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*” (Karmachandran, 2008).

In Kathakali, the harmonious blending of the percussion instruments such as *cenda*, *maddalam*, *ceṅgila*, *īlattālam* and *idakka* facilitates the expression of various *rasas* at their best. Generally five different *tāla* systems in *druta*, *madhyama*, and *vilamba kālas* (paces) are used in Kathakali, for the expression of different *rasas*.

## Contribution of the four types of *abhinayas* for *rasa* in the *āṭṭakkathas* of Irayimman Thampi

The three famous *āṭṭakkathas* of Irayimman Thampi namely, *Kīcakavadham*, *Uttarāsvayamvaram* and *Dakṣayāgam* amply illustrate how different *rasas* can be invoked in the *sahṛudayas* through the four types of *abhinayas* mentioned above.

Thus under *vācikā* for example, the *dvitīyākṣara-prāsas* (*śabdānuprāsas*) and figures of speech play a major role in enhancing the beauty of the *śṛṅgāra-rasābhinaya* and *vīra-rasābhinaya*, in *Kīcakavadham*, and *Dakṣayāgam* respectively. The style in which it is rendered by the singers, and the way in which it is enacted by the actor (*padārthābhinaya*); all have equal importance in evoking *rasānubhooti* in *sahṛdayas*. Besides, the *tālas* and *kālas* of the percussion instruments have their share in supplementing the above *rasas*.

A context of *śṛṅgāra-rasābhinaya* with excellent *āṅgikābhinaya* is that of the character Duryodhana before his spouse Bhānumati, in *Uttarāsvayamvaram*. This is well-known as *ekalocanābhinaya*. Duryodhana says,

*“koki nimukham kandu candranennu cinticcu ekāntam virahatte śaṅkiccitā  
ekalocanam kondu kopamoṭu ninneyum, śokamoṭapareṇa nokkunnu patiyeyum.”*

Having seen the bright face of Bhānumati, the *cakravāki* (she-bird) thinks that it is moon-rise, and time for departure from its mate, and a long solitude thereafter (as per the poetic convention). Hence, it looks at her (the cause of departure) with anger in one eye. At the same time, it looks at its mate with *śoka-bhāva* in the other eye. The display of quick variations of these *bhāvas* in each eye in succession, in the *pakarnnāṭṭam* is considered to be something which only an expert actor can perform. Yet another context in *Uttarāsvayamvaram*, is the *kummi* dance of damsels before Prince Uttaran. The rhythm, symmetry, and equivalence in the pace of dancers, supplementing each other in tune with the verse, makes this dance so much attractive. The verse starting with “*vīra! Virāta! kumārā vibho !*”, has a tinge of *śṛṅgāra-rasa*, as well.

A typical example of *sātvikābhinaya* occurs in the 9th Act of *Kīcakavadham*, which shows the pathetic state of *Mālini* (*Sairandhri*) who is ordered by Queen *Sudeṣṇa* to go to the palace of *Kīcaka*, a wretched character. In the above scene, one can see different *sātvika-bhāvas* such as *vepathu*, *pralaya*, *sveda*, *aśru*, *vaivarṇya*, *stambha*, and *rōmānca* appearing successively in the face and body of the actor, playing *Mālini*; enabling generation of *karuṇa rasa* in the spectators.

Some of the beautiful costumes (*Āhārya*) that can be found in the *āṭṭakkathas* of Irayimman Thampi are that of *katti* (*Kīcaka*), and *minukku* (*Valalan*) in *Kīcakavadham*; that of red *tādi* (*Trigarttan*), and *minukku* (*Uttarā*) in *Uttarāsvayamvaram*; and that of black *tādi* (*Dadhīci*), *pazhuppu* (Lord *Siva*), *minukku* (*Sati*, *Purohitān*), red *tādi* (*Vīrabhadran*), and ‘head of goat’ (*Dakṣan*) in *Dakṣayāgam*. The *āhārya* reinforces the nature of the character wearing it. The beauty of *āhārya* can be enjoyed equally by all spectators, irrespective of their knowledge of Kathakali.

### Relish of *rasa* - a possible mechanism

“According to Abhinava Gupta, the three types of *abhinayas*, music and percussion form the five organs of *nātya*. According to the *Nātya śāstra*, by the blending of *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, and *vyābhicāri bhāvas*, the permanent moods (*sthāyi bhāvas*) existing in the *sahṛudayas* attain the state of *rasatvam*” (Naveen Bhat, 2017). The occurrence of *rasānubhooti* in the spectators has been suggested by Shridevi, in the following words (Shridevi, 2020). “A member of the audience who has cultivated his or her own aesthetic response may experience a transformation of their own emotion into a purely aesthetic, transcendental feeling - an experience of divine bliss. This is the transformation of *Bhāva* (“mood”) into its essence - *Rasa*”.

The objectivity of *rasas* and subjectivity of their experience has been noted by Richard Schechner, after interviews with Kathakali actor (Richard Schechner, 2001). According to him, “the emotions, the *sthāyi bhāva*, are objective; the feelings (what an individual performer or partaker experiences) are subjective”. Regarding the relish of *rasas* in Kathakali, by the *sahṛudayas*, Aymanam Krishna Kaimal notes - “Some of the pre-requisites for enjoyment of Kathakali are knowledge of the story enacted (*āṭṭakkathās*), music, hand-

gestures and rituals of Kathakali apart from an innate ability to relish the *rasas* emerging from the *tauryatrika*"(Aimanam Krishna Kaimal, 1977).

There are many elements in Kathakali that a spectator having general aesthetic sense can enjoy and appreciate, such as the beauty of costumes, melody of music such as *rāga*, *tāla*, and *laya*, and the glances and paces of the actors. However, a *sahṛudaya* spectator with a better knowledge of the art of Kathakali, can enjoy it in much better depth and fineness, understanding each and every words of the verse; and the *druṣṭis*, *mudras* and *bhāvas* of the actor, relating them to the intended *rasa*. Hence, the *rasānubhooti* of spectators of Kathakali, may be thought to occur in the following sequence. The various *rasas* mentioned earlier remain dormant within each *sahṛudaya* (spectator) in a permanent form (*sthāyī-bhāva*). Their degree of development (maturity) is very much subjective; depending upon the essential nature of the spectator (*sāttvika*, *rājasika* or *tamo guṇas*) and his/her previous experience of artistic performances. The aim/objective of the actors, singers and the percussionists should be to invoke and develop the basic *sthāyī-bhāvas* of the spectators to the desired level of maturity, through appropriate *bhāva* / *hāvas*; style of rendering the verses and *tāla-melas*, respectively. When this happens, the *sahṛudayas* / spectators possessing the required attributes for enjoyment, relish the *universalised rasas* properly, and get into the stage of *tanmayībhāva* with the nature of the character being presented on the stage, by the actor. At this point, the intentions of the script-writer, actor and the spectator (with respect to *rasa*) get aligned and merged, and the *sahṛudayas* enjoy *rasa* at its peak.

The four types of *abhinayas*, songs (*padas* and *ślokas*), and the *tāla-melas* of Kathakali are only facilitators to this end. Since the practice of Kathakali closely follows its established *cittas* (standard practices), a learned and experienced *sahṛudaya*-spectator can reach the pinnacle of *rasānubhooti* quickly. Besides the *manodharmābhinaya* of an expert actor will enable him/her to ponder far and wide in the world of imagination to relish the intended *rasa* more effectively.

## Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that the Kathakali performances have got a well-orchestrated and connected string of *rasa-elements*, each one acting synergistically for maximisation of the *rasānubhooti* of the *sahṛudaya*-spectators. Besides, this is done very much in tune with the established prescriptions of authoritative texts on dance and dramaturgy, such as the *Nātyaśāstra*, *Bālarābharatam*, and *Hastalakṣaṇa-dīpikā*. The learned, experienced and imaginative *sahṛudaya*-spectator can relish the *rasa-elements* of the *entire* performance deeply, in a state of *tanmayībhāva*. This, in fact is a state in which there is a close matching of the expectations of the script-writer, actor and the spectator, with respect to the element of *rasa*.

## Acknowledgement

My sincere thanks are due to the libraries of Chinmaya Vishwa Vidyapeetha (CVV), Veliyanad, Kochi, and the State Central Library, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala for providing the necessary reference materials, and to my Research Supervisors, Dr. Anil Narayanan N., and Dr. Sudarshan Chiplunkar, School of Linguistics and Literary Studies, CVV, Kochi for guidance in this work.

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